

The messages to Philadelphia and Laodicea conclude the section on “the things that are.” Chapter 4 jumps to the future. We will do that also as we look ahead to its opening verses.

“After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’” The same voice that spoke to John from behind in Chapter 1 now beckons to him from an open door into heaven. “At once,” John is in the Spirit and before the throne of God.

Many Christians believe that this jump from the present to the future, from earth to heaven, is the place where the book of Revelation describes the Rapture. *“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed”* (1 Cor. 15:51-52). *“... we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord”* (1 Thess.4:15-17).

Locating the Rapture at this point in time, before the seven years of tribulation which follow in Revelation, is called the “Pretribulation” view. Why should we believe this and what does it mean?

Some of the **evidences** for the pretribulation view are:

- All three passages – 1 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, and Revelation -- tell of an instant ascent and meeting with the Lord at the sound of a trumpet. There is agreement between the writers Paul and John.

- Revelation makes no further mention of the church until Chapter 19. From this we might infer that the church has departed from the earthly scene.
- Revelation 3:10 promises to keep believers from the coming hour of trial.
- 2 Thess. 2:3-7 speaks of the removal of One who restrains the “lawless one.” The restrainer is the Holy Spirit, poured out onto the church at Pentecost and withdrawn along with the church at the rapture.
- The twenty-four elders in Chapter 4 represent the priesthood of believers. Their number is complete and in heaven at this point.

Some of the **implications** of this teaching are:

- Matthew 24 is addressed to the Jewish disciples, indicating that there are separate and distinct prophetic destinies for Israel and the church.
- The Rapture can come at any moment, with no prior sign. If it occurs before the tribulation, men will not have the clear warning of tribulation events to repent and turn to the Lord. In fact, we are told they will not repent (Rev. 9:20). This should give a “now or never” urgency to the gospel.

Much more can be said, and has been said, on this subject. There are alternate doctrines: Midtribulation puts the rapture three and half years into the tribulation, after which events accelerate, and posttribulation, in which Christians remain on the earth to be tested through the entire tribulation.

The question is, “*What sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God?*” (2 Peter 3:11:12). We should be listening for the trumpet!

Notes on 3:7-22

3:7 Traveling in a clockwise circle through the cities of Asia Minor, Revelation now comes to Philadelphia, the “city of brotherly love” (named by an early king out of love for his brother).

Alone among the churches addressed by the Lord, Philadelphia receives only praise. The images of verse 1 such as the “keys of David” speak of Christ's governance, indicating that the church in Philadelphia holds Jesus as the head of the church above human authorities.

In the prophetic scheme Philadelphia represents movements of the 18th and 19th centuries which rebelled against the formalism of state churches and sought to reestablish the church according to Scriptural principles, along with renewed fervor for missionary work and evangelism.

3:8 The Philadelphians find their commendation not in sheer numbers or alliances with worldly powers, but in fidelity to Christ's name and word.

3:9 The synagogue of Satan may be hypocritical Jews persecuting the church. “*They answered him, 'Abraham is our father.'*” *Jesus said to them ... 'You are of your father the devil.'*” (John 8:39,44).

3:10 Here is the promise that believers will be kept from the tribulation, the hour of trial, coming upon those tied to earthly matters.

3:12 We write our names on things we own. By bearing their names, the believer knows he belongs to God, His City, and His Son.

3:14 Laodicea was a wealthy city southeast of Philadelphia and near Colosse (Col. 4:13-16). In AD 60 it was nearly destroyed by an earthquake but its inhabitants refused the emperor's help with rebuilding, relying instead on their own considerable wealth. Thus proud self sufficiency was a leading characteristic of the city.

“The beginning of God's creation” does not mean that Jesus was created, but that He had a primary role in creation and is Lord over it (the Alpha, as well as the Omega).

3:17 Spiritual lukewarmness is as distasteful to the Lord as lukewarm tea is to us – we prefer it

hot or cold.

The Laodiceans are basking in a lukewarm complacency: lacking true fervor but having just enough warmth to blind themselves to their condition. Self deception holds danger for any Christian or church.

3:18 Gold may picture refinement of faith produced by trials, as in “*when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold*” (Job 23:10). White garments symbolize righteous living. And eye salve represents the Holy Spirit who helps us to rightly see ourselves in relation to the Lord. The letter to the Laodiceans presents a strong warning against spiritual pride for any assembly at any time. (Firm assurance of salvation, confidence in God's promises, and boldness to approach the throne of God are *not* manifestations of spiritual pride.)

3:19 As strong as the Lord's reproofs toward the Laodiceans may be, they are issued out of love.

3:20 The church has now reached a state where the Lord must stand outside and knock. He calls to individuals within the corrupted church to respond to Him and enter into communion with Him.

Those who hold to the prophetic view of the seven churches see Laodicea in the modern church – wealthy, worldly, and complacent about its lack of devotedness. This may well describe the general professing church of the twentieth century.

But recent years have seen a change in relations between the church and society. There is no longer a stigma attached to open unbelief. In fact, it is possible that for the first time in centuries it is socially disadvantageous to profess a Christian belief.

We may be entering an time where lukewarm and nominal Christians will fade away – a “post-Laodicean” phase. What might this mean, to be departing from the state described in the last words of chapter 3? Is the trumpet of chapter 4 ready to sound?