

TO THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA

Revelation 3:14-22

Intro: The church at Laodicea is mentioned in just two of the books of the Bible: the epistle to the Colossians, and here and in chapter 1 of the book of The Revelation. But when Paul wrote to the Colossian church, mentioning Laodicea, one of the things that he said, was this:

16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans ; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea (Col. 4:16).

It is thought that when Paul mentioned “the epistle from Laodicea, that he was referring to the epistle to the Ephesians, which, because the words “at Ephesus” are not in many of the MSS of Ephesians, that the Ephesian epistle was a circular letter, like the book of The Revelation was, and that Ephesians had been sent to Laodicea from Ephesus. And so Paul wanted the Colossian believers to read the Ephesian epistle which had come to them from Laodicea.

And this seems quite reasonable when you look at a map of the ancient Roman province of Asia. These cities were not very far apart and so it is quite probable that the churches in that area shared the letters of the Apostles John and Paul.

The letter to the church at Laodicea in the book of the Revelation, is the last of the seven letters sent by our Lord through the Spirit to the Apostle John for circulation to the seven churches. It is seventh because it was the city and church which completed the circuit of churches to whom the Lord sent His letters, and, as I have explained, the same circuit of churches to whom Paul's letter to the Ephesians was circulated. It shows how important correspondence was among the churches while the NT was being written.

The church at Laodicea was probably the most affluent church among the seven to whom the Lord wrote. That is, they were probably known for their wealth. Expositors have pointed to the words in verse 17 of our text to show what the Laodiceans were saying about themselves. I am speaking of the words, “I am rich.” However, when we compare this letter with the others, we are struck with the fact that *this is the only church about which the Lord had nothing to say by way of commending them!* Even by the way some people, even the Lord's people, are inclined to set great value upon the importance of a church, and its influence, by

the money that the people have who are in the church, it is important for us to see that the wealthiest, and maybe the largest of the churches, was at the same time the neediest from a spiritual standpoint. Just because a church has a lot of money and a lot of people, does not mean that the spiritual life of the church was also superior to the others. In fact, just the opposite was true. The Laodicean church needed to learn from the other churches, and if they were listening carefully as all of the letters were written to them, the Laodicean believers would have realized that their money could have been standing in the way of blessing. This is not always true, but it was true in the case of the church at Laodicea. Just as the Lord taught that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, so it is equally hard for the people in a rich church to realize how needy they may be.

But let me come back to this fact later. First, I want to go through this epistle to the church at Laodicea showing how the Lord moved from one point to another.

As with the other letters, it was addressed to “the angel of the church,” only this time to “the Laodiceans.” We have learned that “the angel,” meaning *the messenger*, was probably the pastor of the church. The message that he had to give the church was not a pleasant message. In fact, it would have been a difficult message for the pastor to deliver to the people, and perhaps embarrassing to himself as well.

The Lord identified Himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” The only part of this that is found in chapter 1, is “the...true witness” (Rev. 1:5). We will also come back to this in a few minutes.

In verses 15 and 16 the Lord told them what He knew about the church, and it was totally different from what they would say about themselves.

Verse 17 tells us how they evaluated themselves, but also what the real truth was. This ought to be a reminder to us that our evaluation of ourselves may be vastly different from how the Lord sees us.

In verse 18 we see what the Lord counseled them to do, and this is continued in verse 19 after He assured them of His love.

In verse 20 we see His appeal, not addressed to the world of unbelievers,

but to the church at Laodicea – and certainly to all churches who had the same problem that was prevalent in Laodicea.

As in all of the other letters, we have the promise to the overcomers. This is in verse 21.

The letter closes in verse 22 with the Lord's call for the pastor and the people to hear what the Spirit was saying to the churches.

Now let us go back and look at the details in the time that we have.

I. THE ADDRESSEE – THOSE TO WHOM THIS LETTER WAS ADDRESSED (Rev. 3:14a).

Not everything that a pastor has to say to his people, is pleasant, at least to begin with. But if it comes for the Lord, it is necessary, and can result in very good things.

II. THE ADDRESSER – THE ONE WHO WROTE THE LETTER (Rev. 3:14b).

Many expositors see in this a reference to 2 Cor. 1:20:

20 For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

Matthew Henry says that this speaks of the Lord as “one that is steady and unchangeable in all his purposes and promises, which are all yea, and all amen.” This word is probably explained by the next five words in the text: “The faithful and true witness.” It is obvious that the believers in Laodicea were wrong about their evaluation of themselves which is given to us in the first part of verse 7, but the Lord's evaluations are always true, and as the “Amen, the truth of the Lord never changes. Contrary to what a lot of Christians think, the work of the Lord and the ways of the Lord do not change to conform to what is going on in the world at any given time. “Amen” is the same in the Hebrew and the Greek. It is translated in the Gospels, as “verily,” or “verily, verily.” Our Lord is “the faithful and true witness,” and so although the whole world may contradict God and His Word, God is always on the right side. His Word is always true, and this applies in this present instance to what He had to say about the church in Laodicea.

But why did the Lord say in identifying Himself that He was “the

beginning of the creation of God”? This means not only that He was the Creator, but that He remains as superior in rank over all of His creation. But many believe that this expression also has to do with the superiority of our Lord over His new creation, the church. So greater than the pastor, and greater even than the Apostle, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Church, the body of Christ, and of all individual groups of believers in every place, He is the Lord of the churches.

These words, if really *heard* by the people, would force them to listen to what He had to say. There is power and authority in the Word of God, whether spoken or written.

III. THE LORD’S KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHURCH (Rev. 3:15-16).

The Lord’s knowledge in all things is infallible – of me, of you, or our church, *even of the whole world!* And woe to the person, or church, or nation where His Word and wisdom are contradicted.

The church at Laodicea may have been orthodox in what it believed, but as far as practice was concerned, they were neither cold nor hot. They were lukewarm.

“Cold” would mean a total absence of any faith at all. “Hot” would mean a fervent, ardent faith, such as characterized our Lord, and which was manifested also by the Apostle John, and the Apostle Peter, and the Apostle Paul, and countless others down to the present hour. “Hot” does not describe people who will take the law in the own hands and commit crimes in the name of the Lord (like burning down an abortion clinic), but it describes those who would rather die than disobey the Lord or deny the Lord in any way.

The “lukewarm” are those who are compromisers. They try to please everyone. They won’t stand for the truth of the Lord if it is going to offend anyone, or possibly endanger their own lives. On the other hand they maintain a moderate for the Gospel. Compromise is the way politicians get things done, but look at the mess our country is in. Compromise makes the Lord sick at His stomach (to use His own figure of speech). Instead of pleasing Him, it disgusts Him. It is when a person of the world tries to parade himself as a child of God, or when a child of God tries to find some agreement with the world.

How did the church at Laodicea get the way they were?

IV. THE CHURCH'S EVALUATION OF HERSELF VERSUS THE LORD'S EVALUATION (Rev. 3:17).

Note the two phrases, "Because thou sayest," and then the words, "and knowest not." It was the Lord's way of saying that "when you talk about yourselves, you don't know what you are talking about."

In evaluating themselves they were blinded by their affluence, by their material prosperity, by their possessions. "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." This really means that as long as life can be as good as it is now, or even better, I am not looking for anything else. So they were not only a bunch of compromisers, but they were self-satisfied. Their love of material things had choked out any interest in the things of the Lord. We as Christians are in danger of this. The Lord was speaking about people who were satisfied with what they had as long as it kept coming.

Dwight and I were talking yesterday about how terrible the traffic has become everywhere. And I told him that if the day comes when we can't get gas for our cars, you are going to see our country turned upside down. One automobile company has as its motto now, "For the love of cars." I don't want that on one of my cars. What we need is to live "for the love of God."

What was the Lord's evaluation of the church at Laodicea? And remember that he was talking about His own people, at least those who professed to be His.

Now here is the truth: They were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." The NASB translates these words just like the KJV does.

"Wretched" means unhappy, distressed, miserable. "Miserable" means pitiable, or pitiful. "Poor" means that they did not have anything. Solomon says that riches fly away like an eagle. If all that a person has, is material possessions, he has nothing. During the great depression of the late 20's and early 30's, I don't remember how many wealthy men committed suicide, but there were lots of them. They lost their money, and they had no spiritual reserves to help them. "Blind" means that they

can't see where they are going or what they are doing. "Naked" means that just as Adam and Eve were not prepared to meet God after they had sinned even though they had tried to clothe themselves, the person who relies upon himself, or others, or upon what he possesses, is totally naked before God, and unprepared to meet Him.

Well, what was the Lord going to do with such a church? Would He wash His hands, and have nothing to do with them? No, the Lord never gives up on those who know Him, and He was not preparing to separate Himself from the church at Laodicea. About at this point in the letter, I wonder that the pastor was thinking. Was he thinking about how he had failed the people of the church? Was he caught up in the same bondage to materialism that many of his people were?

Well, what was the Lord's advice to His people?

V. THE LORD'S COUNSEL FOR HIS PEOPLE (Rev. 3:18-19).

Like many of you I began the month by starting to read again the book of Proverbs. And I really love it. But I was particularly impressed on Wednesday morning, August 4, when I read Proverbs 4, verse 7, as it is in the NIV. This is how it reads in that version:

4 Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding.

What was Solomon talking about? Was it human philosophy, or just the advice you might get from someone you know? No, he was talking about *the wisdom of God, which is found in the Word of God!* How foolish we are when we begin to neglect the Word of God, or when we don't read it at all. This is God's Word. And here in our text God is saying to us as He spoke to the Laodicean church so long ago, "I counsel thee ..." When Isaiah was rehearsing some of the Names of our Lord, he called Him a "wonderful Counsellor." That means that you can't do any better than go to the Lord, and actually it's free! But it seems that we go to the Lord as a last resort instead of listening to His voice in the Word every day, and many times a day. Just think of those words, and apply them to yourself: "I counsel thee." His counsel is all that we need, and it is right here in the Word of God.

But what was His counsel?

The Lord wants us to be rich, but rich with the true riches which come

from Him. What did He mean by “gold tried in the fire”? The Apostle Peter helps us with this one. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:6-9. Peter had just written about the fact that we have been begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Christ, to an inheritance ... who are kept by the power of God through faith ...” Then he said this:

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:6-9).

What is “gold tried in fire”? It is “the trial of our faith.” You see, the very thing that the believers in Laodicea were trying to avoid with their compromising, was that which would bring them true riches. How many of us have been slow to speak of Christ and to acknowledge that He is our Savior because we have been afraid either of losing friends, or else of stirring up some opposition? You see, true riches are *bought* through the confession of Christ as our Savior and Lord. It does something to us and in us that is enriching to our hearts. But there is a price attached to it. That is the reason the Lord used the word “buy.”

But then we are naked in ourselves, unfit to stand before a holy God. What is this about “white raiment”? What does this represent? Cf. Rev. 19:7-8:

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

As believers we are clothed in the righteousness of God and of Christ, but that is to be manifested outwardly NOW, *in this present world*. This is practical righteousness, which is actually holiness. The Laodiceans needed to seek to be acceptable in their daily lives to the Lord, not to the world of the unregenerate. Only the righteousness of our Lord will be a garment acceptable to the Lord.

Finally, we need eyesalve so we can see. We are blind without the eyesalve of the Word of God. In the light of the Word we see light. But notice that this is why we do. On one occasion that Lord made eyesalve for a blind man out of mud. We have the Word to give us sight. The Laodiceans were people who were neglecting the Word of God. So much of what the Lord said pointed to that.

Notice in verse 18 that the Lord's rebukes were an evidence of His love. The Bible tells us that in different places. He rebukes and chastens us because He loves us.

Next we have:

VI. THE LORD'S APPEAL TO HIS PEOPLE (Rev. 3:20).

This is not for the world, but for the people of God. Our conscience tells us that He is knocking. We hear Him speaking to us. When we open the door by going to the Word and listening to Him as He speaks to us. And then a feast follows when the Lord comes to us. This is personal. We don't have to wait for the whole church, and not even for our whole family. But when other believers see the effect the Lord makes on our lives, they will want to get in on the blessing.

And then we come to:

VII. THE LORD'S PROMISE TO THE OVERCOMERS (Rev. 3:21).

Isn't it wonderful to think that fellowship with the Lord here on earth, will be continued in heaven when we sit with Him on His throne.

VIII. THE LORD'S CALL TO HEAR (Rev. 3:22).

Just think, it all begins with hearing. And that is the way it continues. This is a wonderful letter to hear. The Lord could not approve of the Laodicean church as it was, but He came to bring them into that fellow-ship with Himself which is the very foundation of a life that please God and of a life that brings the greatest joy to us.

Concl: Are you hearing? Don't worry for the moment about anyone else. Just make sure that you are hearing what the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and even the Apostle John want you to hear.