

Christ's Message to the Seven Churches

Christ's Message to Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

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Scripture

We are currently in a series of messages titled, "Christ's Message to the Seven Churches," that is based on the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation.

In Revelation 1 the resurrected and glorified Christ revealed himself to his Apostle John, and told him to write letters to seven churches in Asia. Today, we shall examine the seventh of those letters, and learn about Christ's message to his church in Laodicea.

Let's read Christ's message to Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22:

¹⁴ "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

¹⁵ " 'I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so 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 eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered 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.' " (Revelation 3:14-22)

Introduction

I ran a marathon once in which the water used was from an iceberg that had been hauled in from the south pole! The water tasted terrible, and most of the people who drank the water during the race struggled with diarrhea throughout the race!

Good drinking water is essential for running marathons, and for life itself. The issue of good drinking water plays a role in Christ's message to the church in Laodicea.

Lesson

The analysis of Christ's message to Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22 shows us that a church may be comfortable but Christless.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Address (3:14a)
2. The Description (3:14b-c)
3. The Commendation
4. The Complaint (3:15, 17)
5. The Warning (3:16)
6. The Command (3:18-20)
7. The Promise (3:21)
8. The Appeal (3:22)

I. The Address (3:14a)

First, let's look at the address.

Christ said in verse 14a, **“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write. . . .”** The letter was addressed to **the angel**, which also means “messenger.” In context of the letters, I take it to mean that each letter was addressed to the pastor of the church.

John Stott described the city of Laodicea as follows:

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Laodicea was renowned for its prosperity. Situated in a fertile valley at the junction of several important trade routes, it had amassed considerable wealth. So opulent were its citizens that, when the earthquake of A. D. 60 devastated the whole region, the city was promptly rebuilt without any appeal to the Roman senate for the customary subsidy. The local inhabitants were proud of their city as a mercantile banking center. They could boast of its famous medical school connected with the temple of Aesculapius “whose physicians prepared the Phrygian powder for the cure of ophthalmia,” which was described by Aristotle. Particularly well-known was their manufacture of cloth, garments, and carpets from the valuable wool of the local sheep, which William Ramsay says was “soft in texture and glossy black in color.”¹

The people of Laodicea were extremely comfortable. They were involved in banking, clothing, and medicine for treating eyes.

Commentator Grant Osborne notes that there were only two drawbacks to the city of Laodicea:

First, like Philadelphia it lay in a region prone to earthquakes. One in A. D. 60 virtually destroyed the city, but unlike Philadelphia (and Hierapolis), Laodicea wanted no financial aid from Rome. Instead, the wealthy citizens rebuilt their city. Second, it had no water supply. They had to pipe in water from Denizli, six miles south, via an aqueduct that left the city vulnerable to weather and enemies.²

II. The Description (3:14b-c)

Second, notice the description.

Christ said in verse 14b, **“The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.”**

¹ John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 115.

² Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 202.

G. K. Beale says the following about Christ's description of himself, "The self-description of Christ in this final letter emphasizes more explicitly than in 3:7 his role as a 'faithful witness,' first mentioned in 1:5. The three descriptions 'the Amen, the faithful and true' are not distinct but generally overlap in meaning to underline the idea of Jesus' *faithfulness* in testifying to his Father during his earthly ministry and his continuing as such a witness."³

Christ also referred to himself in verse 14c as **"the beginning of God's creation."** The other day I was sitting outside at a local restaurant, and a Jehovah's Witness was handing out pamphlets to the guests. When he got to me I asked him if he believed that Jesus was God. He said he did not, but believed that Jesus was created by God. He said that Christ was created and was the beginning of God's creation. The problem, however, is with the ambiguity of the translation. The Greek word for **beginning** (*arche*) can also be translated as the "first cause" or "origin of what God has created"⁴ So, Christ is the source of all creation.

III. The Commendation

Third, observe the commendation.

Actually, there was no commendation by Christ. Laodicea is the only church of the seven churches for which Christ has no commendation whatsoever. This is an indication that the church was in really bad shape.

IV. The Complaint (3:15, 17)

Fourth, look at the complaint.

³ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 296.

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 778.

Christ said in verse 15a, **“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot.”** Some commentators have said that **“hot** people are those who are spiritually alive and possess the fervency of a transformed life. The spiritually **cold**, on the other hand, are best understood as those who reject Jesus Christ.”⁵ The lukewarm, those described by Christ in verse 16, they say, “are not genuinely saved, yet they do not openly reject the gospel.”⁶

However, I don't think this is the correct way to interpret this verse. And the reason I say that is because of verse 15b, where Christ said, **“Would that you were either cold or hot!”** Clearly, Christ wants Christians to be either **cold or hot**, indicating that both are good. Here is where the geography of Laodicea helps us understand what Christ intended for his original audience to know. My New Testament professor Grant Osborne notes, “Six miles to the north [of Laodicea] lay Hierapolis, famed for its hot springs. Ten miles to the east lay Colossae, known for its cold, pure drinking water.”⁷ Beale explains further, “The hot waters of Hierapolis had a medicinal effect and the cold waters of Colossae were pure, drinkable, and had a life-giving effect.”⁸

That is why Christ said, **“Would that you were either cold or hot!”** The church members in Laodicea were neither. Beale rightly explains the problem with the church in Laodicea as follows, “The particular ‘work’ which is viewed as ineffective is that of their efforts *to witness*. The unbelievers of the city were receiving neither spiritual healing nor life because the church was not actively fulfilling its role of witnessing to the gospel of Christ.”⁹

Christ continued with his complaint of the church in Laodicea in verse 17, **“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable,**

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 136.

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 136.

⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 205.

⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 303.

⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 303.

poor, blind, and naked.” The church members were comfortable. They had conformed completely to the culture around them.

Christ's words must make us examine ourselves. Do I say, “**I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing**”? If I do, then I will hear Christ's words that I am **wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.**

V. The Warning (3:16)

Fifth, notice the warning.

Christ warned the church in Laodicea what he would do in verse 16, when he said to them, “**So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.**” Osborne says, “Laodicea had no water supply of its own. It was founded at the junction of trade routes not for its natural but for its commercial and military advantages. When it piped in its water from the hot springs of Denizli, the water did not have enough time to cool in the aqueducts but arrived ‘lukewarm.’”¹⁰ But even worse, “the mineral waters were full of calcium carbonate deposits, and the effect of attempting to drink the water would be to vomit.”¹¹ That is why Christ said, “**I will spit you out of my mouth.**” John MacArthur says, “Some churches make the Lord weep, others make him angry; the Laodicean church made him sick.”¹²

Friends, we live in an affluent community. We must admit that for the most part we live very comfortable lives. We are in great danger of being like the Laodicean church. John Stott says,

Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the twentieth-century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so

¹⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 205.

¹¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 206.

¹² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 136.

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widespread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion.¹³

VI. The Command (3:18-20)

Sixth, observe the command.

Christ could have immediately judged and disciplined the church of Laodicea. But, instead, he graciously offered them salvation. Christ's threefold offer correlated with the three features for which Laodicea was so well-known: its wealth, its garments, and its eye salve. Christ offered them spiritual gold, garments, and sight. Notice how he offered it to them in verse 18.

First, Christ counseled them to buy from him gold refined by fire, so that they may be rich. Gold is often a symbol for salvation. The Laodiceans needed pure gold, which represented the priceless riches of true salvation. The Apostle Peter spoke of faith that was "more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire" (1 Peter 1:7). Christ offered the Laodiceans a pure salvation that would bring them into a personal relationship with him.

Second, Christ counseled them to buy from him. . . white garments so that they may clothe themselves and the shame of their nakedness may not be seen. Laodicea's famous black wool symbolized the sinful garments with which unbelievers are clothed (Isaiah 64:6). Christ offered them **white garments**, which symbolized his righteousness that would cover the shame of their sin.

And third, Christ counseled them to buy from him. . . salve to anoint their eyes, so that they may see. The Laodiceans had an eye salve that was effective in healing people. However, they were spiritually blind. And Christ offered "to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in him" (Acts 26:18).

¹³ John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3*, 113.

Well, how could the Laodiceans go to Christ for salvation? There were two steps required.

The first step in receiving salvation is repentance. Christ said in verse 19, **“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.”** Christ had already called on those in Ephesus and Sardis to repent (Revelation 2:5; 3:3). But the situation in Laodicea was worse. Christ would spit them out of his mouth if they did not respond to him in repentance. Christ said that he loved them, and it is because of his love for them that he would reprove and discipline them.

Let us examine ourselves. Are we comfortable with our church and our religion? Are we rich? Have we prospered? Do we have need of nothing? Let us repent and turn from that which keeps us from a personal relationship with Christ.

And the second step in receiving salvation is faith. Christ said in verse 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 eat with him, and he with me.”** Although the letter was addressed to the church in Laodicea, here is a personal invitation by Christ to each church member, **“If anyone. . . .”** John Stott says,

Our heart or soul is likened to a dwelling. Each of us likes to rule our own roost and be king of our own castle. But the living Christ comes to visit us. He who threatens that he may have to spit us from his mouth now stands on our front doorstep. He knocks. He wants to be admitted. It is a visit from the Lover of our soul. The love scene in the Song of Songs repeats itself. “Listen! My lover is knocking: ‘Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. . .’ My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him. I arose to open for my lover. . . .” (Song of Songs 5:2-5).¹⁴

What happens when we respond? Again, John Stott says,

¹⁴ John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3*, 120.

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If we do open the door of our heart to Jesus Christ and let him in, he will bring an end to our beggary. He will transform us from paupers into princes. He will cleanse us and clothe us. He will sup with us, and we shall be permitted to sup with him. The picture illustrates the shared joys of the Christian life, the reciprocal fellowship which believers have with their Savior. That he should bid us come and sup with him is honor enough; but that he should wish to share our humble board and sup with us is wonder beyond our finite understanding.¹⁵

But it gets even better.

VII. The Promise (3:21)

Seventh, notice the promise.

Christ said in verse 21, **“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”** John MacArthur says, “To enjoy fellowship with Christ in the kingdom and throughout eternity is sufficient blessing beyond all comprehension. But Christ offers more, promising to seat believers on the throne he shares with the Father (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:29–30).”¹⁶ What an incredible blessing that will be giving to each one who repents and believes in Jesus Christ!

VIII. The Appeal (3:22)

And eighth, look at the appeal.

Christ said in verse 22, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”** Christ appealed to Christians to pay attention to what he said to them through the Spirit.

¹⁵ John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3*, 121.

¹⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, 141.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Christ's message to Laodicea as set forth in Revelation 3:14-22, we should repent and respond in faith to Christ.

The story is told that Satan once called to him the emissaries of hell and said he wanted to send one of them to earth to aid women and men in the ruination of their souls. He asked which one would want to go. One creature came forward and said, "I will go." Satan said, "If I send you, what will you tell the children of men?" He said, "I will tell the children of men that there is no heaven." Satan said, "They will not believe you, for there is a bit of heaven in every human heart. In the end everyone knows that right and good must have the victory. You may not go."

Then another came forward, darker and fouler than the first. Satan said, "If I send you, what will you tell the children of men?" He said, "I will tell them there is no hell." Satan looked at him and said, "Oh, no; they will not believe you, for in every human heart there's a thing called conscience, an inner voice which testifies to the truth that not only will good be triumphant, but that evil will be defeated. You may not go."

Then one last creature came forward, this one from the darkest place of all. Satan said to him, "And if I send you, what will you say to women and men to aid them in the destruction of their souls?" He said, "I will tell them there is no hurry." Satan said, "Go!"¹⁷

Do not delay. Repent, today! Trust in Christ, today! Amen.

¹⁷ Bruce Thielemann, "Tide Riding," *Preaching Today* No. 30; submitted by Kevin A. Miller, Wheaton, Illinois.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for Christ's message to the church in Laodicea.

The church in Laodicea was a comfortable but Christless church. The members in the church were satisfied with their wealth, their prosperity, and their lack of necessity. But they were in desperate need of salvation.

O God, help each one of us to examine our own hearts. Let us not be self-deluded. Let us never believe that there is no hurry in getting into a right relationship with you. Grant us repentance and faith in Jesus.

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!