

Seven Churches pt 7 4-1-00

Laodicea

We've come to the last church to which the resurrected Lord Jesus addressed through his secretary, John. Most of Scripture is a miraculous blend of the personality of a servant of God and the Spirit of God carrying them along as they wrote. Every word was Divinely inspired or breathed and yet they carry a touch of the holy instrument through which they came. But these letters have been dictated. The personality behind them is not John's but Jesus Christ's. I have been over these letters many times but this time the thing that has really caught my attention is the wonder of our Sovereign Lord. The situations within each city, the history and the culture, all are used by the Lord in making his word plain and understandable. The needs of each church are addressed in the physical setting. It is as if Jesus planned the conditions to be an illustration of his words so the church could get the message. "Oh how He loves you and me."

This is the one church to which there is not a single word of commendation. Still, it is filled with love. We begin, as each letter does, with a description of Christ that emphasizes the call and need of the church addressed.

Rev 3:14 (NIV)¹⁴ "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

To the speaker that week Jesus sends the living Word to be read to the congregation in Laodicea. Laodicea was the banking center for Asia Minor. It was in Lycus Valley that connected Ephesus with Syria. That road was said to be the most important in Asia. It was one of the wealthiest cities, many ruins of great homes can still be seen there. In this affluent city were Christians who also seem to have enjoyed the great wealth there.

Jesus calls himself the Amen. We tack this on to our prayers like an "over and out", "so be it" or "let it be so". Jesus used it to emphasize truth. He began sentences with it. Your translation may say, "Truly, truly" or "Verily, verily". In Greek it is, "Amen, amen". It is a way of saying, "This isn't just important, it is very important". The words of the Amen, are the way it is. They are reality.

The faithful and true witness is the next description. John 8:16-18 (NIV)¹⁶ But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.¹⁷ In your own Law it is written that the *testimony* of two men is valid.¹⁸ I am one who testifies for myself; my other *witness* is the Father, who sent me."

John 8:26 (NIV)²⁶ "I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is *reliable*, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."

John 18:37 (NIV)³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and *for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth*. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

What Jesus says cannot be deceptive or untrue. He only speaks what He has seen with the Father who is the other witness. Their witness always agrees. They speak only truth in

total faithfulness to what is real. As in the letter to Philadelphia this word 'true' means 'real'. Every word of God is utterly reliable. You can read my writings or anyone else's – PhDs and experts of all kinds but the only words that are utterly true, entirely faithful to reality are the words of Jesus. He sees all of time and is a witness of what is real. He has faithfully displayed (been a witness) to us, who God is and how much He cares for us.

The beginning or ruler or cornerstone or initiator – of creation. The word in Greek is *arche*. In the writings of the early church Satan is said to be the *arche* of death. Scripture clearly points, a number of times, to Jesus as the instrument of creation. As Creator He should have the first place over his creation. Now what does all that say to the call of the church and their need? We'll see as we go through the text.

Rev 3:15,16 (NIV)¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

As in the other churches Jesus sees their deeds. The outward actions are a result of the condition of the heart. This week at Cornerstone we had spiritual emphasis week with chapel each morning. Day after day the messages were on our walk – the way we live. The last day the Holy Spirit pointed out that how we live is a result of who we are. The mediocre deeds of the Laodician church showed their hearts were mediocre.

"I wish you were..." I wonder what Jesus would say his wish is for us, for me? For them He wished they hated him or loved him. All through Scripture we have a picture of a zealous husband who greatly loves his bride. In this case she neither scorns Him nor is she in love with Him, she just tolerates Him. How very sad! Have you ever seen a couple in which the husband passionately loved his wife and she just didn't care? That was Laodicea.

The city of Laodicea had one great weakness. Only in a time of peace, while Rome dominated the area, could it become great for it had no internal water source. Its water was brought through an aqueduct from miles away. The source of that water was a hot spring. By the time the water reached the city it was lukewarm, not bad for a shower, but not pleasant in the mouth.

'Spit' in NIV is a nice way to say 'vomit'. Jesus just can't stomach this kind of indifference. The opposite of love is not hate, it's apathy. I don't hear this as words of anger but as words of warning in love of what is inevitable if there is no change. How would you rate your love for Jesus on the temperature scale? Is it close to boiling or closer to freezing or just kind of lukewarm? What is wrong with that? All the passion He displayed for you in going to the cross so you would not have to face the wrath of God deserves much more than a casual response. Scripture says His love for us is zealous – meaning white hot! A lukewarm response to that is to say He is unworthy of you when reality is the other way around.

Rev 3:17 (NIV)¹⁷ You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

The city was so wealthy that they refused the help of Rome to rebuild after an earthquake. They had enough capital to completely finance the rebuilding of their city. The problem with wealth, as Jesus put it, is the 'trust' placed in it. Wealth is not security. Wealth cannot buy you the things you **really** need, but it gives you the illusion that it can. What you need is the fruits of the Spirit. You need peace – but you can't buy it. Ever seen Joy on special at Walmart, not the detergent? Does love come discounted if you buy a case? Can you get patience wholesale? (If so I'd like to order it overnight express.) And if we are honest with ourselves those are the things we really need.

The wealth deluded them into thinking they were much more than they really were, wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. You can be rich and be very poor, or you can be poor and very rich. You can even be rich and rich, if you don't trust in your riches but that is the hardest of the three. Remember the description of Jesus is the witness of reality. This church was to show Laodicea what it meant to be truly wealthy, wealthy in reality. That was the life of Christ they needed to display to these wealthy people so the city would hunger for the reality it was missing. Instead the church joined the city in the delusion of wealth.

Rev 3:18 (NIV)¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Oh the difference between the way the world sees and the way Jesus sees. "Jesus has all the church really needs to function. It is nice to have buildings, great choirs and beautiful music. These are not wrong. I do not mean in any way to suggest that they are. But they are not what the church needs. What it needs is what our Lord describes here." Ray Steadman

They were used to buying whatever they needed. Well Jesus has just told them what they really need and where they can buy it. But it can't be bought with money. Every need we have, the fruits of the Spirit, are in Jesus. It is his life in us that brings those fruits out. They needed to buy gold refined in the fire. Peter says in chapter one of first Peter that is faith. They needed faith in God not their money. The fire is the trials that God blesses us with when we are obedient. They had found ways to avoid them and so the faith they had was a polluted unrefined faith. Do we run from refining fires or run to them?

White clothes we have seen before are representative of the righteousness of Christ. This city was also well known for its black wool. They had a fancy, gloss black wool that they wove into clothing that went for a high price. Jesus asks them to desire his righteousness more than their proud expensive clothing. Those designer clothes did not cover the shame of their spiritual lack of Christ. In fact they left them more obviously naked.

Salve to put on your eyes so you can see. In John's first letter he wrote, 1 John 2:27 (NIV)²⁷ As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him. That is the anointing that lets us see. Is the Scripture alive to you? You may need to ask for this anointing so you can see.

Laodicea made a medicine for the eyes. "The word for salve is kollourion (2854) which literally means a little roll of bread. The reason for the word is that this famous tephra Phrygia, Phrygian powder, was exported all over the world in solidified tablet form in the shape of little rolls." Barclay Those little rolls sting at first and the church of Laodicea would rather go blind than feel the sting. Spiritually they would rather be blind to their comfortable compromises than die to self and live as God was directing them. The heart of this issue is Jesus' instruction for us if we would follow Him. He said, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me." They interpreted it as "indulge yourself, lay down that cross, and follow your desires, but call Him Lord." Understand that if you said this to them they would say you didn't understand and that you were wrong. That is why Jesus had to say the Words were from the AMEN – truly, truly, this is how it is! Poor, naked and blind! Are we willing to feel the sting of the eye salve to see where we must let go of the self-life to conform to His will? Or is poor, naked, blind and comfortable more preferable?

Rev 3:19 (NIV)¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

This is another truth of God that runs throughout Scripture: if you are a son, then God will deal with you in disciplining love. Why? So you will be the opposite of apathetic - earnest. I see God discipline his children and they respond one of three ways. 1. They hate God for it and openly speak against his disciplining hand in their life – even cursing Him. 2. They pray and ask others to pray for God to lift his hand of discipline – denying the need for it and inwardly believing it is some kind of accident or blaming it on Satan. 3. They ask God why He has brought the discipline, kneel humbly at his feet and accept it, asking for grace to apply the eye salve, a heart willing to buy gold, recognizing their nakedness and asking for the mercy to have their nakedness covered. That is a repentant heart. God loves to meet and answer this humble repentant heart. He embraces them in grace.

Rev 3:20 (NIV)²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

A wonderful verse for witnessing salvation but what is the context? The church of Laodicea is not in intimate fellowship with God. Jesus is not at home in their hearts. In fact, they have ushered him outside the door and are not on speaking terms. The lover of their soul knocks, desiring back into fellowship with them. The evening meal is the one referred to here. It was a time after the work of the day was done in which you relaxed and spent the evening together casually. Most people today spend the time relaxing in front of the TV. Jesus wants to be the TV, but an interactive one. They lay around a table and enjoyed the meal and conversation about the day, hopes for tomorrow, discussed the news of the village.

This isn't the first time this picture appears. It is in the Song of Songs. Song 5:2-5 (NIV)² I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking: "Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night."³ I have taken off my robe-- must I put it on again? I have washed my feet-- must I soil them again?⁴ My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him.⁵ I arose to open for my lover, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the lock.

Look back at 3:20 – first you have to hear. In the SOS passage it said “listen”. Laodicea’s one other famous medicine was an ear ointment. Are we willing to hear? Or are we so in love with our self we really don’t want to hear? If you will hear you must get up and open the door. Holman Hunt painted a picture of this with the door having no exterior handle. It is up to us to open the door. The lover of our soul will not enter where He is not wanted and invited. Too busy to spend time with Him? Will you leave Him out there while He longs to come in spend time conversing with you? The dinner is each other’s words that you take time to savor. This verse is written to these saved but apathetic – wealthy in material goods – Christians. But they were not nearly as wealthy as we are. Their homes were not nearly as large, their transportation would not compare, nor would their wardrobes. Its not that we prefer the TV, or a book or a hobby, we just don’t want to hear or see what it is He may show us. We enjoy being the master of our castle, but when He comes we talk with Him we realize He must be. I think the American church has taken this verse out of context because they don’t want it to be the voice of the Holy Spirit to them. They would rather not hear – listen. An image on the mantle and Sunday at church is much more manageable than a Lord and Master with whom I am deeply in love, in the home of my heart.

Rev 3:21-22 (NIV)²¹ To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.
²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

It is God’s intention for us to rule with Jesus’ on his throne. We envision the throne as a seat for one, but the eastern thrones were more like a couch. There is a place for you beside Jesus if you are willing to be one of the overcomers. In past letters we have delved into the meaning of this, overcoming the world and its temptations to take the place of Christ in our hearts. In verse 20 we get back to the same issue. Is Jesus your desire?

This letter like all the letters is for every believer. It is for anyone that will hear. It is for the one that is willing to listen. It is for the believer who needs a warning and for the one who needs encouragement. Jesus acts in love toward his bride. His discipline is love. His warnings are love. His promises here are faithful and true. Will you take the time today to get alone with Jesus and hear him speak verse 20 to you? Will you get up, open the door, and sit down to a leisurely meal with Him? Or will you go on not hearing, not wanting to see? Everyday the choice is each of ours for that handle on the door is only on the inside. He’s waiting for your invitation.

We have finished all seven letters. When Joel Boswell went through these at Wayside he ended with a challenge. What would Jesus write to us? What would He write to the Fellowship of Christ in Sedona? Let’s bring that to this Thursday night meeting. I don’t want to distract from the focus today on the 20th verse. The church is made up of individuals that each need him IN the home of their heart, intimately communing with Him. Then she will be all He intends her to be.