

## **“I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK”**

Revelation 3:14-22

Key Verse: 3:20

“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 that person, and they with me.”

We have now come to the last of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, the church at Laodicea. Sadly, it is the worst of the churches. Even the dead church at Sardis had some people who were not defiled by compromising with the sinful culture. But in this church there is no one. The entire church was so degenerate that there is no commendation to anyone, but only a sharp warning and rebuke. Yet, amazingly, it is to this church that Jesus offers his most gracious invitation. In the darkest time, it should be the church that is the light of the world by keeping the truth of the gospel. But the light was extinguished in this church. Nevertheless, upon this church Jesus' love and mercy was poured out most lavishly. Jesus had a great hope for this church to be renewed and to once again shine the gospel truth brightly.

What was it that had aroused Jesus' indignation with this church? Jesus describes their condition as “lukewarm.” In brief it means they had no truth, and no fervor or zeal; their spirits were lukewarm. What is worse, they had no awareness that they had a problem. In reality, many churches in America today are lukewarm too. We, also, should take warning from this passage. Most of all, we should deeply accept Jesus' unfailing and unending love so that we may be renewed with gospel truth and shine brightly once again in this dark world. Let's listen to Jesus' gracious invitation and open the doors of our hearts to welcome him in.

First, Laodicea, a lukewarm church (14-17). Laodicea was about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia. It was one of three famous cities clustered in the valley of the river Lycus. The other two cities were Colosse, which was about ten miles to the east, and Hierapolis, about six miles to the north. Laodicea became a center of transportation between Ephesus in the west and

Mesopotamia in the east. It was famous for banking, medicine and textiles and was a very wealthy city. It had the best clothes at that time--Roman Senators shopped there. Laodicea's chief deities were Zeus and Men Karou--god of healing and patron of the city's famous medical school. A large Jewish population lived there. Most likely, the churches at Laodicea, Colosse and Hierapolis were founded by Epaphras, who was the Apostle Paul's coworker (Col 1:7; 4:12-13). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul mentions Laodicea five times (2:1; 4:13,15,16 [2]).

Verse 14 says, "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." Jesus identified himself in three ways: "Amen," "the faithful and true witness," and "the ruler of God's creation." "Amen" as a title is uniquely applied to Jesus here. "Amen" is the transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "truth," "affirmation," or "certainty." "Amen" is often used in Scripture to affirm the truthfulness of a statement (Ps 72:19; Ro 16:27). Whatever God says is true and certain; therefore, he is the God of truth (Isa 65:16 ESV). Christ is certainly the Amen in the sense that he is the true God incarnate. But there is even more. In 2 Corinthians 1:20 Paul writes, "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." It is through the person and work of Christ that all of God's promises and covenants are fulfilled and guaranteed. All the Old Testament promises of forgiveness, mercy, lovingkindness, grace, hope and eternal life are bound up in Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection. He is the Amen because he is the one who confirmed all of God's promises.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus is also "the faithful and true witness." Some witnesses may tell the truth but not faithfully. Others might be faithful but do not tell the truth all the time. Jesus, however, is both the faithful and the true witness. He is trustworthy; his testimony is always reliable. Finally, Jesus is "the ruler of God's creation." Here, the word "ruler" is from the Greek word, "arche," which means "first cause," "origin," or "beginning." Jesus is not a created being, but the Creator (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16). Jesus revealed himself in this way to

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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Revelation 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), p.133.

the church at Laodicea to correct their knowledge of him. We can learn about the people in this region from Paul's letter to the Colossians. They were influenced by an early form of gnosticism which portrayed Jesus as a created being, one in a series of emanations from God. The implication of heretical teaching is that Jesus is not the Sovereign Ruler and his word is not the word of God, but just the words of a great teacher. This is one reason the Laodicean church had become so spiritually degenerate. This is not just an ancient story, but a real problem in our time too. Many people's knowledge of Jesus and attitude toward his word is like that of the Laodiceans. They think Jesus is on par with Buddha, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Hare Krishna, Dr. Phil, and Oprah. Their view of Jesus is relativistic. But Jesus is the Sovereign Ruler of Creation and his word is unique, authentic, and the life-giving word of God.

What did this Jesus say to the Laodicean church? "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (15-16). Many have understood these verses with the idea that hot is good, lukewarm is mediocre, and cold is bad. But if that is so, why would Christ prefer cold to lukewarm? We need to understand these words in the context of the city. Laodicea had two neighbors, Hierapolis and Colosse. Hierapolis had hot waters which possessed medicinal effects, while Colosse had cold water, which was pure, drinkable and had a life-giving effect. Laodicea, however, had no good water source and had to pipe their water in over a distance of several miles. By the time it arrived, it was lukewarm and mineral-laden and caused nausea. In fact, it was generally believed in the ancient world that cold and hot water were beneficial for one's health, but not lukewarm water.<sup>2</sup> Some modern people would say that room temperature water is good, but not lukewarm coffee or Coke. General William Boothe, the Salvation Army founder was once asked how he liked his tea. He said, "Hot, very hot, like my religion." The Laodiceans' lukewarm spirit made them ineffective and even a bad influence on people who lived around them. Jesus exposes their spiritual condition: they were like nauseating, lukewarm water that he was going to spit out of his mouth.

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<sup>2</sup>Beale, G.K., Revelation: A Shorter Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015) p. 91.

Through Jesus' words in verse 17, we can find a hint that explains why they became so lukewarm and see what the consequences were. He said, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." Historically speaking, after their city was destroyed by a serious earthquake in A.D. 60, the Laodiceans rebuilt it with their own wealth, declining help from the Roman Emperor. Their wealth had made them self-sufficient and arrogant. This attitude had rubbed off on the church. The Laodicean church said, "We do not need a thing." They implied, "We are wealthy, and we can do everything with money." Their evaluation was based on their wealth, that is, what they had, and not on who they were in the sight of God. Acquiring wealth is not necessarily bad, if we use it properly. It can be the means of laying up treasure in heaven when it is used generously and willingly for the glory of God and benefit of others (1Ti 6:18-19). The problem arises when wealth becomes an idol which people trust in for their security and happiness. This leads to an arrogant self-sufficiency.

How had they become like this? In the beginning, they might have thought that they needed to acquire wealth to do good. But in the course of pursuing wealth, they compromised with the city's economic system, which advocated idolatry and sexual immorality. They lost spirit and discernment. Their wealth became their idol. Now they were rich materially, but poor spiritually. Though their physical eyes were healthy due to good medicine, spiritually they were blind. Though they wore fine cotton clothes, spiritually they were naked. They had become wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. They needed to realize this. But it is not easy to discover that we are lukewarm. How can we do so? There are some signs: 1) God is not first in our lives, rather we serve God with leftovers, as seen in how we use our time and money; 2) we don't hunger or thirst for God, as seen through our infrequent Bible reading and emergency practice of prayer; 3) we don't share our faith with unbelievers and they feel very comfortable around us; 4) we attend church to socialize, not to worship God or grow spiritually; 5) we come to church to be served, not to serve Christ or others; 6) we have no real passion for God in our Christian service.

We need to check ourselves based on these signs. Then we can be aware of our wretchedness. This is the first step in coming to Jesus. Todd Friel has a program called “Wretched Radio.” It is so named because he knows he is a wretched sinner in the sight of God. He says, “I am wretched, and so are you. That’s why we need Jesus.” He is an effective evangelist. As we see the Laodicean church, there seems to be no remedy. But Jesus gave them a remedy.

Second, Jesus’ gracious invitation (18-22). To Jesus, the Laodiceans had become like lukewarm nauseating water. He could not but spit them out of his mouth. Instead, he offered them the most amazing grace. He said, “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” (18). As the ruler of God’s creation, Jesus could have commanded them. Rather, he humbly counseled them. He advised them to buy three things from him which symbolize true salvation. The first is gold refined in the fire, which refers to pure faith. If we have gold, we are rich. Likewise, when we have pure faith in Jesus, we are spiritually rich. Do you want to become rich? How can we? Jesus said, “buy from me gold refined in the fire.” Here, Jesus’ point is “from me.” He does not mean that we can purchase our salvation. Rather, Jesus will provide salvation as a free gift. The prophet Isaiah echoes this truth: “Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost” (Isa 55:1). Though faith is a gift, it needs to be refined in the fire of suffering. When we hear the word “suffering,” we say, “Oh no!” This was probably at the root of the Laodiceans’ compromise. But suffering is not bad. When we have a right attitude toward suffering, it purifies us and brings true glory and honor. 1 Peter 1:7 says, “These [trials] have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

The second thing Jesus wanted to give them was white clothes to wear. This refers to the righteousness of Jesus. We are unrighteous before God due to our sin. But when we accept Jesus, who is righteous, his

righteousness is imputed to us. Paul says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2Co 5:21). When we wear the clothes of Jesus’ righteousness, all our shameful nakedness is covered. Everyone has said and done things for which they are ashamed. This shame or guilt is at the root of estrangement, sorrow, and grief. We can never resolve this shame or guilt by our own effort. But when we simply accept Jesus’ grace at the cross, he takes away all our shame, guilt and sorrow and gives us true freedom, joy and peace.

The third thing Jesus wanted to give was salve, or ointment, to put on their eyes. This meant opening their spiritual eyes. Just as a blind person cannot see God’s beautiful creation, so spiritually blind people cannot see the glorious spiritual world. To see this spiritual world, we need our spiritual eyes opened. That is why the Apostle Paul said to the Ephesians: “I pray 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 his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe” (Eph 1:18-19a). When we consider the three things Jesus offered to the Laodiceans, we find that it is the gospel truth: pure faith, God’s righteousness and spiritual eyesight. This is the best remedy for the lukewarm church.

Jesus’ words were very gracious to the Laodiceans, gracious enough to cure all their spiritual diseases. But this grace was accompanied by words of painful rebuke. When they heard Jesus’ rebuke, it would be natural for them to feel a sense of punishment and close their hearts. So Jesus said, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent” (19). Jesus emphasizes that his rebuke was out of his love. When we realize this, we can respond by being earnest and repenting. The lukewarm church is not earnest--it lacks fervor or zeal. But Christians should never be lacking in zeal, but keep their spiritual fervor, serving the Lord (Ro 12:11). When we have spiritual fervor, we can be ready to repent. To repent is to acknowledge that we are wretched sinners and that sin leads to death and eternal condemnation. It is also to turn to Jesus, the only one who can rescue us from the power of sin and death (Ro 7:24-25). Repentance leads to life and is the best medicine for any kind of spiritual disease (Ac 11:18).

The Lord Jesus followed his call to repentance with a tender, gracious invitation. Let's read verse 20. "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 that person, and they with me." This is a very famous verse which is often quoted to invite lost souls to receive Jesus as their Savior. It does reflect Jesus' heart toward the lost. But in the context of the letter, it was given to a church, not to individual lost souls. It means that Jesus was standing outside the church, trying to get in. Jesus is the head of the church and he should be at the center of the church. But Jesus was no longer dwelling in this church. There was no worship of Jesus, fellowship with Jesus, or listening to Jesus' word. Instead of being honored, Jesus had been cast out, though they were not aware of it. But Jesus did not walk away and leave them alone. He stood outside the door, knocking. The tense of the verbs "stand" and "knock" point toward present, continuing action on the part of Christ. He is standing there, reaching out to the Laodiceans. He pursued them with unending love. He does not force his way, breaking down the door; but he knocks respectfully and gently waiting for a response with a tender heart. Why does he want to come in? It is to eat with us in intimate fellowship. The phrase, "eat with that person, and they with me," tells us that it is a reciprocal relationship. Jesus humbled himself and came into this world to eat with "sinners." Furthermore, he elevates us to eat with him. For this purpose, he cleanses us with his blood and sanctifies us with the Holy Spirit. He makes us his beautiful, pure, spotless bride, that we may eat with him at the wedding supper of the Lamb (19:9).

How can we receive such a blessing? Jesus says, "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in...." This invitation is for "anyone" in the church. If even one person hears his voice, Jesus will come into the church through that person. One person opening the door of their heart is not a small matter. It can be the spark that ignites the whole church and stirs up a fire of spiritual revival. Jesus said, "Here I am!" He is standing at the door of each of our hearts and knocking. Do you hear him? Are you willing to open the door? If you do, surely great blessings will come upon you: having fellowship with Christ in his glorious kingdom. And Jesus promised even greater blessing: "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his

throne” (21). The throne is the symbol of conquest and authority. As Jesus overcame the world and was exalted to the Father’s right hand, so those who are victorious will share in Jesus’ eternal glory (2Ti 2:12; Ro 8:17). How do we know this invitation is for us? Verse 22 says, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to our churches.” Let’s open our hearts, hear his voice and invite Jesus into the center of our lives and our church.