

Laodicea - A Church Apathetic and Deluded

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn to our Bible readings now, and we are in the book of Revelation. If you don't have a Bible with you, we have plenty available. There are Bibles at the side, at the back. Do please grab one of the visitor Bibles if you need to.
- And we are in Revelation, the very last book in the Bible. And we're in Revelation chapter 3. I'll give you a moment to look that up, Revelation chapter 3.
- And we have been looking at these short letters from the risen Lord Jesus to the churches in Asia, what we now call Turkey. And we're looking at the last of the seven letters this morning.
- So Revelation chapter 3, and reading from verse 14. It's the letter to the church in Laodicea. So Revelation 3 and verse 14.
- And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.
- [1 : 1 3] 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 have prospered, and I need nothing.
- Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 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.
- [2 : 1 9] If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into 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. May God bless his word to us this morning.
- Good, well please have those words in Revelation 3, open in front of you, as we consider the last of these letters to the seven churches, and the church in Laodicea.
- Now of all the seven churches we've looked at, and read about here in Revelation 2 and 3, you can make the case that Laodicea is in the worst shape.
- Other churches, despite major failings, have some redeeming features. Ephesus was in real danger, but still had many good things going on.
- [3 : 3 4] Sardis, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, was in real danger, major trouble, but it had a faithful remnant within. But Laodicea, Laodicea was in such bad shape that Jesus had these words to say about them.
- Look again what it says. Verse 16, Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

Spit is a polite way of putting it. The Greek word here is emio. Now some of you will be medics here, you're doctors or nurses or working in the medical profession, and you'll know what an emetic is.

An emetic is a medicine to produce nausea and vomiting. And it comes from the same word, meaning to spit out. That is what Jesus is saying about this church.

It's a very graphic, visceral word. Laodicea is a stale, sickening, distasteful church. And Jesus is ready to get it out of his mouth.

[4 : 51] He wants to spit it out. Now these would have been deeply shocking words for the church there to receive, because their opinion of themselves was the total opposite.

Look at verse 17. Here's what they think about themselves. You say, as in church and Laodicea, you say about yourselves, I'm rich, I've prospered, and I need nothing.

Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. You see, this church in Laodicea, they thought they were a delicious-tasting church.

They thought they were like a fine wine in the mouth of the Lord Jesus. Not so. The situation in Laodicea is desperate.

He dislikes the taste so much, he spits them out. He vomits them out. But the Lord has not one positive thing to say about them.

[6 : 00] And they don't suspect that anything at all is wrong. You see, no church is worse off in Revelation than Laodicea. But no church has a higher opinion of itself than Laodicea.

They thought they were the bee's knees. But the Lord Jesus thought they were the opposite. And often those things go together, don't they? Those who have the highest opinion of themselves are often in the worst spot.

Conversely, those who can see their own sin most clearly, most visibly, they are in a better spot, aren't they? That is a sign of Christian maturity.

Not a growing sort of miserableness, but a growing realization of the depth of our own sin, a growing realism about the reality of our own hearts.

That is a sign of maturity. Laodicea was not a mature church. They thought very highly of themselves. They did not see the reality.

[7 : 06] But the Lord Jesus, in his mercy, does not leave the church in Laodicea in their self-delusion.

And through the Apostle John, he sends them this letter, exposing the reality, and calling them to turn from their ways. Imagine the church in Laodicea gathered one Sunday morning, this letter arrives.

It was not what they expected. It was very shocking. We'll look at it in three parts. Looking at verses 15 to 17 first, we see the self-delusion that renders a church useless.

The self-delusion that renders a church useless. See, this, as we've seen, this was a church utterly deluded about its own reality, about its own status in the eyes of Jesus.

They think they are a superstar church. But actually, in Jesus' assessment, they're useless. They're good for nothing.

[8 : 18] And the fact of the church's uselessness is established there in verses 15 and 16. Look again what Jesus says. 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. Notice that the Lord Jesus' complaint here is that they are neither cold nor hot.

His complaint is not, you're not hot enough, but rather it's not one or the other. You're not cold, neither are you hot.

You're somewhere in the middle. You're lukewarm. His complaint is that they're not one or the other. Look at what it says. Were that you, were either cold or hot.

But because you're lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I'll spit you out. Why does he say that? What's the problem with being lukewarm? What's the issue?

[9 : 28] Well, the problem is they lack any sort of usefulness. You see, cold water has its uses. You can use it for things. It's nice to drink.

Likewise, hot water also has its uses. You can clean things. You can wash things. You can have a nice warm bath. But lukewarm water, this has pretty limited uses.

Who likes a lukewarm cup of tea? Some people in my house actually do. They'll leave a cup of tea sitting for hours and finish it. I can't do that. It's got to be hot. Who likes a lukewarm glass of Coke?

Nobody. You like a hot bath? Or if you're a bit odd, you like a cold bath? But a lukewarm bath, who likes a lukewarm bath?

So the issue with the church was that it wasn't hot or cold because both those things have uses. Lukewarm, it's of no use.

[10 : 31] So the church has been called to task because of the barrenness of its works. It's not useful. They're not good for anything. Like lukewarm water, that's what Jesus is saying.

That's the illustration he's using. They are useless, ineffective, bland, distasteful to the Lord. And this understanding of the text is further pressed home by the situation of the first readers there in Laodicea.

The city itself, Laodicea, didn't have its own water supply. But it was located near two other cities which did. Hierapolis and Colossae.

Now, six miles north of Laodicea was Hierapolis and it was known for its hot springs. So you'd go up there to enjoy some nice hot water.

But Laodicea had none of its own. Similarly, down the road was Colossae. And Colossae had its own pure, clean, cold water source. It was a place where you could get cold water from the spring.

[11 : 37] Ideal for refreshments. So you've got hot water up the road, you've got cold water, and you've got Laodicea in the middle. The people there would have got the implication pretty quickly.

Hot water's got its uses, cold water has its uses. But Laodicea was neither. The Laodicean church was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary nor healing for the spiritually sick.

It was totally ineffectual and therefore distasteful to the Lord. It was an apathetic church. Passive, disinterested, listless, indifference.

And that is one of the hardest things to address in the church. It's one of the hardest things to address in your own family or in your own life.

And sadly, we do know people like this, spiritually apathetic. Maybe that's some of us here. Maybe you've grown up in the church.

[12 : 42] Maybe you're still in the church. You don't outwardly hate Jesus. You're not anti-Christian, but you've never professed the faith or rejected it.

You're sort of indifferent and passive. You're fine about going to church. No big deal. No beef against the church. But there's nothing really going on. There's no spiritual pulse.

They're not growing. They're not involved. They're not reading their Bible. They're not confessing sin. They're not pursuing Christ. They're not engaged with the task of making and growing disciples of Jesus Christ. Apathetic.

Passive. Disinterested. Indifferent. Listless. A consumer. Not a contributor. Church attendance becomes every other week, once a month, quietly dropping out of serving, perhaps not in an intentional, thought-through way, but that's what's happening.

You're pulling out. You're retreating to the edges of church life. And that seems to be the case for the whole church in Laodicea. Useless.

[13 : 51] Apathetic. Listless. And that sort of church Jesus deems useless. He will spit that church out of his mouth.

It leaves a horrible taste in the mouth of Lord Jesus. But why are they useless? Why is this church like lukewarm water?

Why is it not good for anything? Well, in verse 17, look again there, we see that they are useless because their self-delusion has led them there.

I will spit you out of my mouth, says Jesus, for you say I'm rich. I've prospered and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

They don't think they need anything from the Lord Jesus. This is a church that thinks it has it all together. The Christians in Laodicea think they've nailed it.

[15 : 00] They haven't. They think they're faithful. They aren't. They think they have a good testimony about themselves, but they don't. You see, people who are spiritually coasting along don't think they're coasting.

The church in Laodicea didn't think they were lukewarm, but they were. This was a church that perhaps 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.

Laodicea was known as a very rich, prosperous city. It was known for its financial wealth, its textile industry, its medical school.

This was a city with a strut. It was a city that walked up straight. A city that was self-sufficient and wealthy.

It knew it. And it seems that the status of the city had rubbed off on the church. You say, I'm rich. I have prospered.

[16 : 08] I need nothing. That was how Laodicea felt about itself. This was a church that thought it had arrived. But in reality, it was a church that Jesus couldn't use.

He could only spit it out. The reality that Jesus saw, the reality that the church there needed to come to terms with was this. You're actually wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Christ's verdict, which is the ultimate verdict that only counts, he says, at least spiritually, they're desperately needy. And in their complacent self-delusion, they were totally unaware of the fact.

You see, a self-deluded church, a church that is complacent will be a useless church in the eyes of the Lord. A church that thinks it's rich and prosperous and it's going to be consumed with itself and its own comforts.

Prayer, evangelism will slip down the priority list, won't they? Their concerns will be about what happens in the church with its people. They won't be too concerned about the world outside that is lost and needs to hear the gospel.

[17 : 26] Yes, we'll insist on orthodoxy from the pulpit. We want the best preachers, but we'll not pay too much attention. We'll let it wash over us. If we don't like what we hear, we'll leave.

We'll go somewhere else. Because we're rich and prosperous, we need nothing. What can the word of God add to my life?

I've got it all together. Do you see how such a church can become repulsive in the eyes of the Lord? How we can only spit out a church that thinks it's got it all together.

A self-deluded church is a sad church to be in. I've seen it. A church that tells itself it's going great.

A church that thinks to itself it's prospering. A church that tells itself it's united in the gospel when actually the reality is the opposite. It's desperately sad when a church is deluded.

[18 : 30] 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 these first verses is this.

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

Open our blind eyes that we would see our great need and your great provision. Don't be a deluded church, Tron Church.

Be a dependent church. A church utterly dependent on everything for the Lord. The Lord can use a people like that, can't he? The Lord can use a dependent people.

[19 : 35] He can't use a deluded people. Well, that was our first point. It's sobering, isn't it? The self-delusion that renders the church useless. Pretty tough for ladies here to hear that.

But look on to verses 18 and 19. This sobering reality that Jesus has outlined requires that such a church repents. That's our second point.

The sobering reality that requires that a church like that repents. the Lord's exposed the reality. If a self-deluded church is to have any hope of revival or real life, then it must come face-to-face with reality.

And that is never going to be easy, is it? Coming to terms with reality is never easy. Coming to terms with the reality of your bank account is never easy.

It's tempting just to never look. But sometimes we have to come to terms with reality. And it's very sobering. Can you imagine how this went down and led a seer as it was read out?

[20 : 49] You can almost imagine the spluttering indignation among some there in the church. How dare you say that? How dare you say that we are to be spat out from the Lord Jesus' mouth?

But that was Jesus' assessment. 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. And in light of that, the Lord counsels them, he appeals to them to repent. Look at verse 18. He says, I counsel you to buy from me the 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 salved to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

See, the way things that the city prided itself on, wealth, textiles, apparently eye ointment, there's a place to go for eye ointment.

Jesus tells the church, you can only get those things from me. The very things the city prided itself on, Jesus says, you must get them from me.

[22 : 09] 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 that no need exists. Jesus really cuts them down to size.

imagine you're in with your university professor, getting your end of term reports, maybe you're getting your annual review at work, you're there with the boss, and the very areas where you think you are most solid and doing well, you're told actually that's your biggest weakness, that's the need of most attention.

It's devastating sometimes to be made to face up with reality, isn't it? Pride has burst. And that is what Jesus says to Laodicea. Repent, says Jesus to the 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 actually lacked, which it could only obtain from the Lord? Well, three things. He says you need gold, white garments, and salve, eye ointment, there in verse 18.

[23 : 41] Now, they already have all these things in a physical sense. The city was known for them. So it's not literally meant. Jesus is not saying get literal gold from me or literal eye ointments.

No. They have all these physical things. They could go down to the bank, they could go down to the pharmacy and get these things. But these are goods that only Jesus could provide.

He's referring to spiritual realities. Spiritual realities this church desperately needs because they are spiritually poor. They think they're rich but they're not.

Jesus says come buy from me gold so that you may be rich, spiritually rich. See, 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 that Jesus offers. the only riches that really matter are the ones that only Jesus can give.

[24 : 47] And that is what he's saying to this church. Come to me and I will give you gold that never rusts, never destroy, will always be there. Come, I will give you spiritual riches.

sinner. He says, come and get white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen.

now the white garments he's talking about here, you see these through revelation over and over again and it's a reference to righteousness, right standing before the Lord, a righteousness that these folk desperately need because they're spiritually naked.

they think they are arriving in royal robes, they think they are spiritually rich, decked out in the finest, but Jesus says, no, you're naked. You need the white garments that only I can provide.

And lastly, to combat their spiritual blindness, they need to buy salve to anoint their eyes. That great need, as we've seen, is that they would see themselves accurately, that they would see themselves as Christ sees them, and so that they would see their own desperate need, which only he can resolve.

[26 : 14] And we all need that, don't we? We all need to see ourselves with clear vision. We need to see ourselves as Jesus sees us. And all of us, all of us need Christ.

All of us need forgiveness. And so, these dear folk in Laodicea, they need to see clearly. They're spiritually blind. So, Jesus says, come, I can give you these things.

I can give you gold, white garments, salve for your eyes. Very sobering words for the church in Laodicea. But Jesus says these things to the church so that the church would not only wake up and see the reality, but also repent and turn to him and seek the things they needed most.

It's all very well seen the reality. But you must do something with that. You must repent and turn to the Lord. It's no good seeing these things without doing something about it.

and Jesus urges the church to repent. And so for every church and every age and for us today, we need to consider, is it possible that the very areas where we think we're strongest are in fact the areas where we need all from Christ?

[27 : 46] It's very dangerous to think that we're competent. that's when self-reliance creeps in, complacency starts to take root. It's good to remember that we are totally dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ for everything, especially for the things we think we're good at.

Do we need a reality check, I wonder? It's not a bad thing to rehearse the things that we think we're good at, personally, as a church, and cry out again to the Lord to help us in those very areas.

That was the Laodicean failing. They could not see the reality. They thought they were strong, they were not. They thought they were the bee's knees, but they were in dire straits.

The sobering reality requires that a church repents. That's our second point. We must repent. If the Lord shows us these things, if the Lord reveals to us sobering realities, we must repent.

But lastly, final point, verses 19 to 22. The sovereign Lord does this. The sovereign Lord rebukes a church like that because he loves them.

[29 : 09] The sovereign Lord rebukes a church like that because he loves them. 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. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and him with me.

Jesus says these difficult things and they are difficult, aren't they? He says them because he loves them. Even though the Lord Jesus is thoroughly displeased with this church, even though the only suitable response is for him to spit them out, there is nevertheless grace here for this church.

church, there is undergirding all that is said, there is a wonderful and tender care and love for this church. Jesus is so straight and direct with the church and Laodicea because he loves them.

He says these things because he is loving and gracious. For the Lord to refrain from saying these things, that would have been in the very antithesis of love.

[30 : 35] To allow the church to continue in its delusion, that is not loving. So when the Lord rebukes a church like this, he does so because he loves the church.

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

To point out a failing, to point out the possibility that somebody might be making a wrong choice, that can't be love, so our culture tells us.

But that's not love, is it? Real love points out hard truths, and Jesus does that for his church. love, and although the sobering reality will no doubt be very painful to come to terms with, it will be salvation for a church that receives such truths humbly and then repents.

That is the intention of the Lord Jesus. He says these things because he loves them, and so that they will return to him. And that's always the way.

[31 : 49] Maybe you feel the Lord's discipline in your life, even now. Maybe some of these words have hit home. Well, the Lord is gently disciplining you, calling you to repent.

That is his loving intention, so that you return again and come to him. He says these things because he loves you. But so often, that's hard, isn't it?

He's here standing at the door knocking, if anyone hears him and opens the door, he will come in and join them and eat with them. But it's so often that's hard for people, for churches to respond to Christ's word, isn't it?

See, these words are addressed to a lukewarm church. These words were addressed to lukewarm Christians who thought they had no need for Christ.

Christ. This is 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 to their very hearts.

[33 : 03] Later, see, it was keeping Jesus on the outside. The picture is here of Jesus knocking on the door. He's out on the street, knocking on the door of his church. church. And it's very hard when Jesus kept like that outside in the street.

All the dealings a church like this has with Jesus are business-like, lukewarm dealings like a salesman kept on the front door of the house. But the concept of Christ, the Son of God, once crucified for sinners, standing in the road outside the very church for which he died, which is his true home, it's shocking.

Is it not? It's the picture here of Jesus outside knocking on the door for which he died. It's shocking, but it happens. That he should be outside of the unbeliever's heart, that's no surprise, but that he should be exiled from the church which is called by his name is astonishing, isn't it?

one writer put it this way, in their blind self-sufficiency, they had, as it were, excommunicated the risen Lord Jesus from their congregation.

Yet, in an act of unbelievable condescension, he requests permission to re-enter and re-establish fellowship.

[34 : 37] friendship, what love Jesus has for his church, that he would knock on the door that's been closed to him.

Sobering, and may not be the case here at the Tron church, not now, not in a year's time, not in ten years' time. Because what is at stake is everything, for now and eternity.

Look on to what Jesus promises for those who conquer. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into 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. Do you see what he's saying?

To those who conquer will sit with Christ forever, reigning with him. That is what Jesus offers to all who will return, who will welcome him in.

[35 : 49] So let's never presume to know our own true spiritual state by our own estimations. The word of the Lord exposes our hearts, doesn't it.

Let's see ourselves through the lens of scripture. Let's never fall into the trap of self-delusion that had befallen Laodicea. Let's never be rendered useless by the Lord.

Let's never shut the door to the Lord Jesus Christ by thinking we have it all together. It's foolishness. Rather, listen to Jesus. Listen to his rebukes.

and when they repent, when they strike home, repent. Jesus loves his church. He loves you, Tron Church.

He loves you, Christian. And he loves nothing more than to be welcomed in, to sit and eat with us.

[36 : 52] He loves nothing more than to provide abundantly for all that we need to assure us of eternity with him, reigning on the throne. He loves you.

And it's not too late. Even if you're here this morning and you realize you have been complacent, you have been lukewarm, apathetic, God can give you new life.

he's eager to do so. Because he loves you. And he wants to come and dine with you, to have fellowship with you.

And if the Lord is knocking on the door of your heart this morning, maybe it's for the very first time, or maybe you've been a Christian for a long time and you've realized you've pushed the Lord out.

Well, if the Lord is knocking on the door of your heart this morning, then open it. Let him in, right now this morning, and he will dine with you.

[37 : 58] Let's pray. Father God, we thank you that you are a loving and gracious God, that you delight nothing more than to sit down and to dine with sinners like us.

And so, Lord, keep us from thinking too highly of ourselves, but rather help us to see us as you do, and to turn, and to repent, to call on you for salvation.

Thank you that you are a good and a gracious God. And help us always to trust you, help us always to be dependent upon you, and thank you that you are a gracious God.

We praise you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.