

The Seven Churches of Revelation
Revelation 3:14-22 NIV
“Laodicea: The Sickening Church”

Introduction

“So Because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of My mouth.” **Revelation 3:16**

Laodicea was a very prosperous city indeed. It was one of a triad of cities (along with Hierapolis, and Colossae) located in the Lycus valley approximately 100 miles east of Ephesus. Though its precise founding date is unknown, the city was established by the Greek ruler Antiochus II, who named it for his wife Laodice. Since he divorced her in 253, it stands to reason that he had the city constructed sometime before that date.

Laodicea was situated high upon a plateau, which normally would ensure safety. However, this particular location had one very substantial weakness which made it very vulnerable. It had an inadequate water supply, and therefore, its primary source of water had to be piped in from several miles away through aqueducts. In the event of an invasion, Laodicea could have been easily overthrown simply by cutting off her water supply. So, while this large metropolis would appear to be both powerful and prosperous to the casual observer, in reality, it could be brought low with minimal effort. Appearances can often be deceiving and such was also the case, not only with the city of Laodicea, but for the church there as well.

When addressing the church of Laodicea, Christ introduced Himself as The Amen, The Faithful Witness, and The Ruler of God’s creation. It is interesting to note that to the last two of the seven churches (Philadelphia and Laodicea), Jesus uses “*Old Testament*” style titles to introduce Himself, rather than the ones that are listed in the first chapter of *Revelation*. To Philadelphia He is the One Who is holy and true, and to the church of Laodicea He is The Amen. The word Amen in Hebrew actually means “truth” or “let it be so”. In both of these instances, Jesus was reminding these churches that what He says can be counted on. His Word is always truth. In the case of Philadelphia, He promised to prosper them in spite of their weakness. But in Laodicea He promised to close them down, if they did not repent.

Another distinction in regards to the church of Laodicea is that The LORD did not find anything positive to say about them. All the other churches had at least a few qualities that were admirable, but the church at Laodicea was completely devoid of everything that is necessary for a church to make any lasting difference in the world.

Recently, I helped my brother do some repair work on my father’s old barn. When we began to access the damages that needed to be repaired, from a distance, some of the old boards looked to be solid, but with a slightest tap of my hammer, the boards would completely disintegrate. This is a perfect description of the church at Laodicea. At first glance, it may have appeared to be healthy and thriving, but a closer inspection by the eyes of The Master Carpenter showed that they were rotten to the very core.

The city of Laodicea was a very important hub of commerce for the region. It was not only the financial district known for its wealthy banking institutions, but also a major exporter of luxury items. Two notable products that were produced in the city. The first being a high quality black wool used to make expensive clothing and rugs. The wool was highly prized in the region and was shipped far and wide to those who could afford such finery.

The second product produced in Laodicea was a special eye salve that was developed by a local medical school there. Much like the black wool, this salve was both expensive and in great demand as a treatment to various eye ailments. The eye salve was exported all over the Greco-Roman world and was a major source of revenue for the city.

As Christ offered His rebuke of this pitiful church, He actually used the very things that they saw as their strengths; their wealth, wool, and eye care products, to show them that in reality, while they appeared to be secure and healthy on the outside, in fact, they were spiritually bankrupt. Instead of being rich, well clothed and clear eyed, they were in fact “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. The church of Laodicea may have been rich in the material sense, but they were desperately poor spiritually. Jesus saw right through their prosperous facade and looked into the bankruptcy of their hearts. Just as the city itself

seemed at first glance to be safe and secure, it was in fact extremely vulnerable. So too, the church was an empty shell. Professing themselves to be wise, they had become fools (**Romans 1:22**). I cannot help but wonder if this passage of Scripture became the inspiration for the famous children's story, "The Emperor Has No Clothes" by Hans Christian Anderson.

Jesus, whose Word can always be counted on as truth, warned the church of Laodicea that they must repent, or He would judge them with severity. He offered them redemption, if they would but turn to Him for forgiveness. If they would invite Him in, He would give them Gold (Spiritual Riches), Clothing (Spiritual Raiment), and Eyesight (Spiritual Revelation).

Spiritual Riches

The church (if you can even call it a church) at Laodicea was an empty shell. It was all religion, but no relationship. In short, although an outside observer would think it to be a legitimate church, it was merely a social club for lost people. Due to the financial prowess of its membership, the church building itself would more than likely have been very ornate and beautiful; after all, nothing but the best, for its rich members to be able to gather together dressed in their finery. Every Sunday would have been a gathering of who's who of the Christian society. However, the church, in all of its fashion, was much like Jesus had once said of the Pharisees in Jerusalem.

"Woe to you, teachers of The Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of The Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean." **Matthew 23:25-27**

Wow! What an intense evaluation that was! Sometimes people desperately need to hear the truth, plain and simple. And Jesus is a truth teller. He is, as He explained to the church of Laodicea, the source of all truth. And the simple fact was that while they appeared to be "doing church" from an external view, in reality they were full of death and corruption. They were materially wealthy, but spiritually impoverished.

Jesus compares them to the very water supply on which the city relied. For you see, having no legitimate source of water within the city, Laodicea had its water supply piped in from outside. And as a result, the water there was both tepid and foul tasting. In a similar manner, this so called "church" had no living water welling up from the inside (**John 7:37-39**). In other words, it seemed to be religious, but The Holy Spirit was not there. It was nothing but a gathering of lost people pretending to be saved! And when their spirituality was "tasted" by the Savior, it was just as foul and tepid as the cities water supply. Neither hot, nor cold, this church was revolting to The Son of God, and it literally made Him sick.

"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth." **Revelation 3:15-16**

To be hot would mean that the church was on fire. To be cold would mean that the church was in desperate need of revival, but to be lukewarm was to be nothing. It was a group of hypocrites, pretending to be the real thing. And the phrase that Christ used to describe His reaction to them was that they made Him sick enough to vomit! What a horrific evaluation for a church that had been planted in the Name of Jesus Christ. I can imagine no worse pronouncement. But God in His grace offered up a solution. He admonished them to come to Him for the things that they needed. The spiritual wealth that they so desperately lacked could be found at its source, namely, The Son of The Living God. Jesus offered them the "treasures of heaven" as opposed to the worldly riches that the Laodiceans prided themselves in. Worldly riches have no lasting value, but heavenly treasure lasts forever. Or as Christ Himself has testified:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:19-21

The church at Laodicea had material wealth, but in the sight of heaven they were impoverished. They needed to repent and turn to Christ to receive the kind of riches that truly mattered. The warning He gave them was reminiscent of the parable of the rich man in **Luke Chapter 12**, who was so impressed with his material wealth that he gave no thought to his own eternal standing with God. In the end, his life was cut short just when he thought he would live out the rest of his days in luxury.

“But God said to him, You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” **Luke 12:20-21**

Spiritual Raiment

Jesus also pointed out to this sham of a church, that although they may have come to worship every week dressed in their “Sunday best”, they were spiritually naked. He counseled them to turn to Him and be clothed in “white raiment”. It is important to see the spiritual significance of this passage. The Laodiceans were clothed in the finest black wool that could be produced by human hands. But Jesus commanded them to take off their black garments and exchange them for spotless white ones. I could preach a whole sermon on this one illustration!

For you see, the very best “righteousness” that we can clothe ourselves in is still filthy rags in the sight of heaven. To be saved is to trust in Christ and exchange our righteousness for His. We no longer try to make ourselves acceptable in God’s sight by the worldly righteousness with which we attempt to cover ourselves, but rather, we turn to Jesus in faith and are clothed in **His** righteousness. The Laodiceans were dressed in some of the worlds finest clothing, but they were still cloaked in the blackness sin in God’s sight. Their best wasn’t good enough. Religion cannot save... Jesus saves.

Just as the story of “The Emperor Has No Clothes”, the hypocrites of Laodicea were naked spiritually speaking. But Christ once more had offered to meet their desperate need, if they would simply acknowledge their need of Him! He rebuked them, because of His longing to help and heal them (**vs.19**). He offered to exchange their filthy rags for the spotless robes of righteousness that can only be found in Him. He offers this same salvation to every sinner who will humble themselves and confess Him as LORD.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. **Ephesians 4:22-24**

Spiritual Revelation

The medical school at Laodicea had developed a salve to alleviate various irritations of the eyes. Therefore, is it no coincidence that Jesus uses this as an illustration to emphasize that although the church thought it had the healthiest of eyesight, it was in fact wandering in spiritual blindness? It is exactly the same condition in which the Pharisees were found in the tenth chapter of *John’s Gospel*. Jesus had come to Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles and had healed a man who was blind from birth. Rather than recognize that God was truly in their midst, the Pharisees chose to accuse Jesus of law breaking and even Blasphemy. While the blind man was healed and forgiven, these religious leaders proved to be so spiritually blind that they could not recognize God as He stood before their very eyes!

The church at Laodicea were suffering from the very same spiritual condition. They were religious, but wandering in spiritual darkness. They had religion, but not salvation. What they needed was to have their eyes opened, so that they could truly see their need of the Savior. Isn’t it amazing that so many in this world speak of God, but truly have no idea as to Who God really is!? Welcome to the

paralyzing reality of the modern day church, my friends. And we must always remember, that just because a person claims to be a follower of Jesus, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are in reality. Many these days have tried to "reinvent" Christ in a manner that is more readily suitable to their own selfish desires. But as Christ reminded the Laodiceans, He is not some created idol. He is The Creator Himself.

"...These are the words of the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Ruler of God's creation." **Revelation 3:14b**

The created being cannot remake its Creator in his own image. But rather, he can be remade in the image of Christ. This requires the spiritual realization that it is we who need to be transformed into the image of Christ and not the other way around! The cure for spiritual blindness is to allow Jesus to open our eyes so that we may see and believe. This will transform us from dead religion into living relationship. So many churches today are trying to rid themselves of the truths found in God's Word, in order to bend God to their own will, rather than bow down to His.

It is said that the Laodiceans had embraced Gnosticism in the church. This false doctrine allowed a person to claim Jesus "spiritually" and still live in complete "physical" depravity. The purveyors of this abomination had convinced their congregants that they could have salvation, as well as, sexual immorality and perversion simultaneously. The sad reality is that this offered a false hope that deceived many by allowing them to believe that Jesus would ignore His own Word and offer saving grace to those who had no desire to repent of their sins. A simple reading of God's Word of truth informs us otherwise.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I WARN YOU, AS I DID BEFORE, THAT THOSE WHO LIVE LIKE THIS WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD." **Galatians 5:19-21** (emphasis added)

It really cannot be said any clearer than this. Apart from the repentance of sin due to the genuine believe in Christ, there can be no salvation. So you see, the Laodiceans may have had a form of religion, but they most certainly did not possess Christ. This is why He told them that He was standing at the door of the church and knocking. He would have delighted in coming into their church, if they would simply open the door and let Him in.

"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. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with My Father on His throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what The Spirit says to the churches." **Revelation 3:20-22**

It is the very same offer that He makes to any who will truly see Him and believe upon His name. The church at Laodicea thought they were doing well. They had all the money, fine clothes, and medical advancements that only the richest congregants could afford. By all worldly standards, they were rich, but in the eyes of The One that mattered they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. And so we all are, when we do not have Christ. But the good news of the gospel is this:

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is LORD," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. **Romans 10:9**

Religion without Christ is worthless. You can have all the things that this world can offer in abundance, and yet, if you do not possess The Son of God, you are a blind beggar in the sight of heaven.

For: **"What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"**

Mark 8:36

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!