

# Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if we could, this evening, for a short while, with the Lord's help, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, to Revelation chapter 3.

Revelation chapter 3, and if we read again at verse 14, where Jesus says, To the angel of the church in Laodicea write, What would Jesus say about our church?

As you know, that's a question we've been asking ourselves as we consider these seven churches, or these seven letters to the seven churches in Asia.

What would Jesus say about our church? What would Jesus say about Barba's free church? What would he say about our spiritual temperament and our spiritual temperature? What would he say in relation to all the aspects of our church?

Would Jesus commend us, or would he condemn us? Would Jesus comfort us, or correct us?

Would Jesus console us, or would Jesus critique us? What would Jesus say about Barba's free church?

[ 1 : 30 ] And it's a very searching and a very solemn question. But as we said throughout our study of these seven churches, a healthy gospel church, it's not about figures, it's about faith.

It's not about quantity, it's about quality. It's not about goals, it's about godliness. It's not about popularity, it's never about popularity. It's always about preaching, pastoring, and praying.

A healthy gospel church is focused and fixated upon Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. And that's what this revelation is all about. It's all about revealing to us that Jesus is the risen, ruling, and reigning King who is going to return.

He needs to be our focus. He needs to be first and foremost in everything. And this revelation, this apocalypse, it is for the church of Jesus Christ in every century.

That's what the seven churches symbolize. They symbolize the universal church of Jesus Christ in every century. But as we said before, they're also specific.

[ 2 : 33 ] They identify specific issues. They identify specific sins and struggles and stresses and strains that the church of Jesus Christ faces in every single century.

And this evening we've come to the seventh and last church in Asia, the church in Laodicea. And Laodicea is the lukewarm church.

The lukewarm church. And I'd like us to consider this church under just two headings, a word of condemnation and a word of counsel. A word of condemnation and a word of counsel.

So first of all, Jesus gives to the church in Laodicea a word of condemnation. He says, We've considered these seven churches and the message which Jesus Christ, who is the king and head of his church, we've considered the message that he gave to them.

And the first church that we visited, as you know, was the church in Ephesus. It was a seaport city called Ephesus. But Ephesus was, as we've said, the loveless church.

[ 4 : 10 ] Because despite its deep history and sound and solid theology, they had become legalistic in their head and loveless in their heart. We then travelled 35 miles north to another seaport city called Smyrna.

And we saw there that the church in Smyrna was the persecuted church. They refused to concede and confess that Caesar, Caesar Curios, that Caesar is Lord.

Instead, the church in Smyrna continued to confess, Jesus is Lord. We then went another 60 miles north to the acropolis city of Pergamos.

We saw that Pergamos is the compromising church. Because they were conceding to the world and they were compromising their Christianity in a city that was called and described as Satan's city.

We then turned around and headed 45 miles southeast towards Thyatira, which was the tolerant church. They were a trade town built upon business.

[ 5 : 12 ] It had prospered because of working class people. But it was because of this prospering that was taking place. Because Christian businessmen and women were being challenged to concede and compromise their Christianity, this was a detriment to the disciples in Thyatira.

Then we continued a further 30 miles southeast to the city of Sardis. Sadly, the church in Sardis, you'll remember a church that is always remembered as the dead church.

A church that you didn't want to be part of. They had this reputation of being alive to everybody else. But Jesus said, you are dead. You are dead.

Then last Wednesday, we continued our journey another 30 miles to Philadelphia. And as we said, Philadelphia was this rose between two thorns. The church in Philadelphia was the rose because it lived up to its name.

They were a faithful church. They were the church of brotherly love because as a church, they loved one another. And they loved one another as Christ had loved them.

[ 6 : 20 ] And so this evening, we come to the seventh and final church, which Jesus addressed and he admonished. And sadly, like Sardis, Laodicea was the other thorn beside the rose of Philadelphia.

Because Laodicea was the lukewarm church. Laodicea was the lukewarm church. Now, today, the ruins of the ancient city of Laodicea, they're located near the industrial city of Denizli in southwest Turkey.

But in its day, the city of Laodicea was a very wealthy city within the Roman Empire. They had built up their reputation and they had built up their riches because they were one of the key trade routes of the ancient world.

As you would expect, a lot of commerce and a lot of trade, it would come in by sea. It would come in at the seaport cities of Ephesus and Smyrna. And they would travel inland towards Pergamos in the north.

You see that. You see Philadelphia in the east and then towards Laodicea in the south. But of course, commerce and trade was not only imported to Laodicea.

[ 7 : 30 ] It was also exported from Laodicea. And that's because Laodicea was this city that was very talented in textiles. Particularly in soft black wool, where they would have this wool woven into expensive and very extravagant clothing.

But what really increased Laodicea's wealth was its intelligence and its investments. Laodicea was known for its school of medicine, which specialised in the diseases of the eye.

More than that, Laodicea was also known for being a centre of banking. It was this great place of finance in the ancient world. And needless to say, you could say that the city of Laodicea had this immense and immeasurable wealth.

In fact, the city of Laodicea was so rich. They were such a rich city that when most of the city was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60, the Roman government, which was a huge empire at that point, the Roman government, they offered to provide emergency aid and financial assistance for the city of Laodicea.

But the Laodiceans said no. They rejected and they refused any help, claiming that they could rebuild and restore and renew their city without requiring a penny from Rome.

[ 8 : 56 ] Needless to say, the Laodiceans, they saw themselves as self-supporting. They saw themselves as a self-sufficient city. They were this self-reliant people who believed that they could do things on their own without the help of anyone else, any government or even any God.

They didn't need anyone. Which is why Jesus addresses and admonishes the church in Laodicea. Because their spirit of self-sufficiency, it had not only become their passion as a city, it had also become their problem.

And Jesus repeats and he reiterates their own claim of wealth in verse 17. You look there at verse 17. Jesus says, You say, I am rich.

I have become wealthy and have need of nothing. But Jesus says that the Laodiceans, they're so inward-focused, they're so inward-facing, that you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked.

It's a word of condemnation. Jesus gives a word of condemnation. But of course, you know, the church in Laodicea, it wasn't always so proud.

[ 10 : 16 ] They weren't always so puffed up. As a people. Because there was a time in the history of the church of Laodicea when they didn't see themselves as self-sufficient and self-reliant.

There was a time in their experience where they actually came to rely upon the all-sufficient grace of God in Jesus Christ. There was a time in their experience where they came to confess and love Jesus for what he has done and what he continues to do.

Now, we're not sure who planted or pastored the church in Laodicea. But we can be sure that there were neighbouring congregations that cared for the church in Laodicea.

Because we read earlier in Colossians chapter 4, we read there in Paul's letter to that church in Colossae, that the churches in Hierapolis and Colossae, they were neighbouring congregations to the church in Laodicea.

In fact, Hierapolis, it was just to the north. It was about 12 miles north of Laodicea. And also Colossae was about 10 miles to the east of Laodicea.

[11:26] And just, I suppose, just to put it in perspective to make it more local to ourselves, our congregation here in Barvis, Ness is about 10 miles to the north and Stornoway is about 12 miles to the east.

Very similar to the situation of the church in Laodicea. And so Laodicea, Hierapolis and Colossae, they were close neighbouring congregations. They weren't far away from one another.

You could probably even say that they were part of the same presbytery. I was thinking to myself, well, if I was going to name a presbytery in that area, I'd probably call it the presbytery of Southern Asia.

But the thing about this presbytery and even this congregation is that Paul didn't plant the church in Laodicea. He didn't plant the church in Hierapolis. He didn't plant the church in Colossae.

In fact, Paul never even visited these places. He never went to any of these places on his missionary journeys. Which is why I believe that the man who planted the church in Colossae was that man we read of in Colossians 4, Epaphras.

[12:33] This man, Epaphras. Epaphras was actually from Colossae. He was a local, a local lad, you could say. But he was converted while listening to Paul preaching in Ephesus.

And undoubtedly, through the encouragement and the exhortation of the Apostle Paul, Epaphras went home. And Epaphras went home and planted the church in Colossae.

And as the church in Colossae grew, a core group of these Colossian Christians, they would have thought, well, let's plant another church. Let's go along the road to Hierapolis.

Let's go and plant a church there. And let's go and plant another church in Laodicea. And as we read towards the end of the letter to the Colossians, Paul commends Epaphras. He commends him for his pastoral care.

He commends him for his faithfulness as a preacher of the gospel. Paul said, as we read it in Colossians 4, he said, I bear witness that Epaphras has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

[13:38] More than that, Paul, we read that he went on to say, give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house. But you know, what's interesting is that this letter that we have, that we're looking at this evening, the letter to the church in Laodicea, it wasn't actually the first letter that they received as a church.

Because when Paul wrote to the Colossians, I don't know if you noticed when we read it, Paul said, when this letter, meaning the letter to the Colossians, when this letter to the Colossians has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

So Paul wrote a letter to the church of Laodicea. We don't have Paul's letter to the church of Laodicea, but we do know from his own letters that it was written and it was shared among all the other churches.

And you know, that's the thing, although Paul never met the Christians in Colossae or Hierapolis or even Laodicea, even though he never met them, he loved them and he wanted to encourage them. He wanted to exhort them in their endeavors of gospel ministry. He wanted to encourage them to keep pressing on. Now, all this sounds exciting and enthusiastic, that in the early stages of the early church, people were being converted, churches were being planted in different places, and presbyteries were being established and formed.

[15:18] But when you come to this letter, when you come to the church in Laodicea, you see that something went wrong. Something went wrong in this church.

There must have been some reason for Jesus to give a word of condemnation to a new church plant. There must have been something hindering and hampering their growth in grace. Because Jesus says 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 says that the Laodiceans had become lukewarm. They were neither cold nor hot. And of course, there was a day in the experience of this church in Laodicea that they were on fire for the Lord.

There was a day when the church was planted and the church was established and people were coming to church. People were hearing the gospel. There was a day when the Laodiceans were on fire for the Lord. There was a day when they were hot and they were holy in the work and the witness and the worship of the Lord.

[16:33] They were just like the church up the road in Philadelphia. They were faithful, like the faithful Philadelphian church. But something changed. Something was different.

Something happened. But they didn't. They weren't as hot as they once were. And yet they weren't completely cold either.

They weren't dead like the church in Sardis on the other side of Philadelphia. They were neither hot nor cold. They were just lukewarm.

The Laodiceans were lukewarm. And Jesus says, verse 16, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

And you know, Jesus, he's very blunt there. So you know, Jesus never minced his words. He always spoke his mind. And he says to the Laodiceans, you make me sick.

[17:36] That's what he says to them. You make me sick. Your self-sufficient and self-reliance makes me sick. Your attitude and your arrogance, it makes me sick.

Your pride and your possessions, it makes me sick. As lukewarm Laodiceans, you make me sick. But what was making them sick?

What was making them lukewarm? It was the loot of the Laodiceans that was making them lukewarm. It was the loot of the Laodiceans that was making them lukewarm.

Verse 17, you say, I am rich. I have prospered, and I need nothing. Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

It was the loot of the Laodiceans that were making them lukewarm. As you know, in a moment, we're going to consider the congregational accounts. Ivan's going to present them to us.

[18:42] But you know, the congregational accounts for the church in Laodicea, they were on another level completely. They were a wealthy and well-off congregation. They were financially safe and secure.

They had acquired lots of assets. They didn't worry about wages. They didn't struggle with spending. They had this healthy bank balance as a congregation. But their loot, all their money, the loot of the Laodiceans made them lukewarm.

And that's because financial wealth doesn't always equate to spiritual wealth. You can have a healthy bank balance as a congregation, but an unhealthy church.

You can have good givers, but godless attitudes. You can have a mindset that you're a self-sufficient congregation, with no need to pray about the Lord's provision or rely upon the Lord. And that was the church of Laodicea. They were self-sufficient. They didn't pray about the Lord's provision. They didn't rely upon the Lord. And you know, I was thinking, I was wondering if it was actually Laodicea that Paul was referring to.

[19:50] When he wrote to Timothy, when Timothy was the minister in Ephesus, he wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy, he said, the love of money is the root of all evil, from which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

And I was thinking, I wonder if that's, it was Laodicea he was talking about. Because it was the loot of the Laodiceans that made them lukewarm. The love of money is the root of all evil, from which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

That was the church in Laodicea. That was their, that was their church. Which is why Jesus not only gives a word of condemnation, he also gives a word, secondly, of counsel.

A word of condemnation and a word of counsel. A word of counsel, look at verse 17. Oh sorry, verse 18. Jesus says, I counsel, well actually no, we'll read from verse 17.

For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, I need nothing. Not realising 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.

[ 21 : 33 ] You know, as Jesus exposes the error of the Laodiceans, he does so graciously and lovingly.

You know, I don't think there's anyone Jesus ever spoke to about their sin and he didn't speak to them graciously and lovingly. Even the rich young man who expected to experience eternal life because he had claimed that he had kept all of God's commands, we read that when Jesus looked at him, he loved him.

Jesus looked at him and loved him. Don't you just love that? Jesus looked at that man and loved him. Jesus graciously and lovingly counseled the rich young man saying to him, you lack one thing. Go and sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me. And that's what Jesus does here. He looks at the Laodiceans and he loves them. He loves them. He graciously and lovingly counsels and corrects this church because he loves his church. That's how we should never forget. He loves his church.

[ 22 : 50 ] Laodicea claimed to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. They didn't need the Lord. They claimed to be in need of nothing and in need of no one. And Jesus corrects them. He lovingly and graciously corrects them and he says to them, no, no, you are poor.

You are blind and you are naked. You can't see yourself. Jesus looks at the Laodiceans and he loves them and he counsels them saying, you are poor.

So buy from me gold refined by fire that you may be rich. You are blind, he says. So I counsel you to buy from me eye salve to anoint your eyes that you may see clearly.

And you are naked. So I counsel you to buy from me white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen. And why does Jesus say all this?

Verse 19. Those whom I love I reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent. Those whom I love I reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent.

[ 24 : 03 ] You know, discipline should always be done in love. Should never be done any other way but the way Jesus does it graciously and lovingly.

Those whom I love I reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent. Jesus looked at this lukewarm church of Laodicea and he loved them.

He didn't refuse them, he didn't reject them, he didn't disgrace them, he didn't dispose of them, he counseled them and corrected them. And you know, it ought to be a reminder to us how we counsel and how we correct those in our congregation who have maybe become lukewarm.

lukewarm. First of all, we look at ourselves without a doubt. But you know, when we counsel and correct those who may be lacking commitment because their commitment is more casual than it used to be, their church attendance is more apathetic than it once was, their fellowship is more fleeting than it was in the past and their prayer meeting and attendance, well, that's not their priority at all.

How do we deal with lukewarm Laodiceans? How do we deal with lukewarm Laodiceans? We deal with them not in hard, harsh or hurtful ways, but we look at them and we love them.

[ 25 : 29 ] We speak to them graciously and lovingly. We counsel them. We correct them and we compel them to come in. We compel them.

Even the Christian, we compel them. We lovingly invite them. That's what the word means. Compel them to come in. And we counsel them and correct them and compel them. Well, because that's what Jesus does.

Verse 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. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

Now, although I don't have any problem with someone preaching an evangelistic text from this, an evangelistic sermon from this text, I believe that all of Scripture presents to us the good news of the gospel.

You can preach the gospel from any verse. That said, as we can see from the context, this verse is not a call to compel the unconverted to come to Christ. It's a call to compel the Christian to come back to Christ.

[ 26 : 38 ] It's a call to compel the Christian to come back to their first love, to come back to the one they loved at first. It's a call to compel the lukewarm Laodiceans to look to Jesus and love Jesus and lean upon Jesus once again.

And you know, that's what William Holman Hunt sought to depict and describe when he produced that famous painting. I put it up there. Kenny John put it up there for me. The painting is called The Light of the World.

As you can see, Jesus, he's standing at a closed door, a door that's overgrown with thorns and thistles, indicating that the door has been closed for a long time.

It hasn't been opened in a long time and yet Jesus is there and he's there looking, he's there loving and he's looking for these lukewarm Laodiceans.

He's seeking to counsel them, he's seeking to correct them, he's seeking to compel them to open the door to him. But what's interesting is that Holman Hunt's picture, in the painting he didn't paint a door handle on the outside of the door.

[ 27 : 52 ] There's a door but no door handle. Therefore the door can only be opened from the inside. Which means that the one on the inside has to let Jesus in.

But Holman Hunt's painting isn't this Arminian view of salvation where you have to let Jesus into your heart. No, the one on the inside already knows Jesus.

They already know why Jesus is there. They know why Jesus is knocking and they know why the weeds are overgrown. Because they know who this Jesus is.

They encountered, they experienced, they enjoyed following Jesus in the past. But like the seed which fell among the thorns. Remember that seed in the parable of the sower?

The cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, the desire for other things that caused the weeds to grow, the thorns to grow.

[ 28 : 50 ] And when they grew and crept in, they choked the word making it unfruitful. unfruitful. And over time, that person has grown lukewarm like the Laodiceans.

They've grown lukewarm like the Laodiceans. And Jesus, he's standing at the door knocking. And so what have we been taught this evening?

We're being taught that Jesus lovingly looks at every lukewarm Laodicean. You might feel lukewarm tonight. You might think, I'm a lukewarm Laodicean. But Jesus lovingly looks at every lukewarm Laodicean and he counsels them and he corrects them and he compels them to respond to what they hear.

Because, as we've said many times before, how you hear affects your heart. How you hear affects your heart. And so Jesus says to the church in Laodicea, 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.

[ 30 : 14 ] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Well, may the Lord bless those thoughts to us. Let us pray.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word and that Jesus speaks to us so lovingly and so graciously in it. And Lord, as we consider thy word, we confess that how often we feel lukewarm, like the Laodiceans, that we are neither hot nor cold.

But help us, we pray, to be set on fire for the Lord, to have that great passion, a passion for the Lord and a passion for the lost. O Lord, encourage us as thy people to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, that we, O Lord, as thy people, that we would be faithful, a faithful people, looking to our faithful Saviour and loving him and confessing him as the author and the finisher of our faith. Cleanse us, we pray and go before us, for Jesus sake. Amen. Well, I'm now going to hand over to