

THE PRIDE OF LAODICEA Revelation 3:14-22

As we've looked at the messages to the 7 churches in Revelation, we've seen that each church is unique, with its own problems and challenges and areas of strength. But, now with Laodicea, Jesus has saved his strongest critique for last. Strong words are what these people need, because they have a totally false image of themselves. They think they're good Christians, that they have it all together- but they couldn't be more wrong.

Laodicea had a world famous medical center, and possibly some of these doctors were a part of the church. So to deliver the bad news Jesus puts on His doctor's hat, as Tim Keller puts it. Jesus is going to tell them his diagnosis- first the symptom, then the underlying disease and then the medicine.

The symptom

Look at verse 15, "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!" Close to the city of Laodicea were Hieropolis, which had hot spring water, and Colosse, which had cold water. These were both places that had very desirable water. But Laodicea didn't have its own source of water. The water supply came through aqueducts from far away- so by the time it got there it was lukewarm.

Hot water heals, cold water refreshes, but lukewarm water does neither, it's basically worthless. Nobody liked the water in Laodicea.

What does Jesus mean by this metaphor? There are hot people- those who are up front in ministry- teaching and leading with all their heart and energy. You feel a lot of heat from their passion. Pastor John Piper in Minneapolis comes to mind, whenever I hear him preach or read his books, his passion just jumps out at me.

There are cold people- people who are refreshing to others. These people may not be the extroverts, but may be introverts; but introverts who care. These people are often encouraging, counseling, and sharing their home with others. This church (Grace Stillwater) has a lot of people who are refreshing in their caring.

But lukewarm people are ambivalent. They don't really care, they're just going through the motions of life and religion. They think they're fine but they don't actually help anyone in the church. They're just dead weight.

In the church where I was first ordained, there was a family who had been long-time members of the church- we'll call them the Johnson family. Whenever I preached, they were always looking around. I thought 'they're just not paying attention.' But then they would make comments after the service- 'Good sermon, there were some people that needed to hear that.' It was never that *they* needed to hear it. It was always for someone else. They never got excited about anything. They complained about programs in the church, but they never volunteered. They questioned leadership, but were very defensive if you ever questioned them. If I had to summarize them, it would sound like the opposite of Jesus: 'The Johnson family came not to serve, but to be served.'

And Jesus has a scathing rebuke for people like that. Verse 16, "I will spit you out of my mouth." Their attitude and their apathy is so disgusting to Jesus, that He can't stand the taste of them. He says, "*You make me wanna puke.*"

Now remember these are church people that Jesus is talking to. Here's real proof that there's no one further from Jesus than someone who makes an idle profession without real faith, someone who sits in a church pew but has no spiritual life in their heart. Jesus made that point very vividly in His life when He was teaching the people and He was questioned by the chief priests and elders. These were the highest-ranking people in the Jewish faith, and He tells them, "The tax collectors [the IRS mafia who were thieves and everyone hated them] and prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you."

How could He say that? Well, let's look beneath the symptom of lukewarmness where Jesus identifies the real problem.

The underlying disease

Their underlying disease is pride and self-sufficiency. See Jesus' pointed words in verse 17, "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

There are really 3 kinds of people in the world, according to the Bible. The irreligious person says, "I don't need God, I can make my own way. I'll follow my heart and let it be my guide." The religious person says, "I have the rules to live by and if I keep them well, I'll make a good life for myself. Everyone will see that I'm a good person and God will be obligated to reward me."

Neither the religious nor the irreligious person takes his sin very seriously. They both think that they can overcome any faults fairly easily, by keeping the rules or doing enough good to overcome the bad. But here's the thing- if you find your identity in how good you are, you'll always be striving to keep up appearances. Because anything that threatens to expose your flaws or sins is toxic- it will devastate you. You'll get angry at anyone who tries to correct you. "I'm a good person! There must be something wrong with you. Clearly it's your fault."

Both the religious person and the irreligious person are depending on themselves. They look different on the outside, but inside they're really not much different.

But the Bible gives us a third category of people. The truly redeemed person says, "I need more than just myself to make my life work. I can't do it on my own. I need a Savior."

How freeing is that? To be able to give up defending your goodness and loveliness. To be able to look at each other and say, "I'm a mess- will you love me anyway? Spiritually, I'm a poor, blind wretch- and so are you. Let's worship."

Jesus wants us to see how needy we are. Not because He wants us to feel bad about ourselves. No, He wants us to see our need because it's reality- **and** because He wants to have a relationship with us. And we won't come to Him if we're self-sufficient and consumed with our own goodness.

So Jesus prescribes our medicine.

The medicine

He says, 'Be zealous and repent.' Lukewarm people don't repent. Because repentance forces us to confront the ugly parts of us. But what we need to see is that repentance is a sign of life. It's a life-changing practice, if you start doing it, you'll never be the same.

The story is told that one day Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, visited a prison and talked with each of the inmates. There were endless tales of innocence, of misunderstood motives, and of exploitation. Finally the king stopped at the cell of a convict who remained silent. “Well,” remarked Frederick, “I suppose you’re an innocent victim, too?” “No sir, I’m not,” replied the man, “I’m guilty and deserve my punishment.” Turning to the warden, the king said, “Here, release this rascal before he corrupts all these fine innocent people in here!”

Acknowledging our sin and guilt, a 100% acceptance of responsibility for wrongdoing, is the first step to cleansing and growth. But Jesus tells them what goes along with repentance.

In verse 18- Jesus tells them to buy 3 things from him: gold refined by fire, white garments cause you’re naked, and salve to help you to see better. The gold and the clothing are metaphors for good works. And Jesus says that you have to buy it from Him. Why? Because He’s truly wealthy. He’s the One who sits on the throne of God having conquered all of His (and our) enemies.

How did He get so wealthy? Well, that’s the gospel story. It’s start with Him on the throne of God. But when Christ came to earth, He gave up His kingdom and became poor in order to live a perfect life among us. And in order to save us, He was stripped naked and hung on a cross. And on the cross He paid the penalty for our sin and claimed “It is finished.”

Those words, “It is finished” mean more than just “This execution is done.” What they mean is that everything Jesus set out to accomplish has been done. Everything necessary to please God and rescue us was done in the life and death of Christ. And what do we need to add to that work? Nothing. You don’t have to do anything else to add to what Jesus did. The finished work of Christ on the cross and in the resurrection is your righteousness if you put your trust in Him. It makes you acceptable to God and clothes you in His sight.

And if you understand that you’ll understand your need for repentance. Your need to give up all the ways you have of being your own Savior.

Only those who can’t pay get to buy what Jesus is offering.

Only those who see their utter spiritual poverty can become truly rich.

Notice v. 19, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.” Jesus has been harsh with them (and by extension with us), but He wants them to get better. He really cares for them. Maybe the most surprising part of faith is realizing that when we go looking for Jesus, we find out that He’s been looking for us along. “Behold I stand at the door and knock, If anyone hears my voice I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me.”

Some of the resources I used for this series on Revelation were *Letters to the Seven Churches* by William Barclay, *The Returning King* by Vern Poythress, *Revelation* by Leon Morris, *A Year With the New Testament* by Dave Dorst, as well as sermons by Dr. Dave Silvernail (Potomac Hills Community Church PCA) and Dr. Timothy Keller (Redeemer Presbyterian Church PCA). The reader should assume that little, if any, of this material is original.