**Revelation – Laodicea**

**Revelation 3:14-20**

**14 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. 15 “‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. 21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”**

* The name Laodicea means “people ruling” or “judgment of the people”
  + The church was a prosperous commercial and administrative center in the Roman Empire
    - It was the richest city in its district, and when the city was destroyed in 60 AD, it refused to accept Imperial aid
  + Refusing such aid was unheard of since the cost to rebuild was usually beyond the reach of a city’s own resources
    - But Laodicea was so wealthy, it could fund the work itself
    - The desire to do so was a reflection of their desire to remain independent of Roman authority and its self-sufficiency
  + Among its many industries, three stand out historically
    - Laodicea was known for banks, linen and woolen industry and a medical school
    - The banks held the money of the district and profited greatly from the income
    - The woolen industry produced some of the finest wool cloth, and it was particularly known for a rare black wool
    - The medical school also contributed to the commerce of the city, selling a well-renowned eye salve for various eye diseases
* Looking at the letter, the description of Christ takes the phrase “faithful and true Witness” from John’s first chapter
  + Jesus also describes Himself as the Beginning of creation, which is a reference to the Alpha and Omega in Chapter 1
    - Why this reference?
    - A testimony of Jesus’ truth and of Creation are both essential to understanding this church
  + Jesus’ comments to the church begins by looking at their works
    - He says He knows their deeds, that they are neither hot nor cold
    - In earlier letters Jesus was concerned with the number or quality of their deeds because of how those deeds reflected on Jesus
    - But notice this time Jesus’ concerns are for how the deeds reflect upon the people themselves
  + Notice Jesus says in v.15 that “you” are neither hot or cold, though He wishes they were either hot or cold
    - Instead, they sit between these two conditions in a lukewarm state
    - And as a result, Jesus says Hey will spit them out of His mouth
    - The more literal way to translate Jesus’ words would be to say I will “vomit” you out, so it’s not a gentle word
  + Jesus’ choice of words puzzles us a little...what does it mean to be hot and cold in this context?
    - And making it harder, Jesus says He prefers either hot or cold to their current condition of lukewarm
    - We don’t see a solution in the immediate verse, so we keep moving to get more context
* Then in v.17 we get the context we need to understand Jesus’ concern
  + Jesus admonishes them for seeing themselves as rich and in need of nothing, which was a false view of their situation
    - In reality, the church in Laodicea was wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked
    - Immediately we realize we must take Jesus’ words to be hyperbole or metaphor, not literal
  + First, we know the church in Laodicea was actually quite prosperous, not poor
    - And we know the believers living in Laodicea were not universally blind, and they did not walk around naked at all times
    - Much less did the church think it was clothed while actually naked, etc.
  + Therefore, we must understand that Jesus was not speaking about their church’s literal, physical condition
    - Instead, Jesus is speaking of their spiritual condition
    - Spiritually speaking, Jesus says the church was wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked
  + What do these terms mean when used to refer to spiritual conditions?
    - A quick study of the other passages in the Bible gives us only one conclusion
    - First, we remember what nakedness means because we saw that earlier: lacking Christ’s atoning covering
  + And similarly, to be poor or wretched or blind, all stand for the condition of a person before faith:
    - Blindness pictures the inability to see spiritual truth
    - Wretchedness refers to the unclean spiritual state of an unbeliever
    - And spiritual poverty refers to the failure to share in riches of Christ in the Kingdom
* So, the church of Laodicea is condemned by Jesus for a state of unbelief, yet they tell themselves they have everything they need
  + They are wealthy and in need of nothing, and unlike Jesus, this church isn’t speaking in purely spiritual terms
    - The church in Laodicea was very wealthy like the whole of that city, and as such it lived a very luxurious lifestyle
    - That was particularly out of keeping with other churches of the day
  + Yet their physical prosperity blinded them to their spiritual poverty
    - Even as they lived self-satisfied and secure in their earthly wealth, yet they remain in jeopardy of spiritual judgment
    - And at this point we ask how can a “Church” be unbelieving?
    - And the answer comes from a broader understanding of the church as a whole
  + From an earthly perspective there was an institution in the city of Laodicea called the church
    - People met in buildings, sang songs, prayed, and conducted other services
    - And to anyone who observed these things, they would say “there is the church of Laodicea”
  + But from a spiritual perspective, that building full of people actually consisted of two different groups
    - There were believers and unbelievers in the room
    - The true believer is the one who has been indwelled by the Holy Spirit, according to Romans 8
    - But the Spirit is invisible for we can’t see who has the Spirit and who doesn’t
    - And outward signs are tricky...it’s easy for someone to imitate what they see Christians doing and fool us into thinking they believe too
  + So, Jesus writes to this church talking about unbelief because apparently there was a large contingency of unbelievers congregating within
    - Such that Jesus’ chief concern with the body as a whole was this rise of unbelief
    - The presence of unrecognized unbelief in the body is the single most dangerous problem any church can have
    - Christians are naturally wary of the influence of Satanists or other non-Christians
  + But we naturally lower our guard when someone says they are Christians like us
    - And yet if it turns out they aren’t truly saved, we have now allowed a wolf in sheep’s clothing into the church body
    - And that is a terrible situation for both sides
    - For the believers in the church, the influence of unbelievers in the body leads to apostasy and compromise
    - For the unbeliever, living side-by-side with believers leads to a false sense of security
* Now we see what Jesus meant when He said He would rather the church be hot or cold
  + Hot suggests a believer while cold suggests the opposite, an unbeliever
    - We understand why Jesus wants someone to be hot (believing) but why would he also prefer cold (unbelieving)
    - The key is to remember that Jesus says He prefers either of these two states to lukewarm
  + In other words, it’s better to be cold (an acknowledged unbeliever) than to be lukewarm, thinking you’re a believer when actually not
    - At least if someone is an acknowledged unbeliever, they might be yet converted one day
    - But the lukewarm church goer doesn’t even realize what they don’t have
    - This is where you get those who declare to Jesus

**Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV),**

**21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’**

* Or as Jesus says here, those who are in the church but do not belong to Jesus by faith will be spit out, or vomited out of His mouth
  + - The city of Laodicea was situated in a valley surrounded by mountains, with two streams of mountain waters flowing into a valley at Laodicea
      * One stream of cold and refreshing water came from the southeast near a place called Denizil
      * A second source was a hot spring near Herapolis that produced an undrinkable sulfuric water used for medicinal baths
    - In Laodicea, the two streams combined, producing a foul-tasting lukewarm water
      * Drinking that water would result in vomiting, since it was poisonous
      * When Jesus says that He would vomit them out of His mouth, they understood the meaning clearly
* Not surprisingly, there is no commendation to this church (the only church with nothing positive said), and in v.18 Jesus gives an exhortation to this church
  + - Each recommendation is a spiritual remedy to cure the heart condition of the church
      * First, Jesus advises them to purchase (obtain) from Christ gold refined by fire so they might become rich
      * Gold refined by fire pictures our eternal treasure which Christ qualifies us to receive
    - Secondly, they should buy white garments to clothe themselves
      * Once again, the garments refers to the robes worn by believers which picture Christ’s atoning work
      * They are naked spiritually, meaning unbelieving, in contrast to the believer with insufficient works who had “soiled” robes
      * So, this too is an allusion to placing faith in Jesus
    - Finally, they need eye salve to see, and seeing in spiritual terms means to come to a knowledge of God’s truth
      * Each of these remedies draw from the major industries in the city
      * Jesus is emphasizing how this church relies on its worldly prosperity as its measure of worth
      * But it’s using the wrong measure...it should have been looking to Heaven for its measure of success
* Jesus gives the church an exhortation, a challenge to change and repent
  + - He says the ones who are truly the Lord’s will know reproof, correction, and discipline
      * Which is a way of saying that luxurious, easy, safe living isn’t the standard for successful Christian living
      * Instead, the course that gives us the most reassurance is one of training and conviction

**Hebrews 12:6-7, 11 (ESV),**

**6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?**

**11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.**

* Following the exhortation, in v.20 Jesus calls this church to faith in Him
  + - Those who hear His voice and open the door (of their heart) may receive Him and possess what they have been missing
    - And for those who do so, salvation awaits, pictured by dining at the table with Jesus in the Kingdom
  + Finally, for those who were of faith, the overcomers, Jesus says I will extend the great privilege of ruling with me in the Kingdom
    - So that even in this church of unbelief, true belief still existed and would still endure
    - No matter how lost this church became, the true believer was always in Christ’s care
* By now, it should be obvious that the seventh church will be the last period in the Church age, the times that “are”
  + And it should be equally obvious that this is the age we live in now, which I call the Apostate Church
    - Apostasy means to fall away, to abandon something that was previous accepted
    - But the sense here is not with respect to a certain individual coming to true faith and then leaving the faith
    - The Bible is clear that a person who is born again is forever a new creature in Christ and spiritual rebirth cannot be reversed
  + We’re talking about the church overall changing from that of predominantly believing to predominantly unbelieving
    - So earlier the church was Philadelphia, a faithful, believing church
    - But now it has fallen away from the Lord and His word and is no longer a believing church
    - As an institution, it is apostate having left the truth
  + Paul taught that this falling away or apostasy within the church would mark the last days of the age

**1 Timothy 4:1-3 (ESV)**

**Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, 2 through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, 3 who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.**

* It comes because of doctrines of demons (false teaching) promoted by deceitful spirits, indwelling liars, is seared in their conscience
  + - These are false teachers who are influenced by demons to say what they say and lead the church astray
    - This is exactly Jesus’ concern for a lukewarm church: unbelievers masquerading as believers to introduce false teaching
* One of the signs of the end of the age and the apostasy is the trend to advocate abstaining from certain foods
* The key issue here is the wealth of the church in the last days
  + Like Laodicea, the Apostate Church has so much wealth that people can afford to be picky eaters
  + And in that pickiness, the enemy takes advantage and begins to assign spiritual meaning to food, making it a false god
* While we shrug our shoulders at this concern, wondering what’s the big deal, that in itself tells us we are Laodicea
  + The luxury of being picky in our food selection is a modern phenomenon of wealthy cultures
  + Never before in history has such pickiness been possible for the church as a whole, but it is today
  + So, this detail is meaningful for how it points us to our day and no other day in history
* Paul gives us more detail about the apostate church in 2 Timothy

**2 Timothy 3:1-5 (ESV),**

**But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.**

* These traits have existed in the world to varying degrees from the time of Cain
  + But Paul says the last days will be known for these things
  + Simply put, they no longer become the exception, they become the rule
  + And looking through the list, it’s hard to imagine a world dominated by these traits...or is it? This is our world!
* The last days, the time of the Apostate Church, will also (not coincidentally) be an age of excess and brutality and perversion
  + And what brought these things to pass? Where did the church go so wrong?
  + Paul alludes to the cause in 2 Timothy again

**2 Timothy 4:1-4 (ESV),**

**I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths**

* Myths and doctrines of demons brought about this falling away in the church, but what are these false teachings specifically?
  + The clue is found in the way Jesus addressed the Laodicean church in the beginning
    - Jesus said He was the beginning and end of Creation the True witness
    - Jesus is referring to two important, bedrock beliefs of His Church that were lost at the end of the last century
  + The transition from the Missionary church to the Apostate church began principally as a result of two movements
    - First, the end of the 19th century brought the arrival of Biblical criticism
    - This movement began in Germany with the teaching that Scripture was not inerrant
    - On the contrary, scholars argued that the Bible must be understood as an imperfect work of men (false)
    - Therefore, it must be interpreted loosely and without regard for historical views, and in fact its literal meaning was not important (false)
  + These schools taught men to question the authorship of books of the Bible, and other details long before accepted as truth
    - In the U.S., seminaries began to interpret Biblical doctrines in light of natural laws and human reason and scientific discovery
    - These new thoughts caused divisions and disagreements in the Church
    - And at that point, compromises were made to doctrine because unity was considered more important than fighting for the truth
* Quickly, pulpits were filled with pastors trained at these “progressive” seminaries, leading to the disappearance of orthodox Biblical teaching
  + The trends continue today and has only worsened in the past decades
    - Now humanistic principles, self-help and pop psychology is preached in place of God’s word
    - Jesus refers to this trend in declaring Himself to Laodicea to be the faithful and true Witness
    - He is the Truth, and He witnesses to the Father
* Secondly, the rise of Evolution in the 20th century weakened confidence and reliance on scripture in many denominations and their congregations
  + As Peter promised in 2 Peter 3, people began to reject the biblical account of Creation
    - A worldwide belief in a fairytale called Evolution which directly contradicted Scripture gave fuel to doubt in the Bible
    - It was all the easier to claim that the Bible wasn’t to be taken literally than to fight the world’s belief in Darwin
  + And when the Bible can’t be trusted for how it says things began, then it can’t be trusted for how it says it will end
    - And without a beginning nor an end to worry about, life becomes only about the here and now
    - And God and His word becomes an afterthought
  + Because the Church left behind the True witness of God’s word and the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of Creation, it left behind Jesus
    - And in leaving Jesus, the last days church becomes an apostate human institution void of true faith in many corners
    - Interestingly, the name Laodicea means people ruling, and it’s a reference to our time in two ways
      * First, it’s a reference to democracy, the dominate form of government in the last days – a clear marker of our times
      * And secondly, it refers to the hearts of people ruling themselves rather than being ruled by Christ, another clear marker
    - The Apostate Church runs from the beginning of the 20th century and is still ongoing...but for how much longer?