

Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church

Text: Revelation 3.14–22

Theme: Jesus calls us to a wholehearted discipleship.

Introduction — Well, here we are; we've nearly come full-circle

- began on coast of Aegean Sea in Ephesus; church straight on doctrinally, but were sliding backwards in love for Lord & one another
- up the coastal route is Smyrna, whose little church was poverty-stricken, but rich in heavenly treasure as they suffered severe persecution
- A bit more north and just inland was Pergamum; believers here were compromising their faith with things of world & Jesus calls them out
- moving clearly inland now is Thyatira, smallest & least significant of the cities, whose Christians were accommodating themselves to false teachers big time
- it can get worse, as we move southeast in the circle and come to Sardis, and the church there which is nearly dead
- next to last is the church in Philadelphia, another suffering church that Jesus can only commend for their enduring faith

Complete our journey w/ Jesus, walking thru these lamp stands

- come to Laodicea, a rich and prosperous city
- she sat on the hub of all the major trade routes, thus the wealth was great there
- all this wealth made Laodicea the center of banking for the great region
- well-known medical school also existed, specializing in ophthalmic medicine: eyes

Church there most likely begun by Epaphras from Colossae

- mentioned in letter to Colossians; Paul sent a separate letter to them
- been around for 40 years, perhaps, by this time
- yet had stagnated, grown smug & self-sufficient, independent & stale
- Jesus comes and has nothing for which to commend them
- His rebuke is particularly biting, the harshest of any
- not the kind of followers Jesus calls to Himself
- instead, Jesus calls us all to wholehearted discipleship

But before we hear that, let's see...

I. Jesus: the Amen Over Everything, vv. 14

- Jesus' description, like all others, is unique for Laodicea

1. Words of the Amen

- amen, a word we're accustomed to: use it to close our prayers
- there, means: so be it, Lord; make these requests so
- word literally means "truly, most certainly"
- one detail stands out: Jesus is THE Amen
- means all He says is certain and will more surely come to pass
- so much so, God the Father calls Him the Amen
- **2 Corinthians 1.20** – *"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."*

2. Faithful & True Witness

- add to that truth this truth and all He says is sure & certain
- He will always & only ever speak truth
- He will never lead astray nor deceive anyone

3. Beginning of God's Creation

- this does NOT mean He was created first; flies in face of Bible
- no, it means, as in Colossians 1.15–17, He is source of all
- *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*
- John 1.1–3 affirms this great truth
- *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

4. Jesus' credentials on display

- imagine going to Dr's office for serious chest pains
- only one you see is janitor, emptying wastebaskets
- he doesn't know where Dr is, but is willing to help you
- he's worked there for 20+ years & has picked up a lot
- he thinks you have potential life-threatening issues
- instructs you to check into hospital immediately
- but he's not qualified, has no credentials
- then, at that moments, in walks your physician
- in his office, you see framed credentials all over wall
- when he examines you, he says your situation is critical
- you trust his diagnosis — why?
- based upon his credentials, experience & work
- Jesus has just laid out Himself before Laodicea
- so they'd best listen to His diagnosis & follow His instructions

This is wise, since what we see is...

II. Laodicea: A Church That Makes Jesus Sick, vv 15–18

- Laodicea is a trading center, so help us to see Jesus visit here
- see image of Him drinking their water, trading His wares & Dr offering His medicine

1. Need a drink?

- helpful to know Laodicea here
- just to the north was Hieropolis; known for hot springs
- these springs had great therapeutic & medicinal value
- to the southeast was Colossae, known for her crystal clear water
- Laodicea, however, middle of Lycus Valley, had no water source
- so aqueducts built to receive water from Hieropolis & Colossae
- trouble was: by time either water arrived; practically useless
- Jesus says it best: lukewarm, tepid, nauseating
- when I study, cup of piping hot coffee by my hand
- get involved, lost in thought, forget about coffee

- when I do take a sip, cooled off: gross!
- some of you liked cold brew or iced coffee; room temp though?
- Jesus puts it sharply: spit you out
- word is one we get word *emesis*: medical field, emesis basin
- used for you to throw up into when sick
- Jesus tells Laodicea: your works, your Christian living is making me sick
- you need to change – and fast – or I will come & spit you out
- what a judgment!

2. Jesus, the Merchant

- sees a church that thinks it is rich, blessed, self-sufficient
- but His diagnosis is considerably different, **end of v. 17**

1) perhaps worst thing a church could ever say

- *“I need nothing”* — translated that: I have no reason to cling to Jesus Christ for anything; I’m good on my own, thank you very much
- think they’re rich, when actually spiritually bankrupt
- so Jesus offers them three things they would have known well

2) Gold refined by fire

- remember: Laodicea very wealthy
- century prior, destroyed by earthquake
- when Rome offered to rebuild city, Laodicea said no thanks
- we don’t need you; we have enough wealth to do it ourselves
- Jesus says: my gold has been refined by fire
- impurities burned away; this should be your treasure
- *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

(Matthew 6:19–21 ESV)

- *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

(Colossians 3:1–2 ESV)

3) White garments

- another luxury item from Laodicea: black wool
- only from there, very expensive, gorgeous
- Laodiceans very proud of this material
- Jesus says: worthless; instead you need My garments
- instead, you parade around like Emperor wearing new clothes
- actually naked!
- but this is how God sees us already:
- *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

(Hebrews 4:13 ESV)

- but Jesus wants to clothe us with His righteousness

4) Eye Salve

- Laodicean school of medicine renown throughout region
- speciality: eye salve to help various levels of blindness

- Laodicean Christians were spiritually blind & didn't know it
- Jesus wants to give them healing touch to cure self-deception
- John Newton, former slave-trader turned pastor, hymn-writer knew the glory of this healing grace: once was blind but now I see
- **Ephesians 1.15:** *"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints"*

Harsh words? Yes, but truth...and merciful because now Jesus calls them to...

III. Repent & Be Restored to Sweet Fellowship, vv. 19–20

- for Jesus to say He'd rather vomit than tolerate this is jarring
- yet He is preeminently merciful, for He issues call to come back
- like prophet Isaiah to Judah so long ago
- *"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.*

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

(Isaiah 55:1–3 ESV)

1. Harsh judgment a sign of His loving mercy

- reminiscent of Hebrews 12.5–6
- *And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."*
- as bad as it is, Jesus still comes & offers mercy
- be zealous, be earnest, get serious about holiness & godliness
- you're so smug & self-sufficient; that's not a follower of Mine
- stop playing around with Christianity
- repent: same call to four others that needed correction
- evidence of genuine repentance? following wholeheartedly
- no more trying to serve two masters

2. Jesus knocks

- often used as an evangelistic appeal; fits the spirit of what's happening here
- but not the meaning of the text here
- while true, probably many unbelievers in this church; unregenerate members
- what's happening here is we see Jesus outside...the church
- supposedly His people, but they live without Him, even to point of rejecting
- Jesus is supposed to be standing in the midst of His church
- in pulpit, in singing, in prayers, when they come to the Table
- but here is Jesus, withdrawn, outside, waiting for repentance of heart
- then that door opens & He comes in to sweet fellowship with them
- remember: these are already believers, no matter how nominal
- so, this is not an evangelistic verse for unbelievers
- Jesus is asking for something different here, not conversion
- what is He asking? to have sweet fellowship restored
- this is what sitting & eating a meal represents: fellowship

3. At this point, Jesus is addressing individuals: anyone

- if any believer in this tepid, smug, self-reliant church repents
- Jesus comes to those striving to independence: stop it!
- exercising self-sufficiency: cease now
- Laodiceans known for this: Jesus – stop acting like the world
- they came together, sang songs, prayed, heard sermon
- even partook of Lord's Table, but no true communion

4. Wonder how this applies to us today?

- John 14.23, Jesus calls out:

Jesus answered him, *"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."*

- this is the fruit of buying & receiving from Jesus
- so, what can be done if you find yourself in this position?
- Jesus is outside, your heart is lukewarm, making Christ nauseous
- first, face up to your condition
- Jesus here: I know your works & you don't know you're wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked
- confess your sins, acknowledge your heart's cold deadness
- then, return to fundamentals of the gospel
- have white garments placed upon you; if believer, remember they are on you
- use medicine of Word & Spirit Jesus offers to have your eyes opened again
- third, submit to His lordship once again
- "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent"
- see that Jesus has merely withdrawn, not left you entirely
- He loves you still and is mercifully calling you back into fellowship with Him
- finally, be zealous for Him: what does that look like?
- be hot, like Heiropolis' hot water that helped strengthen and heal others
- be cold, like Colossae's springs, whose presence brought refreshing to others
- repentance is something only God can grant
- but by crying out in that repentance, you rekindle that flame
- you've quenched the Holy Spirit; allow His breath to breathe new life back
- these passages are given as not just mere descriptions
- they are meant to serve as warning calls: don't go here! turn back!
- remember, each letter ends with same admonition:
- He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches
- and so we turn to hear & receive His precious & very great promises
- *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*

As stern as it looks, Jesus, faithful & true witness, holds out promise that we'd be...

IV. Conquerors Together, v. 21

- the lowest depths of awful Christian living had been reached here
- yet, they are promised the highest heights with Christ
- from Jesus' gag reflex wanting to vomit them out to sitting in complete fellowship with them in a banquet hall
- told they would sit with Christ on His throne
- all things put under Christ's feet, sits at right hand of Father
- all who overcome these sins: same glory awaits!
- cease the pursuit of earthly glories; go hard after God Himself

- He has conquered, you can too, thru Him!
- just remember: this overcoming is what flips world upside down
- the way up is down: dying to self, only to be raised up to glory
- losing is winning: taking up a cross in this life to get a throne later
- give up your self-reliance and give self over completely to Christ

Conclusion — Jesus stands here this morning, calling to each one

- words of hymn, 250 years old, speak still today:
Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy, hymnal #486

1. Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
 Weak and wounded, sick and sore!
 Jesus ready stands to save you,
 Full of pity, love and power.
 I will arise and go to Jesus,
 He will embrace me in His arms;
 In the arms of my dear Savior,
 Oh, there are ten thousand charms.
2. Come, ye thirsty, come, and welcome,
 God's free bounty glorify;
 True belief and true repentance,
 Every grace that brings you nigh.
 I will arise and go to Jesus,
 He will embrace me in His arms;
 In the arms of my dear Savior,
 Oh, there are ten thousand charms.
3. Come ye weary, heavy laden,
 Lost and ruined by the fall;
 If you tarry till you're better,
 You will never come at all.
 I will arise and go to Jesus,
 He will embrace me in His arms;
 In the arms of my dear Savior,
 Oh, there are ten thousand charms.
4. View Him prostrate in the garden;
 On the ground your Maker lies;
 On the bloody tree behold Him;
 Sinner, will this not suffice?
 I will arise and go to Jesus,
 He will embrace me in His arms;
 In the arms of my dear Savior,
 Oh, there are ten thousand charms.
5. Lo! The incarnate God ascended,
 Pleads the merit of His blood;
 Venture on Him, venture freely;
 Let no other trust intrude.

I will arise and go to Jesus,
He will embrace me in His arms;
In the arms of my dear Savior,
Oh, there are ten thousand charms.