

August 15, 2021
The twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Other People's Mail-Laodicea

Grace, Mercy and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Well, here we are! It's number seven, the last of the churches that Jesus writes to in the Book of Revelation. We started with a very good church, a very poor church, three churches of mediocrity. Last week we had Philadelphia, probably the best of the churches; and today we have Laodicea, probably the worst of the church.

Laodicea was only 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia and its claim to fame is that it was probably the wealthiest of all the churches that Jesus is talking to. They had great wealth for two reasons. One, they raised a particular type of sheep in that area, they had very soft black wool. The people of Laodicea had perfected the dying of articles of clothing black. And so, if you have wool, nice soft black wool and then you dye it black on top of it, while you had super Laodicean black wool and that sells for a whole lot of money on Amazon, or whatever they had back then.

Secondly, Laodicea was like a university town. In this case, a Medical University that specialized in the production of a medicinal salve that people would apply to their eyes, and it was supposed to help people regain sight or cure all sorts of eye conditions. You know itchy eyes from allergies and stuff like that. And as we know in America, pharmaceuticals fetch a pretty penny. So, Laodicea was very wealthy financially, but they were very poor; probably the poorest spiritually.

Even Sardis, church number five, which was at the lowest of the mediocrity; Jesus said that they were quote, "spiritually dead." There was hope there at least. When we look at Laodicea, it appears that this this group of quote, unquote Christians, was almost totally unrepentant, unregenerate, literally a counterfeit church.

And so, Jesus begins His letter like he does with the others. He begins with a greeting, and then with a title for Himself. In this case, like with Philadelphia, it's a three-part, or trinitarian title. The first is that He is the Words of the Amen. Again, the word amen is a unique word. In this case, it's the only place in the Bible where it's used in a title. But it's a word that most Christians associate with, well the end of a prayer, or the end of a hymn. So, they think it's the end, when, it's actually a bold proclamation. Yes, it is so. In fact, it is the words of an oath. It is truth. It is binding, and it is appropriate that Jesus uses this term for Himself, that He is the Amen. Because He is the yes, it is so, to all of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah: Born of the virgin, born in Bethlehem, is pierced, you know His hands, His side. He fulfilled them all. He's the yes, yes, it is so! I am the One! It is why Paul writes in Second Corinthians 1 verse 20, "For all the promises of God find their yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our amen to God for his (Jesus') glory." We say Amen, Lord Jesus is the One, we praise you for Him, the Amen, the yes, it is so.

Secondly, He says He's the faithful and true witness. We've already seen that He is the truth, but why throw faithful in there? Well, because there's a lot of people that will say I'm telling you the truth; I'm telling you the truth; I'm telling you the truth; and then they don't really tell us the truth. We've seen a little bit of that, I think, with this COVID19 stuff. We have heard a lot of truths. Jesus is the faithful and true witness. What He said, and what He did and who He is, is truth and He will be faithful to it, and He will not change.

And third, He is the beginning of creation. To understand that we need to go to John 1:1 to 14. Remember John was a disciple of Jesus. Jesus taught him. So, this is what Jesus must have taught His disciples. "In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God. He was with God in the beginning and through Him all things were made that were made." Now if you've been a member at Zion for any length of time, you know that the Greek is logos, that is what is translated as word. And logos was a very important word. It was the final answer, the ultimate truth. In Acts we read of the Greeks spending all their time in the Areopagus speaking with each other and talking about things. What were they talking about? About the logos. What's the final answer? What's the ultimate truth? Jesus is the ultimate truth. So, Jesus is the ultimate truth. He was with God in the beginning and through Him all things were made that were made. God the Father created the world

through His son, Jesus Christ which makes Jesus the Ruler of creation, the King of all kings.

He is the faithful One, the true One, the Amen, the Creator; not the first created. And that is what we have seen over the years different groups have come up with. No, no, no this means that God created him first and then created the world for him. That is not what scripture says. It's heresy. People are thinking it's not that big of a deal, as long as you see him as a good prophet, or a son of God, as we're all sons of God, and he just happens to be the creator or the savior. No! The minute we say that He is a created being like you and me, we have watered down the personhood, the role the ministry of Jesus Christ. And the minute we start playing around with the truth, we find ourselves very quickly following, falling into a heretical belief.

Jesus backs up the idea that He is the beginning of creation that He is God with what He says very next. He says, "I know all the things you do." That's omniscience. That is a characteristic of God. Why does he start with that? Because He is God, and He's going to focus on their works. He knows their works. Why focus on their works? Because that was their hope. You see, the people of Laodicea basically had an attitude of, 'I've done plenty, I'm good person. God will certainly save me because I'm me.' They didn't understand what the Bible says about fruit. Fruit only comes from a good tree as we see in Matthew 7:16-20. Grapes only come from a good vine. They don't come from a thornbush or from a thicket. Unless you are connected to Christ and Christ is living in you, you don't bear good fruit. This was the problem with them. They said we're connected to Jesus, and Jesus is saying no you're not. I know what you're doing. I know your heart. Your heart's not in the right place. Let me make it very clear. I'm not saying they were; you know, they were doing good works and you know or if they were doing good works they would be getting to heaven. No, we know by grace we are saved through faith, it's not your own doing, it's a gift of God. Not because of works lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8 and 9. But they were the ones who were focusing on the work. Saying our works will save us. Jesus is saying, "I know your works." They're not founded in Me, they're not founded in faith, those works mean nothing.

And so, He goes into the rebuke. He has no praise for this church. He just goes straight into their works, and He says, "you are neither hot nor cold." This is again one of those very beautiful things here where Jesus is relating to them at their level. Yes, Laodicea was very wealthy, but they had a problem. There was no fresh water there no good mountain streams coming in. Their water came from 5 to 6 miles away from Hierapolis where there were Hot Springs. Hot Springs, geothermal springs; it's volcanic in nature with high sulfur content, scalding hot. It travels 5 to 6 miles through a series of pipes in an aqueduct system. By the time it got to Laodicea, it had cooled some. It was warm, tepid; and in the 1st century there was two types of water that were highly cherished among people. I'd say they still are today. One, hot water. Hot water is very good for cleaning because it helps cut through stuff. Two, cold water. If you've been out working all day and you're hot and thirsty, there is nothing like a big cup of ice-cold spring water.

Now that's what wealthy people could afford. They could afford to heat the water up and have it nice and hot to clean with. They could afford to have a cooling system to cool the water down and to clean it up so you could drink it. But the tepid water that just came into town; to just drink it, well that's what the servants drank. It was untreated. You drink that, you don't deserve it because you're not rich like us. So, if someone gave somebody else in Laodicea, a cup of their water that hadn't been heated up for washing or cooled down for drinking and they took one drink... it's terrible! That water is not worthy of my mouth! I can afford much better than that! I mean it's almost like wine snobbery with people that you know. A bottle of \$2 Chuck would make them want to throw up.

And this is the image Jesus picks up on because you are neither hot nor cold. I spit you out, or literally I vomit you out. He has no patience for someone claiming to be a Christian and not being a Christian. It's like a person who likes Coca Cola, and you give them, you know some Walmart cola, Signature-Select cola; they will take a sip and say, oh that's not the real thing! We call it genericide. It's, you know death by generics. It used to be that if you said I want a coke, it meant Coca Cola and nothing else. There was no substitute. Or if you wanted to Kleenex, you got a Kleenex, not some other facial tissue.

But you see how over time, things can become generic. A term can come become generic. And this was the problem with the people of Laodicea, Christian had become generic. Sure, they looked like they were Christians. They went to church every so often, every so often dropped a little pittance in the offering plate, every so often did something nice for their neighbor. You know, they were the ones who said 'we don't need creeds, we need deeds. And look at what we've done. We've done so much; we are so good.' And these creeds, you know, it just gets so specific, you get bogged down and doctrine and all that stuff; and you know we just we don't want to offend people. So, they never take a stand on God's word. These were the type of people who say, yeah, my name is on the church roster. I'm a member there. But, unfortunately, Jesus is pointing out you might be a member there, but your name is not in the Book of Life. He's totally repulsed by this.

He spits them out and He begins to rebuke. The first part of the rebuke is, 'you say 'I am rich, I've prospered, I need nothing.' In reality, Jesus says, 'you're ignorant because you don't see that really you're wretched.' What is meant by wretched? A terrible attitude, that leads to terrible behavior. You're pitiable. You have so much and yet you can't see the obvious right in front you. Poor people, you're poor, got a lot of money in your wallet or purse, but you have no riches stored in heaven. You, the ones who make the pharmaceutical for good eyesight, you're blind to the reality, to the truth of Jesus as savior and you're naked. Sure, you got a lot of nice soft black wool clothes, but you don't have the white robe of righteousness. Jesus's advice His prescription for them, by gold refined by fire. Gold refined by fire had the impurities removed. It was very expensive, very costly.

Buy gold refined by fire so that you may be rich, rich, rich, in heaven. Because what is the ultimate purist thing, of the greatest value in the world? It is salvation. It has been bought with the blood of the very son of God. You can't get more expensive than that. And if you put your total faith, trust, and hope in Jesus Christ, and not in self, not in other things; you inherit a mansion and you will be clothed with that white robe of righteousness by Him who is faithful. It won't change. Your sins are removed forever. Why? He says so. Your robe's been washed in His blood. It's the exact opposite of the black wool. And you also need spiritual sight to see spiritually that Christ is the way, the only way, the truth, the only truth, and the life, eternal life!

Christ is expressing to them that He loves them, and He makes it clear because those who you love, you will rebuke, you will discipline. He's taking the time to reach out to the people of Laodicea and any today who are far off from Him but think they're close. He says to them, He says to us, "behold I stand at the door and knock." I think we get this image of Jesus timidly knocking and saying, 'excuse me, excuse me.' No, that's not how it's written! When you look at it, Behold, is literally, "Here I am." And the knocking is written in a tense that says, "Here I am! I am aggressively banging or literally almost breaking down your door. Would you please stop resisting me through indifference!" Oh, you know, there's many ways... if they would listen to Jesus, they would hear His promise. Repent, be transformed, overcome, be the Conqueror through Christ. They needed to conquer their self-centered, self-reliance, self-assurance and become totally and wholly Christ-centered, Christ-reliant, and assured through Christ the faithful. Then, and only then, would they as we be ready to; 'sit with me on My throne as I have conquered and sat down.' And when He sat down, it's a sign that the work has been done. And we sit down, because the work has been done. Done for us by Christ.

And this morning it takes on a whole new meaning because we get that time, that chance, to rediscover that relationship, that fellowship, that assurance, that forgiveness, as we celebrate Holy Communion. It's not a symbolic thing. Christ is coming to us through those physical elements. It's a little foretaste of us sitting next to Him on the throne. As we come forward for communion, literally picking the bread up, picking the wine up, having Him right there in our hands. Letting Him come into us, bringing forgiveness, bringing salvation, being the faithful One who says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

And as you go back to your seats and you sit down, think about it. You're sitting down with Jesus Christ Himself. It's a foretaste of heaven. Bow your heads, and thank Him that He has died for us, that He has conquered for us, that He has made us Christian, those who bear the name of Jesus Christ. To the glory of His holy Name, Amen.