

The Lukewarm Church

Revelation 3:14-22

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BIG BEND
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Review: Rev 3:7-13 – The Faithful Church

- God opens doors of opportunity for us; it is up to us to go through them.
- Little strength is great strength if it causes us to depend more on God.
- We should pray that those who persecute us should become fellow children of God.
- Overcomers will be kept from the Tribulation!
- Overcomers will receive rewards and be recognized for their faithfulness.

Revelation 3:14 – Jesus describes Himself to Laodicea

“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:”

What do we know about Laodicea?

Laodicea was an important, wealthy city, with a significant Jewish population.

- It was a center for Caesar worship and the worship of the healing god Asklepios.
- There was a temple of Asklepios in Laodicea, with a medical school connected with the temple.

After an earthquake devastated the region in a.d. 60 Laodicea refused Imperial help to rebuild the city, successfully relying on their own resources.

- Laodicea was too rich to accept help from anyone.

Laodicea was also a noted commercial center and prided itself on three things: financial wealth, an extensive textile industry, and a popular eye-salve which was exported around the world.

What was the weakness of Laodicea?

Laodicea had a poor water supply that made them vulnerable to attack through siege. They had insufficient water supplies in the city, and the supplies coming into the city could be easily cut off.

- Therefore, the leaders of Laodicea were always accommodating to any potential enemy, and always wanted to negotiate and compromise instead of fight.

Their main water supply came on a six-mile aqueduct from the hot springs of Hierapolis; it arrived in Laodicea unappetizingly lukewarm.

What did the Apostle Paul have to say about Laodicea?

The church at Laodicea is mentioned by Paul in a somewhat unfavorable light in Colossians 2:1. Colossae was only 9 miles from Laodicea and he wanted to make sure they passed on his letter to them to the Laodiceans per Colossians 4:16. He also mentioned that they should read the letter to the Laodiceans which was probably also the letter to the Ephesians (about 40 miles away).

What does it tell us that Jesus describes Himself as the Amen?

Jesus is the “so be it,” the “it is done.” As 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, *for all the promises of God in Him are “Yes,” and in Him “Amen.”*

- Jesus is “the personification and the affirmation of the truth of God.”

Why did Jesus emphasize that He was *The Faithful and True Witness*?

This was a contrast to the Laodiceans, who will be shown to be neither faithful nor true.

What does it mean that Jesus was the *beginning of the creation of God*?

The idea behind the Greek word for **beginning** is that of a “ruler, source, or origin,” not of first in a sequential order.

- This verse does *not* teach that Jesus was the first being created, but that He is the *ruler, source, and origin* of all creation.
- It has the idea of *first in prominence* more than *first in sequence*.

Rev 3:15-16 – What Jesus knows about Laodicea

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.

What does mean that the Laodicean Christians were neither cold nor hot?

This picture of lukewarmness would immediately connect with the Christians of Laodicea because the water they drank every day was lukewarm.

- In this spiritual sense, lukewarmness is a picture of *indifference* and *compromise*.
- It tries to play the middle, too hot to be cold and too cold to be hot.
- In trying to be both things, they end up being nothing

What caused the Laodiceans to be lukewarm?

If they were essentially hot toward Jesus, they became cooled down by their apathy and self-reliance.

- Is there any soul harder to reach than the one who has just enough of Jesus to think they have enough?
- The church of Laodicea exemplifies empty religion... tax collectors and harlots were more open to Jesus than the scribes and Pharisees.

Satan will have us any way he can get us, but he prizes a lukewarm religionist far above a cold-hearted sinner.

- The world is always at peace with a lukewarm church, and such a church is always pleased with itself

What did Jesus desire instead of lukewarmness?

I could wish that you were cold or hot: What Jesus wanted to change in them (and us) is the deceptive playing of the middle, trying to please both the world and Jesus.

- Lukewarmness is a picture of *uselessness*: Hot water heals, cold water refreshes, but lukewarm water is useless for either purpose

The lukewarm Christian has enough of Jesus to satisfy a craving for religion, but not enough for eternal life.

Why will unhappiness generally characterize a lukewarm Christian?

Deep down, there is no one more miserable than the lukewarm Christian...

- They have too much of the world to be happy in Jesus, but too much of Jesus to be happy in the world.

How could Jesus say, *I could wish that you were cold*?

We know His deepest desire is that they be **hot**, with an on-fire love for Him (see Revelation 3:19, where the word *zealous* is associated with this same word **hot**).

- Yet if they would not be **hot**, Jesus *preferred cold* rather than **lukewarm**.
- If you were cold, then the very feeling of your need might drive you to the true warmth.
- In your lukewarmness, you have just enough to protect yourselves against a feeling of need.

How does lukewarmness impact our witness for Jesus?

Negatively... That is why unbelievers accuse Christians of being hypocrites; claiming to be a follower of Christ but living no different than unbelievers.

- Jesus would rather people be cold toward him... at least others would see them for what they are: garden variety pagans like them.

Why wouldn't Jesus want us lukewarm and going to heaven rather than cold and going to hell?

It's not just about us... Jesus loves the salvation of souls and if we are conducting ourselves in any manner that harms that mission, He will spew us out.

- Lukewarm Christianity keeps people from salvation.

What does it tell us that the name *Laodicea* means *rule of the people*?

This church well represents a church run by majority rule instead of God.

- Its name designates it as the Church of mob rule, *the democratic Church*, in which everything is swayed and decided by popular opinion, clamor and voting.

This is reflected in Jesus' address to the church: *the church of the Laodiceans* (Revelation 3:14).

- For others, it was *the church of Ephesus* (2:1) or *the church in Smyrna* (2:8) or *the church in Sardis* (3:1)

What does it mean that Jesus would vomit the lukewarm church out of His mouth?

Churches are in the mouth of Jesus in the sense that they spread His Word and because He prays for them constantly.

- What a terrible thing — in either of these ways — to be expelled from the mouth of Jesus!

Rev 3:17 – What Jesus has *against* the Laodiceans

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—

What does it tell us that the Laodiceans considered themselves to be rich?

The church at Laodicea lacked a sense of spiritual poverty. They had worldly riches and equated that to their spiritual condition (Prosperity Gospel).

- They were the opposite of *blessed are the poor in spirit* Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5:3.

What didn't the Laodicean Christians know?

And do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked: It wasn't that the church at Laodicea wasn't spiritually poor — they were, they were simply *blind* to it.

What was significant about the contrast between how Jesus saw them and what they thought of themselves?

These contrasts were shocking:

- between what they thought they were and reality
- between what they saw and what Jesus saw
- between the wealth and affluence of their city and their own spiritual bankruptcy.

What Jesus saw in them was more important than how they saw themselves.

- The church in Smyrna thought they were poor when they were really rich (Rev 2:9), but the Laodiceans believed they were rich when they were really poor.

How were the Laodiceans typical of the modern world?

The modern world revels in that which the natural eye can see but is untouched by the gospel and does not see beyond the veil of the material to the unseen and real eternal spiritual riches.

Rev 3:18-20 – What Jesus wants the Laodiceans to do

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. 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.

What was essential for the Laodicean Christians to do?

I counsel you to buy from Me: Their change had to begin with understanding their spiritual poverty. As long as we believe we can meet the need for wealth, clothing, or sight ourselves, we can never receive them from Jesus.

- We must seek these things from Jesus *instead* of relying on them ourselves.

What was this gold they should purchase from Jesus?

If they received from Jesus His riches, His **gold** — beautifully **refined in the fire** — then they **may be rich**.

What were the white garments they should purchase?

If they received from Jesus the pure, righteous covering He gives, then they would **be clothed**, and no longer would **the shame of your nakedness... be revealed**.

Why was the eye salve important?

If they received from Jesus the healing of their spiritual sight, they would then be able to see reality.

How can we *buy* these things from Jesus?

We don't earn them through our good works. Instead, all our self-sufficiency must be set aside and our effort should be focused on obtaining from Jesus the absolute necessities we really need.

With such a sharp rebuke, had Jesus lost His love for this errant church?

Not at all... *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten:* Jesus' great love was expressed *in* His rebuke.

- It is God's final punishment to leave a man alone.

What is significant about the word for *love* in *as many as I love* is not *agape*, but *phileo*?

Jesus' heart to this church is, "Even though I **rebuke** you and **chasten** you, I am still your friend. I love you deeply as My friend."

- The word here used for 'love' is one which signifies an intense personal affection.

What should the Laodicean Christians do?

Therefore be zealous and repent: He commanded them to make a decision to repent, and to continue in *zeal*. "Turn your way," Jesus said. "Don't look to your own riches and resources, because they are really bankrupt. Turn around and look to Me."

- The ancient Greek word **zealous** comes from the same word as *hot* in Revelation 3:16.
- Jesus wanted them be *hot* with zeal rather than cold.

What does it tell us that Jesus stands at the door and knocks?

Jesus gave this lukewarm church *The Great Invitation*. He knocked at their door, asking entry to come and **dine with** them, in the sense of sharing warm, intimate time.

- It only happens as we respond to His knock, but the promise is made to all: **If anyone hears my voice**. Sadly, Jesus stood on the outside, knocking to get in.
- If the church at Philadelphia was "The Church of the Open Door," then Laodicea had "The Church of the Excluded Jesus."

Is Jesus giving this invitation to the church or individuals?

Jesus gave the call to individuals... He didn't say, "If any church," but *if anyone*. It must be done by individuals: the church will only get right by each man getting right

Is Jesus standing at the door and knocking an invitation to believers or unbelievers?

Both... Jesus wants to **come in to** us, and **dine with** us, in the sense of having a deep, meaningful relationship.

What does Jesus want us as individuals to do?

The occupant must open the door. That is, he must repent of his pride and self-sufficiency, his human wisdom, and his cowardly neutrality.

- Jesus comes to the door as the lover in the Song of Solomon 5:2: *It is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, 'open for me, my sister, my love.'*

The key to opening the door is to first **hear His voice**...

- When we give attention to what Jesus says, then we can be rescued from our own lukewarmness and enter into a “zealous” relationship with Him.

What is significant about Jesus dining with those who open their door to Him?

When Jesus said **dine with him**, He spoke of a specific meal known as the *deipnon*. The *deipnon* was the main meal of the day and was a leisurely affair, not a hurried snack. This speaks of *fellowship*.

- This speaks of a *depth* to the relationship.

Revelation 3:21-22 – A promise of reward.

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

What does it mean to be an overcomer in Laodicea?

Jesus' promise to the overcomer, even at Laodicea, showed that we *don't have to be* Christians who are compromising and lukewarm. If we are, we can change and become one of Jesus' overcomers.

What is promised to the overcomers?

I will grant to sit with Me on My throne: Those who overcome the battle against indifference, compromise, and self-reliance, will enjoy a place with the enthroned Jesus (*as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne*).

- This is the worst of the seven Churches, and yet the most eminent of all the promises are made to it, showing that the worst may repent, finally conquer, and attain even to the highest state of glory.

Who should hear this message to the Laodicean church?

He who has an ear, let him hear: Few want to identify themselves with the church of Laodicea. We would much rather identify ourselves with the church at Philadelphia.

- We *must* hear what the Holy Spirit says here, because He speaks **to the churches** — including us.
- May God deliver us from the self-reliant, compromising lukewarmness that marked the church of the Laodiceans!

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- The Laodicean Church thought they were spiritually rich due to their prosperity, but the opposite was true
- Jesus prefers us to be either hot or cold, not lukewarm
- Jesus wants us to do what is necessary to have a relationship with Him
- We may be living in the Laodicean era but that does not mean we have to be Laodicean believers.