

Behold, I Stand at the Door and Knock

By Rev. Ronald Van Overloop

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Revelation 3:20
Preached on: Sunday, August 20, 2017

Grace Protestant Reformed Church
O-11225 8th Ave NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49534

Website: www.graceprc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/graceprc

Our reading from the Scriptures this evening comes from the Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the third chapter. Revelation 3. The first chapter is introductory and describes the heart of the vision that John saw on the Lord's day. In verse 10 he says that, and that vision is of the Lord Jesus Christ standing in the midst of seven golden candlesticks and those seven golden candlesticks are the seven churches to which he writes in chapters 2 and 3. Those seven churches are all true churches. They represent the true church of Jesus Christ as it existed then and as it exists throughout all of the new dispensational history. So the characteristics of those seven churches and they each have strengths and weaknesses, can be found at any given time in any congregation, any true church of Jesus Christ is going to have the characteristics of those seven. Not only is that true of churches, congregations, local established churches, but it's also true of individuals and that, well, take the first church, Ephesus, it's mostly known because of the characteristic that it lost its first love for Christ. That's not only true of a church, that's true of us individually and the text that God gives us now in this last part of Revelation 3, is also true not only of the church to one degree or another, sometimes more than in other times, but it's also true of us individually. In chapter 4 on all the way to the end, he gives a revelation of what will be, 2 and 3 describe what is as he sees it then and as it's true now.

Revelation 3,

1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. 4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. 5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. 6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. 7 And to the

angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; 8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. 9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. 10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. 11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. 13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. 14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; 15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: 18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. 21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. 22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

May God bless our reading of his word.

The text that God gives to us this evening is that which is found in verses 19 and 20 of Revelation 3.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

The understanding that many have had in a confused way about verse 20, at the risk of being overly simple, is because they don't see the connection between 20 and 19. We consider, first, to whom is the Lord speaking; secondly, we want to consider what's he saying, what's the nature of his call and knock; and then thirdly, the promise, the very very wonderful promise that he gives to those who hear and respond to his call and knock.

The erroneous interpretation of verse 20 that is commonly out there, I can remember very vividly when we saw a picture that was on the wall of a church building that we were using when we were a missionary in the Birmingham, Alabama area that was on the wall of that church, and there the figure of Jesus was standing outside of a door, a wooden door that had vines growing over it, it had long been shut. There was no knob, no handle on the outside and Jesus was standing there knocking and calling and the common interpretation that that picture represented is that Jesus is standing at the door of a sinner's heart and he's begging and he's calling to be able to come into that heart but he cannot and he cannot unless the sinner open the door from the inside and allow him to come in. So his knocking and his calling is Jesus doing everything that he can to suade the sinner to open to him and Jesus often goes away sad, it's said, because there's often a door left closed. Sometimes it's opened but often it's closed and Jesus fails in his efforts. Why that interpretation cannot be, is incorrect, is first of all, because of the nature of the Lord, the one doing the knocking, and 2, because the context makes it very very clear that this is not a sinner's heart but it is a believer's heart, the church's heart.

First, look at what the context says about the one knocking. He says in verse 14, as every one of these letters gives an introduction to him that identifies him and the specific way Jesus is identified here in relationship to the church of Laodicea is that he is "the Amen," so let it be, he's "the faithful and true witness," he is "the beginning of the creation of God." He's the first of all of God's creation. Jesus, the Son of God, not the second person of the Trinity but the second person of the Trinity in our human nature is the first, the beginning of the creation of God. He's the essence of God's creation. He's no weakling. He's not limited in his abilities.

Look at all the ways in which he's identified to the other six churches to whom he is writing, but look at the description of him particularly as you find it in the first chapter. There in verse 8,

8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

In verse 13, he's described standing in the midst of the candlesticks. He is "the Son of man" and that's the identification, the name that's given to Jesus as the one who judges,

13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. 14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; 15 And his feet like unto

fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. 16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. 17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.

That's the Lord Jesus Christ. No one begging. No one who is incapable of accomplishing what he desires to accomplish. But secondly, the door is of the church. If there are interpretations that this is the door of a sinner's heart, then that's the door of a dead, a spiritually dead sinner who is totally incapable of hearing any call or any knock. That's someone who 1 Corinthians 2:14 says is incapable, he cannot understand spiritual things. His heart is desperately wicked, Jeremiah describes. There is hatred in his heart, Romans 8:7 says, toward God. But instead, this is not a sinner who's not regenerated and the Lord wants to regenerate him, this is the door of one of the true churches. There is a candlestick in its midst. It's faithful. It's not perfect, it's far from perfect, it's got all kinds of faults just like every other church on earth and it's filled not with perfect people but with sinners.

Now the question that has to be answered is: why does Jesus say in verse 20 that he stands at the door and knocks? Why is he portraying himself to be outside and not inside? How is it he's not in there but out and he's knocking and calling? The answer to that is found in the description of the church of Laodicea, in verse 17 particularly. Verses 15 and 16 lead up to it, "I would you were cold or hot. You're spiritually lukewarm. You're not fervent, you're not an ice-cold drink, you're not a nice hot cup of coffee drink, you're lukewarm, rather disappointing and I'm ready to spew you out of my mouth." And that kind of a description is because of what he says of them in verse 17. "I'm outside because you have put me outside in the way in which you are thinking and living your life. You describe yourselves as being rich and increased with goods and you don't lack anything when the reality is that," not only is it true of every single believer, but also of every church that their constant consciousness must be what he says here of the church of Laodicea, "you are instead wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

The description that he gives in those five words is of every believer who still carries his old man of sin, who knows that because of the presence of sin even though – now just take the description and the definition of a saint as you find it in the Canons, Fifth Head, Article 1, someone whom God has brought into communion with his Son Jesus Christ, regenerates by his Spirit, delivers also from the dominion and slavery of sin in this life, but not altogether, not altogether delivered from the body of sin and from the infirmities of the flesh so long as they continue in this world, so that hence daily sins spring up, daily sins of infirmity and hence spots adhere to the best works of saints which ought to instead furnish them with constant matter for humility, for flying for refuge to Christ crucified. But if I don't see my old man that I must always be putting off, I'm not going to fly for refuge to Christ crucified. When I go through my day and I have forgotten my need for him, when my faults are pointed out by someone and my response is, "You don't understand. I didn't mean it that way. I didn't sin." Then we have to remember that every time we don't sin or think we don't, then we don't need Jesus.

Jesus saves sinners. He doesn't save those who don't sin. They don't need him. He saves sinners and not just theoretical intellectual sinners, real sinners, sinners who acknowledge that their nature against which they are struggling all their life long is that they are wretched and miserable, poor, blind and naked in themselves. The Lord of the church comes to this church and says, "The way in which you're living your life and your lives is that you have, in reality, put me outside."

Now the truth is he's there inside. He's with them. He never leaves them. He's regenerated them. He abides in them. But their experience is they went through the whole day and they didn't even think of him. Oh, they prayed at lunch but it was a head bowed in a perfunctory way and they said some words that they always thought and think and then their amen, and there they go. They don't need him. It's a true church, it's a believer but not a strong church and not a strong believer. It's weak and getting weaker.

Now in some ways we might be able to say it's not filled with an ardent love for God and for Jesus, it's not zealous for the truths of the Gospel, we can say that it's not hot against sin and errors, but the reality that's closer to the truth is that we realize how many times throughout the course of a day and a week in our life we can be easily self-satisfied and we don't live in the consciousness of our need for Jesus.

That last word in verse 19 is critical in understanding. The last word of verse 19 is "repent." The word literally means "a turning of one's mind" and it refers to the constant activity, and this is what God calls us to have, a constant awareness of the struggle that must be ours to take heed to what you find in Colossians, put off the old, put on the new. Always that effort to put off this guy, put off these sins that just well up within us. I don't even have to think to think wrong, I have to think to think right. But it's natural for me to lie, it's natural for me to sin, it's natural for me to do all kinds of things, wrong things, and it's work to do what's right. That's the activity of repenting. Be constantly repenting. That's the way that God calls us to live. When we're actively repenting, then we know we need him.

Sometimes I put it as bluntly as I did to the kids in Catechism when they are making excuses, where they are shifting the blame, and I'll just say just to try to show to them that immediately, "You don't need Jesus right now, do you?" "Oh, yes I do." They don't want to say that but if you didn't do something wrong and you did it right, then you didn't need him. You're not aware of your need. You're not repenting.

Jesus is addressing the church, the Christian church at Laodicea. He's addressing the true church of every age. He's addressing every believer who lives in the consciousness that weakness adheres to them and spots are present in every work of theirs and they have a constant need of Jesus.

Now every single one of us is pretty well aware that we're not always high spiritually, we're not always living in the consciousness of his relationship to us and ours to him, and it's a wonderful experience. We can be busy in games, we can be busy in work, we can be busy in the home, we can have our arguments in the car, we can be self-centered so

constantly, so often. Now we have a Savior who in his wisdom knows what we need. He knows how to handle us when we think we're okay, we have need of nothing, and what he does as the sovereign Lord, the Almighty, Alpha and Omega, is he calls, he knocks.

Verse 19 describes his knock and his call as chastening and rebuking. "I call. I'm not begging. I'm not begging as someone who can't get in if I want to. I stand with eyes as a flame of fire and my tongue is as a two-edged sword and I come with a rod of chastisement." That's why we sang 266. He has a rod of chastisement. He stands before the church, he stands before every believer and he wants our attention. He wants us to hear him. He wants us to see him. He wants us to look up because we're so busy looking horizontally. He wants us to wake up in every given moment when we are spiritually lethargic. He wants us to recognize at all those given moments then need to put off, put on, over and over and over.

So this verse, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. As many as I love, I chasten and rebuke," he's indicating that the motive that's behind his activity every time the rod is used, is love. This is a quote, of course, from Proverbs 3:11,

11 My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: 12 For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

It's referenced the same language in Deuteronomy 8. God through Moses is reviewing the history of taking the children of Israel through the wilderness. He says,

3 And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. 4 Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. 5 Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee. 6 Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him.

"I am the vine, the Father is the husbandman. Ye are the branches." Every branch that beareth fruit, he prunes, he purges, he cuts, he chastens that it may bring forth more fruit, though it hurts, though it's uncomfortable. In his love, he chastens and rebukes.

Hebrews 12 quotes that Proverbs 3 verse again.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father

chasteneth not? 8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Whom the Lord loves, he chastens. He gives a word of rebuke. He calls us.

Now God is always talking, he's always calling, he's always saying, "Look at me," whether it's an eclipse and something very unusual, he gets our attention. A 17 year old dies, he gets our attention. But God is never silent. Jesus is always calling in every event of our life. Sometimes he hits hard on the door of our consciousness. He wants us to wake up to our constant need of him. "I am weak. I am by nature wretched and miserable. I am blind. I don't know what's best. I like to think I do but I really don't know what's best for myself. I need the covering of the righteousness of Jesus Christ constantly." That's the awareness that he wants us to have. That's the attitude of repenting so that we never, we would never dare say, "I don't need Jesus," but beloved, this says we often go through life thinking we don't or acting like we don't. Not consciously maybe, but it's there all the time and in his love, in his love, our chastening Father is always saying, "Look at me and know your need for a Savior to forgive and to be making you righteous."

When the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 asked God to take the thorn out of his flesh and the Lord said to him, "Paul, my grace is sufficient for you." "Yup, good, thanks Lord. Would you take the thorn away?" Three times until he came to the consciousness, "When I am weak, then am I really strong. When I admit my faults, when I am conscious that I can't, then I look to him who alone is able. Then I'll look up. Then I will open unto him. Then I will know where my strength really lies. Then I will look to the rock from whence I have been hewn."

Then he makes this promise: every time, every time, even if our repenting is still imperfect and needs to be forgiven itself, every time we look up, every time we say, "I'm sorry," every time we say, "Please forgive," God says this, "I will come in and I will sup." Now because he's already in, he's talking about our experience and our consciousness of his coming in, not whether he's in reality already there. To come in is literally to abide and to live with someone in an intimate relationship of love and peace and confidence where he seeks the well-being of the other occupants of that house to live together, to come in and to sup. Why is it when we want to visit with some people, we'll sometimes go out to eat together? And it's not so much what we're eating as the fellowship. And the word "sup," you children can see, gives us the word "supper." And to eat with the cereal boxes on each side and in front because I'm not talking to anybody, or the hood of the sweatshirt that covers over everything, or we sit there in sullen silence as teenagers and when dad or mother asks us, "How did it go today?" "Good. Same old." You don't talk. To sup is what suppers ought to be and it's Jesus himself saying, "I'm going to come in and I'm going to sit down at your table, the table of your consciousness and I'm going to talk with you and I'm going to assure you and you're going to communicate to me and we'll fellowship."

We call that covenant and that's the right way to say it. Covenant communion. Jesus and his people together. God dwelling with us. God at home with us. God drawing us into his

own divine family. So the glorious perfectly holy God receives us into his own life, he shows us his love, "Trust my love. You're hurting. You're looking at me. Trust my love for you. I won't leave you. I'll be right here with you and I have forgiven you." The Lord hath put away thy sin. It's gone. "And I chose you in order to make you holy and without blame." He'll remind us of that. In the consciousness of our sin, he answers all the time with these words, "I'm with you. I'm going to live with you. I want to live with you in your consciousness. Don't have me inside of your heart in a regenerated way but you live your life as if you don't need me." That's the call.

So when he says, "If any man hear my voice," it's more, "When any man hears my voice." Every time we repent, he comes and he sups with us and I can be bold to ask that in the form of a question: isn't that true? Isn't that what you've experienced in the course of your life? Through hardship, through the rod, you stop and as hard as that time may be, that's when you experience his presence like never before upholding you and holding you. Why don't we have that all the time? Because I am wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked by nature and I still have that old man and I've got to put him off all the time and it's hard. Sometimes I don't want to. Sometimes I want to like my sin. So he knocks and sometimes he pounds and he gets us and he calls us as a church and as every individual believer.

"As many as I love, every single one that I have eternally loved, I chasten." Why? Because we're still sinning. When we get to heaven, no more chastening. Then we're perfect. Until then, his love isn't going to let us go. His love is going to keep calling, calling us to a consciousness of our need for him and every time he answers, "I will eat with you. I have not forsaken you. I will walk with you." Amen.

Our Father, we thank thee for the call, for the knock. Help us to hear it. Sometimes thou dost have to knock hard but so often thou dost call and bring us to a consciousness of thy care, of thy love, that sometimes we're even bold to think we don't need. Thanks for this word that reminds us of thy work. May we have an ear to hear what the Spirit said to Laodicea and to us today. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

One thought that I wanted to bring up and that was this: that the church at Laodicea did hear. Many think that the church at Laodicea was the worst of the seven but in the 300's there was a church council that was held in Laodicea and one of the decisions of that church council was to finally determine which books of the New Testament belonged to the Bible, the Holy Bible. That church heard and repented.

Revelation 3:20

BEHOLD, I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK

- I. Those addressed.
 - A. An erroneous interpretation is that Jesus is begging to be allowed into the sinner's heart.
 - 1. First, this is the Son of God, the Lord (1:8,13-16,18) before Whom John fell as dead (1:17).
 - 2. Second, the natural man is spiritual death, unable to want to choose for Christ (Eph. 2:1-3; 4:18; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 8:7).
 - B. Rather, this is the door of the Christian church in Laodicea, which is a part of the true church, though in sad condition.
 - 1. Jesus stands before this church, not begging, but as a King of the world, Head of the church, and as chastening Father.
 - 2. The Lord is portrayed as being outside because generally the church acted and spoke as if it had no need of Him (17).
- II. Before this church (this believer) the Lord Jesus says, "I stand at the door, and knock."
 - A. The Lord is not begging, but angrily standing before it with flaming eyes (1:14) and with a rod of chastisement.
 - 1. He stands before this church with the urgent call to wake up from its spiritual lethargy and to repent.
 - 2. The Lord delivers a word of rebuke, by which He undresses this lukewarm congregation.
 - B. Jesus knocks in order to lead them to repentance, i.e., to change one's mind and activity.
- III. The Lord comes with a wonderful promise: "I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me."
 - A. The figures describe the communion of salvation in a home life with Jesus Christ.
 - B. This is the covenant communion Jesus has with His people.
 - C. "If" is "when" giving assurance, not a condition occasioning doubt.
 - 1. In the way of repentance and daily conversion we experience this blessed covenant fellowship.
 - 2. This is what it is to have a heart for God, both as a congregation and as an individual believer.