

## A Tale of Seven Churches: Laodicea Revelation 3:14-22

### **Slide 1**

Last week the letter that John delivered to Philadelphia was a real joy; it had nothing but praise. Today's letter is a little different.

Just as there was nothing bad to say about the Philadelphian church, there's nothing good to say about the Laodicean church. I bet John wasn't looking forward to delivering this letter.

Now, the city of Laodicea was neither the youngest nor oldest of the seven cities. It was founded by An-ti-och-us of Syria and named after his wife La-od-i-ce, 300 years before Revelation was written.

Laodicea was one of the greatest commercial centers of its day. Straddling the major trade route that lead from Ephesus to Syria meant that the majority of the east-west trade passed through the city.

Originally, Laodicea was designed as a fortress, but it had a major liability--it had no internal water supply. It's only source of drinking water had to be piped in from six miles away.

One historian said that, "*Laodicea needed only peace to make it a great commercial and financial center*" and that peace came from the Roman Empire.

This was one of the richest cities in the known world. When devastated by an earthquake in 61 AD, they refused any aid from the Roman Government. In fact, they rebuilt an even greater Laodicea from their own resources.

## **Slide 2**

As we look at our map, we find that Laodicea completes the circular route this letter took. Situated in what is now Turkey, the city was located approximately 62 miles southeast of Philadelphia.

Besides being a city of great wealth and commerce, it was also known for clothing manufacturing. The sheep, which grazed round Laodicea, were famous for their soft, black, glossy wool.

It was also a center of medicine. Just thirteen miles to the west stood the temple of the Carian which was known for its school of medicine. It had its administrative center in Laodicea.

The school and its physicians were so well known that they were honored on some of the local coins. The medical school was famous throughout the known world for an eye and ear ointment they produced.

## **Slide 3**

This slide shows all that remains of city, nothing but ruins. And so, to the church in this great, wealthy city of commerce and medicine Jesus addresses His most scathing letter.

## **Slide 4**

Again, this letter begins with the words: *"I know your deeds."* A frightening reminder for us today that the church doesn't serve under a blind eye. Everything we do or don't do is observed by Jesus.

Every time we neglect to do the things of God, it's seen. Individually, each of us will be judged on our relationship with Christ, a relationship of *"Grace based on faith."*

But the entity known as the church will be judged as a corporation, and that judgment will be based on how well we represented Jesus to a lost and dying world.

So, if Jesus stood before us today and said, *“I know your deeds.”* Would the words be words of praise or condemnation?

His words to the Church in Laodicea were harsh. Listen to what Jesus says to them in the rest of Revelation 3:15, *“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!”*

The words used here are extremes. The word “cold” is the Greek word Psychros and it literally means cold to the point of freezing. This isn’t just a little cold; this is teeth chilling, Slurpee brain-freeze cold.

At the other extreme Jesus uses the Greek word Zestos which means hot. Not a little hot, but hot to the point of boiling.

These metaphors and analogies were great for those who were there. They were like inside jokes.

Therefore, the citizens in Laodicea, who heard the phrase “Neither hot nor cold,” probably went “Ahhhh,” while on the other hand we’d wonder what He’s talking about.

But remember, Laodicea had no internal water supply. One source of water they received came via aqueducts from the mountains surrounding Co-los-sae, about 9 miles from the city.

This water came from the melting ice and snow high in the mountains and at its source it was psychros. But, by the time it traveled through miles of aqueducts it became tepid or lukewarm.

Another source of water came from the city of Hierapolis. A city known for its hot thermal springs that bubbled out of the ground and, at its source, it was Zestos. These springs were viewed as therapeutic and people came to get relief from their aches and pains.

But, by the time this water traveled from Hierapolis to Laodicae, it too became tepid or lukewarm.

Many believe that Jesus was saying to the church, *“You’re not providing refreshment for the spiritually weary, nor healing for the spiritually sick, you’re just kind of coasting and you’re ineffective in ministry.”*

There are others who speculate that Christ was saying, *“You are neither on fire for me nor are you unknowing of me, instead you are just kind of so so, you’re bland and tasteless. You’re just average.”*

Nobody likes to be average. We strive to be above average in sports and academics, in business and self-improvement. Yet, way too many people in our churches today want to be average Christians.

One individual defined average as *“The worst of the best and the best of the worst.”* Is that what you want to be? That’s what the Laodicean church was, just average.

The church didn’t appear to have any of the heresy of Thyatira or Pergamum but on the other hand there wasn’t any love and faithfulness of Philadelphia or Smyrna.

Yet, these people claimed to know Christ. They called themselves Christians but somehow the fire had gone out. Remember, Jesus didn’t say, *“I know all the things you do, that you are not hot but at least you’re not cold.”*

No! What He said was, *“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!”*

Jesus was saying, *“At least if you were cold, you’d have an excuse for not being hot. If you were an unbeliever, I wouldn’t have expected you to get excited about your faith.”*

Then Jesus tells them in Revelation 3:16, *“So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”*

Have you ever taken a drink of something you thought was supposed to be hot, and it had been sitting there long enough to cool off. Most people would spit it back in the cup.

This is what Jesus is saying, *“I would love it if you were on fire for me and I could accept it if you had rejected me but how can you profess to be a Christian and be as dead and cold as a corpse?”*

## **Slide 5**

Like it or not, the lukewarm Christian is nauseating. Nauseating not only to God, but to everyone else as well.

The scary thing is that, prophetically, the Laodicean church represents the church age between 1850 and the return of Christ.

You only have to look around to see that we're in the middle of the most apathetic era in which the Christian church has ever stood.

In 2020, most Christians are content to do nothing more than occupy a pew and toss a coin or two in the plate when it goes by.

The Laodicean church was not lukewarm in one area and effective in many others, no it was totally ineffective across the board.

It was lukewarm in love, lukewarm in service, lukewarm in theology, lukewarm in evangelism. It was a lukewarm church. The Laodicean church was nauseatingly mediocre.

It wasn't that they were wrong, they just weren't right, it wasn't that they were doing evil things, they just weren't doing good things.

They weren't doing anything, they were just there, and Jesus said that's not good enough. But here's the cool thing, the letter doesn't end with Jesus spewing the church out of His mouth.

Revelation 3:17, *"You say, '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."*

The Laodicean church was saying, *"We've got it made."* But Jesus said, *"Oh no you don't."* Notice the comparison, the church in Laodicea was rich, but Christ said they were poor.

Do you remember what He said to the church in Smyrna? Revelation 2:9, *"I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!"*

Interesting. Now I'm not slamming material wealth. The desire to achieve makes the world go round. The bible doesn't say money is the root of all evil, it says: 1 Timothy 6:10, *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."*

When we don't need to depend on God because we can depend on our money, then we're poor. When our happiness is tied to our bank balance, or what we have or don't have, then we are wretched and miserable.

When we think that money is the solution to every problem and neglect the power of God then we're blind. And when we think it's enough to clothe ourselves in silks and jewels and furs and neglect the clothing of righteousness then we're buck naked.

These revelations must have cut the Laodiceans to the quick. They thought they were wealthy, yet Jesus says they're poor. They were so proud of their medical school and the eye ointment that they produced, and Jesus says they were blind.

They were so proud of the black wool produced in the fields around the city and the clothing they manufactured, but Jesus said they were naked.

Christ's words must have struck directly to the heart of people who thought they had so much that they felt they had no need for God.

Now, if I were God, I would have closed the letter there. Jesus didn't leave it at that point because for every problem identified He had a solution.

It's easy to spot the problems, but are we willing to provide a solution. Jesus wasn't going to give up on this church or these people.

Revelation 3:18, *"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."*

He says, are you poor? Here's gold. Are you naked? Here are clothes. Are you blind? Here's medicine.

But Jesus wasn't going to force Himself on them, that's not the way He works. He says come and get it, make a decision! Of course, it's going to cost you something, but here it is.

### **Slide 6**

And then He explains His action in Revelation 3:19, *"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent."*

The love of Christ wouldn't be much of a love if He allowed us to do whatever we wanted.

When we correct our children, we tell them, *“I’m only doing this because I love you, I’m doing it for your sake.”* They’ll never understand until they have children of their own.

The correction and discipline that’s being spoken of here is the kind that compels a person to see the error of his way, not so much as punishment, but as illumination.

Remember the story of King David and his affair with Bathsheba? When Nathan confronted David with his sin it wasn’t so Nathan could gloat, it was so David could repent.

That’s what Jesus is calling on the church of Laodicea to do. To turn away from their indifference. This rebuke and its reason are quickly followed by the greatest promise in the Bible.

We’re all familiar with Revelation 3:20, *“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.”*

This verse has been used as an evangelistic tool for hundreds of years. But this verse wasn’t originally an invitation to the non-believer to become a believer, it was to the believer to repent.

Jesus wanted His church back. In all of the other major religions of the world -- Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam we see man seeking God.

Only in Christianity do we see God seeking man. Jesus wants to be a part of our life, not just an observer.

In Biblical times, there were usually three meals: breakfast was often just a piece of bread, lunch was more of a picnic eaten on the side of the road or in the city square as a break from work, but supper, this was a meal to be lingered over and enjoyed.

This is the meal that Jesus speaks of here. He doesn't want our relationship with Him to be something we rush through, instead it's something to be savored and enjoyed.

But He needs to be invited. He's not going to push His way into our lives, it has to be our choice.

## **Slide 7**

### Conclusion

There have been a myriad of paintings representing Revelation 3:20 through the years and the one thing they all seem to have in common, other than a European looking Christ, is that the door doesn't have a handle on the outside. It has to be opened from inside.

So where are you at today? Is Jesus a part of your everyday life? Are you enjoying the friendship that He craves to have with you?

You can have that, He's standing, knocking, and calling. All you have to do is invite Him in.

Perhaps He's never been a part of your life, in that case this is your opportunity. Ask Him for forgiveness and turn your life over to Him.

Or maybe you've already made the decision, but He hasn't become a part of you. Your faith is just kind of lukewarm. He's telling you today that it doesn't have to stay that way.

What's your decision? What will you do with Jesus? Behold He stands at the door and knocks.