

Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church

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[0 : 00] Well if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could turn to the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation and Revelation chapter 3.

And we're concluding our study of these seven churches. Seven churches in the book of Revelation.

And this evening we're considering the letter to the church in Laodicea. So Revelation chapter 3, it's page 1, 2, 3, 7. And we're reading at verse 14.

Where Jesus says, and to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

I know your works, you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

[1 : 11] For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 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. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

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.

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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

What would Jesus say about your church? That's the question we've been asked as we've studied these seven letters to the churches in the book of Revelation.

[2 : 25] What would Jesus say about your church? What would Jesus say about Barba's free church? And as we said before, it's a very searching question.

Because what would Jesus say about the spiritual condition of Barba's free church? Would he condemn us? Would he commend us? Would he comfort us? Would he have concerns about us? What would Jesus say about Barba's free church? And as we said again and again, these letters to the seven churches, were to view them as the results of a spiritual health check.

Dr. Jesus, the great physician of souls, he's giving the churches in Asia, which is now modern day Turkey, Jesus is revealing the spiritual condition of their soul.

But of course, the reason Jesus is giving these results of his spiritual health check is because Jesus wants his church, he wants his church to be faithful and obedient in a world that's hostile to the gospel.

[3 : 29] And that's what the book of Revelation is all about. It's all about revealing Jesus Christ as the exalted and reigning Savior, so that the church will live faithful and obedient lives in the face of opposition and even persecution.

And these seven churches, we've said it again and again, they symbolically represent the whole church of Christ. Therefore, the seven letters to the churches, they apply to every church.

They apply to every church in every generation. They apply to us here tonight. And we're to take heed to them so that we will apply what Jesus says to us.

And we will apply it in our own lives and to our own congregation. But when we come to the church in Laodicea, which is, as we said, the last of the seven churches, we read here that Laodicea was the lukewarm church.

And I just want us to see what Jesus has to say to the church in Laodicea. He has three things to say to her. He has a word of condemnation, a word of counsel, and a word of consolation.

[4 : 41] A word of condemnation, a word of counsel, and a word of consolation. So if we look first of all at a word of condemnation.

A word of condemnation. Jesus says, And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

I know your works, you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Now the ancient city of Laodicea, it's now located in modern day Denizli, which is in southwestern Turkey.

And Laodicea was a wealthy city during the Roman Empire. Because Laodicea was located on this major trade route, and it was connected to other important cities who also were involved in trade.

[5 : 53] Cities like Ephesus, Smyrna, and Sardis. Which interestingly, they are some of the churches that Jesus sent letters to. But because of its location, and its trade, and it was actually a center for banking in the ancient world, Laodicea was a city that was characterized by its wealth.

In fact, the city of Laodicea, it was so wealthy that it didn't need the help of anyone else. And that was the case when the city suffered a severe earthquake in 60 AD, 30 years before this letter was written.

The city of Laodicea, it had so much wealth that the people managed to rebuild their city from their own financial resources without asking Rome for a penny.

And so Laodicea, you could say it was an independent and it was a self-sufficient city. But sadly, so was the church. The church in Laodicea thought that they could work independently and self-sufficiently.

They thought that they could do everything without the help of God. Now, we're not told who planted the church in Laodicea. It wasn't the Apostle Paul.

[7 : 11] But what's interesting is that when Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, which we read from earlier, the pastor in Colossae was a man called Epaphras.

And Epaphras, he had been converted while he was in Ephesus listening to Paul preaching. And Epaphras, having been converted in Ephesus, he went back to Colossae and he went to plant a church there.

And he became the minister of the congregation in Colossae. And now I mention Epaphras because at the end of his letter, Paul says that he had a concern for the Colossians and the Laodiceans.

And in his letter to the Colossians, Paul commends Epaphras to the Colossians for his dedication and his zeal in the work of the gospel among them. And we read in Colossians chapter 4 that Paul says, Epaphras has struggled on your behalf and he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

And you know, what's fascinating is that Colossae was just a neighbouring city to Laodicea and Hierapolis. And so it seems that this man Epaphras, he planted the church in Colossae, in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

[8 : 33] But sadly, over 30 years has now passed since then. And the church in Laodicea was different to the church that Epaphras had planted because the church now wavered in their commitment to their Christianity.

And like the church it was, like the church of Pergamos, which compromised its Christianity, the church in Laodicea followed suit. As you know, there was this constant pressure upon Christians in the first century to partake in emperor worship, where they were to bow down before the statue of the emperor and confess Caesar is Lord.

They were to sprinkle the incense on the altar to the Caesar. They were to confess him as Lord. In fact, it was Domitian. He was the first Roman emperor. He was the first Roman emperor who declared himself to be a god whilst he was still living.

All the other Roman emperors, they were deified after they had died. But not so with Domitian. He wanted the Christians to worship him. He wanted the Christians to bow down to him and confess him as their Lord.

And of course, for a Christian to do that, it was a contradiction of their confession. Because for a Christian, Jesus is Lord. And to confess Caesar as Lord would be to deny Jesus.

[9 : 58] And Christians, they were being threatened in Laodicea, they were being threatened with extortion, with exile, or even execution. They were being threatened so as to ensure that they would bow down before the image of the beast and receive the mark of the beast.

And of course, the image of the beast was the emperor. The mark of the beast was Caesar as Lord. You were known by your confession. That was your mark.

But those who refused, those who refused to confess Caesar as Lord, they received extortion. They were blackmailed. They were told that they could no longer buy or sell goods within the Roman Empire, which was growing all the time.

They couldn't buy and sell goods, which meant immediate poverty. Others, they were exiled. Just like the apostle John. It was the emperor Domitian who exiled the apostle John to the Isle of Patmos.

And he exiled him there because John refused to submit to the emperor's authority. He refused to confess Caesar as Lord. But failure to confess Caesar as Lord, it not only brought extortion where you couldn't have any money, it not only brought exile where you're exiled somewhere far away from your home, it also brought execution.

[11 : 20] You were executed for your faith and commitment to Jesus Christ. But not so for the Laodiceans. Because there was no commitment to Jesus Christ.

Just compromise. The Christians in Laodicea, they were wealthy and self-sufficient. They were living wealthy and self-sufficient lives.

And they all knew that if they confessed Caesar as Lord, if they didn't confess, they would be extorted or exiled or executed.

But you know, instead of standing up for the truth and what they believed in and what they confessed and said that they were committed to, they said they were Christians. But for the sake of comfort in this life, the Laodiceans compromised their faith.

For the sake of comfort in their short life, the Laodiceans compromised their faith. And what we see here is that Jesus has something to say to them.

[12 : 29] It says in verse 14, to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. This letter to the church in Laodicea begins the same way as all the other letters with the phrase to the angel of the church.

And as we said before, the angel of the church, it wasn't a guardian angel. It wasn't a spirit within the church. The angel of the church is the pastor of the church. Because the word angel, it can also be translated as messenger.

And that's what the pastor of a church is. He's God's messenger to God's people. And the spiritual health and condition of a church, it's the responsibility of the pastor.

It's the pastor's responsibility to ensure that his people are being fed and taught and challenged the word of God correctly. And so Jesus, he addresses the letter to the angel of the church.

But notice how he describes himself. Every description is different with every letter. Jesus says to the Laodiceans that he is the Amen.

[13 : 39] He is the Amen. Amen. And the word Amen, it refers to something that is certain or true. In the ancient world, the word Amen, it was used as a verbal seal of truth.

It was a confirmation of trustworthiness. And Jesus said this in order to give his seal of truth and to emphasize that what he's about to say is absolutely true and that you're not to doubt what he's saying one bit.

that's what Jesus often said. He often used those words. He said, Amen, which is translated or often described as verily, verily or truly, truly.

Amen. Amen. And he wanted to give his seal of approval. You see it often in the Gospels. Verily, verily, truly, truly. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. And so what Jesus is saying is that he is the Amen. He is the ultimate truth. His words are reliable and they're absolutely true.

[14 : 47] And all the promises of God, they're found to be yea and Amen in Christ. But then Jesus says, he is the faithful and true witness.

And this goes beyond the Amen. His verbal seal of truth, it goes beyond that because it emphasizes that what Jesus says is without error and it's without exaggeration.

Therefore, the faithful and true witness will always give to us the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But more than that, he then says at the end of verse 14, he is the beginning of God's creation.

Meaning that he is the Word of God. He is the Word of God. And is that not how John opened his Gospel? In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God.

And as the Word of God, all things were made through him and without him there was nothing made that was made. And so what we have to see here in Jesus' self-description is that he affirms that he is the truth and that his words are true.

[15:59] And this is relevant to the Laodiceans because they weren't being true. They were compromising the truth. They were exchanging the truth for a lie.

They were confessing Caesar as Lord instead of Jesus as Lord. And because of their compromise, and the contradiction of their faith, Jesus is brutally honest with them.

And he says to them in verse 15, I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

Jesus uses the illustration of water and he mentions the temperature of water at its two extremes. It's either refreshingly cold or boiling hot.

And as you know, cold water, when you have a drink of cold water on a hot day, it's refreshing. And as you know, boiling hot water is useful for cleaning.

[17:12] Cold water is refreshing. Boiling hot water is useful for cleaning. But lukewarm water is useful for neither. It's no use at all.

Because lukewarm water, it tastes disgusting. And bugs grow in lukewarm water. And that's how Jesus describes the church in Laodicea.

He calls them lukewarm. He says, they're disgusting and useless. In fact, Jesus says that the church in Laodicea makes him feel sick. Because all he wants to do is vomit them out of his mouth. He wants to spew them out. And yes, it's such a vivid image. But it gets the message across very clearly. Because we all vomit things up that don't agree with us.

We vomit things up that aren't refreshing or useful. And that's what Jesus thinks of the church in Laodicea. They don't agree with him.

[18:16] They've compromised their faith. They are a complete contradiction to what they should be. And what they confess to be. And Jesus says about them, you make me sick.

You make me sick. My friend, it's a solemn word of condemnation. And because of this word of condemnation, Jesus gives, secondly, a word of counsel.

A word of counsel. Look at verse 17. Jesus says, For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you're wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

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 salved to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. So be zealous and repent. In these words, Jesus applies his words of condemnation.

[19:27] And he applies them with a word of counsel. And Jesus explains why the Laodiceans are lukewarm. He explains why they make him sick. And Jesus says that the confession of the Laodiceans, it is not Jesus is Lord.

Their confession is not I am blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. Their confession is not by grace I've been saved through faith, and that not of myself, it is the gift of God. Their confession is not I have received an inheritance that is incorruptible undefiled, that does not fade away, but is reserved in heaven for me. That's not the confession of the Laodiceans.

No, the confession of the Laodiceans was Caesar as Lord. Caesar as Lord. And because they confessed Caesar as Lord the Laodiceans, they had no problems.

They could say I am rich, I have prospered, I have need of nothing, I have all that I need and more. But can't you see my friend that it's because the Laodiceans compromised their Christianity and because they denied their saviour and because they danced to the tune of the world.

[20:41] That's because the world, that's why the world loved them. That's why the world accepted them. That's even maybe why the world respected them. But when Jesus looks at them, he wants to vomit.

their confession, their contradiction, their compromise, their inconsistency, their worldliness, it makes Jesus sick.

Because when Jesus looks at the Laodiceans, he doesn't see holiness. He doesn't see growth. He doesn't see faithfulness. He doesn't see commitment.

He doesn't see discipleship. Yes, as a church, the Laodiceans might have had a form of godliness. But they denied its power. And it makes Jesus sick.

So sick that he wants to vomit. My friend, don't ever be tempted to think that your personal confession isn't important.

[21 : 42] Confessing Jesus as Lord is vitally important. Because confessing Jesus as Lord is the difference between being saved and being lost.

That's what the Bible teaches us in Romans chapter 10. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

And of course the opposite of that is if you don't confess Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you can't be saved. you will be lost.

And I believe that's the position the Laodiceans were in. They were lost. The previous generation in Laodicea where Epaphras planted the church, they weren't lost because they confessed Jesus as Lord.

They stood firm, they didn't compromise their faith. But this new generation in the church of Laodicea, they had a form of godliness but they denied its power.

[22 : 49] Yes, they were churchgoers, yes, they attended the services, they showed their face at worship, they dressed appropriately, they sat in church, they sang the items of praise, they heard the word of God being preached but they weren't Christians.

They were lost. They may have known their Bible, they may have been brought up in a Christian home, they may have had family worship, they may even have attended Sabbath school but I tell you they were lost.

They were lost because they had no desire for holiness, they had no growth in grace, they had no interest in faithfulness, no heart for commitment, no humility for discipleship, they were lost.

Because anyone who does not confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior is lost, they are lost. And Jesus he looked at the Laodiceans and he looks at everyone who refuses to confess him as their Lord and Savior and Jesus says to them, you say I am rich, I have prospered and I need nothing, not realizing you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.

And you know my friend, what a contrast between what the Laodiceans thought of themselves and what the Lord thought of them. And I wonder if that's what you are like tonight where you are blind to the reality of yourself, you are blind to the reality of your condition, you are comfortable, you are in need of nothing, life has been good to you, everything is well, you have prospered in life, you have a good job, you have worked hard, you have built a nice house, you have acquired a good pension, you have all your family around you, your children and your grandchildren, you are in need of nothing.

[24 : 50] But what makes Jesus sick is that you don't realize that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. My friend, what makes Jesus sick is that you can't see yourself in your lost condition, you can't see that you are poor, you can't see that you can't purchase salvation for yourself and enter into God's kingdom, you can't see that you are blind to your own sin and your condition and the miseries of life, you can't see that you are naked, that you have no righteousness of your own to clothe yourself.

My friend, the church gorge in Laodicea made Jesus sick because they had a pretend religion, they had a pretend religion, they pretended everything is okay and they convinced themselves that they are not as bad as other people around them, the other people in the city, the other people in the streets, they are not as bad as the Bible says they are, but you know such arrogance, such self righteousness and blindness, there is a complete insult to Jesus because Jesus can see your condition and like the Laodiceans, you don't realize that you are miserable and wretched and poor and blind and naked.

Jesus says you make me sick, I want to vomit you out of my mouth, but you know what is remarkable is the patience of Jesus.

patience of Jesus is nearly at its end. He hasn't vomited them out, he hasn't got rid of them completely.

Jesus, he's ready to, but instead of receiving condemnation, they receive counsel. He says in verse 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 be seen and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see those whom I love I reprove and discipline.

[27 : 12] So be zealous and repent. For years the Laodiceans, they had refused to confess Jesus as Lord just so that they could enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

But you know the patience of Jesus, it was wearing thin. But what we're reminded of here is that the Lord is long suffering. He's not all suffering. Judgment will come, but he's long suffering.

The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance. And you know my unconverted friend, sitting here again tonight, like the Laodiceans for years.

You have refused to confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. For years you have put it off. For years you have put these things to the back of your mind just so that you can enjoy the pleasures of sin, whatever they may be for you.

But Jesus is reminding you of your condition tonight. You are in ruin. You're wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. And Jesus is saying to you, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich, and white garments that you may clothe yourself so that the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

[28 : 49] In other words, Jesus is saying to you personally and individually, come unto me. That's what he's saying.

Come unto me. As someone who is wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, Jesus says, come to me that you may be rich. Come to me that you may be clothed.

Come to me that you may see. Come to me. Come to me. That's what he's saying. And you know, this is what's so beautiful about the gospel.

that Jesus wanted the church in Laodicea. And he wants you tonight to know how close he is to you.

He wants you to know how close Jesus is to you. That he says in verse 20, Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

[29 : 51] If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me. Jesus wants you to know how close he is to you.

He's outside the door of your heart knocking. And he says to you, come to me. Come to me because I have a word of consolation for you.

come to me. That's what I want us to see lastly, this word of consolation which Jesus has. We've considered a word of condemnation, a word of counsel, and lastly, a word of consolation.

Where Jesus says, behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me.

I'm sure I've mentioned this before, that in the middle of the 19th century, William Holman Hunt, he produced a famous painting which now hangs in St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

[31 : 02] And this painting was named The Light of the World. Because on the canvas painting, Holman Hunt, he painted a figure depicting Jesus standing at a door, a closed door.

But the door in the painting, it's overgrown with weeds and thorns, indicating that the door had never been opened. And so in the painting, Jesus is standing at this closed door, it's overgrown, never been opened, and he's knocking.

Of course, Holman Hunt, he was illustrating the words of verse 20. But what's remarkable about the painting is that Holman Hunt, he didn't paint the door handle, on the outside of the door.

There's a door, but no door handle. He was indicating that the door could only be opened from the inside. Therefore, the only way to let Jesus in was for the one on the inside to open the door.

And that's what Jesus was saying to the church in Laodicea. That's what Jesus is saying to you tonight. 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.

[32 : 25] The church of Laodicea, it had a form of godliness, but denied its power. And like many in here tonight, the church of Laodicea, they were churchgoers, they attended the services, they showed up at worship, they dressed appropriately, they sat in church, they sang the items of praise, they listened to the word being preached, but sadly, they still weren't Christians.

They were lost. They may have known their Bible, they may have been brought up in a Christian home, as we said, they may have had family worship, they may have gone to Sunday school, but

they were lost.

Because anyone who does not confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour is lost. And like it was for the church in Laodicea, Laodicea, Jesus can see people in Bore of Church tonight as people who are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.

But Jesus says to you in the gospel, come to me, come to me that you may be rich, come to me that you may be clothed, come to me that you may see, come to me, I'm not far away, I'm only outside the door of your heart, knocking.

my friend, Jesus is standing at the door of your heart and he's knocking. And you know there are many ways in which Jesus knocks on our heart.

[33 : 50] Because he not only knocks at the door of our heart through the reading of God's word and through the preaching of God's word, Jesus also knocks on the door of our heart through all our providences, all the events in our lives, whether they're events which bring us joy and gladness or events that bring us pain, heartache and sorrow, Jesus uses every event not to drive us away from him but always to drive us to him.

My friend, Jesus uses every providence in your life to remind you of his faithfulness towards you and his persistent knocking. And tonight again, Jesus is knocking at the door and on hearing the knock at the door, you are being presented with a choice.

Will you answer the door or will you leave it? Will you respond to the knock or will you just hope the knocking stops and Jesus goes away?

Will you open the door? Will you welcome Jesus in? Or will you send him away until a more convenient season in your life? My friend, Jesus is standing at a closed door and he's knocking at the door of your heart.

But like, if I can use the illustration in some way, like Oldman Hunt's painting, there's no door handle on the outside where Jesus is standing. He's not going to force his way in.

[35 : 32] The door handle is on the inside. The door handle is on your side. You have to turn the handle by faith. You have to open the door. You have to commit your life to Jesus Christ by letting him into your heart.

And Jesus promises in verse 21 that those who open the door, I will grant him to sit down with me on my throne. My friend, what are you going to do with Jesus?

What are you going to do with Jesus? This Jesus who is persistently knocking at the door of your heart. And I know for certain he's been there for years.

That's why it's overgrown with weeds and thorns. He's been knocking for years. And are you going to say to Jesus, not today.

Are you going to say to Jesus, well, maybe some other time. I mean, are you really going to say to Jesus again, come back at a more convenient time in my life?

[36 : 53] Are you really going to say that to him again? Who is promised tomorrow? Who is promised tomorrow?

Are you really going to say to Jesus tonight, as he knocks on the door of your heart? Are you going to say to him, not today, Jesus?

Or are you finally going to give in, submit your life to him, deny self, and just welcome him in?

He's that close, that close, that he says to you tonight, behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me.

[38 : 07] It's about time you open the door. To let Jesus in. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we thank thee for thy patience with us.

How often we are so stubborn. How often, Lord, we are so disobedient. How often we turn our back upon thee. And yet, thou art one who is faithful, faithful in persisting with us, in striving with us, in continuing to knock day by day.

And Lord, we plead that those who are hearing the knock, all that they would open. Because Jesus says to them in the gospel, that if you open the door, I will come in.

Lord, bless us, we plead. Apply thy word by thy spirit, that we would respond in faith and in obedience, and follow in the footsteps of Jesus, this Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us.

Bless us in the week, Lord, that lies ahead, a week that is unknown to us, but help us to cast every care that we have into the hands of the one who cares for us. Take away our iniquity, we plead, and go before us for Jesus' sake.

[39 : 34] Amen. We shall bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 118.

Psalm 118. In the Scottish Psalter, page 398, we're singing from verse 17 down to the verse marked 23.

Psalm 118, this was Martin Luther's favourite psalm, and he loved it because of the words of verse 17. They give to us the promise of the gospel.

I shall not die but live, and shall the works of God discover. The Lord of me chastised so, but not to death given over. O set ye open unto me the gates of righteousness, then will I enter into them, and I, the Lord will bless.

Down to the verse, Mark 23, to God's praise. I shall not die, but live and shine, the works of based mark, not to date given over.

[41 : 22] O set ye open unto me the gates of righteousness, Then will I enter into them, and I the Lord will bless.

This is the gate of God by it, the just shall enter.

The well I pray for love me first, and ask my safety me.

That stone is made, a cornerstone, Which builders did despise.

This is the doing of the Lord, and wondrous sin arise.

[43 : 23] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.