

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Things Which Are: The Seven Churches – Laodicea

May 7, 2017

LAODICEA – THE LUKEWARM CHURCH/THE COMPLACENT CHURCH

Rev. 3:14-22

¹⁴ *“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: ¹⁵ “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ 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—¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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.

²² *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”’*

Throughout the Church Age there have been believers attending churches who have left their first love, who have suffered for their faith, who have compromised, who have been corrupt, who have been spiritually dead. There have been believers throughout the Church Age who have been faithful, and there have been those who have been lukewarm!

According to Jesus’ parables concerning the time between His first and Second Comings, the wheat (genuine believers in Jesus) and tares (non-believers who LOOK LIKE genuine believers) will live together under the banner of Christendom. Our antennae need to be raised. We need to know the essentials of Christianity. We need to, per Scripture, examine our own faith. Are we settling for a Christianity that revolves around catering to ourselves when the central message of Christianity tells us to abandon ourselves to Jesus? Abandon to Jesus: to surrender to Him without counting the cost!

The city of Laodicea was established by Antiochus II (264-261 BC). It was named in honor of his wife, Laodice. Laodicea was strategically located on a major trade route running from Ephesus to Syria which enabled Laodicea to accumulate great wealth. The entire area was a well-known banking and money-changing center. And, they even minted their own coins. The city of Laodicea manufactured expensive cloth made from a glossy black wool. Laodicea boasted a medical school which became famous for the development of an eye salve that was used in the treatment of eye diseases worldwide. Laodicea was so wealthy that when a massive earthquake destroyed the city in 60 AD, it refused aid from Rome and rebuilt the city at its own expense.

Scripture gives no indication of when or how the church was established. Paul mentions Laodicea (Col. 2:1), sends greetings to the church (Col. 4:15). Paul also requested that the Colossian epistle be read in the church at Laodicea (Col. 4:16).

For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ *Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.* ¹⁵ *Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house.* ¹⁶ *Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.*

From these Scriptures in Colossians, it appears that the church at Laodicea was a healthy and legitimate church. But, something happened. By the time Revelation was written, approx. twenty-five years after Paul's letter to the Colossians, the Laodiceans' hearts apparently didn't belong to God despite the fact that they were still active as a church. Their church was materially prospering and they didn't seem to be experiencing any persecution. They were comfortable and proud!

Jesus used three descriptions about Himself in His message to the church in Laodicea. Jesus is contrasting Himself with this church.

- He called Himself *the Amen* which comes from a Hebrew root word that means *certainty or truth*. *Amen* is often translated "so let it be" or "truly." Isa. 65:16 speaks of "the God of truth" (lit. *Amen*). When we speak of God in this manner we are talking about God's faithfulness – His being true to His covenant promises to Israel which will impact the world! *The Amen* confirms Jesus' trustworthiness. All truth is measured by Him (Jn. 14:6). II Cor. 1:20 - *For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.* All God's promises are guaranteed and affirmed by the person and work of Jesus. In the OT God said He would forgive sins. God could never do that if it were not for the shed blood of Jesus on the cross! All the promises of God are bound up in Jesus. Jesus is the One Who confirms all the promises of God!
- Jesus called Himself *the Faithful and True Witness*. We have noted Christ as such in past lessons this term.
- Jesus conveyed that He is *the Beginning of the creation of God*. Jesus is the eternal Lord. The word *beginning* refers to Jesus being the source of all creation. Col. 1:16-17 - *For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*

You need to know that Jesus' message sent to the church at Laodicea is connected to Paul's letter to the Colossians. Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea were three sister cities. It appears that there was a heresy in Colossae concerning Jesus. Paul addressed it in his letter to the Colossians. That heresy taught that Jesus was a created being and not God. That heresy have caught on within the church in Laodicea. Jesus, in this message to the church in Laodicea highlights that He indeed is the source of everything!

Jesus severely condemned their spiritual condition. *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.*

We can surmise that their works reflect the fact that they are neither cold nor hot. What does their “not cold” description mean? Some teach that cold refers to people lacking salvation – people who are unresponsive toward spiritual things. Jesus calls the Laodicean church people “not cold.” What does their “not hot” condition mean? Hot appears to refer to true believers who have placed their trust in Jesus for their salvation and who display spiritual fervor in their lives/in their actions. They are “not hot.”

What does *lukewarm* mean?

The word *lukewarm* also described the water supply of Laodicea. Water had to be piped through a system of aqueducts from the cool springs of Colosse and the hot springs of another city, Hierapolis. By the time the water reached Laodicea, it was lukewarm, tepid, unfit to drink. Spiritually speaking, a lukewarm person is tepid, lacking enthusiasm, halfhearted about what he or she believes. A lukewarm person may possess some sense of duty to the church but lacks true conviction and commitment.

Is a lukewarm person a believer? It’s been suggested that lukewarm people attend church, enjoy the worship and fellowship because they fill a need in their lives, but remain unregenerate. If one is unregenerate, they are not saved, not born again. They are definitely NOT wheat but a tare. They look like a genuine believer, but they are not. While “cold” seems to. Shouldn’t our relationship with God change the way we live? What if we suddenly stopped believing in God? Would our life look the same as our lives now? Can we individually say, “Jesus is my life?” Or do we find ourselves saying, “Jesus is part of my life?”

Each of us has lukewarm elements and practices in our life. And herein we are amazed at God’s extravagant grace! It doesn’t mean that when we mess up that we’re not genuinely born again. If that were true, no one could follow Jesus.

Lam. 3:22-23 - *Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.* ²³ *They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.*

II Cor. 12:9 – *My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*

I John 1:9 – *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*

God persists in loving us with unending, outrageous love. Believers are overwhelmed by a relentless, loving, holy, serious God!

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

The lukewarm church is seen as obnoxious and nauseating to Christ. He will “spew” it out of His mouth. There’s no gentle rendering of the word “spit” in Gk. This is the only time it is used in the NT and it speaks to gagging, hurling, retching. Do they fall under what Jesus says in Matt. 7:21-23 - *Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

²² *Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*

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—
This church had become wealthy with the possessions of this world and they had need of nothing. The church at Laodicea was self-deceived!

Jesus revealed their true spiritual condition. He called them *wretched* - the Gk word for “wretched” means afflicted/bearing a burden. Being possessed by the burden of wealth.

I Tim. 6:9 - *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.*

Matt. 6:24 - *...You cannot serve God and money.*

Jesus sees this church as *miserable*. The understanding per the Gk word for “miserable” – they were to be pitied.

Poor – although they had gained materially, they were spiritually bankrupt.

Blind – how ironic when the city of Laodicea was noted for producing the best remedy for treating eye disease! The church in Laodicea was blind to their spiritual condition!

Naked –Laodicea produced costly garments for others yet they were spiritually naked. Jesus’ message to them states that they were NOT clothed in the white garments – the white garments of God’s righteousness.

This church’s spiritual poverty, blindness, and nakedness made them wretched and miserable. When we read the words, wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked, this is NOT describing saints – believers in Jesus!

What is the proposal to this church from Jesus?

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.

buy from Me gold refined in the fire – we cannot purchase salvation. This is a precious metal from JESUS that has been refined, purged, the dross has been eliminated. It’s pure gold. Salvation is from Jesus.

and white garments – white garments speak to salvation – our being clothed with the righteousness of God. *that you may be clothed* – that they might be covered.

Isa. 61:10 - *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed

Adam and Eve were covered in shame – the shame of their sin. They were aware of their nakedness when they sinned against God – until God covered them with the skin of an animal, blood having been shed.

and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see

The church in Laodicea was blind. The Apostle Paul wrote...

II Cor. 4:3-4 - *But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,⁴ whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*

Jesus asks the church in Laodicea to give up what they thought was so necessary and valuable, in exchange for what really matters. The Laodicean church did not realize or acknowledge that their souls were sick, that they were desperately in need of what Christ offered. It has been said that “Our greatest fear as individuals and as a church should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don’t really matter.”

Francis Chan, in his book, *Crazy Love*, shares that when he was in high school, he seriously considered joining the Marines. What turned him off, however, was that in their advertisements, everyone was always running. “I hate running,” he writes. “I didn’t bother to ask if they would modify the rules for me so I could run less, and maybe also do fewer push-ups. That would’ve been pointless and stupid and I knew it. Everyone knows that if you sign up for the Marines, you have to do whatever they tell you. They own you. Somehow this realization does not cross over to our thinking about the Christian life. Jesus didn’t say that if you wanted to follow Him you could do it in a lukewarm manner. Jesus said, ‘Take up your cross and follow.’”

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Jesus speaks of His love toward them. He also states “I reprove” them. The Gk. word includes a rebuking of them, intending to expose them (Eph. 5:11 - *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.*), to bring them to light, to call them to account, to punish them! Jesus’ statement can be understood as a general move of God toward sinners. To “chasten” – to cause one to learn; speaking of a judge ordering one to be scourged.

II Tim 2:25 - *in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,*

The Gk word for “correcting” is the same word for “chasten” (pi dyu o) – again, meaning to cause one to learn; speaking of a judge ordering one to be scourged. Jesus is specifically sending His message to these people in Laodicea – this message of love.

“And those whom I love, I will convict, I will expose, and I will punish!”

The word “love” is not *agape* which is God’s supreme love. The word in this verse for “love” is *phileo* – to treat affectionately or kindly. *Agape* is selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love, *Agape* perfectly describes the kind of love Jesus has for the Father and for His followers. But He uses *phileo*.

Therefore be zealous and repent.

When a sinner changes his mind and understands Who God is and who he is, a sinner, transformation follows when there is a heart change.

II Cor. 7:10 - *godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation*

We read of Jesus’ invitation

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.

Jesus is seeking to enter a church that bears His name but lacks a single believer. His message to them is His knocking.

I stand at the door and knock

Regarding Jesus knocking, the Gk for knocking is in the present tense and means *I am knocking*. The picture is of Jesus standing for a period of time, knocking. He awaits a response. From the church that had shut Him out, Jesus requests permission to enter – He requests permission from individuals.

If anyone hears My voice.... Notice: if any ONE hears. All men have ears; not all hear His voice. Jesus is asking, “Is there anyone in this church?” The invitation is personal.

and opens the door, I will come in to him

God saves individuals. God saves people one at a time. And, often the commitment of one person who is “hot”/passionate for the Lord, who is filled with fervor and enthusiasm for the Lord will spark an awakening with a church!

and dine with Him, and he with Me.

Dining conveys the idea of intimate fellowship. The OT and the Gospels highlight the significance of feasting and dining with one another. Jesus says He will dine with “him” in ongoing fellowship/intimacy as soon as the door is opened.

Matt. 8:11 - *And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.* Jesus was speaking of feasting during the Millennial Kingdom during the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9; Isa. 25:6).

We absolutely must take a strong stand on truth. We do, however, need to be compassionate. God, in His unfathomable mercy, can save those who are deceived. We see churches that are steeped in error – filled with people who are still redeemable! And so, we need to expose heresy because those who espouse heresy stand on the brink of God’s judgment. We expose because we love – because of God’s love. AND, we continue to “knock” in Jesus’ name, calling individuals to salvation!

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne

To the one who overcomes – who becomes a believer (I Jn. 5:4) - he will sit with Jesus on His throne! This is an amazing manifestation of God’s grace. Those who were about to be spit from Jesus’ mouth, are invited to dine with Him and to co-reign with Jesus when He sits on His throne in the Millennial Kingdom on earth!

Sitting with Jesus on His throne - *My throne* – is noted in the future. Jesus is NOT sitting on His throne at this time. Where is Jesus? He is sitting at the right hand of God the Father as our Great High Priest (Psa. 110:11; Matt. 26:64; Lk. 22:69; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 12:2). In the Millennial Kingdom on earth, Jesus will sit on His throne (Matt. 25:31).

as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne

Jesus has overcome. Believers are called overcomers because we belong to the One Who has overcome! In the Millennial Kingdom, Jesus will sit on His throne.

In the Eternal State it appears the two thrones, Jesus’ throne and the Father’s throne, become synonymous.

Rev. 22:1, 3 - *And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb...³ And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.*

Jesus’ promise in His message to Laodicea is the grandest – it is the crowning promise – and it’s placed at the end of all the seven messages. It is the capstone message for believers. AND, it links to Rev. 4 where we see the throne room of God!

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

What the Spirit speaks is spiritually discerned (I Cor. 2:14)

After reading the seven letters to the seven churches...we see in every message, among the compromise, and the worldliness, and the lack of love for Jesus, and the spiritual deadness – the Lord LOVES and continually calls His Church to purity, to holiness. He speaks to us as well through the messages to the seven churches.

Each of us needs to ask, “How shall I then live – for JESUS?”

QUESTIONS

What matters to you?

Is God’s word enough?

It's up to each one of us to respond to what we read/hear. We all have a choice in that response. We can adjust how we live daily or stay the same! What say you?

What are your thoughts regarding Jesus' message to the church in Laodicea?

How do you see Jesus after reading His seven messages to the churches?

What is your take-away?

How does Jesus' messages to the churches impact you personally?

HOMEWORK

Reread your handout for week 10.

If you disagree with anything in the handout, what do you believe based on Scripture?

Ponder your walk with the Lord. Ponder the questions asked throughout this lesson.

Share what you have gleaned with someone this week.

Read the handout for week 11 when you receive it.