



January 14th, 2025
Week 11

¹⁴ “Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea: Thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator^u of God’s creation: ¹⁵ I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit^u you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, ‘I’m rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,’ and you don’t realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ I advise you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich, white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed, and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent. ²⁰ See! 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.

²¹ “To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

²² “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”

It is probably the best known of the seven messages because of Jesus’ words, “**Behold, I stand at the door and knock.**” Jesus’ words are often used at evangelistic crusades, and appropriately so. But Jesus did not speak these words to the unbelieving or pre-believing world. He first spoke them to _____!

This last of the seven messages to the churches is at once the hardest hitting and most inviting. Jesus expresses his displeasure in almost violent terms and here Jesus offers the greatest blessings imaginable. On the one hand, “**I will spit you out of my mouth.**”

On the other hand, “**eat with me and I with you and you will sit with me on my throne.**” No greater threat. No greater promise.



In this last of the seven, Jesus gives us the clearest statement of who he thinks he is and why he has the right to come on as strong as he does. He calls himself, ***"The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation"*** (3:14).

Up to this point in the seven messages Jesus has introduced himself in terms of what he has or does. He has used no titles, except in the message to Thyatira, where he refers to himself as ***"The Son of God"*** (2:18). That is because in Thyatira, people were calling Apollo, the patron god of the trade guilds, "son of Zeus the high god," and calling the emperor "son of god."

Up to this point Jesus has not told us who he is, just what he does or has:

- To Ephesus — ***"The One who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands"*** (2:1).
- To Smyrna — ***"The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life"*** (2:8).
- To Pergamum — ***"The One who has the sharp two-edged sword"*** (2:12).
- To Thyatira — ***"The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like burnished bronze"*** (2:18).
- To Sardis — ***"He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars"*** (3:1).
- To Philadelphia — ***"He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David"*** (3:7).

But to Laodicea Jesus tells us who he is — ***"The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation"*** (3:14).

He calls himself ***"the Amen."*** It is a Hebrew word. It is used in Isaiah 65:16 where the living God is called ***"the God of Amen."***

Jesus says he is the Amen. He is the utterly trustworthy foundation of life. His word is valid and binding. In him we see the real thing. He is life as life was intended to be. Like the "Amen" at the end of a prayer, he is the last word, the solid foundation, the rock of ages.

Jesus also calls himself ***"the faithful and true witness."*** John calls Jesus this at the beginning of the book in 1:5: ***"Jesus Christ, the faithful witness."*** And near the end of



the book, in 19:11, John says he saw a white horse ***“and he who sat on it is called Faithful and True.”*** Jesus is the utterly faithful witness to God.

He is the true revelation of the Father. In the Greek language there are two words that are translated “true.” One, *alethes*, means true versus false. The other, *alethinos*, means genuine as opposed to illusory or counterfeit. It is the second word that Jesus uses here.

He is the real and genuine article. What he says about God is exactly true because he exactly represents God. There is no greater truth than Jesus Christ!

Jesus calls himself ***“the beginning of God’s creation.”*** The actual word Jesus uses is _____. As we saw in the first chapter of this book, God uses the term of himself in 21:6: ***“I am the alpha and omega, the beginning (arche) and the end (telos).”***

Jesus uses the term of himself in 22:13: ***“I am the alpha and omega, the first and the last, the beginning (arche) and the end (telos).”*** He is the end because he is the beginning. Yes, *arche* means “beginning,” but not just in the sense of first in a sequence.

Arche means source of the sequence, originator of the sequence, archetype of the sequence. Jesus is reminding the Laodiceans, and us, that all of God’s creation has its origin and purpose in him. He is the source, the first principle, the moving cause of all of life—of the first creation and of the new creation.

The Laodiceans were no doubt very familiar with what Paul declared in Colossae because Laodicea and Colossae were neighboring cities. Laodicea was one of three “sister cities,” as they were called, situated in the rich valley nurtured by the Lycus River—Laodicea, Hierapolis (six miles across the river) and Colossae (ten miles up the river).

We know from the apostle Paul’s letter to the Colossians that the churches of Colossae and Laodicea shared a close fellowship. Paul speaks to both churches as those for whom he ***“agonizes”*** (Col 2:1), praying that they might find the fullness of life in Christ. Paul tells the Colossians to have his letter to them read to the Laodiceans and tells them to have his letter to the Laodiceans read to them (Col 4:15).

In the letter to the Colossians Paul quotes a hymn that very likely was sung in the Laodicean church. Colossians 1:15-20:

He [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—



all things have been created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and he is the beginning [arche], the first-born from the dead; so that he himself might come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in him, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, having made peace throughout the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

All of that is what Jesus is affirming when he calls himself the arche of God's creation. And the implications of his claim are staggering! It means that everything in the universe has the stamp of Jesus on it.

From microscopic existence to the far-flung reaches of interstellar space, it all bears the imprint of Jesus the arche. So E. Stanley Jones could say that the personality and way of Jesus are stamped on our nerves, our blood, our tissues, our organs. The personality and way of Jesus are "not merely written in the text of Scripture, but into the texture of our being."

Is that not why the New Testament says we are "predestined" to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ? That "destiny" is written into every cell of life. Every cell of life works best when it operates in _____. "All things are intrinsically made to work in Christ's way, and, if they do, they work well."

The foundation, the source, the reason, the revelation, the pattern, the goal of creation. That is who *Jesus is*.

And that is why Jesus is so nauseated by _____. As C. S. Lewis has observed, "Jesus Christ produced mainly three effects—hatred, terror, adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval." Mild approval. That is the condition that plagued the church in Laodicea.

The Laodiceans are not criticized for holding false ideas about Jesus Christ. Their theology was apparently orthodox. It's just that there was no zeal. They held their belief respectfully, but without deep conviction, without passion, without accepting and living the concrete, life-transferring consequences. And it made Jesus sick. ***"I know your deeds. You are neither hot nor cold. So because you are lukewarm I am about to spit you out of my mouth,"*** he says.



In the original Greek his words are even more crude: ***"I am about to vomit you out of my mouth."***

Jesus' words may have been suggested by the fact that Laodicea lacked a natural, local source of water. Water had to be brought in from miles away through an aqueduct system of stone pipes. But by the time the water got to the city it had lost its freshness. It had become tasteless.

Or, Jesus' words may refer to another fact of life in Laodicea. As noted earlier, six miles away was the city of Hierapolis. Hierapolis was famous for its hot springs, the water from which flowed across the Lycus Valley, spilling over a broad cliff directly opposite Laodicea.

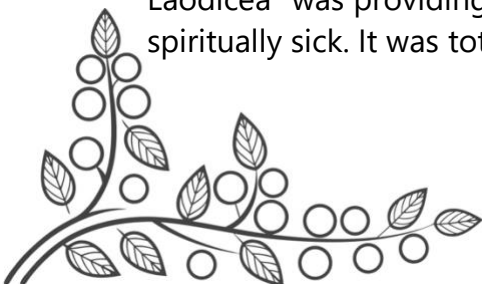
"The cliff was some 300 feet high and about a mile wide. Covered with a white incrustation of calcium carbonate, it formed a spectacular natural phenomenon." But as the hot mineral water from Hierapolis traveled across the valley and spilled over the cliff at Laodicea, it gradually became lukewarm, putrid. It became not only tasteless but positively distasteful, nauseating.

Unsuspecting tourists would drink it only to spit it out upon the rocks. In some people the lukewarm water induced vomiting.

Jesus' words "hot or cold," therefore, were most likely suggested by the fact that everyone in Laodicea knew about the hot medicinal water of Hierapolis and the cold refreshing spring water of Colossae. The water of Laodicea was neither—neither hot and healing, nor cold and refreshing.

Hot or cold. Both conditions are good. I do not think Jesus is saying they are opposites: one good—hot; one bad—cold. Some argue "hot" means aglow with the Spirit, and "cold" means hard, unresponsive to the gospel. So one commentator says, "Here Jesus is saying something that no preacher would dare to say if the Lord had not spoken it first; namely, that ice-cold atheists and pagans are preferable to him than lukewarm Christians."

I do not agree. Yes, Jesus does find lukewarm Christians _____. But the point of "hot or cold" is shaped by the geographical realities. Hierapolis had hot, healing water. Colossae had cold, refreshing water. Laodicea had neither. The church in Laodicea "was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary, nor healing for the spiritually sick. It was totally ineffective, and thus distasteful to its Lord."



"I know your deeds," says Jesus, "that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other. So because you are lukewarm I am going to vomit you out of my mouth."

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, tells of how he came to realize that he was lukewarm. The story goes that he was in an audience where a lecture was being given by a hard-core unbeliever. At one point the lecturer chided Christians by saying, "If I believed what some of you believe, I would never rest day nor night telling others about it."

We have heard the greatest news imaginable. Have we not?

"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. So because you are lukewarm I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

G. Campbell-Morgan is right when he says, *"Lukewarmness is the worst form of blasphemy."* Lukewarmness says that the amen and arche of life is not worthy of passionate faith. Given who he is, Jesus Christ deserves a vigorous, robust, wholehearted zeal. ***"Be zealous,"*** he says. Not fanatical.

What causes this nauseating condition? What we see in the case of the Laodiceans is fairly typical.

Lukewarmness is caused by _____. As we have seen in the other messages, especially the one to Thyatira, the disciples of Jesus in the first century were under tremendous pressure to compromise with the so-called "imperial cult": to not only swear allegiance to Caesar as god, but to then live by the values and priorities of the idolatrous empire.

The disciples in Laodicea had apparently succumbed to the pressure. They had developed a brand of Christianity that allowed them to live in relationship with Jesus in the private, religious realm, and then live the values and priorities of Rome in the public, secular realm.

They, of all the seven churches, could say, ***"I am rich."*** Of course, they had compromised with the culture. In that day one could only become rich by going along with the spirit of the age.

See the line in the text, ***"I have need of nothing"*** (3:17)? Dangerous words.



Laodicea was famous for three things. *First*, Laodicea had many banks, and they were all solvent. Solvent is an understatement! At one point the Jews of Jerusalem appealed to the Jews of Laodicea for financial help. A collection was taken and, get this, 22 ½ pounds of gold was sent from the city's banks.

In a.d. 60 an earthquake leveled Laodicea (and Philadelphia and Sardis). The city was offered assistance from Rome. But it refused and proudly rebuilt the city from its own resources. ***"I have need of nothing."***

Second, Laodicea was famous for its clothing industry. It was especially known for the glossy wool from the sheep that breed nearby. The garments made there were exported all over the world. The Laodiceans were the best-dressed people of the Roman province of Asia. They gave minute attention to external appearance. ***"I have need of nothing."***

Third, the city was famous for its excellent medical school. Especially famous was the eye salve developed there that was believed to heal weak and failing eyes. ***"I have need of nothing."***

The tragedy of it all is that Christians were boasting about their condition! Jesus quotes their words: ***"You say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'"*** (3:17). The church was "spiritually self-sufficient and saw no need of Christ's aid."

St. Augustine said, *"The saying, 'I have everything' is a terrible saying when 'everything' does not include the living God."* And that is why Jesus comes on so strong in his message to the Laodiceans: ***"You say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"*** (3:17). ***"You do not know."***

"The city where they claimed to treat physical myopia, was blind to its spiritual blindness." Lord, help us! It is the nature of lukewarmness to be unaware that it is lukewarm. Jesus speaks so bluntly to break the illusion. His words are stern. But they are not angry.

In Greek they all end with the same sound (os), the sound of compassion.

- "You are poor." The word Jesus uses refers to the beggarly poor, those who have nothing. "You may have pounds of gold in the safe, but you are bankrupt in the things of the Spirit." "Rich in things, but poor in soul."



- “You are blind.” Even though they used the expensive eye salve they were not seeing things as they really are. They could see only as far as their physical eyes could see. They were, therefore, cheating themselves.
- “You are naked.” How that must have stung! The Laodiceans stood before the world fashionably adorned. And the world was impressed. But before God? God was not impressed. They were wretched and pitiable.

What does Jesus do with this “wretched” church? _____!

He does not want them to remain in that nauseating condition. They were made for him and for the life of which he is the foundation and source. Jesus counsels them to buy from him what they do not have. He counsels them. Imagine that!

His counsel has a note of irony to it. ***“I advise you to buy from me.”*** Buy. He is using language that the commercially minded Laodiceans understood. But he is advising them to buy what they could never buy, thereby showing them that life’s true riches come only by grace. ***“Buy from me gold refined in fire, so you may become rich.” Buy from me “white garments, so you may cover your shameful nakedness.” Buy from me “eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see”*** (3:18).

“From me,” he says. That is the key phrase in his counsel—***“from me.”*** He has the true riches. He has the clothing that covers shame. He can give us eyes to see.

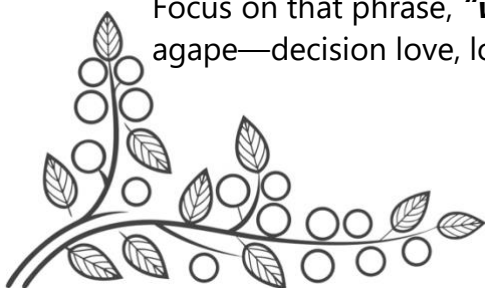
What grace! Sheer grace. He is nauseated by their lukewarmness and about to spit them out of his mouth. And what does he do? He opens up to them the storehouse of the Amen and Arche!

The risen Lord is saying to the Laodiceans, and to us:

If you will just recognize your poverty, I will enrich you with my riches. If you will just recognize your nakedness, I will clothe you with my garments. If you will just recognize your blindness, I will make you see with my eyes. They are not angry words. They are words of compassion.

For he says, ***“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline”*** (3:19). Why? So that we will achieve the destiny built into our very bones—to know him and the life only he can give!

Focus on that phrase, ***“whom I love.”*** The word Jesus usually uses for love is the word agape—decision love, love as an act of the will. Here the word is phileo—affectionate



love, love that feels, love that likes being with the beloved. Jesus not only chooses to love those who made him sick, he feels love for them. What grace!

Then Jesus moves from counsel to command. **"So be zealous and repent."**

"Repent" is in the verb tense [aorist] that means _____. Turn around now. "Be zealous" is in the verb tense [present] that means, _____. "Keep on having passion."

But how? How can they become and keep on being what they are not? How can they move from nauseating lukewarmness to healing hot or refreshing cold?

"Behold," says Jesus. **"Look!"** It is a command. In fact it is the command of the book of Revelation. "Look, I am standing at the door and I am knocking." I am right here. And I have all you need.

Here we discover the root cause of lukewarmness. It is caused by excluding Jesus. It is as simple and as tragic as that. **"I stand at the door and knock."** He is outside and he wants to come in. **"If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in."**

These words are often used in evangelistic settings when people are making a first commitment to Jesus Christ. They are appropriate words for helping people become Christians. But Jesus speaks them to people who are Christians, or who at least thought they were. Jesus is telling them that they have _____.

Lukewarmness is fundamentally due to a fact about which we are usually unaware: we have excluded Jesus from one or more areas of life. That is why there is no healing or refreshing. The fire himself is gone. The well himself is gone.

But not far! Out of sheer grace he stands by, knocking and waiting. The solution to lukewarmness, therefore, is not to jack up warm emotions. The solution is not to exert more self-sufficiency. The solution is to open the door again.

"Let me in," says the Foundation and Source of life. Jesus does not ordinarily kick the door in. I sometimes wish he would! But most of the time he knocks—and waits.

He makes a wonderful promise: **"I will come in and I will eat with you and you with me."** That is a Middle Eastern way of saying, "I will make a covenant with you to be for you all I am, to share with you all I am."



It is more wonderful than that! Revelation 3:20 echoes Song of Solomon 5:2.

Revelation 3:20 — ***"Behold, I stand at the door and knock."***

Song of Solomon 5:2 — ***"The voice of my beloved, he knocks at the door. Open to me my beloved."***

See that? Jesus promises to restore the intimacy of lovers, the courting of the bride and groom. Is it any wonder then that the rest of the book of Revelation leads up to the revealing of the Bride of the Lamb?

"Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (19:9).

"Open the door to me my beloved and I will come in to you."

If that were not enough, Jesus goes on to promise more: ***"To the one who overcomes, I will grant the right to sit down with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne"*** (3:21). He comes through the door not only to sit at the table with us but to lift us up to his throne.

"Let me in."

You may have never turned the door handle. You know that you are spiritually bankrupt, naked and blind. You know you need what Jesus offers. Open the door. He will come in.

Or you may have opened the door some time ago. But for whatever reason have slowly, but surely, excluded him. That is why it all feels so empty and stale, so dry and dirty. Welcome him back in. Turn the handle again. He will come in again.

Or you may have opened the front door of the house and have let him in the living room. But the other doors to other rooms have not been opened.

He stands before each of them and knocks. The Amen and Arche will never be satisfied until he has access to every room. Neither will we, for all the rooms were made for him. Only he can make all the other rooms what they were made to be. He is moving through the house knocking at every door.

Will you open them?

