

Comments on Revelation 3

The addresses to the seven churches of Asia continues from the preceding chapter.

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.

v1-6 The Lord speaks to the church at Sardis, identifying Himself as the one in the vision in ch. 1 who holds the seven servants in His hand. He sees their works and while they are still physically alive, they are spiritually dead (v. 1, the IV changes this reading, see below). They must wake up and endure to the end, because He has found their works lacking (v. 2). They need to remember the things they have learned and repent, or the end will come to them when they are not prepared and they will be judged (v. 3). Some few there are faithful and have not sullied themselves, these are they who have the Lord's promise of heaven (v. 4). The Lord then closes with an admonition (v. 6) that those who endure to the end will be presented to the Father by the Son (v. 5).

The church at Sardis is not doing particularly well. While it seems they have not fallen prey to Nicolaitans or Judaizers, it does appear they have lost their initial zeal and are apathetic about the gospel. Some few among them are still zealous, and are held up as examples, but the rest need to get back on the straight and narrow path.

The persistent theme of names throughout these verses are tied up with the book of life reference in v. 5. In v. 1 the Lord says they have a name, His name, that they might be alive in and through, because of his advocacy before the Father (v.

5). While some of them still have their name in the book of life (v. 4), most appear to be in danger of having their name removed from that book (v. 5).

v1-2 The KJV and the IV/JST differ, as follows:

KJV

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.
Be watchful,
and strengthen
the things which remain,
that are ready to die:
for I have not
found thy works perfect
before God.

IV/JST

And unto the servant
of the church in Sardis,
write;
These things saith
he who hath
the seven stars,
which are the seven
servants of God;

I know thy works,
that thou hast a name
that thou livest,
and art not dead.
Be watchful therefore,
and strengthen
those who remain,
who are ready to die;
for I have not
found thy works perfect
before God.

The IV changes the wording on v. 2 to address those faithful few who are not spiritually dead and encourage those who are nearly spiritually dead to repent.

v3 "as a thief", i.e., without forewarning, cp. Matt. 24:43, 1 Thes. 5:2.

v4 The reference to defiled garments in v. 4 might be an obscure allusion to Priesthood leaders who are not acting in the capacity they should, cf. Ezek. 33, Jacob 1:19, D&C 109:76. The symbolism of white garments is explained in 19:8.

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.

v7-13 The Lord addresses the church at Philadelphia, identifying Himself as the Messiah spoken of by Isaiah (v. 7, cp. Isa. 22:22). The Lord acknowledges their faithfulness in the face of adversity (v. 8), and tells them the persecuting Judaizers will be debased (v. 9) while they are sheltered (v. 10). He encourages them to continue to endure, so that no man can prevent them from obtaining the crown the Lord has reserved for them (v. 11). The Lord then gives his closing admonition (v. 13) telling them they will be firmly founded, even as a pillar in the Lord's heavenly temple, and they will bear the name of His Father and Himself (v. 12).

v8 "for thou hast a little strength", this is probably referring to the church being in a minority position in the society within which they dwell. They are a persecuted minority who have persevered, so the Lord Himself intercedes to hold the door of opportunity open for them.

v9 "I will make them to come and worship", referring to the Judgement when those whom the Lord loves are exalted and those who rejected the Lord are debased.

"to know that I have loved thee", those of natural Israel enjoyed the blessings of the covenant, but have largely rejected the Lord, so the blessings of the covenant have been made available to all nations. All those who worship Him are beloved by Him.

v10 "the word of my patience", the word of the Lord requires

patience and perseverance in the face of afflictions and adversity, cf. Matt. 5:38-42, John 16:2.

"the hour of temptation", a better translation would be "the hour of testing" (NAS). The Lord refers to the trials and tribulations of daily mortal life, but more specifically refers to the tribulations spoken of in ch. 6 and 8, and ultimately the final Judgement, as referenced in v. 11.

v12 "go no more out", a better reading would be "he will never leave". It conveys the idea of eternal connection between God and man as a result of Christ's redemption. The man who is ushered into the Kingdom permanently has a place. He is the Father's and is not lost, similar to the idea of John 17:12, 3 Ne. 27:31, D&C 50:42. The symbolism of being a pillar in the heavenly temple is given as a metaphor of the eternal nature of the blessing. Just as heaven and its pillars and its foundation are eternal, so will those who are found faithful and brought there.

"write upon him the name of my God", the person who has reconciled themselves to the will of the Father is redeemed by the Son. Those redeemed by the Son become His, cp. 14:1, ct. 13:16-17. Additional symbolism comes from Exod. 28:36-38, where Aaron and his sons are to be consecrated as high priests to the Lord with His name written upon them. Thus, these people who are taken into the heavenly kingdom are made high priests and priestesses to the Lord.

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.

v14-22 The Lord addresses the church at Laodicea, identifying Himself as the consummation, the witness, and source of the Father's Creation (v. 14). He says the church is not doing well, so the Lord will reject them (v. 15-16). Their material wealth and life of comfort and ease has resulted in them being spiritually destitute (v. 17). They need to invest themselves in heavenly wealth so they may be eternally rich, spiritually clean, and able to see (v. 18). He is reprimanding them because He loves them and wants them to repent (v. 19). He stands at their door asking to dine with them, if they will only open the door to him (v. 20). The Lord then closes by telling them they must overcome the world, even as He did. If they do, then they will sit enthroned with the Father, even as He is (v. 21). He then admonishes them to listen to what He has said (v. 22).

The statement that they are neither hot nor cold in the Greek is masculine, and not feminine. The church is typically treated as the feminine article. This suggests the Lord is more directly censuring the servant over that church, as opposed to the church in general.

v14 The authority statement in this verse is obscure. When the Lord states He is the "beginning of the creation", He means He is the source of the Creation, or the Creator, having been commissioned by the Father to do so. That He is the "Amen", indicates He is the consummation or fulfilment of that Creation, in that He redeems man from the Fall, returning them to the Father. He is the "faithful witness" because He came into mortality as the Messiah and served the Father flawlessly to perform the Atonement.

v15-16 The intent of the symbolism is obscure, and thus the verses are variously interpreted. A common reading is that "hot" represents gospel zeal and the "cold" represents heathen zeal, and if they were only one way or the other the Lord would prefer that. Instead, these people are apathetic Christians, whom the Lord finds more offensive than zealous heathens. This reading is problematic as why would the Lord prefer "cold" over "luke-warm"? Others read this more simply as the Lord metaphorically wishing they would decide one way or the other whether they are Christians or not.

Taking the passage in the context suggested by the ensuing verses, it is likely the Lord is presenting the antithesis of v. 20, just as v. 17 is the antithesis of v. 18.

In v. 20 the Lord offers to come in and dine with anyone who will open to Him, and clearly the imagery is that of both eating and drinking. Given this context, v. 15-16 would then represent a meal which is neither hot nor cold, neither freshly cooked nor carefully preserved, and is therefore stale and spoiled. It is food that has been left out too long, is filled with bacteria, and causes food poisoning such that when eaten it causes people to vomit.

The symbolism then becomes, "You are like food that has gone bad, making people sick". They enjoy material and therefore plenty to eat, but the physical food they are eating is poisoning them spiritually.

v16 "spue thee out", the Greek would be better translated to "vomit". An obvious symbol of rejection, cp. Lev. 18:28.

v17 Comfort and ease has resulted in religious torpor, cp. Hosea 12:8, Hela. 12:2.

v18 Physical gold is not of eternal worth, cp. Isa. 48:10, Zech. 13:9, Matt. 6:19-20.

"the shame of thy nakedness", while they have material wealth, they are in spiritual poverty. A common mark of poverty is the inability to buy clothing, thus they are spiritually "naked", or not clothed in offered "white raiment".

v20 The Lord freely offers the spiritual food of eternal life, cp. Deut. 8:3, Isa. 55:1-2. This is spiritual food that saves instead of sickening as in v. 16.

v21 The Lord's willingness to forgive is exemplified as He is offering His throne, on condition of repentance, to the one whom he is presently telling He is presently rejecting. To sit with the Lord on His Father's throne is a reference to exaltation.

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