

## The Letter to the Church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:14–22)

Just a show of hands...

- How many of you remember prayer in schools?
- How many of you remember when businesses were closed on Sundays?
- How many of you remember when it was normal to go to church more than once a week?

Times are changing, right? I read the following:

### Inoffensive Celebration

*To avoid offending anybody, the schools dropped religion altogether and started singing about the weather. At my son's school, they now hold the winter program in February and sing increasingly nonmemorable songs such as "Winter Wonderland," "Frosty the Snowman" and--this is a real song-- "Suzy Snowflake," all of which is pretty funny because we live in Miami. A visitor from another planet would assume that the children belonged to the Church of Meteorology.<sup>1</sup>*

I think there is some truth to that. The times are changing, but at least in beliefs the church cannot change.

Look at this passage: Hebrews 13:8: *Jesus Christ is the same **yesterday and today and forever.***

Jesus does not change, the Word does not change.

My theme and application today:

Theme: Laodicea, the Church that Wasn't a Church

Application: Are we cold, hot, or lukewarm? Be zealous and repent.

Let's read the passage from the Message:

### TO LAODICEA

- <sup>14</sup> Write to Laodicea, to the Angel of the church. God's Yes, the Faithful and Accurate Witness, the First of God's creation, says:
- <sup>15-17</sup> "I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold, you're not hot—far better to be either cold or hot! You're stale. You're stagnant. You make me want to vomit. You brag, 'I'm rich, I've got it made, I need nothing from anyone,' oblivious that in fact you're a pitiful, blind beggar, threadbare and homeless.
- <sup>18</sup> "Here's what I want you to do: Buy your gold from me, gold that's been through the refiner's fire. Then you'll be rich. Buy your clothes from me, clothes designed in Heaven. You've gone around half-naked long enough. And buy medicine for your eyes from me so you can see, really see.
- <sup>19</sup> "The people I love, I call to account—prod and correct and guide so that they'll live at their

---

<sup>1</sup> Dave Barry in his "Notes on Western Civilization" (Chicago Tribune Magazine, July 28, 1991), Christianity Today, Vol. 35, no.

20-21

*best. Up on your feet, then! About face! Run after God!*

*"Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you. Conquerors will sit alongside me at the head table, just as I, having conquered, took the place of honor at the side of my Father. That's my gift to the conquerors!*

22

*"Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches."<sup>2</sup>*

- I. First, our great and awesome Jesus is speaking to us (verse 14)
  - a. The second part of verse 14 reads: *These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.*
  - b. Second of the "bad" church
  - c. The good, the bad and the ugly
  - d. This is about Jesus. This is also a different introduction. The other introductions to the churches were more about an attribute of Jesus, but this introduction seems more conclusive of His being. This introduction is more about Jesus as the authority.
  - e. This church is the worst of the churches and this could be why Jesus is setting up His authority.
  - f. Laodicea was a very affluent city. They were on a north-south, east-west trade route. They had a major earthquake in 60 A.D. and Rome offered loans to help them rebuild but they chose to do it on their own. They were a city of banking, a city of commerce, specifically wool, and they were a city with a medicine trade. They would trade a type of eye salve. Laodicea was also the home of a medical school and the manufacture of collyrium, a famous eye salve.
  - g. No city in the Roman world could exist without running water, they had public baths and water just kept running
  - h. They would also flush out their streets, people would empty their chamber pots in the morning in the streets and they would flush them out
  - i. But Laodicea had no good water, so they would pipe the water in from a city some 5 miles away. They got their water from Hierapolis, the soda- laden, lukewarm water piped in from Hierapolis. By the time the water got to Laodicea it was filled with sediment and was lukewarm. It would make one vomit. They had a type of black clothes they would wear which contrasts the white robes which Jesus will mention later on.
  - j. So, they thought they had it altogether. This church thought they were okay because of their great wealth, but nothing could be further from the truth. They were fake.
  - k. This is the worst of the seven churches. Jesus has nothing good to say about them.
  - l. So, Jesus sets up His authority. Jesus is the Amen.
  - m. This has the idea of "The Truth." This as the idea "so let it be." Jesus is the final amen meaning what He says is to be done and it is the truth.

---

<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Re 3:13-22.

- n. Jesus is the faithful witness. He is the witness that matters, He is the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25)
  - o. Jesus is the beginning of creation. Don't get confused thinking that Jesus had a beginning. The Greek word really means first place. You can see this in Col. 1:18. This means that Jesus is the Ruler of all creation. If we read Col. 1:15-20 (maybe read it now) we see that Jesus has all authority over creation.
  - p. Colossae was very close to Laodicea and they may have had the same heresies denying Jesus.
- II. Before we get the tough stuff consider what happens when we overcome (verse 21)
- a. Verse 21 reads: *To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.*
  - b. This is a very powerful and encouraging ending.
  - c. When we overcome we rule with Jesus. Don't miss this. We must stay loyal to Jesus, we must stay true to Jesus, but we will be with Him in the end when we do.
- III. Here is the application: We must be hot or cold, don't be lukewarm. Look at verses 15-16: *I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*
- a. Being hot or cold are both good things. Cold is a benefit on a hot day. Hot is a benefit on a cold day, but lukewarm is not any benefit. Jesus vomits this church out. They really are not a church. Jesus says that they make Him sick. So, they must repent. Jesus stands at the door and knocks. This means that He is waiting for them to repent. It was always a big deal to dine in those days and that is what Jesus is talking about.
  - b. Verses 17-18: *Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, <sup>18</sup>I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.*
  - c. Remember we talked about their wealth.
  - d. The ESV Study Bible says: *The spiritually blind, bankrupt, naked Laodiceans obviously had no resources to buy from Jesus gold or garments or salve for their eyes. They could "purchase" these necessities only by his grace, as the Lord had once invited thirsty spiritual paupers to "buy wine and milk without money" (Isa. 55:1-4).*
  - e. Repent: *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote on repentance: "Repentance means that you realize that you're a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, and that you are hell bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, and that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on it in every shape and form; you renounce the world, whatever the cost – the world in its mind and outlook, as well as its practice – and you deny yourself, and take up the cross, and go after Christ, your nearest and dearest. And the whole world may call you a fool or say you have religious mania. You may have to suffer financially,*

*but it makes no difference: that is repentance. Repentance is only going to come if you realize you're not rich, and you're not wealthy and in need of nothing.*

- f. Repentance is not simply saying your sorry. Dr. Mulholland of Asbury Theological Seminary tells the story of learning to fly when he was in the Naval Academy. He had to learn how to stall the plane, they were old World War I type planes. He stalled the plane once and started moving again and then a second time and the plane did not come out of the stall. All he saw was the Chesapeake Bay. He says that being sorry was not good enough. He could be sorry all the way down to the ocean. His instructor said to let go of the controls and he would take over. Repenting means changing our actions. We are sorry and we let God take control.
- g. Some principles under the application:
  1. This means we must have a correct understanding of Jesus (verse 14). John MacArthur shares: *There's a wonderful story about a woman theologian named Lindemann – you remember the story, I know it's deep – who was a Christ-denying, Scripture-denying liberal scholar. And by the grace of God – and, of course, a part of a church that was no church, a church where Christ was outside. But she opened the door, Christ came in and saved her – very rare – in the midst of liberalism. And she had written books and books and books, denying Christ, scholastic books denying Scripture. And after Christ came in, people asked her, "What do we do with your books?" Her famous answer is this: "Throw them away like I did; they're worthless."*
  2. This means that we must go to Jesus (verse 18). Go to Jesus for our well being not riches and material things.
  3. This means we must be zealous and repent (verse 19).

Times are changing:

#### A Church Building Gets 'Converted' into a Luxurious Home

*It was an online description of a real estate listing in Dallas. The headline just said, "Converted church." Once it had been a church, now it was somebody's house. According to John Whiteside, the realtor showing the house, "De-sanctified churches are the number-one type of building converted to residential use." Whew! That's something of a mind-bender for Christians who call each other brother and sister, and talk about their church home.*

*The article said, "The altar has been adapted for use as a granite and stainless steel themed kitchen, in homage to the cooking gods." That's the words they used—"in homage to the cooking gods"! It went on, "The choir loft has been rewired for a home theater." There was no baptistery, but there was a soaking tub—and, among other things, a game room, a music room and an exercise studio. All this for about \$2 million!*

*Oh, and the 15,000 square foot church/home now has 11 bedrooms. Nice to know the folks there can sleep comfortably, once the church has been "de-sanctified" and "converted."<sup>3</sup>*

---

<sup>3</sup> [CNNMoney.com, 5/28/10; "Live in a cave or a tower: 6 cool homes"; submitted by Lee Eclow, Vernon Hills, Illinois](#)

When things like that happen it doesn't matter because the church is already dead, or was never a church to begin with. The church at Laodicea was dead.

I hope that we are never this way. I hope that we are real and authentic and it does start with our understanding of Jesus.