

Letter to Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Revelation 3:14-22

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Well, good morning. When my wife, Allie, and I were first married, we only had one child at the time, our oldest daughter, Ocean. And my wife's oldest brother, Brian, is in the army. And so his wife and young daughter were in town for a visit with us. And one day, my wife was at work and I was supposed to help with a grocery store trip with my sister-in-law and the babies. And Ali was going to come after work and meet us in the parking lot.

And I'll be straight with you. I was feeling pretty good about myself that day. I'm doing my good deed, helping a woman out. Being a good uncle. Chivalry's not dead. We have conquered the Walmart trip and upon arriving, my wife begins to walk towards me. And I'm waiting to hear you're the best, babe. I love you so much. Thanks for stepping up and stepping in today.

Instead, I heard these fateful words. You have a massive booger hanging on your face. Hero to zero in an instant. And my first instinct was to feel embarrassed and frustrated and defensive. My sweet sister-in-law had known the whole time we were at the store and had been too nice to tell me. And I couldn't see my own embarrassment. It took the love of my sweet wife to make me aware of my shame.

And that day, I found out that true love is one who doesn't let you keep walking in self-deception and embarrassment. I found this to not only be true in the hanging booger and ketchup smear moments of life, but also to be true in my spiritual journey as well. Tender moments where the Lord has blasted through my lack of self-awareness.

These moments are often deeply embarrassing, humbling, being made aware of the gross habits and flaws and inconsistencies in my faith and in my life. But I have found that these are the mercy and the love of God because it's in these moments of rebuke and clarity that I've grown most into the heart of God. As recent as this week, lest you think I'm, you know, holier than thou, God has just been lovingly exposing the hypocrisy of my own heart.

I see this on a larger scale for the church nationally and globally as well. Now you're going to think I'm crazy for the next thing I say, but I try to personally keep up to date with the latest church scandals that hit the national news and the local news. Now before you judge me as a gossip queen, hear me out. These stories break my heart. Many times I've been reading or watching and it brings me to tears.

These stories make me angry. How could someone do something so damaging to others and to the name of Christ? Another pastor falling into sin, another secret revealed, another church exploding. But I personally choose to stay up to date with these stories for two reasons. One, as an ordained minister and a leader in a local body of believers, I want to learn the crafty intent of the enemy within the church so that I can be wise in the moments that will come up in my life.

Learning wisdom and discernment for situations that may arise around me. And second, I use these stories to remind myself that apart from the grace of God and the boundaries and fellowship and accountability that

God's Word calls me to live in by the power of His Spirit, I am fully capable of becoming any one of these horror stories.

And so it keeps me humble and committed to the boundaries and disciplines that God has given me for my flourishing. And it's in each of these stories that as much as it's a glaring embarrassment to the body of Christ, I always remember that it is God's great love and mercy that exposes our shame. God loves the church. And He's willing to expose us for the purpose of calling us back to the health and wholeness and holiness of his heart.

So today we're going to be looking at a passage in Revelation chapter 3. So if you'd begin turning in your Bibles or your mobile devices to Revelation chapter 3, we're going to be looking at verses 14 through 22. And this passage is a gut punch. It's a reality check to a specific body of believers in the first century. And by God's grace, I pray that it is a reality check to each and every one of us this morning.

But in all the pain and all the rebuke of this passage, my deepest longing is that you will see the great love of the Savior for us today. So would you pray with me toward that end this morning? God, it is your mercy that shines a light on what we cannot see. And so God, as much as we feel humbled and embarrassed in those moments, I thank you for loving us that much.

Lord, for anyone who is hearing my voice, whether it's in here or watching online, God, I pray that they would sense your great love for them today. And Lord, would you change us into the image of Jesus? I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're reading from the book of Revelation, and this is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It was written by the apostle John near the end of the first century. And John was one of the three disciples referred to as Jesus' inner circle.

And he is specifically referred to as the disciple whom Jesus loved. It was on the cross that Jesus gave John the charge to take care of his mother, Mary. And near the end of John's life, he's a prisoner for his faith on a small island called Patmos. And it's a small island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Asia Minor, which we would now know as modern-day Turkey. And by the Holy Spirit, John has a vision.

And in this vision, John has an encounter with the risen Savior, Jesus Christ. And Jesus gives him a heavenly perspective on the current state of the church in Asia Minor. And He also gives him a heavenly perspective on how the events of all time and all humanity will conclude. And Jesus commands John to write down what he hears and what he sees. And this book, no matter what you've heard, is meant to bring a sense of urgency and a sense of hope to the people of God.

Urgency to live in a way that's faithful to the call of Christ. Urgency to live in a way that's ready for His return. But this is a book of hope. Hope that God is fully in control of the events that have happened, are happening, and will happen. And that one day He will punish all evil. And for those who put their faith in Him, they will have the blessing of living in a new heaven and a new earth, no longer bound by sin and death.

And so we look, chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation at the beginning of the book are composed of seven short letters that Jesus is writing to seven literal churches in Asia Minor in the first century. These seven letters had first century context and meaning for these churches, but they're also applicable to believers of all generations as seven types of churches, seven types of experiences.

And so today we're looking at the seventh and final letter that Jesus writes, and he's writing it to a church in a town called Laodicea. So if you would join me, I'm going to read the entire passage this morning and then we'll break it down verse by verse. We read beginning in verse 14, "To the angel of the church in Laodicea, write, "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either one or the other. So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, I'm rich. I've acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you can become rich and white clothes to wear so that you can cover your shameful nakedness and salve to put on your eyes so you can see. Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person and they with me.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. This is a story of a church with affluence, but also apathy. A church with ingenuity, but also indifference. A church that was successful without the Savior.

So let's begin breaking it down, starting in verse 14. We read, "To the angel of the church in Laodicea, right, these are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." Jesus is beginning this letter by announcing not only His identity, but His authority to write such a letter to this church. We read the words, "These are the words of the Amen." The truth is that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises.

2 Corinthians 1:20 says, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ." And so through Him, the Amen is spoken by us to the glory of God. Jesus is the fulfillment of all God's past promises, and He's the one through whom all future prophecies and promises are coming to fruition. And he says, "I'm the faithful and true witness." What Jesus says is right and trustworthy.

He gives us an accurate view of God and He gives us an accurate view of ourselves. Then He says, the ruler of God's creation. Now, depending on what translation you're reading from, you might have the beginning of God's creation. And some groups that are no longer considered Christian would use that verse to say, see, Jesus was a created being. He was the first created being. But that's not what's intended.

It's meant to say Jesus is the source of all creation, the ruler of all creation. This not only affirms that Jesus existed before he came to earth as a man, but he is truly God. The Almighty God is Jesus Christ. The book of Colossians was written by the apostle Paul. And it's a rock solid defense of the divinity of Christ. And actually, this town we're looking at, Laodicea, was very near this church in Colossae.

And they faced similar challenges of doctrine in the first century. And so Jesus is beginning by saying, I'm God. We continue on in verse 15. He says, I know your deeds that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other. First, we need to remember that Jesus has the right to assess His church. This should remind us that salvation is not some ticket you punch.

This is not your fire insurance card. The church has a purpose. Christians have a purpose to bring glory to God, to enjoy God, and to advance His kingdom and His rule. We cannot disconnect our eternal destination from the purpose of the call of the church. And he says, I know your deeds. God sees the public and private deeds of our lives. And He also perceives the hidden motives and desires that no one else knows.

Many scholars have noted that Laodicea had a drinking water problem in the first century. They didn't have a water supply of their own. And so water had to be brought in via aqueduct from a town five miles south. And by the time the water arrived, it was lukewarm. We see today. How many coffee drinkers do we have in the house? By a raise of hands. God bless you. I hate coffee.

But when you go to get a cup of coffee, you're thinking, "Hey, I want a nice hot cup of coffee." Or maybe you're a cold brew person and you say, "Oh, I just love that ice cold cup of coffee." You're probably not going to see five legs putting a banner that says lukewarm coffee, come and get it. We continue reading in verse 16, Jesus says, "So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth." This church was literally repulsive to God.

The word that's translated spit in our Bibles actually can be translated vomit. I think of like a gag reflex. That's how God felt about this church. And he's making it clear, I'm not waiting indefinitely. I am about to spit you out

of my mouth. But I want us to remember that a rebuke and a warming is actually an act of love. Think if you have children and you say, hey, if you don't stop, you're going to get X, Y, Z.

Your desire is not for the discipline to come. Your desire is that they would listen. You love them. And Jesus is saying, I love you. I am patient with you, but I will not wait forever. But then I asked the question, what made this church disgusting to Jesus? What was the source of its lukewarm title? What made them gag worthy? He's going to spell it out in verse 17.

You say, I'm rich. I've acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. You see, Laodicea was a wealthy town. It was located on a major trade route in the first century. And it was famous for a beautiful black clothing industry from a local breed of sheep that had black wool.

It was a major banking epicenter of the first century world, known for its currency exchange and its lending. They also had an elite medical school that was renowned for an eye ointment that they had created to help heal eye infections. They were by the world's metrics, hardworking, happy, successful as a community. And it could be easy to just peg this town as like having the perfect life.

Oh, they just got all the privilege, you know, right place, right time. But it's not as if this town had never experienced trials. In AD60, before the writing of this letter, there was an earthquake that leveled the town of Laodicea. And the Roman Empire reached out and they said, "Hey, we will give you finances to rebuild your town." And they said, "You know what? No, thanks. We've got enough money." They were an amazing example of self-sufficiency.

You might consider them the perfect picture of the self-made man. And yet they had what I would call perception deception. They couldn't see the massive booger hanging from their face. Jesus says, "You say that was their self-perception." And then he goes on to say, "But you do not realize." And he gives them his accurate assessment.

And then Jesus begins to take the specific details of Laodicea and He starts flipping them to show the real state of their spiritual lives. They were worldly happy. Jesus said, "You're spiritually wretched." They were worldly desirable, and Jesus says, "You're spiritually pitiful." They were worldly rich. Jesus says, "You're spiritually broke." They were known for their healing eye ointment in their medical school.

And Jesus says, "You're spiritually blind." And they were known for that marvelous black clothing industry. And he says, "You're spiritually naked." They absolutely didn't see it. Before we all get too judgmental, like, oh yeah, they were so bad. Let's be honest, we all struggle to see our flaws. It's human sin nature to look at ourselves through rose-colored glasses.

And this is why God's loving rebuke is so precious in the life of a believer. He always sees the whole picture. He perfectly sees every detail of our heart and our mind and our lives. And He has the perfect view of time and life and eternity through which to assess us. He is the faithful and true witness. So now that Jesus has just dropped this spiritual bomb on this town, with his rebuke, let's see what solution he offers.

In verse 18, we read, "I counsel you to buy from me, gold refined in the fire so that you can become rich and white clothes to wear so that you can cover your shameful nakedness and salve to put on your eyes so you can see." Notice, he says, "From me!" It's as if Jesus is saying, "I'm the source. I'm the solution. All other sources are fake. You think you're self-sufficient as a community?"

I want you to find your all-in-all in me." I want to give you gold refined in the fire, the spiritual treasure of Christ. Gold that was refined in the fire was the most pure and precious. And the fire of suffering has a way of producing spiritual riches in our life. Early on in Revelation chapter 2, Jesus writes a letter to a church in a town called Smyrna. And he writes this, "I know your afflictions and your poverty.

That was their worldly circumstances." And he says, "Yet you are rich." Was the polar opposite of Laodicea? Because difficulty and need have a way of pushing us to the heart of Christ. And they leave us with great spiritual riches when we seek Him in our times of troubles. And Jesus says, I want to give you white clothes to wear. I want to give you the purity of myself in place of your morally shameful ways.

This group of believers has obviously been allowing rampant immorality to just be accepted within the church. And Jesus says, I want you to live righteously. I want to give you salve to put on your eyes. I want to give you the clear vision of Christ so you can clearly see yourselves and clearly see the world and clearly see God, a spiritual wisdom and discernment and self-awareness.

But then I ask, how are we going to buy this from Jesus when we're broke? Isaiah 55:1 says, "Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come buy and eat. Come by wine and milk without money and without cost." And later on, Jesus in Matthew 13 says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it.

And then in his joy, he went and sold all that he had and bought the field. The economy of the kingdom of God is surrender. God has already paid the price for your spiritual riches and your righteousness and your sight. But we have to let go to receive it. I want you to imagine that your arms are so full of the things that you value and you treasure and that you are seeking to fulfill you. And God says, lay it down.

That's the price because I want to give you far greater. But we have to lay it down to receive. We read on in verse 19, Jesus says, "Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent." God deeply loves us. God corrects us out of love. God trains us out of love. Like a parent disciplines and trains a child. All throughout the gospels, we often read that Jesus was moved with compassion.

But God wants authentic spiritual action from His people. No more faking it. No more riding the fence. He wants our hearts. True spiritual passion. And yet that spiritual passion always begins with repentance. When the people of God genuinely acknowledge our sin.

When we genuinely grieve over our sin and when we genuinely choose to turn away from our sin, that is where spiritual passion begins. We read on in verse 20, Jesus says, "Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person and they with me." This is both a beautiful and heartbreaking image.

It's heartbreaking because the reality is that Jesus is locked out of this church. The personal and corporate body of Christ is missing Christ. The power and presence of Jesus is not in this church. The intimacy of Christ is not being experienced in this church. And yet, the beautiful reality is that Jesus is not playing hard to get. Here I am!

He's willing and ready and longing to be close to them. This picture is often used. This verse is often used as an example of salvation. And it can be used that way, but that is not the intended purpose in this passage. This is an invitation to Christians, half-hearted, lukewarm, self-reliant Christians. And Jesus is wanting more for them and for us.

John Piper puts it this way, "Christ did not die to redeem a bride who would keep him on the porch while she watched television in the den. His will for the church is that we open the door, all the doors of our life. He wants to join you in the dining room, spread a meal out for you and eat with you and talk with you. The opposite of lukewarmness is the fervor you experience when you enjoy a candlelit dinner with Jesus Christ in the innermost room of your heart.

And when Jesus Christ, the source of all God's creation is dining with you in your heart, then you have all the gold, all the garments, and all the medicine in the world. We read on in verse 21, "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my father on his

throne." Jesus conquered by laying down his life, by rejecting the lie of self-sufficiency and lukewarmness, and by surrendering everything unto death.

And that's the invitation. We are called to that same sacrifice to lay down our lives that we might find them, to lose everything that we might gain something far greater. The reward of Christ is awaiting those who will answer the door. Matthew 16 says that Jesus said to His disciples, "Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me.

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world and lose their life, lose their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what they have done." And finally, in verse 22, we read, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The Spirit was speaking to a very literal church in a town called Laodicea in the first century. And the invitation to them was to receive this message with an open heart.

I believe that the same Spirit of the living God is speaking to us today in Angola, Indiana, in a sweaty gym. The same Jesus who spoke the words to the apostle John is speaking to us today. Will we open the door and receive him? I ask, how could the circumstances in Laodicea correlate to us, Fairview Missionary Church?

In what ways are we out of touch with the state of our hearts personally and the spiritual climate of our church corporately? We live and worship in a hardworking, self-sufficient, financially prosperous, desirable community and church. None of these features are wrong in themselves. Hear me out. But do we have an accurate view of our hearts?

Are there ways in which we are spiritually broke, morally shameful, or lacking the clear vision of the Spirit? Are there ways in which we've been so blinded by our successes and comforts that Jesus is no longer in the building? Are we truly living in the manifest presence and power of our Savior, Jesus Christ? Let me be clear, there is a huge difference between contentment and self-reliance.

Contentment says, come what may? I'm at peace because my satisfaction is found in Christ alone. I delight in Him. Self-reliance says, I'm so consumed with the features of my life or even the human solutions to my problems that I'm indifferent to Jesus. This is being lukewarm spiritually. So today is the day for us to repent personally, corporately.

Jesus is knocking at the door. Will we answer? I want to get very practical how we begin to live this out. First, I invite you to pray a prayer something like this this morning. Holy Spirit, in what ways is my perception of myself inaccurate? Are there areas of my life where I'm spiritually poor, morally shameful, or lacking spiritual discernment?

Are there ways in which I've become so self-reliant that I've become indifferent to the call of Christ in my life? And I believe that if you pray that earnestly, the Holy Spirit can supernaturally reveal answers to you and point things out. But the second is like it. I believe that the Holy Spirit also at times uses other believers to reveal those answers to us.

So I encourage you this morning to be open to the loving voice and perspective and even rebuke of someone else in your life. Because they just might be saving you the embarrassment of one massive spiritual booger. Let's pray together. God, in our sinful ways, we often assess ourselves far too highly.

And God, we can be blind to the ways in which that we are broke and shameful and blind. And so, Lord, I ask in each of our hearts, would you just reveal what you long to transform in each of us? And God, as a body of believers, would we never be so comfortable in the blessings that you've given us of financial stability and a beautiful building and as we are in the process of a remodel?

God, would we never hold these things as the center of our desires, but would we be dining with Jesus in the deepest parts of our heart? And when people come in, would they not say, "What a great building." But would they say, "What a great God that would bleed and die and love us so much?" And what a humble group of people that find their source and supply in Him alone. God, would that be what we are known for?

And Lord, if there's a conversation that needs to happen today or tomorrow, or in the weeks to come, for someone to show us, to speak into our lives, a loving word of clarity or rebuke. God, would we have the humility to receive and to accept that from your Holy Spirit?

All these things, Lord, we ask in Jesus' name and