

Delivered from Delusion, part 1

Revelation 3:14-22

The Church at Laodicea

The church at Laodicea had apparently been in existence for about three decades. Paul's references to the church in Colossians 2:1, 4:13-16 help us to establish that rough timeline. So, there were people who had been converted and who had introduced their children to the faith. But the new generation in the congregation was more like their worldly culture than like Christ. As a result, that congregation was more like something that the Savior wanted to spit out rather than spare. But He offered them a way back.

Laodicea was a very wealthy metropolis at the intersection of 3 imperial trade routes. The city had so much wealth that when it was nearly destroyed by an earthquake, it was rebuilt without outside help from the Roman government. A medical school, famous for helping those with eye and ear problems, was located at Laodicea. Christ used the notoriety of the city to describe the needs in the church. The church was wallowing in worldly wealth, but viewed from a heavenly perspective, they were poor paupers; nothing positive was said about them in this text. Think about that: Christ found nothing praiseworthy in that congregation! They blindly lived in dreams of grandeur, but they were deficient in God's sight. Could they turn around? That church need look no further than the Old Testament judge named Samson. His head was shaved, and Samson was poor, blind and wretched. But the Scripture testifies that "the hair of his head began to grow again" (Judges 16:22). And in his final assault on the enemy, Samson accomplished more than he had during his entire twenty year ministry. Repentant people are powerful reminders of God's righteous power. So what would you give to a congregation that thinks it has everything? Christ gave them reminders about His character, and a rebuke with wise advice and powerful promises. We must learn to affirm the Amen to be delivered from our delusions.

Who Christ Is, 14

¹⁴ And unto 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;

In verse 14, Jesus Christ reintroduced Himself to the members of the local congregation in Laodicea. As we have studied throughout this series on the seven churches, each new introduction is significant. Many of these introductions are drawn from the revelation of Christ in chapter 1. From His all-wise perspective, Christ diagnosed the problems in each church. Then, He presented himself as the answer for those problems. His multi-faceted character is on display among these golden lights, the seven churches. In each case, He wanted to blow upon His lamp to produce new light in a dark world. And these passages remind us that Christ is our Savior and All-Sufficient One for every problem that every church faces today. What do we learn about Christ in this passage? He is "**The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, and the Beginning of the Creation of God.**" According to verses 18-19, He is the Possessor of some very important items that are essential for our spiritual health. We will study those two verses in the next message. Christ's communication to Laodicea was lengthy, second only to the one to Thyatira. With that in mind, we will study this Christ's words to Laodicea in two messages rather than one.

The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness

The word "amen" is a transliteration (of the letters A-M-N). The root word is found throughout the Hebrew Old Testament. It is transliterated into Greek in the New Testament and into English and other languages today. To say that Jesus is "the faithful and true witness" is to say that His testimony is

trustworthy; it is genuine; His testimony perfectly conforms to reality. “Amen” means “certainly, assuredly, verily, or truly.” The word “amen” conveys the idea of faithfulness, stability, remaining in or continuing fidelity.ⁱ Study this word in the Scriptures to recognize its immense significance. (We studied this together on a recent church anniversary under the title, “And All God’s People Said...”)

In Isaiah 65:16, the expression, “the God of truth” could be translated as “the God of the Amen.” In Genesis 15:6, we read about Abraham, **“And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness.”** Before we look for the word “Amen” in that verse, stop to consider the powerful impact of Genesis 15:6. The Apostle Paul explained its significance in Romans 4:2-5 **“For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. For what says the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that works not, but believeth on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”** The Scriptures teach us that we cannot be saved by our works, but only by God’s gracious favor. And which Old Testament Scripture did Paul use to illustrate this teaching? He used Genesis 15:6. So why is Genesis 15:6 so significant for our study today? Here is why: **““And he believed [He “amen”ed] in the LORD; and He [God] counted it to him [Abraham] for righteousness.”** John the Baptist explained it this way in John 3:33: those who really receive the testimony of God “set their seal” to the fact that God is true. So this raises the question for each one of us. Have you “Amen-ed” God’s promise to you? According to the testimony of Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4, God saves the people who “amen” Him and gives them everlasting life. In Romans 4:20, Paul went on to explain: **“[Abraham] staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.”** Abraham glorified God by giving God his “amen.” Have you glorified God this way?

According to 2 Corinthians 1:20, all the promises of God are “yes and Amen” in Jesus Christ. That is, by Christ’s holy life, His horrible death as our substitute, His rising again bodily from the dead and His ascension back into Heaven, Christ fulfilled the promises of God. He is the faithful and true witness of God – “The Word” (John 1:1-4, 14). He promised to save you, based on His finished work. Have you said “amen” to God’s promise that He will save you and give you eternal life? Have you glorified God by placing your faith in Him? We must learn to affirm the Amen to be delivered from our delusions.

We can learn much about the definition of the word “amen,” by the way Jesus used it. For instance, 25 times in the Book of John, Jesus Christ was quoted as saying a “double amen.” John 1:51 **“And He said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”** Where is “the double amen?” It’s the word “verily” – also translated “truly.” It means “to confirm” or say “assuredly.” It is a statement of truthfulness and integrity. It teaches us that something is “steadfast,” or “certain,” or “assuredly true.”

The Beginning of the Creation of God

Christ is the Maker of all creation and the new creation. The word translated as “beginning” in Revelation 3:14 can also be translated as “ruler.” It refers to “the first” in place or power, the source.ⁱⁱ This introduction reminds us that Christ is the Creator of all things, including humanity (John 1:3, Colossians 1:15-16); He is the Creator of the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17); He is Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14); Christ is the Head of the body, the church (Colossians 1:18). Today, if you are a child of God, it is because you have professed Jesus Christ as your Lord – the Author of your salvation – and believed in your heart that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9). He alone can transform a sinful human being to become a citizen of heaven – a new creation in Christ. When you see the blind and wretched state of the

congregation at Laodicea, it reminds you of the description at the beginning of creation: "the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Genesis 1:2). But Christ said, "Let there be light!" and he can still enlighten us today (2 Corinthians 4:6).

What Christ Knows, 15-17

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: (Revelation 3:15-17)

The congregation at Laodicea probably thought of itself as refreshing; Christ told them they were repulsive. There are a couple of possibilities as to what Christ meant by "cold, hot and lukewarm." Nearby Colosse had cold water to soothe the thirst; nearby Hieropolis had hot water for hot, medicinal baths. Laodicea was plagued by lukewarm, mineral laden water that everyone wanted to spit out. How would Christ, the faithful witness answer this need? The Laodiceans desperately needed a hot-hearted witness for God that could inspire and comfort others. They needed to be like a cold drink that could give answers to thirsty souls. But their lukewarm witness didn't help anyone. They were spiritually indifferent.

The other way of looking at this passage is as follows: Instead of being "cold" (totally lacking enthusiasm for the things of God) or "hot" (zealous for God's concerns), they were lukewarm; they were spiritually indifferent. Though some in the congregation had, at some time, been "on fire for God" they were now lukewarm at best in a creepy, cold conformity to their culture. The problem with looking at it this way is that Jesus said, "I wish you were cold," which in this case would probably mean lost or at least unrecognizable as a Christian (2 Peter 1:9). In this line of thinking, Christ would be saying that it would be better to be cold so that people knew exactly where they stood (in opposition to Christ) rather than say that they were Christians and be lukewarm (a witness plagued by partial truth infested with lies). In this case, the Amen, the Faithful Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God would be the answer for lost church members who were living out lazy lies.

How were they deluded and deceived? They thought of themselves as wealthy, having no needs. Remember the children's story of "The Emperor's New Clothes?" They had all agreed to look the other way, ignoring the king's foolish behavior. But a little child told the truth. Here the congregation at Laodicea somehow ignored the light of God designed to show them their true spiritual state. But Christ told the truth. The Faithful and True Witness told them, "You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked." We will study this more carefully in the next message.

When I first came to Calvary as pastor, more than 27 years ago, I received a lot of advice about how I ought to be a shepherd to our people. One man told me, "Preacher, just get up there and scald them. I know you've got it in you. Just get up there and let 'er rip and tell them what they are really like!" I asked the man, "Do you really believe that the people here clearly understand Biblical principles and that they are in willful violation of those Scriptures?" He admitted that he did not think that was true. He agreed that the better approach would be to clearly teach and preach the whole counsel of God and then hold believers accountable for what the Bible says. And by God's grace, that's exactly what we did over a number of years. (I later discovered that he had been asked to leave 3 churches for the "scald 'em" approach!)

But dear friends, our pastors and teachers here have labored to share the whole counsel of God. We know what Christ taught about the sinfulness of sin and the greatness of His redemption. You know what Christ has affirmed, so where is your “amen?” If you are not “amen-ing” Christ, you most certainly are affirming something. And that tells you a lot about your witness.

In 2 Samuel 13 we find the tragic story of Amnon and his twisted desire for his half-sister, Tamar. If you had a friend who was on the brink of sexual immorality, adultery or some abomination, how would you respond? Would you affirm his evil desire? If he broadcast it on social media, would you affirm that you liked it? Here’s the tragedy. According to 2 Samuel 13:3, Amnon had a friend named Jonadab who not only gave his “amen” to Amnon’s evil desire, he helped him to act upon his lust. I ask you again, “Where is your “amen?” Are you the kind of friend who would glorify God to those who are snared in adultery and abomination? Somewhere along the line, in its 30 year history, the congregation at Laodicea had cooled and refused to confront the destructive behavior of others. Is that what we are becoming? As older folks go to heaven and are replaced by a younger generation, are we becoming like Laodicea with lukewarm lies? We must learn to affirm the Amen to be delivered from our delusions.

In a recent news article, Jerry Falwell, Jr. confessed, ““Because of my last name, people think I’m a religious person. But I’m not,” Falwell says in the piece. “My goal was to make them realize I was not my dad.””ⁱⁱⁱ Jerry Falwell, Jr. was recently dismissed as the president of Liberty University, one of the largest Christian universities in the world. If the generation after Jerry Sr. falls, shouldn’t that be a wake-up call to all of us? In Job 1:5, we find that Job regularly prayed for his children for fear that his children had sinned and cursed God in their hearts. But here is the fascinating part. The word translated “cursed” is actually the word [*barak*] meaning “to bless.” The idea seems to be that he was afraid that his children had only blessed God with faint praise, rather than the wholehearted “amen.” Job was afraid that his children were blessing God as they slowly backed away from God. (For instance, Laban blessed his children as he bid them farewell, Genesis 31:55. Joshua did the same in Joshua 22:6). So here at Calvary, one generation needs to take a careful look at the other generation. Adults, would your children say that you are wholehearted and hotly zealous for the things of the Lord? Would they say, “My mom and dad, my grandpa and grandma, are saying ‘amen’ to God’s promises?” And the older generation can use the light of this passage to ask the same question to the new generation. Is yours just “the faint amen” of faint blessing? You might say, “Well I don’t disagree with what Christ says.” But that’s not the question is it. The question is this: have you set your seal to God’s promises? Have you said “amen” to Him with a heart that is hot for His glory?

Today, our Deliverer still speaks truth in the midst of our delusion. The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the Creation who can make each of us a new creation is here with us. May the Lord be pleased to deliver us from our poor, blind wretchedness!

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ⁱ William Lee Holladay and Ludwig Köhler, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 20. For a more detailed explanation of the use of “Amen” see “And All God’s People Said” accessed at <https://www.cbfindlay.org/and-all-gods-people-said/> (manuscript, audio and video)

ⁱⁱ Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 252.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jerry Falwell Jr.: ‘People Think I’m a Religious Person. But I’m Not.’ Relevant Magazine, January 24, 2022 (citing an article in Vanity Fair) accessed <https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/church/jerry-falwell-jr-people-think-im-a-religious-person-but-im-not/>