

REVELATION 3:14-22

(Readings: 1 Corinthians 3:1-23; Isaiah 55:1-13)

Laodicea - Those Vomited Out?

Church of our Lord Jesus Christ...

You think of when you needed to communicate a particularly negative point.

This is when you need to raise a serious concern with someone.

Tell me: Do you get to the point immediately?

Were you straight up about it?

I know some people who don't believe in beating around the bush.

As soon as you begin reading a letter or email from them, or pick up the 'phone when they call, you get it full blast!

Or are you a little like me?

First of all you talk or write about something that's not so important, a minor issue, perhaps something conversational.

Once you've been chatting away for a while, or you're well into the correspondence, then you bring up the serious aspect.

Mind you, then don't you often get the reply from your friend or the person you're addressing, "I was wondering when you were going to get to the point"?

Because they could tell all along this was no social chit-chat.

Congregation, in a similar way, we can see the same with what we've come to with the last of these seven letters the Lord writes to the churches in Asia Minor.

For this is by far the worst situation of all.

While Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis are confronted with serious deficiencies, they all have some redeeming features.

Laodicea, however, has nothing in its favour. Indeed, as she is right now, this golden lampstand is about to be snuffed out altogether!

In the words of the first aspect to this text, THIS CHURCH RECEIVES THE WORST DIAGNOSIS OF ALL.

Verse 14 immediately alerts us to what's happening here.

For notice which attributes of the Lord are referred to there.

It begins first with saying that "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness."

"Amen" is a word which refers directly to the truth.

It's a word used to affirm and to guarantee a statement as absolutely truthful and absolutely faithful.

That's certainly its tradition in evangelical circles.

Don't some among us here say this word exactly because the gospel truth has struck you then and there?

To say that the Lord is the "Amen" is to declare that Jesus is the personification and the affirmation of the truth of God.

So commencing a letter with this at its beginning is being very clear that what's in this letter is the truth from God.

The reader will neglect or avoid its truth at the risk of the most serious danger to himself!

The next divine attribute also confirms this same theme.

To speak about the Lord as "the ruler of God's creation" is to describe Jesus as the source and the origin.

So it's more than His simply being over creation - He is the Creator!

This is just another way of saying what John had already so clearly stated at the beginning of his gospel.

For there verse 3 of chapter 1 pronounces, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

Believer, let there be no doubt!

The same Lord who created this world is also the One who recreates the world.

The God who made all things is also the God who redeems all things.

He's writing this letter!

Then come the application of these attributes.

Verse 13 declares, "I know your deeds!"

No one gets away from this eye in the sky.

And no one gets away from the Lord who sees right through us all.

He knows, as verse 15 says next, that they're "neither hot nor cold."

How serious is this?

Well, we read next that the Lord wishes they were one or the other - hot or cold.

Because what they are now is the very worst thing of all.

Here a number of commentators draw in the medicinal background to Laodicea.

It had tepid baths which many found useful for relaxing and every having certain healing qualities.

But it wasn't water that was good for anything else.

You certainly couldn't drink it.

And neither could you cook with it.

It wasn't cold or hot - it was "lukewarm."

In this way the Lord tells them there can be no neutrality in the church.

Either you are full on for the Lord or you have switched off the Lord.

Don't let anyone try to kid himself otherwise.

You can't enjoy all the good things of this world the other six days of the week and then give the Lord an hour or two on Sunday - if that!

You don't get all involved in enjoying all the material blessings of this world and then switch on religion for just that short time every week.

True faith isn't a matter of keeping your religion out of your business or politics - or anything else for that matter.

True faith is your business!

So, THIS CHURCH RECEIVES THE WORST DIAGNOSIS OF ALL.

For a diagnosis is the identification of the nature of the illness by examining the symptoms.

And this patient's temperature is not good.

She's very sick.

So, what to do?

Because the tepid waters physically served some use.

But to be like this spiritually is of absolutely no use at all.

In fact, the Lord goes on in verse 17 to say, "So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

Did you hear that?

They make the Lord want to throw up!

Much worse than the fact they are so spiritually sick is that they make the Lord Himself sick to His stomach!

Congregation, we see that not only does this church receive the worst diagnosis of all, we next see that THIS CHURCH HAS THE CLEAREST PROGNOSIS AMONG ALL.

Our second aspect.

And what helps us to see this even more vividly is the Lord's next words in verse 17.

Because here he refers to the second thing Laodicea was world-famous for.

For they are a wealthy commercial centre.
They are filthy rich!

How can we know?

Well, verse 17 says, "You say, I am rich; I have acquired wealth and don't need a thing."

How rich is this?

Well, let me give some historical background.

You might remember the major earthquake which struck Sardis and Philadelphia in A.D. 17.

That also struck Laodicea.

And at that time, like those other cities, Laodicea was rebuilt with the generous help of the Roman Emperor, Tiberius.

In A.D. 60 Laodicea was struck by an earthquake again.

Once more she was completely destroyed.

But that time, though aid and assistance was offered, Laodicea completely refused it.

They rebuilt the city out of their own resources.

This city was too rich to accept help from any one.

Someone once said of a very rich man, "He is a self-made man and he worships his own maker!"

And that exactly describes Laodicea.

She was rolling in it.

But they also had help in this.

For the royal family - the Seleucids - which had founded Laodicea and a number of other cities recognised the financial qualities of the Jews.

So when they had set up these cities they offered free citizenship to all Jews who wanted it.

It has been estimated that there were more than seven thousand five hundred adult male Jews in this area in 62 B.C..

That's a number which would have increased quite a bit by the time of our text.

In fact, there were even complaints about the number of Jews who had left Palestine to settle in this area.

And they used their influence politically also.

At one point they appealed to the Roman governor that they be granted the right to follow their own customs and observe their own laws.

The locals didn't like that.

They protested, and the matter went to the Roman consul.

But he allowed the Jewish appeal and told the magistrates in Laodicea they had to live with it.

They were very wealthy in this town.

Something the local Christians had become caught up with us well.

What the Lord says next in verse 17, though, makes it clear that their material wealth is at complete odds with what they have spiritually.

He says, "But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."

A terrible indictment!

For not only does it expose what they have become - it also declares that they cannot even realise what they have become.

This CHURCH HAS THE CLEAREST PROGNOSIS AMONG ALL.

And it is the most clearest prognosis because a prognosis is a forecast of the course of this disease.

They are so sick there's only one way this is going.

It's not a matter of **if** they could survive but **when** they will die.

That's how very serious this is!

And yet there is hope.

Even to this congregation with nothing to say in praise of it, this congregation totally taken up with the things of this world, there's still a word.

For they really need to be converted!

They have to be changed right around!

They need to be tipped upside down!

This is what verse 18 brings out.

For in three illustrations the Lord forces it home to them.

Three word pictures which relate to the three most important material blessings to Laodicea.

The Lord turns those material benefits completely on their heads.

The first of these is gold.

The gold which those citizens had so much of.

One year it was found that the weight of the gold sent as the Jews' annual contribution to the Temple at Jerusalem was over ten kilograms.

You work that out on today's rates!

This gold represented the financial business so close to Laodicea's heart.

This was the place Cicero cashed his letters of credit in 51 B.C.

And then there's the reference to "white clothes".

Of course, we immediately think of the white gowns referred to later in Revelation.

Those white gowns symbolises the righteousness of Christ as imputed to His people.

But here it could be a local comment.

For another major part of Laodicea's wealth came from the cloth and clothing industry.

And providing much of that material was a world-famous local breed of sheep.

A breed of sheep known for its black wool.

Black wool which was very dark and which was excellent for outer garments sold all over the empire.

So what could be more of a way to make His point than the Lord using the very opposite colour in reference to outer clothing?

They may take pride in the clothes they make but it doesn't cover the fact that they're spiritually quite naked!

The third description is in regards to the medicinal fame which Laodicea has.

We have touched on that already but here the Lord draws upon it through reference to the most famous ointment they produced.

This was known as 'Tephra Phrygia', the eye powder of Laodicea.

It was exported in tablet form, and when you used it you ground down the tablets and applied it to your eyes.

This powder was said to be the very best remedy for weak and frail eyes.

But, again, despite the helpful physical properties of this powder, they could not see spiritually.

They had forgotten altogether the eye of the soul.

The Lord has taken those three key parts to Laodicea's wealth and had shown how terribly poor they truly were.

They should have been buying and wearing and using what He had ready for them.

As Isaiah 55 verse 1 says, it wouldn't have cost them anything at all!

And then He turns to showing, in the third place, that THIS CHURCH NEEDS THE CURE TO IT ALL.

A cure, medically speaking, is the way you end a deadly sickness by appropriate action or treatment.

And here the Divine Doctor's prescription is clearly written out!

In verse 19 He declares, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.

"So be earnest, and repent."

We must notice here, though, that there's no way this could be a kind invitation to the whole congregation.

The Lord specifies only a few here.

It is not addressed to "you" whom He loves but to "those" whom He loves.

Even if the church as a whole does not heed the warning the individual may.

Some could still turn to the Lord.

They could yet be "earnest, and repent."

The word order might seem to be more appropriate the other way around here.

One must first repent and then may be zealous.

But the two aren't separate.

To be earnest is actually to be "zealous" in the service of the Lord.

This is the "hot" the Lord spoke of in verse 15.

And it will come along with repentance.

So it's not which one must come first but rather that when they come they come together.

For example, we are told we must forgive our brother his sin if he confesses it.

But that forgiveness can only be extended if that brother is living a life showing he's been forgiven!

He can't still be committing the same sin!

It's the same concept here.

To repent means that one definitive action.

And being earnest is living out that repentance continuously after that.

Then we come to a very famous Bible verse.

For Revelation 3 verse 20 would have to be amongst the most well-known of all scripture references.

But, sadly, it's also the most regularly misinterpreted verse of Scripture!

So what **does** Christ mean when He says, "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"?

There is one very popular interpretation.

It's an interpretation supported by commentators such as William Barclay.

For those men treat this verse as essentially an evangelistic text.

This is a view promoted by William Holman's famous painting, 'The Light of the World,' which is inspired by this verse.

Perhaps you've seen this painting?

It pictures a forlorn-looking and impotent Christ knocking at the door which is meant to represent the sinner's heart, with the door handle very firmly on the inside!

The opposite couldn't be more truer.

As Richard Brookes comments, this verse pictures the glorious, risen, ascended, and all-powerful Lord Jesus Christ standing at the door of the **church** at Laodicea.

As He stands there and knocks, He speaks to every individual in the church.

They have 'put Him outside,' we might say, with their neglect and arrogance.

And now He appeals to them that they would be shaken out of their lukewarmness and their self-confidence, and be restored to new heights and depths of fellowship and communion with Him.

So this isn't about to coming to faith - it's about living out the faith!

The Lord is direct and sharp like this so that they would be stirred up within.

Spiritually speaking, the only "cure" for them is being made on fire for the Lord and being completely humble before Him.

The apostle Paul showed this in describing himself as the worst of sinners and yet living a life which was full on for the Lord!

Jesus holds out the hope of the gospel.

Sinful and inadequate though the church of Laodicea be, it still has its lampstand.

And so we come to come to the final aspect in connection with this letter.

An aspect, incidentally, which ties in all seven of these letters.

Because now we see that THIS CHURCH CAN YET BE WITH HIM OVER ALL.

Congregation, that would be the ultimate healing.

That would be the most blessed of all possible situations.

And that would be for all eternity.

Here again the Lord ends a letter with a promise.

But let's also note that here is a promise which is that much more higher than the six before it.

For this is what the Lord declares, "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."

You see, we easily pick out those passages in Scripture which speak about the believer's desiring that communion with Christ.

But God's Word has just as much to say about His wanting fellowship with us.

And that's a fellowship which can only happen in the church which glorifies God because she's right with God, she's walking with God, and she's constantly communing with God.

So heaven will be no surprise!

Because heaven will be the consummation of whatever blessed fellowship we've had with Him upon earth.

It will put us right up there - sitting next to Christ upon His throne.

And since Christ's throne is the Father's throne, what royal glory awaits us!

This will be the theme further developed at the end of this book.

Revelation chapter 20 declares how glorious will be the believer's position then.

Because he was granted the faith to endure.

He bore testimony for Jesus and the word of God.

He did not bow down to the beast and become sucked into this world.

Congregation, we have read the seven letters to the church in Asia Minor.

We have met the One who wrote these letters.

And then we met those these letters were written to - the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

We saw congregations which were either loveless, persecuted, compromising, over-tolerant, dying, greatly blessed, or lukewarm.

And weren't they just like churches today?

Churches in all kinds of conditions and situations.

So, congregation, which church are we?

Let's pray and so work that we are the congregation with the ears to hear.

The ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Bridegroom of the Church,

You by whose blood the bride was bought.

And You by whose Spirit Your people have been kept through all the ages and in so many places in this world; we come pleading Your blessing upon us this night.

May it be, that we in this congregation here, are as the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia.

But if we be more like one of the other churches, then speak to us too.

By Your Word and Spirit stir us up so that we may be thrown down before You.

Help us then to repent and to be zealous for the things of Your Kingdom.

For we pray this, dear Lord, in Your saving and ruling name alone, the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

