



to the SEVEN CHURCHES

REVELATION 3:14-22

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Ethan Ezikian

I. Introduction

Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, your word says that we were dead in our trespasses - spiritually dead! But you, in your mercy and love for us, made us alive together with Christ. The same Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead also gives life to your people. So, God be merciful to us again today. Show us your love again today by sending us your Spirit to wake up our dead and dull hearts. God we are numb to you. For some of us our whole hearts are numb to you. For others parts of our heart, sections of our lives are asleep to your glory. Would you wake us up by your Spirit? Give us ears to hear what the Spirit says to the church. Amen.

Greeting

Well good morning! My name is Ethan. I'm grateful you're here. I'd love for you to get your eyes on that text from Revelation 3 that was just read.

Intro Series

Since the beginning of the summer we've been working our way through seven letters from Jesus to seven churches in the Book of Revelation. We've been spending time in this book because Revelation is a letter written to stir up the flames of faithfulness and courage in God's people. It's for the churches that received it when it was written and for the church throughout history as we navigate life as disciples of Jesus the world of sin and suffering, waiting for Christ to make all things new. And next week will be our last week in the book of Revelation (Pastor Kyle will be wrapping up our time in the book), but today we are coming to the last letter: the letter to the church in Laodicea.

Now, I don't know if you notice a pattern in my preaching, but what I usually try to do is spend a little time introducing the sermon, then I'll tell you the main point that I'm trying to get across in the message, and then we'll start to excavate the text of scripture together. That's my normal pattern, but today I want to do a little bit of excavating in the text before I tell you the main point that I think the Lord would have us take away.

Verse 14-16

Of the seven letters, the letter to the church in Laodicea is probably the most well known today. And my theory is that it's probably the most well known of the seven letters for a few reasons. One is that Jesus uses really striking language here: that he is going to spit this church out of his mouth. In fact,

our english translation even kind of softens the imagery. The Greek word more literally translates as vomit. “because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will [vomit] you out of my mouth.” Anyone enjoy the thought of vomit? I’m terrible. If I think about it hard enough right now I will start to gag. And Jesus says of this church, “I will spue you out of my mouth like vomit because you are lukewarm.”

Laodicea was a city situated at the crossroads of major trade routes, so in one sense it had a really great location, but there was one problem: There was no good water. Now the towns nearby had water. Heiroplis to the north was famous for its hot springs. Colossae to the south had cold and pure water, but Laodicea had no water, so they built aqueducts to pipe in water from other places. And no matter if the water was hot or cold when it started in the aqueduct, by the time it got to Laodicea the water was neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. Some of my study even said that the water, by the time it got to Laodicea, was so mineral-rich that it smelled and tasted bad and caused vomiting. And Jesus says of this church - you’re just like your water. I wish you were hot or cold - it’s not a metaphor that communicates that Jesus wishes they were either all the way in or all the way out - hot or cold. He’s saying, I wish you were good for something like the hot and cold waters, but you’re not. You’re like the rancid water of your city. You’re not good.

Jesus has some strong things, some difficult things to say to the church in this city and if we are going to hear the strong rebuke of Christ, then we need to trust the opinion and authority of the rebuker. He also has clear advice for the church. If we are going to head his counsel and put his advice into practice, then we need to trust the counselor. This is why Jesus introduces himself in the way he does in verse 14: he says he is, “the Amen, the faithful and true witness.” Jesus says to an unfaithful church, “I am the one who has been and will be faithful and true. My counsel can be trusted.” Not only that, but he says he is, “the beginning of God’s creation.” Which doesn’t mean that Jesus is a being God created (because that would contradict what Jesus says about himself being the eternal God), it does mean that Jesus is, in his resurrection and exalted place of victory over the grave, is one in whom God’s promises are fulfilled, who has the authority and the power to give his people everything they need when they put their trust in him.

Jesus introduces himself as the God who is faithful and true, who is the living proof of God’s fulfilled promises and this gives him the authority and the credibility to say hard things to this church. And we’ve already talked about his diagnosis of the church in Laodicea: they are lukewarm and he will vomit them out of his mouth. These are just the beginning of the hard things. What has made the church in Laodicea so nauseating to Jesus? In the rest of the letter Jesus is going to tell us why he wants to spit them out and how they have to change. Jesus is saying to the church in Laodicea and he’s saying to us: There is a pride that comes from affluence and leads to condemnation *from* Jesus and there is a humility that comes from need and leads to exaltation *with* Jesus. We must repent of our prideful self-reliance and humble ourselves to depend on Christ for everything.

II. Pride That Comes from Affluence

Jesus tells us pretty plainly why he will vomit the Laodicean Church out of his mouth. Look at 16 again: ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ **For** you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,...

It's so interesting - we've already seen how Jesus is contextualizing the words of his correction by using the imagery of being hot, cold, and lukewarm, just like the water situation in Laodicea. Well he's going to keep using things that the city is known for as metaphors for the spiritual condition of the church. Outside of having bad water, Laodicea was a pretty posh place. It was at the crossroads of major trade routes. It was known in the region as the center for banking, it was famous for exporting luxurious textiles - particularly a black wool that would be used to make expensive clothing, and it was also famous as a medically advanced city. People would come from all over to get a salve for the eyes from Laodicea that was said to cure blindness. This was a prosperous city! As an example of how prosperous they were, at one point Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake and the Roman Government offered them money to rebuild, but the city was so rich that they refused the help and rebuilt on their own. And out of that came the city's motto: "We Need Nothing."

So Laodicea was a wealthy, prosperous city that proudly proclaimed it needed nothing. And what happened in the church in Laodicea was that instead of living as a counter-cultural community in the city, the church was apparently letting the culture of the city shape them because Jesus says to the believers: "You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." There was a self-reliant pride that arose in the church. The affluence of their city had given them a false sense of security, and had caused them to confuse their economic prosperity and comfort with their spiritual vitality.

You know, before we planted Union Church, pastor Kyle and I did a fair amount of research about Brighton and Howell and the rest of Livingston County. We wanted to learn about the culture here. We wanted to understand the ways people thought, the assumptions they made, the ways that the culture aligned with the gospel and the ways that the culture came up against the teachings of Jesus. Some of the most helpful insights I got were from conversations I had with other local pastors or with community leaders. I remember one person I sat down with who was not a christian, but worked in education at the county level told me about his frustration with the culture in Livingston County - that the people here were more interested in preserving their comforts than caring for the less fortunate. He said that Livingston County was full of selfish-individualism. I remember asking another local pastor what he thought were the barriers to the gospel here. He said to me: "When you have all the money you need, when you live just down the road from some of the best medical care in the state, when your life is secure in every way, why do you need God?" He went on to describe the culture of Livingston County as one which views faith as supplemental - something that is a helpful, but unnecessary addition to your life.

In Laodicea and in the communities we live in today - (in whatever community, not just Livingston County. I think just by virtue of living in the USA, regardless of our income here, we live in a level of comfort that makes us part of the wealthy minority in the world) - In Laodicea and in the communities we live in today followers of Jesus are in danger of living in an economically prosperous way while

believing that they are doing just fine spiritually. They're in danger of saying, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing" and yet not realizing their true spiritual state - that they are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Jesus was nauseated by the Laodiceans lukewarmness and their lukewarmness had to do with their feeling of self-sufficiency. They couldn't see their true condition and they thought they had no needs. They got by in life without Christ. They lived as functional atheists - bearing the name of Christian, but walking through life without any urgency about following Christ and leaning on him. Have you ever stepped back and evaluated your life and the degree to which you've brought Christ into it? Is Christ a part of your habits, your home life, your parenting, your grand parenting, your work, your retirement, your hobbies, your friendships, your finances, your hopes for the future? Listen this deserves more than just a cursory once over evaluation. This deserves deep consideration. I am a pastor. I study the bible and talk about God with people and pray and that is my vocation and yet this week as I prepared I was so convicted by the reality that there are parts of my life that are so comfort-driven that I been lulled into an apathetic autopilot that doesn't include any sort of reliance on Christ. Let me get more specific - my time can be comfort driven. I live in the luxury of a home with internet and streaming services and often I will choose the comfort of entertainment at the end of the day (just neutral shows, nothing inherently sinful about them), but I don't have any thought of how spending one to two hours on a show late at night will affect my ability to desire to wake up and be in the word the next morning. Here's another example - my worries are comfort driven. Recently I had several things around the house stop working or need attention in a way that really inconvenienced me and put a little pressure on my pocket book. Nothing terrible, but I felt it. And I was so knocked out of whack because the comfort of having a little wiggle room in my time and in my money was taken away, and I was defaulting into an attitude of self-reliance, not even thinking about bringing my cares to the Lord in prayer. I was dealing with my problems like a functional atheist. Or even in my journey as a disciple of Jesus, when it comes to overcoming sin in my life. So often I default to the things that I can do to get rid of my sin, steps that I can take and I take no steps toward relying on Jesus and his strength. This happens all the time in my life. And this is the kind of lukewarmness that had taken over the church in Laodicea. They had no need for Jesus and so following him became supplemental - a nice, but not necessary portion of their lives.

Friends, we need to ask the Lord to reveal to us if this is present in our hearts! Otherwise we will continue to live in prideful self-reliance, thinking that all is well, not knowing that our prideful lack of dependence on Christ betrays that we don't truly know him at all and that we will be vomited out of mouth.

This is the pride that that comes from affluence and leads to condemnation *from* Jesus. But the good news is that the Lord reproves us not so that he can reject us, but to discipline us That's what he says i verse 19, right? His reproof is for our sanctification. And he doesn't just reprove his church. He also gives counsel on how to put our self-reliant pride to death. Jesus invites us into a humility that comes from need and leads to exaltation *with* Jesus.

III. Humility that Comes Out of Need

After Jesus calls out what the Laodicean church can't see, "you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked"(17). He, in his loving kindness, gives us a path away from his reproof. Jesus introduced himself as the one who was the faithful and true witness and now he gives faithful and true counsel. Look at verse 18. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹

The church in Laodicea doesn't need Laodicea's wealth - they need gold that only Jesus can give them. They were spiritually poor and they needed "buy from {Jesus} gold... so that you [might] be rich." Now, this doesn't mean that Jesus was looking for a transaction with them as if they really could buy the gold they needed from him. God says in Isaiah 55, "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." (Is 55:1). There is no transaction here. The price has already been paid on the cross. Jesus invitation is for the church to let go of seeking wealth from material prosperity and to instead find their true wealth in Him.

And in the same way, Jesus invites them to cover their nakedness not with the luxurious black wool of Laodicea, but in robes washed white with the blood of Christ. Jesus has salve for their eyes that will heal their spiritual blindness and it is not the salve of Laodicea, but a healing only he can give.

All three of these things - gold, white garments, salve to anoint our eyes - these are all things that only Jesus can give. The point is that followers of Jesus need to depend upon Jesus - not just for the "churchy," "spiritual" things, but for everything. We, as his people, are called to a radical humility that says,

- Jesus, I have all these material things, but they will consume me if I don't have you and if I don't have you I am nothing
- Jesus, I have these gifts and talents and skills, but I cannot make things happen unless you will work through me
- Jesus, I am battling this sin, but I will never have victory unless you intervene in my life
- Jesus, I am limited in everything I do but you are limitless. I need you to act in my life.
- Jesus, I am trying my best to share the gospel with this person, but unless you act my efforts will be in vain
- Jesus, I am trying to live in contentment, but I need more of you.

Friends, we might have all things this world can offer, but if we don't have Jesus we will have nothing. And on the other hand, we may have nothing - we may be wretched, pitiable, poor, naked, and blind in the world's eyes, but if we have Christ, we have more than enough.

If you are recognizing the pride of self-reliance in your life and you need to ask the Lord to humble your heart, there are two scriptures that are precious to me that I want to challenge you to pray:

- "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

- “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)
- “³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:31-32)

IV. Humility That Leads to Exultation

That last verse is what Christ promises to the Laodicean church. Look at verse 20 - 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 eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered 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.”

Jesus has been functionally cast out of the hearts and lives of the church in Laodicea. He stands at the door and knocks to be let back in. But if we will humble ourselves and let him into the nooks and crannies of our lives, if we will give up our self-reliance and exchange it for dependence on him, Jesus promises the opposite of vomiting us out of his mouth. He promises to eat with us, to have fellowship with us. And not only that, he promises exultation with him.

Listen, to reject the self-reliance of the world and humble ourselves to dependence on Christ could mean sacrificing material comforts, it could mean a loss of short-term gratification... but Jesus promises that whatever you lose in this life because of following him will be restored to you and then some.

The feast he’s promising to those who conquer - that is the marriage supper of the lamb in the new Jerusalem in Revelation 19. The throne he’s promising to share - this is the throne that is his because he has conquered the grave and paid for our sin. After he offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God and all the enemies of God will be made his footstool (Heb 10:12) and one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord (Phil 2), and he will reign over the new heavens and the new earth for eternity and he will be exalted forever and ever. And this is an inheritance that he promises to share with those who belong to him. Just as Jesus humbled himself, lived faithfully, humbled himself even to the point of death, and then was exalted in resurrection, so also the Laodiceans (and you and I) are to live faithfully, humble ourselves even to the point of suffering and death, knowing that only the faithful and the humble will be exalted.

VI. Conclusion

Jesus’ letter to this church that existed in a city so far away, so one that I believe is incredibly applicable to churches like ours in communities like ours today. I’m haunted by a documentary I watched where an Iranian Christian couple came to the United States to flee persecution and after spending a few months here, the wife began to beg to go back to Iran, back to persecution. And when she was asked why she said, “There is a Satanic lullaby here, and all the Christians are sleepy, and I

am feeling sleepy.” This haunts me because this sister perceived here in the west a kind of threat to her faith that was greater than the persecution she could experience in Iran and it was the threat of becoming spiritually sleeping, of becoming less and less aware of our need for Jesus and more and more settled in with the lullaby of our comforts.

Now understand me here, my argument has been that there is a pride that comes from affluence and leads to condemnation *from* Jesus and there is a humility that comes from need and leads to exultation *with* Jesus. What I don’t want you to hear is that money is evil, being wealthy means you’ll be rejected by God, and poverty is an automatic holy card. Money is a neutral tool. Wealth can be a great blessing from God and can be used wisely and beautifully to bless others for God’s glory. You’re not automatically condemned if you are wealthy. But because of your wealth you are uniquely vulnerable to the lullaby of comfort and materialism and the illusion that you need nothing. And so my exhortation to you is to listen to the counsel of Jesus, come to him full of need, depend on his strength to meet the needs that the things of this world can never meet, and rest on the promise that he who did not spare his own son will give us all things in Christ.