

MESSAGE NOTES
Revelation Unveiled - Part 11
“Laodicea – The Conceited & Comfortable Church”
Revelation 3:14-22

Introduction: When John wrote Revelation, Laodicea was probably the most affluent city in that part of the Roman Empire. It was a city with a highly developed commercial banking industry; the place where they minted gold coins that was the currency used throughout Asia; a city which had an advanced medical school specializing in ear and eye ointments and salves; and a booming textile industry specializing in black wool that produced a black thread used to produce a coat or robe which was famous all over the ancient world. Laodicea was a proud city with so much wealth that it had become self-reliant and self-sufficient. It was so self-reliant that in 60 A.D. when a massive earthquake hit that area of Asia Minor and Rome poured an enormous sum of money into the region to rebuild city after city, the city declined Rome’s financial help. Then after rebuilding their city, they minted coins that said, “*We Did It Ourselves.*”

These were people who were self-sufficient, self-satisfied, prideful, conceited, complacent, and comfortable, and that same spirit and culture found its way into the church. The Laodicean church was a safe, comfortable place to attend and to have a membership. It was not a dynamic church, but it was not a declining church either. In a sense, it was a pretty acceptable kind of church with no false teachers that we know of, no troublesome leaders that we hear of, no real conflicts going on, but also no daring ministry ventures being prayed about, and no talk of eternal difference making in people’s lives. They were just a warm, caring group of people meeting together to care for each other. They were a benign bunch of believers perfectly content to cocoon with other Christians for an hour or two a week and be “nurturers” but not also “gatherers”. They are neither hot nor cold in their faith but are lukewarm and disgusting in the eyes of Jesus. DISGUSTING? OUCH! The strongest rebuke of all the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 is reserved for the believers at Laodicea.

See Revelation 3:14-22...

Verse 14: The titles used in verse 14 describing Jesus are titles used by the prophets in the Old Testament to describe God and talk about the certainty of his promises. We can be certain He will do what He says He will do.

Verses 15-16: A literal translation from the Greek is saying, “*You people make me feel like vomiting.*” Jesus is upset about the conceited and comfortable Christianity in the church at Laodicea. He doesn’t mince words about how He feels that the culture of their city has seeped into the church and that his followers are looking like the culture around them. They are Christians who believe in him but have a half-hearted, comfortable commitment to him. They consistently put Christianity tenth on their priority list of life commitments. They think have it together as they are financially set and they don’t feel like they need God very often, so they are not intentional about growing in their relationship with him. They don’t identify and develop their spiritual gifts and use those gifts to serve others. They would rather cocoon for an hour or two a week in a church building with other Christians and then go about their business and life as usual –not really think about being with Jesus and living life for his glory and neighbor’s good.

When Jesus sees what is going on in the church at Laodicea and says, ¹⁵*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!*, He is using an image they fully understood. Near Laodicea was the city of Hieropolis, a resort city known for its hot mineral springs that Roman soldiers used for R&R and which people used as a health spa in the Asian world. People with arthritis and skin diseases came to soak in the hot mineral baths. Also, near Laodicea was the city of Colossae by Mount Cadmus which is snow-covered most of the year. The snow would melt and create lots of cold mountain streams for which the city was well known. People loved coming to Colossae to enjoy the cold refreshing waters of the mountain streams, and many people from the surrounding area would go there for their drinking water.

Jesus uses the contrast of Hieropolis (with its hot springs) and Colossae (with its cold mountain streams), to the City of Laodicea which had no natural water supply. Laodicea had built an aqueduct system made of stone pipes that brought water to the city which was stored in a tower. But the water which was piped in was so full of minerals that the pipes got really narrow with lime deposits. The water was lukewarm by the time it reached the city and was “disgusting”.

Jesus is using that illustration to describe the Laodicean church. It is interesting that many people have interpreted this passage as hot meaning BEING FOR GOD, cold meaning BEING AGAINST GOD, and lukewarm meaning WHO CARES? They say God would rather have people EITHER be for him OR against him BUT NOT sitting on the fence. But what Jesus is saying is that He wants his followers to be like the hot springs and be encouraging, healing, restoring, and give hope to hurting and suffering people in the world around them. Or be like the cold mountain springs to people

and be refreshing and invigorating and encourage people. BUT DON'T BE LUKEWARM. Make a difference for God in people's lives. Be a healing AND refreshing person for people who are hurting today. Don't let your life be all about you.

Verse 17: Jesus is saying to these lukewarm Christians at Laodicea: You are deceiving yourself and do not understand your condition. You think you are fine, but the truth is you are spiritually bankrupt. You are impoverished. You are convinced you are living acceptable lives spiritually, but you cannot see your compromised commitment for what it is – a terrible affront to me who gave my all for you as your crucified Savior! Do you understand what I went through for you? O that you would say, After ALL He has done for me, there isn't anything I wouldn't do for Him. If you love me, then: *Become like Jesus Together, AND Grow Together in relationship with JESUS, in COMMUNITY with others, and in ministry to the WORLD....* If you love me, you will be a difference maker in people's lives.

Verse 18: Remember that Laodicea was a wealthy city known for its banking institutions, the minting of gold coins, a textile industry that produced fine woolen black coats from the wool of black sheep, and a medical school and the production of eye salve. Jesus uses their culture to say to the lukewarm Christians in Laodicea: You need MY gold, MY white garments, and MY eye salve." He is saying you need:

- True spiritual wealth that only comes in a vital, authentic relationship with Jesus and there are no shortcuts to that.
- Forgiveness and cleansing from your deception and half-heartedness. So, you need my white garments (purity) to cover the nakedness of your deception about your condition.
- Renewed spiritual vision which comes from me so you can see life and lost people for who they really are rather than being blinded by the glitter and allure of the surrounding culture in which you live.

Questions: Can we be vulnerable and take some time to reflect today and this week on our lives and see if there are places where we have become comfortable and are:

- Treating Jesus too casually and need to be more intentional about developing a vital and authentic relationship with him?
- Becoming too casual in dealing with some sin in our life?
- Seeing life and people as the world sees them rather than as Jesus sees them?

Verse 19: The idea here is changing your mind about how you are living the Christian life before you experience the consequences of a half-hearted Christian life. This verse reminds all of us that God loves us too much to allow us to remain in a condition of spiritual apathy or lukewarmness indefinitely. He promises to discipline us to wake us up if need be because we matter to him too much for him to allow us to squander the one and only life we have been given by living our Christian lives in lukewarmness.

Verse 20: This verse is often used for evangelistic purposes, and I suppose it works for that, but that is not the way it was intended by Jesus and John to be understood. Jesus is saying this to believers who live in a city with a Roman gladiator training center and a strong Roman army presence. They experienced on a regular basis the Roman law called *Angaria*, which said soldiers could demand you carry their pack for a mile and you had to do it, and that a soldier could enter your house and tell you to feed them and give them a place to stay overnight, and you had to do it. So, Jesus is saying, I will not force my way into your life, but will knock, and if you will let me in, we will eat together and commune together. He wants us to invite him each day to experience a growing relationship with him. This takes time as the Greek word for eating here in verse 20 is the word for a long, drawn-out feast, not a quick meal. What an amazing expression of God's love for us.

In light of Jesus' message to the church at Laodicea, we need to ask ourselves: What is my life about? What am I going after in life? What is my priority as I live life? Is my life about BEING WITH JESUS so I can be BECOMING LIKE JESUS so I can be DOING WHAT JESUS DID by living for God's Glory and Neighbor's good? Does that priority influence and impact how I live at home, at school, at work, in our neighborhood?

The church in Laodicea responded to Jesus' corrective words and became one of the most dynamic of the 7 churches. We know from history that they ended up making a difference in people's lives by loving and serving Jesus and loving and serving others. What about you and me? If we will make the changes in our life we need to make in response to what we are hearing, **Jesus' words in Revelation 3:21-22 are for us today as well....**