

## Revelation 3:20

*Revelation 3:20 (NLT) “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.”*

The speaker of this famous verse is the resurrected Jesus. The audience is the church in Laodicea, a city in southwestern Turkey. The date is at least five decades after Jesus ascended to heaven to lead His church until He returns at the end of this age.

Is Jesus speaking to true Christians in this verse? There are a couple of reasons why this could be the case. First, the New Testament normally refers to “the church” as the people who have personally entrusted themselves to Jesus as Savior. Second, in the previous verse, Jesus says: “I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference” (Revelation 3:19). Passages like Hebrews 12:6-10 teach that only true Christians are subject to God’s loving discipline. If Jesus is addressing true Christians in Laodicea, then He is inviting them to turn from their spiritual indifference and renew close fellowship with Him. Many fine Christian teachers have interpreted this verse in this way, and they have helped many true Christians (including myself) to grant Jesus renewed access to their lives.

It is also possible that Jesus is speaking to people who, while formally identified with Christianity, were not actually Christians. The Laodicean church was several decades old, and could by this time have been predominantly populated by nominal members. Tragically, this has happened over and over again throughout church history. Jesus’ description of His audience’s spiritual condition seems to fit this interpretation. They think that they are spiritually “rich, and have



become wealthy, and have need of nothing.” But Jesus says that they are tragically unaware of the fact that they are “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17). The New Testament frequently uses blindness as an illustration of an unbelieving person (see John 9:40,41). Jesus’ advice in verse 18 that they “buy” from Him “white garments” is used elsewhere in Revelation as a symbol of being forgiven through faith in Jesus’ death for their sins (Revelation 7:14). Many fine Christian teachers have interpreted this verse in this way, and have helped many people (including myself) to come to a saving relationship with Jesus.

Of course, it is possible that Jesus was speaking *both* to true Christians who needed spiritual renewal *and* to nominal members who needed conversion. Both kinds of people were likely present in the Laodicean church. Let us focus then on two great complementary truths in this verse that apply to both groups of people.

The first truth is that *Jesus takes the initiative with us*. He is the One who comes to our doors, and He is the One who knocks on our doors. He seeks us out, rather than insisting that we seek Him out. True, the Bible sometimes urges us to seek God (e.g., Matthew 7:7,8). But it also says that no one naturally seeks for God (Romans 3:11). The best resolution to this paradox is that our seeking for God is always (whether we realize it or not) a response to God’s prior seeking us. This is why Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him” (John 6:44). If we wind up loving God, it is always because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

What a wonderful truth this is! God is not playing hide-and-seek with us. Nor does our finding Him depend on how much or how hard we search for Him. He loves us, and in His love He seeks us out through Jesus who knocks on the door of our hearts. He may do this directly, through a Bible passage, or by pricking our conscience, or even through a dream or vision. He may do this indirectly, through the words of a friend or stranger, or even by allowing difficult circumstances to



sensitize us to our need for Him. He takes the initiative with us when we are lost; He is the Good Shepherd who seeks and saves that which is lost (Luke 19:10). And He takes the initiative with us when we belong to Him but are straying from Him; He is the Good Shepherd whose staff lovingly draws us back to follow His leadership (Psalm 23:4). Throughout all of our lives, we can be confident that Jesus is seeking us because He loves, and because He wants us to enjoy communing with us as His friends.

The second truth is that *Jesus will not impose Himself on us*. He knocks, and then He waits for us to open our doors. He will not batter our doors down. Rather, He politely asks permission to enter into our lives, and then He awaits our response. The very fact that He seeks a love-relationship with us means that He will not force Himself on us, because a love relationship requires mutual willingness.

This truth is both comforting and sobering. It is comforting because it means that God is not a Tyrant who imposes His rule on us, but rather a Friend who desires our voluntary trust. Although Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth, He invites us to receive Him as our Savior, and then to follow Him as our Leader.

This truth is also sobering because it means that we can say “No” to Jesus, to our own detriment. Consider these wise words on this passage by William Temple:

“(Jesus) never forces upon us His own gifts. He offers them, but unless we actively accept them, they remain ineffective as far as we are concerned. ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock’ – that is always the relation of God our Redeemer to our souls. He has paid the whole price; He has suffered the atoning death; yet still He waits till we open the door of our hearts to let in His love . . . And this is true not only of His first (request) for the admission to the mansion of the soul; it is also true of every room in that mansion . . . There are (many) who have welcomed Him into some rooms, and hope that He will not ask what goes on behind the doors of others. But sooner or



later He asks; and if we do not . . . take Him to see, He leaves the room where we were so comfortable with Him, and stands knocking at the closed door . . . We can only (enjoy His friendship) in the room that we choose for Him, if we (give Him free reign) of all the house.”\*

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\* William Temple, cited in John Baillie, *A Diary of Readings* (Oxford University Press, 1981), Day 51 – “The Room with the Closed Door.”

