

Revelation 3:14-22 “When Truth Becomes Real”

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this word. Thank you for your spirit, which is here because we're gathered. And thank you that you are shining in eternal glory right now and you want to speak to us right here from your word and by your spirit.

So walk with us, I pray. Stir our hearts and give us what we need to hear, Lord Jesus, right now. It's in the name of Jesus that I pray. Amen. So I'm excited to continue our Revelation series with you. Revelation was the first book that I read after I became a Christian at age 16 on a beach retreat. And I went to church and started just, I would sit up in the balcony while they're preaching and I would just read Revelation.

And I was fascinated by it. So it's crazy to think, now I'm standing up here about to talk about Revelation. And it's just such an amazing book.

[1:07] So it's filled with wonder. And you ever think of a time in your life where you had that wonder of God or you had that mystery or just the feeling of something that was so very real and just fun?

That's what I get when I read Revelation. For me too, when I was thinking about this, it reminded me of childhood, strangely. When I was growing up, we would ride bikes to the Buffalo Rock plant. And when you went there, you could get any soft drink you wanted. So they made like Dr. Pepper and everything. Dr. Pepper, Pepsi, any sort of like fruit drink. And you could go in there as a kid, ride your bike, and they'd give you a free cup and you could make whatever you wanted.

So we made these things, they called them suicides back then. And you'd mix some Dr. Pepper, something orange, something who knows. And you'd mash it up. But part of the fun was that you couldn't get that drink anywhere.

It was just your drink. And there was just something about it that was ours. It was this taste that no one else knew. And it was real to me.

[2:15] And I can go back to that moment right now. And I would encourage you, do you have something like that in your mind that you could go to? Something that is just life-giving to you and it feels real to you.

And it's exciting when you go there in your mind. There is a large difference between knowing something is true and experiencing that thing as real.

I'll give an example. Like sometimes you may have a thought where you're like, is this actually real?

Am I really a father of a son who's bigger than me who just went to homecoming?

Am I in care of a human being? Right? I will have these moments. Sometimes maybe there's something that's not true, but it just feels so real.

This morning my wife told me that she woke up and she had a dream that I left her for Brandi Carlisle, the singer, and she had to win me back by being a great rollerblader. And it felt very real to her.

[3:25] But it was not true. And I laugh at these dreams, the dream Derek. Funny stories there. But then sometimes there's something we will say is we say it's true.

And then if you look at our lives, it's not real. Not real at all. And the thing that we say is true, we really want it to be real. So what has become real to us sometimes through experience has greater impact on us than what we learn to be true.

Now think about this for a minute as it applies to Scripture, okay? I can know God loves me. I can know God provides for me. I can give you all the right answers about God and know that my identity is secure in Him and know that Jesus is enough.

But if those truths are not becoming real, if I can't taste those things, if I can't feel those things, if I can't experience them where I actually am and where I live, then guess what happens, right? These other things that feel more real, they start to be the ones that replace the thing that I want to be real. Example, my bank account, my career, my reputation, my grades, my possessions, my plans, right?

[4:46] I can say one thing about God, but experience and live something that is a completely different reality. So the hard thing about this is we can do this and be blind to it.

We may not even know what's happening because what we know to be true is not actually what's real in our life. And when that happens, God becomes negotiable.

What are your non-negotiables? That is a question that was asked to me by one of my mentors when I was on sabbatical recently. And he said, if you don't know what your negotiable, your non-negotiables are, then everything in your life is negotiable.

Well, today we get to read, and Lance had just read, thank you again, Lance, about truth versus reality and about non-negotiables.

But they're in the form of a letter written from Jesus to the church in Laodicea. So let's jump in first with verse 14 there. He says, and to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, the words of the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

[5:59] The first thing we see here is that Jesus tells them who he is before he tells them who they are. Okay. Now, when we write letters today, we write dear so-and-so.

But in biblical times, it was way more common to identify yourself at the very beginning, and that's what Jesus is doing here. So he starts by saying, before I tell you the truth about you, let me remind you about who I am and who it is that is speaking to you.

I'm the amen. I am the faithful and true witness. I am the beginning of God's creation. Now, if you walked into Dr. Kost's office, is he here?

He's not over there. Okay. I pointed that way because he usually sits there. If you walked in there, any doctor, Ray, whoever, and on their wall, instead of their credentials, it said the beginning of God's creation on the wall, you'd probably stop and be like, hmm.

Right? Well, here in this letter, Jesus is about to give a diagnosis, and he's laying down his credentials to remember that, hey, I'm the one speaking, and you're the one who really needs to listen to this, and I'm qualified to tell you.

[7:12] But the thing he's going to diagnose them about is a serious condition, and he's going to prescribe a remedy to people who he knew before they were ever born and people who don't even know that they're sick yet.

Okay? So that's the posture of which we need to enter into listening to what he says. And this is also the first of the letters that we've read so far that is really all negative. He doesn't say anything nice about the church.

Okay? So let's jump into what he says. I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot.

So because you're lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I'll spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I'm rich, I've prospered, and I need nothing. Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich. And white garments so that you may clothe yourself.

[8:17] And the shame of your nakedness may not be seen. And salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. So as we jump in here, Jesus has told them who he is before he tells them who they are.

And now Jesus tells them who they really are and what they really need. A little background on Laodicea. This is cool stuff, I think. It was a real church in a real city.

A very successful city. And it was a textile, financial, and medical center. It was well known for its glossy black wool from the sheep that were only in that area.

And they made these eye treatments from the rocks there that people would come from all over to get. So that was its medical center success. And they were also a city that had a reputation for depending on nobody but themselves.

So much so that after an earthquake in 60 AD, they accepted no help from the Roman Empire to rebuild. They said, why? Because Laodicea takes care of itself. And Laodicea's assessment of

Laodicea was one way.

[9:21] But Jesus has an assessment of Laodicea now that he tells us. And they're very different. And the diagnosis he gives right there up front is lukewarm. So this is even more fun.

A little more background. Though Laodicea had it all, they had a water source that would dry up in the summer. So they had to pump their water in to keep water all year long.

So there's this one place called Hierapolis. And it was known for hot springs. So they'd pump that water in. And then Coloss was nearby. And it was known for cold water. And they would pump that in. But by the time it got there, it was lukewarm.

So much so, they said, it had minerals in it. And it would make you vomit. Isn't that interesting? So when you read this text, it becomes a lot more personal to those that Jesus is speaking to.

And he's saying, you are lukewarm like you're water. Some confuse this with Christian or non-Christian. Don't go down that route. He's talking about being stagnant.

[10:27] Being completely unexcited. Okay. A lukewarm Christian. He's speaking to Christians, remember. To the church. Those who profess belief.

A lukewarm Christian is a professing believer. Whose supreme passion and greatest love has been set on something besides Jesus Christ. And the result is no zeal.

They know Jesus loves them as true. But they don't experience and live it out as a reality. Okay. Now, this is a picture of my dog.

That's Quill. Quill has so much faith in the unseen muffins on the counter that he knows that if he sits there long enough, they will become a reality in his stomach.

So much so that he will sit there with zeal for hours until you relent. Okay. He has this zeal.

[11:30] He has this excitement. And you see it evidenced in his life and in his actions. And he has this assurance of things that he cannot see. Now, the Laodiceans, they say that. They say Jesus is their life and their joy.

But it's not a reality in their life according to Jesus. In reality, they're depending on everything except for Jesus for life and for joy. And Jesus says very plainly, you make me vomit.

Now, there's a diagnostic question we can ask ourselves here. Where has the life of God in me become stagnant? See, Jesus goes on with a diagnosis.

Okay. He says, you say you're rich. You say you're prosperous. You say you need nothing. He's naming them. He knows them. Why have they lost their excitement about Jesus' love?

I think the real problem here is self-reliance. They have confused having resources with the blessings of God only and the good life with God's favor.

[12:39] And in the process, they've lost their real life. Jesus. Jesus is not only telling that to the Laodiceans. He's given us an opportunity to think about it today as Southwood.

If you look in your bulletin at the beginning there, there's this quote by Tim Keller in the meditation. He says, There's so little compared to them.

Secondly, they're appalled by how much of the money we make we spend on ourselves instead of giving away. Thirdly, they're appalled by the fact we're afraid to even let people at the office know we're Christians.

While they're going to jail and being put to death by identifying with Jesus Christ. There's this unique spiritual danger that comes with comfort.

And I think Jesus wants us to consider that today. Because compared to the rest of the world, we live pretty comfortable lives.

[14:03] And when you're capable and when you're educated and you're accomplished and you have enough resources to handle most of what life throws at you, you can slowly begin to live like you don't really need God and not even know it.

And we may still believe in grace. And we may still know that Jesus loves us. And we may still know the right answers. But prayer then becomes a little less necessary.

Generosity becomes a little less natural or supernatural. And following Jesus just becomes less costly. And without ever rejecting Jesus outright, we can become so good at managing life that our need for him just stops feeling real.

And the result of that is that the love of Jesus doesn't excite us anymore. It's not the thing that wakes us up in the morning. It's not the thing that is at the core of our being. Grace doesn't feel like a miracle anymore.

Because deep down we've lost touch with how much we actually need it. And we know we're sinners saved by grace. But we don't feel the wonder of being saved by grace.

[15 : 12] And when grace stops amazing us, Jesus can slowly become familiar and ordinary. And there's an echo in here in this passage of the Garden of Eden.

Right? Adam and Eve become naked and ashamed. And they hide and they manufacture their own coverings. We've been doing that ever since, y'all. Achievement, money, competence, religion, approval, control, whatever, you name it.

None of them, though, will heal our shame. They only hide it. But God comes looking for hiding people like us.

And even though we're doing it today, if you don't listen to the words of Jesus, remember that he sent you the 1990s monster ballad rock band Extreme to drill the message into your hearts.

The circle can't fit where a square should be, y'all.

[16 : 13] One more time. One more time.

There's a hole in my heart that can only be filled by you. Okay. If you don't listen to Jesus, are you going to listen to his 1990s messenger?

There's a hole in my heart that can only be filled by you. And this hole in my heart can't be filled by the things that I do. They didn't know they were writing about Revelation 3.

Let's keep going, right? There's this hole in our heart. But what does Jesus say should fill this? He says the answer is found in riches from me.

It's not money. He laughs at money, I think. Right? It's our things we play with down here. But what is the money saying about our heart? He sees the heart.

[17 : 21] Get your covering from me. Get your sight from me. And he says, what's the remedy?

Does he say, try harder, do more. Nope, nope. The remnant for stagnant faith, non-zeal, Laodicean faith, is turning around and simply moving towards Jesus and his very, very real love.

He goes on in verse 19 here. Let's read it. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. So be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. So the third thing he's telling us, Jesus is reminding them of his real love for them.

Okay, so this letter that seems like this huge rebuke is a letter of love like a father written to a child that he cares about. If you go down this path, it's not going to end up well for you.

[18 : 42] What you're really looking for is me. If you really think about it, this is just a love letter. But he's saying, here's what I want you to do. I want you to buy your gold from me. Gold that's been through the refiner's fire.

Then you're actually going to be rich. Buy your clothes from me. Clothes designed in heaven. The white garments. You've gone around half naked long enough.

I want you to buy medicine for your eyes from me so that you can actually see truth. You can see the unseen things that I'm making real to you. Turn around, run after God, look at me. And then verse 20 goes into, I stand at the door and knock.

Okay, that carries two truths with it. The first one is an accountability. Okay? And when we lose our excitement for Jesus, there's a good chance that we've forgotten this, that we live in the master's house.

Okay, we're stewards. We're not owners. He's the owner. And that's that first reality, is the reality of accountability.

[19 : 53] Maybe part of the problem with us as humans is that we stand in God's house and we act like it's ours. We say mine like the kid in the sandbox. Mine! Mine!

Mine! We don't share. We don't care well unless it's us first and then we got a little time left over to care. He says no, care others first. Share first.

My money, my time, my house, my career, my abilities, my retirement, my life, my vacation. Me. Everybody else is doing it, so this is right. Right? Jesus might be saying, maybe, maybe not.

Right? The king is saying, I'm coming home. What are we going to do with what he's entrusted to us when he asks us and he knocks on the door?

Are we protecting the stuff in the house? Are we using the gifts to participate in what the master cares about most? See, but the knock also carries with it this second reality.

[20:54] There's accountability, but there's also intimacy. And this is where the loving father, I think, wants us to focus, okay? In ancient times, to be invited into somebody's house was this very special thing.

And it was this invitation into deep fellowship and friendship. And remember this, when that door opens, okay, this master wants to come in and eat with us.

He wants to come live with us. It reminds me of the book of John where he says, I and the father will come make our home in you. Or it says in the Psalms, I will set a table before you in the presence of your enemies.

That's the heart of our father. And repentance here isn't try harder, stop it. In fact, it's really more about doing less. It's simply turn around. Look at me.

And what sounds like a rebuke at first glance is really this reminder of God's goodness. He's so good. And he wants me to tell you that today. Wherever you've forgotten it, God wants you to know how good he is.

[21:54] And he loves you right where you are. And he knows what you're doing wrong. And he's knocking at the door saying, I love you. So if you're here today and you've lost excitement about God's love, if you feel like a modern day Laodicean, know this, God's truth must move from something you merely know into something increasingly that you experience as real in your day-to-day life.

And it starts, according to Jesus, with Jesus. Turning around, repenting toward him, unlocking the door and welcoming him into that stagnant part of your life, which is unique to you.

Remember at the fall, here's the gospel. At the fall we hid. And in Christ, God's providing the covering we're really seeking. Jesus is saying, come to me and rest.

You realize that there's nothing in this world can offer you more than what Jesus is offering. Why can we get a white robe? Because he was stripped naked on the cross.

Why can we have true spiritual wealth? Because he was made poor for our sakes. Why can we have spiritual sight? Because when we were crucifying him, or blindfolded him, right?

[23:15] He was mocked. He was beaten. And they said, prophesy us right now. Who hit you? And he endured all of that for the joy set before him. You.

You ever thought about yourself as joy? Probably not. Where has your life with Jesus become lukewarm and stagnant and lifeless? If you need help in figure that out, here's something a little practical.

If you can spell the word mom with two Ms, maybe it will help you. Mom, see? The Christian life, I think, is four buckets, four doors.

There's a monastic peace. There's a unified peace. There's a missional peace. And there's this, there's a mystery there. Okay? And monastery is, chances are, if you've lost fervor, by the way, if you find one of these areas might be a little bit weaker than the other if you look at your heart.

And it may change all throughout your life. Okay? Just imagine these like dashboard lights for your soul. But monastery, how is your private life? Ask yourself, how's my private life with Jesus?

[24:21] Do I enjoy being with him? Or has life become just informational and hurried and mechanical and absent and I check my prayer box? Unity.

Unity is this God between us factor. There's got to be fellowship with other believers. You are not meant to be isolated. Okay? Who actually knows me? Am I sharing life with God's people?

Or has independence slowly become isolation? The harder thing is some of us can be in grace groups and still be very isolated. Because we only let people in so much. But there's got to be someone that knows you.

Okay? So unity. Community. And then mission. God through us. Right? Where am I personally participating in what God's doing? Not where am I only giving money.

Where am I? Where is my soul stirred? Where am I walking, talking, using my senses? In the mission of God. Okay? Who is receiving the love of Christ through my actual physical presence?

[25:23] Okay? And then mystery. This is one we as Presbyterians are afraid of. Okay? I'm going to give you permission. Don't be afraid of that.

Wonder. Okay? When was the last time God surprised you with something like incredible? He spoke something in your heart. He moved you. Or he showed you a caterpillar.

And you're like, why did you make that? Or it's just something really. Look at that sunset. Or that sunrise. As Will was saying this morning. See, typically when we've lost our way. Our zeal. Our excitement. I think one of these doorways. Might help you size up. Where are you lacking? Could be all of them. It's okay. It's okay. So, so important here. If you figure that out. If you figured out which door is you. Or you're confused or whatever. Just keep going. Don't try harder. Okay?

[26 : 18] Don't do more. That will be you trying to fix it. Simply know this. It might be where Jesus is knocking.

That's all I'm saying with this door thing. Where is he knocking? Trying to help you identify where he might be knocking on your soul. And what I want you to do if you do anything. Is go sit down somewhere.

And imagine that door that you identify as the need. And imagine it being closed. Okay? And then say, Jesus.

Jesus, will you come on in and sit here with me please? Will you put your right hand on me that I may rise up? Here's an exercise that's been helping me.

Maybe it will help you when you do that. Because for me, I need help lining up my self-identity with my Christ identity all the time. Okay? The two, I fight with that.

[27 : 18] That's one of my large struggles. So after praying and after reading scripture, I'll sit down and I'll say, hey, Holy Spirit, will you make the things that I'm reading in scripture actually real and things that I feel and believe and live out?

Will you move them from information into things I actually feel and believe? And then I'll take a verse that I know and read it out loud. So as though Jesus were speaking to me.

So this is an example. This verse here that you know well, Hebrews 12, says this. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that's set before us.

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

You've heard that probably a million times. Here's an exercise. If it's helpful, use it. If not, throw it away. After you read that verse, say this to yourself out loud.

[28 : 21] Write it down and say it out loud. Do you know that I had you in mind when I went to the cross, Derek? That's why I did it. You were worth it.

You were the joy that was set before me as I carried the cross to Calvary. And read it. I will read. I've got a whole bunch of these verses I read. And I do it over and over.

And I promise you, over time, you start to change. It changes you in circumstances. You can hear the voice of God more. When you are fighting it, boom, it's louder.

That's his spirit. That's his Holy Spirit working in us. We can call on him at any time. It's mysterious and it's beautiful. And we don't have to explain it. But we do have to live it out. Okay?

And here's why it matters. Because sometimes the danger isn't that we stop believing what's true. It's that everything else starts feeling more real. And sometimes, like those Laodiceans, we can just get comfortable living inside this version of ourselves that is not true.

[29 : 24] And Jesus loves us too much to leave us doing that. Okay? And repentance, he says, begins when he helps us see the gap between our zeal and between our confession.

And repentance is simply, in this instance, agreeing with Jesus about what is real and who we really are. And turning toward him over and over and over and over again until his love becomes our deepest reality.

And over time, y'all, it's so great. God tells you that you are a temple of his Holy Spirit. That means that you right now, individually, have someone today that when you walk out this door, even in here, that God will use you to impact as his hands and his feet.

The Holy Spirit, the power that raised Jesus from the dead, is dwelling in you as his temple. People used to go to the temple. Now they come to us. And they need to see us.

And this isn't a go work harder. This is a live in that identity. Go start by being with Jesus. Watch him use you in your school. Watch him use you in your marketplace, in your neighborhood.

[30 : 37] Watch the Holy Spirit change a life. And you don't have to have all the answers. You know what you have to do in those moments? Just say, what do you want me to know? And what do you want me to do? And he will tell you.

He will give you the promptings. He will give you the excitement. And when you see the lives change, y'all, you will know that you are used by the living God to do what he says in his scripture. And he wants to use you to do that today somewhere. Where, I don't know. But I know he knows. And I know you can go be with him. You can ask him. And you can welcome him in and say, what do you want me to do?

How do you want to use me? But it may start with you battling the lies in your own heart about who you really are. And the fears that he does not want you to live within. So, here's the promise he has for you.

To the one who conquers. Remember that's been at the end of all of these? Listen to what he says. You're going to get the tree of life. The second death will never touch you.

[31 : 37] I'm going to feed you with hidden manna. I'm going to give you a new name. A name known by me. I'm going to give you the morning star. I'm going to clothe you in white. I will never erase your name from the book of life.

I'm going to say your name before my father and his angels. I'm going to make you a pillar in the temple of my God. I'm going to put my name on you. The name of my city on you. My own new name on you.

And then, this is almost too much to imagine. I'm going to bring you all the way to my throne and let you sit with me. To the one who conquers. He is the one who conquered and he gifts this to you.

That means if you are in him, you conquer. And all of these things are true. And that is more real and powerful than anything this world has to offer. Remember who you are. Come to me and rest. As I close, I want you to remember that suicide we used to make in the beginning when I was little. All those flavors. All that mixing. Part of what made it so great was that we made it.

[32 : 37] And nobody else could get this drink anywhere else. But sometimes it was awful. But we would never admit it. We would just sit there and drink it and act like it was incredible.

And maybe that's not a bad picture of what we do with this life. We keep adding these things to it. Career, education, money, relationships, success, comfort, religion, one more achievement, one more plan, one more seminar, one more ministry, one more layer of protection.

Or we keep thinking, maybe if I get the mixture right, it's finally going to taste like this. And Jesus is not standing at that door holding another ingredient saying, take this and put it in the casserole that you're making.

He's offering himself to walk through that door. So hear that knock. And where is he knocking?

Okay. It's not this angry pounding of someone who can't wait to catch you doing something wrong.

That's what the enemy wants you to believe. That has been done away. We even sing about it.

Right? No guilt in life. No fear in death. This is the power of Christ in me. But it's the knock of the faithful and the true one.

[33 : 50] The beginning of God's creation. He says, I love you. Let me show you what you can't see. Let me give you what you can't manufacture. Let me sit with you.

Let me put my hand on you. Let me lead you home. I am who you are looking for. God bless you. Let's do it together. Hold me to it.

And I sure want to hold you up in it too. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word that you are true, that you deliver us true, true hard things to say to our souls because you love us.

But Lord, may we take from this what you really mean. And I pray by your spirit you would make whatever that is true in the people's hearts right now by your spirit.

You know what's true and you are the truth that will speak to them because you are the way, the truth, and the life. I don't pray for outcomes. Oh, no. These people don't need any more outcomes than the world has already put on them.

[34 : 51] I pray for you. I pray for your presence, Holy Spirit, to rush into their souls and excite them in a way that only the kingdom of God can, that only the son of God can, that only the resurrected living Christ can.

Remind them of who they are, how you have uniquely made them, and how you are calling them to something that is far greater than anything this world has to offer. And may it make all the difference in the world until we are with you forever, walking through that door at the great marriage supper of the Lamb to be with you forever.

Praise be to you, Lord Jesus, risen Christ. Please look on the church of Southwood and smile and change us and use us. We want to make you proud, but we need you to do it.

Please be with us and rest on us, I pray in Christ's holy name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.