

*In one little Midwestern town, Miss Jones had the distinction of being the oldest resident in town. So, when she passed away, the editor of the local newspaper wanted to print a little article remembering this dear old lady, except he couldn't think of anything to say when he sat down to write the article. Miss Jones had never done anything significant, nor had she never done anything terribly wrong either.*

*With this problem still on his mind, the editor went down to the local café, and there, he ran into the funeral director. He too was having the same trouble. He wanted to put something on her gravestone besides “Miss Nancy Jones, born such-and-such a date and died such-and-such a date,” but he couldn't think of anything either.*

*So, the editor decided to go back to his office and assign the job of writing up a small article for the paper and something for the gravestone to the first reporter he saw. When he got to the office, he ran into the sports reporter, who got the assignment. So somewhere in some little community in the Midwest, there is a gravestone which reads:*

*Here lie the bones of Nancy Jones, for her life held no terrors. She lived an old maid. She died an old maid. No hits, no runs, no errors.*

In a roundabout way, that describes the way many Christians live their lives – no hits, no runs, no errors – no nothing, and that's how we might best describe this next church we are looking at this morning.

We have made it to the last of the seven churches that Jesus addressed in the book of Revelation – the church in the city of Laodicea.

The city of Laodicea was founded in the third century B.C. by King Antiochus II, who named it after his wife Laodice. He named the city for her, which was a nice gesture on his part, but then he divorced her, and she later poisoned him – but the name stuck.

The city was located 90 miles east of Ephesus and 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia. It was a prosperous city, known as a major banking center – we might call it the Wall Street of the region, and as such, the city attracted a lot of people with a lot of money, and as an example of just how rich they were, the city was destroyed by an earthquake around 60 A.D; however, they were able to rebuild the city by themselves without any help from others. In fact, they were so rich, they even rejected an offer of assistance from the Roman government.

The city had a very large and wealthy Jewish population, it was a center for emperor worship, they worshiped the healing god Asclepios – and associated with the worship of Asclepios was a famous medical school – known for its medical advances and care, to include the manufacturing of an ointment that was used to treat a common eye problem. This ointment was exported all over the world.

The city also had a booming textile industry, which was especially known for the production of soft black woolen fabric and garments.

So, the city financially thrived due to its banking, its medical services, and its textile industry – money flowed through the city like water, and it was reflected in its infrastructure, in its buildings, and in its businesses, and oddly enough it was water that plagued this city because they lacked an adequate water source to supply their ever-increasing population. Laodicea was located on a high plateau, far from a sustaining water source, so to address their needs, they had to pipe in their water from other cities through a system of aqueducts.

Laodicea was one of three sister cities – the other two was Colossae, which was about 10 miles to the east, known for its cold mountain water and Hierapolis, which was about 6 miles to the north, known for its hot mineral springs. So, from miles away, cold water was piped in from Colossae and hot water was piped in from Hierapolis. That sounds like an ingenious idea to obtain hot and cold running water, but by the time the hot water and the cold water actually reached the city of Laodicea through the miles of aqueduct, it was no longer hot or cold – it had become lukewarm.

So, this city had a water problem, but for these self-sufficient and self-reliant people, it seemed to be comfortable place to live, and apparently a comfortable place to go to church as well.

In regard to the church, little is known about its early history, but it's thought that it was planted by one of the Apostle Paul's disciples named Epaphras – the same individual who likely planted the church in Colossae. When Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, he mentioned Epaphras by name and gave instructions to forward his letter to the Colossians to the church in Laodicea for they were likely dealing with similar issues of false doctrine at that time.

Now, we could spend more time focusing on Paul's letter, but let's look at the Lord's letter to this church which came about 30 years later. If you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 3** and we will begin with **verse 14**. Jesus says,

**“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:**

Here Jesus introduces Himself to this church as **“The Amen.”** When we hear that word *“amen”* we understand it to mean *“so be it”*, or for some, *“let’s eat”* but in this context, the Hebrew word for *“amen”* means *“truth”* – so this could read, **“The Amen, that is to say, the faithful and true Witness.”** In essence, Jesus is the Truth who speaks the truth, and we might also say that since *“amen”* is generally the last word spoken, Jesus is the last word of God, and He has the last word in our lives, because He is the faithful and true.

Jesus also said He is **“the Beginning of the creation of God”** and this can be somewhat misleading. The word *“beginning”* in Greek is *“arche”* – which in this context refers to the source or the origin – it has the idea of prominence rather than sequence, so this phrase is not teaching that Jesus was the first to be created – instead, He is the origin of creation – He is the source of all life, and this was further explained by Paul in **Colossians 1:15-17**, where He states about Jesus,

***<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.***

So, Jesus is faithful and true. He is the source and the sustainer of all things, He stands out in relation to creation, and He has the last word for this church in Laodicea, and here it comes. Let’s look at **verses 15 and 16**. Jesus says,

**<sup>15</sup>“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup>So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.**

Like the other churches, Jesus tells this church **“I know your deeds.”** Jesus knows what they are doing – He knows where they are in life, and He says to them, **you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup>So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.**

Let me say that what you might think Jesus is saying here, is not what He is saying here. It’s not what you may think. A common misconception is that those who are **hot** represent the saved and those who are **cold** represent the lost, but that really makes no sense when you think about it. **Does Jesus wish that some people were**

**cold – meaning lost?** Of course not. Hot doesn't represent the saved and cold is not lost. Actually, in context, both hot and cold are very desirable, just as they were for the people in the city of Laodicea who sought hot and cold water from their sister cities. The hot mineral waters were good for cleansing and warming, they had therapeutic value, whereas cold mountain water was cooling and refreshing. Both hot and cold water were beneficial and desirable, and that's what Jesus was implying here, but when it came to **lukewarm** water – the kind of distasteful water the people of Laodicea actually received from their sister cities – well, that symbolized a problem in this church, and let me explain with an example.

Suppose you wanted a cup of hot tea on a cold day – **what would you do?** You've got to do something to make the water hot. You have to boil the water either on a stove top or in a microwave oven, you add a tea bag to your cup, pour in the hot water and then you let it steep for a few moments before drinking.

Suppose you wanted a glass of cold iced tea on a hot day – **what would you do?** Well, you've got to do something to make the tea cold. Typically, you would put ice cubes in your glass or you could put it in the refrigerator to cool. The point is, to enjoy hot tea or cold iced tea, you got to do something. Typically, hot tea does not become hot and iced tea does not become cold all by itself.

**Now, what do you need to do to make your tea lukewarm?** Do nothing, give it no attention, and simply walk away. Just leave your cup of hot tea or your glass of iced tea on the countertop, give it a little time, and the tea will eventually reflect the temperature of the room. Without any effort, it will become lukewarm all by itself, and that seems to be the issue with the church in Laodicea.

This outwardly self-righteous, and self-sufficient, and self-reliant church was so comfortable and so complacent that they had become spiritually lukewarm – inactive and indifferent, unconcerned about the things of God, and lethargic to the point that God had become nothing but a mere afterthought to them.

This church may have sounded spiritual, they may have met on Sunday to fulfill their religious obligation and to feel good about themselves, they may have sung hymns about God, they may have professed their devotion to Him, but in reality, in the way they lived their lives day in and day out, God really didn't matter to them, and it made Jesus sick to His stomach.

In essence, He is telling them – *“You are so distasteful that I want to vomit.”*

Those are some strong words, and that would be more than enough to hear from Jesus at this point, but because He is faithful and true – He’s not done. Jesus has more to say to them. Look at **verse 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,**

The city of Laodicea was known for its financial prosperity. The Laodiceans put their trust in their riches. They felt they didn’t need anything. They believed they needed no one – and this church was no different. Like the city, in its pride, the church boasted that it was **rich**, it had **become wealthy** – in **need of nothing**. They had all they wanted, and they lived their lives in such a way as to suggest they had no need for the Lord. They acted as though they could do church without Him.

And here’s the worst of it all – they didn’t even realize it. Jesus said, **“you do not know.”** They were so comfortable and so complacent that everything seemed fine, but it wasn’t. They were oblivious to their real need and blind to their spiritual condition. The city of Laodicea was famous for its wealth and luxury, but the church was spiritually **wretched, miserable, and poor**. The city of Laodicea was famous for its healing eye ointment, but the church, who thought they had insight, were spiritually **blind**. The city of Laodicea was famous for its fine clothing – it’s black woolen fabric, but the church, who thought they were dressed in righteousness and purity, were spiritually **naked**.

The city had gotten into the church, and they thought their spiritual needs were filled by worldly means, and so they assumed they had it all. Their faith and their hope rested on their material wealth rather than on Jesus Christ, and so they got complacent and comfortable, and they became inactive and indifferent – unconcerned about the real need for God in their lives and forgetting that He is the source and the sustainer of all things.

They had it all wrong. They did not see themselves as they truly were, and they treated Jesus like an old comfortable shoe. They made Jesus sick to His stomach – but, He still cared for them, and wanted to see them change. Let’s continue with **verses 18 and 19**.

**<sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.**

Jesus is faithful and true, and He spoke some hard truth to this church because, quite frankly, He had to, but it wasn't too late for this church, and Jesus tells them how to turn things around.

They must **repent** from their self-righteousness, and their self-sufficiency, and their self-reliance, and realize that ultimately everything comes from God – the Source and the Sustainer of all things. You see, they had put their faith and their hope in the wrong things – content with the things that money could buy, but if they wanted true treasure, if they wanted to be dressed in righteousness and purity, if they wanted spiritual insight that was life-changing – then Jesus says they can only get that from Him – so repent and humbly return to the Lord.

I was reminded of something that Jesus said to His disciples in **Mark 8:36**. He said,

***For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?***

Yes, you can crave the things of this world and you can build your own kingdom, but it will all pass away and you will have wasted your life. You may appear to be successful in the eyes of others, and yet have nothing to show for your life when you stand before the Lord. It's not about building your kingdom – it's about expanding His – for that's why the church exists, and if you want spiritual blessings in His kingdom, a kingdom that will last forever, Jesus says, *“Stop trusting in yourselves, stop living for yourselves, and live for Me.”*

This truth from Jesus was likely very hard for the people in this church to hear, but there was another truth that was just as important to hear – Jesus said He loves them. It was a tough **love**, but it was love none the less – the kind of love a concerned parent has for a child who needs correction and discipline. Jesus loves them, and He gave an invitation to them, so let's look at the last three verses, beginning with **verse 20**.

**<sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

Take a look at this painting. This is a famous painting called the “Light of the World” by an artist whose name was Holman Hunt. It’s a painting of Jesus standing outside, knocking on a door, wanting inside – and if you look at it closely there’s something odd about it – there’s no door handle on the outside. People thought this was a mistake, but the artist explained that this door must be opened from the inside.

That’s the image we get from **Revelation 3:20**, which is a verse that is used by a lot of people as an evangelistic passage – a passage to reach the lost, and I guess that’s fine, but in context, **who is Jesus talking to?**

He is talking to the church. Jesus is talking to the congregation. Symbolically, Jesus is knocking on the door of this church, because He wants this church to let Him in. You know it’s bad when Jesus isn’t allowed in your church.

*A cowboy came to city church one Sunday morning. All he had on were jeans, a flannel shirt and boots that were worn and ragged. He carried a worn-out hat and a worn-out Bible. After church, the pastor said, “Next time, ask God what you should wear to this church.”*

*The next Sunday, he wore the same thing. The pastor said, “I thought I told you to ask God what you should wear to this church.”*

*The cowboy responded, “I did, but he said He didn’t know. He’s never been to this church.”*

Jesus is telling the church in Laodicea, *“I’m not going to force the door open, but if you will open it, I will gladly come in.”* This is an invitation to those who seem far away from the Lord to start fresh. Jesus is knocking, willing to forgive, wanting to move forward, and desiring to be in a meaningful relationship with those He dearly loves – but it will be on His terms. To open the door to Christ requires a willingness to change, a willingness to surrender, and a willingness to trust and obey Jesus as Savior and Lord.

For those who open the door, Jesus promises to come in and make Himself at home. That’s the picture I get from His words, and in a sense, this applies to all of the seven churches we looked at in this book, and thus it applies to all believers, everywhere, at all time, and it begs a few personal questions for each of us because each of us make up the church.

**Is Jesus really welcome in my life? Is He at home in my heart, or am I refusing to open the door to the Lord because I can’t accept His terms?**

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