OPEN THE DOOR

Revelation 3:14-22

Key Verse:3:20 “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.”

 Today’s message continues with Christ’s message to the church in Laodicea. The church in Laodicea is known being built by Epaphras, who built the church of Colossae (Col 4:12,13). In fact, Laodicea was distant only 10 miles away from Colossae. But the city of Laodicea was wealthier and more developed city than other cities around. It became wealthy because of the black glossy wool industry. The city was the center of trade, connecting the east and the west, from Ephesus to the inland of Asia. The city had a six-mile long water supply system, an aqueduct which conveyed hot water from a hot spring at south to the district of north. Like other cities around Laodicea had the temples of pagan gods.

 How is the Christ portrayed in his message for this city? Look at verse 14. “***To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.***” Jesus was introduced as a man of Amen, the faithful and true witness, and the ruler of God’s creation. Why was Jesus identified as the words of the Amen. ‘The word ‘*Amen*’ in Hebrew means ‘so it be!” ‘Amen’ is a people’s submissive response to God’s message or his will. As we studied in Exodus, when God made a covenant with the Israelites, they responded by saying, ‘Amen!”, which means “*We will do everything as you said*.” (Ex 24:3) In a marriage vow during a wedding ceremony a bride and a bridegroom often answer with ‘Amen’ in replace of saying, “I do.” In the same way Jesus responded with ‘Amen’ to God’s will. Jesus said ‘Amen’ for the death on the cross even though he wanted to avoid it if possible. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”* (Mt 26:39, Mk 14:36, Lk22:42) Jesus meant saying “Amen” for God’s will, and “No” for his will. Follow Jesus’ example so that we can be men and women of ‘Amen. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, “*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God*.”

 What was Christ’s message to the church in Laodicea? Look at verses 15-16. “***I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth***.” Jesus rebuked their lukewarmness. Here lukewarmness means their spiritual backsliding and lack of zeal. The hot water which was conveyed through the aqueduct from the south to north became cold on the way. In the same way the believers’ heart became cold while living in the cold world. In Matthew 24:12 Jesus predicted the end of the age like this, “*Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold*.” When the church started, people’s heart must have been hot like fire in the furnace. All the believers devoted themselves to the Lord and for the work of God. But as time passed by, they began to lose their zeal and interest for the work of God. At that time two main challenges they confronted from in and out of the church. There were severe persecutions from the Roman government. Emperor Domitian ordered all colonians to worship him. If not, they were put to death or they lost all social benefits from the government. In order to survive under the persecution some compromised with the pagans. When they compromised one by one with the pagans, they lost their spiritual purity and identity as people of God. Others might be tempted by the love of money. They chose money more than God. Persecution from outside and temptation from inside the believers in the church became lukewarm and complacent.

 Jesus warned those who are lukewarm in verse 16, “*I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*” Jesus meant that they would be useless before God. Jesus said in Matthew 5:13, “*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again*? *It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*” Like the salt which are thrown out and trampled, lukewarm Christians will be spit out of the mouth of Jesus.

 How did Jesus counsel them? Look at verses 17-18. “***You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness, and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see***.” Jesus meant that they are not rich at all in the sight of God even though they said that they were rich. This is the opposite message from that of Smyrna in 2:9 which says, “*I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich*!” Jesus called the believers in Smyrna rich, but the believers in Laodicea wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. Why? This is because they didn’t know the true richness in God. Those who are rich toward God are really rich. Even though they lack money, they are really rich people, if they are rich toward God. So Jesus said, “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*” (Mt 6:19,20) Jesus counseled the Laodiceans to buy gold from him. His gold is not Bitcoin, but genuine faith like pure gold refined by fire. Here, fire means hardships and persecution. Genuine faith refined by hardships and sufferings are more precious and valuable than gold and silver. Peter hated sufferings, so he denied Jesus three times. But later he realized the value of suffering for Christ. So, he encouraged the suffering Christians scattered around the world in his letter, “*These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed*.” (1Pe 1:7) As the pandemic continues and the global economy goes uncertain, people want to buy gold or silver for their security. But true rich people buy gold from Jesus. His gold never perishes, disappears, or devalues because it is stored in heaven. We cannot go to heaven naked. We need the white clothes for the heavenly banquet, which can be purchased by the blood of Jesus. We cannot go to heaven blinded. Jesus opens our eyes to see the kingdom of heaven. Jesus provides white clothes and opens our eyes to see the kingdom of heaven. Amen!

 How did Jesus plead with them? Look at verse 19. “***Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.***” Proverbs 27:5 says, “Open rebuke is better than hidden love.” Jesus rebukes those whom he loves and he disciplines those whom he considers as his people. Hebrews 12:5-6 says, “*My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son*.” Therefore, let us accept God’s rebuke and discipline as his divine love and repent. Amen!

 What does ‘repent’ mean? The word ‘repent’ has two meanings: remorse and return. In other words we remorse for our wrongdoings, and return to God. In verse 20 Jesus also teaches us about repentance. This verse is the answer for the problems of all the seven churches including that of Laodicea. Those who understand this verse and respond to Jesus’ invitation will be called great in the sight of God. Look at verse 20. “***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.***” This is Jesus’ invitation for communion. Jesus visits us and invites us to dine with him. Jesus desires koionia with us. In ancient days eating food at the same table was regarded as treating other as their family. Jesus’ abidance in us is more than social fellowship, but intimate relationship like a vine and its branch. (Jn 15:5) It indicates perfect unity in Jesus. In our holy communion we eat bread and drink wine. It symbolizes our communion with Christ by eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Jesus said in John 6:55-56, “*For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.*” Jesus wants us to be one with him. He wants us to be one with him as he is one with the Father. Jesus wants us to have perfect unity through the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to his disciples in John 14:20, “*On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you*.” He also said in John 17:20-23. *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity…*” How can sinners become one with the Holy God? Jesus made the way. Jesus said, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” (Jn 14:6) Jesus made possible for sinners to come to the Father and to be one in him through his death on the cross. Praise Jesus!

 Welcoming Jesus in our hearts also admits the Lordship of Christ over our lives. According to the Four Spiritual Law, accepting Jesus in our hearts means yielding the ownership of our life to Jesus. In other words, we accept Jesus as our Lord and King. Before we accept Christ, we were the king of our lives. We lived as we desired until we became slaves of sin. But Jesus died for our sins and set us free from the slavery of sin. The moment we invite Jesus in our hearts, Jesus rules us with his peace and love. He becomes our eternal, peaceful, Savior King. Life with Christ under his lordship, we enjoy new life, life abundant, satisfied, joyful, meaningful, fruitful, and eternal. Life with Jesus gives us fire into our hearts. This is not only because Jesus baptizes us with fire and with the Holy Spirit, but also because we are overwhelmed by the love of God through Jesus Christ. Those who have koionia with Jesus through the Holy Spirit are full of spirit, zeal, and power for the work of God.

 All the believers in the seven churches were the same as these when they accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This was expressed as the first love in the Ephesus church. The fire and zeal for Jesus encouraged the martyrs in the church of Smyrna to be faithful even to the point of death. This love for Jesus helped the believers in the church of Pergamum and Thyatira to overcome the false teachings of Nicolaitans and stand firm on the side of truth. This communion with Jesus waked the saints in the church of Sardis and Philadelphia from their spiritual blindness and slumber. But, when they lost their communion with Jesus, they lost their first love, listened to false teachings of pagans, compromised with the worldly authorities, and loved money more than God. They were like broken branches apart from the true vine Jesus. They became lukewarm, complacent, superficial, and half-hearted. Jesus rebukes them to repent and restore their communion with him. Jesus stands at the door and knock their hearts, “Please open the door. I want to come in and eat with you. Please open the door.” How can we apply Jesus’ message to each of us and to our ministry? How can you respond to Jesus’ invitation for his communion? Are you ready to open the door so that he may come in?

 In verse 21 Jesus promises reward to those who are victorious. This reward is a sort of conclusive and climatic reward to all those who are victorious. Let us read verse 21. “***To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne***.” Jesus promised to let the victors sit on the throne of Jesus and sit with the Father God in heaven. What an incredible blessing to those who are victorious! Jesus is the first victor. He overcame the world and sat on the throne of God the Father. Now it is our turn. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, and follow him until we eat from the tree of life, until we receive life as victor’s crown, until we receive hidden manna and a white stone with our names, until we receive authority over nations, until we are dressed in white, until we become the two pillars of God’s temple, and until we sit on the throne of God with our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen! Let us be faithful to the point of death and until our Lord Jesus comes again. Amen!