

LAODICEA

WEALTH | Laodicea was an extremely rich city. The people so prided themselves on their financial independence that they refused Roman financial aid after an earthquake devastated the city in 60 AD.

MEDICINE | Laodicea had a School of Medicine, so it was the chief medical center of the region. One of its graduates wrote an influential textbook on the eye, and the city was also known for its eye salve.

TEXTILES | The city was renowned for its soft, raven-black wool, supposedly produced by sheep that drank certain water. This wool was used to make garments for the upper class of society.

WATER | The city's major weakness was its water supply. Because the waters of the Lycus were undrinkable, they received water through an aqueduct built by the Romans. But by the time the cold water arrived from Colossae, or the hot water from the springs in Hierapolis, it was lukewarm.

RELIGION | The major god worshipped in Laodicea was Zeus, the "Father of gods and men." In April, 2011, the head of a statue of Zeus was unearthed in excavations at this city.

This week, we conclude our series "*Seven*", by exploring the final and seventh letter written to the church in Laodicea. It seems that the congregation in Laodicea was filled with self-satisfied churchgoers. They said, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need anyone or anything" (**Revelation 3:17**). And they were right – materially speaking. They lived in a prosperous banking center, located in a rich, agricultural region at the center of several key trade routes. Laodicea was rebuked because they imagined their spiritual wealth mirrored their city's material wealth. Jesus calls for repentance in **v. 19** and he follows up with a gracious invitation in **v. 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 that person, and they with me." Eating speaks of fellowship, communion and intimacy. To those who repent and have this close connection to him, Jesus promises a seat on his heavenly throne (**Revelation 3:21**). Jesus doesn't just want to save you – He wants to know you!

SCRIPTURE

- ¹⁴To 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.**
- ¹⁵I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!**
- ¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.**
- ¹⁷You 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.**
- ¹⁸I 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.**
- ¹⁹Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.**
- ²⁰Here 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 that person, and they with me.**
- ²¹To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.**
- ²²Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."**

FOCUS ON CHRIST

In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. To the Church in Laodicea, he identifies himself as "the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Ruler of God's Creation" (**Revelation 3:14**). These words communicate some powerful truths about Jesus.

- ***Jesus is the Amen*** because he is the One who confirmed all of God's promises (**2 Corinthians 1:20**).
- ***Jesus is the faithful and true witness*** because his testimony is completely trustworthy, accurate, and always reliable (**John 12:49-50; John 14:6**).
- ***Jesus is the ruler of God's creation*** because through his power all things were created (**John 1:1-2; Hebrews 1:1-2**).

Q: *Why do you think these descriptions would be important for the people in the church of Laodicea to hear?*

Q: *Which ones are important for us to think about today?.....Explain why.*

It is evident, they had lost their centering on Jesus, and their zeal and passion. They needed to be reminded that no matter how “successful” they were, they had no success unless it was in Christ. Think about the state of the Christian church in the USA and even here in Missouri and what is most important for us to remember.

FOCUS ON THE CHURCH

The Laodicean Church doesn't receive any affirmation; Jesus corrected them immediately. The city and the church boasted of their wealth and independence. “You say, I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing” (**Revelation 3:17**). But Jesus called them wretched, poor and pitiful. What is alarming is the fact that the people of Laodicea didn't see themselves as Jesus did.

Q: *How does this happen to a church? To a country?*

Q: *What factors contribute to a group of people losing an accurate self-awareness?*

Q: *What happened in Laodicea?*

When people start to drift from their identity and values, we find ourselves in this place. The church in Laodicea had done this. It had drifted away from the anchor of Christ and because of this, it had lost sight of what was truly important. Jesus called them lukewarm; this is a reference to water. They knew the refreshing power of cold water and the cleaning and medicinal power of hot water. In comparison, lukewarm water was useless.

Q: *How would you describe a lukewarm church?*

Here are some identifiers:

- A church that is more concerned about the needs of those inside the walls than those on the outside.
- A church that is no longer passionate about holiness (being like Jesus).
- A church that is no longer learning.
- A church that is judgmental.
- A church that is complacent.
- A church that is more concerned about doing things without a focus on Jesus.
- A church that is cruel to those who are hurting.
- A church that doesn't speak against cultural sins such as racism, mercy and oppression of the marginalized.

Jesus tells them three things they need in order to get back on track:

1. He tells them to buy his refined gold,
2. to put on white clothes to cover their nakedness,
3. and to apply salve to their eyes so they can see.

Q: *How do these three things connect with history?*

Q: *What is the spiritual meaning to each of these?*

This is a city known for its financial independence. They also made a raven-black wool for the upper elite and they were also famous for making eye salve. Jesus is telling them that they need the spiritual version of these things in order to be realigned with Him. To hold on to their riches in Christ, the things that will last forever.

The spiritually “blind, bankrupt and naked” Laodiceans obviously had no resources to buy from Jesus gold, garments or salve for their eyes. They did not realize they did have a need - the grace from Jesus who opens our eyes, clothes us in his own righteousness, and makes us rich in mercy and grace. Here are scripture references for all three of these:

- **Blind:** When Paul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:18 the bible tells us that something like scales falls from his eyes: and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. We sing Amazing grace, I once was blind but now I see - John 9:40-42
- **Naked:** Isaiah 61:10 - I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
- **Rich:** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2: 4-10

FOCUS ON ME

Think about the word, “lukewarm.” Lukewarm water is hot water that cooled, or cold water that, over time, stopped being refreshing.

Q: *What are some of the characteristics of a lukewarm Christian?*

Q: *Describe how a passionate follower of Christ can become lukewarm?*

Q: *Why did Jesus use such strong language?*

In the Greek, this word actually means Jesus will vomit out what is lukewarm. We can become lukewarm through discouragement, theological compromise, spiritual laziness and complacency. If we stay in this state, we can actually become cut off from Christ and the life He gives to us.

Jesus invites the wayward Church to open the door of fellowship with him. “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 that person, and they with me” (Revelation 3:20). In the ancient world, dining together was the ultimate symbol of friendship and love.

Q: *Is God knocking on any doors in your life?*

Q: *What would it look like for Jesus to enter into that room and dine with you?*