

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Knock, Knock – Dear Church

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Welcome to National Community Church, all seven of our campuses, this weekend we wrap up our series, Dear Church. We've been looking at the seven letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. We come to the last letter this weekend, we're going to jump in, here we go.

Revelation chapter three, verse 14,

¹⁴ *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation."*

I said this week to.. let me say it again; who is this letter is written to is important, but not as important as who this letter is written from. Each letter includes a unique name and each name a unique dimension of God's authority. To the church in Smyrna, he is the first and the last, the one who died and came to life. To the church in Philadelphia last week, and he's the one who holds the key of David, what he shuts, no one can open. And then finally in this last letter, he is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

Let me go backwards; three unique names. First, he is the beginning of God's creation. Now it's impossible to survey the full authority of this name because it's measured in light years. In the beginning, God said, let there be light and light has been defeating darkness at a rate of 186,000 miles per second, every second of every minute of every hour of every day since the beginning of time. Those four words, let there be light, are still creating galaxies at the outer edge of the universe according to astrophysicists, the commoving distance from one side of the universe to the other is 93 billion light years. Come on, if God can do that with four words, what are you worried about?

"I In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

³ *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

Quite the opposite, light is overcoming darkness. The same God, who said, let there be light wants to shine his light into the dark places in your life. His light, his love can cast out all fear and fill the void with the peace that passes, understanding. His light, his love, listen, it can heal a broken heart and fill the void with joy unspeakable. He is the beginning of God's creation. And guess what?

II Corinthians 5:17 says that...

¹⁷ *"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!"*

So if you're at the end of your rope this weekend, I think you're in the right place because that is the beginning often of a new creation that God wants to do in your life.

Second, he is the faithful and true witness. Now, long before Pastor Joel moved to DC and came on staff at NCC, he got a speeding ticket. Shocking! I think he was in college and he decided that he wanted to go to court to contest the ticket and I'm not sure where this idea came from, but he asked if I would go with him as a character witness. I didn't even know if this is a thing. So, we go to the courthouse, you know, you're sitting in a room, there's about 100 people. It's really quiet until your name gets called. And so we're waiting. Finally, his name gets called. He stands up and there's this loud ripping noise. Listen, his pants ripped right down the seam in the butt region. So, he's there what's he going to do? He untucks his shirt I mean this is back in the day before that was fashionable. Untucks his shirt and walks up to the judge and I'm thinking internally, this is not a good start; this is not going to go well. And the judge asks who I am, and I said, I'm his character witness. He was not impressed it might have backfired, and Pastor Joel was found guilty. When it says faithful and true witness, think the opposite of me, okay, we're talking about Jesus.

In Hebrews 4:15 says this,

¹⁵ *We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, (Aren't you grateful for that?) but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*

¹⁶ *Let us then approach God's throne of grace (how?) with confidence, so that we may receive mercy (mercy is not getting what we deserve) and find grace (grace is getting what we don't deserve) to help us in our time of need.*

In those moments where we're at the end of our rope and the Bible says that one day we will stand before the throne of God and the moment those words kind of fire across your synapses, maybe hit the amygdala I wonder what your emotional reaction is. I think a lot of people tend to react negatively to that statement that it invokes a little bit of anxiety, and yet what I want to suggest is that if you are in Christ, it should incite anticipation on parallel with Christmas morning. Let me explain why. But first, let me say this; I think in many ways we have inverted the Gospel. We've made it more about going to heaven then having heaven coming to earth; that's backwards.

Jesus prayed this prayer. (Matthew 6:9 -10)

⁹ *"Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

¹⁰ *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."*

It's about heaven invading earth. That said, we do believe in a place that the Bible calls heaven, it's beyond certainly are four dimensions of space time.

First Corinthians 2:9 says that

⁹ " *Eye hath not seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for us.* "

But we do know this Revelation 21:4 says that it's a place where there's no more death or mourning or sorrow or pain. Why? Because we will be in the presence of God. So let me cut to the chase. The bad news is that our good works don't get us in. The good news is that our bad works don't keep us out. It has nothing to do with what we've done wrong. It has everything to do with what Christ has done right? Stick with me.

II Corinthians 5:21, *"God made him who had no sin to become sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of Christ."*

Those are the terms of this thing that we call the new covenant. You cannot negotiate those terms and you do not want to because the terms don't get any better than they are. Here's the bottom line; God says, here's the deal, why don't you transfer your sin, everything you've done wrong to my account and I'll pay that sin debt in full? Now that's amazing, isn't it? But that's only half of the Gospel. It gets even better. He says, then I'll transfer my righteousness to your account. Are you ready for this? And we'll call it even. Now, that's why it's called the Gospel, which means good news.

Now, what does that have to do with the faithful and true witness? Well, someday you'll stand before the throne of God, but those who are in Christ will not give account for their sin. Why? Because their sin is already been accounted for. Where? At the cross of Christ. In fact, do you remember what he said on the cross? It is finished. It's one word in Greek. It's an accounting term and it refers to the last payment on a debt. In other words, Jesus makes the final payment, the full payment for my sin, for your sin. Why? For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. All I know is this. I'd owed a debt I could not pay. He paid a debt, he did not owe. Now, I John 2:1 says, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He not only took our place, he stands in our place as our advocate, as the true and faithful witness.

Third, he is the amen. It's a Hebrew word, it means so be it. There are 52 amens in the Bible. There are a few places, the Psalmist, for example, does a little double amen at the end of some of those Psalms. But there's a unique place in the Gospels where Jesus employs this word but not at the end of a prayer, he employs it at the beginning of a sentence. Now in the King James, it would read verily, verily I say unto you, but really it's amen, amen. Now, what's interesting is that this is absolutely unique, there is no precedent, there is no parallel in Hebrew language. It seems backwards, but I don't totally get the full reason why Jesus is doing this, that's not even my point. My point is this, it's his prerogative. He can do it any which way he wants. Why? Because he's not just saying amen, he is amen. No matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ and through him the amen is spoken by us to the glory of God. That's the promise that guarantees all other promises. If you are in Christ, the promises of God belong to you. It is a package deal. It's part of our birthright as children of God. Are you encouraged this weekend?

We're going to talk about who this letter is to. I just wanted to make sure we understand who it's from. These are the words of the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

Verse 15,

¹⁵ *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!"*

¹⁶ *So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."*

Now, Laodicea is interesting because it did not have a water source within the city limits, so it had to do what? It had to use these ancient aqueducts to transport water. Now, what happens to water over great distances? I mean this is not complicated, okay. Cold water tends to warm up and warm water tends to cool down and by the time it gets to Laodicea one way or the other, it's lukewarm. Hold that thought.

This past week, speaking to some pastors in San Diego and not far from my happy place, Catalina Island off the coast of California and I had a couple of days, so I, I called my son Parker. I said, why don't we just add a little bit of fun for a couple of days and so he met me on the island. And he's gotten into mountain biking and so I like kind of doing what my kids love it's, I think, one way to love your kids. And so we decide to bike up to the eastern summit of Catalina Island, but I find out that if you rent a bike, you can't bike out of the city, you've got to join the Catalina island conservancy. And so I'll walk into the office and I tell them I want to buy two permits, I want to join the conservancy and I tell them that we're going to bike up to the summit of the island and the guy gives me the strangest look. He says, are you sure you want to do that, it's a 1400 foot climb? He said, there's a guy who will drive you to the top, drop you off and you can bike down. Yeah, yeah, it was hard not to laugh. Bro, I got this, you have no idea who you're talking to. And so I get my two permits, we rent the bikes. Five minutes in I realized this guy is a lot smarter than me because here's the deal; Parker will sometimes bike six-seven hours a day and he's 23 and he's got like zero body fat. And so, in fact, three weeks ago he does the grinduro. It's a 62 mile mountain bike race with an 8,600 foot elevation gain. And so the eastern summit to him is like this little warm-up and so it's ridiculous. I mean, he's biking up these switchbacks, you know and he's talking like there's no tomorrow and like, I'm dying, my quads are on fire. And bottom line is this, I've got to stop about a dozen times and this is so humbling, I literally had to walk my bike to the top of the summit. Now listen, once we got there, the view was awesome. We actually came five feet from two buffalo of our own freewill and you can see it on Instagram if you follow me. Not my brightest moment.

So, here's the deal, my son and I, you know, we've got this adventure gene, so after mountain biking what are you going to do, well, zip line. And so we had a zip line scheduled and the problem is it took us two hours to get to the top of the summit and so we've got like 20 minutes and so we raced down the mountain and return the bikes and we don't have time to get a drink and it's 83 degrees and we have to run part of the mile to the zip line. And so long story short I'm thirsty, you know where this is going, don't you? I'm thirsty, but the good news is the zip line, come on, there's water; there's a water cooler on the second platform. Hallelujah. And so guess who's the first one to do the second run? I'm just like, I'm stepping out. We're going and I get to that water cooler and I could not be more excited. And you can guess what happened at the end, the last run at the end of an 83 degree day, you might as well call it Laodicea. Okay. Because the water was lukewarm. It was the most unsatisfying drink of water. Your pastor was hangry, but I think I'm able to pick up what Jesus is throwing down here. Okay? Lukewarm doesn't cut it.

Can I tell you what lukewarm is? Lukewarm is noncommittal, lukewarm is one foot in, one foot out, it's sitting on the proverbial fence. It's halfhearted and it's double minded. And it's the very antithesis of everything that Jesus modeled, everything that he called us to; 'for the joy that was set before him'. My goodness, he endured the cross. Listen, he held nothing back. God does not hold out on us.

I love Psalm 84, *"No good thing will God withhold from those who walk uprightly before him"*. God is not holding out on us, but I think all too often we're holding out on him or we'll sell out for 30 pieces of silver like Judas. I think it comes down to this. I think a lot of us think that we're following Jesus, but the reality is we've invited Jesus to follow us. We're not serving his purposes, we want him to serve our purposes, but I think those are two totally different things. Can I challenge you this weekend? If you want to experience true joy, true power, true meaning in your life? Listen, you relinquish control of your life to the one who has plans and purposes for your life and God will get you not only where you need to go. I promise you he will get you where you want to go.

Now, one last thing, in his letter from Birmingham jail, April of 1963, Dr Martin Luther King wrote these words. He said "there was a time when the church was very powerful and the time when the early Christians rejoice that being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days, the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion. It was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society." We talk about this a lot, don't we? Are you a thermometer? Are you someone that just kinda reflects the temperature in the room around you? When things get negative, you get negative; when people start to gossip, use start to gossip. It's so easy, right? Just to kind of reflect the temperature in the room. Come on, God has called us to something higher than that. We are not thermometers, we are thermostats, we change the temperature. How? With love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control. With the fruit of the spirit, we shift the atmosphere around us. Why? Because of what Jesus Christ has done in us and wants to do through us. May we set the temperature in our workplaces. May we set the temperature and shift the atmosphere in this city. May we be ice cold and white, hot and nothing in between.

Verse 17,

¹⁷ *"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."* (Talk about some blind spots.)

¹⁸ *"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."*

I can't drill too deep, but along with being the Wall Street of the ancient world, the wealthiest of these seven cities there was a garment district where wool was manufactured and there was a research hospital where this eye salve had become somewhat famous in the ancient world, something that would correct vision. And so these are targeted words, but you know what? I'm just going to say what Foth says; Jesus talks a lot about two things, money and relationships, and one of those will make you rich, and I think you know which one. I think all too often we get the

little motto on the back of our dollar bill backwards, don't we? In God, we trust. The truth is I think for the Laodiceans, money was their security, money was their identity. And if we aren't careful, listen, I've met very few people who are possessed by a demon, but I've met lots of people who are possessed by their possessions. They don't own things, things own them. And we've got to be very careful that we understand what rich means. It's not a number in a bank account, it's something else.

Verse 19,

¹⁹ *"Those whom I love (the Lord says,) I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent."*

Just kinda focus in a little bit for a moment. I think it takes tremendous discernment to know the difference between the consequences of our actions and discipline that is initiated or implemented by the Lord. Let me try to thread this needle and I hesitate putting a number on it. But I think 95 percent of what happens in our lives, it is a function of an algorithm called the law of sowing and reaping; we reap what we sow.

Galatians 6:8,

⁸ *"Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap decay; (and then it flips the script) whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."*

You cannot break the law of sowing and reaping, it will make or break you. Your life is perfectly designed for the results you're getting. Now, I know bad things happen to good people. Why? Because we live in a fallen world, and so I'm not talking about those instances. What I'm saying is generally speaking, the results we're getting are the byproduct of our habits, our decisions, our priorities, our boundaries, so let's not blame bad results on bad luck. Let's not blame bad results on bad people. I think the law of sowing and reaping prevails. That said, there have been seasons in my life where I have discerned that the Lord is disciplining. Why? Because no one knows our potential more than he does and no one loves us more than he does and he's just not able to give up on us, but he won't let us go with... I think Max Lucado said it this way; 'God loves you just the way you are, but he loves you too much to leave you that way.' He wants you to be just like Jesus. Now, hold that thought.

Hebrews 12:1 says,

¹¹ *"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful."*

Our kids have never once said, Dad, would you discipline me? It's just never come out of their mouth. But guess what? If you don't discipline your kids, your kids will be undisciplined, they will be undisciplined, and so it's the lack of discipline that is hurting them in the long run.

Hebrew says it this way.

^{11b} *"Later on, however, discipline produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."*

Now you might be in one of those places, a spot where maybe you feel like there's just a season of discipline. I would say two things; One, learn the lesson God is trying to teach you and, Two cultivate the character that God is trying to grow in you.

I'll have a little bit of fun with this. When we purchased the Navy Yard, Car Barn, which will be our prototype campus, which by the way, demolition is not only begun, they're almost done knocking out those walls and getting ready to do a little bit. Now, can we just pray one more thing? We still need that building permit. Okay. So let's pray for that. But it's getting real up in here, but now I'm getting sidetracked. Okay. So four years ago, we buy the Navy Yard, Car Barn, and the bank that gave us the loan required that the church take out a life insurance policy on my life. Now this is not uncommon, and unfortunately we didn't get the best rate because I had asthma. Now this year, when it came time to renew that policy, I didn't have asthma because the Lord healed me 849 days ago. And so, I said to them, I don't have asthma anymore. And they said, that's great, we'll give you the best rate. No, that's not what they said. They said we might need to verify that. And so listen, doctor's appointments, letters from doctors, another kind of round of blood work, it was not complicated, but for me, it was a matter of principle, pun intended. Come on, I work hard at this, this is hard. It's harder than it looks. And what ensued was perhaps the longest renewal than an insurance policy ever, it took months and months. Now, can I share some good news? About a week ago the underwriter said we're giving you the best rate. Come on, my healing is saving us money and I love. Here's what our insurance agent wrote, and I quote, "this might be the longest underwriting process in my 25 years of doing this. I guess God is teaching me patience again." I don't know, I just, I love that, I love that because here's someone who I think gets it. Now, how does God teach us patience? By putting us in situations that require it, and if you need more patience, God will put you in situations that will require more of it.

See, this is the best way I can liken this to; is who's ever worked at our campus? Who's ever worked out with a trainer? Let me see those hands. Why would you do that? Why would you pay money for someone to put you through pain? I'll tell you why. Because you know, you know that you need someone to push you and that you know that there's a process of breaking down before there is the process of building up. I think in many ways God puts us through this same process. Listen to me. God's ultimate goal is not your comfort, I'm so sorry. God's ultimate goal is that you would be conformed to the image of Christ. What makes us think we can be conformed to the image of Christ without going through some of the things that Jesus went through? Listen, you might be betrayed. Well, welcome to the party. Listen, it happened to Jesus, one of his closest friends, a disciple. You might be mocked. You might have a few Pharisees in your life who give you a hard time, always looking to pick a fight, puts you down, find something wrong. You know what? There's a chance that maybe just, maybe you might spend 40 days in the wilderness. But if you'll learn the lessons God is teaching you, if you cultivate the character that God is growing in, you, listen, at the end of the day, you're going to look back and you're going to be grateful for those seasons that produced growth in you.

One last footnote, in my experience, the Lord's discipline in my life usually happens when I'm not practicing spiritual disciplines. In other words, I'm not disciplining myself so God sometimes steps in because he loves us too much to leave us the way we are.

Verse 20, and we'll close with this,

²⁰" Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."

I know people and you do too, who have closed the door on God. For some it was during a science class. They couldn't reconcile what their teacher was teaching them with maybe what their Sunday school had taught them in Sunday school and they let go, they closed the door. I think for some it's someone they respect who lets them down. I mean it could be a pastor or a priest who goes off of the reservation in does the exact opposite of what they've been teaching. Listen, in situations like that, it is so hard not to project human failure onto God. I think for some it's just the wear and tear of life, and then for others they just drift spiritually and they let the current kind of take them where the current is going and the next thing they know, they look up and it just feels like God is so far away. I want you to please hear what I'm about to say. You can close the door on God; you can slam the door in God's face. Guess what? He's still on the other side. He's right there. He hasn't gone anywhere and he won't. He's still knocking, he's still knocking.

In 1854 the British artists, William Holman Hunt painted his interpretation of Revelation 3:20. I think we have a picture of it. It's a picture of Jesus knocking on a door that looks like it hasn't been open in a long time. The garden is overgrown, but the most significant detail might be the fact that there is no door handle on the outside of the door. It would be 50 years later that Hunt would explain why. He said the door to the heart can only be opened from the inside.

Can I invite you this weekend to open the door of your heart? For some the front door, you need God in your life. You need to open that front door and see the difference that it makes. Now, maybe some of us have opened that front door, but there's a closet door, there's another door that we need to open. It's the place where it's very difficult to believe that God forgives us behind that door. It's very difficult to believe that God can heal us behind that door, and so we trust God to a point. Listen, maybe you need to open that door this weekend. You need to let him in. Let him heal you and make you whole. I think opening the door is as simple as a prayer, and so if it's okay this weekend, at all of our campuses, I might invite you to take a little more traditional posture in prayer. I often pray with my eyes wide open. I think it's okay. I think God still hears us, but occasionally I like to close my eyes because it gets rid of those distractions.

Can I invite you this weekend at all of our campuses to close your eyes, bow your head, and I just want to ask a question. Maybe you're here this weekend at one of our campuses, and I want you to know this is really between you and God, but I would love to pray for you this weekend and if you're here and you would say, you know what? I can hear that knocking on the door. I just feel like I need to open the front door or I need to open the closet door or I need to somehow let Jesus into my life. If that's you, could I ask you to do something really simple? This is all I'm going to ask you to do; just slip up a hand and take it right back down, that's it. Just put up a hand and I want to pray for you and then you can take that hand right back down. You know, it's a lot of hands because I think a lot of us either need to open that front door and then some of us, you know what happens is we opened the door and then close the door and opened the door and

close the door. Anybody else? You want me to pray for you this weekend? Just a door that you need to open, that's between you and God, you know what it is, alright.

Lord, I thank you today that you're the God who doesn't stop knocking. You are the God of second chances. You are the God who doesn't give up on us and I thank you that you are the beginning of God's creation and in this moment when we give ourselves to you, when we give our hearts to you, that God's you have a way of beginning a new chapter in our lives. And so right now we just simply pray, Lord Jesus, come in, come into my life, come into that situation at work, Come into my marriage, we need it. Come into that place in my heart where I've lost my ability to trust you. God come into that place where I have an addiction and I need your delivering power. God, would you come into that place where I just didn't know if it would ever heal? Would you come with your healing power and make us whole again? Lord, we open the door to you and we thank you that you come in and make all the difference in the world and Jesus name. Amen.