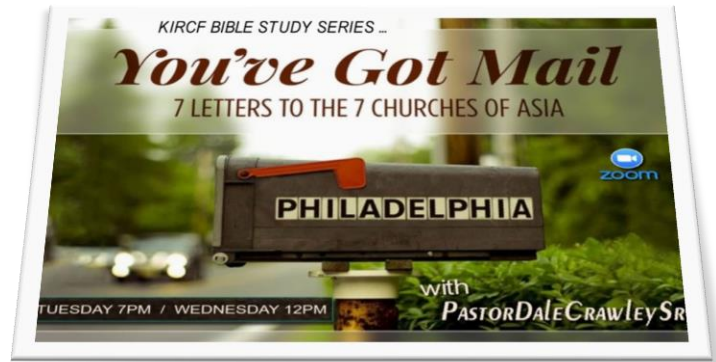


## 7 – LAODICEA: “The Lukewarm Church”



MAY 4-5, 2021

“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: 15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 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 — 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 may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 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 dine with him, and he with Me. 21 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. 22 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"" -- Revelation 3:14-22 (NKJV)

As we consider the last of the seven churches in Revelation, let's remember what we have learned so far. Every church received a special introduction from Christ, describing some important facet of his person and character. As our king and Messiah, He has the right to evaluate the spiritual condition of any local church, including these seven. For some, His message was mostly positive because they continued to do right even under terrible pressures. For others, His message was negative because of their lack of obedience to Him ... which in some cases was especially appalling. To all these imperfect congregations, Jesus' promises in the future stand as testaments of His goodness to them.

**In Laodicea, we find a church that struggled to be productive for the Lord. *The problem was they did not even know it!*** Have you ever had a problem that you did not know about until someone told you? Example: If you have taken a public speaking class, you may have experienced this. In this class, you give speeches of various kinds to your professor and fellows students. The audience gets to critique you on your communication skills. You may find out about your nervous ticks, random hand gestures, and verbal clutter etc. You would not know about these tendencies until someone told you! Jesus does the same thing for the Laodicean church. Unaware of their spiritual condition, the church is about to get a shocking surprise from their Lord!

### **Some Background on the City of Laodicea.**

Laodicea was the last of the seven cities to which John wrote this book. One of its sister cities included Colossae, to which Paul wrote a letter during his first Roman imprisonment.

In Colossians, we discover that he also wrote a letter to Laodicea. He asked that these two cities exchange their letters and read them in their respective churches (Col. 4:16). This means that the Laodicean church had the book of Colossians read to them and were familiar with its teaching. **Paul's Laodicean letter, however, is lost to history ... although some speculate that this letter and the book of Ephesians are the same.**

Once again, Jesus Christ begins this message by identifying Himself as the One giving the message. His names include: *“the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness”* and *“the Beginning of the creation of God”* (verse 14). Some have wondered if the last name mentioned—“the Beginning of the creation of God”—indicates that Jesus was a created Being.

The Greek word *arche*, which is translated **“Beginning,”** has a range of meanings from “beginning, origin” ... to “the person or thing that commences” ... to “that by which anything begins to be” ... to “the first place, principality, rule, magistracy” (*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*). Since Scripture tells us that the Word (Jesus) **“was in the beginning with God”** and that **“all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made”** (John 1:1-3), we know that Jesus was not a created Being.

Instead, this name—“the Beginning of the creation of God”—means that Jesus was the Creator of the universe. And because Jesus was the Creator, He has the rule over it. After identifying Himself, Jesus immediately tells the church at Laodicea that He knows their works—that they *“are neither cold nor hot”*—and because they *“are lukewarm,”* **He will “vomit” them out of His mouth** (Revelation 3:15-16). Similar to how some people likely spewed the city's unpleasant drinking water out of their mouths, Jesus said He would do the same, yet more violently. He would **“vomit”** them out of His mouth ... because their works were so distasteful to Him!

Another way to understand this passage stems from the geographic context of the city. We mentioned already that because there was no convenient water source, Laodicea had to transport their water through aqueducts from springs that were miles away. The two closest were in Hierapolis and Colossae. Hierapolis was known for its hot springs, which people used for healing and medicinal purposes. Colossae possessed cool, pure spring water perfect for drinking. By the time these waters reached Laodicea after several miles traveling in stone pipes, they had lost their desired temperature. They became lukewarm and, thus, useless for either healing or refreshment.

## **A HALFWAY CHURCH**

The church had become distasteful and unusable like the city's water. Lukewarm water makes a disgusting drink. The church in Laodicea had become lukewarm, and thus distasteful and repugnant. **The believers didn't take a stand for anything;** and indifference had led to idleness. By neglecting to do anything for Christ ... the church had become hardened and self-satisfied, and it was destroying itself.

- As a result, Christ was about to spit them out of His mouth! ***There's nothing more disgusting than a halfhearted, in-name-only Christian who is self-sufficient!***

Having gotten their attention, Jesus then explains why He described their spiritual condition as lukewarm. ***"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"*** (verse 17).

Christ's words showed them that He knew that the citizens of their city were wealthy—they had at least twice declined the government's help to rebuild their city after an earthquake ... and had rebuilt it with their own funds. Yet this wealth had blinded them from seeing their true spiritual condition. The culture of the city had infiltrated the church ... and the members didn't know how spiritually wretched and weak they were.

With their apathy came a spiritual blindness; they claimed to be rich, blessed, and self-sufficient. Perhaps they were rich in material things. But, spiritually, the Laodiceans were in a wretched, pitiful condition, made all the worse in that they could not see their need. This was a church filled with self-deceived hypocrites!

Jesus said, ***"Without Me ye can do nothing"*** (John 15:5). The Laodicean church was independent, self-satisfied, and secure. Their attitudes said ***"We have need of nothing!"*** But all the while, their spiritual power had been decaying ... their material wealth and glowing statistics were but shrouds hiding a rotting corpse. Their Lord was outside the church, trying to get in! (Rev 3:20).

- ***They had lost their Values*** (vv. 17-18 a).
- ***They had lost their Vision*** (v. 18 b).
- ***They had lost their Vesture*** (V.17-22) **They needed the white garments of God's righteousness and grace.**

Jesus calls the Laodicean church to repent of its sin: ***"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."*** (Revelation 3:18). Their material wealth had no eternal benefit, so Jesus commands them to come to Him for true, spiritual riches (see Isaiah 55:1-2). Only Christ can supply an everlasting inheritance, clothe us in righteousness, and heal our spiritual blindness.

Jesus then notes His concern for His church in Laodicea: ***"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."*** (Revelation 3:19-20).

Jesus' rebuke is not born of animosity but of love. ***"The Lord disciplines those He loves"*** (Hebrews 12:6). The desired response to God's reproof ... was zealous change and true repentance!

Verse 20 is often used as an evangelistic appeal, yet its original context communicates Christ's desire for fellowship with His lukewarm church in Laodicea. The church is nominally Christian ... but Christ Himself has been locked out. Rather than turn His back on them, He knocks, seeking someone to acknowledge the church's need and open the door. If they would repent, Jesus would come in and take His rightful place in the church. He would share a meal with them ... *a Middle Eastern word picture speaking of closeness of relationship.*

Jesus then makes a promise to the believers in Laodicea: ***"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne."*** (Revelation 3:21).

## **LESSONS FOR US**

There are multiple lessons that we can learn from Christ's message to Laodicea. One of these is what the Bible calls "the deceitfulness of riches" (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19). **People commonly but mistakenly believe that wealth means that God is pleased with them.** The truth is that sometimes the wicked prosper (Jeremiah 12:1). In our world filled with technology, material prosperity and modern conveniences, many mistakenly assume that they do not need God. People who are going to be faithful to God must not allow material things to lull them into a false sense of spiritual security.

**Another lesson from the message to Laodicea is that we must be doers of God's Word.** We can't relax and mistakenly assume we have it made. God expects His people to maintain zeal for His way of life.

**A third lesson is that we need to vigilantly maintain our spiritual eyesight—our ability to see things from a spiritual perspective.** This occurs as we repent when we learn that we have sinned and as we allow ourselves to be led by God's Holy Spirit.

**As we await the return of Jesus Christ to earth ... WE NEED TO AVOID BEING LUKEWARM...** We need to avoid becoming callous to God's way of life and His expectations of us.

**Let's remember the overall lesson from Christ's message to Laodicea. Don't become lukewarm ... about God's way of life!**

***"You've Got Mail ..."***