

The seven churches

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[0:00] God's Word. If you have a Bible, you find it really helpful to turn to the book of Revelation! That we're going to be looking at this morning. It is in the form of a letter.

And as you will have noticed, it's a letter for us to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. So imagine our letterbox, a personal letter has arrived.

I get quite a few important looking letters, but I'm never quite sure who they're for. We've had loads of people living in our house over the years. We still get mail for them.

We get bank statements for previous people who've lived with us. But if you look at it, it's not for us because it's the wrong bank. So that's all right. I just put gone away.

I actually get pension statements. I'm sure that's a wrong address. Because it's the wrong name on the personal state, pension state.

[1:02] And I could tell from looking at the outside of it. We actually also get traffic tickets for cars we don't own. And that's good because it's the wrong car. So it's not for us.

And I just had to say we even got a summons to court. But it was the wrong finds and the wrong person. So we got let off that. So all those letters, I didn't know quite who they were meant for. But we do get some letters that are meant for us. And as we look at the book of Revelation, here's a letter. And our question is, who is it for? Who is he addressing? That's the question that we'll be looking at.

Certainly know who sent it. Because if you look in Revelation chapter 1, verses 12 and onwards, you have this impressive description of the risen Lord Jesus.

And he tells people to write things down. And in each of the sections that follow, like chapter 2, verse 1, we're told who the words are of.

[2:11] The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. That's Jesus. And we're also told in verse 7 that it is what the Spirit says to the churches.

So the writer has this very close view of the relationship between the risen Christ and the Spirit. What Christ says, the Spirit says.

What the Spirit says is what Christ says. They're the words of the Holy Spirit. They're the words of the risen Jesus. And if there's a letter, if you had a letter from the risen Jesus, would you not want to open it and see what it said?

So we want to know what this letter says. And we want to find out if it's for us. So we've been going through the book of Revelation.

This is my standard introduction. The book is in the Bible. It's for our edification. It's to help us survive as Christians and progress as Christians.

[3:13] It is an apocalypse. Apocalypse, that means unveiling. It shows us the truth behind the appearance. It is in the form of a letter.

It addresses particular people to a certain number of churches. And the number is? Seven. Seven. Mark is awake. Good. Letters by their nature are relevant to the hearers.

So there's a relevance to the people to whom it was first written. It is in the form of a prophecy, which is telling them what is now and what is shortly going to happen. And it gives the big picture of the horizon from the time of writing to the end of the world.

It isn't all about the end of the world and it isn't all about them there. It stretches across all of that. And it gives them the behavioral implications of being in that situation.

This is where you are in God's plan. This is how you should behave. So let's look this morning at the situation of the seven churches, the spiritual realities for them and for us.

[4:21] Look at what we can know or say about the churches and we'll look about what Christ says about the churches. So we'll just work our way through this early section in that sort of way.

So let's look at the situation of the seven churches. Now if you've got your Bible there, you'll see the names of them. So chapter 2, verse 1, it's a place called Ephesus. Then there's a place called Smyrna.

Then there's a place called Pergamum. Then Thyatira and Sardis and Philadelphia and Laodicea. So the first thing to say is they're not just places, they're people.

So we nowadays say, oh, St. Saviour's Church or St. Nicholas Church, meaning the building. But they didn't mean the building.

He meant the people. The communities of people that met together and interacted together and as we've been seeing were committed to one another. So it's assemblies and groups of people.

[5:24] And the fact that there's seven has some significance. Does anybody like to remind us what the number seven gets used for in the book of Revelation? It is.

It's the complete thing. It's the number that he usually uses to mean the complete thing. So he's not just addressing seven random churches, but he's saying, I chose you seven, but you're sort of representative of the whole thing.

The whole Church of Jesus Christ. And of course if it's the whole thing, then we must be in there somewhere. There must be a bit there that applies to us. So which bit is it?

And if you want a map, there's the little map. Ephesus is in that part of the map. And I think that's Laodicea in that bit. So they form a sort of circle. And maybe it's significant, but it's written in the order that a messenger would go if the messenger took the letter first to one church.

And then they copied it, and then to the next church, and they took a copy, and then, and so on, and so on, and so on. So that everybody would hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

[6:37] It's worth noticing. He doesn't say, here's the first bit. That's just for you, Ephesus. And we won't show anybody else what that bit is. And here's the second bit. That's just for you, Smyrna.

Nobody else will know about it. No, it's not like that. Each bit is what the Spirit says to the churches. So they all need to read what has been addressed to each one individually, because there's something in there that they need to hear.

So my question is, what should we be hearing? Which of this applies to us? Let's put ourselves back in the situation of those seven churches.

It's back in the time of the Roman Empire, and there was a certain situation that prevailed. If you imagine walking through the streets, you'd probably see Roman soldiers.

You'd certainly see a lot of money splashed about, because if you think Elon Musk is rich, well, they were rich too. There was a lot of money splashing about.

[7:34] The military would be in evidence. Conquest and force was part of the way the Roman Empire worked. And the Roman Empire produced peace.

There's a name for it, the Pax Romana. The peace that Rome imposed across its empire by military force. They had wonderful cities, or were they so wonderful?

You might say, actually, they're rather shameful cities. There was a cult of emperor worship. On the coins, the emperor would write, so-and-so emperor, saviour of the world.

Which is a big claim for an emperor, isn't it? You might think that name belongs to somebody else, actually. So the emperor would be worshipped, and of course, it was a polytheistic society.

They had lots of little gods, maybe lots of big gods, like Diana of the Ephesians, Artemis of the Ephesians. As great as Artemis of the Ephesians, which we were hearing the other day.

[8:38] Sexually, it was all over the place in terms of homosexuality, in terms of prostitution, unfaithfulness. So I put a prostitute lady up there on the screen.

The polytheism I've already mentioned, and you would walk through the streets and see priests. Priests of Jupiter, priests of Zeus, priests of Diana, priests of Mercury, priests.

And that's their situation. And we can stop to say, does that situation apply to us? And of course, that depends on our background.

So if you came from a primarily Hindu background, you'd say, a lot of that I can identify with, particularly the polytheism. Because Hindu culture has loads and loads of gods.

I was told three million gods. Some of those things apply to us in different ways. Some of them perhaps don't apply at all. But that's their situation. So if we're thinking, what applies to us?

[9:40] We look at that and say, how much of that applies to us? Let's look at the spiritual realities. Because the book of Revelation says that there's things you can see, like if you'd walked in the streets back then.

But what are the spiritual realities behind what you can see? So the first thing perhaps to pick up on is that the churches are symbolised by the seven lampstands.

So I'm sure you noticed that, the seven lampstands. And a sevenfold lampstand would be something in the Bible where? In the temple.

In the temple, yes. And in the tabernacle, there would be, in the place that God used to meet his people in a building, there would be a lampstand with seven branches.

And Jewish people still have those, don't they? The menorah. And in the book of Revelation, the churches are symbolised by lampstands.

[10:46] They shine light in a dark place. That's what these churches are meant to do. And be a light in a dark place. As we go through the book of Revelation, as we've been doing on Sunday evenings, we find some other symbols and symbolisms.

The beast, which I think simply taken would be the state power against Christianity. And there are, we don't get that so much in this country, but there are countries in which state power is put to work to crush the Christian church.

And then we have another animal, the false prophet or the other beast. And this, I think, simply we could say is the speaking of deception and false teaching.

Now, actually, we've got a whole load of that, haven't we, in our culture. A whole load of false ideas about how we got here, where we're headed for, what it is to be human.

So, that beast is at work. And then there's an image of the beast which gets worshipped in idol worship, making idols of our scientists and gods of our experts.

[12:03] They saw reason and knowledge kiss, but now they're in divorce court, wrote Graham Kendrick in the 1970s. Another spiritual reality is the future of the church, which is the heavenly Jerusalem.

Like in Pilgrim's Progress, Christians are depicted as heading on a journey. And we are encouraged to look not just at what's happening now, but what is promised for the distant future.

And as you might have noticed in those addresses to the individual churches, there is a promise at the end. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.

For example, a long distance, future, glorious promise to stir us on our way. And of course, another spiritual reality, which is explored in chapters 4 and 5, is that there is a throne and that things don't just happen by themselves.

But they are orchestrated and ruled by the one on the throne. And in chapter 4 and chapter 5 of Revelation, we're told that the one on the throne is the lamb, the lamb upon the throne.

[13:35] And not a thing happens in this world without the permission of the one whose hands were pierced for us. So those are some of the spiritual realities that those people would have had to deal with and that we have to deal with too.

To one degree or another, we are lights in a dark world. The state may try to squash Christianity. There is deception and false doctrine.

There is idol worship. There is the long-term goal of reaching the heavenly city. And the lamb is upon the throne. Well, that's enough, isn't it?

I could stop at that point, but I'm going to go a little bit further. So John describes a situation of conflict. And the Christian life is a fight.

And he's going to say, we can't stop fighting. We don't get to a point in this life where we can take our foot metaphorically off the accelerator and just coast the rest of the way.

[14:44] Every day is a spiritual battle of one sort or another. And the promise... Sorry, we'll come to that in a minute. So when Paul says, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power, that's us.

And when he says, put on the full armour of God so that you can stand on the evil day and withstand the evil one, that's us. And when Peter says, resist the devil standing firm in the faith, that's us.

And when, in Thessalonians, Paul says, put on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet, he's using fighting talk and that's us.

Am I right? Yes. Yes. And in each of these seven churches, the paragraph ends with a promise to the one who is victorious.

So, for example, in chapter 2, verse 7. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

[15:52] And each of the statements to the churches ends about being victorious. That's what the risen Jesus says. And therefore, we cannot give up.

We cannot just be knocked down and stay down. We can't stop praying. We can't stop seeking the Lord.

We can't stop listening to his word. We can't stop waking up each morning and saying, Lord, I want to walk with you today because we have to be victorious.

It doesn't mean we're perfect. It just means we keep on fighting. So, let's say something about these churches. So, number one, to say they're symbolically depicted as lampstands.

And I think I've already answered my question here. The picture or the symbol comes from the temple, the tabernacle. That's right. Jesus said, you are the light of the world.

[16:58] Interesting, he said he is the light of the world. And then because we belong to him, we become some of the things that he is. And we are the light of the world. A light shining in a dark place, says Peter.

So let your light shine that people will see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Church is not meant to be invisible. It's meant to be a light.

That's one thing to say. Second thing to say is that Jesus walks among the churches. And you will have seen that in chapter 1, verse 12, where it says, I turned and I saw seven golden lampstands. And among the lampstands was someone like a son of man. That's Jesus. And he walks among the churches. And so if you wanted to ask the question, I would like to meet Jesus.

I would like to meet Jesus as much as it's possible to meet Jesus in this world. And where would I go? And the answer is, you would go amongst the assembly of his people.

[18:11] Because Jesus is found there. As his people meet, where two or three are gathered, there he is in the midst. And that's why it's so important that we don't forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

But we get together as a group, as a community, as an assembly. Where to go to meet Jesus? In the churches. Let's say something else about the churches.

He knows the churches. He speaks to the churches. And he loves the churches. Each of the sections begins like this.

Chapter 2, verse 1. These are the words of him. Chapter 2, verse 8. These are the words of him. Chapter 2, verse 12.

These are the words of him. Chapter 2, verse 18. These are the words of the Son of God. Jesus addresses his churches in words.

[19:16] These are the words. It's important that our Christianity has words. It's not just feelings. Not just moods. Not just what I think.

But what Jesus says. These are the words. Also, Jesus knows the churches.

Chapter 2, verse 2. And it's the same for all of them. I know your deeds. Chapter 2, verse 9. I know your afflictions.

Chapter 2, verse 13. I know where you live. Chapter 2, verse 19.

I know your deeds. Your love and faith. Your service and perseverance. So Jesus not only speaks to his churches. But he knows the churches.

[20:15] And I think that is both comforting and frightening. I don't know what you think. But Jesus knows us. And he knows us individually.

He knows. I guess we would say he knows more about us than we know ourselves. But he knows exactly what's going on in our hearts.

He knows what we've done for him. And he knows the things where we have failed him. He knows. The comfort is that perhaps other people don't know.

And we say to the Lord, you know. You see what I was trying to do. You know how I tried. You know what I was aiming for. It all went wrong, but you know. And there's comfort in that.

And then on the scary side, the things that we wouldn't want other people to know. Oh, the Lord knows that. He knows.

[21:19] There we are. That's our saviour. And he loves the churches. Chapter 3, verse 19. Where he says, Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline.

And I'd like to come back to that in a moment. But fascinating that he says to the church in Laodicea, I love you.

He specifically says that to that church. But let's assume that it's true of all the churches. He's not indifferent. He's not absent.

He's not apathetic. He knows and speaks and loves and cares about his church.

His churches. Us. As his people. Like the good shepherd who knows his sheep and leads them accordingly.

[22:18] And the fourth thing that we can say about these churches. Jesus is not afraid to withhold salvation from the impenitent.

That's the people who don't take any notice of him. Or to spit out a church from his mouth. Just, this is a bit scary, isn't it?

Chapter 2, verse 5. To the church at Ephesus. He says, Consider how far you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first.

If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. If you do not repent. If you do not listen.

If you do not take on board what I'm saying to you. I will come and remove your lampstand from its place. It will no longer be a church of Jesus Christ shining in a dark place.

[23:22] It will be a dead stick sticking up somewhere that is of no spiritual significance at all. Jesus is not afraid to withhold salvation from the impenitent.

Or spit a church out of his mouth. And that spitting out of the mouth is in chapter 3, verse 16. Where he speaks to the church in Laodicea.

Because you are lukewarm. Neither hot nor cold. I'm about to spit you out of my mouth. And chapter 2, verse 16. Where he says, Repent, otherwise I will come to you and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Or chapter 2, verse 22. Where it says, I will cast her on a bed of suffering. And I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely. Unless they repent of her ways, I will strike her children dead.

Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds. And I will repay each one of you according to your deeds. Jesus is not to be messed about with. Jesus' patience and kindness and compassion ought not to be confused with complacency and indifference and anything goes.

[24:47] This is true, isn't it? His eyes are like blazing fire. And churches that are not listening to him, having warned them, he will spit them out of his mouth.

And people in the churches who are not listening to him, or what it says, will face the consequences. It is sobering, isn't it?

So we don't have too far to go to find churches that used to be churches, but aren't churches any longer.

Either because they've been taken over as carpet warehouses, or the Pentecostal church that's on the corner there is now a block of flats. Or it's open for business, but Christ never turns up, because whatever they do in there isn't church business, it's something else completely.

Churches that used to be churches. And that there are people who called themselves Christians, but will not be found in heaven. People who called themselves Christians, but will not be found in heaven.

[26:04] That is how serious it is with the Lord Jesus Christ. But even to these, and I think Laodicea is the most extreme of these, even to these, Jesus stretches out a hand first.

You'll notice that, as we'll see in a moment, the church at Laodicea is probably the worst offender. But even to the church at Laodicea, the risen Christ says, look, I'm standing at the door and knocking.

If you turn to me, I will come in. We will eat together. Even there, Jesus stretches out a hand first. Right. Let's do a little bit of an overview.

It's very difficult to sort of make one sermon out of the seven churches, because there's so much material. But let's just do a little bit of an overview. To each of the churches, there is a basic pattern with variations.

Each one starts off with, there are the words of. So if you've got your Bible there, let's just check that out. Chapter 2, verse 1, these are the words of. Chapter 2, verse 8, these are the words of.

[27:16] Chapter 2, verse 12, these are the words of. Chapter 2, verse 18, these are the words of. Chapter 3, verse 1, these are the words of. Chapter 3, verse 7, these are the words of.

Chapter 3, verse 14, these are the words of. It all starts off, these are the words of. And there's different descriptions of the Christ. And the descriptions tend to be drawn from the original description that Valerie read to us of the risen Christ in chapter 1.

Then there is an assessment of the church. And it usually takes the form, I know, but. But. So let's follow.

Sometimes the but is translated yet. Or the but is translated nevertheless. So let's look at that. Chapter 2, verse 2, I know.

I know your deeds. Yes? And chapter 2, verse 4, yet. I know yet. And it's actually but, or but rather. But. Verses 8 to 11.

[28:34] There is a yet and a but. But it's not quite as big as. It's not quite in the following pattern. So let's go to. Chapter 2, verse 14.

So it was verse 13. I know. And verse 14. Nevertheless. Yeah? Or but. And then for Thyatira, in verse 19.

I know your deeds. Verse 20. Nevertheless. But. In chapter 3, verse, is it verse 1?

I know your deeds. Verse 4. Yet. But. From verse 7, Philadelphia.

There's no, nothing that works quite like that. And in the 7th church, Laodicea. The I know is in verse 15.

[29:37] And the but. Nope. There isn't. There is a but. Yeah. Verse 7, it says but.

But actually. That is an actually an and. Although it's translated as a but. I don't think there is a but there, actually. And in most cases.

There is a repent. Something to turn from. Turn away from. And to turn to the Lord. That's what repenting is. It's turning away from something.

And then turning back to Jesus. And in each case it says. Hear. Let him who has ears to hear. Let him hear. So important to listen. And. A promise about victory.

To the one who overcomes. As a promise to motivate us. So let us come back to these knowing and buts. So. The I know for Ephesus. There's an I know.

[30:36] And there's a but. Okay. There's an I know and a but. And the I know is something good. And the but is something negative. With Smyrna. There's an I know which is positive.

But there's no but. There's no but. For Smyrna. He just says positive things about them.

He doesn't say a nevertheless or a but. With Pergamum. There's an I know. And there's a but. With Thyatira. There's a positive I know.

Verse 19. And there's a negative but. Verse 20. Nevertheless. For Sardis. There is an I know.

And verse 4. There is a but. Whoa. Whoa. Wait. Wait. No. Let me see if I've got that right. The I know. Is not positive. So this is a bit different.

[31:41] For the church in Sardis. I know your deeds. You have a reputation of being alive. But you are dead. So the I know is a negative thing. What I know about you. Is that.

People think you're a brilliant church. But actually you're a dead church. So it starts off. With a negative. I know. And the but. Is the positive one. In verse 4.

Yes. But. You have a few people in Sardis. Who have not soiled their clothes. So it works the other way. Most. The first thing he knows is negative. And the. Positive thing.

Is the. Exception. Philadelphia. Is all positive. There's no but at all. For Philadelphia. And Laodicea. There's no. There isn't a. A proper but there. But it's all negative. So. We're in there somewhere.

[32:39] We're in there somewhere. I know. Good things. But. Or it could be. I know. Good things. And there isn't a but. Or it could be.

Mostly. I know. Bad things. But there's some exceptions. Or it could just be. I know. Bad things. No exceptions. We're in there somewhere. Who is this letter addressed to?

Which is the bit that applies to us? That's what. We have to hear. We have to listen. It's. Surprising. Isn't it? Because. You'd think.

That Jesus. Well. You might. You might be forgiven. For thinking. That what churches are there to do.

Is just pat people on the head. And say. Jesus loves you. But the Jesus of Revelation. Doesn't do that. He really knows people. And he really assesses them.

[33:35] And he says. That's good. But. Or he might say. There's nothing good here. But there's a few exceptions. Or he might say. Actually. You're completely off course.

But even if you're completely off course. Jesus still knocks on the door. I think that's very significant. With each church.

There is an action. So there is. Typically. Repent. For the. Only positive church. Smyrna. It says. Be faithful.

For the other churches. It says. Repent. Repent. And for Philadelphia. Which is another positive church. It says. Hold on. And for Laodicea. It says. Repent.

But it's sort of repent. In red letters. This is your last chance. I'm standing at the door. And knocking. And if you open the door. I will change everything for you.

[34:30] So we're still asking. Is this letter addressed to us? And. Let's do a little bit more work on it. Before we go home. So what about the Ephesians. The church at Ephesus.

Is this. Is this the sort of church. That. That fits us. Now what. Let's just look at this. In some detail. I'm sorry. We can't look at all of them in detail. But let's just dip in. To.

Two or three of them. And follow it up in detail. Christ knows. And he says. I know your deeds. Your hard work. And your perseverance.

I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people. But you have tested those who claim to be apostles. And are not. And have found them false. You have persevered.

And endured hardships for my name. And not grown weary. That's positive. Isn't it? They are active. That's good. They are tenacious.

[35:26] They hang on. They don't give up. They are doctrinally discerning. They test the claims. Of these pseudo apostles. And work out.

This is not Christianity. These are not. Representatives of Jesus Christ. We're not going to listen to them. And they're commended for those things. But there is a but.

And you might be saying. Oh I'd like those things to be true of us. And I'd like those things to be true of me. But there is a but. And the but. Is in verse four.

But I hold this against you. You have forsaken the love you had at first. And he says. With all that. Commendable activity.

And tenacity. And discernment. In terms of the human heart. In terms of what's going on in your heart. I find. There's a.

[36:23] An emptiness there. There's a gap there. You have forsaken. Your first love. The way that you put me first.

The way that it was about me. I'm thinking this is what it's being said. The way that Jesus says it was about me. Now it's against. Now it's all about doctrinal accuracy.

Or keeping the rotors going. Or. Or just. Never changing anything. Out of stubbornness. And he says. Well you can do all those things.

But. Where's your heart? And I suppose. We could ask. Is this addressed to me? Am I. Doing lots of.

Commendable things. But. In the heart. Where it was meant to be motivated. That's. Gone cold.

[37:22] Where's my deepest motivation? Why am I doing all these things? I do it because I love the Lord Jesus. Or. For some. Less. Valuable reason.

And I think we might think. Well is that me? And I'll tell you what. I don't know whether it is. I don't know whether it's you. Or. Whether it's me. But I think the safest thing is.

To take the advice. And repent. And make sure that every day. I'm repenting. And every day. I'm looking at the things.

That might. Be. Distracting. Holding me back. Displeasing the Lord. And every day. Saying. I'm. Turning away from those things.

And I want. Out of love for the Lord Jesus. To live for him today. That's the safest thing to do. Isn't it? Just do that every day. Let's try another one on.

[38:21] For size. Let's look at the church in Philadelphia. Where Christ knows. In verse 8. Their deeds. I know your deeds.

I've placed before you. An open door. That no one can shut. I know that you have little strength. Yet you have kept my word. And not denied my name. I will make those. Who are of the synagogue of Satan.

Who claim to be Jews. Though they are not. But are liars. I will make them come. And fall down at your feet. And acknowledge. That I have loved you. Since you have kept my command.

To endure patiently. I will also keep you. From the hour of trial. That is going to come on the whole world. To test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming soon.

Hold on to what you have. So that no one will take your crown. The one who is victorious. I will make a pillar. In the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it.

[39:15] And so on. So he says. I know your deeds. And he says. I know you don't have a lot of strength. It says that in verse 8.

Doesn't it? But I know you have kept my word. And have not denied my name. Other people denied my name.

But you haven't. And that's commendable. In verse 10. He commends their endurance. And patience. You have kept going. And he doesn't have a word of criticism for them.

Is that us? I don't know. What he does say to them is. What I will do. As I'll give you more opportunities. Verse 8. See I've placed before you an open door.

That no one can shut. I'm going to give you more opportunities. And I'll give you spiritual vindication. There was a promise.

[40:16] In the Old Testament. Verse 9. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan. Who claim to be Jews. Though they are not. But are liars.

I will make them come and fall down at your feet. And acknowledge that I have loved you. And this perhaps is a synagogue. Where they say. Jewish people. Are the people who are fulfilling the promises of God.

God's love is not on Christians. But on Jews. They're the ones who are being faithful. As they keep doing their sacrifices. As they keep the law of Moses.

That's faithfulness. And John says. No. That is not where God's purposes are at. It is you Christians. Who receive Christ as the Messiah.

Who see in Christ. The fulfillment of the law. Who see in Christ. The fulfillment of the sacrifices. It's you that God has loved. And I will vindicate that.

[41:16] He says. They will know that I have loved you. He will give them more protection. Verse 10. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently.

I will also keep you from the hour of trial. That's going to come upon the whole world. To test the inhabitants of the earth. I would like that to be me. Wouldn't you? I will protect you.

I will protect you. And verse 11. Hold on. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have. So that no one will take your crown.

And what he says to them is. I'm commending you. I'm giving you opportunities. But you need to hold on. Not let go. So that no one takes your crown.

Maybe he's saying that to us. I commend you. I'm going to give you more opportunities. But you need to hold on to what you've got.

[42:15] And hold on like anything. Because that's so precious. Maybe that's what he's saying to us. And he's saying that the reward for this. There will be an eternal place.

You will be a pillar in the temple of my God. Verse 12. I will write on them the name of my God. And the name of the city of my God. The new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven.

I will also write on them my new name. And he says that I will write my name on you. Which is saying.

Whose are this lot? Whose are this? Whose is this lot? And Jesus says they're mine. I've written my name on every one of them.

They belong to me. It's a precious thing, isn't it? Would you like to be in that position? Where the Lord Jesus says. It's a little bit like.

[43:16] When you pick up kids toys from the ground. They're all over the place. What's this? There's a bit of Lego. A bit of something. Or a bit of a handle of something. That came off something.

Which has now got lost. Who does this belong to? They're mine. Get your hands off them. They mean something to me. The Lord Jesus saying. Well whatever else people think about these people.

They're mine. Got my name written on them. An eternal place. An ownership. Belonging to Christ. Is that us? Well it would be nice.

That would be a good one, wouldn't it? And let's go to the most extreme one. The Laodicea one. Chapter 3 verses 14 to 22.

And this is the one where the thing that Christ knows is the negative thing. And there is no positive nevertheless. You know there's I know and but.

[44:12] I know and but. But here there's no buts. Because it's all negative. These are the words of the Amen. The faithful and true witness. The ruler of God's creation.

I know your deeds. Wait for it. That you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were either one or the other. But because you are lukewarm. Neither hot nor cold.

I'm about to spit you out of my mouth. In Laodicea. So I'm told. There were hot springs and cold springs. At different parts of the hill. Of Laodicea. And the hot springs were useful for washing. And the cold springs were useful for drinking. And he says. You're not hot. You're not cold. You're not the hot springs. You're not the cold springs. You are useless.

There's no use for you. You're lukewarm. Can't drink you. Can't do washing with you. You're just useless.

[45:11] And I'm going to spit you out of my mouth. Which is a horrible thing to say, isn't it? But this is what Jesus says to this church. They're complacent.

And they say. No, we're not. We're rich. We have acquired wealth. We don't need anything. Look at our wonderful church building.

Look how full we are. Look at the music that we have. Look at how well organized we are. Look at our plans and projects. We're wealthy.

We don't need a thing. And Jesus says. Well, actually, you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. That's what you're really like.

You are complacent. You think you're rich and not needy. But actually, you are poor and blind and naked. And Jesus says. But I can solve that.

[46:07] It's a very, very penetrating criticism, isn't it? They really don't understand where they are spiritually. But Jesus says.

Look. I can solve that. Verse 18. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you can become rich. White clothes to wear so that you can cover your nakedness.

And salve to put on your eyes so that you can see. Jesus says. I can solve all that. That's great, isn't it? Even the most rubbish church.

Jesus still says. I can solve that for you. More or less says. I can solve it in a moment. Those who I love.

He says. In verse 19. I rebuke and discipline. That's a fascinating insight, isn't it? You get a similar thing in Hebrews. That the Lord disciplines those he loves.

[47:08] And maybe you've been going through recent months thinking. Why has life been so hard? Why isn't God answering my prayers? Why is my health doing what it's doing?

Why is my situation so difficult? Where's God in this? And please to notice that those he loves, he disciplines.

He sends difficult things into our lives so that we can respond fruitfully. And he sends them because he loves us.

Those I love. He says in this case. I rebuke and chasten. So turn to me. I mean he says that in the most radical way here, doesn't he?

Be earnest and repent. Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door. I will come in and eat with that person. And they with me. And that is, to my mind as we've gone through this, a most remarkable invitation from the risen Christ.

[48:16] Because he could be saying, I've finished with you lot. You're a load of rubbish. And you don't ever take any notice of me. So that's it. And at some point he says, well I might spit you out of my mouth.

But at this particular point he's saying, look, there's still an opportunity. I can solve this. If you come to me. I can give you all you need.

I can change your attitudes. I can change your situation. I can put things right. And we will have fellowship together. And wouldn't you like that? Isn't that something you say, yeah, I would really like that.

Even the spiritually stupidest church, Christ knocks on the door and says that he loves them, wants them to change, and wants them to open up to him.

And I think if he says that to that spiritually stupid church, how much more does he say it to us? Wouldn't we all want to eat with Christ?

[49:24] To have fellowship with him? Wouldn't we all want to be open to him? Well, we could take the advice that he gives here to this rubbish church.

I mean, we could do that. We could listen to him and repent and open up to him. So I started off saying the letter, was it for us? Or was it for somebody else?

And I don't know the answer. That's up to the Holy Spirit to tell us. But we could ask ourselves this. Am I listening? It says, hear the words of.

Am I listening to his authentic voice in Scripture? Am I fighting the fight of faith? And if there is opposition or pressure or pride or complacency or weariness, I'm still pressing on.

Am I standing on and for apostolic truth? Because that's a commendable thing to do. Am I doing things just out of habit and stubbornness?

[50:21] Or am I doing them out of love for Christ and his people? Am I worshipping idols? Idols, perhaps a little less obvious. Money.

Being successful in Western culture can be an idol, can't it? Education can be an idol. It's a good thing that it can be an idol. Are we worshipping the idol of youth?

Or the idol of health? Or the idol of family? Or the idol of being approved by people? Or even are we worshipping a Jesus that we have made up as we have moulded our own version of who Jesus is?

And he's not the same as the Jesus in the Bible. All good questions for us to ask. And the advice that we come to in each case is turn to the Lord.

Repent. Let's turn to him every day anyway. Let's open up to him as he knocks on the door of our lives. Because this is the route to victory.

[51:21] This is the route to the heavenly city. And that's how we'll get home. Amen.