

Laodicea

Prayer

Good morning. This morning we will be looking at the book of Revelations. Specifically, we are going to look at “The church of the closed door.”

How about some background history on Laodicea?

The Church of Laodicea was to no ones surprise located in the city of Laodicea, which was approximately 72km south of Philadelphia. It is located on a roughly square plateau a couple of hundred feet high. It is about 3 km south of the Lycus tributary of the Meander River. The city was founded about 3 BC by Antiochus the second who named it after his wife Laodice.

Laodicea often conjures negative connotations in the minds of many Christians, and justifiably so, but I want to place it in context this morning.

Laodicea was a prosperous commercial center. It had banking and was famous for a medicinal salve for the eyes produced by its medical college. Its clothing, specifically clothing made from the wool of black sheep was famous throughout the entire region. In fact, the city was so prosperous that when there was a major earthquake in 17 ad, She was rebuilt without any financial assistance from the capital of Rome. Even Philadelphia required financial assistance to rebuild. What I am getting at is that if you were a citizen looking at Laodicea you would see prosperity and a desirable state. So why then does the letter to the Laodicean church get the most scathing appraisal of all of the churches by our Lord? In fact, he offers nothing in support of her.

One more physical attribute needs to be mentioned... Although this was a prosperous city, she had a significant weakness. She did not have access to an adequate water supply. To get her water she had to pipe the water in by aqueduct from 10 km away.

There were a lot of battles going on back in the period... How many can see that the water supply was a significant tactical advantage to any enemy that wanted to separate the city from its water... effectively leaving the city helpless. It was prosperous but was always in danger of being cut off by an enemy.

Let’s read from Revelations 3:14-22 CEV

This is what you must write to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

I am the one called Amen! I am the faithful and true witness and the source of God's creation. Listen to what I say.

I know everything you have done, and you are not cold or hot. I wish you were either one or the other. But since you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth. You claim to be rich and successful and to have everything you need. But you don't know how bad off you are. You are pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

Buy your gold from me. It has been refined in a fire, and it will make you rich. Buy white clothes from me. Wear them and you can cover up your shameful nakedness. Buy medicine for your eyes, so that you will be able to see.

I correct and punish everyone I love. So make up your minds to turn away from your sins. Listen! I am standing and knocking at your door. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and we will eat together. Everyone who wins the victory will sit with me on my throne, just as I won the victory and sat with my Father on his throne.

If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

My friends, the church at Laodicea stands as a warning to today's church. Did you notice that at the beginning of the passage the Lord states: "I am the one called Amen!" ?

Why this designation?

If you look back into the Old Testament you will find that the prophet Isaiah refers to the "God of Amen" Today we use Amen to acknowledge that something said is true, right and valid. This trustworthiness of Christ is seen as a stark comparison and contrast to the church at Laodicea and is used in this context for emphasis.

Think about it for a minute...

The God of Amen is true, right and valid. Laodicea is half-hearted, blasé and completely indifferent to the truth they have been given.

More Historical Context

I don't want there to be any misunderstanding about what is being said here. Often times as a pastor, I hear people say they don't understand the book of revelations. By the end of this sermon, at the very least this reference to Laodicea will be clear.

North of the city of Laodicea is a place called Hierapolis. This place was famous. It was like Harrison, Invermere, or Radium. It was totally famous for its hot springs. It was well known as a destination for people to come and bathe for health reasons. It's hot water was famous in the land for its healing properties.

South of Laodicea was a place called Colossae. Colossae was known for its pure cold mineral waters, which held refreshing properties.

Now the water in this area flowed to the tributary from which Laodicea obtained its water. By the time the water arrived at Laodicea, the water was lukewarm...

Many times this scripture is used in the context of being hot or cold. I myself have used it as an illustration of being fervent for the Lord or cold as indifferent. Yet if we really carefully exegete the context here, we can see there is a more specific meaning implied here in the Lord's criticism of Laodicea...

Our Lord says:

I know everything you have done, and you are not cold or hot. I wish you were either one or the other. But since you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth.

Specifically what the Lord is saying here is that the church at Laodicea was demonstrating a lack of devotion and that it was distasteful. The devotion of the body of Christians comprising the church at Laodicea had become unpalatable to the Lord. He was telling them their service was so unpalatable that he would literally spew them away from him. He found it nauseating.

As a church warned by the message of Laodicea, do we take the consequence of complacency seriously? Do we really actually recognize that there is a consequence for being half-hearted or lukewarm in our devotion and service to him?

We are coming to the time that he has called us to harvest. Are we committed?

Let's consider for a moment what to call a church that is not actively and obediently serving God?

Now many churches today, and in fact Laodicea itself did not recognize the state it was in. It is my belief that Laodicea is offered to us as more than a historical note. It is a warning against complacency to the modern church. Christ even recognizes this in the passage we read today where he says:

I correct and punish everyone I love. So make up your minds to turn away from your sins. Listen! I am standing and knocking at your door. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and we will eat together.

Jesus is inviting those who have grown lukewarm or complacent back into fellowship with him. He has clearly illustrated the consequences of complacency, but if faithful and just to forgive and restore. Once aware, the onus is now on the church to eliminate the complacency. He has made the church aware, he has extended his invitation to fellowship and he has indicated the results of complacency.

This message to the Christian church of today is very relevant. Laodicea was so caught up in their version of what success looks like that they failed to miss the fact that they were vulnerable. They had become convinced that they were blessed, they had money, they had stuff, they became so self-sufficient in their blessings that they either consciously or subconsciously came to the conclusion that they did not need God and so their hearts grew complacent.

We live in the richest region of the world. Even the poorest among us are in the top 5% of the richest people in the world... Is this message relevant to the North American church today? Is this a warning that needs to be given? Of course, it is the reason it is in the Word.

So what advice does Jesus give these people who have found themselves in this place. Jesus tells these church members who have become self-satisfied instead of Christ-satisfied to buy three items... Seems a bit peculiar doesn't it? Stay with me and I'll explain...

- Jesus tells the church that they need to purchase Gold refined in the fire.
 - What this means is that the riches that cannot stand the fire are not really riches. In short, He is referring to spiritual riches that have been tested and found to be real and genuine. True sustainable wealth that transcends this world is only found in Christ.
- Jesus tells them to buy white clothes.
 - An interesting contrast to how Laodicea makes wealth with the dark. Yet this is referring to garments to cover their spiritual nakedness in his righteousness. Jesus is telling the church at Laodicea that they are naked before him and their spirituality as Christians were merely illusion. They are being told that they have deceived themselves. It is also a clear point that the material possessions of this world cannot cover their nakedness.
- Jesus tells them to use some eye salve.
 - Our Lord is being clever here. They make their wealth on healing eye salve and yet their problem, their complacency and their inability to see it, is all caused by their spiritual blindness. He tells them they are blind, they need to heal their spiritual eyes and see the truth of their state.

Here is a point that stood out to me and I learned something new in preparing this sermon... Despite their wealth, despite their prosperity, the church was broke and could not survive without the government subsidy from imperial Rome.

Paul said in I Corinthians 11:32 CEV

But when the Lord judges and punishes us, he does it to keep us from being condemned with the rest of the world.

Jesus then calls the church to repent so she will not be condemned with the rest of the world. If our Lord did not care about his church he never would have bothered to leave us the warning in Laodicea.

I don't want to sound like a broken record, but the truth is Jesus does not want fans he wants followers. Leading a good life and attending church is not enough. We are to be unconditionally committed.

This morning are we 100% unconditionally committed to enthusiastically knowing and doing the will of the Lord? When he is say he would rather we be hot or cold. He is not saying to be on fire or go away, he is happy with either... No, he is saying be useful!!!

Jesus is standing in his churches today knocking on the hearts of his children. Do they listen to his correction and obey his calling or do they remain naked before him?

What is the Spirit saying to the churches in North America today?

Today, I ask each person who hears this sermon, each person who reads this sermon to look inside and ask the questions:

1. Am I spiritually blind?
2. Am I spiritually naked?
3. Am I investing in the eternal or just worldly stuff?
4. Have I grown lukewarm?

Jesus stands at the door of the hearts of those who have grown complacent and is knocking. If anyone here is hearing his knock, there is no condemnation, just please answer the door.

Prayer

**This sermon is based on a conceptual outline by Pastor Bob Leroe*