

“A CHURCH IN DIRE NEED OF RENEWAL”

I. Introduction

- A. Tonight we come to the last of Christ’s messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3.
- B. Jesus speaks these words to these churches, and to his church across history, in order that the church might be faithful in its mission as a lampstand in a sin-darkened world.
- C. In our study of these messages, we have seen that many of these churches were compromising with the world, which was making their witness ineffective.
- D. This was certainly the case with the church Laodicea, which is the only church out of the seven that received no commendation from Jesus.
- E. For them, Jesus only has words of rebuke, coupled with a call to repent.
- F. As we study this text this evening, we will see that our Lord utterly despises religion that is self-satisfied and half-hearted.

II. The Words of the “Amen” (14)

- A. Jesus speaks to the church in Laodicea as the Amen, the faithful and true witness.
 - 1. This title is probably drawn from Isaiah 65:16, where God is called the “God of truth,” which is literally “God of Amen” in Hebrew.
 - 2. As the God of Amen, the Lord is utterly reliable.
 - 3. He always keeps his word.
 - 4. When Jesus applies this title to himself, he is identifying himself as the one true God and declaring that he is completely reliable and

trustworthy.

5. As the Word made flesh, he bears faithful testimony to God, and the words that he delivers to this church in Laodicea are absolutely true.
 6. In fact, Jesus' identity as "the Amen" sets him in contrast to the church in Laodicea.
 7. While he is fully trustworthy, this church was proving itself to be unfaithful to the Lord.
- B. Jesus also says that he is "the beginning of God's creation."
1. As you might imagine, this is a phrase that could be employed for mischievous ends.
 2. Jehovah's Witnesses might point to it in support of their claim that Jesus is a created being.
 3. The problem is that this would be in clear conflict with the fact that in the same verse Jesus applies the divine title "the Amen" to himself.
 4. One parallel passage that sheds light on the meaning of this phrase is Colossians 1:18, where the apostle Paul describes Jesus as "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent."
 5. Note the similarity with Revelation 1:5, where Jesus calls himself "the firstborn of the dead."
 6. Both of those passages are clearly talking about Jesus' resurrection.
 7. This tells us that the phrase "the beginning of God's creation" in our text is referring to the fact that the resurrected Jesus is the beginning of God's new creation.

8. He already has a new creation body, the kind of body that God promises to give to all of his people on the day when he returns to consummate his kingdom.
9. Jesus speaks to the church in Laodicea as the beginning of the new creation because he wants them to understand the bearing that this has upon their lives as those who profess to belong to him.
10. This reminds them why it is so important that they not be conformed to the world around them but be transformed by the renewing of their minds.

III. A Warning to the Lukewarm (15-18)

- A. As I noted in the introduction, Laodicea is the only church of the seven to receive no word of commendation from Jesus.
 1. This obviously tells us that they were in a bad spiritual condition.
 2. Think of the apostle Paul's letters to the church in Corinth.
 3. In spite of all of the problems in that church, Paul still gives thanks for them at the beginning of his letters to them.
 4. There is nothing like that in Jesus' message to the church in Laodicea.
 5. This church was in serious trouble.
 6. Jesus describes their problem this way: they are neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm.
 7. This illustration is drawn from a particular feature about the location of Laodicea.
 8. One of its neighboring cities was Hieropolis, which had a hot spring that was believed to have medicinal value.

9. Another neighboring city, Colossae, was noted for its fresh cold water that was especially good for drinking.
 10. In those two cities, the water was useful and fulfilled an important purpose.
 11. But in Laodicea, there was no easy access to water, so it had to be piped in from hot springs to its south.
 12. This water arrived in Laodicea lukewarm, and it was probably not very healthy to drink.
 13. Compared with the water in its neighboring cities, the water in Laodicea was almost good for nothing.
- B. This is the image that Jesus uses to describe the spiritual condition of the church in Laodicea.
1. In his estimation, this church is good for nothing.
 2. Notice, however, that this is not how these people think of themselves.
 3. They think that they are vibrant and healthy.
 4. They say, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing."
 5. This attitude betrayed the extent to which they had been infected by the mindset of the culture around them.
 6. Laodicea was renowned for its wealth.
 7. It was located at the convergence of several major trade routes, which enabled it to become a major economic center, with scores of wealthy citizens.
 8. In fact, the city was so affluent and independent-minded that once, when it was severely damaged by an earthquake, they declined the

offer of funds from Rome to help with the rebuilding efforts.

9. Laodicea was a proudly self-sufficient city.
10. It was also a pagan city, which meant that its economic system was intertwined with its cultic system.
11. In order for Christians to attain material prosperity there, they would almost certainly have to compromise with the city's idolatrous culture.

C. Jesus is saying that the church in Laodicea viewed their material prosperity as a sign of God's favor.

1. They had bought into a version of the prosperity gospel, which says that wealth and success are signs of God's blessing.
2. While it is true that the good things that we enjoy in life come from God, it is a fallacy to conclude that prosperity serves as proof that God is pleased with you.
3. Many ungodly people prosper in this world.
4. The church in Laodicea was evaluating itself by a worldly standard of success.
5. They should have been evaluating themselves by the standard of the One who is the Amen, the faithful and true witness.

D. Jesus tells these Christians, "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."

1. The problem with these believers is that they, like the pagans in their city, have a self-sufficient attitude.

2. They think that they are spiritually robust, but in reality they are spiritually destitute.
3. They need to recognize that Jesus is the only source of spiritual riches and blessing from God.
4. They need to repent of their self-sufficiency and become utterly dependent on Christ as their source of spiritual life.
5. This is an important reminder for us as God's people today.
6. We too need to guard against the temptation of thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought.
7. We too need to guard against the lie of thinking that we are sufficient in ourselves to live the life of faith.
8. The only way we can be spiritually fruitful is if we keep ourselves humble and abide in Christ, the true and living vine.

IV. A Call to Covenant Renewal (19-22)

- A. Even though Jesus' words to the church in Laodicea are harsh, they are not words of condemnation.
 1. They are words of discipline.
 2. He makes this clear in verse 19 when he says, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent."
 3. Discipline has a positive goal.
 4. The goal is not punishment, but correction.
 5. It is motivated by love.
 6. Because Jesus Christ loves his people, he sometimes chastises and disciplines us.

7. This is what he was doing with these Christians in Laodicea.
 8. He was calling them to repent of their self-sufficiency and pride, and to renew their relationship with him.
- B. It is important to have this context in mind when we consider the words that Jesus speaks 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."
1. This verse is sometimes cited as an evangelistic plea, with Jesus depicted as standing at the door of an unbeliever's heart and asking to be let inside.
 2. And sometimes, this image is used to support the Arminian teaching that says that a person's salvation ultimately depends on whether or not they decide to accept Christ.
 3. The problem with that argument is that it takes a text that is figurative in nature and interprets it in a manner that contradicts literal teachings found elsewhere in the Bible, such as Jesus' assertions in John 6, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (v. 44), and, "no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (v. 65)
 4. Furthermore, we should note that Jesus is not speaking to non-Christians in this passage.
 5. He is speaking to believers, to those whom he loves.
 6. He is knocking at the door of a church.
 7. The meaning of this image is brought into focus when we consider its Old Testament background in the Song of Solomon.
 8. In Song of Solomon 5:2, it says this: "I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking. "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew,

my locks with the drops of the night.”

9. This is depicting a husband knocking on the door of the bedchamber so that his wife can welcome him home and express her love for him.
10. In a similar way, Jesus is the head of the church in Laodicea, and he is knocking at her door in order that she might renew her covenant relationship with him.

C. Covenant renewal is an important element of the Christian life.

1. We need to be renewed in our relationship with the Lord on a regular basis.
2. This is one of the key purposes of public worship.
3. When we assemble for worship on the Lord’s Day, we do so to participate in a service of covenant renewal.
4. God reminds us of his covenant relationship with us and refreshes and strengthens us with his grace, and we respond by reaffirming our commitment to him.
5. We need this regular renewal if we are going to persevere in faith.
6. We need it if we are going to be conquerors and reach the glorious eschatological destiny that is described at the end of Revelation.

V. Conclusion

A. The Christian life is a battle.

1. We are continually being pressured to compromise with the world, to give in to the devil’s temptations, and to be controlled by the desires of the flesh.
2. The stakes in this battle could not be any higher.

3. It is a matter of our eternal destiny.
 4. This is why God gave us the vivid imagery contained in the book of Revelation, images of demonic riders, monstrous beasts, a terrible dragon, a great prostitute, and more.
 5. These images are intended to shock us into seeing the real nature of the battle in which we are engage.
- B. Jesus promises that if we conquer in this battle, we will inherit a reward that transcends anything else: the reward of sitting with him on his throne.
1. That throne is described in the next two chapters of Revelation.
 2. It is God's throne.
 3. While we could never attain to that place by our own merits, if we are united to Christ we have a share in this glorious blessing.
 4. Because Jesus has taken his church to be his bride, those who persevere in faith will be seated with him in glory for all eternity.