

Revelation 3:14-22

14 “And to 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: 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore 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 dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame 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.” ’ ’ ”

Today brings us to the last of the seven churches that the Book of Revelation is addressed to.

Thus far the format of each of the addresses has been similar. The Lord is introduced according to one of the ways He was seen in John’s vision in chapter 1. Remembering that Jesus is the One who is in the middle of the 7 golden lampstands and that He is overseeing the churches, He then tells them that He knows their works or their deeds. Up to this point all of the churches had at least something that they had done that was commendable, or admirable. After he addresses the areas of praise He speaks to them regarding the areas that need improvement.

That is a kind way of saying, He told them the areas that they were falling short. Of the six previous churches, only two escaped any notes of condemnation. These were the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia. But this week brings us to the Church of the Laodiceans and they are the lone church amongst the seven that did not receive any words of praise.

Now in saying that I want to say something that may seem obvious, but to some it is not. Even in Laodicea there are promises of blessings to the overcomers. Each of the addresses to the churches gives a promise to the overcomers. There are overcomers in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and yes, Laodicea. Last week I talked briefly about the closing line to each of the churches. “He who has an ear, let him hear, what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” If you were one of the faithful, in let’s say the church of Pergamos, there were warnings to you in the address to each of the churches. The command is to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, not just the church at Pergamos.

All of that being said, though nothing is said in general positively to the Church in Laodicea, there are those of the Laodiceans who are characterized as the ones who overcome.

Let’s begin the examination of the text today with the description of Jesus as the Amen and the faithful and true witness. Amen is a word that we are all familiar with. We have become familiar with it as the closing for our prayers. Less familiar to most, but it should be something we at Providence are aware of is the way in which we close out our confession of faith. The word means, ‘so be it.’ In actuality when we say Amen at the end of our prayers and our confession we are in reality binding them with an oath. Oaths are something that our society in general takes little to no notice of. Let’s take for example an oath of office. Often times people are violating the oath of office while they are taking the oath. In marriage vows we are calling on

God to be the enforcer of the Covenant. When we say Amen we are calling on God to be the guarantee and the enforcer of those vows. The word Amen in liturgy is a call upon God to enforce the terms of His covenant. When Jesus presents Himself as the Amen here in Revelation, He is reminding them that they are in subjection to Him and to His Word.

He also refers to Himself as the faithful and true witness. Jesus is presented to us in the Gospel of John Chapter 1 as the Word made flesh. By His Word and by His Witness which are faithful and true all things are established. The Church in Laodicea is a church that is very much leaning to their own understanding and the Lord is telling them to stop listening to themselves and to hear the faithful and true witness. One of the verses that my Father always quoted to me was Proverbs 3:5-6 ⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;* ⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.* Remember we disregard God's Word at our extreme peril. I mentioned last week, that there is no such thing as your truth and my truth, there is only truth. It does not matter how you feel about something it is the Word of God that is faithful and true.

Jesus is also presented in verse 14 as the Beginning of the creation of God. This word for beginning is the Greek word *ἀρχή*. The word implies that He is both the Origin or purpose and the Ruler over all creation. In Colossians 1:15-18 the Apostle Paul wrote the following description of Jesus:

¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the*

body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

When Jesus is spoken of as the ἀρχὴ what this means is that He is the source and origin of all authority and as the faithful and true witness He is bringing to bear true and righteous judgment. You see it is one thing for me to tell you that you are in sin. You can take it or leave it. But here Jesus is preparing to bring judgment, and He will issue faithful and true judgment because He is the Word of God, and He is also before all things.

Let me be clear. If your pastor opposes the Word of God, I don't care how many letters he has after his name he is not only opposing God, he is leading you astray. If your counselor opposes the Word of God, and if you heed their council you are being led astray. And lastly and probably most important, if your heart, the most deceitful of all this crowd, opposes the Word of God you had better beware.

Now verse 15 and 16 give us the problem in Laodicea. The Lord knows their works and they are described as being neither cold nor hot. They are known in fact as the lukewarm church. The common interpretation of this is that if you are hot, that means you are full of a Godly zeal, and if you are cold this means you are perhaps hostile toward spiritual things. Being lukewarm means they are simply apathetic. I have a cousin who often jokingly referred to this passage as if you are good be real good, but if you are bad, be real bad, because God hates lukewarm. I think one of the things we have to understand though is this passage had a geographical and local context that we often miss.

Geographically Laodicea was between two other important cities. The City of Colossae and the City of Hieropolis. Colossae is the City that the letter to the Colossians, which we quoted from earlier, was written to. It was located in a narrow valley and received water from the ice cold streams that flowed down from the surrounding peaks. The City of Hieropolis was famous for the mineral hot springs that were present.

As we know there is nothing quite as refreshing as a drink of cold fresh water on a hot day. And as some of us are aware here, surrounded by areas with hot springs these serve a refreshing and medicinal purpose as well.

Laodicea however, had neither the cold waters of refreshing, nor the hot mineral springs that bring healing. By the time the water from Colossae had reached Laodicea it had grown lukewarm. Yes, you could drink from it but was not refreshing like it had been, and by the time the healing waters of Hieropolis had got to Laodicea all of their soothing and healing qualities were gone. The Lord uses this very present metaphor, for them, as a description of their being ineffectual and literally good for nothing.

Jesus speaking during the Sermon on the Mount used the illustration of salt in Matthew 5:13 ¹³ *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.* Salt served as a seasoning and as a preservative, but if it loses those qualities, it had become worthless. Here in Laodicea, the Church neither refreshed nor did it offer healing. The reason behind this ultimately comes down to pride. They began to trust in their own understanding.

There are many churches today that want to focus only on the very rudiments of the faith. They will avoid controversial topics for fear of offending people. Of necessity, this will affect the Gospel that they proclaim. They are seeking only converts, but they have no idea as to what should be done with them once they are there. These churches will never address issues that might be contemporary problems. A Church that does not speak with definitive voice about issues such as abortion, homosexuality and feminism is at best a compromised church more likely they are an unbelieving church. On the other hand, a church that loses the Gospel of healing and reconciliation in favor of social design will have problems as well.

Jesus says He would rather they be hot or cold. Laodicea went for the sloppy center, and thus they have become good for nothing, The response of Jesus to this is that because they have become good for nothing is that he will vomit them out of His mouth. Some of the translations render this word as spit, and yet, I think it is far more accurate to understand that this is a reaction one would have to something that is stomach churning or abominable.

Listen to these words from the Book of Leviticus 18:24-28

²⁴ 'Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. ²⁵ For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. ²⁶ You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you ²⁷ (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), ²⁸ lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

In verse 26 of Leviticus 18 the Lord tells them to not commit any of the abominations that He has warned them against. The abominations were practices that the heathen nations regularly engaged in and practiced. At the end of the passage we learn that it was because of those practices they were spewed out, or vomited from the land. Israel was warned that if they engaged in these activities they would also be vomited from the land. Laodicea in their lukewarmness had become an abomination before God. Their conformity and their unwillingness to speak true healing had cause them to become a stench in the nostrils of God.

Verse 17 of Revelation 3 gives us the reason for the lukewarmness of this Church. ¹⁷ *Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—*

Laodicea thought very highly of themselves. They were pleased with their financial prosperity. They were convinced that they had no needs. But the Lord's assessment of their situation was of a very different nature. The words that are used regarding the lord's assessment was that they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. In many ways it makes me think of our participation trophy culture. There is no such thing as failure, and everyone is equal. Of course what happens in that kind of environment is people begin to praise mediocrity and even failure. We become blind to our flaws, and we instead of repenting for our sins we embrace them and laud those who practice them. Romans 1:32 speaks of this attitude when it says:

³² *who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.*

An unwillingness to confront sin is a mark of the Laodiceans. Going along to get along when sin needs to be confronted is a sure sign of lukewarmness.

What does it mean to confront sin? Matthew 7 contains one of the most quoted passages in the Bible, and yet it is also one of the least followed:

7 “Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

We confront sin in our own lives when we repent of our own desire and submit to God.

However, once we have done that, we are expected to help our brothers. Of course when we go in with the attitude that we have done nothing wrong, that we are rich and have need of nothing that is going to be a major problem. We must recognize our own blindness by confronting sin in our own lives.

We can identify that this a large part of their problem in Laodicea because of the counsel that they are given by the Lord in verse 18: *¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*

The imagery from this passage is a familiar one found in other places in the Bible. 1 Peter 1:6-8 says: *⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved*

by various trials,⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Genuine faith is faith that will stand through trials. The trials in this passage are spoken of as being tested by fire. They are also told to buy white garments. Remember in the Church of Sardis it is mentioned that there are a few who have not defiled their garments. The Laodiceans are described as being naked. This should bring us back to our very first appearance of nakedness in the Bible. In Genesis 3:7 after our first parents ate of the fruit we read that *“the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves covering.”* Nakedness in this sense is very closely related to disobedience.

Throughout the Book of Revelation we see the people of God clothed in white linen garments. This is a symbol that their nakedness has been removed, and rather than being clothed in fig leaves, they are now clothed in the righteousness of Christ Jesus.

The Laodiceans are also called to anoint their eyes with salve that they may see. Blindness in Scripture is symbolic for man's fallenness throughout Scripture. They are blind and they do not know it. In Isaiah the 6th chapter when Isaiah is in the heavenly throne room of God and He sees the glory of the Lord we also read perhaps the most detailed description of the idolatrous human heart.

After Isaiah is cleansed with a live coal from the altar the Lord calls Isaiah to minister to His people. But he also describes the problem of this people in verse 8-10:

⁸ *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:*

*“Whom shall I send,
And who will go for Us?”*

Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

⁹ And He said, “Go, and tell this people:

*‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’*

¹⁰ “Make the heart of this people dull,

And their ears heavy,

And shut their eyes;

Lest they see with their eyes,

And hear with their ears,

And understand with their heart,

And return and be healed.”

Last week we spoke of holiness which means to be separate and set apart. One of the key aspects of holiness is the ability to make distinctions. Man in their sins is blind. They do not know truth in fact they are totally blind to it. When the Laodiceans are counseled to buy eye salve and anoint their eyes they are being told to embrace the Word of Truth. Psalm 119:105 says *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* Jesus prayed in His high priestly prayer in John 17:17 that His disciples would be sanctified by truth, and that His word is truth.

Hearing all of this and knowing that the Laodiceans received no words of praise from the Lord makes us wonder why the Lord even bothers with them, but though there are no words of praise of commendation for Laodicea there is plenty of room for encouragement. The Lord's counsel to them is calling them to repent. And verse 19 tells us His reasoning.

.¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent. One of the abiding themes of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ loves His bride and give Himself for her. That being said we have given to us in this passage the reason that the Lord rebukes and chastises Laodicea is that she is the church. She is not an outcast, she is not an outsider to the promised of God, She is the Church, and it is because the Lord loves her that he rebukes and chastens her.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews the author quotes Proverbs 3:11-12 and writes the following in Chapter 12: *⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:*

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,

Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

⁶ For whom the LORD loves He chastens,

And scourges every son whom He receives.”

⁷ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the

Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

This is probably a passage most of us have heard or are familiar with, but when we read this message to Laodicea there I both chastening and rebuking. One of the problems with many of our churches today is they can never even imagine discipline or chastening, part of the reason for that is they refuse to rebuke sinners.

Rebuke and chastening go hand in hand, but if sin is never rebuked chastening from the Lord will not follow. We may think this is a good thing, but remember it is those who are chastened of the Lord that He loves. Many times we think we got away with one, when in reality we are setting ourselves up as those who are not loved by God.

The Church in Laodicea is in terrible shape. The Lord is rebuking her but He is also giving her the command to therefore be zealous and repent. It has been said that the Christian life is a life of repentance. The only thing I would add to that is I would say that the Christian life is a life of zealous repentance. Stop casting blame on others, stop blaming your circumstance, repent and turn to God.

Some would argue that the above statement seems work based, however the next verse, a verse very often taken out of context, speaks directly to this circumstance.

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 dine with him, and he with Me.

I am pretty sure I have told this story before, but years ago, when I lived in Sacramento, I was in a Salvation Army Brass Band. I was one of the trumpet players and we would travel to different churches or venues and play our music. We always had the leader of our group give a little sermonette at each event. I am not meaning to mock here, but I know there was not a large amount of prep that went into each of the sermons because at every event he preached the same one.

He would speak of the allegorical painting by the English artist William Holman Hunt, who began the painting at the age of 21 and finished it when he was 29. The painting illustrates the biblical passage in Revelation 3:20:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.”

Jesus, carrying a lantern, is depicted knocking at a door with no handle on the outside. The door is overgrown with weeds, and the nails and hinges are rusted, implying that the door has never been opened.

The message: it is up to the person on the other side of the door to let Jesus in. So Jesus is standing on the door knocking on the sinners heart and because there is no doorknob he is powerless to open it.

I usually found myself cringing at this time of the service, because this is a pretty blatant example of reading into the text what you want it to say, and an equally blatant example of taking a passage out of context. I am not denying that this is what William Holman Hunt wanted

to say, but and this is important...What he wanted to say and what this passage says are two different things.

The context of this passage is a letter written to a church. Christ is not a powerless and weak deity at man's mercy, He is in this passage, as noted above, the Amen, and the faithful and true witness. He is not speaking to Christians as individuals, but as members of His church. Of this passage David Chilton writes: We must take seriously the doctrine of the Real presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. We must return to the Biblical pattern of worship centered on Jesus Christ, which means the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper as well as instruction about its true meaning and efficacy.

Notice when this door is opened Jesus comes in to dine with him and him with me. This is a call to true fellowship with Christ.

A verse that makes many people uncomfortable comes to mind here and that is found in the Gospel of John 6:53-58: ⁵³ *Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is ^ufood indeed, and My blood is ^udrink indeed. ⁵⁶ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."*

The message to Laodicea closes with a promise to the overcomer. Yes, even in Laodicea there are those who would overcome: ²¹ *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

Something that I would hope we are aware of by now is that this sitting with Jesus on His throne is not speaking only of in the far distant future. The one serious mistake I see so often in the Church is to hear people speak of When His Kingdom comes. Colossians 1:13 says ¹³ *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,* There are numerous Scriptures that speak of the present and ongoing Kingdom of God. We often close our Worship Services by proclaiming the Great Commission from Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Amen.

Christ rules now and His dominion is an ever increasing dominion. To those who over come Christ is saying that they will rule and reign with Him. This is what the Great commission begins with a therefore. It is because Christ has all dominion, all power and all authority that we go.

John closes with the familiar phrase by now ²² *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* ' 'Remember Saints. Laodicea is one of the Churches, Let us hear What the Lord is saying, and let us obey His call on our lives in everything that we do.

Amen

