

**Laodicea: The Church That Thought It Was
Okay
Revelation 3:14-22**

In the spring of 1977, after my first year in college, I traveled to Munising with our family doctor to run the Pictured Rocks Road Race. As with any road race, there were aid stations along the way where you could get a quick refreshing drink of water. Volunteers wait at each aid station pouring drinks into Dixie cups from a large cooler and place them on the table or hand them to passing runners.

At one such aid station there was a drink being offered that was new to me and was touted as being able to quench thirst as well as replenish depleted electrolytes and carbohydrates lost during physical exertion. My first experience of sampling what was known as Gatorade, was not a pleasant one. It was sour and tasted like it had way too much salt and besides that it was warm. On a hot day running 11 miles I wanted something that would be refreshing. I spit it out and at the time remember thinking that I would never drink that stuff again.

I am now part of the 75% market share drinking Gatorade to be refreshed after a workout. All be it, it must be cold and besides, the flavor has been dramatically improved.

The last church in our series on the churches of Revelation is the church of Laodicea. It was a church that left a very bad taste in the mouth of Jesus. They thought they were okay. Let's turn to

Revelation 3:14-22.

A wealthy city

A wise Christ

A wretched Church

A wonderful covering

A waiting companion

A welcome citizenship

I. IT WAS A WEALTHY CITY – v. 14a

Laodicea was a city that lay 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia. It was founded around 250 B.C. by Antiochus II and named after his first wife Laodice. The name itself means voice of the people.

The city of Colossae could be seen in the distance about 12 miles to its west below a mountain range. To the south about 6 miles away was the city of Hierapolis. These cities would play an important part in the imagery where Jesus wished the church was either hot or cold.

The city of Laodicea had no natural water source nearby so it had to build a series of aqueducts underground to carry water from its source into the city. Excavation shows this system was approximately 5 miles long. By the time it reached the city the water was lukewarm. In their excavation of these clay pipelines archeologists found them lined with sediment. Research indicates that the sediment deposits would have left the water tasting and smelling bad.

Colossae received its water from the nearby mountain streams and was cold and refreshing. Hierapolis received its water from the nearby hot springs and was hot and soothing. Right in the middle was Laodicea with its tepid water – neither hot nor cold.

Yet, in spite of this drawback, they had something that was in its favor. They were world famous for black wool. That was their main industry. The rich color and texture of the wool was unmatched. Consequently the city became quite wealthy. It was the cosmopolitan place to live. The city was on a direct road to the interior of the east through Colossae and through a direct road to Ephesus it could reach west to the rest of the world. With all its wealth it became the center of banking in the region. Many people came from near and far to bank there. It housed an exorbitant amount of gold. Jesus will use that later in His letter to them.

The city was so wealthy that when an earthquake devastated it around A.D. 60 they refused financial aid from Rome and rebuilt the city with its own wealth.

The problem the Church had was the same problem the city had. Its self-sufficiency made them lose sight of what was really important. Like the city, the church was made up of wealthy members. Jesus once told His disciples that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven.

It was a wealthy city. The problem is, they knew it. Wealth isn't wrong but it can lull a person, a city or even a church into believing it doesn't need anyone else, even God. Jesus has something to say about that.

Verse 14 also shows us we have a wise Christ.

II. HE IS A WISE CHRIST – v. 14b

“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s Creation.”

Jesus reveals something unique about Himself that is specific to each church situation and need. Notice how Jesus describes Himself.

He first of all says that He is **“the Amen.”** We normally think of amen as a word that ends a prayer. Amen is a transliterated word which means it's the same in both Hebrew and English. The word literally means “so be it” or we can understand it to mean something that is sure or certain, something that is fixed and unchangeable.

When we say amen at the end of our prayer we are saying that the Father through Jesus is the source by which our prayers can be answered. We also use it to mean that what we have just prayed we are approving of or agreeing to.

During elections we often hear advertisements from various groups in support of a particular candidate or an ad the candidate himself or herself might give. At the end the candidate will come on the air and say “I’m so and so and I approve of this message.” They could shorten it up and just say “AMEN.” It means the same thing.

In the letter to Laodicea, Jesus uses it as a proper name of Himself. In essence He is saying that His name AMEN; He is the certain one; He is the sure one; He is the unchangeable one. What He says will happen. It's a way of stating that He is truth. It also revealed to them His sovereignty. No matter how rich they felt they were as a church, believing they could do things themselves, He was really the one calling the shots. He was the One in control.

Listen to what Paul said to the Corinthians.

II Corinthians 1:20 – “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through Him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

So it is a title Christ uses of Himself. He is saying that He is unchangeable, the sure One, Truth. It doesn't mean that He just teaches or declares truth, but that He is Truth, there is no appeal available, His is the final and ultimate authority. His word stands.

Sometimes kids will play one parent against the other. **Did your kids ever do that?** They ask their Dad for something and he says no so they go ask Mom. Not knowing that Dad just said no, she says yes.

The assessment Jesus gives of this church is final because He is truth. Because He is the **“faithful and true witness”** He will not contradict Himself or change His mind. His assessment is always accurate, without preferential treatment and always complete.

To validate this, He concludes that He is **“the ruler of God’s creation.”**

Now, the KJV says He was **“the beginning of the creation of God.”**

Liberal theologians have interpreted this to mean that Jesus was a created being like you and me. But the verse really reveals that Christ existed before creation and is in sovereign control over it.

John 1:1-3 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.”

Then in just a few more verses we find out who this Word is.

Verse 14 “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Christ was not a created being. He is deity and is the creator and sustainer of all that has been created. If He is in charge of the world, He certainly is in charge of the church. His perfect and wise eye saw deep into the core of this church and what He saw He did not like. It was a wretched church.

III. THEY WERE A WRETCHED CHURCH – v. 15-17

As He has done with the previous churches, Christ speaks about their deeds. But note a subtle difference here. The other churches all had some deed that was notable to Christ, something that they had going for them, something that was positive in nature, something He could commend them for. But that is absent from this letter. Where Christ had no word of condemnation for the church at Philadelphia, He has no word of commendation for the church of Laodicea. Not one. Their deeds were condemned. They brought Christ no satisfaction, no joy, no glory.

What He says is a scathing rebuke. They aren’t hot or cold, they are just lukewarm. It signifies a heart that had no enthusiasm for Christ or spiritual things. **Remember the cool, refreshing waters of Colossae and the hot springs of Hierapolis that were soothing?** This church was just like its water source – lukewarm. It was content to stay in its sad state of spiritual laziness.

This church apparently had no desire to change. After all they thought they were okay. They liked the way they were. They were content. Unfortunately there are a lot of churches and Christians like that today. They are content to remain where they are spiritually, they think they’re okay and don’t need to change. God’s Word makes no impact on them whatsoever. Listen to what Christ says.

“I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold - am about to spit you out of My mouth. You, ‘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.”

Imagine for a moment if Jesus said that to us. **Would it move us to change or make any difference in us?**

Here was a church that was well off financially. If they needed a new roof, someone paid for it. If they needed to send kids to camp, someone underwrote the expense. Whatever the material need was it was not a problem to them. They thought they were rich and to many people wealth was a sure sign that God was blessing. If you were healthy and had a good job and had a great harvest or plenty of flocks or herds God must be blessing. But if you were poor or sick or without work and so on then God must be punishing you for some sin.

To the Church of Smyrna God said they were poor from the standpoint of worldly goods, but they were rich in things that mattered to Him.

To the church of Laodicea God said they were rich from the standpoint of worldly goods, but they were poor in things that mattered to Him.

The problem of the church was the same problem of the city, they had become self-sufficient. They didn't need to trust the Lord, they didn't need to have any faith because they relied on their own resources. Their wealth left them in a spirit of complacency and spiritual lethargy. They had lost the fired up enthusiasm that came when their church first began, when ministry was exciting and fresh. Their contentment in their wealth left them comfortable with their poor spiritual state and they didn't even know they were lukewarm. The problem is we can deny ourselves nothing in this life only to find out that we are denied everything in the next. Jesus' story of the rich man is a good example of this church while Lazarus serves as a good example of the church in Smyrna.

Jesus said that where our treasure is that is where our heart will be as well. It's obvious to the Lord that their treasure was on earthly things. They thought more about their church than they did about Christ. Oh, they were faithful in attending and playing church. They had all the appearances of being a great church, but they lacked real heart desire for Christ and desiring godly character.

A worthwhile **Proverb** to consider is **30:7-9**. **“Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”**

Deuteronomy 6:10-12

Let's keep in mind this admonition, this warning. It's easy as a church to rest comfortably in what we have in the bank and forget God.

It's easy as a family or individual to rest comfortably in what we have saved up and put in the bank for a rainy day or for retirement and forget God.

It's easy to rest in our own strength and skills and assets rather than depend on Christ.

It's easy to rest on our education or credentials and forget God.

They loved the gifts more than the Giver. Do we?

Bill Gaither wrote a song many years ago that still asks a powerful but urgent question.

Modern times have brought us many comforts

People live in wealth and luxury

But the Master still asks the question

Lovest Thou Me,

Lovest Thou Me,

More than these?

Lovest Thou Me more than these my child

What will your answer be?

CLLI 1292471

That's the question He asks us to ponder.

Christ told the church, I wish you were hot, on fire, enthusiastic, spiritually hungry and growing or I wish you were cold and opposed to spiritual things. Instead, they were religious, but religiously apathetic. They were pitied when they thought they were envied. They had a false sense of security, resting in cash not Christ, depending on gold not God. Their economic self-sufficiency had lulled them into spiritual lethargy. They had all the appearance of spirituality but no desire. They weren't hot for Christ and neither were they cold about Him. They were just blasé.

Oh, church, I hope that is not us.

That the Laodicean church was lukewarm and self-sufficient made it harder for them to change than someone who was opposed to Christ.

What are some things that we might tend to rely on to the neglect of trusting God?

We can trust our job to provide.

We can trust our income or bank account.

We can trust our intellect.

We can trust our charm or charisma.

We can trust our skill or ability.

We can trust our athletic prowess.

We can trust so many things rather than God and become just like the church in Laodicea. They can lead to being spiritually bankrupt.

A lukewarm nature isn't just seen in an independent spirit apart from trusting and relying on the Lord to provide. It is also in a very casual approach to pursuing godliness. Reading our Bible, prayer, worship and other spiritual disciplines don't really matter. Like Laodicea, we can become lukewarm when we have the truth and ignore it, don't obey it, or when we are willing to serve the Lord but it must be on our terms and in our way.

The lukewarm person avoids self-examination because something might be revealed that may need changing.

This condition left them odious to God. He was nauseated by their condition. The foul taste left the Lord with no alternative but to spit them out unless there was change.

I remember taking a big drink of chocolate milk one night at dinner. It was a Thursday night because it was cookout night at camp and staff families received the same cookout menu the campers did. That night it was hotdogs, chips, stuff to make s'mores and chocolate milk. I tipped my head back, took a swig and instead of a refreshing cold drink got a mouthful of curdled, sour milk – chocolate no less. I reacted like any normal person and spit it out.

That Christ is about to spit them out indicates His strong disapproval of them as a church. Their affluence got in the way of their knowing and living for Christ and it made Him sick to His stomach.

About the Laodicean church John R.W. Stott gives this very pointed remark in comparing it to churches today: "It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion."

Christ is challenging them to get on board with Him, fire up their zeal. Correction is possible where there is condemnation. Notice that even for a wretched church, a wonderful covering is available.

IV. THERE IS A WONDERFUL COVERING – v. 18

Christ offers to them something that will cover their spiritual nakedness, fill their spiritual bank account and give sight to their spiritually blind eyes.

Isaiah 55:1-2

"Waters" refers to spiritual refreshment here. In **John 4:14**, Jesus invited people to drink of the water of life. When famine spread through the land it was not uncommon to have to buy water, but the author says that you could now get milk and wine, symbols of prosperity, and wouldn't cost anything.

Like the words in Isaiah, Christ is inviting those with spiritual need to come to Him to be refreshed. There is no charge for what He offers.. What He provides is free. Coming to Him is an indication of the willingness of the individual to set aside his own efforts and self-sufficiency and totally rely on what Christ offers. **"For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God..." (Ephesians 2:8-9)**

Salvation is a free gift. Only what He offers can bring true satisfaction.

The gold they had was useless to get them what only Christ can provide. Only through what He offers could they truly be rich.

Their beautiful garments made from black wool could not cover their spiritual nakedness, but the white robes of Christ's righteousness would cover them.

Laodicea had a medical center and was famous for a salve that was world renowned to help in healing eye problems, but it could not cure spiritual blindness. That can only be done through Christ whose Spirit opens our eyes to see the reality of our true condition and need for a Savior.

Hans Christian Anderson wrote a story about a very proud king who cared nothing except for wearing and displaying his wardrobe. In the story of the Emperor's New Clothes, he hired a couple of swindling tailors who strolled into town and spun a story that they had come across a very special fabric that was invisible to those who were unfit for their positions or who were stupid or incompetent. After days of pretending to make invisible cloth into garments the swindlers reported that the suit was ready. They pretended to dress the king in the invisible clothes. For fear that they would appear unfit, the king's ministers remarked on the beauty of his attire even though there was nothing there. The king then proudly marched out into town to display his new suit. All the townsfolk played along pretending to see the clothes. But one child blurted out the obvious "but he isn't wearing anything at all." Many others began to say the same thing. Alarmed and believing that what they were saying may be true, the king continued his parade.

That was the church of Laodicea. They believed they were spiritually clothed, but Christ revealed that they were truly naked. Yet, if they came, they could be clothed in His righteousness.

Jesus said whoever wants to can come to Him. It is a wonderful covering that Christ gives, one that will cover us for eternity.

Along with that there is a waiting companionship.

V. THERE IS A WAITING COMPANIONSHIP – v. 19-20

There are those who are a lot smarter than me who take this passage to mean that Jesus is talking to a group of people who are not saved at all. Maybe they're right. After all they are smarter than me. But I believe Jesus is talking to a group of believers that have just gone to sleep spiritually. Here's why I believe that. Back in chapter one, we saw the image of Christ standing among seven candles. We found out in that chapter that the seven candles represent His church. **Why would Christ include a church that was not truly saved among those that are around Him?**

Second, we see in verse 19 that those He loves He rebukes and disciplines. The writer of Hebrews says that as well. Christ will punish the unbeliever, but the believer He will discipline. Why, you ask? He disciplines those who have strayed or disobeyed because He loves them. It's the same here.

If you miss everything else I say I want you to catch this so listen carefully because what is true of this church is true of us as well: *even though our love for Christ may wane and we become spiritually lukewarm, His love for us will never change.* He still loves us but He will discipline us.

He then encouraged them to be earnest or zealous and repent - turn around and go in the direction that honored Christ. To be zealous or earnest means to be hot for Christ as when Paul told Timothy to fan into flames his spiritual gifts to serve the Lord. Along with the other churches we could imply that Jesus wants them to return and do the things they did at the first, to restore their first love for Him.

Maybe that's what you need today a little fan flaming.

If that is what verse 19 is about then that changes the implication and application of verse 20. We often use this as a verse for salvation - that Christ is on the outside of the door of our heart knocking to be let in. That much is true and we can take it to mean that. But the verse has much greater implications for believers.

He is not only seeking to have fellowship with individuals through salvation, He is also seeking re-admittance into the heart that has become lukewarm, the heart that has excluded Him. This door could be the door of faith for some and opening it means you are inviting Christ in for the very first time to be your Lord and Savior. This door could be the door of love for Him or for others that has been shut for far too long because of sin, unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment, anger. This door then could be the door of forgiveness. This door could be the door of worship because we have left Him outside our heart and our worship is stale. I think the verse is implying that there are any number of doors we have left shut making Jesus stand outside, but He is there patiently waiting, knocking, asking us to invite Him in so that once again there can be intimate fellowship.

We open the door through repentance. It means we realize we are guilty of sin in God's presence and that we deserve His punishment and we want Him to get rid of it. It means then that we turn our back on it. We want to follow Him whatever the cost.

Christ is waiting for our companionship. When we open the door, He will come in to fellowship with us. There is no fellowship when He is on the outside.

We see one final truth in this passage. There is a welcome citizenship

VI. THERE IS A WELCOME CITIZENSHIP – v. 21-22

We are given a place of honor, a place that is exalted, a place of respect. We will have the privilege of sitting with Christ on His throne.

We have a table and chairs out on the patio in the back yard. Whenever we eat outside, I usually sit at the head of the table. It's customary. It's, well, the place of honor. David likes to sit there because it has a swivel seat. While it's mine, I let him.

Jesus will invite us to sit with Him in that esteemed place at the head of the kingdom. That is the extent of our fellowship with Him, the degree to which He is willing to go.

This passage gives us a reminder. It's a reminder for every one of us.

It's a reminder that for the unsaved there is still time to repent and be saved.

It's a reminder that for the saved that there is still time to repent and be in close fellowship with Christ, to put off lukewarmness.

Both are your decision. Only you can open the door.

The church had an "I" problem. They were proud of their self-sufficiency. They needed to realize how dependent they needed to be on Christ.

Modern times have brought us many comforts.
People live in wealth and luxury.
But the Master still asks the question
Lovest Thou Me,
Lovest Thou Me,
More than these?

Lovest Thou Me more than these my child
What will your answer be?
Oh precious Lord, I love you more than all of these
More than fame, more than wealth, more than the
world.