

Lessons from the Lamps: Let Me In

Revelation 3:14-22

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~The Infinitely Awesome God is repulsed by halfhearted worshipers but still offers grace ~

We have arrived today at the final message in our series through the seven letters Jesus gave to the churches in Revelation. Originally these letters were specifically written for seven distinct congregations scattered across Asia Minor, but because Jesus is their author, and they bear His mark, their relevance has remained as fresh throughout the ages as the day these words were spoken.

Now today we are looking at the letter to the church in Laodicea, and this is probably the best known of the seven as it contains the line “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” And this phrase was immortalized on canvas by Holman Hunt about 150 years ago.

No doubt you have seen this picture or one of the dozens of reproductions – most with a whiter Jesus than we see here. But in each of the pictures the point is the same. Jesus stands outside a closed door with no door-knob. But this isn’t a mistake; the door-knob is on the inside. So Jesus knocks but never forces His way into our lives. We must open the door. It’s profound!

And this verse and picture have been used in evangelistic crusades around the world because of how accurately they present the Christian journey. But while that is certainly an appropriate use of the verse what is almost always left out, or unknown, is that Jesus says these words “Behold, I stand at the door and knock,” not to unbelievers, but to His church.

And so what we get in the letter to the Laodiceans is a message similar to his words to Sardis. You remember that the church in Sardis was a place that looked good and lively from the outside, but was actually dead – it lacked the vitality of the Holy Spirit. And here Jesus speaks to a similar church that had lots of members, and did Christian things, but in the midst of this had excluded Jesus – He was forced to stand outside and knock.

Can you imagine a church like that? Now certainly the board at Laodicea had never sat down and said “We are tired of having Jesus in our church, let’s exclude Him.” And they hadn’t adopted some heretical theology and so fallen into excluding Jesus by mistake – in fact they believed all the right things about Jesus. And yet Jesus had been excluded, forced outside to knock.

Now this is a big idea to wrap our minds around – how does a church slip so far that it effectively kicks Jesus out? And quickly! This church was doing well just 30 years earlier when Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians. He mentions Laodicea in it without any hint that anything was wrong.¹

But then in just 30 years this church slipped from a Christ centered body of believers to a Christ excluding body of believers – they still believed the right things but had excluded Jesus.

Now with that as a prognosis you probably won't be surprised that this letter is the hardest hitting of the seven, but what you might not expect is that it is also the most inviting. On one hand Jesus says "I am about to spit you out of My mouth." And on the other He offers "eat with Me and share My throne of power."

So if you haven't already please open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 3 starting in verse 14. And as you turn there would you please pray with me?

[Pray]

This morning the big idea of our passage is that **The Infinitely Awesome God is repulsed by halfhearted worshipers and yet still offers grace.**

Look with me at verse 14

[Read Revelation 3:14]

Now we already know that each of these letters shares a similar format. Each starts with a unique introduction where Jesus tells us something about Himself that is relevant and life giving.

So to the Ephesians Jesus was "Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand."² And to the church in Smyrna He was The One who "died and came to life again."³ And to Thyatira Jesus was "The Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze."⁴

So in each of the other six letters Jesus tells us about what He has or what He does, but to the church in Laodicea He tells us who He is – He is the **Infinitely Awesome God**. And He gives us three pictures that make this clear.

First Jesus says He is the "Amen." Now Amen is a very familiar word for Christians. We use it to say "I'm done praying now" or "I agree with you" if someone is preaching.

¹ Colossians 4:16

² Revelation 2:1

³ Revelation 2:8

⁴ Revelation 2:18

But in the Hebrew “amen” has more significance. When a Jew says “amen” it signifies that something is valid or binding.⁵ So think a handshake to solidify a deal – “let’s shake on it” – or telling someone “I give you my word.” That’s Amen.

While these agreements don’t hold up in court, between people who trust each other they are all that’s necessary to assure someone that something is going to happen.

And here Jesus calls Himself the “Amen”. Jesus is the trustworthy one. In fact He is the final authority on trustworthiness. So where does Jesus get this from?

Actually in the Old Testament God is given this name. In Isaiah we read:
 He who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the
God of truth; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by
 the **God of truth**... (Isaiah 65:16 NKJV)

YHWH is the “God of truth” and the word “truth” here is literally “amen.” God is the “God of Amen.” And so when Jesus says He is the Amen He is saying I am the Completely Truthful and Trustworthy One. You can build your foundation on Me. If you make Me the center of your life it will go good for you.

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Second Jesus says I am “the Faithful and True Witness.” These are titles that are used for Jesus throughout Revelation. In chapter 1 Jesus is the “faithful witness,”⁶ and in chapter 19 John sees a white horse “whose rider is called Faithful and True.”⁷

And the word “witness” is the Greek word *martus* from where we get our word martyr. This is someone who bears testimony to God to the point of death.

So Jesus is the Faithful and True Witness, He is the perfect representation of God. And He bore this image His entire life even up to the cross. So Jesus is the complete revelation of the Father. If you want to know what God looks like look at Jesus.

And finally Jesus says “I am the **ruler** or the **beginning** of God’s creation.” This is the Greek word *Arche* and it also is one of God’s favorite words for Himself. At the end of Revelation the One sitting on the throne says:

“It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the **Beginning** and the End. (Revelation 21:6)

Now it is important to note here is that while “beginning” does mean first in the sequence that isn’t its primary meaning here – the Jehovah’s witnesses

⁵ Darrell Johnson “Discipleship on the Edge” (Vancouver: Regent Press), 2004. pg 115

⁶ Chapter 1:5

⁷ Revelation 19:11

mistakenly read this to say that Jesus was the first of God's creations, and so as important as He is He is still just a creation – but Jesus wasn't created, He is the Creator. And here *arche* means "source of the sequence."⁸

You will remember we came across this same idea when we studied Colossians a few months back. There Paul quoted a first century worship hymn that sang:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the ***beginning*** and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

When Jesus says "I am the *arche*" this is what He is affirming – He is the source of all that exists.

So Jesus is the Amen; He is the Faithful and True Witness of God and He is the Source of everything in creation. This is the biggest and boldest claim that has every been made in all time! Jesus says "I AM the Infinitely Awesome God.

So what happens when we encounter the Infinitely Awesome God in the person of Jesus Christ?

C.S. Lewis wrote:

"Jesus Christ produced mainly three effects – hatred, terror, adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval."⁹

But just 60 years later this wasn't the Laodiceans' experience. Look at verse 15.

[Read Revelation 3:15-16]

The Laodiceans, like many church going Canadians, looked at the Infinitely Awesome Jesus in all His majesty and glory and by the way they live their lives proved that they had embraced Him with moderate approval – Jesus is alright.

⁸ Johnson pg 116

⁹ C.S. Lewis "What Are We To Make Of Jesus Christ? In God In The Dock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pg 158

And this makes Jesus sick. When people see God's majesty and say "that's great, but have you seen the latest episode of the Simpsons?" Jesus wants to spit, or actually He is gagging. The Greek word here means "vomit" – So Jesus says: "Laodicean church attending people, because you are neither hot nor cold but lukewarm I'm going to vomit you out of My mouth – you're repulsive to Me."

The Infinitely Awesome God is repulsed by halfhearted worshipers...

So what had gone wrong here?

The Laodicean problem was that although they knew everything about Jesus they weren't in love with Him. They lacked passion. Friends, it's not alright to stoically respect Jesus. He calls this being lukewarm instead of cold or hot.

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Now these words are familiar, and a bit confusing. Hot makes sense, but cold? Does Jesus really prefer people who are completely cold to Him over those in the church who are lukewarm? Is all out rebellion better than apathy?

I don't think so, and most commentaries agree. Instead this is a reference to something the Laodiceans understood.

You see Laodicea lacked a fresh water source. They had to pump water through "an aqueduct system of stone pipes" from two of the nearby cities – Hierapolis and Colossae.¹⁰

Now Hierapolis was famous for its hot springs which boasted medicinal qualities. People would go and relax in the hot water and come out feeling great. This water was excellent for bathing, but after it was pumped to Laodicea it wasn't hot anymore and the calcium carbonate and sulfur in the water made it nauseating to drink.

Colossae on the other hand had several ice cold springs that gushed out sweet and fresh, but a lot of that sweetness would again be lost on the trip to Laodicea.

So both cold and hot are positive terms here; it is only the mediocre middle ground that was repulsive. Ice coffee and boiling hot coffee are great, but either one left on your desk all day is disgusting – even if you paid \$5 for it at Starbucks.

So what is a lukewarm Christian? Look at verse 17

[Read Revelation 3:17-18]

¹⁰ Johnson, 118

I heard a story about William Booth – the founder of the Salvation Army. Once he was at a lecture by an atheist who chided the Christians in the room saying “If I believed what you believe, I wouldn’t stop telling people about it day or night.” When Booth heard this he was cut to the heart and realized he was lukewarm. And after that he started the Salvation Army.

To be lukewarm is to be unaware. The Laodiceans said “I’m rich, I don’t need anything” but what they didn’t know was that actually they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked – says Jesus!

When we are lukewarm we believe we are alright. Friends, how are you doing? Are you alright? Is our church alright? Does the way we live prove we think we are alright? Or do we recognize we need a heart transforming miracle to survive and are desperately pursuing this with everything we have?

To be lukewarm is to be unaware, so this is dangerous! It is only when, like Booth, something shocks us that we wake up and realize “this is me! I am making Jesus puke!”

And shock is what Jesus does to the Laodiceans. The words He uses here were very intentionally crafted. He targets four aspects of daily life in Laodicea that everyone could relate to: He touches on their finances, their fashion, their pharmaceuticals and their fetid water.

So Laodicea was a rich city that prided itself in needing nothing. In AD60 when an earthquake leveled several cities in the area including Philadelphia and Sardis, Laodicea was offered assistance from Rome, but rejected it to rebuilt their city with their own savings¹¹ - they needed nothing.

Laodicea was also famous for their fashion. They sold their black wool clothing all around the Empire and prided themselves in being the best dressed people outside of Rome.¹² They needed nothing.

And Laodicea marketed an eye salve they made by grinding up certain minerals prevalent in the area. This salve allegedly cured weak or failing eyes.¹³ Even in health they needed nothing.

The only thing in Laodicea they weren’t proud of was their fetid water, but this they had accepted as a small price to pay for having everything else.

¹¹ Colin J. Hemer “Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 2001, pg 194.

¹² William Barclay “Letters to the Seven Churches” (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 2001. pg 98.

¹³ Hemer, 196-197.

But what would have been absolutely shocking for the Laodiceans was that Jesus lumped their so called blessings, the things they were most proud of, in with their lukewarm, vomit inducing water.

Jesus says your finances, your fashion and your pharmaceuticals have blinded you to reality. In fact things are the opposite of what you think. You aren't rich and self-sufficient, "you are pitifully poor." This pictures a beggar who induces pity by their deplorable poverty. "You are blind and naked!" Not only are you shamefully exposed but you can't see it. Laodicea your gold and your clothing and your medicine have stolen your true wealth and left you wretched.

What a terrible thing for Jesus to have to say about a church.

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Now let me just bring this very close to home because the similarities between North American culture and Laodicean culture are obvious. And the reality is Jesus knew that churches like our own would struggle with the same things Laodicea struggled with.

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Like them we are an incredibly wealthy people. Actually average Canadians are wealthy beyond even the wildest imaginations of the richest Laodiceans.

I've used these stats before, but the reality is if you make \$12,000 a year you are richer than 90% of everyone who has ever lived, and if you make \$50,000 a year you are part of the 1% of all time.¹⁴ So all of us here are among the richest people to ever live. It's you, me Bill Gates and Caesar Augustus.

And aren't we used to referring to our wealth as a blessing and then taking care of ourselves? Don't we emphasize that what is really important is "careful stewardship of our resources" by which we mean, socking enough away so that we can be comfortable in old age?

Sure we give or tithe but there is even danger here. It is easy to think we are God's benefactors; that He needs our money and we are helping Him out.

But that's baloney! Here's the reality. Wealth isn't a blessing it is a responsibility. And the Laodiceans had failed here and many Western Christians fail here as well. We buy into the lie that the resources at our disposal are our own. So then we deserve that nice watch or that fast car. But really everything we have – not 10% - is God's. And our job is to steward 100% of God's resources at our disposal to increasing His kingdom and expand His glory.

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Now does this mean we have to give it all away? Or that we can't ever enjoy anything nice? That's what we want to know, but that's the wrong question. The premise behind that question is how much of *my stuff* do I have to give away to please Jesus. But Jesus says "You don't have enough to please Me."

¹⁴ www.givingwhatwecan.org

Verse 18 says “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich.” You think you are rich, I’ll tell you how to get rich! The key words here are “Buy from Me.” So how much does it cost to buy Jesus’ gold or clothes or healing eye salve? 10% of \$50,000? Come on! Jesus answers “it costs more than you have if you offer anything less than everything.”

I alone have true riches, and the clothing you need to cover your shame and the healing salve you need to discern the world, but the only way you will obtain it is when, by grace you realize how much grace is worth, and then hold on to it with everything you’ve got. You must passionately seek My grace.

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Now the irony or secret of this is that when we dedicate everything to seeking God’s kingdom first we stop worrying about how much it costs and start living in true joy.¹⁵ That’s Jesus’ promise.

It’s like the man who found treasure in a field and in his *joy* sold all he had to buy the field.¹⁶ The point is not that the man was just rich enough to get what actually matters, the point is he recognized that using 100% of what he had to get the kingdom was an incredible deal – it’s grace when we get what God has for us. And the only way we get it is when we realize we must get it.

Jesus says to the Church recognize your poverty and I will give you My riches. Recognize your nakedness and I will clothe you with My righteousness. Recognize your blindness and I will give you eyes to see reality.

These are Jesus’ words of grace to a church that had totally missed the mark. And there is grace for us here as well.

Friends, wherever you are today, no matter how lukewarm you have been, in spite of the fact we are all incredibly wealthy and so continually slip into self-sufficiency as individuals and as a church, we have been offered the miracle of waking up. And if we will do it we will find that Jesus is just outside the door and knocking. Look down at verse 19.

[Read Revelation 3:19-22]

The Infinitely Awesome God is repulsed by halfhearted worshipers but still offers grace.

Jesus says “I love you, so be earnest, be cold or be hot. Repent. Turn around. Stop being apathetic. Stop giving Me a part of your life. Be zealous. Start passionately loving Me with everything you have because I’m Awesome! Please recognize that what I offer is worth way more than whatever you might have to give up. Buy My gold to get rich. I tell you this because I love you.

¹⁵ See Philippians 4:12 Matthew 6:31-33 and 1 Timothy 4:4

¹⁶ Matthew 13:44

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But how? How can lukewarm Christians like us do what Jesus asks?... Here is where His grace shows its glorious magnificence.

Jesus says “Look”, I’m right here. I’m at the door and I have everything you need to get Me and I want to give it to you. I designed you to have Me so use My strength to open the door and let Me in. Friends the answer to living like Jesus wants is not more self-sufficiency, it is weakness, this is what lets Jesus in.

But we hate weakness, and so the default position for every Christian and every church is to exclude Jesus again and again by relying on ourselves. But the good news is even when excluded Jesus keeps knocking.

And when we hear Jesus’ loving rebuke knocking and accept His strength to open the door He will come in – we will get Jesus!

Jesus says “If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me.” In Middle Eastern culture this means “I will make a covenant with You, I will share everything I am with you.”

And in case we miss this Jesus gives us a second picture. He says “To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne.”

Now people don’t share their thrones because our power is limited, but when You are the Infinitely Awesome God, the way you increase your glory is by inviting people in to enjoy You.

So friends, if you want to enjoy the fullness of the Infinitely Awesome Jesus again or for the first time then open the door by admitting you need Jesus. And if we want the Infinitely Awesome Jesus in our church then we must stop living safely and in control and open the door to Jesus’ leading.

Yes it will be a paradigm shift in thinking, a transformation of the mind. It will mean instead of giving back a portion we will use everything we have for Him and His Kingdom. But if we do He will come in and we will eat with Him and share His throne.

So church, the gold and clothes and healing Jesus wants to sell us are worth it, so let’s stop relying on ourselves and our strength and open the door to our Saviour.