

The Self-Deluded Church

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[0 : 00] Good, well we turn now to our Bible reading for this evening, and we're in the book of Revelation, and chapter 3, if you're using one of our Blue Vista Bibles, that's page 1030.

And this is the last in our little series here at the start of Revelation, looking at these letters to the seven churches. And so tonight, we're in the final letter, the church to Laodicea, and that's chapter 3, verse 14.

So Revelation 3, and from verse 14. And to the angel of the church in Laodicea writes, the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

For you say, I am rich, I prospered, and I need nothing. Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

[1 : 25] I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments, so that you may clothe yourself, and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. So be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to us this evening.

Very good. Often catches us out, that one, doesn't it, at the end? Good. Well, please do turn to Revelation and chapter 3, and we'll think together about this letter to the church in Laodicea.

[2 : 55] Now, this confession may surprise you, but I was never really all that into the X factor. I'm sure there are a few diehard fans out there, but for the uninitiated, the X factor was, or is, a talent show.

A singing talent show. Now, I wasn't all that keen myself, but I did quite enjoy dipping in at the very beginning of a new series. You would have a set of episodes where people were auditioning to take it further in the competition.

And all sorts of folk would go and stand in front of Simon Cowell and the others and sing their wee hearts out. And I was always astonished at the levels of self-delusion I witnessed.

You'd have 18-year-old Jamie from Pristatin or wherever, and he simply could not hold a tune. It would be truly awful. And Simon Cowell would point out the awfulness of it.

Cue absolute astonishment and bewilderment from Jamie from Pristatin. And the usual defense would go something like this, but my mom says, I'm an amazing singer.

[4 : 03] She says I can sing beautifully. Well, Jamie's mom is wrong, and Jamie is utterly self-deluded. Unwilling to see the reality, he cannot sing.

Now, that's the most trivial example, isn't it? It's very trivial indeed, but it is pitiable. Person after person on that show would have the reality of their talents exposed.

But they were totally oblivious to the fact, totally self-deluded. Now, to be self-deluded on the X factor, well, that doesn't really matter at all, does it?

But far, far more serious, and that is the real issue in this letter, far more serious, far more pitiable is the self-delusion of a church.

And self-delusion is the real issue here in the last of our seven letters to the churches here in Laodicea. Look again at verse 17.

[5 : 00] You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

The situation in Laodicea is desperate. The Lord has not one positive thing to say about them, and they don't suspect that anything at all is wrong.

But the Lord Jesus, in his mercy, does not leave them in their utter self-delusion. And the Lord Jesus, through the Apostle Paul, he sends them this letter.

And these are the words, verse 14, the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. So, they had better listen up, hadn't they?

Three points. First, the self-delusion that renders a church useless. Second, the sobering reality that requires a church repents.

[6 : 00] And thirdly, the sovereign Lord rebukes such a church because he loves them. So, first, verses 15 to 17, the self-delusion that renders a church useless.

The fact of the church's uselessness there is established in verses 15 and 16. Look at what Jesus says about the church. You are neither cold nor hot.

Would that you were either cold or hot. So, because you're lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. Let's notice what Jesus is saying here.

And it's not what we tend to assume. We use the term lukewarm to mean someone who's half-hearted, lacking in enthusiasm. We imagine a sliding scale, don't we, from cold to hot, with cold being bad and hot being good.

But Jesus doesn't mean it in that sense here. Notice that his complaint against them is that they are neither cold nor hot. His complaint is not, you're not hot enough.

[7 : 13] Rather, it's that they're not one or the other. They are neither hot nor cold. Look at what he says next. Would that you were either cold or hot.

So, because you're lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. Why does he say that? What's the problem with being lukewarm?

Well, the problem is that it lacks any sort of usefulness. Cold water has its uses. It's pleasant to drink. Likewise, hot water has its uses.

It's pleasant to drink. Who likes a lukewarm cup of tea? So, the church is not being called to task for its spiritual temperature, but rather for its barrenness of its works.

They're useless. They're ineffective. They're bland. Distasteful to the Lord. Now, this understanding of the text is pressed home by the situation of the first readers, those who first got this in Laodicea.

[8 : 17] The city itself was without its own water source. It was located near two other cities, Hierapolis and Colossae. Six miles to the north of Laodicea, across the valley, was Hierapolis, known for its hot springs.

The hot spring would pour forth hot water, and that would, by the time it reached Laodicea, be lukewarm, and therefore of no medicinal use.

Similarly, down the road in Colossae, it had its own pure, clean, and cold water source, ideal for refreshment, for drinking. And so, as one commentator put it, the contrast being made here, which would have been immediately apparent to the first readers, was the contrast between the hot medicinal waters of Hierapolis and the cold, pure waters of Colossae.

The church there in Laodicea was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary nor healing for the spiritually sick.

It was totally ineffectual and thus distasteful to the Lord. So, the church in Laodicea was useless.

[9 : 38] It was neither hot nor cold. And Jesus establishes the fact of their uselessness here. And that is a devastating assessment because the Lord will spit them out.

Utterly useless to him. It's a church that leaves a horrible taste in the mouth of the Lord Jesus.

Utterly useless. But why? Why are they useless?

Well, in verse 17, we see that they're useless because they are utterly self-deluded. Look down again. Let me read from the end of verse 16. Jesus says, I will spit you out of my mouth, for you say, I'm rich, I've prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

The church in Laodicea doesn't think it needs anything from the Lord Jesus. This is a church that thinks it has it all together.

This is a church that has made the mistake of equating the material realities of the city around them with the spiritual realities of the church in the sight of Jesus. The city of Laodicea, it was known for

the three things.

[10 : 54] It was known for three things. And these three things are the very things that the church have attributed to their own spiritual well-being. Laodicea was a church known for its financial wealth.

It was known for its textile industry. It was known also for its medical school. And in particular, they made this eye ointment there in the city. It was well known. And such was the wealth and self-sufficiency of Laodicea that when it was struck by an earthquake in AD 60, totally destroyed the city.

Laodicea rebuilt itself with its own funds. No need to go to the Roman Empire Emergency Relief Fund. They did it themselves. Such was the wealth of this city.

This was a city with a strut, with wealth. A city that was self-sufficient and knew it. And it seems that the status of the city had rubbed off on the church.

You say, Jesus speaking to the church, you say, I'm rich. I've prospered. I need nothing. This was a church that thought it had arrived.

[12 : 08] But in reality, it was a church that Jesus couldn't use. He could only spit them out. The reality that Jesus saw, the reality that the church there needed to come to terms with was this.

You are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, naked. They consider themselves to be rich in no need of help from anybody else.

But Christ's verdict is that they are at least spiritually desperately needy. And in their complacent self-delusion, they were completely unaware of that fact. A self-deluded church is a complacent church, a useless church.

A church that thinks it's rich and prosperous is going to be consumed with itself and its comforts.

Prayer and evangelism will slip down the priority list, won't they?

Yes, we'll insist on orthodoxy from the pulpit, but we'll not pay too much attention. Because, well, we're rich, we're prosperous, we don't need anything. What else can the word of God add to my life?

[13 : 17] Do you see how such a church could become utterly repulsive to the Lord Jesus? How he can only spit out such a church? A self-deluded church is a sad church to be in.

I've seen it. A church that tells itself it's going great and prospering. A church that tells itself it's united when the reality is the opposite. It's desperately sad.

So heed the warning, Tron Church. Let's never think to ourselves, yes, we've made it.

Look at our buildings. Look at our prosperity. Look how great we are. Never think that. Always ask the Lord to show you the reality. A right prayer to pray off the back of this letter, off the back of this first point, is this.

Lord, keep us. Keep us from self-delusion. Keep us from thinking we've made it. Rather, show us our poverty. Show us our weakness.

[14 : 22] Open our blind eyes that we would see our great need and your great provision. The Lord can use a people like that. Well, there's our first point.

The self-delusion that renders the church useless in the eyes of the Lord. So secondly then, verses 18 and 19, we see the sobering reality that requires that such a church repents.

The Lord Jesus exposes the reality. If a self-deluded church like this one is to have any hope of revival, of real life, then it must come face to face with that reality.

And that is never going to be easy. It's very sobering. Can you imagine how this letter went down in Laodicea as it was read out? You can almost imagine the spluttering indignation, can't you, among some?

How dare you say that, Jesus? How dare you point out that fact? We're fine. Can you imagine it? How dare you?

[15 : 29] But here is Jesus' assessment. You're lukewarm. You're good for nothing, and you don't see it. You're self-deluded. You're not rich. You're poor.

You're not prosperous. You're wretched and pitiable. You're not without need. In fact, you're blind and naked. That's the sobering reality. And so, in light of that reality, Jesus counsels them.

He appeals to them to repent. Look at verse 18. I counsel you to buy from me the gold that is refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments, so that you may clothe yourselves, and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

The very things that the city prided itself on, wealth, textiles, eye ointments. Jesus tells the church, you can only get those things from me.

The smug satisfaction of the Laodiceans is countered with the advice that they make some purchases in the very areas in which they're most confident no need exists. The very areas they think they're strongest.

[16:44] Jesus says, come, you have to buy from me. Jesus really cuts them down to size, doesn't he? Imagine that you're in with your professor at university getting your end-of-term reports, or imagine you're in work getting your annual appraisal.

And in the very areas you think you're absolutely rock solid, going well, you're the best in class. Well, you're actually told you're weakest in those very areas.

You need most attention on those things that you thought you were safe on. It's devastating, isn't it, to be made to face up with reality. Pride is totally burst.

Repent, says Jesus to a self-deluded church. Turn again to me, and I will provide all the things that you think you have, but don't. I will provide them for you.

Just turn to me. So what is it that this church lacked that they could only obtain from the Lord? Three things we see there.

[17:48] Gold, white garments, and salve, eye ointment. Now, of course, these are not literally meant. They already have all these things in a physical sense.

The city was known for them. They could pop down to the local pharmacy or to the bank to pick these things up. But these are goods that only Jesus could provide, and they refer to spiritual realities.

Spiritual realities that the church desperately needs because they're not rich. They are spiritually poor. So Jesus says to them, firstly, come, buy from me gold so that you may be rich, spiritually rich.

Only in Jesus are eternal riches to be found, riches that will outlast this earthly life, riches that can be ours only through the salvation and redemption Christ offers.

That's what he's talking about. Buy that from me. Second is white garments so that you may clothe yourselves. And white clothes, so often in the book of Revelation, are a reference to righteousness, a righteousness that these folk desperately need because they're spiritually naked.

[18:59] And then lastly, to combat their spiritual blindness, they need to buy salve to anoint their eyes. Their great need, as we've seen, is that they would see themselves accurately, see themselves as Christ sees them, and so see their desperate needs, which only he can provide.

These verses were a very sobering dose of reality for the church and Laodicea, weren't they? A real kick in the teeth.

A real dose of reality. But Jesus says these things so that the church would not only wake up to the reality, but also repent and turn to him and seek from him the things that they needed most.

And that is true for the church in every age and for us today. Is it possible that the very areas where we think that we're strongest are, in fact, the areas we need all from Christ?

It's very dangerous to think you're competent. That's when self-reliance starts to creep in.

Complacency starts to take root. It's good to remember, isn't it, that we are totally dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ, especially for the things that we think we're probably good at.

[20:23] So do we need a reality check, I wonder? It's not a bad thing, is it, to rehearse the things we think we're good at and then cry out again to the Lord to help us in those very areas.

That was the Laodicean failing. They totally missed where they were weak. They thought they were the bee's knees, but they were in dire straits. The sobering reality requires that such a church repents.

That's our second point. But thirdly now, and finally, verses 19 to the end, the Sovereign Lord rebukes such a church because he loves them.

Jesus says all these things, these difficult words, these sobering words. He says them because he loves them.

Jesus loves his church. Look again at verse 19. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. So be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

[21:28] If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and him with me. Even though the Lord Jesus is thoroughly disgusted with this lukewarm church, even though the only suitable response is to spit them out of his mouth, there is nevertheless grace here,

isn't there?

There is undergirding all that is said, a wonderful and tender care and love for this church. Jesus is so straight and direct and shocking because he's loving and gracious.

For the Lord to refrain from saying these things, for Jesus not to say these tough things would have been the very antithesis of love. So when the Lord rebukes a church like this, he does it because he loves them.

We often mean the very opposite, don't we, today? When people talk about loving people, showing love, what they often really mean is unconditional acceptance, total agreement, total affirmation.

To point out any sort of failing or to point out the possibility that somebody might make a wrong choice. Well, that can't be love. That's what our culture tells us, isn't it?

[22 : 47] But that is not love. That is not real love. Real love points out hard truths. And Jesus does that to his church. So although the sober reality here would have been very, very painful to come to terms with, it would be salvation for that church.

If they receive those truths humbly and repent. That is the intention of the Lord Jesus here. He says these things because he loves them and so that they would return to him.

That is what he wants. He loves them. He wants them to return to him. He stands at the door.

He knocks. If anyone hears him and opens the door, he will come in and join them. He'll eat with them. Now that verse there, I've just read verse 20.

It can be applied without damage, I think, to the unbeliever, as we often use it. But that's not its purpose here. This verse 20 is addressed to a lukewarm church, to lukewarm Christians who think they have no more needs of the living Lord Jesus.

[24 : 01] It's addressed to churchgoers who do not enjoy the riches of Christ or the garments of Christ or the medicine of Christ because they keep the door shut. They keep the heart of their inner lives. All the dealings they have with Jesus are the sort of business-like lukewarm dealings with the salesman on the front door of the house.

You can stay outside, but you're not coming in. The very concept of Christ, the Son of God, once crucified for sinners, standing in the road outside the very church for which he died and which is a true home, would be staggering, wouldn't it, if it wasn't so common?

That he should be outside the unbeliever's heart is no surprise, but that he should be exiled from his church, which is called by his name, is astonishing, isn't it? And yet we see it all over the place.

As one writer put it, in their blind self-sufficiency, they had, as it were, excommunicated the risen Lord from their congregation. And yet, in an act of unbelievable condescension, he requests permission to re-enter and to re-establish fellowship.

It's a staggering image, isn't it? The church for whom he died excommunicated him. He'd stay outside. And yet he comes and knocks on the door.

[25 : 27] Unbelievable condescension from the Lord. What love Jesus has for his church. That he would knock the door that's been closed to him. Sobering, isn't it?

And may that not be the case here at the Tron Church. Not now, not in a year's time, not ten years' time. For what is at stake here is everything for now and eternity.

Look on to what Jesus promises to those who conquer. Verse 21. Those who hear his voice. Those who open the door, who repent.

Jesus promises to them, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne. Let's never presume to know our own spiritual state by our own estimations.

Let's never fall into the trap of self-delusion that's befallen Laodicea and be rendered useless by the Lord Jesus. Let's never shut the door to the Lord Jesus, thinking we have it all together.

[26 : 36] What foolishness. Rather, listen to Jesus. Listen to his rebukes. And when they strike home, repent.

When Jesus puts his finger on an issue, repent. repent. Jesus loves his church. He loves you, Tron Church.

He loves you. And he loves nothing more than to be welcomed in, to sit and eat with us. He loves nothing more than to provide abundantly all that we need.

And he loves to assure us of eternity with him, reigning on his throne. That is what awaits the believer. That is what awaits his church, reigning forevermore with him in the new creation.

So let's not be self-deluded. But rather, let's listen to Christ's assessment of his church. And if we need to repent, we must. Because Jesus does it.

[27 : 36] He says these things because he loves his church. For he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Amen. Let me pray. Our Father God, we thank you that you love your church, the church for which you died.

And Lord, you bring difficult words at times because you love us. And so we do pray, Father, that you would help us to not be deluded about our true state.

We do not presume to think we've made it and are something. But Lord, realize that all we need, all we need comes from you alone. So help us to be a dependent people rather than a deluded people. And help us to repent where you put your finger on an issue. So Lord, help us to be a living church, a church that is useful to you.

[28 : 57] And we ask you to help us in that task. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Sherman, amen.

Amen.