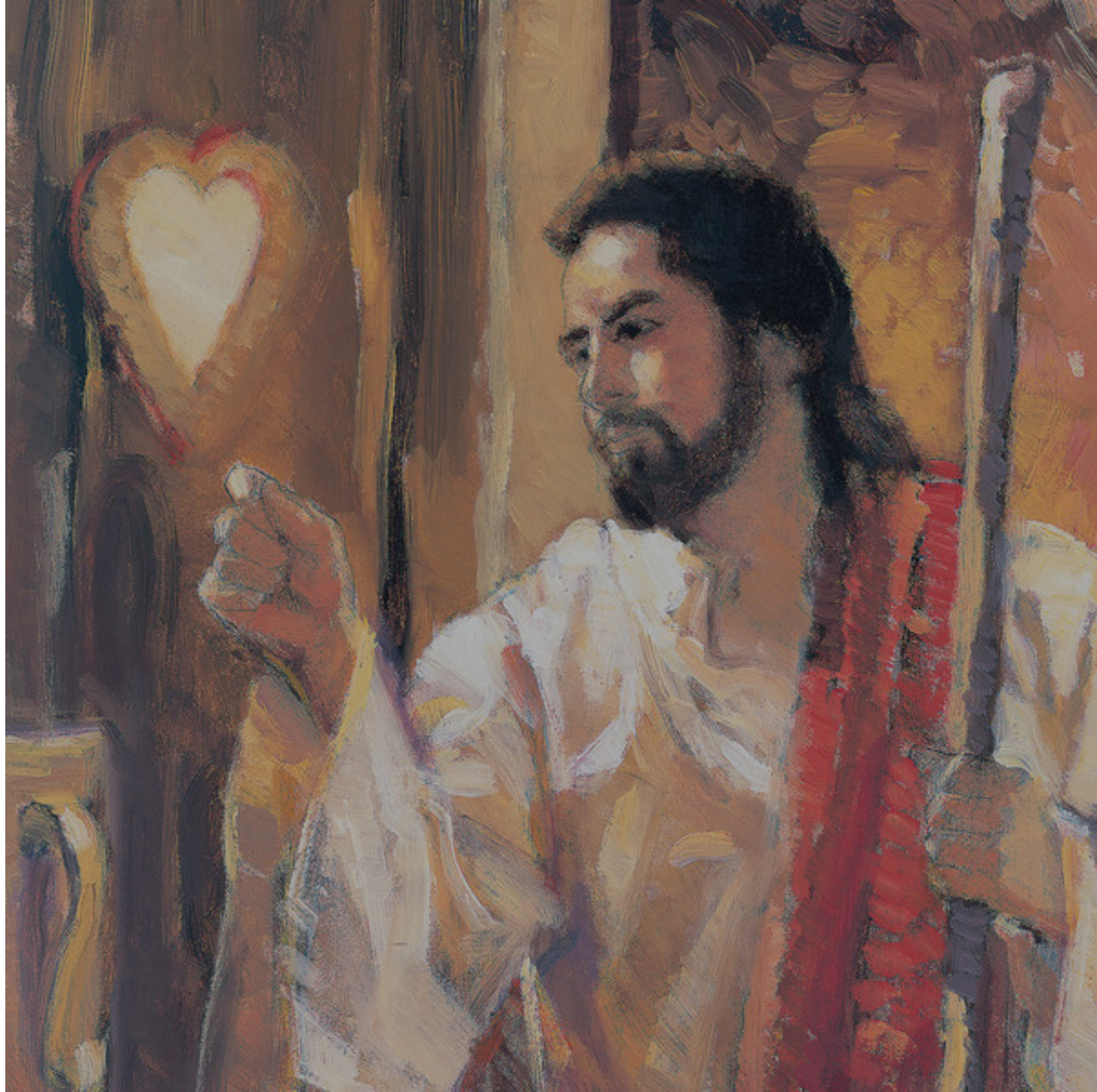


# Focus on Prophecy GUIDE 9



## Someone Cares About You

- **Joe and his two grade-school sons, Brady and Cooper, were skiing some of Colorado's finest slopes.**
- **The snow was deep and powdery. The days were bright and crisp; the nights were full of stars.**
- **One morning the two boys decided to make new ski trails through a forest that paralleled the slope. Joe told the boys he would meet them at the bottom of the hill.**
- **Joe and Brady and one of their friends popped out of the end of the forest. But Cooper was nowhere to be found.**

# Someone Cares About You

- **Joe patiently waited for thirty minutes, hoping to spot his son's bright yellow ski pants. But Cooper didn't emerge from the trees. Joe called the ski patrol for help.**
- **This group skied down through the forest searching.**
- **Still no sign of Cooper. Lunch time came and went.**
- **Eleven-year-old Cooper never missed a meal, no matter what was on the menu. But by 2:00 p.m. he hadn't appeared, and tears were beginning to fill Joe's eyes. He feared something had gone terribly wrong.**
- **By 4:30 p.m. the ski lifts had shut down, and all the other skiers were going home. Joe was frantic. He looked up at the almost emptied slopes, hoping against hope.**
- **As the last few stragglers made their way down, there at the tail end was a tiny, lone skier in bright yellow pants.**
- **Joe's tears became uncontrollable sobs. But he quickly skied across the base of the slope to meet Cooper. The two threw their arms around each other and hugged for five minutes, unable to speak.**

# Someone Cares About You

- **A ski patrol man gliding by called out to Joe, “I bet you’re gonna be mad at him!” He obviously was not a dad who’d been separated from his boy.**
- **Joe couldn’t imagine being angry. He had lost a son, and now he was found!**
- **The Bible tells us that you and I are sons and daughters of God. He loves us. Oh sure, we don’t always please Him.**
- **In fact many of us live lives that reveal we don’t even think about Him. But God never gives up on us.**
- **Even some of us who claim to belong to God, and to His Christian church, sometimes live as if we are lost to His plans for us.**
- **That’s why He has given us messages in the Bible to help us. God is still reaching out. He does that because He loves us!**

# Someone Cares About You

- **Scripture says the Christian church is like a body, and Jesus is its head. That means that believers, members of Christ's church, are like His hands and feet in the world; we are to go and share with others that God loves them and died for their sins.**
- **One would expect, then, that Jesus would be very concerned about the welfare of His body, the church. And guess what? He is.**
- **The second and third chapters of Revelation contain letters Jesus sent through John to seven churches in the province of Asia in the area that is now modern Turkey.**
- **The churches are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These cities were so located on the interconnecting Roman highways that it was possible to visit each one of them in the order they are listed.**

## Someone Cares About You

- **The characteristics and lifestyles of the members of these churches represent the journey you take as you grow as a Christian in your relationship with Jesus.**
- **There are times of struggle and times of joyful experiences. But no matter where you are in the journey, God loves you and cares about you.**
- **As you study the seven churches, relate your personal experience to that of the members of the seven churches.**

# Someone Cares About You

- **In addition many biblical scholars believe that the seven churches are symbolic of the whole Christian church throughout history.**
- **The experience of each church taken in order reflects the experience of the Christian church during seven consecutive eras.**
- **This means that each message has three applications.**
- **The first applies to the actual church at the time of the writing of the letter.**
- **The second application is to an era of actual church history.**
- **The third is how the experience and message apply to your life and mine today!**
- **Let's study each church and make these three applications as we seek to understand God's message.**



# The Church at Ephesus

- ***The Apostolic Church, A.D. 31-100***
- **The name Ephesus means “desirable.” It was indeed a very desirable city, located on a beautiful harbor in the Aegean Sea. It was known for its many commercial and cultural interests.**
- **One of the Seven Wonders of the World was located here—the temple dedicated to Diana, the pagan goddess of fertility.**
- **Aquila and Priscilla helped to start this church, assisted by Apollos, an evangelist, and the apostle Paul (Acts 18:18-26).**
- **READ REVELATION 2:1-7.**
- **Jesus praised the church at Ephesus. “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil.**
- **And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. . . . [You] have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary” (Revelation 2:2, 3).**



# The Church at Ephesus

- **Yet He also points out its problems.**
- **“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. . . . To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (vss. 4-7).**
- **The members of the Ephesus church were zealous for God, patient with others, and were loyal and protective of the truth of Scripture.**
- **However, in time they lost their first-love relationship with Jesus. They lived their Christian lives as a “to do” list rather than a “I love you and want to do this” experience.**
- **God calls the Ephesians back to loving Him again.**

# The Church at Ephesus

- **The Nicolaitans, mentioned in these verses, claimed to be Christians but believed obedience to God's law was unnecessary. Jesus used strong language about the Nicolaitans, saying He hated their "works" or lifestyle.**
- **Irenaeus, a second-century minister, said they called themselves Christians, but they considered it "a matter of indifference to practice adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols."**
- **Jesus used strong language in other books of the Bible on this same topic. Jesus said, "He who says 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). Jesus also said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).**
- **You see, it is important to God that Christians are not hypocrites. His Word should be important to them because they love Him and have chosen to have a relationship with Him. It is like a husband and wife.**
- **They do things for each other because they want to, not because they have to.**

# The Church at Ephesus

- ***As you think about your own relationship with Jesus how do you feel at this moment?***
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: Christians obey God because they want to—not because they have to in order to go to heaven. (False or True)**
- **Jesus says that those who claim to keep His commandments, but who do not do so, are liars. (False or True)**

# The Church at Smyrna

- ***The Persecuted Church, A.D. 100-313***
- **The city of Smyrna was about forty miles north of Ephesus on a beautiful inlet of the Aegean Sea. Smyrna means “sweet smelling,” and still exists today under the name of Izmir, the third largest city in Turkey.**
- **The citizens of Smyrna built a modern three-level shopping mall.**
- **This church also passed through bitter persecution, but stood faithful to God.**
- **The persecution finally ended when the Roman emperor Constantine became a Christian.**
- **READ REVELATION 2:8-11.: Smyrna is called the “persecuted church.” Jesus says to it, “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**
- **Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested. . . . Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. . . . He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (vss. 9-11).**

# The Church at Smyrna

- **Seventy years after this prophecy Smyrna became the death site of numerous martyrs.**
- **It was a terrible time in the Roman Empire when Christians were thrown to lions and burned at the stake.**
- **One of the last to die heroically was Polycarp, the leader of the church at Smyrna.**
- **As he faced a bloodthirsty crowd in the city stadium, the Roman governor demanded that he swear by Caesar and curse Christ.**
- **Polycarp replied calmly, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and he did me no wrong.**
- **How can I blaspheme my King, who saved me?”**
- **Jesus promised the church at Smyrna a crown of life if its members remained faithful and that they would not be hurt by the “second death.”**
- **Receiving the crown of life means that one lives forever with God.**

# The Church at Smyrna

- **The Bible calls the final destruction of the world with fire the second death. A later lesson will discuss this in depth.**
- **These promises are to those who are “faithful” and “overcome.”**
- **They are for those who through faith in Jesus would rather die than reject Jesus; would rather die than be dishonest or dishonor their parents or commit adultery or reject the Sabbath.**
- **TO THINK ABOUT: *If you were put on trial for your faith, what would happen?***
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: God’s promises are for those who would rather die than to reject Jesus through willful disobedience. (False or True)**

# The Church at Pergamos

- ***The Exalted Church, A.D. 313-538***
- **Pergamos (or Pergamum) means “citadel;” it was located on a mountain spur.**
- **This splendid city was known for its many pagan temples and its great library of 200,000 scrolls.**
- **Pergamos created the first cult worship of a living emperor.**
- **That’s why it is referred to as the place “where Satan has his throne.”**
- **The Christian church in Pergamos was firmly established, but believers there were bombarded with temptations from the sensual, pagan worship that surrounded them.**



# The Church at Pergamos

- **READ REVELATION 2:12-17.**
- **To the church at Pergamos, Jesus said, “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr” (vs. 13).**
- **But the Pergamos church had some problems as well. “I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality” (vss. 13, 14).**
- **If its members repented and remained faithful, Jesus promised the church at Pergamos, “To him who overcomes I will give of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it” (vs. 17).**

## The Church at Pergamos

- **The courageous martyrdom of a believer named Antipas contrasts with “the teaching of Balaam.”**
- **Balaam was a false prophet who led Israel into immorality and idolatry (Numbers 22-25). The Nicolaitans posed a similar threat.**
- **The “hidden manna” promised to overcomers refers to the bread placed in the sacred ark (box) of the Most Holy Place inside Israel’s temple.**
- **It represents Jesus as the Bread of Life. The “white stone” was an emblem of honor.**

# The Church at Pergamos

- **After Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, the church rose to a position of unchallenged popularity and power.**
- **Pergamos itself hosted a series of church councils.**
- **The historian Theodoret tells us that some of the participating bishops arrived without eyes or arms from the days of persecution.**
- **But now the church faced a different threat: pagan practices from the surrounding culture were beginning to seep into the church.**
- ***Have you ever felt that you were struggling to be a faithful Christian in an evil environment? If so, what did you do?***

## The Church at Thyatira

- ***The Church in the Wilderness, A.D. 538-1500s***
- **The city of Thyatira lay between two valleys on a principal trading route.**
- **It was distinguished by the trades and crafts that flourished there, especially the dyeing of cloth.**
- **Its Madder Root, which produced what was called a purple dye, was used in royal attire around the world. It was here that Lydia, one of Paul's early converts, bought her dyes (Acts 16:11-15).**

# The Church at Thyatira

- **READ REVELATION 2:18-29.: Jesus praises the church members at Thyatira for their faithful deeds. “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience” (vs. 19).**
- **The church there organized orphanages, hospitals, and mission outreach. It was a very caring congregation, dedicated to meeting people’s needs.**
- **But He goes on to say, “Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things offered to idols” (vs. 20).**
- **Jezebel was a princess and priestess of Baal, a pagan nature god. She promoted sun worship and helped lead Israel away from its special relationship with God.**
- **Those who continued in her sins would be punished. “I will cast . . . those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. . . . And I will give each one of you according to your works” (vss. 22, 23).**

# The Church at Thyatira

- ***Why do you think God is so concerned when His truth is mixed with false teachings?***
- **To those who remained faithful in Thyatira, Jesus said, “I will put on you no other burden.**
- **But hold fast what you have till I come.**
- **And he who overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him I will give power over the nations . . . and I will give him the morning star” (vss. 24-28).**
- ***How could a church today be deceived by a false teaching or leader? What should you do so you won't be deceived?***

# The Church at Sardis

- ***The Church of the Reformation, A.D. 1500s-1790s***
- **Sardis means “that which remains.”**
- **This center of textile manufacture and jewelry making was located on a plateau 1000 feet above the valley below and seemed impregnable.**
- **But Cyrus the Great found a way inside.**
- **One dark night in 547 B.C. he sent an agile soldier to scale the cliffs below Sardis.**
- **While the city slept peacefully, the man opened the huge gates from the inside.**
- **Almost 300 years later, Antiochus conquered the city in the same way again while everyone was sleeping.**



# The Church at Sardis

- **READ REVELATION 3:1-6.**
- **Jesus described believers in Sardis as being alive but dead—sleeping “on the job” of being Christians! What do you think it means to be asleep as a believer?**
- **Have you ever fallen asleep when you should have been awake? How did you feel about it?**
- **What advice does Jesus give to the church members at Sardis? “Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die” (Revelation 3:2).**
- **Sleeping believers are complacent believers. Sardis represents the time period of the Reformation. Unfortunately the Reformation’s descendants split into several quarreling factions. Believers came to experience religion only as a formal assent to the right creed. They fell asleep inside the safety of their “correct doctrine.”**

# The Church at Sardis

- **“Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. . . . You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.**
- **He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” (vss. 3-5).**

# The Church at Sardis

- **In the Bible, white symbolizes spiritual purity. Christ's perfect life is sometimes represented as a spotless, white garment. God promises to give that garment to everyone who accepts Christ as Savior.**
- **That's how we're "dressed in white." He exchanges our imperfect life for His perfect life.**
- **The garment of Christ's righteousness can cover our filthiest rags (Zechariah 3:1-5). Jesus provides that white robe, His perfect life, to all who will accept it.**
- ***Have you accepted Jesus? If not, why not tell Him you want Him as your friend and Savior today?***
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: Christ's perfect life is sometimes represented as a spotless, white garment. (False or True)**

# The Church at Philadelphia

- ***The Missionary Church, A.D. 1790s-1840s***
- **Philadelphia, which means “brotherly love,” was built on a hill overlooking two valleys.**
- **It was named for King Attalus II Philadelphus in honor of his loyalty to his elder brother who had preceded him on the throne.**
- **Today the prosperous town of Alasehir stands on the site.**
- **This church must have been remarkable. It received only commendations from Jesus—no rebukes!**

# The Church at Philadelphia

- **READ REVELATION 3:7-13.**
- **Notice how Jesus describes Himself to the church at Philadelphia. “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” (vs. 7).**
- **Philadelphia represents a time period in the nineteenth century when great evangelical and Advent movements revitalized the church.**
- **Believers established the British Missionary Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the Sunday School Movement. They also founded many private church colleges. Revival propelled the church forward as never before.**
- **The church was able to present Jesus to tens of thousands—the opportunity was “an open door that no one can shut.” Also, the “open and shut door” symbolizes the beginning of the investigative judgment and Jesus’ ministry in the Most High Place of the sanctuary in heaven. (More on this in another lesson.)**

# The Church at Philadelphia

- **Jesus praised the church at Philadelphia in these words, “I know your works. . . . You . . . have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (vs. 8).**
- **And He promises to those who overcome, “I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God. . . . I will write on him the name of My God. . . . And I will write on him My new name” (vss. 11, 12).**
- **Maybe at times you feel opposed by friends and family because you are a Christian.**
- **If so, cling to God’s promise that He will give you a new name and a special place with Him in heaven!**
- **What would you like to ask God to do for you in your Christian life? Pray and ask Him right now to answer your prayer.**

## The Church at Laodicea

- ***The Lukewarm End-Time Church, A.D. 1840s-Second Coming of Jesus***
- **The seventh and final church is Laodicea. This city was a wealthy center of commerce; its citizens specialized in the production of woolen goods.**
- **Its medical school was famous for an eye ointment. Laodicea also boasted bubbling hot springs a few miles out of town.**
- **The people managed to pipe this water into the city, but it was sickeningly lukewarm by the time it got to their homes.**



# The Church at Laodicea

- **READ REVELATION 3:14-22.:** The message to Laodicea is quite sobering; it contains only warnings. This church represents the time period in which we are living. It is pictured as a church of compromise, neither hot nor cold.
- ***Why would God want a church to be cold instead of lukewarm? (vss. 15, 16)***
- **What the Laodicean church thinks of itself and what it actually is are completely different. Jesus tells the members of this church, “You say, ‘I am rich, 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” (vss. 17, 18).**
- **The Laodiceans thought they were spiritually rich, when they were actually poor and blind and wretched. There is only one way to be rich spiritually—accepting and receiving God’s grace.**
- **The Bible says that God has shown “the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; for it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:7-9).**

# The Church at Laodicea

- **The white clothes that Jesus advises the Laodiceans to buy from Him represent the righteousness of Jesus which covers our sins.**
- **“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10.)**
- **Jesus also tells the members of the church at Laodicea that they should anoint their eyes with eye salve so they can see spiritual things clearly. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us clear spiritual vision and helps us to understand spiritual things.**
- **“The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. . . . Now we have received . . . the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. . . . The Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:10-13).**
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: Jesus’ message to the church at Laodicea contained nothing but praise and blessings. (False or True)**

# Conclusion

- **Glenn Loury personally discovered that God's promise is true. Glenn had reached the pinnacle of his profession as a tenured professor at Harvard, yet he was haunted by a sense that life had no meaning. He'd even begun using drugs and alcohol to fend off his depression.**
- **After spending some time in a substance abuse program, Glenn decided maybe he should start reading the Bible.**
- **One Easter weekend he ventured into a church and heard a powerful sermon about redemption. This sophisticated professor found himself weeping for two hours as he realized his great need of forgiveness.**
- **As Glenn began to attend regular Bible studies, he realized that "there was something real to this Christian business."**
- **He'd always built intellectual detours around his need for faith. But now he saw that God really did want to have a relationship with him. God was knocking on the door, and Glenn opened up his heart.**

# Conclusion

- **After that, things in his life began to change. Dead relationships came to life. He found joy in a new commitment to his family. He was discovering “a richness of meaning that I dreamed of but never believed to actually exist.”**
- **Glenn Loury says this about the result of welcoming Christ into his life: “Only now do I know joy beyond my wildest expectation, even though my time is often not my own, and I have since lost the taste for the hedonistic delicacies which I used to savor. Life has such a sweetness. Instead of ‘Life has no meaning,’ my wife, Linda, now sometimes overhears me saying, ‘Thank You, Lord.’ ”**
- **At the end of these messages to the seven churches, Jesus is standing at the door and knocking. He is seeking to come in. He is knocking on the door of your heart, saying, “If you want, open the door and let Me come into your life.” *What will be your answer to Jesus?***