

How does Jesus Respond to Those Afflicted & Those Comfortable?

Revelation 3:7-22

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You never know what a day will bring. Some days, we wake up after a good sleep. We energetically begin the day looking forward to all the possibilities. We feel good and strong. We go out and do our daily activities with confidence and zeal. We think about pursuing our dreams. We complete everything on our to-do list. We wonder why some people can't be happier and accomplish what they set out to do in life.

Other days the morning arrives after a disturbed sleep. We're troubled about something at work or school or home. Or maybe the baby was sick and needed a parent there most of the night. Or the pain killers didn't work so well and we couldn't sleep. So we drag ourselves out of bed and pour a cup of coffee in an attempt face the day. We stumble around and forget things that we promised to do. We're just trying to make it through and hope we can find some rest at night. We look at the happy and energetic people and wish they would just go away or get out of our sight.

Some days are pretty comfortable. Other days we feel afflicted by life's challenges. Thankfully, we don't have to go through the days of our lives alone. Our God is constantly attentive to our needs including our comfortable days. For even then, we have need we might not be aware of.

Today, we are going to see how Jesus responds with exactly what is needed for afflicted and comfortable people. We come to the end of the messages to the 7 churches today. We have seen Jesus bring messages of commendation, confrontation, prescription and promise to the previous churches. He will again follow that pattern. But these last two churches show very well how He responds to the afflicted and comfortable. I pray that wherever you're at today, you will open yourself to what Jesus has for you. He has what we really need not necessarily what we want. Yet He knows our needs best. Today, if you hear his voice, please do not harden your heart but listen and respond to His words.

Revelation 3:7-22 (ESV) (Page 868-869)

⁷“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

⁸“‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. ¹⁰Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.¹¹I am coming soon. Hold fast

what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ¹²The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. ¹³He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

¹⁴“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

¹⁵“‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. ²⁰Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²²He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

How does Jesus respond to the afflicted? We receive our answer in His response to the church in Philadelphia. **Jesus comforts the afflicted. (Philadelphia – Rev. 3:7-13)** To be afflicted means to suffer some torment, trouble or persecution from someone or something.

The ancient city of Philadelphia seems to have been smaller than the others we have seen of the 7 churches. Its economy was based on agriculture and industry. But it was subject to earthquakes. Nearly destroyed by the great earthquake in the year 17, Rome helped it rebuild and suspended tribute payments for 5 years. The city responded by giving itself a new name for a while – Neocaesarea – The new Caesar city. The church was small but of good quality. Its enemies came from the outside. So it struggled and had little strength.

Yet, to this afflicted group, Jesus provides comfort. First we see **the characteristic of the Comforter**. The way He identifies Himself immediately brings comfort. He describes himself as the **Holy One**; a familiar title for God. Afflicted people can find comfort in God's holiness especially if their affliction is oppression by others. It's comforting to know there is a holy God who will not tolerate sin. He will call to account all those who do injustice and oppress the vulnerable. I recently read somewhere that afflicted people find God's holiness and justice comforting. But comfortable people find God's holiness and justice offensive or disturbing. Jesus is the Holy One who will call wrongdoing to account.

He is also the **True One**. True refers to His reliability. Afflicted people need reliable people who are true to their word. Oppressed people suffer from the lies and corruption of their oppressors. The true one will not tolerate lying and corruption. He will confront it and deal with it.

Jesus also describes Himself as the one who **has the key of David**. Earlier in Revelation 1:18, Jesus says he has the keys to death and Hades? Well here he holds the Key of David who was considered Israel's greatest king. So David here represents the eternal kingdom of God. The key holder controlled entrance to the royal palace implying a position of highest authority in the kingdom. He determined who would & would not enter. So it is not the powerful, the wealthy, the oppressor or the insider who will decide who gets into David's kingdom. Jesus holds the key.

He emphasizes his absolute supremacy over this with the phrase "I am the one who opens and no one can shut; who shuts and no one can open." So Jesus has more power and authority than any force threatening the Christians at Philadelphia. He holds the power over entry into the eternal kingdom of God.

Then we see **the knowledge and works of the comforter**. Jesus says "**I know your works**." Jesus is aware of the works of this little church. He also **knows they have little power**. But that doesn't stop Him from being on their side. He also **knows their faithfulness**. They kept His Word and have not denied His name. Isn't it comforting to know that Jesus is aware of the realities facing a small church? He is also aware of our personal afflictions. When you've go through a sleepless night or had some difficulty at work or home, Jesus is not on vacation. He supernaturally knows what you're going through. He intercedes for you before the Father.

Then He tells them what He has done. "I have **set before you an open door** which no one is able to shut." So the one who holds the key of David opens a door to the Philadelphian Christians that no one can shut. Despite their weakness, he opens a door for them. What is this door? It could be missionary activity. Paul uses the phrase "open door" several times to describe opportunities for missionary work opened up by the Holy Spirit. But more commentators see the open door to the eternal kingdom. We will soon see these Christians had trouble with the synagogue. Likely the Jewish Christians had been shut out of the synagogue. That door was closed to them. But the door to Jesus' eternal kingdom was open. Though some authorities excluded them from God's people, Jesus is the One who truly provides entrance to the eternal people of God. This can comfort the afflicted. Another piece of affliction is exclusion. You comfort the excluded by including them. Jesus offers this to the community of His kingdom.

Then we find out about the trouble they experienced in verse 9. Jesus again uses the term “synagogue of Satan.” It describes Jews who are not or lying He says. They weren’t God-fearing believers but seemingly more interested in position and power. They would conclude that the Christians were certainly not part of God’s people. But look at what Jesus is going to do. **“I will make those of the synagogue of Satan bow down before you and learn that I love you.”** So in some way, the Jews of this synagogue would be forced to acknowledge that the Christians were truly God’s people. And they would learn that Jesus loved them. This likely didn’t happen during the lifetime of these Christians. It points to something that will happen at end of history. Those specific Jews will have to acknowledge that those Christians were God’s people and that God loved them.

This was quite a reversal. For in the Old Testament, Israelites are promised that those who oppressed them will one day bow down at their feet. Isaiah 60:14 for example – “The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel”. So the Israelites expected their oppressors to bow down before them. But here, these of the “synagogue of Satan” Israelites who oppressed the Christians will in some way bow down before the Christian. There is a sense here of very specific justice. There’s justice generally and justice specifically. There’s a general justice that’s happening for abused residential school survivors. But each one has their own specific experience of injustice. Here we see Jesus addressing the specifics of an injustice with a tailor made justice that He will enforce. That’s comforting to a person suffering from some act of oppression by another. Here we get the picture of Jesus very aware of personal injustices and His action to bring justice to the oppressed.

There’s one more work of Jesus that is described for these afflicted Christians. It’s a comforting promise but has caused lots of debate. In fact this verse is the crux of debate between those who hold a pre-tribulation rapture view of the end times and those who hold a post-tribulation rapture view. I will explain these views as we go through his. In verse 10, Jesus says “Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, **I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world**, to try those who dwell on the earth.”

The Scriptures talk about a great time of tribulation that precedes the final return of the Christ. Judaism and early Christianity expected this. The Hebrew expectation is found in Daniel 12:1 in the Old Testament states “And there shall

be a time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.” Revelation 7:14 talks about the great tribulation. But the debate centers on whether or not the church will be present through this tribulation.

Those who say the church will be taken away before the tribulation hold the pre-tribulation rapture view. They would use Rev. 3:10 to support their argument. Jesus promises He will keep them from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world.” They could also point to Daniel 12:1. “But at that time (the time of trouble), your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be written in the book.” So this view argues that the church will be removed prior to this great tribulation.

But others point out that “keep from” can mean “protect you through it” or “see you through safely.” They support this view based on the only other time this exact wording is found in the New Testament. John 17 contains Jesus great prayer prior to his arrest and crucifixion. In John 17:15, he prays for his disciples. Listen to what He prays. “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” That’s the exact same phrase as Revelation 3:10. “I will keep you from the hour of trial.” So Jesus prayed that God would keep the disciples from the evil one. But that did not mean the disciples would be removed from the world or the activity of the evil one. It was a request for some sort of protection from the worst the evil one had to offer. Those who believe this is what Rev. 3:10 states hold a post-tribulation view. The church will be protected somehow through the tribulation and then brought to Christ after or post-trib. Advocates of this also point out Revelation 3:10 was promised only to the Philadelphian church, not everyone one of the 7 churches. Smyrna had to go through tribulation. And they also point out how often in the Bible, God’s people are not removed from trials but preserved through them.

We won’t resolve this today. However, one of my professors provided some wise counsel on how we might approach this. Pray and prepare for the possibility that you will go through the great tribulation. If you do, the Lord will protect you through it. Protection doesn’t mean that we won’t die. But it does mean our souls will be protected and we will go through the open door into the kingdom. But if Jesus chooses to remove us before the tribulation, we would celebrate a great blessing from God. Either way – the Comforter Jesus will be with His people.

So we’ve seen the identity of the comforter Jesus. We’ve seen his knowledge of this afflicted church’s situation and his works on their behalf. In verse 12, we see Jesus promises to the afflicted. They will be **made a pillar in the temple of God**. They **will never go out of it**. He will **write on them the name of God, the name of the city of my God, New Jerusalem**

and my own new name. To be made into a pillar of the temple means you and I will be a permanent part of it. We will never have to leave. We will also have the name of God written on us to indicate His ownership. We will have the name of the New Jerusalem written on us to indicate our citizenship. Jesus will write His own new name on us. It's like Jesus provides multiple levels of assurance that the afflicted will arrive at their eternal home.

So **how do we respond to Jesus' comfort when we are afflicted?** Verse 11. "Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown." Keep trusting Him. Isn't that one of the biggest challenges in the midst of affliction? We are tempted to trust ourselves or try to find other solutions. But to keep trusting Jesus will ensure we keep our victor's crown – the crown of completion. No one will take it away as if we have disqualified ourselves by our lack of trust in Christ. So if you are afflicted today, will you receive from Jesus His comfort and promises?

We all love this picture of Jesus don't we? We love to receive the comfort and help of our Lord. But then we come to the second question. **How does Jesus respond to the comfortable?** By comfortable I mean those who are complacent in their faith or walk with Christ.

Jesus reveals His response to the comfortable church at Laodicea. This city was very wealthy. It was famous for a glossy black wool that it produced from careful breeding of its sheep herds. There was so much money that they developed a banking system in Laodicea. There was also some sort of medical school with eye and ear doctors. They produced special ointments to bring healing to ears or eyes. Laodicea was so wealthy that after another earthquake in the region in year 60, Laodicea refused help from Rome. The city paid for its own reconstruction costs. So Laodicea was wealthy, industrious and self-sufficient. Laodicea's only weakness was her water supply. It came from a hot springs about 8 or 9 kilometers away. By the time the water reached the city, it was lukewarm. The wealth, prosperity and self-sufficiency of the city spread into the character of the church. Laodicean Christians had become complacent in their passion for Christ. So how does Jesus respond to them?

Jesus afflicts the comfortable (Laodicea – Rev. 3:14-22)

We begin by seeing **the characteristics of Jesus as the afflicter.** He starts by asserting his authority. The words of **the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of creation.** Amen was a name of God from Isaiah. It was also a Hebrew term for confirmation. It acknowledge that which is valid and binding. If Jesus is called the Amen, then He needs no one else to confirm Him as valid. He has authority in Himself.

He is also the faithful and true witness. He is about to speak truth. He is the beginning of creation. But the word translated "beginning" does not mean He is God's first created being but that He is the one who began creation. So he is the ruler over creation. He is the creator. These are words of the supreme creator who is about to speak to the comfortable church.

But comfortable people won't move or be roused by words of comfort. So what does Jesus say? Verse 15. "**I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot.**" Sounds like the water of Laodicea. "I would or I wish that you were either cold or hot. Cold water refreshes. Hot water soothes or heals". They are both useful. Verse 16 – **Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.**" Or in today's language, because you are so complacent in your faith and have no passion for me, you make me want to vomit." A lukewarm heart towards Christ repulses Him.

Then Jesus' affliction of the comfortable continues. He states **their self-perspective. "For you say 'I am rich, I have prospered and I need nothing.'"** Sounds like the average Laodicean citizen. Their riches, prosperity and self-sufficiency had crept into their attitude towards Jesus. They didn't think they really needed him. Just like they could pay for the city's reconstruction by themselves, maybe they didn't really need Jesus that much.

But then **Jesus reveals the reality of their condition.** "But you are **wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.**" They may have been materially rich. But they were spiritually poor. They were spiritually blind. They were spiritually naked – unclothed in righteousness. So Jesus afflicts these comfortable, casual Christians with His revealing words. Remember the sharp double edged sword coming out of Jesus' mouth? He cuts open their lives and reveals what's really there.

Before we just shake our heads in moral superiority over these Laodicean Christians, some commentators write that every Christian born into the Western World meaning western Europe, Canada and the USA, Australia and New Zealand needs to recognize that they have grown up in Laodicean like society. Oh, we definitely have our times of affliction. But we also live in a prosperous society which can negatively influence our spiritual lives if we are not careful.

But notice Jesus does not afflict for fun. **He afflicts with a purpose. He offers counsel and reveals His heart.** He counsels them to buy gold refined by fire, white garments for clothes and salve to anoint their eyes. Each addresses their great needs of spiritual poverty, nakedness and blindness. He doesn't mean that they literally have to pay him money

using the language of commerce that they're so used to. Gold is the life of Christ and all its benefits. White garments may be the righteousness of Christ that covers us. Salve or ointment is the opening of a blind eye to the truth about Christ.

Then He explains His motives in verse 19. "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline". No one likes to be disciplined by another. In the moment, no one enjoys correction or rebuke. But if done out of love and concern for the person and if acted upon, such reproof can later be seen as a gift.

Then comes one of the most famous verses in the Bible. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me." Notice this verse is directed towards the Christians at Laodicea. It's like some of them had shut Jesus out of their lives although He spiritually never leaves us. But He doesn't want to sit downstairs in the store room. He wants to be invited in to the kitchen where life is daily. I believe this verse can also apply to those who never knew Christ personally. There were likely some in the church who thought they were Christians but really weren't. But the picture is of Jesus lovingly desiring deep fellowship with the person on whose door He knocks. Have you opened your door to Him? Have you shut Him out of your life recently or for a long time? Isn't it time to open the door?

How do we respond when Jesus afflicts us? I love the Jesus who comforts me when I am afflicted. I love receiving His help in ministry and life. I need His strength, mercy, wisdom and counsel. I don't like Jesus afflicting me when I'm comfortable. I like being comfortable. It's not likely that I will pray the prayer "O Lord: I am comfortable. Please afflict me today." But when He does afflict me, I need it. When I accept it, I can be restored, renewed, clothed and have my eyes opened. Verse 19 – **Be zealous and repent.** Instead of being lukewarm, it's time to return to hot and cold by reconnecting with Christ. He fills and empowers us to live the Christian life.

Jesus comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. Which one are you today? How do you need to respond to Jesus now as we come to His table?