

## TEXT SERMONS

SERIES: REVELATION CHAPTERS 1-3

Message #10

## LAODICEA

**“THE LUKEWARM CHURCH”****Rev. 3:14-22**

The frog in the kettle syndrome has been used to illustrate many things. It fits the Laodicean scenario very well. The story goes like this: if the frog is placed in a pot of boiling water, the frog would immediately jump out, but if the frog is placed in cool water and gradually heated, the frog will adapt until it is boiled!

Unfortunately, the church in Laodicea, like the frog in the kettle, slowly adjusted to the cultural attitudes and secular environment of the day and became content with mediocrity. Spiritual apathy characterized them and Jesus said that they were not cold or hot but a nauseating, in between lukewarm, tepid.

The conditions that existed in each of the seven churches have been replicated in churches, to varying degrees, down through the centuries. Some have suggested that the seven letters not only deal with churches in existence at the time Jesus wrote to them, but that the letters also represent periods of church history down to and including our present day. It has also been stated by some, that we are now living in the Laodicean Age, that is, the last days before the coming of the Lord Jesus, when the church in general is “lukewarm.”

Therefore, it behooves the conscientious Christian church member, to be continuously aware of the problems that Jesus addressed in these seven letters and be on guard against repeating the same errors today.

As we have studied these letters of our Lord, we have followed the same outline in each. We shall study this last letter using the same pattern as before.

**I. THE PLACE – LAODICEA.****A. The Name.**

The city was founded by Antiochus II and named in honor of his wife Laodice, about 250 B.C. The word “Laodicea” means “people’s rights.” As we study this letter we will see that the Laodiceans felt that their Christianity should not infringe upon their personal liberties and their personal rights. Does that sound familiar?

**B. The Location of The City.**

Laodicea was located 11 miles from the city of Colosse. The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Colossian Christians and in it he mentioned Laodicea four times. Laodicea was a river town. It was located at the confluence of two rivers, the Lycus and the Maeander.

**C. Their Claim To Fame.**

*Laodicea Was a City of Industrial Prosperity.*

Located as it was where two rivers met, there was much river traffic. Added to this was

the advantage of three roads that crossed Asia Minor intersecting in Laodicea. It was a busy commercial hub. In addition, Laodicea was a center of the woolen industry. The surrounding countryside was famous for a certain breed of black-wooled sheep. This wool was known for its softness and glossiness and was in great demand.

*Laodicea Was A Banking Center.*

One of its claims to fame lay in the fact that it was the center of the banking business in Asia Minor. In other words, it was the Ft. Knox of Asia Minor. Cicero, the Roman writer, in one of his letters, mentions that he exchanged currency there on one occasion.

*Laodicea Was a Well-Known Medical Center.*

It was famous for two kinds of medicine. One was an ointment for the ears and the other was a medication for the eyes. More about this later.

To summarize, prosperity made the citizens of Laodicea very self-sufficient and independent entrepreneurs. The church had not impacted society, but society had impacted it. They had not transformed their environment, but their environment had transformed them.

## II. THE POSTURE OF CHRIST.

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God...’ (Rev.3:14)

### A. “The Amen” – v.14

The word “amen” is used to guarantee a statement as being absolutely true. To call Jesus the “Amen” is therefore to say He is the personification of the truth of God.

### B. “The Faithful and True Witness.” v.14

The Lord Jesus is referred to with the same words in Rev.1:5 – “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness.” Jesus will witness only what is true concerning the situation in this church.

### C. “The Beginning of the Creation of God.” v.14

In Colossians chapter one, we read that all things originate and orbit in Christ. (Col.1:17-18) Therefore, in the same vein, He is reminding the church in Laodicea that they had their beginning in Him and in Him alone could they fulfill their destiny.

His posture projected in His letter to this church is one that communicates to the church that what He has to say to them is absolutely correct, in every aspect, and they are responsible and accountable to Him Who is the Head of the church.

## III. THE PRAISE FOR THE CHURCH.

There is no praise for this church. There was no praise for the church in Sardis and there is no praise for the church in Laodicea. There was nothing that was praiseworthy, nothing about which He could commend them. They were meeting, going through the motions, carrying out their programs but nothing they were doing was pleasing to the One Who died for the church, Who is the Head of the Church. What a sad commentary!

Externally the church appeared to be prosperous and looked as if they did not need anything, but they were in need of a revival for their survival. Remember this when you see churches advertised and extolled as great, that: “All is not gold that glitters!” Praise for a church by persons on earth does not impress the Lord Jesus.

#### IV. THE PROBLEM IN THE CHURCH.

This church was prosperous but problematic; affluent but apathetic; successful in the eyes of men but sickening in the eyes of Jesus.

Read about it for yourself: “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. 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.” (Rev.3:15-17)

This is the most severe condemnation of a group of professing Christians in the entire New Testament. It is shocking, yes, even stunning that a true assembly of believers could be so devoid of any Christian graces. It just shows how subtle and inoculating sin is and how innocuous is sin in the nostrils of the Lord. Let us take Jesus’ analysis of this church statement by statement:

##### A. “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot...”

The Christians in the Laodicea church were too cold to be called hot and too hot to be called cold. What, therefore, were they? Jesus said, “You are lukewarm.” They were too bad to be called good and too good to be called bad. Instead of being either/or, they were neither/nor!

The members of this church were lying to themselves and to each other. They were saying, “I’m ok, you’re ok!” How many churches are there where the parishioners enter to attend services and exit in the same condition as they were before they went? No one on earth knows, but be assured that the One Who walks in the midst of the candlesticks knows! (Rev.1:17)

##### B. “I could wish you were cold or hot...”

Isn’t it interesting that Jesus would rather see them “cold” if they were not going to be “hot”? Is He saying, “A cold Christian is better than a lukewarm one”? A cold Christian is easy to spot and so is a Christian on fire for God. But a lukewarm Christian blends in with the crowd and just goes along to get along, therefore, is a “blah!”

##### C. “So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 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.”

The condition of this church was nauseating! When Jesus said He would “vomit” them out, the Greek verb used here is “*emesai*” and is the root of the English word “emetic” which is a drug that induces vomiting. Jesus literally said that this church nauseated

Him. This statement would have registered forcefully with these people. Why?

Jesus was probably referring to the drinking water in Laodicea. Upriver from Laodicea were located the hot springs of Hierapolis which was six miles to the north. In Hierapolis, the waters were hot and the people went there to take hot baths. But the water ran down to Laodicea from Hierapolis and by the time it reached Laodicea it was lukewarm. It is said that visitors to the city of Laodicea, who were not accustomed to the lukewarm drinking water, literally vomited when they drank it. Jesus used this analogy when He was writing to the church in Laodicea about how their spiritual condition affected Him.

**D. “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.” v.17**

As we saw earlier, Laodicea was a city of great wealth. It was the banking center and well known for its affluence. History records that twice Laodicea had been destroyed by earthquakes. Once in 17 A.D. and another in 60 A.D. In the aftermath of the 17 A.D. destruction, the Roman Government financed the rebuilding of the city, but in 60 A.D. the city refused to receive assistance from the government and rebuilt the city from its own resources. Tacitus, the Roman historian, writes, “They arose from the ruins by the strength of their own resources.”

They were a self-sufficient city and that attitude spread into the church. Jesus said, “you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.’” (v.17) These people were proud, haughty and fiercely independent. The Laodicean Christians had been so influenced by their culture that their attitude was that they needed no help from man or God!

Paul wrote to the Galatians, “if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” (Gal. 6:3) Many churches are suffering from illusions of grandeur.

**Illust.** Nothing humbles us like seeing ourselves as God sees us. One of the most sobering evaluations by God is in Isaiah chapter one. God looked at Israel and said, “Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.” (Isaiah 1:4-6)

God’s evaluation of Israel and Jesus’ evaluation of the church in Laodicea are quite similar. Christians individually and churches corporately need to remember that “the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (I Sam.16:7) What divine scrutiny revealed in Israel and what Jesus saw in the church in Laodicea was so counter to what God expects when

He inspects, that it indeed is sickening. Both conditions call for a prescription from the Great Physician.

## V. THE PRESCRIPTION FOR THE CHURCH.

“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.” (Rev.3:18-19)

The Lord Jesus prescribes the cure for their carnality. What was the cure for such a decadent church? Let us look carefully at His prescription:

### A. They Needed Heavenly Currency. “Gold refined in the fire.”

What is the heavenly currency described as “gold refined in the fire”? Jesus was saying, “You need some fire time!” I Peter 1:7 speaks of our faith being tested by fire. Trials and testings have a way of refining us, of refocusing us. This church needed to be purified. A purified church is currency that purchases favor with heaven.

### B. They Needed Heavenly Clothing. “and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed...” They were well clothed in the eyes of people on earth, but in the eyes of heaven they were naked.

The city of Laodicea and surrounding area was known for the clothing industry that produced clothing from the black wool of the sheep raised in the vicinity. This clothing was desired for its softness and glossiness. In view of this, the Head of the Church counsels them to obtain from Him “white garments.” It is as if Jesus had said to this church, “You pride yourselves in the clothing you produce for the body and export, but your soul is bare.” Later, in the book, John would record that the white garments represented the “righteousness of the saints.” (Rev.19:8) These Christians in Laodicea, as well as all Christians, are positionally righteous but many are not practicing righteousness.

### C. They Needed A Heavenly Cure. “and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.” They had spiritual eye trouble. Their gaze was earthward, not heavenward!

Laodicea was famous for an eye medicine that was produced there. It was a famous powder that was exported in tablet form and the tablets were ground up and the mixture applied to the eyes. It was called “Phrygian powder.” When Jesus counsels this church to “anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see,” He was saying, “you are famous for your eye medicine which aids the physical eyes, but the eyes of your soul are blind.” Peter reminds us all that he that “he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.” (II Peter 1:9)

### D. They Needed Heavenly Chastening.

“As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” Notice

that the Lord's prescription for those whom He loves is not to leave them alone in their decadent state but to rebuke and chasten them, which will bring true believers to repentance.

#### **E. They Needed Heavenly Counsel.**

"Therefore be zealous and repent." Earlier Jesus had said that they were neither cold nor hot. The word "hot" in the Greek is "zestos." This is the word from which the English word "zealous" comes. The root word of the Greek has the meaning of fervent heat or boiling. Jesus was saying to the Christians in Laodicea, "Get hot and repent." The Berkley translation renders it this way: "So burn with zeal and change your attitude."

**Illust.** A daughter from out of state came to visit her very sick Father. She discovered that he had been going to the doctor but had no medicine in the house. She found the reason: he had a file folder full of prescriptions that he had not taken to the pharmacy! Like medical doctors today, Jesus' prescription would not remedy their spiritual sickness unless they followed His directives. So with present-day church members who hear Bible expositions, pack notebooks with jottings, file them away and forget them!

### **VI. THE PROMISE TO THE CHURCH.**

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 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." (Rev.3:20-21)

There are, at the very minimum, two promises contained in verses 20 and 21. I will address the first part of verse 20 in the next message, but verse 20 also contains this promise:

#### **A. The Promise That He Will Sit At Our Table.**

"I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." This is the language of warm fellowship. He stands at the door awaiting our invitation to enter. He knocks, He awaits. If we open up to Him we will have the high and holy privilege of enjoying His companionship.

**Illust.** Charles H. Spurgeon said of the Laodicean church, "If we are growing chill, let us listen to this solemn rebuke. It will be terrible for us if we ever come to be loathed by our Lord on account of lukewarmness. This sin is common all around us, and we are very liable to it; let us pray for more grace, and, above all, let us open wide our hearts to Jesus to come in. One spiritual feast with Him will be of more service to us than all the groaning and moaning in the world. Come, Lord Jesus, and sup with us even now!"

#### **B. The Promise That We Will Sit On His Throne.**

"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.” To the Christians in Laodicea who overcame, Jesus promised that He would reside with them and they would reign with Him. If we are an overcomer here, we shall be an overseer hereafter!

### CONCLUSION

The church in Laodicea was a wealthy church, a worldly church and a weak church because it was a church with Christ standing outside. The church’s mission to exalt Christ, the Head of the church, was missing. As the letter concludes, the Lord Jesus is knocking to gain entrance. Here is the church with the crowded-out Christ. They had everything but Jesus Christ. How characteristic of many churches today.

**Illust.** A man visiting in Florida one winter was in shopping in a greenhouse and fruit stand. Suddenly an electric bell began ringing. The owner exclaimed, “Frost!” and rushed from the shop to the greenhouse in back. Upon his return he explained, “The furnace malfunctioned and the temperature dropped and triggered the ‘frost warning system.’ If it hadn’t been for the “frost bell” I would have lost thousands of dollars in frozen fruit and flowers.”

The Laodicean sickness is nothing more than spiritual “frost bite”! Wouldn’t it be wonderful if each Christian and each church had a “frost warning bell” that would sound off when we are getting cold spiritually and the fruit and foliage of our lives is about to wither and die?

“Revive us again – fill each heart with Thy love;  
May each soul be rekindled with fire from above.  
Hallelujah, Thine the glory! Hallelujah, amen!  
Hallelujah, Thine the glory! revive us again.”

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