

STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS
JESUS LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

Read Revelation 3:14-22

Introduction

Laodicea was an important, wealthy city, with a significant Jewish population. It was a city of wealthy bankers and financiers. The many millionaires combined to build theatres, a huge stadium, lavish public baths, and fabulous shopping centres. Laodicea was also a noted commercial centre, and some of its goods were exported all over the world. “It is frequently noted that Laodicea prided itself on three things: financial wealth, an extensive textile industry, and a popular eye-salve which was exported around the world’.

The church at Laodicea is mentioned by Paul – in a somewhat unfavourable light – in Colossians 2:1-5 and 4:16. Certainly, this church illustrates and speaks to the church in our time, our modern period of materialism, consumerism, self-sufficiency, do-your-own-thing kind of independence and individualism, religiosity, and apostasy.

Jesus describes Himself to the church at Laodicea.

“... ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:”
(v14b)

Jesus is the Amen, the “so be it,” the “it is done.” As 2 Corinthians 1:20 AMP says, “For as many as are the promises of God, in Christ they are [all answered] “Yes.” So, through Him we say our “Amen” to the glory of God”. Jesus is “the personification and the affirmation of the truth of God.”

“Amen” also connoted the idea of finality or the last word; is used of our Lord as the True One, the last word and final authority in everyone’s life as well as for the entire world. As used of Christ, it points to Him as the end, the finality and certainty of all things. With Him one needs no substitutes, no subtractions, or additions. With Jesus Christ there is no further search needed for truth for in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). Thus, every promise He makes is true and every woe He pronounces shall come to pass.

As the “Faithful and True Witness,” He stripped them and so also us of all our false appearances and pretentiousness, rationalizations, and excuses. It stresses the need in each of us for honest examination followed by an honest to God confession that demonstrates a genuine desire for a change of life.

“The beginning and the creation of God.” The word “beginning” is the Greek word “arch” meaning (a) first in time or (b) first in place, cause, or origin. The point is Jesus Christ is the origin, the cause, the Creator of all things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17; Rev. 1:8; 21:6). He is the Creator of this earth.

What Jesus knows about the church of Laodicea.

“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.” **(vv15-16)**

“I know your works.” As before, the Lord begins with a solemn reminder of His knowledge of the true condition of our lives. Since His witness is true and He is the Amen (the final word) it is as foolish for us to run and hide, as it was for Adam and Eve. We should never run or hide from his witness to us through the Word, or from the disciplines He brings into our lives.

“Hot” is *zestos*, a word which means “boiling hot.” It is found in Rom. 12:11 where we are first warned against “lagging behind in diligence,” but also exhorted to be “fervent (*zestos*) in spirit, serving the Lord,” an obvious cause and effect relationship. It refers to spiritual fervour, zest, zealotry for the things of Jesus Christ. Our word *zest* comes from this word.

“Cold.” Christ says “I would that you were either cold or hot.” Why cold? Why is cold preferred to lukewarm?

“I will vomit you out of My mouth”. How are churches in the mouth of Jesus? What a terrible thing to be expelled from the mouth of Jesus!

What Jesus has against the church of Laodicea.

“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (v17)

What does it mean to be lukewarm? Verse 17 expresses what Christ means by lukewarmness. It refers to Christians who are indifferent or apathetic because they are self-sufficient and self-satisfied. Christians who are trusting in themselves and their wealth or what they thought their wealth could buy them. Note their threefold claim:

1. “I am rich”—they had an overabundance of material blessings, but by this statement, it shows they were proud and trusting in that richness as though wealth had the power to give them security and happiness.
2. “... and have become wealthy”—they continued to add to their wealth. Not only was wealth a sign of security, happiness, and success, but the truth is, it never really satisfies, and people want more. I can’t remember who it was that said this, though I know he was a very famous wealthy man, but when asked how much is enough, the millionaire replied with one word, “more.”
3. “... and have need of nothing”—They were so well off they thought they needed help from neither man nor God. They had bought into the satanic delusion that money can buy anything. They didn’t need to trust God. They could simply go out and buy whatever they needed or desired. There was no need to wait on the Lord, no need to put Him first.

What do a lukewarm church look like?

Why isn’t the church more effective in the world today? Is the problem simply with the world? Is it too stubborn and too blind to listen? Or could part of the problem be with us? Have we, because of our materialism and despite our religiosity, excluded the Saviour and His mission? Have we literally shut Him out of our lives so He can no longer flesh out His life in ours to impart His vision, His character, and values into ours?

The saddest thing about the Laodicean church (and most churches today) is not just the Lord’s statement about their condition as “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,” but the words that preceded this indictment, **“and you do not know that you are ...”** How sad to be this numb and blind!

How can a person or a church know their true spiritual state? The church in Laodicea clearly did not know their true state in the Lord.

“Wretched” is the Greek word (*talaipwros*): the use of this word suggests that they were wretched in the sense that they were hardened against the truth.

“Miserable” means “pitiable.” It describes one in such a state that he becomes the object of extreme pity, like a beggar. The real pity is that they were like a drunk in the cold, they could not feel their condition.

“Poor” is “beggarly.” This word referred to one who begs for crumbs trying to fill his hunger or craving. Those who try to find happiness and security outside of Christ are like beggars trying to exist on crumbs while, as we see in verse 20, Christ stands at the door inviting us to come in out of the cold and dine with Him in fellowship.

“Blind” They were without spiritual insight or discernment. They were walking in darkness. Their eyes were bad and so their whole body was full of darkness (Matt. 6:23). Here was the crux of their problem; it was spiritual blindness, poor spiritual insight or a lack of biblical perspective or vision. Here is something we must not ignore. The problem of seeking happiness in the treasures of the world is at heart, an eyesight problem, a problem of blindness or poor spiritual eyesight (Matt. 6:19-23).

“Naked” is the Greek word “gumnos” from which we get our word gymnasium. It meant (a) to be totally without clothes, or (b) to be poorly clothed, dressed in rags. Though they were rich, and manufactured and wore expensive clothing, and though they made eye salve, they were, spiritually speaking, in pitiful condition.

The contrasts are shocking:

- The contrast between what they think they are and what they really are
- The contrast between what they see and what Jesus sees
- The contrast between the wealth and affluence of their city and their own spiritual bankruptcy

What Jesus wants the church of Laodicea to do.

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (vv18-20)

The change in the Laodiceans had to begin with understanding their spiritual poverty. If we believe we can meet the need for wealth, clothing, or sight ourselves, we can never receive them from Jesus. We must seek these things from Jesus instead of relying on them ourselves.

- If they received from Jesus His riches, His gold – beautifully refined in the fire – then they may be rich.
- If they received from Jesus the pure, righteous covering He gives, then they would be clothed, and no longer would the shame of your nakedness... be revealed. The merchants of Laodicea were famous for a glossy black wool they used to make beautiful garments. Jesus says, “I know the beautiful black that the world can clothe you in. But I have white garments, that you may be clothed.”
- If they received from Jesus the healing of their spiritual sight, they would then be able to see.

How can we buy these things from Jesus? We don’t earn them through our good works. Instead, Jesus would say, All this self-sufficiency must be expended in the labour of getting from Me (Jesus) these absolute necessities.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: With such a sharp rebuke, had Jesus lost His love for this errant church? Not at all. Jesus' great love was expressed in His rebuke. "It is, in fact, God's final punishment to leave a man alone." The word for love here is not agape, but phileo. Jesus' heart to this church is, "Even though I rebuke you and chasten you, I am still your friend. I love you deeply as My friend."

Therefore, be zealous and repent: He commanded them to decide to repent, and to continue in zeal. The ancient Greek word zealous comes from the same word as hot in Revelation 3:16. Though Jesus detested their lukewarmness, He would rather them be hot with zeal rather than cold.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock: Jesus gave this lukewarm church The Great Invitation. He knocked at their door, asking entry to come and dine with them, in the sense of sharing warm, intimate time. It only happens as we respond to His knock, but the promise is made to all: If anyone hears my voice.

- The idea of Jesus at the door applies to the sinner and to the saint just the same. Jesus wants to come into us, and dine with us, in the sense of having a deep, meaningful relationship.
- Sadly, Jesus stood on the outside, knocking to get in. If the church at Philadelphia was "The Church of the Open Door," then Laodicea had "The Church of the Excluded Jesus."

Why did Jesus stand outside the door? Why did He knock? Why did He wait until someone opens the door?

I will come into him: What a glorious promise! If we open the door, He will come in. He won't ring the bell and run away. He promised to come in, and then to dine with the believer. When Jesus said dine with him, He spoke of a specific meal known as the "deipnon". The "deipnon" was the main meal of the day and was a leisurely affair, not a hurried snack. This speaks of fellowship. This speaks of a depth to the relationship.

A promise of reward.

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."" (vv21-22)

Jesus' promise to the overcomer, even at Laodicea, showed that we don't have to be Christians who are compromising and lukewarm. If we are, we can change and become one of Jesus' overcomers. Those who overcome the battle against indifference, compromise, and self-reliance, receive a special reward. They enjoy a place with the enthroned Jesus.

What type of church are you in your personal life?

What type of church do you want your local church to be and what role will you place to make it like that?

