

Jesus' Letter To The Church At Laodicea

Text : **Revelation 3: 14-22**

INTRODUCTION :

A. If asked by someone unfamiliar with us, how would you describe our congregation ?

1. Would you describe us as being a cold church, a hot church or as being not too much either way ... just sort of average ?
2. Would you describe us as being on fire for the Lord, a dead church or in between ?
3. Today we are going to study the letter of Jesus to a church that was just average.

B. This was a church that did not have a realistic self-image.

1. We would all be amazed at how much differently others see us than we see ourselves.
2. **Ill. :** On the first day of camp I asked a group of 15 to 20 young people to write one short paragraph describing themselves without using any physical features. On the last day of camp I drew some from a hat and read them, but no one could guess who they were. Why ? Others did not see them as they saw themselves.
3. The image that the church in Laodicea had of itself was not realistic.
 - a. **Vs. 15** Jesus said, “**I know your deeds, ...**”
 - b. Jesus knew them as they really were, not as they wished they were.
4. Jesus the functioning head of the church (**Eph. 1: 22-23**) **not** the figurehead.
 - a. Jesus is not a “hands-off” ruler.
(*He is the one who opens doors or removes lampstands.*)
 - b. He died to purchase the church so He has a vested interest in each individual member.
5. Jesus understood the brethren at Laodicea and He understands us as well.

C. Whether by chance or by design Jesus saved the worst congregation 'til last.

1. The Laodiceans thought themselves to be well-pleasing to God.
2. He had absolutely nothing good to say to or about them.
3. Basically He told them :
 - a. You make Me sick the way you are !
 - b. You must change !
 - c. If you change will I have a relationship with you.

I. As with all of the letters, the local conditions are reflected in the message.**A. Laodicea was not as old as some of the cities, but became very rich.**

1. It was established by Antiochus II in about 260 B.C.
2. It was named after his wife, Laodice. (*She later poisoned him.*)
3. It was destroyed by the great earthquakes of 17 A.D. and 60 A.D.
 - a. After the quake of 60 A.D. it refused any outside help and rebuilt itself.
 - b. It was at that point that it reached the height of its glory.

B. It's location was very conducive to financial success.

1. It was located at the intersection of three major highways.
2. It was in a very fertile section of the Lycus River Valley.
3. It was within trading distance of three other cities.
 - a. Philadelphia was 40 miles to the northwest.
 - b. Colossae was only 10 to the east. (*Laodicea took business from Colossae.*)
 - c. Hierapolis was just across the valley 6 miles to the north.

C. There were three major industries in Laodicea.

1. Laodicea was a political and financial hub. (*regional capitol*)
 - a. It was an assize city so it was frequented by high government officials.
 - b. It was the banking center of the region with international connections.
* *The Syrian king had brought a significant number of wealth Jews into the area.*
2. Laodicea was world famous for the garments it manufactured, especially tunics.
 - a. Abundant supply of black wool which was very soft.
 - b. Romans established garment manufacturing there.
3. Laodicea was the home of a famous medical school.
 - a. The school was known far and wide for selling eye salve.
 - b. The salve was finely ground Phrygian Stone and mixed it with oil.

D. Laodicea's major problem was water.

1. Water had to be brought in from Hierapolis and Colossae.
2. The water left Hierapolis hot and Colossae cool, but arrived tepid.
3. It had to be cooled before it could be drunk.

II. Jesus introduces Himself to the church at Laodicea as God, as the authority.

A. The “Amen” (“Amen” is a particle of Hebrew origin. (*amam* = faithful)

1. The word “**amen**” is a transliteration, **NOT** a translation. (*name reserved for God*)
2. The definition is not as is commonly understood today. (*I agree.*)
 - a. at the beginning of a discourse — surely, truly, of a truth
 - b. at the end — so it is, so be it, may it be fulfilled
3. **John 8: 58-** Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, (*amen, amen I say ..*) before Abraham was born, I am.”
4. **THUS :** Jesus says He is the source of truth.
 - a. There is no debate or doubt.
 - b. If He says it, it is true.

B. He is “The faithful and true Witness.”

1. Refers back to **1:5** “and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us ...”
2. Jesus was the witness of God on the earth.
John 15: 15- ... all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

C. He is “the Beginning of the creation of God,”

1. This is **NOT** to say that Jesus was created. (*Not first, Not last, Not in-between*)
2. Jesus was the origin of all that was created.
 - a. **John 1: 1-3, 14**
 - b. **Col. 1: 15-17** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. **17** He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Thus : *Jesus assured them that He speaks with the full authority of God.*

III. They are condemned, but not accused of immorality, idolatry or false doctrine.

A. Jesus is completely repulsed by this church.

1. He wants **NO** contact with them ... I will spit them out.
2. How horrible to have God say “*You make Me sick.*”

B. This word is properly translated “vomit” you out.

1. “*emeo*” means : to vomit, vomit forth, throw up
2. “*emeo*” is the word from which we get “Emetic.” (*medicine to induce vomiting*)
3. There is a word for spit : “*ptuo*”

C. They were guilty of the sin of remaining average, of failing to have zeal.

1. They were not accused of the more common sins of their day.
 - a. They had not gone off into false doctrine. (*Gnosticism, Judaizing, etc.*)
 - b. They had not taken up emperor worship or gone back into paganism.
 - c. They had not adopted the carnal lifestyle that was available to the affluent.
2. They had simply become complacent in their service to God.
 - a. They had lost their zeal for serving God.
 - b. They were no longer “Hot” for God.
 - c. The word hot is “*zestos*” from which we get our English word “*zest*.”
3. When one loses his zeal for God, God doesn’t even want to be around him.
 - a. Better to be a cold-hearted Ephesian than “*Charlie Pewpaker*” in a faithful church.
 - b. God doesn’t want Christians to be cold, but He won’t accept one that’s not hot.
 - *c. *A “lukewarm” Christian is a contradiction in terms.*

D. Jesus is NOT politically correct; He WILL NOT accept average.**IV. He told them they had deceived themselves.****A. Christians are warned not to deceive themselves.**

1. **James 1: 26** - If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.
2. **I Cor. 3: 18**- Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise.
3. Jesus taught that self-deceived people would be rejected by Him. **Matt 7:21-23**

B. They thought that they were spiritually rich, but they were impoverished.

1. They were “*wretched*.” ... “*One who is forced to endure toils and troubles.*”
2. They were “*poor*.” ... “*begging, asking alms, destitute of wealth,*”
3. They were “*blind*.” ... “*not able to understand*”
4. They were “*naked*.” ... “*unclad, without clothing*” (*ultimate shame*)

C. Their pride was without foundation because they saw with the eyes of flesh.

1. **I Cor. 3: 18-** Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise.

2. Their physical circumstances were as they perceived. **Physically they :**

- a. They were in need of nothing.
- b. They were one of the richest cities in the world.
- c. They sold eye slave all over the empire.
- d. They were dressed in the finest clothing money could buy.

D. Other congregations would have looked on them with envy

- 1. Jesus saw their spiritual reality.
- 2. It is hard for those who are physically blessed to feel need. **Matt. 19: 24 ... camel**

V. Even though they had become totally repulsive to God, He still loved them.

A. Vs. **19** “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.”

- 1. I’m scolding you because I don’t want you to be lost to Me. **II Pet. 3: 9**
- 2. **John 15: 2** - ... every branch that bears fruit,
He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. (*Pruning isn’t pleasant.*)

B. They are give two commands to qualify for restoration to His favor.

- 1. “**Be zealous**” (*You can’t be self-satisfied or accept average.*)
 - a. The terms of acceptance are set by God ... serve Him with zeal.
 - b. Average is NEVER acceptable. *God measures effort ... not result.*
- 2. “**Repent**”
 - a. Stop being what you are ... average.
 - b. Change your heart and your attitude resulting in a change of actions.

C. They can no longer just be attendees and abstainers ... they must serve with zeal.

VI. He was willing to fellowship any of them who will respond to His invitation.

A. Vs. **20** Knocking at the door indicates that He is outside.

- 1. Outside of that church.
- 2. Out of their hearts.
- 3. They are separated from God, i.e., lost.

B. Vs. **20** ... You must take the initiative to restore fellowship.

1. You must hear His knocking at your heart. (*He knocks with His word.*)
2. You must be the one to open the door to your heart.
 - a. Listen to the message of His word ... **be zealous.**
 - b. Your repentance will open the door. ... **commit themselves to the relationship.**
3. When you do so you will be returned to direct fellowship with Christ.

C. Jesus is not a beggar at the door, but a friend offering an opportunity.

1. He will ONLY fellowship with those who overcome.
2. Those in Laodicea had to overcome the attitude of accepting average. (*We do to.*)
3. Their success depends upon their complete change of attitude and commitment.

CONCLUSION :

A. This is possibly the easiest of the 7 churches for Americans to identify with.

1. We enjoy enormous amounts physical blessings.
2. We feel entitled to have all of our physical needs met. (*Cares over to spiritual*)

B. Consequently, we do not feel need as others do.

1. Not feeling need, we do not feel gratitude as deeply as those who do feel need.
2. Being given so much, we don't feel the obligations to serve in response to receiving.

C. THUS : Many American Christians walk in the shoes of the Laodiceans.

1. They are satisfied that they are fine.
 - a. Believe the right things
 - b. Go to church
 - c. Abstain from overt sin
2. As long as they are as good as everyone else in church they are satisfied.

D. Those who walk in the shoes of the Laodiceans end up as they did.

1. Jesus is totally aware of our reality ... **not** our self-perception.
2. He gives us the same commands he gave the Laodiceans :
 - a. Be zealous
 - b. Repent

INVITATION :

Lesson Text :

Revelation 3: 14-22

- 14** To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:
The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:
- 15** 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. **16** So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. **17** Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, **18** I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. **19** Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; 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 will dine with him, and he with Me. **21** He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down 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.'