

Behold! I Stand at the Door *Revelation 3:14-22*

Introduction

This is the second of our midweek Advent services. During these Thursday nights our goal is to build on our "Behold" theme by taking specific statements outside of the birth narrative – that is, outside of the Christmas story found in the early chapters of Luke.

Last week Pastor Bruce Kramer took us to the shores of the Jordan River just prior to the baptism of Jesus. There John the Baptist proclaimed

"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:35)."

We are not on the banks of the Jordan River today. We are in a much more confined environment. It is an image that was beautifully presented in one of the most famous paintings of Jesus. It was painted by Warner Sullivan and is part of the art collection at Anderson University. The painting was inspired, of course, by verse 20 from today's text:

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. (Revelation 3:20)

Now, if you remember our definition for the word "Behold", you will recall that this word is used to focus your attention on something you might otherwise miss. Here, the easy-to-miss thing is a knock on the door of your heart.

Before unpacking the teaching of this passage, though, I want to take you outside the pages of Scripture to another ancient story. It's the story of "Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves." If you know that story, you know there was a magic phrase that could open the door: *Open Sesame.*"

Even if the people on the other side of the door didn't want to let you in, the magic phrase opened the door. If you knew the magic phrase, they couldn't keep you out.

There is no such magic phrase for the door in today's text. The only way the door can be opened is for someone on the inside to open it. In fact, if you study the painting close enough you will notice that the artist did not include a door knob on the outside of the door because he wanted to emphasize the essential truth of Revelation 3:20:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door ... (Revelation 3:20a)

The owner of the house must open the door. Behold! Now... Why would anyone refuse to open the door if Jesus was on the outside knocking? The text gives us two reasons:

REASON #1: THEIR FAITH IS LUKEWARM

Verse 15:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. (Revelation 3:15)

The problem facing the church today is that to many unchurched people we Christians and Christianity have no relevance to the issues they face. And so those unchurched people feel quite justified in viewing us and our ministries with indifference.

As one writer expressed it:

This indifference can be broken down only by the actual demonstration that Christianity is a powerful reality that can make life strong and has an amazing grace that can make life beautiful.

But the greater problem is the lukewarm faith found among the church, found in the lives of people who claim to be walking with Jesus. It's not a surprise to see that in the world, but Jesus is addressing what he sees in the church

Wilber Rees was a pastor in upstate Washington when in 1971 he wrote a little book titled "\$3 Worth of God." Here's how he described the indifference he saw among Christians at that time.

\$3 WORTH OF GOD

*I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk
or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man
or pick beets with a migrant,
I want ecstasy, not transformation.
I want warmth of the womb, not new birth.
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. (Wilbur Rees)*

A faith like this isn't likely to open the door when Jesus knocks.

#2: THEIR FAITH WAS BUILT ON SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Verse 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... (Revelation 3:17)

The church described in this passage was a wealthy church.

- The city around it prided itself on its clothing trade. The garments made there were famous all over the world, and the wool from their sheep was a prized luxury item.
- There was a major medical school in the community, known for its ability to cure issues of the eyes and ears. So renown was this school that the images of the school's main doctors appeared on the currency, not politicians.
- It was also a great banking and financial center, making it one of the wealthiest cities in the world.

In A.D. 61 this city was devastated by an earthquake. But – get this – they declined all financial assistance from the Roman government and rebuilt their city from their own reserves. As a result, the citizens were known to boast about how they didn't need anyone or anything. They were so wealthy, they didn't even need the help of the gods.

We can shake our heads, but we know people like that.

- They believe in their money, not what it says on their money (“In God We Trust”),
- They trust in their health.
- They trust in their wit and personality.
- They trust in their knowledge

But the text reminds us that:

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... (Revelation 3:17)

As long as people rely on their own ability and refuse to admit their own short comings, they won't open the door.

REASON #3: THEY DIDN'T HEAR THE KNOCK

Verse 20:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door ... (Revelation 3:20a)

Hearing the knock is a pre-requisite to opening the door.

In a city famous for curing ailments of the ear, it is still possible to fail to hear the knock of Christ on the door your heart. How much more is it possible to miss that knock in the hustle and bustle of our lives today?

Christ knocks. He does not pound. He does not break the door down. He knocks. But we must answer. The door can only be opened from the inside.

APPLICATION

In Bible times people ate three meals a day. Three different words were used for these three different meals.

- Breakfast was no more than a piece of dry bread soaked in grape juice. It was a quick, almost rushed, meal.
- The midday meal was more like a picnic snack, eaten wherever you happened to be at the time. You rarely ate it at home.
- The word used in this passage describes the evening meal. This was a “lingering” meal. It was not hurried. The day’s work was completed, so there was no rush to get up from that meal to do something else.
 - It is this meal that Jesus describes, a meal where people linger in relationship and fellowship.
 - Those who open the door begin a special time of fellowship with Jesus.

Earlier in this Advent series, we heard that the name of Jesus means “The Lord is my Savior.” Last Thursday Pastor Kramer reminded us of the proclamation of John the Baptist that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is the result: a lingering relationship with Jesus.

In the midst of this busy time of year, I encourage you to take time to linger with Jesus.

Amen.