

Laodicea – a church where Jesus stood outside

Intro: [Read Revelation 3:14-22 while the congregation stands] The church at Laodicea is mentioned five times in the Book of Colossians. It met in the home of a woman named Nympha and it also received the Book of Colossians. They were told to share their letter with Laodicea and for Laodicea to share the letter from there with Colossians. (that letter was probably Ephesians or Philemon)

This letter wouldn't have arrived out of context. The people at Laodicea would have sat through the other six letters, exchanging comments and meaningful glances back and forth as compliments and complaints from God were given to their sister congregations.

They would have been certain that they would fare pretty well in Jesus' letter.

I. Laodicea

A. This was a wealthy city. Like a couple of the others we have studied, it was destroyed by an earthquake during Nero's time, but unlike the others, they refused help in rebuilding.

1. They were rich, self confident, and self assured.
2. They believed in themselves.

B. Unlike Colosse or nearby Hierpolis, Laodicea had no natural hot springs or cool springs. They used an aqueduct to bring water into their city from six miles away. By the time it arrived, it was lukewarm and hard. It had to be reheated and treated before it was usable.

C. It was the seat of a famous medical school (two physicians were on their coinage); the home of a salve and a powder used to treat eye infections. (Phrygian powder)

II. The Letter is Read

A. Imagine what happened in that congregation as the reader continued to read.

1. "I know your works." (I know all about you. I know what you're like) And, frankly, you make me sick. You think you are so great but you are useless. Your self satisfied attitude just makes me want to throw up!
2. How can Jesus be so... uh... un-Christian? (recent blog on those who try to out-Christian Christ)
3. How can he say those things after all we have done?

- B.** Out of all the seven letters, this is the only one without anything good to say! Why? They were lukewarm.
- C.** That doesn't mean they were half-hearted, which is generally what we say it means. What it means is that they were room temperature; they were indistinguishable from the world. That made them offensive, just like the city's water supply.
1. (Lampassas and the sulfur water – even in the ice cubes)
 2. On a hot day, hot or cold beverages sooth, but lukewarm is just – blah.
 3. Hot and cold water were precious commodities in the ancient world – and they are today. We have hot and cold taps on our sinks – not a lukewarm one.
 4. The problem was, like the aqueduct water, the church had taken on the ambient temperature of the world. It had completely lost its Christian distinctiveness and had absorbed the character of the world around it.
 5. And that made Christ sick.
- D.** Just like their attitude towards Nero's offer to help, they felt they could handle things on their own – with their money, influence, and efforts. (v.17). They had no idea that that attitude would anger Jesus so much.
- E.** They had stored up no treasure in heaven. None of their wealth would survive their death.
- F.** They thought they were well clothed, but Jesus says they were naked because their clothing was only good and proper in the eyes of the world (this works for sharp and shabby dressers, by the way).
- G.** Instead of relying on Jesus, they relied on the world; on what they could see.
1. His parables about finding a pearl and selling everything you had to get it, or finding a treasure in a field and leaving everything for it, would have confounded them.
 2. Faith? Yes, but show me the paperwork, the plans, the procedure... just like at work. Just like a Wal-Mart.
 3. And since they were going about their business just like the world, they were practical atheists who took the name of Christ but had no room for Christ in their hearts or in the church.

4. Their church might as well not exist at all. (what would happen if this church disappeared?)

III. This Church

- A.** Do we do what we do with prayer, with the vision of Christ as our vision? Are we a church that is designed to meet our needs or His? (they are different)
- B.** Studdert Kennedy's "When Jesus Came to Birmingham."
- C.** Amos Niven Wilder's poem "Alien: A Period Piece." A wounded stranger wanders outside a beautiful place of joy and celebration. A gentle, homeless pilgrim, he hears the music within and knows he cannot enter...
- D.** (Wild Kids – we are talked to here)
- E.** Do you pray about your work, presentations, school, relationships? Do you lay your treasure down at Jesus' feet for him to use or do you hoard it? Do you hand everything over to him so that you will have a faith that infects the world, rather than letting the world infect your faith?
- F.** When our faith becomes religion; when it becomes all about just being a good person; when we think we're doing God a favor by turning up on Sundays; when we aren't excited by the word, the sermons, the songs, the communion; when we lose any urge to tell people about Jesus... it is getting very late, indeed. We have arrived at Christianity without Christ.

IV. The Door

- A.** Holman Hunt painted the most famous painting of any inspired by Revelation. It is Christ, standing at the door, knocking.
- B.** The door has no handle on the outside. It must be opened from the inside. (sad that Jesus is outside, isn't it?) But verse 20 says anyone here can open that door. It isn't up to the person beside you, the elders, the ministers.
- C.** If you say, "Lord, I am so, so sorry. I had no idea. Please forgive me. Please come into my life and make it your own. I want to learn to do things your way, not mine, but I need your help. Oh, how I need your help. Thank you for not giving up on me" this day, this church can be reborn and Jesus can walk in the door.

1 When Jesus came to Golgotha they hanged Him on a tree,

2 They drove great nails through hands and feet, and made a
Calvary;

3They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red were His wounds and
deep,

4For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap.

5When Jesus came to Birmingham they simply passed Him by,

6They never hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him die;

7For men had grown more tender, and they would not give Him pain,

8They only just passed down the street, and left Him in the rain.

9Still Jesus cried, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do,"

10And still it rained the wintry rain that drenched Him through and
through;

11The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,

12And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary.