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# "Do You Need Jesus?"

## Revelation 3:14–22

Many of you are probably frequent letter writers. I am not. If you have ever RECEIVED a letter from me you can consider yourself a member of an elite minority!

- A. If you write a letter you probably write to just one person per letter
  - 1. Sometimes you might write to a whole family
  - 2. But, have you ever tried to write to a whole group of people? (like, say, to a whole church?!)
- B. Many of the books in the NT are actually letters that were written to whole churches and today we are going to look at one of them - Revelation
- C. Actually, the book of Revelation was not written to only one church
  - 1. It was addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor
  - 2. Which were representative of the other churches in Asia Minor
  - 3. And in God's plan, intended to be read by all churches since then—Yes, the book of Revelation is relevant for us today!
- D. Background of the book
  - 1. Written in 95 AD by the Apostle John from a prison on the island of Patmos (off the west coast of Asia Minor)
  - 2. During the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (Julius Caesar - Augustus (during the birth of Christ) - Caligula - Nero - Domitian)
  - 3. Under Domitian, failure to engage in emperor worship became a punishable political offense
    - a. Probably the reason John was banished to Patmos (Rev. 1:9b)
    - b. As a result, concern about imminent persecution of Christians is revealed in Revelation (which is really an exhortation to remain faithful to Christ because of His ultimate victory over Satan)

4. In light of this ultimate victory and the upcoming persecution Christ commissions John to write letters to the seven churches
  - a. As Merrill C. Tenney put it, "Rigid inspection, powerful protection, and loving evaluation must precede the day of judgment on the world, for judgment must 'begin with the family of God' " (I Pet. 4:17 NIV)
  - b. Christ is concerned with the character of the churches. This was important for facing the persecution that was to come
4. The introduction in the first chapter gives a description of Jesus which we will refer to later
5. John opens the letters to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3) with a word-picture of Christ who commissions him to write to them

#### D. Background of the letter to the church in Laodicea

1. Seven common elements can be found in the letters: The Commission to write, The Character of the One who originates the message, The Commendation, The Condemnation, The Correction, The Call, and The Challenge
  - a. Most of these elements can be found in every letter
  - b. Significant – **No.** Commendation is found in the letter to the church in Laodicea! (Christ had nothing good to say about them)
  - c. Let us strive to be different. As we look at what Christ said to the church in Laodicea this morning let us examine ourselves in all honesty to see if perhaps some of what was true about them isn't also true about us.
  - d. If this turns out to be the case, then we shall be very interested in the hope that Christ offers
2. In verse 14 of our passage we find the commission to write and a description of the character of the One who is to speak
  - a. "The Amen, the faithful and true witness"
    - means the One who is certain and reliable
    - the second part is really a definition of "The Amen"
    - verse 1:5, therefore, this refers to Jesus also
    - He is the embodiment and expression of the truth of God (John 14:6)
  - b. "the Beginning of the creation of God"
    - NIV "the ruler of God's creation"

- Jesus is preeminent both in time and authority
- He had pre-existence before creation (Col. 1:15,17)
- He is the source or origin of all creation (John 1:3)

c. Therefore, as Tenney said, "Jesus is the eternal, unalterable standard by which institutions and men must be measured."

d. Because of who He is Jesus can speak to His people as both critic and counselor

3. Through this letter we will see that the key to effective service for God is **not** the self-sufficiency of human endeavor but our response to Christ. Only through fellowship with Him are we equipped to meet the spiritual needs of those around us and therefore, can be commended by God

#### I. The church's condition

A. In vs 15-16 Jesus said that He knew their deeds and that their **deeds** were neither cold nor hot (Note: Not that they didn't have any deeds at all!)

B. He desired that their deeds were either one or the other

1. Notice that "cold" is just as desirable as "hot". The Greeks did not use these words to describe people as we do, and even here they are used to describe "deeds" rather than the spiritual "temperature" of the people.

2. They were not just "half-hearted" or "indifferent"

C. But their deeds were lukewarm so Jesus said He would have to spit (actually, vomit!) them from His mouth

D. To understand this and other allusions in the passage we need to know something of the background of the city of Laodicea itself

1. Laodicea was one of three cities in the Lycus river valley located about 150 miles east of Ephesus

2. 6 miles away - Hierapolis - known for its natural hot springs that seemed to have medicinal properties because of the minerals it contained

3. 10 miles away - Colossae - a prosperous trade city which had a spring of pure, cold water that formed a waterfall in the middle of the city

4. The location of Laodicea had been determined by the road system not because of any natural resources that might have been available

5. It was situated at the crossroads of 3 important trade routes but it had one problem: it lacked a satisfactory water supply
6. Water had to be brought to the city from a distant source by a pipeline of stone blocks then distributed by pipes which radiated from a central water tower
7. Thick deposits of impurities found in the pipes show that not only did they need a good water softener but that the water would have tasted VERY bad
8. Also, no matter what temperature the water was when it first entered the pipeline system (cold or hot) it would have become lukewarm by the time it finally arrived in Laodicea
9. Visitors to Laodicea may very well have been warned to not drink the water for the very real fear that it would make them sick!
10. Not only did every traveler probably grumble about the awful water but many (if not all!) Laodiceans must have also

E. We can see how the Laodiceans would have understood this as a rebuke from the Lord

1. As their water could easily make someone sick so their deeds being lukewarm would make the Lord sick
2. As their water lacked both the medicinal properties of the hot spring water of Hierapolis and the pure, cold, life-giving water of Colossae so their deeds lacked any spiritually medicinal or life-giving qualities
3. They would have been forced to see themselves as similarly useless. The church was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary, nor "healing" for the spiritually sick.
4. Being totally ineffective they were distasteful to the Lord
5. We need to ask ourselves today what the Lord would think of **our** deeds. Would He consider them lukewarm as well? Do they provide spiritual refreshment or "healing" to the needy? To answer that we must first ask...

F. Why were their deeds so ineffective? Why were they so distasteful to the Lord that they would make Him vomit?

G. They had a prideful attitude - verse 17

1. In the peace that usually accompanied Roman rule the city became the wealthiest city in the region (Phrygia)
  2. The Lycus river valley provided good grazing for sheep
    - a. They bred them to get a wool that was soft, glossy and black
    - b. Fame and fortune came as a result of the high demand for clothing made from this wool
  3. They developed a very successful banking industry as a result of the financial success of their woolen trade
  4. They also had a famous medical school which was known for its ear and eye ointments
  5. To illustrate both their enormous wealth as well as their pride...
    - a. In 61 AD the whole city was destroyed by an earthquake
    - b. The people of the city went about the task of rebuilding the city by their own resources actually refusing the aid of the Roman Empire!
    - c. The Emperor did not even have to declare the city an Imperial disaster area!
    - d. Within 20 to 30 years they had restored the whole city and then some!
  6. No doubt about it. These people were externally successful! They had everything... and for that they could even put up with their lukewarm water!
- H. The people in the church were so wealthy that they didn't even think they needed God! This self-sufficiency kept them from realizing their real condition (vs 17b)
1. They were so secure in their affluence and so self-satisfied that they were unaware of their real lack.
    - a. They had actually left Christ outside the church
    - b. As C. J. Hemer said "In there human self-confidence they saw no need of a Savior."
    - c. Many of you might be saying "That certainly doesn't apply to me. I'm not that rich that I'd be willing to help rebuild Rochester, MN if it was destroyed by an earthquake!"
    - d. But the real issue here is self-sufficiency in one's own resources. Isn't wealth just one of many things that can be a catalyst for this prideful attitude?

- e. Surely the Laodiceans are not alone here! I think if we are honest with ourselves we would all agree that we have struggled with this problem at one time or another
  - f. Think of areas in your life where you have thought that you didn't need anybody else's (especially God's) help or resources. Might it be:
    - raising your kids?
    - doing your job?
    - studying for school?
    - ministering in the church? (Sunday school, etc.)
  - g. A prideful feeling of self-sufficiency in one area can easily lead to a feeling of self-sufficiency in ALL areas of one's life. We then lose sight of our own real needs.
2. Christ's description of their predicament really shows 5 aspects of the same condition.
- a. 3 of the 5 correspond exactly to the 3 things that the Laodiceans were proud of possessing!
  - b. Despite their wealth and a thriving banking industry, Christ says they are "poor"
  - c. Despite their famous medical school that specializes in eye disorders, Christ says they are "blind"
  - d. Despite their beautiful, unique woolen clothing, Christ says they are "naked" (symbolizing bitter need and extreme poverty)
3. What does Christ mean by these things?

## II. Their need

- A. In verse 18 Christ says that they need to buy (a word that the Laodiceans would have been able to relate to!) three things from Him in order to correct their situation. The irony here is that they already think they have them!
- 1. Gold - that they might really become rich
    - a. Symbolizing what is truly valuable (I Pet. 1:7 - faith is more valuable than gold)
  - 2. White garments - that they might really be clothed
    - a. Symbolizing the true righteousness of Christ which belongs only to the redeemed - (Rev. 19:8 - righteous acts of the saints)
  - 3. Eye-salve - that their eyes could be healed so that they might really be able to see

- a. Symbolizing the restoration of vision which brings spiritual understanding
- B. Again, these 3 solutions offered by Christ coincide with the 3 items of pride for the Laodiceans and the 3 descriptions that Christ gives of them in vs 17
- C. Where to begin? They need to repent - vs 19 - they need a personal encounter with the risen Christ
- 1. Christ's rebuke above is an expression of His love
  - 2. Here we see the principle of rebuke and discipline that we find elsewhere in Scripture
    - a. Proverbs 3:11-12 - real love, love that cares must sometimes seek to change the behavior of the loved one for their own good
    - b. Hebrews 11:5-13 - God only disciplines His sons - this shows us His love
  - 3. How do you view discipline? Do you see it as a good and important thing?
    - a. There are times when you need to give discipline to your kids. Do you allow them to do as they like? If you do then they will surely end in ruin.
      - Children, how do you respond? Do think that your parents are out to keep you from having a good time? Next time remember that they love you and they discipline you out of concern. You might as well get used to it, for where your parents leave off God graciously takes over!
    - b. There are times when you need discipline from our loving Father in heaven. How do we react? We should not resist it but be devoutly thankful for it shows His love for us!
- D. "Be zealous therefore, and repent." NASB (i.e. As soon as you get the opportunity make a decisive act of repentance.)
- 1. Zeal - an intense and earnest effort to reach a goal
  - 2. Repent - turn around, change one's mind
  - 3. They needed to repent of their prideful, self-sufficient attitude
  - 4. Maybe this applies to you, as well, this morning. We need to find our sufficiency in God. Only in Him is salvation. Only in Him is found peace. Only in Him is security. God is our provider!

### III. Their promise

- A. The church as a whole has been addressed up until now. But repentance must be individual, therefore, the promises that follow are to the individual who will repent (you can't just take a vote as a church and decide to repent!)
- B. Verse 20 is a familiar verse. Christ is pictured as standing outside of a persons life knocking to get in. They were used to doors that would keep unwanted people out as they had built a triple gate for the city during its reconstruction.
  - 1. A picture of God seeking man. No other religion has this concept!
  - 2. It is up to the individual whether to let Him in or not. Jesus never forces His way in; He must be invited in.
  - 3. Indeed, as Barclay said, "It is, in fact, God's final punishment to leave a man alone."
  - 4. Notice the context is not one of evangelism. The promise is given to those in the church who have neglected Christ.
  - 5. As Mounce said, "Self-deluded members of the church are the ones who are given the opportunity"
- C. When Christ comes in what happens? We dine with Him, and He with us. What does that mean?
  - 1. Invitation to share intimate fellowship with Christ if they responded
  - 2. The sharing of a common meal indicated a strong bond of affection and companionship. It is a symbol of the intimacy to be enjoyed in the coming messianic kingdom which has its beginning in a fellowship in the **present**.
    - a. Matt. 8:11 - feast in heaven
    - b. Rev. 19:9 - wedding feast in heaven
  - 3. vs 21 - promise to the faithful and obedient over comer
    - a. This promise is eschatological (for the future time when we are in the presence of God). The over comers are to sit with Christ on His throne!
    - b. II Tim. 2:12 - reign with Him!

- c. Barclay - "No higher honor can be imagined!" and this is offered to the Laodiceans who had just received one of the worst rebukes in the letters to the 7 churches!
- d. "He who overcomes" - this personalizes the challenge and the promise. "This means **you!**" Not everyone, but me.

Conclusion - vs 22

- A. "churches" - The Spirit was not just talking to one church. But to us as well.
- B. We are exhorted to really hear what was just said. Really hearing means doing something about it because then the rebukes and the promises are taken seriously.
- C. What about you? Have you lost your sense of needing Christ? He is addressing those who have.
- D. Get alone today with God and examine your heart. We need to put away our self-sufficiency and exchange it for intimate fellowship with Christ and reliance on God. Only then will we be able to meet the spiritual needs of those around us and truly be commendable by God.
- E. Be zealous! Don't delay! His promises await you!