

## **Revelation 3:18 – Church at Laodicea Part II**

### **To buy from Jesus, one has to abandon a life lived in neglect and sin**

#### **Revelation 3:18**

*I 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.*

In the last sermon, we stopped at the word “buy.” It seems there is an exchange involved. When you buy something, you exchange something else for it, hopefully, of equal value. In this case, are the things mentioned by our Lord Jesus of equal value? In other words, my wretched, poverty-stricken life for God’s spiritual riches, clothes and medicine? Is that a fair exchange? Even if I have a lot of material wealth, would that be enough to buy from Yahweh all these spiritual essentials and, indeed, Yahweh’s eternal life?

### **Even if you own the whole world, you cannot buy your soul**

#### **Mark 8:35-37**

*<sup>35</sup>For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. <sup>36</sup>For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup>For what can a man give in return for his soul?*

In verses 36 and 37, Jesus says that your soul is worth more than all the material wealth in the world put together! Even if you have the whole world, you still cannot buy your soul. If you can’t buy your soul, much less God’s riches and eternal life, how then are we to understand Revelation 3:18?

### **Buying is forsaking the desire to be rich**

Now Mark 8:35, the Lord Jesus says, “you have to lose your life.” Not just for the sake of losing it (so you can go to heaven), but for Jesus’ sake and the sake of the gospel. When you do that, you will gain your life; you will have eternal life.

Many scholars say that Revelation 3:18 is an allusion to Isaiah 55. Here is what Isaiah says:

#### **Isaiah 55:1 and 7**

*<sup>1</sup> “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.*

*<sup>7</sup>Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to YAHWEH, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.*

In verse 1, there is no cost to it, yet it seems that you still have to buy. So here, we are not talking about exchange; we are talking about abandoning what is abhorrent in God’s sight, which is clarified in verse 7. So this so-called buying is, in fact, rejecting and forsaking the very things that are causing your spiritual demise. We have seen that the attitude towards riches caused the Laodicean disciples to become lukewarm, making our Lord Jesus want to throw up!

If you go back to Mark 8, our Lord Jesus says that you lose your life, i.e., a life centered on oneself. From now on, you live for him and the gospel. So there is parallelism, a similarity in thinking. Forsake your old way of life centered on this world and what we can get out of it, and God will give you what is truly good for us. So we are not talking about exchanging; we are talking about forsaking. Forsake in order to gain from Him. So that is what Jesus says to the Laodicean church, "You forsake the desire to be rich, to have security and comfort in this world, then I will give you the spiritual gold refined by fire, clothe you with white garments and eye salve to make you see."

**Not able to see spiritual things because of the love for this world**

What God wants to give us is far superior to what the world has in store for us. There is no comparison right here if we have eyes to see! We cannot see spiritual things because we love this world. We regard the things of this world as precious. Hence Jesus' diagnosis, "you are blind." But if you repent, Yahweh will open your eyes, and you will perceive who He is. His very being and what He wants to give you is far superior to everything this world offers.

**Revelation 4:10-11**

*<sup>10</sup>the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will **cast their crowns before the throne**, saying, <sup>11</sup>"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.*

The next chapter describes a worship scene in the heavenly temple where the twenty-four elders fell before Yahweh and cast their crowns before His throne. You can see their attitudes in worship. They are well aware that they were unworthy of what God had given them, namely the white garments and golden crowns (v:4)! That helps us see that we, having abandoned our old way of life, do not mean we are now worthy of receiving the spiritual gold, white garments and eye salve from Jesus! When we have eyes to see who Yahweh is, we will share the same sentiment as the twenty-four elders. That keeps us humble. In Romans 8:18, Paul says that all the sacrifices and sufferings in this world are not worthy of being compared to what God has in store for us. Let's look at the next verse.

**Sacrifice in this world is nothing compared to God's eternal glory**

**2 Corinthians 4:17-18**

*<sup>17</sup>For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup>while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

For Paul, the sufferings for Jesus' sake are only momentary, light afflictions compared to the eternal weight of glory. The latter is far beyond all comparison! I hope that Yahweh will give us all a glimpse of what He has in store for us. Even in the present, we can catch a glimpse of Yahweh's glory, provided our hearts and minds are set on Him.

The book of Revelation challenges us to set our minds on the things above and in the future. Paul says the same thing, "We look not at the things that can be seen, but the things that are not seen with the physical eyes." So we need spiritual perception, and that is why Jesus offers us the eye-salve to open our eyes. But

there must be the forsaking. What then do they have to forsake? All the accumulated riches that are causing their lukewarm state of being.

### **Three Items to buy from Jesus**

#### **Revelation 3:18**

*I 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.*

When we are done with this verse, it has nothing to do with the “thing” that we have or do not have. It has to do with our spiritual life. So what are these?

#### **(i) Gold refined by fire – faith tested daily by fire through difficulties, so to be fully dependent on Yahweh**

Let’s look at the first one: gold refined by fire. Now this is the true riches. This kind of riches will never perish. Now let’s look at the next verse.

#### **Revelation 3:14**

*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.*

Notice the words, “Faithful and true.” We will look at the word “faithful,” and you will see the connection in

#### **1 Peter 1:6-7**

*<sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

The genuineness of your faith is more precious than gold that perishes. But this faith is tested by fire. We talked about the gold refined by fire, and here you have the faith tested or refined by fire. Now, what is this important quality? It has to do with the daily testing of our life so that our faith (confidence and trust) is totally on Yahweh alone.

The Laodicean church has the money and can relax while living comfortably. Since they have everything, what faith is there to practice? There’s no need to depend on God. In contrast, the poor and afflicted cry out to God in the Old Testament. They rely on Yahweh because they are weak and defenseless.

That’s how their faith in God becomes more and more purified and genuine. In a sense, we are all tested every day. It doesn’t have to be persecution; it can be any hardship that we experience in this life. For example, many people are going through depression during the Covid lockdown. It is not a pleasant experience to be alone all the time. So what should we do? Turn to Yahweh. Use the time to strengthen your relationship with God, and we can also communicate with each other by phone or internet. Others are worried about their business’ survival because of the lockdown. So what do we do? We have to learn to depend on and trust Yahweh all the time. There may be a tragedy in the family because of the virus. All

these are testings. Some people go through a difficult relationship; that's a lot more common today. So every negative experience or encounter is a trial. We need to look to Yahweh and pray that He will grant us victory over all our anxieties. Throughout the Old Testament, the story is still the same. Saints are made, not born. Yahweh allows us to go through all these difficulties so He can refine our faith and commitment to Him.

So Jesus is challenging the Laodicean church, "If you are willing to let go of all these riches that you have as well as the whole process by which you got all these riches, and accept a situation where you are totally dependent on me, then within you there is already that gold that is refined by fire.

### **Testing of Faith produces Steadfastness – Confidence in Yahweh**

#### **James 1:2-4**

<sup>2</sup>Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup>for you know that the **testing of your faith** produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup>And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be **perfect and complete**, lacking in nothing.

We focus on this word, "steadfastness." We saw that the title of Jesus for the Laodicean church is the faithful and true witness. We need to come to a point where we can be calm and steadfast even if the winds are blowing hard and there is a storm. That's because, through all your experiences of Yahweh, you have a growing confidence in Him. So do we have this confidence in Him? Whatever trial or temptation we have to go through, we have the confidence that God will see us through.

When we were in Indonesia two years ago, I met some coworkers there. Well, I can see over the years of service, they have grown in their steadfastness in Yahweh. They have been living a life of hardship for many years, yet they experience Yahweh's sustenance all the time. So they have grown to be steadfast. We can see what Yahweh is doing in their lives, that even though they are materially poor, they are spiritually rich. I have to admit that when I was there and saw them, I envied them for great is their reward in heaven.

### **Jesus was perfected being obedient even through sufferings**

So thinking of the Lord Jesus himself, let's go back to Revelation 3:21

#### **Revelation 3:21**

*He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as **I also overcame** and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

In his life, Jesus had to go through all kinds of trials, and he never lost. Why? Because he was constantly dependent on the Father, right down to the minute detail, such as paying the temple tax. Even for that, he had to depend on the Father, who has a sense of humor. Yahweh told him the money was in the mouth of a fish. So Jesus had to ask Peter to go fishing to find that fish! God, too, has a sense of humor. Now, let's look at Hebrews 5.

#### **Hebrews 5:8-9**

<sup>8</sup>Although he was a son, he **learned obedience** through what he suffered. <sup>9</sup>And being **made perfect**, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

Notice that even Jesus has to be made perfect in his faith and obedience to God. That is why I said that saints are made, not born, including Jesus. But Hebrews tells us he never failed. So I hope we will learn this obedience to God because that is what faith is in the Bible.

### **The poor depend on God**

Now let's look at James 2

#### **James 2:5**

*Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be **rich in faith** and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?*

Again, it is the poor who lives through dependence on God. Their response to their difficult circumstances enabled them to be rich in faith in the God who never fails. For example, George Mueller depended on God to feed the children every single day. No wonder he is a man of faith. Some of us struggle to pay our bills every month. There's nothing to worry about if you were wealthy; there is no testing. But if you are poor, let's say your employer withholds your income for one month, then you are really in trouble. So it is people like these who turn to Yahweh.

So whatever testing we may be going through, it can be anything. It could be job loss, family tragedy, health issues, or relationship problems. We need to exercise faith in God.

### **Jesus is there to support the church**

You will also notice that Jesus is there supporting the church. "If you are willing to take this step, I am with you because I have been through it as well." Like a good coach, he is there with them because he himself has been through the whole process. Now think about this. He wants to be with us because he wants us to be spiritually rich before Yahweh. Now let's look at the next one.

#### **(ii) White Garments – the Quality of God**

#### **Revelation 3:18**

*I 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.*

What is this garment that he wants to give us?

#### **Matthew 6:22**

*The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.*

How is this tied to the perfection of faith? The Lord Jesus puts it in another way, "If your vision is single (I am rephrasing it), then your whole body will be full of the light of God's life." That's what faith does. When we are enduring trials and don't complain but look to God, our whole vision will gradually become clearer. The more you experience Yahweh's goodness, the more focused you become, and consequently, your body, your whole life will be filled with God's light. So we see this white garment as the quality or character of God.

## **Tribulation brings about perseverance that leads to proven character from God**

### **Romans 5:3-5**

<sup>3</sup>And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; <sup>4</sup>and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Why do we rejoice in tribulation? Like James, it leads to perseverance and then proven character. For example, suppose you are trying to make a relationship work. Before, it was just wobbly and failing a lot, but with this proven character, the love of God has come into your life. In that case, you will become more compassionate and patient. You are not as irritable as before because there is stability in the character that comes from God. So this white garment that Yahweh gives us is His life and His character.

### **Ephesians 4:24**

*And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Paul uses “put on,” which is the language for clothing. In this case, the new man in the likeness of His character is His “righteousness and holiness.” It doesn’t come from us; it comes from Him.

## **The character from God has to do with our relationship with others**

### **Colossians 3:12-14**

<sup>12</sup>**Put on** then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>And above all these **put on** love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

The new character has to do with our relationship with others. The first in the list of descriptions is “compassion.”

## **The Laodicean church has lost her sensitivity to other people’s needs**

But that’s the problem with the Laodicean church. They are so self-satisfied that they have lost their concern for others. When you read the Gospel of Luke, there are at least three occasions where Jesus spoke about the rich. Remarkably, Jesus never said that they got rich by cheating other people. On the contrary, they worked hard to get rich. But alas, when they have gotten rich, they have lost their sensitivity to other people’s needs.

For example, the parable of the rich fool, the rich man and Lazarus, and the rich young ruler who went to Jesus. The latter, like the other two, didn’t get his riches by cheating other people, and yet Jesus immediately tells him, “Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Learn to be concerned for them.” But alas, he reacted with sadness, if not offended.

It is a very good experience for people in well-developed countries to go to third-world countries. When we were in India, a mission group from Hong Kong came to visit. When they had arrived, we arranged a meeting in a small village. Everyone in that community turned up; they were willing to listen. Most were

very poor. For us, a bottle of shampoo or soap is an everyday item. For them, it is considered a luxury. If they visited any of our homes and saw the kinds of things we regard as ordinary, they would think that we are very rich.

Anyway, they turned up and listened to the mission group from Hong Kong. I thank Yahweh because He began to move in the hearts, not of the villagers but those who came for the mission. When they had completed their mission trip and returned to Hong Kong, Pastor Eric gave me a call. He told me that one of them had decided to commit her life to the Lord for full-time service. Her experience in reaching out to the poor touched her heart; it was a very precious experience. As for me, when I was ministering in a poor area of a certain town, they were asking me to pray for their sick because they couldn't afford to buy medicine. So they pleaded with me, "Please pray for my son or daughter," their loved ones. So I did that and left because I would leave the town soon. I don't know if my prayers were answered, but I trust their family members would be okay.

### **Treasure the garment that God gives us**

#### **Revelation 3:4**

*But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy.*

The garment must not be soiled if you want to walk with Jesus. You must treasure the garment, which is God's life and character that He gives us. Please don't allow it to be soiled by this world and sin. Then you will walk with Jesus, and here it says, "They are worthy in God's sight."

#### **(iii) Salve to anoint your eyes**

We now come to the third one.

#### **Revelation 3:18**

*I 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.***

If you look at the historical background, the eye salve is a kind of ointment for certain types of eye disease. To anoint your eyes with salve, you either do it yourself, or somebody does it for you.

In the gospels, it is always Jesus who puts his hand on the blind. Or he would make, in the case of the blind man in Jerusalem, a ball of mud, and he applied it on the blind man's eyes. Whatever it is, it was always Jesus who acted to heal, either in response to a request or he takes the initiative to effect a healing.

### **When we have God's life, our perception becomes clearer**

It is vital that when we go through the first two stages. First, we attain the perfection of our faith, where we express our confidence in His faithfulness by being utterly dependent on Him. As a result, we experience transformation by being filled with His life from above. What happens next is that our perception of God's ways and wisdom becomes clearer.

Now, this is crucial for us because to warn the church; we must be able to see what's coming. We anticipate every threat and be on the lookout for one another. Discernment and wisdom are called for here. There was no one to warn of the dangers inherent in acquiring riches in the church at Laodicea. The leaders of the church did not admonish or rebuke the congregation. There was no warning, and therefore, the whole church was on the brink of collapse.

So we need to discern what is right from wrong. From the beginning, we must constantly be faithful, live the life He has called us to live, and exercise perception into His Word. Pastor Eric always tells us that our spiritual perception is dependent on how we live our spiritual life. If your life is not right with God, you will have no perception. In other words, you study the Bible, but you cannot grasp the significance of what is written.

Consequently, your preaching is a declaration of your spiritual state. We were afraid when we heard this, so we led a bible study or preached a message with fear and trembling. Our whole spiritual condition is on display! So you can now see the connection from gold to seeing. I should say, "From faith to seeing." All these come together; you cannot separate one from the other. They are linked; you cannot have one without the other.

### **Are you troubled today? Rejoice!**

Paul and James say, "Rejoice in your trial and tribulation." Are you troubled today? The Bible says, "Rejoice!" Because now is your chance to experience Yahweh's kindness. Now is your opportunity to be spiritually rich! Now is your opportunity to participate in God's life. Then people will begin to see that you are a different person, "Before, I knew who you were, but now you are not like that anymore." They will realize that your perception is different. Your sense of values and your goal in life is different. Why? Because your spiritual eyes can now perceive spiritual things, the things of God. So may Yahweh take hold of our lives and our hearts. May we be determined to let Him have His way, and we'll experience how much good can come out of it.

### **Jesus will keep knocking on your door for you to open**

#### **Revelation 3:20**

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will dine with him, and he with Me.*

Jesus is not knocking once or twice. He will keep knocking. "Knock" is in the present tense. He says, "If anyone hears My voice." Do you hear his voice? In the gospel of John, "to hear his voice" means "to obey him." So he is calling us to faith and obedience! When we hear his voice and open our door, or the door of our hearts, then you will know what the friendship with Yahweh is all about. When Jesus comes into our life, Yahweh God, too, comes into our life. Then you will know the presence of God. That is the true riches! That is what abides for all eternity!