

99-02-07a

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to Revelation chapter 3. The context of our study in Genesis 18 is the personal visit of God to Abraham. One of those places in the scripture that you should know by heart. First Corinthians 13, the love chapter, Hebrews 11, the faith chapter and so forth.

As soon as you hear Revelation 2 and 3, we pretty much should remember that those are the letters to the seven churches. These are very important because these are the only direct first person words of the Lord Jesus Christ to the church. When Jesus was here on earth and engaged in his earthly ministry, he was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

And it wasn't until his last night before the cross that he addressed any church age truth at all with his disciples. After Judas leaves the room, Jesus shifts gears and begins to teach the disciples about what is to come. Because there is going to be this transition into a new dispensation.

And of course he says a few things, we have just a few of his words recorded after the resurrection and before the ascension. We have a lot of truth communicated through the apostles, Paul especially, John and Peter. But these are direct words from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ to the church.

They are exceedingly important. Every word carries freight. It is such an amazing thing that we have the words of the Lord Jesus Christ here in Revelation 2 and 3. We are going to read the letters to two of the churches beginning in Revelation 3 in verse 7. We have the letter to the church at Philadelphia.

Then in verse 14 we have the letter to the church at Laodicea. This of course was the church that received the letter that we call Ephesians. They also received a copy of Colossians.

To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things says he who is holy, he who is true, he who has the key of David, he who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens. I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it.

For you have a little strength, have kept my word, and have not denied my name. You will notice just in passing here that the reason an open door has been set in front of these believers is not because they are saved, it is because they are obedient. Verse 9, Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not, but lie.

Indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have

loved you. Because you have kept my command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly.

Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. Notice the obverse of that coin is that if you do not hold fast what you have, someone may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more.

I will write on 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 I will write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth.

Because you say, I am rich, I have become wealthy and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich, and white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed, and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.

Therefore, be zealous and repent. Once again, you'll notice in verse 18, if you do not buy that gold and those white garments, the shame of your nakedness will be revealed. Then verse 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 dine with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my father on his throne.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. In these two letters, if you wanted to formalize this, you could call it the doctrine of the two doors. In the letter to Philadelphia, the Lord has set a door before believers.

He has opened it, and no one can shut it. If he shuts that door, no one can open it. This is his door.

This is the one that either he opens or he shuts, and no one can change the state of that door. It's only the Lord. In Revelation 3.20, you have a different door.

This is the door that we have the option of opening or leaving closed. It is initially a

closed door. Jesus says, I'm knocking at that door.

If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and share a meal with him. I will come in and participate in that fellowship. So there are two different areas of opportunity here.

One, opportunities will come or not come based on God's evaluation. Some of us are not going to ever have the open door placed in front of us because we're not obedient. We don't have the faith.

We don't hold fast to the things that we have. We're not in the Philadelphia category. We don't even have the little strength that he talks about in verse 8. He says, I've put this in front of you because you have a little strength.

You've kept my word and have not denied my name. That's not a very high threshold, to not deny the name of the Lord, to keep his word, and to have that little strength. That puts us before the open door that Jesus sets before us.

And no one can shut that door. If he opens it, if he provides the opportunity, if he gives us that opportunity to enter into a new area of function, a new area of fruitfulness, that's a door the Lord has opened. No one can shut that door.

But there's another door, and this is also for believers. Believers, of course, we're familiar that a lot of people who haven't taken the time to study the context use Revelation 3.20 as a salvation verse, that Jesus is knocking at the door of someone's heart, and that if you open the door and let him in, he will come in, and that this is his salvation. But, of course, you realize these are letters to the churches.

These are believers. And it is inconsistent when you look at all of the other letters to think that this is somehow suddenly switching audiences and has addressed unbelievers. People like to think there was a mixed multitude in the churches, that there was a mixture of believers and unbelievers.

This lets them freely switch back and forth, and any time they see something they don't want to apply to believers, they'll say, oh, well, now he's talking to the unbelievers. But there's no clue, there's no marker, there's no transition, there's no change in the form of address to indicate that suddenly the author is somehow addressing unbelievers instead of believers. It's just exceedingly bad hermeneutics.

It's bad interpretive function to do that. But this is the only way people can get their interpretation of a passage to fit. They don't want to think that believers need to open the door of their heart to the Lord.

But we do. And we've seen this many times. We'll review some of those passages when we get back over to Genesis here in a moment.

But the point is, this is something that is related to the presence of the Lord. We know from our study last week in Genesis 18 that we're talking now about personal contact with God in Abraham's experience. God has spoken to him.

God has appeared to him. Now God is going to stand there on the ground. Abraham is going to stand in the presence of God.

God is going to stand in the presence of Abraham. What is the significance of the immediate, and in some cases in the Bible, literal, physical presence of God? Why didn't God just appear to Abraham again? One of the things that this speaks of, and one of the things that we find here in these two letters, is it speaks of opportunity. It's an opportunity that is not common to all believers.

It's opportunity based on being qualified, based on being prepared, based on meeting the conditions that enable God to dispense this particular grace. Sometimes we talk about being spiritually mature or having grown spiritually and reaching the place. You see this by analogy in human experience.

Children don't drive cars. Children don't go in and buy alcohol at the liquor store. There are certain things that we restrict children from doing because they're not capable of handling those responsibilities.

They're not equipped. They may not be ready for a lot of those things until maturity comes. We don't typically see people in their pre-teen years getting married because we recognize that someone is not ready for the commitments and the responsibilities and all of the features of marriage that we're familiar with as adults.

There are things in God's plan that aren't available to us and are not appropriate for us when we're first building on the foundation of Jesus Christ and learning who we are and why we're here. We don't typically take raw recruits in the military and send them into the front lines. We want to train them.

We want to teach and equip them and make sure they're ready to do that well and to be able to protect each other and support each other and to do a good job when they reach the place of function. But to have someone sign on the dotted line, technically that makes them a mariner, that makes them a sailor or a soldier. And we hand them their issue of camouflage utilities and boots and a helmet and so forth.

Well, yes, in name and by identity and on paper and for pay purposes, they're in the service but they're not yet equipped. It's going to take some time. We're going to send them to boot camp, send them to school and get them ready.

Some people never advance beyond the initial stage. Some people never show up for basic training. Some people never go to their occupational specialty school.

They never get their surface warfare officer pin or they never get their schooling finished that qualifies them to occupy their place in the plan. Those people are not going to have the open door set before them. They're going to think they see lots of open doors and they're going to be walking through and seizing all kinds of opportunities that they perceive.

And they may even have the appearance of fruit. They may be involved in evangelism and they may have lots of people that they can point to and say, here's someone I led to Christ or here's someone I turned their life around and I was there and I had an influence on them and so forth. One of the things that we're seeing in our Colossians study is we really have to be careful about how things are measured.

God will do things in spite of us. God wiped out the enemies of Israel and used Israel as the instrument of doing so even when Israel was in a state of disobedience. They weren't always where they should be.

And the fact that they want to battle doesn't validate their worship life and doesn't validate the things that were going on in Israel. God gave the armies of David victory after victory after victory but read the Psalms where David talks about the rapacious self-centered evil people that are living in Israel. At that same time, David writes Psalms and says, deliver me from these evil men that set snares around me and are seeking my life and so forth.

You think, well, I thought those were the glory days of Israel when David was in the land and was the king and singing his Psalms and so forth. You can't look at a victory or you can't say, well, God has used me to do this and so therefore everything I'm doing is validated or even the way that I did this. You can look at some of these terrible evangelism services that are on Christian TV.

People may walk the aisle and they may genuinely be saved. That doesn't mean that God is pleased, that God is blessing. What it means is that God's word will accomplish its work when he puts it out on the water.

It doesn't matter if the wicked are like the troubled sea and sometimes God floats that bread of his word out on the waters and it never returns to him void. That doesn't mean that that ministry or that operation or anything else is valid. So, the fact that we see believers who are engaged in lots of active ministries and so forth does not necessarily mean that God is pleased.

What is the measure that tells us whether or not God is pleased? The fact that lives are changed? The fact that people have gotten off of their womanizing, drinking, cussing, overtly evil lifestyle and now they're an upright, church-going, station wagon-driving man? The secular world can do that. You remember when Moses went in before Pharaoh, said, let my people go, threw down his rod, turned into a snake? You saw the little

cartoon version here recently of Prince of Egypt. Then you see, of course, I had to leave right at that time, so I missed that part.

But, as I have been told, and what it says in the word of God, the little Egyptian wizards, they throw down their rods and those turn into snakes also. Well, you can counterfeit. You can have the appearance of the power of God, but the measure is, is it done in a way that glorifies God? The secular world can wreak change.

They can make someone's lifestyle change. You can go to step programs that will fix some of your behavior problems. You can get into therapy and they can fix some of your problems.

They can make you act differently. But it isn't glorifying to God because God is not in it. It doesn't reflect glory.

It doesn't make use of the grace of God or the power of God. It isn't based on the work of the Savior on the cross. It's just based on a lot of human effort.

You basically are shuffling things on the table. You're exchanging one problem for another. Now you're not a kleptomaniac anymore.

Now you're a workaholic. Now instead of going out and being drunk with wine wearing his excess, now you go to excess in some other area. You go for emotional drunkenness or you go for workaholic drunkenness or some other form of excess.

You just trade one thing for another because there's no power of God in it. But people will point to the visible results and say, God must be pleased. Look at the change.

One of the ways we know that we're making genuine progress is that there's going to be the open door that the Lord puts there. He has to be there to put that door there. A door is a place of entrance and exit.

Jesus says to the church at Philadelphia, I have set before you an open door. You get the idea that he's there and he put that door there. Same thing in the letter to Laodicea.

He says, I'm standing in front of that other door and knocking. I've opened this one door. That's a door of opportunity.

That's for you to go out and accomplish things. Why? Because you have a little strength. You've not denied my name.

You have kept my word. You've got those things. Now you're qualified to go through a door of opportunity and accomplish things.

You're going to go out and go somewhere and do something that God has given you the opportunity to do. But you look at Laodicea. These people have not got that

commendation that Philadelphia has.

He doesn't say you've kept my name. He doesn't say you've kept my word. He doesn't say you have a little strength.

He says you've falsely estimated yourself. You think that you're rich and well-dressed and I don't need anything. See, people that go out to minister to the world think, well, I'm all fixed up now.

I'm going to go help everybody else. Look at that poor person across my back fence there. That person needs ministry.

Look at the sick and afflicted. Look at the lost and dying world. I've got to go out and meet their needs.

And we haven't gotten the beam out of our own eyes. This was the problem in Laodicea. You say, I am rich, in verse 17.

I have become wealthy. I have need of nothing. And do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

Jesus Christ has to walk through the door and come in. We have to hear His voice and open the door and have His presence within. Have fellowship with Him.

Our needs have to be met. We have to buy that gold that's been refined in the fire and those white robes to be clothed so that the shame of our nakedness will not be revealed. These people are trying to walk through an open door of opportunity and they're naked.

Who of us would walk out our front door and get in the car and go out in public with no clothes on? But that's what Christians do when we go out and try to minister and we have not yet reached the place where Jesus Christ has set the open door before us. So this is the doctrine of the two doors and it's tied to the presence of God. We have to be familiar with the Lord God.

We have to have sat at table with Him before we're ready to do the other. I'm not speaking so much chronologically as I am growth-wise. There is a certain level of growth and maturity we have to reach.

We have to have that little strength. We have to know His word and keep it. Then He will put that open door before us that no one shuts.

Well, this relates to our study which we now resume in Genesis chapter 18. We saw the broad overview. We read Genesis 18 and 19 last time.

This is remarkable in so many ways. We have several things that we need to digest right here in the first verse. You will remember that God has confirmed the covenant with

Abraham, has changed his name, changed Sarah's name in chapter 17.

We saw the importance, the central emphasis, the chiasmic structure and so forth that points our attention to circumcision as the sign and the seal of the covenant and what signs and seals are supposed to do for us. We have our own signs and seals. All the ones that we study in the Bible should remind us of these truths.

We also see there the obedience of Abraham. You can think, well, Abraham could decide that maybe this wasn't such a smart thing to do. But he does.

So then we enter a new phase here. And in chapter 18, verse 1, the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. What was the time of day the last time Abraham had contact with God? Do you remember? Where was Abraham when the Lord appeared to him? Back in chapter 15.

Remember, he said, I am your shield and your exceeding great reward and so forth. And then in verse 5 of chapter 15, he brought him outside and said, Look now toward heaven and count the stars. It was the middle of the night when God appeared to Abraham back in chapter 15 and he had the dialogue and the promise of the land and the 400 years of bondage for his descendants and so forth.

Actually, that was the time before last because then in 17, Abraham was 99 years old and God appeared to him again. In the chapter 15 episode, you recall after he went out and looked at the stars, then the next day you had a cutting of things. He cut the animals in pieces and there was a sealing of the covenant on God's side.

Then in chapter 17, you have the cutting of the foreskin and the sealing of the covenant on Abraham's side. So now the Lord appears to Abraham for the third time in our recent study and now it is in the heat of the day. This is significant.

Almost everything in this first verse, we need to slow down and take a look at because it's all significant. First of all, we find out right away, we don't have any doubt in our minds as to what the identity of these visitors is because it tells us that the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees or oak trees of Mamre as he, Abraham, was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. Let's talk about the time of day first.

It's the heat of the day. The reason Abraham is sitting in the door of his tent is this is siesta time. Kind of like they do down south in Mexico.

If you know about the Mediterranean climate, you know that it gets really too warm to do much outdoors in the middle of the day, the heat of the day, say from 12 to 3, that area of the day, and what the Mexicans would call siesta time. And so they would get up early in the morning before the sun rose and get dressed and go about their business and work for six or seven hours and then take a siesta. And they would rest in the heat of the day and then after, say, three or four, when the heat had started to wane, they could go

back and do a few more hours of work before they came in and the sun went down.

And at the sun down, they considered the day to be over. So this is after the work of the morning has been done. Abraham has already done his first six or eight hours.

He's already met with his shepherds and his gardeners and his crop managers and all of his servants, his household service, his merchant guys, his salesmen that go out and engage in commerce and negotiate with his neighbors and perform all the transactions of trade and so forth. He's a busy man. He's got a huge enterprise.

Abraham Incorporated is running here. And so he's got the whole morning's work already behind him. It's the heat of the day and it's the time of rest.

So he has met his duties and this is a time of rest. And so he's sitting in the door of his tent in the heat of the day. And the Lord appeared to him.

So normally travelers would also stop and rest at this time of day because it's also too uncomfortable to travel at that time of day. But as Abraham sits there he sees suddenly these travelers appear and this is seemingly a sudden appearance. You get the idea that maybe Abraham was sort of nosing and all of a sudden he's sort of startled because he realizes that these three are there.

And it's likely that they probably literally appeared. I doubt that God gave himself a long walk although he might have. But Abraham in verse 2 lifted his eyes and looked and behold.

And this idea of looked and behold this phrase whenever you see this in scripture it has the idea of something very important that has taken place and it's often something sudden. He looked and behold something that wasn't there before is suddenly there. He looked and behold three men were standing by him.

And when he saw them he ran from the tent door to meet them. So one of them may have cleared his throat a rustle of garments or a clanking of something and he opens his eyes and looks and hears these three men. This is the appearance of the Lord.

So a lot of people think well Abraham didn't really know yet. We know because the omniscient narrator has told us in verse 1 that this is the Lord. But Abraham just sees these three men.

But if you look at his reaction when he saw them he ran from the tent door to meet them. Remember who Abraham is. He's a very great man in the land.

He's got butler type guys that can go and inquire as to who a guest is and come to Abraham and say he's not going to be bothered with every single passerby that goes up and down the road. There are lots of people coming and going that have business with

Abraham. They're buying and selling from his flocks and herds and his crops and his other industries that he's got going on there.

So Abraham is not personally just like the president of a company doesn't sit out the reception desk. When Abraham sees these three men he immediately knows that they are special. And I am convinced that he knows right away who they are.

If you are familiar with the Lord God you recognize him when you see him. You know him when you see him. Abraham has spoken with the Lord God several times before.

We've seen these conversations going all the way back to Genesis 12 Genesis 15, Genesis 17 here again in Genesis 18. I think he recognizes him right away. Here's one of the reasons why.

He saw them and he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the ground. Now they like to talk a lot about hospitality in the ancient Near East and what a custom it is even down to this day. They pride themselves on hospitality.

People will take you over to the New Testament and talk about, over in Peter where he talks about hospitality and in Hebrews where it talks about some have entertained angels unawares and everybody thinks that verse be hospitable with one another for by so doing some have entertained angels unawares that this is referring back to Abraham because here he is entertaining angels. I don't think that is a reference to Abraham. All those things may be true but for Abraham to go and bow himself down to the ground in front of strangers there are too many strangers coming and going from the camp for Abraham to be running out bowing down in front of them.

And the clincher is in verse 3. When he says in verse 3 This can be pointed as I mentioned last week one of two ways. It can either be Adoni which is the normal term of respect for someone or it can be Adonai which is my Lord as in Lord God. And the consonants are the same so the text by itself doesn't tell us.

Now the Masoretes may have pointed it one way or the other but the consonantal text that Moses wrote down does not indicate which of those it is. But there are three men here and obviously they look good. They don't look like servants.

They are not raggedy. This of course is probably a very oblique argument for taking care of personal appearance as believers. When God shows up he doesn't show up looking ragged or looking unkempt.

As soon as Abraham sees them he recognizes whatever view you take I think he knew it was the Lord. A lot of people think he didn't. But he knows this is somebody he says my Lord and he bows himself down to the ground.

So these people look impressive. But the reason I think Abraham knows who this is is

first of all he says my Lord and he uses Adonai here. He says if I have now found favor in your sight up to this point the only time this phrase has been used was back of Noah when it said Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

This is that phrase in the form of a conditional clause. If I have found grace in your eyes if I have found favor in your sight my Lord do not pass on by your servant. And this language indicates to me that Abraham knows exactly who it is he is addressing.

He is startled and he is going to knock himself out. There is nothing that he leaves undone in terms of extending hospitality. Especially when you look at the second person pronouns in here.

If I have found favor in your sight do not pass on by your servant. This is in the singular. There are three men standing there but Abraham has recognized one of them as the Lord.

When he says my Lord he says it in the singular. The rest of these things that he says in verse 4 let a little water be brought and wash your feet and rest yourselves this is the second person plural. And throughout the rest of the dialogue here he addresses all three.

But this first statement that he makes in verse 3 is in the singular. And he can recognize that one of these three with no questions no introductions no words spoken by any of the three he knows right away one of them is my Lord he bows himself down and he says please do not pass by your servant. So it seems fairly persuasive in my mind that he knows right away who this is.

The request that he makes is that the Lord not pass by his servant. This indicates that they look as though they are not necessarily turning in and they haven't stopped to see what he is going to do. They appear to be going by.

And he runs out and sort of stops them on their path. And says please don't pass by your servant turn in here and rest. Well it's time for us to take a break and so before we analyze this any further we're going to pause when we come back we'll investigate this a little more closely.

I hate to stop right at this point but it is time so let's pause and take a break.