

**'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'**

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[Biblical text at the end of sermon for those online.  
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**Introduction**

What is in a name? The Bible clarifies much of human history for us, and certainly personal history by use of a name. But first...

In Shakespeare's classic, 'for never was a story of more woe/ than this of Juliet and her Romeo.' The servant states "Find them out whose names are written here. It is written that the shoemaker should meddle with his yard, and the tailor with his last, the fisher with his pencil, and the painter with his nets, but I am sent to find those persons whose names are here writ."

After their first kiss, the star-crossed lovers separate. Act II features Juliet's soliloquy, "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo," and continues with "Tis but thy name that is my enemy, thou art thyself though not a Montague. What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part belonging to a man. O be some other name! What 's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet; so Romeo would, were he not Romeo called, retain that dear perfection which he owes without that title/ Romeo, doff thy name and for that name, which is no part of thee, take all myself."

Like Juliet we ask, "what's in a name?"

Today's lesson from the Book of the Revelation is going to help us answer that question. Chapter three is really three lessons in one. As last week was 4 in one, today we study three more congregational monologues from Y'shua. And with each one we are hearing a bit more of God's plan for us, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, trying to learn what we are supposed to be and how we are to live. This book is not a history lesson only, and it's not about future things, so that we can give it a miss. It's about us and God and how we should live today. So let's listen to the words, let's consider our lives, and let's fix things up according to God's master plan, amen? Let's find out, what's in a name?

**Sardis (1-6)**

The first city we speak of today is Sardis. What we know of this community is that it featured sheep stations, like much of country Australia. It was an Asian hub of dyeing and wool industries. And it was also was a stronghold of the cult of the pagan goddess Cybele, and had a reputation for hedonism.

More notable for our purposes though is that the congregation is deluded. It thinks everything is going well, but honestly, it was dead. I don't know anything worse than going into a church, which appears alive, but is really dead. Y'shua taught about this with the Pharisees who were like 'whitewashed tombs' that were outwardly looking good, but were inwardly dead. (Matt.23.37ff) Their reputation was known in the area as a place to find life, but really no one could seriously find life there. Y'shua says no commendatory words. This is shocking and would be disappointing if I were the angel hearing the message.

What does Y'shua say? Verse one, he knows our works. The name, the reputation of a living one, but really we are hopelessly dead. What characterizes death? When do you know something is dead? When the doctors in France tell us of the death of Yassir Arafat, how will anyone verify this? Doctors will run tests on his comatose body and he will not respond. That's a description of death. Electricity is run through wires to the body and no response is indicated in the flat line. Breather readers show no breathing is happening. A dead person does not respond to stimuli. So it is in Messiah or in religion. A person who does not respond is dead. Y'shua is not

happy about the Sardis believers, who were non-responsive to the needs of others or to the worship of God. Yes, they did good works, but they were not truly responsive. Shame.

1 Timothy 5.6 describes a widow who is seeking pleasure and not God, whom Paul says 'is dead even while she lives.'

I don't know any more spoken reason why people reject the Gospel than the hypocrisy of those who claim to be religious. It may not be the true reason for unbelievers, that is, the one that really is nestled deeply in their fallen heart, but it's the one they speak. It's the one I hear. And it's one you will hear. And instead of rejecting it, let's be confronted by it. Let's repair ourselves. Let's get it right and not be hypocrites. (Isaiah 58, 64.5-6)

Only a few are faithful, or as the Bible here calls them, dressed in white. (Verse 5) (cf. Isaiah 61.10, Eph. 2.10) This is in contrast to the soiled clothing (verse 4) of the fakers. This might be a condition similar to the folks from last week, who were compromisers, who did some good things, but lived with both their feet in the world. God help us to be full on for Messiah. Let's be honest and dedicate ourselves to his plans and purposes.

A note on worthiness. I want to be very clear. You are not worthy of this commendation because you have obeyed. You are not worthy because of your commitments. You are worthy because of the death of Y'shua and your faith in him. Full stop. Anything less than that is cheap grace or ultra-humanism, which is not godly. An exaggerated view of yourself will not help anyone. And it won't reflect the Awesome One who holds the 7 spirits. Only one thing is worthy, and that's Y'shua. And we are worthy because of his indwelling us.

And if we do that, what does God promise? Verse 5: I will not blot out his name. Do you remember the sin of the people just before the time of Abram? Genesis 11 immediately precedes chapter 12. Abram comes to the fore in chapter 12 verse one. So what were the people doing in chapter 11, which Moses wants us to see so clearly juxtaposed? They were building the Tower of Babel. Why did they want to build the tower? "To make a name for themselves" (Gen 11.4) God demonstrated then what he thought of others building names and reputations for themselves. Then remember one more thing. What did God promise Abram (12.1-3)? A new nation, a blessing and ... that's right, a name! "I will make your name great." (Verse 2)

So here in Revelation we read that God will give the believers who are worthy, who are unstained in worldliness, that he will not blot out our name, AND that he will confess our name before God and the angels. Awesome is our God. What makes a name great is not how many out there read our name in lights at the State Theatre or in the Sydney Morning Herald but that God declares our name in heaven and it's forever inscribed in the Book of Life. That's what's in a name. Sardis had made a name for itself as a pagan centre, and that was a bother to the church there. God had something better for Sardis believers.

### **Philadelphia (7-13)**

Let's look at the 2<sup>nd</sup> congregation today, Philadelphia. Before it was a city in eastern Pennsylvania, it was first in Turkey as we see on our map here, a mere 30 miles southeast of Sardis. Sardis and Philadelphia had experienced earthquakes in CE 17, and Philly was often in rebuilding mode. It also was a bastion of Greek civilization, a frontier city of sorts, and saw itself, if I can use Christian terms here, as a sort of missionary city, sending the message of Greek civilization to the interior tribes people of Asia Minor.

Philly was economically weak, due to two problems. One was the earthquakes that happened 70 years before and continued at times. The people had to rebuild at times, especially the sacred Temple of Dionysius, and its associated pillars. The second reason was the decree of the emperor Domitian. He commanded the people in Philly to stop growing vines and grapes (as it had done before) and to grow corn instead. This caused many people to leave the region, who only knew grape growing.

Also of note was the renaming of the city to NeoCaesarea in honour of Tiberius who gave large sums of money after the earlier earthquakes (about CE 17).

Y'shua makes a point about each of these things. Consider verse 8: the idea of the 'open door' may well refer to the missionary mandate of the Philadelphians themselves and the comparison for the believers to carry on that missionary mandate. But it's not human, as 'none can

shut' it. And again, you have 'not denied my name.' God's reputation was to be held by those in Philadelphia and by all of us as pre-eminent.

Look at verse 12, what Y'shua gives to the overcomers. " A pillar in the temple of my God.' This is in direct contrast to the pillars of the Dionysians. And the promise continues about never leaving again. This would appear to be about the impermanence of the locals who had to leave to find work. God says, if you stay with me, you won't have to leave the eternal city. Yes, all things are ephemeral, but in God, you will find eternal things, and mostly eternal life. (Also compare 1 King 7.21, 1 Peter 2.5)

Oh, and one more promise in verse 12. I will write on him the name of my God, the name of Jerusalem, and my own name, says Y'shua. This triad formula is often found in the book, and reminds us of the Trinity, the solid relationship we should have with him, and the continual reflection of Older Testament faith.

And the new name may reflect the idea of NeoCaesarea/ Philadelphia. Friends, you think your city has a new name; I'll show you a new name. And it's an eternal name, named for another king, another deity, the True Deity, the Almighty.

One more thing about the words in verse 7, about the key of David. This sounds exactly like the citation in Isaiah 22 to Eliakim, who was over the household of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18.18, .37). Comparing that to this reference in Revelation we see Eliakim being given full authority to act on behalf of the king Hezekiah. So Y'shua is given full authority to act on behalf of God, our King, and amazingly he shares this authority ("the keys of the kingdom of heaven") with his followers.

### **Laodicea (14-22)**

Finally today we finish the 7 cities of the region, with Laodicea. It was a commercial centre, situated on the junction of the rivers and trade routes of Asia Minor. It was a banking centre and had created a salve for eye ailments. Unlike its regional neighbours after the earthquakes, the city of Laodicea had refused assistance from the emperor deciding that they were well able to take care of the restoration themselves.

The people of the church had grown up in that situation and had a sense of pride, of self-help in the worst sense of the word. No wonder Y'shua corrects them as being blind when they thought they could see. No wonder he challenged their belief that they were rich, when they really were poor (.17, cf 2.9, the Ephesians). Their spirit of self-adequacy was ruinous to them and it is ruinous to us. God, help us to know how desperately needy we really are.

Listen how Y'shua introduces himself; first he is The Amen. (Verse 14) This is another Hebrew word, usually identified as the end of something, not the beginning, right? But it is not unusual, if we have read the Gospels. How often do you read in your King James Version "verily, verily I say to you"? This is the Hebrew word, amen. Who can say this: "What I am about to say is totally trustworthy." Who can say, "You can always trust what I say"? Listen to Isaiah 65.16 where the name of God as Elohim and the name Amen are repeated twice

**בְּאֱלֹהֵי אֱמֵן וְהַנְּשָׁבַע בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֱלֹהֵי אֱמֵן**

The New English Bible translates this to "He who invokes a blessing on himself in the land shall do so by the God whose name is Amen, and he who utters an oath in the land shall do so by the God of Amen." He is the Faithful and the True. He is to be believes, He is the Divine One.

Now listen to the admonition in verse 19. The Greek words are similar. 'Be zealous' (zeleue) in verse 19 and 'hot' (zestos) in verse 15 are from the same root, zeo, to boil.

God wants us hot, he wants us on fire, and he wants us to be zealous for him. Let's not shirk back, nor shrink back...let's press on!

Listen to the invitation if we do that. God invites us in verse 20 to have a meal with him. All we have to do is open a door, to listen to his voice, and to open the door. We will have sweet fellowship. This is a stark contrast and repair of the situation in the Garden of Eden, isn't it? There we were naked and sent away. Here if we will admit our nakedness and our need, God will come in and meet with us, he will repair what is broken in our lives and make us to have a meal of fellowship and love with him.

He who has an ear, let him hear what God is saying, and let him repent and be hot for God.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

*Beloved Shakespeare! England's dearest fame!*

*Dead is the breast that swells not at thy name!*

Mrs Browning surely knew the reality of reputation and name; she understood Shakespeare's worth to all generations.

Sometimes however we forget to really listen to what someone is saying, and St Elmo is quoted as saying:

*"Too frequently men's names are enshrined in death before the world wakes to know their worth; and then they are in danger of having their reputation harmed more by indiscriminate and exaggerated praise than by the world's previous neglect."*

And yet, if we only as Elmo warned praise Shakespeare or John the Revelator, we will miss by neglect the very words he wants us to hear. John wants us to acknowledge God's Saviour Y'shua. He wants us to acknowledge our sin. This same Y'shua wants to extend God's forgiveness to a people who are without it and who so desperately need it. Y'shua's name is translated 'saviour.' And John beckons us to listen to him. What's in a name? Everything if we will but listen.

### Summary

So: What should you learn/hear today as a result of reading this text? Or what lessons do we learn from today's teaching?

- 1) Be blessed by reading this book regularly
- 2) Repent and ask Y'shua to be your Saviour today
- 3) Self-adequacy leads to self-congratulations and that's not going to get you far in God
- 4) The keys of David belong to Y'shua by right and to us by rights extended. We should therefore be very grateful.

### Invitation

So... let me ask you. Today we give a choice to you. Maybe you have been an opponent of the Messiah. Maybe you have worshipped wrong. Maybe you have rejected what God said, but today you want to turn and agree with God about Y'shua. If you would like to be delivered from your sin by the blood of Y'shua, then pray this prayer and receive His love and grace. Father, forgive me in the name of Y'shua for all my sins. He was the Saviour and the fulfilment of all prophecies about Messiah. He is the one and the only one who can save me from my selfishness, from my sin. I acknowledge Y'shua as that one who wants to free me, and who alone can free me. I repent of my sin and accept Y'shua as my deliverer. By faith I am now born again by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer, please talk to me after the service is over, [\[or email me if you are reading this online\]](#) so we can talk about growing in this knowledge and this relationship with God.

### Actual text

**Rev. 3.1** ¶ "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

**Rev. 3.2** 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.

**Rev. 3.3** 'Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.

Rev. 3.4 'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy.

Rev. 3.5 'He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.

Rev. 3.6 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Rev. 3.7 ¶ "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:

Rev. 3.8 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

Rev. 3.9 'Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie — behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

Rev. 3.10 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.

Rev. 3.11 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.

Rev. 3.12 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.

Rev. 3.13 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Rev. 3.14 ¶ "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

Rev. 3.15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot.

Rev. 3.16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

Rev. 3.17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

Rev. 3.18 'I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that

the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

Rev. 3.19 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.

Rev. 3.20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.

Rev. 3.21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

Rev. 3.22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

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Notes not used in sermon: