

Revelation 3:14-22 “Laodicea: Listen to the Voice of Jesus”
Isaiah 55
Psalm 103

June 23, 2019

Isaiah 55 calls you to *come* to Jesus.
Seek the LORD while he may be found!
Repent of your sin – and turn to Jesus!

Return to the LORD – for he will abundantly pardon!

This is true for all of us!
Whether you have been a Christian for 50 years –
or whether you have never known the Lord Jesus Christ –
the same message is for *you*.

The Word of the Lord comes to you and calls you to trust God and turn away from sin.

And God’s promise is that he *will forgive*.
He will *abundantly pardon*.

No matter what you’ve done –
if you forsake your wicked ways –
if you turn away from evil – and turn to God –
then God *will forgive you*.

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 103,
which shares a number of key themes with Isaiah 55 –
focusing on how forgives our sins – brings justice for the oppressed –
shows steadfast love and faithfulness to those who fear him.

Sing Psalm 103
Read Revelation 3:14-22

We’ve spent most of the last few weeks focused on the content of each of the letters.
I want us to lift up our eyes now and see how these seven letters fit into John’s message.

The seven letters reveal the church of Jesus Christ in all her frailty and weakness –
and not just frailty and weakness – but even sin, rebellion, and *death*.

There are lots of ways in which the churches of Revelation 2-3 fall short!
But I want you to see that all of those shortcomings are overturned
in Revelation 21-22!

Let me run through a few:

There are false apostles in the church of Ephesus (2:2).

There are twelve apostles of the Lamb in the heavenly city (Rev 21:14).

The church of Pergamum dwells where Satan's throne is (2:13).

The heavenly church dwells before the throne of God and of the Lamb (21:1)

Some in the church of Sardis are dead (3:1).

All in the new Jerusalem are written in the Lamb's book of life (21:27).

Jesus may remove the lampstand from Ephesus (2:5).

God and the Lamb *are* the lamp of the eternal city (21:23, 22:5).

The church of Smyrna (and others) are filled with lies and idolatry (2:9, 14-15, 20, 3:9)

Nothing unclean, detestable, or false will enter the holy city (21:27).

Trial and tribulation characterizes those in the seven churches who rely on God's *promises*.

The heavenly city is characterized by the *fulfillment* of those promises!!

All of the promises to "the one who conquers" in chapters 2-3
are fulfilled quite explicitly in Revelation 21-22.

All of the letters are about *hearing* Jesus –
but this final letter to the church in Laodicea highlights that theme.

And again, at the beginning of the letter, we see who Jesus is!
Jesus is teaching us something here!
At the beginning of every letter he starts by telling us about himself.
If you are going to hear Jesus rightly,
then you need to understand who Jesus is!!

There are some in our day who think that Jesus was just a wise teacher.
He was a wise teacher.
But he was far more!

1. Who Is Jesus? The True Witness, the Beginning of God's Creation (v14)

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.*

This goes back to chapter 1, verse 5 – where we heard a greeting
"from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of kings on earth"

Now in chapter 3, Jesus identifies himself as "the Amen,
the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation..."

When you hear this, you probably only hear one connection:
"faithful witness."

But there is also a connection between the idea of the firstborn from the dead and the beginning of God's creation.

John is playing with a theme that Paul also recognizes:

In Colossians 1, Paul says that the beloved Son is the firstborn of creation and the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

Paul uses the same language of *firstborn* (prototokos), beginning (arche), and says that all things were created through and for the Son.

Jesus is the Amen.

In Isaiah 65:16, God speaks of himself as “the God of truth” (the God of *amen*).

Isaiah 65 is a passage that speaks of the coming of the New Creation.

(verse 17 goes on to say, “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth”!)

So when Jesus says that he is the Amen –

he is saying that he is the God of Isaiah 65 – the God of Amen.

And when he speaks of being “the beginning of God's creation”

he is speaking both of creation and new creation.

The one *through whom and for whom* God created all things

is also the one who reconciles all things to himself in the cross.

He is the beginning of God's creation because everything starts with him.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God!

That was true when, in the beginning God *spoke* –

and it remained true when, in the resurrection God spoke once more!

When Jesus speaks, life comes out of death.

And that's good news for Laodicea!

Because Laodicea is not doing so well!

2. What Does Jesus Know? That You Are Wretched, Pitiable, Poor, Blind, and Naked (v15-17)

¹⁵ “*I know your works:...*”

In all of the other letters, there is some sort of commendation –

something where Jesus can say “well done” – or at least “hold on”!

Sardis was similar – but at least there were “a few names” in Sardis that had not soiled their garments!

But for Laodicea, Jesus has nothing good to say!

Most of the time it is important to commend people –
even when you need to rebuke them.
But there are times (maybe once in seven times!) –
when the rebuke is whole focus of what needs to be said!!

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.*

We sometimes think that “hot is good” “cold is bad.”

But Jesus says that he wishes that they were *either* cold or hot.
Cold is good – on a hot day, a cold glass of water is refreshing!
And hot is good – on a cold day, a hot bath feels great!

Many have pointed out that there is a hot spring a few miles from Laodicea.
Since the town didn’t have a great water source,
they decided to pipe in water from the hot spring.
Now a hot spring is *great* for soaking in!
But hot springs are not so great for *drinking*.
The minerals that come along with a hot spring make the water taste awful.
And after water from a hot spring travels a few miles,
it's not really *hot* any more.

Water from a hot spring that isn’t hot is just disgusting!

A cold spring produces refreshing drinking water.
A hot spring produces great bath water.

But Jesus says that the church in Laodicea is like drinking old bath water.
One swig makes you want to spew!

And in verse 17, Jesus explains what he is tasting:

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.*

The emperor has no clothes!
You say “I am rich” – but you are poor.
You say, “I have prospered” – but you are wretched.
You say, “I need nothing” – but you are naked.

Truly you are pitiable!
We don’t want to admit that we are pitiable!
We want to be the magnanimous one – the one who helps others –

not the one who needs help!

I began to learn this about myself when I was a boy.
I was riding my bike home (around age 12),
and I got broadsided by a car (it was my fault!).
I was limping, bloody, and bruised – and my bike was smashed to bits –
but I refused a ride home (more than a mile over a tall hill).
I was too proud to admit that I needed help.

So I started limping along – pushing my twisted bike!

A neighbor saw me and refused to take no for an answer!
He picked up my bike – tossed it in the back of his truck,
and ordered me – “Just get in!”

We “are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked...”!

You might look around you and say,
“No, pastor, these people are happy, enviable, rich, healthy, and well-clothed!”

That is making the same mistake as the people of Laodicea.
They confused economic well-being with spiritual well-being!
Just because someone is doing well financially,
don't think that they are doing well spiritually!

Indeed, the economic well-being of the Laodicean church
came only because of their spiritual poverty!
They thought of themselves as “influential” people –
but they become influential only through abandoning their devotion to Jesus!

What does the Church of Laodicea look like today?
The pastor preaches trendy sermons in order to attract movers and shakers.
The church ignores discipline out of fear that people would leave.

To the Church of Smyrna Jesus said, “I know your poverty – but you are rich!” (2:9).
To the Church of Laodicea Jesus says, “You say, ‘I am rich...not realizing that you are...poor’
What use is all the wealth and status in the world?!”
Some people say, “Well, if I had money, then I could serve the kingdom of Christ better!”
My observation is that people either serve Christ – or they don't.
If they serve Christ, then it doesn't matter how much they have –
they use it to serve Christ!
If they serve themselves, then it also doesn't matter how much they have –
they use it to serve themselves!

And Jesus already knows you.

You can't pull one over on him!

He knows your heart – better than you know it yourself!

And the truly amazing thing?

He loves you anyway!

Here's what he says:

3. What Must We Do? (v18-20)

a. Buy Gold, White Garments, and Salve (v18)

¹⁸I 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.

Many commentators follow the “theologically correct” approach.

They say, “The spiritually blind, bankrupt, naked Laodiceans obviously had no resources to buy from Jesus gold or garments or salve for their eyes.

They could ‘purchase’ these necessities only by his grace.” (ESV Study Bible)

There is a sense in which that is true.

Isaiah 55 – which we read earlier – says

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;

and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price...”

But think about the things that Jesus calls them to buy:

“gold refined by fire”

This is gold from which all impurities have been burned away.

“*Refined gold* is a biblical idiom for purifying one's life by removing sin...”

The metaphor is also used for the purifying effect of tribulation on God's people.”

(B 305)

Or think about “white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen.”

White garments – as we saw in Sardis in 3:4-5 –

refers to those who did not “stain their garments” –

or as we see at the marriage supper of the Lamb in chapter 19,

this refers to the “righteous deeds of the saints.”

And, also, “salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see” –
In John 9, Jesus spit on the dirt to make mud,
anointed the man’s eyes with the mud, and told him to go wash –
and when he did, he could see.
Ordinary dirt can’t bring sight to the blind!

But when ordinary dirt is mixed with the saliva of Jesus, it opens the eyes of the blind.

It is true that you can only obtain this “gold...white garments...and salve” by the grace of God!
But when Jesus says “I counsel you to buy from me...”
he is calling you to *do something!*

Don’t take my word for it: just listen to what Jesus says he means by it (in verse 19!):

b. Heed Christ’s Loving Discipline and Repent (v19)

¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

If you respond to Jesus by saying, “No, really, I’m fine – thanks!”
Then you remain pitiable, poor, naked, and blind.

But if you hear Jesus’ rebuke and say, “Yes, Lord! You are right!
I am wretched, poor, naked, and blind –
that is the first step of repentance.

And Jesus says this to us because he loves us!

We discipline our children because we love them.
The child needs to learn not to run and play in the street!
If you run and play in the street, you will soon become a hood ornament!
I love you – and I don’t want you to become a hood ornament!!

In the same way, Jesus says to *you* –
“I love you – and I don’t want *you*
to get run over by the world, the flesh, and the devil”!

And so Jesus calls you to “be zealous and repent.”

And verse 20 makes this even more clear:

c. Hear Jesus’ Voice and Open the Door (v20)

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.

This text has often been used in evangelism – preaching to the unconverted.
But Jesus isn't speaking to the world!
He's speaking to the *church*.

He's talking to you!
“Behold, I stand at the door and knock...”
What door?

The image here comes from the Song of Songs 5:2
where the husband calls to his bride to open the door and let him in!

Here Jesus stands at the door of the church and asks his bride to open the door
and let him in.

There are churches (in every denomination) where Jesus is not welcome.
There are churches where “everything is fine” –
and no one will admit their misery, their poverty, and their helplessness.
Jesus stands at the door and knocks.

But because this is true for churches,
it is also true for individual Christians.
There are Christians where Jesus is not welcome.
There are Christians who say that “everything is fine” –
who will not admit their misery, their poverty, and their helplessness.

Jesus stands at the door and knocks!

Remember, we're not talking about unbelievers here!
We're talking about professed believers!

Do you hear the voice of Jesus?
Do you hear his knock at the door of your heart?

Because Jesus says to *you* –
“If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in...”

It's not enough to “hear” –
do not be *hearers* of the word only!
We must be *doers* of the word!
“If anyone hears my voice and *opens* the door, I will come in...”

Jesus will not do violence to your will.
He will not force the door open!

He stands patiently at the door and knocks –
because he knows that his sheep know his voice!

But to the one who opens the door, Jesus promises:
“I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”

This is *headed* toward the wedding supper of the Lamb!
But Jesus is not just saying, “eventually, after you die, I will let you eat with me.”

Jesus is saying I will come in *right now* – and eat with you.
It’s why Jesus gave us the Lord’s Supper!
So that we might have a foretaste of the Wedding Supper of the Lamb!
We gather at the table with Jesus.

My friend David Covington wrote a poem that says it very well:

Supper time

Tonight I’ll be able to sit at the table
With somebody who understands.
I know I’m not worthy; my clothes are still dirty,
But Daddy, he’s washing my hands.

Supper time, oh supper time,
At the close of a long working day I come home to
Supper time, oh supper time,
And I know they won’t turn me away.

We’ll come in together, or some one by one;
We’ll wait until everyone’s there.
When we’re all in our places, the light on each face is
From the one who sits in the end chair.

Supper time, oh supper time,
When I most need to know that it’s near,
Supper time, oh supper time!
Sometimes I smell the kitchen from here.

When my heart gets tender, it helps to remember
That I’m going to be there tonight.
I’ll see all the others, my sisters and brothers,
And I’ve got the right, I can invite you to

Supper time, oh supper time,
At the close of a long working day we’ll come home to
Supper time, oh supper time,
And I know they won’t turn us away.
We’re here to stay.

And that is really at the heart of Jesus’ promise in verses 21-22:

4. What Does Jesus Promise? To Sit with Him on His Throne (v21-22)

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.*”

What does it mean to *conquer*?

This is the cry, “Nike, Nike!” – victory, victory!

How did Jesus conquer?

He died.

More than that – he was crucified by the Romans!

As we keep seeing in these letters,

the way that you triumph is by holding fast – persevering until death –
in your faith, your hope, and your love!

The one who conquers is the one who holds on to Jesus until her dying day!

It’s not about being the first one to cross the finish line!

It’s too late for that!

Jesus was the “winner” in that sense!

He is the firstborn from the dead!

No, our victory is simply *that we cross the finish line!*

And Jesus says that to the one who crosses the finish line,

“I will grant to him to sit with me on my throne,

as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

In the incarnation, God joined himself to our humanity – so that might join us to himself –
so that we might become partakers of the divine nature (to quote 2 Peter 1:4).

By faith, you have been joined to the life of God.

Nothing less than the divine life of the Son of God – the resurrection life of our Lord Jesus!

I hope that you have been encouraged – and challenged – by the letters to the seven churches.

As we’ve seen, five out of the seven churches are not just “slightly damaged” –
but *deeply flawed*.

Smyrna and Philadelphia – the two exceptions –

are known for their poverty and their feebleness!

So it is *not* by might – nor by power – but by the Spirit of God! –
that the kingdom of Christ advances!

In this age, the church is imperfect.

In this age, the church is deeply flawed (*we* are deeply flawed!)
But that's not where the story ends!

There is a way in which the story of the letters reminds us of the whole story of salvation.

Just look back over the promises at the end of each letter!

The letter to Ephesus ends with eating of the tree of life (2:7).

Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But at the end of the story, in 22:2, those who dwell in the heavenly city
partake of the tree of life.

When Adam and Eve ate of the tree – death came to all humanity.

But Jesus says at the end of the letter to Smyrna

that those who conquer will not be hurt by the second death (2:11),

and in 21:4, when God dwells with his people, death will be no more.

The letter to Pergamum ends with hidden manna (2:17),

reminding us of the story of the “new creation” in the days of Moses –
when God brought Israel out of Egypt.

The letter to Thyatira ends with the theme of Psalm 2 –

ruling over the nations with a rod of iron – a promise that God made to David's Son –

and in 22:5 “they will reign forever and ever.”

The letter to Sardis ends with a promise of white garments –

not soiled garments – echoing the story of Joshua the high priest (from Zechariah 3) –
and the return from exile;

which is gloriously fulfilled in 21:2 when we see the New Jerusalem coming as a bride
adorned for her husband.

Which is also reflected in the language at the end of the letter to Philadelphia,

as Jesus places his name upon us (a reflection, perhaps of our baptism).

And now in the letter to Laodicea,

Jesus says that the one who conquers will sit with him on his throne,

“as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” –

a reference to the ascension of Jesus –

which happens to be the central focus of the next chapters (Rev. 4-5).

But Jesus' point is that you need to hear him.

You need to trust him.

And you need to come to him eagerly and repent!