

A SERIES THROUGH THE REVELATION

LAODICEA: CROWDED BUT CHRISTLESS | 2.17.22

I. THE CITY OF LAODICEA (Rev. 3:14-22)

- A.** The city of Laodicea was almost due east of Ephesus and about 40 miles Southeast of Philadelphia. Laodicea was a democracy as their very name means ‘the rule of the people.’ Paul knew of this Church during his first imprisonment (A.D. 60-62) though he had never visited it (**Colossians 2:1**). He also wrote them an epistle that we don’t have today (**Colossians 4:16**).
- B.** This city was like many others that Jesus addressed; wealthy, and important in the eyes of men. In 60 A.D. the same earthquake that leveled Sardis, and Philadelphia, also crippled Laodicea. But instead of receiving money from Rome for its rebuilding, they did it on their own.
- C.** Their wealth came from its location, which was right in the middle of three very important trade roads. The convergence of these roads became the prominent factor of its wealth.
- D.** The two most important things that were exported from Laodicea was beautiful black wool used to make carpets/clothing and ‘Phrygian Powder’ used to make a renowned eye ointment/salve.
- E.** Recent archeological digs in the city have unearthed houses that measure around 3,000+ sq. ft. with centralized water systems and indoor plumbing. Unlike most cities, their water had to be transported nearly 6 miles through a massive aqueduct made of stone. When the water started its journey to Laodicea from Hierapolis it left a hot spring with temperatures upwards of 95 degrees Fahrenheit.
- F.** But because of the 6-mile aqueduct, though the water left hot, it was only tepid or lukewarm by the time it reached the city. Scholars say that because of the long distance the water had to travel the aqueduct collected calcium deposits, which could cause some to either spit out the tepid water, or even vomit it out.
- G.** When it comes to the messenger delivering this letter, they might have had the hardest task among all 7. This message is among the most challenging rebuke, to a outwardly prestigious congregation, in an affluent city, much like Seattle proper, Magnolia, Mercer Island, Issaquah or Bellevue (*on par with housing in Manhattan*).
- H.** The Church isn’t noted for struggling with Roman oppression or persecution from Jews. They had simply become like their surroundings. They were complacent with the Gospel, compromising truth for comfort in the city. The Church was crowded but without Christ.

II. THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA (Rev. 3:14-22)

- A.** **Revelation 3:14** *“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...”*
 - 1.** Jesus begins His ADDRESS by holding accountable those whom He Himself has set in charge of the ministry. It’s not that the Church didn’t care about Christ, it’s that the overseers didn’t care about Christ.
 - 2.** Quickly He moves into revealing three ATTRIBUTES of Himself to speak to specific things both taking place in their midst and that Jesus would shortly address.
 - 3.** Says the Amen = This is the only place in the Bible where Christ’s name appears as the Amen, as a self-description. Jesus is the ‘*so be it of God*’, the One who is true, *fixed*, and *unchanging*. It’s going to be hard for this Church to receive both his ACCUSATION and His ASSURANCE of reward.

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4. The Faithful and True Witness = John is the only one that ascribes to Jesus this title in the whole of the Bible (**John 3:11, 32, 33**). He is assuring them that in their broken, complacent state, His words and observations are trustworthy (**Matthew 16:13-14**).
 5. The Beginning of the creation of God = To a people that had grown lax in their relationship with the Lamb, it would be possible that they downplayed His divinity and made Him something less than He truly was.
 - a. Some people have used this verse to state that Christ isn't divine, He's created. But what Jesus is saying is that *"He was at the beginning with God, at creation."* If Christ isn't eternal, and not equal with God, how could He ever speak to this Church in such a straightforward way? How could He rebuke them in the way that He does? And how could He promise them such outlandish promises?
 - b. Remember, Laodicea is a neighboring city to Colossae, which shared letters among the two cities and Churches (**Colossians 1:13-18; 2:1; 4:16**).
 - c. He's presenting His resume and titles before this Church as the Amen, the One who always tells the Truth and the One who is God. He is making sure they know He's qualified to enter into their ministry and speak to them.
- B. Revelation 3:15-16** *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish that you were cold or hot. So then, because you are neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."*
1. Laodicea is only one of two Churches (Sardis) that receive no APPROVAL from Jesus about positive things in their midst. He says to them, *"I know your works, and there's nothing among you that's worth approving."*
 2. And with no approval He goes straight into His ACCUSATION of them.
 3. You are neither cold nor hot. I could wish that you were cold or hot. So then, because you are neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth = Jesus is accusing the Church of their gross compliancy and inability to deliver the Gospel of the Kingdom to the city in which they lived.
 4. There are two primary thoughts about this issue of hot and cold.
 - a. Firstly—Colossae (9mi) was known for having cool refreshing water, and Hierapolis (6mi) was known for having numerous hot springs. When Laodicea was built, the stream coming into the city was sufficient, but overtime they were forced to bring in water from Hierapolis through this long stone aqueduct. But by the time the water reached Laodicea it was tepid, and pretty much good for nothing.
 1. This school of thought sees Jesus' statements saying, *"I wish you could heal bodies like the hot springs, or give a glass of cold, refreshing water, but you can do neither. Your tepid, lukewarm, and it's good for nothing."*
 - b. Secondly—Other's see Jesus saying, *"I wish you were on fire/hot (Zestos), or even cold/angry/antagonistic, but because you're in the middle, just flat indifferent, it's repulsive to me."*
 1. *"To prefer outright rejection over a halfway response is startling, to say the least, but to profess Christianity while remaining untouched by its fire is a disaster. There is more hope for the openly antagonistic than for the coolly indifferent. The state of coldness is more conducive to a person's*
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coming to Christ than the state of lukewarmness.” -Walvoord, Robert Thomas, Revelation Vol. 1, Pg. 306

2. *“The best way to see this, is the two spectrums of being cold (away from Christ, non-believer, unsaved) and hot (fervent and on fire). So despicable did Christ find lukewarmness that He preferred to deal with an obstinate opponent of the Gospel, seeing the better chance of finding fertile soil for the message than a lukewarm person who has been around the message but doesn’t care. Anything is better than lukewarmness.” -Robert Thomas, Revelation Vol. 1, Pg. 307*

5. Because this idea of Jesus vomiting a people/Church out of His mouth doesn’t appear anywhere else in the Bible, it seems to have an almost entirely local connotation. Because they were neither cold (refreshing) or hot (healing), but just lukewarm and indifferent, they weren’t helping anyone. They weren’t just halfhearted; they were indifferent, and ineffective (*I think it’s heartsickness*).

- a. *“Lukewarmness says that the Amen and the uncreated God of the universe, are not worthy of passionate faith.” -Darrel Johnson, Discipleship On The Edge. Pg. 120-121*

C. Revelation 3:17 *“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...”*

1. Jesus continues His accusation about their indifference towards Him. Their self-appraisal was at odds with their true condition. The blessings given to this Church had become the very things He was now judging them for.
2. Their external wealth had given them the false assumption of comfort and left them in a place where they no longer dependent upon Christ for all things. There were in the opposite place of Smyrna. Smyrna was broke, but called rich, and Laodicea was wealth, but called broke.
3. Your wretched = This word only appears one other time in the New Testament and it’s used by Paul to speak of his condition before God (**Romans 7:24**). Paul was aware of his condition but not so much with this church.
4. Your miserable = This word only appears once in the New Testament as well speaking of a person who deserves eternal torment if they remain where they are (**1st Corinthians 15:19**).
5. Your poor = This speaks of one who *cowers, crouches, and begs* because of a *place of destitution*.
6. Your blind = This blindness speaks of a mental blindness. Their blindness had left them confused.
7. Your naked = They assumed they were clothed, but the Lord said they were naked.

- a. One scholar rightly said, *“The Church of Laodicea had a people that came to Church out of privilege and not patronage. Patronage says, “I support that Church” and privilege says, “that Church supports me.”*

A) Revelation 3:18 *“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 might not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent.”*

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- 1) With the strong accusation of Jesus delivered to this ministry He now gives them ADVICE on how they can get from where they currently are to where He is. Based on the 5 accusations against them (*wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked*) He tells them the three primary ways they can resolve the situation;
 - 2) Buy gold from Me, gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich = Jesus is speaking a language that materialistic people would easily understand. He is asking them to buy something they don't have money for. It's a heavenly substance not an earthly commodity.
 1. The gold from God that we buy is purchased through humility, dependency, prayer, Bible study, service, forgiveness, and radical generosity. It's a gold that passes through the fire of His testing, that only He can provide. It's the call to a cruciform life (**Luke 12:21; 1st Timothy 6:18; James 1:3; 2:5; 1st Peter 1:7; Proverbs 17:3; Zechariah 13:9**).
 - 3) Buy white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness might not be revealed = The city was exporting a beautiful wool, that was remarkably soft and black like a raven.
 1. The city considered these woolen garments something to be desired, but not Jesus. He was looking for a Church who was clothed in the righteous acts of the saints, in pure acts of worship done for others in Jesus' name.
 - (a) **Revelation 19:7-8** *"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."*
 - 4) Anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see = The city was renowned for producing an eye salve from "Phrygian powders" that was said to treat myopia. And though they were helping others with their nearsightedness, they themselves had lost sight of their own life.
 1. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can rightly touch our eyes and cause us to see what we can't see on our own. This is about daily receiving the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
 - 5) As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent = Jesus was training the Church in Laodicea through Judgment, which is the same way that He trains us. That word chasten, literally means to *scourge, inflict suffering or pain*.
 1. The only way out of indifference, the only way out of lukewarmness is zeal. The fire of love breaks off the power of indifference, or apathy, or compliancy, or lukewarmness. This is the same Greek word that was used previously in **v.16**, 'zestos', *hot, fire, zeal*.
 2. Jesus knows that this Church will be deeply saddened on that Day when they stand before Him if they don't repent. So, He doesn't mind inflicting pain today for the purpose of changing their tomorrow (**Hebrews 12:3-11**).
 3. Trusting Jesus now with our lives (salvation) should be no different than trusting His evaluation of us. When we see God rightly, we cling to conviction as the greatest gift God gives to humans (**John 16:5-15**).
- D. Revelation 3:20** *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."*
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1. To the Church that He has nothing positive to say, He appears before them in stunning tenderness as the Lover of their souls, pursuing them though they aren't pursuing Him. The Church has pushed Jesus outside and was content, while Jesus is urgently knocking in great discontent.
 2. This is the knock of voluntary love. The door only opens from the inside, not the outside. Hearing His voice is the start, but we are only healed as we open up the door, and allow Him in.
 3. Many see this as an eschatological door, like the door of His second advent (**Matt. 24:33; Mk. 13:29; Lk. 12:36; Jm. 5:9**). Either way it's a further call to reconcile with Christ, to walk out of compromise, sin, lukewarmness, indifference, and distance from Him. Both now, and when He returns.
 4. Beloved, He's longsuffering as He stands at the door of our hearts, knocking, reaching, looking, desiring us to open for Him. Beloved, opening to Him is agreeing with Him, it's turning, it's submitting under Christ, and His Church.
 - a. I find it interesting that Jesus asks them to open the door of their hearts to Him, and in just a few verses later He shows them that the door of His heart is wide open eternally in heaven.
 1. **Revelation 4:1** "After these things (the messages to the seven Churches) I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me saying, come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."
 5. Sharing a meal in the ancient world was a time of intimacy, confidence, and affection. Jesus was chided by religious leaders for eating with sinners (**Luke 15:2**), Peter was rebuked, not for preaching but eating with Gentiles (**Acts 11:3**) and Paul told us that Christians shouldn't share a meal with anyone claiming to be Christian but living in open sexual immoral lifestyle (**1st Corinthians 5:9-13**).
 6. To a Church with deep brokenness, compromise and utter separation from Christ, He offers to sit with them, sharing a meal in their brokenness and healing their lives (**John 21:1-19**).
- E. Revelation 3:21-22** "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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."
1. Some commentators assume that this must be an epilogue to the whole of the seven Churches because there's no way that Christ would speak so kindly to this Church whom He seems to be a such odds with, in the same way that He spoke to Philadelphia. They say, "impossible." But, if you know Christ, it's true!
 2. The Amen (the Truthful One), the Faithful and True Witness (The trustworthy One), and the Beginning of the creation of God (God), is giving ASSURANCE of outlandish reward to the overcomer (the responder).
 3. And for the final time, He APPEALS to the Church, that they would trade in earthly wealth which passes away for spiritual wealth that will never fade away. He's promising to take them from spiritual poverty to opulent wealth in the age to come if they will give ear and open the door allowing Him access.

III. CONNECTION BETWEEN REVELATION 1 AND REVELATION 2-3

- A. Collectively, the seven addresses to these seven Churches in Asia Minor (*modern day Turkey*) form an indispensable part of the Revelation as a whole.

- B.** And as we've mentioned previously, the messages to the Seven Churches of Revelation 2-3, are tied in profound connection to Revelation 1.
- 1. Revelation 2:1** (Ephesus), draws from **Revelation 1:13, 16.**
 - 2. Revelation 2:8** (Smyrna), draws from **Revelation 1:17-18.**
 - 3. Revelation 2:12** (Pergamos), draws from **Revelation 1:16.**
 - 4. Revelation 2:18** (Thyatira), draws from **Revelation 1:14.**
 - 5. Revelation 3:1** (Sardis), draws from **Revelation 1:4, 16.**
 - 6. Revelation 3:7** (Philadelphia), draws from **Revelation 1:5a.**
 - 7. Revelation 3:14** (Laodicea), draws from **Revelation 1:5a.**