

To The Church

Letters from the book of Revelation

Loved Laodicea

Context/Introduction

In our study on the letters written to the seven churches so far, we have seen some recurring themes:

- Jesus loves the local church
- Our circumstances matter to Jesus
- Jesus desires our restoration rather than our destruction
- Jesus is stern so as to convict

This week's text looks at the letter written to the church in the city of Laodicea, which was in South-Western Turkey, nestled between Colossae and Hierapolis. Colossae was known for its refreshing cold, running water, while Hierapolis had hot water springs that were useful for medicinal purposes. Laodicea, on the other hand, had no natural water supply of its own, and had to have water piped in by aqueduct from several miles away. By the time it arrived, it was not fit to drink, as it was lukewarm, full of minerals, and could induce vomiting. In this letter, Christ rebukes the church for being an ineffective witness, and calls them to repent. (Longman, 2013)

Today's Text - Revelation 3:14-22

1. "You Are Not Who You Think You Are; You Have A Distorted Sense Of Identity"

- Revelation 3:15-17

Jesus' reference to lukewarm water has been largely misinterpreted and applied because readers have not understood the context into which he was speaking. In rebuking them for their dismal spiritual life, he was comparing their hearts to the undrinkable water (mentioned above), which was so dismal that it was no longer fit for its intended purposes. Though the people in Laodicea were wealthy and successful due to industry and a well-established medical school, Jesus thought very little of their character, and pointed out that they had absolutely no reason to boast in themselves.

Because of their own resources and abilities, the church was fiercely independent and had few real felt needs, which obviously led to a spiritual pride that prevented them from seeing the true nature of their spiritual state. Because of this, Jesus called them out for being self-absorbed, which must have shocked them because they thought they were doing so well.

As a church, we find ourselves in a similar societal bracket to the church in Laodicea, in which we are abundantly blessed with ability, talent, education, success and wealth, and it is easy to look at what we are accomplishing as a church body and to give ourselves a rave review. But this passage reminds us that Jesus looks at the heart and into the core of our character to assess how faithful we are.

- Q. What did Jesus mean when he called their faith "lukewarm"?
- Q. Why was the church's self-assessment so different to Christ's assessment of them?
- Q. As a church, what are some of our strengths that we tend to pride ourselves on?
- Q. In what way, if any, do you think that we as a church body could be in danger of being self absorbed?
- Q. Why is Christ's assessment of us, as a church, the only assessment worth holding onto?

2. Christ's Love Is The Solution To Our Distorted Sense Of Identity/Self-Absorption

- Revelation 3:18-22

The church in Laodicea was totally blind to its own spiritual state, and because Jesus loved them, he could not allow them to continue with such a distorted sense of identity, and so he exposed their hearts and called them to repent. In order to be a church that would be used for its intended purposes, they would need to turn from their self-absorption, reject their idolatry, and start seeing themselves in the way Christ saw them. In his loving rebuke, Jesus revealed his kindness, and offered them what they really needed. He did not just scold them, but in love he called them to himself.

We often have a negative view of repentance, but this passage reminds us that, for all of God's children, repentance is the call to leave our foolishness and sin behind, and to follow after God, who has all that we need. It's a *response* to his love and mercy, something that we should *want* to do.

The letter ends with Jesus reminding them and us of the reward for all the saints who would persevere in the faith, which is to be united with Christ and to reign with him for all eternity. Following him is worth it.

- Q. Why was it an act of kindness to rebuke the church in Laodicea for her distorted identity and self-absorption?
- Q. What was Jesus calling the church in Laodicea to do/be differently and why?
- Q. Why does it help us to see that Jesus is not harsh in his discipline?
- Q. Why is repentance always for our good?
- Q. Why do you think Jesus reminded the church of their eternal reward for perseverance in the faith?

