

THE CHURCH THAT WAS LUKEWARM

Revelation 3:14-22

Christ looked down from heaven on the church of the Laodiceans, observed its condition, saw its needs, and sent it His message.

I. The Christ.

Here we find one of the most select unveiled splendors of Christ. So fully did He do the will of God, fulfill the Word of God, and discharge the work of God that He was honored with the most coveted titles.

1. The Final Authority.

"These things saith the Amen. "Amen" is a word which signifies what is true, fixed, and unchangeable. It signifies eternal certainty. Christ is the finality of divine authority, the fulfillment of divine declaration, and the certainty of divine truth. He is the One the church needs to hear as the Amen of God. God says "Amen" to what Christ says. The church must do the same. What Christ, who is infallible and immutable, says about the condition of the church is final. It cannot be controverted. It must be accepted.

2. The Perfect Witness.

"These things saith the faithful and true witness." The real witness has two characteristics, namely, faithfulness and trustworthiness.

(1) Christ is the faithful witness.

One of the chief purposes of Christ's coming to this earth was that He might witness to men and reveal to them the Heavenly Father. Whatever can make a witness valuable belongs to Christ. He speaks because He knows. There cannot be any inaccuracy in His words. He is absolutely faithful and reliable. In the case of each He knows the relation between capacity, privilege, and attainment. He understands perfectly the difference between what is and what ought to be.

(2) Christ is the trustworthy witness.

There was no counterfeit in Him. He sealed His testimony with His death. His very name guaranteed that His testimony was infallibly true. Because He is trustworthy we should trust Him.

3. The Eternal Creator.

"These things saith the beginning (or, author) of the creation of God." "By Him were all things created...and by Him all things consist (or, hold together)". The thought of originality lives in the phrase, "the beginning of the creation of God." That is consistent with the account of creation given in both Genesis and John. Not a thing would have been but for Christ, and not a thing would be but for Christ.

II. The City.

Laodicea was located at the junction of three important Roman roads in the southern part of the Province of Phrygia, midway between Philadelphia and Colosse. It was founded by Antiochus II, King of Syria. He named it after his wife, Laodice, by

whom he was afterwards poisoned. Because of its favorable location, there was a large stream of traffic continually flowing through it, and its inhabitants became very rich. It was the chief commercial center in a large region. Its chief commerce was in the wools grown in the region round about, which were celebrated for their richness of color and fineness of texture. It was also noted for its manufacture of medicinal powder for the eyes.

When this large, beautiful, and wealthy city was practically destroyed in 60 A.D. by one of those earthquakes by which the whole region was so often disturbed, its citizens did not appeal to the emperor for assistance. They had too much self-respect, initiative, pride, and industry for that. When Rome proffered aid in rebuilding the city, its citizens refused to accept it, and reconstructed the city entirely by their own efforts and at their own expense. One cannot help but admire them for their sense of propriety and their self-reliance.

III. The Church.

The church in Laodicea to which Christ sent this message was a rich, self-satisfied church that needed rebuke. Christ did not see anything in it to commend, but He did see much to condemn. He rebuked it more severely than He did any other church in Asia Minor.

IV. The Condition.

Christ said, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot." This statement was in form a wish, but in reality a regret. There was a company of avowed disciples gathered together at Laodicea to form a fellowship, to maintain Christian worship, and to advance the cause of Christ. They had care and interest enough to hold together an external fellowship, and to maintain all outward church proprieties, but the living Christ was not permitted to have His rightful place among them. While there was no absolute denial of the faith, or a disregard of all Christ's claims, neither was there the fervent zeal, the devout spirit, nor the all-sacrificing love, springing from a vigorous faith, which would make a church glow with holy fervor and sacred heat.

They were not entirely devoid of affection. They were not without some works. They had enough religion to go to church some, and to give to the church something, but they did not have enough religion to go to church regularly or to give to the church scripturally. They did not oppose Christianity, but they did not support Christianity. They did not hate the preacher, but they did not hear the preacher nor help the preacher. They did not believe in making too much fuss about faith and faithful living and giving.

Christ characterized this church as lukewarm. This condition is more obnoxious to our Lord than any other. Lukewarmness is far more offensive to Him than coldness. Of all those who are difficult to reach, those are the most so who have "made a profession," and then settled down into a state of self-complacency. Due to their satisfaction with themselves, there is far less chance of the arrow of conviction's piercing their souls. And this half-and-half, neither one thing nor the other, condition is all too common among those who call themselves Christian.

V. The Complaint.

1. Self-Deception.

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Because of their material wealth, they were self-deceived.

They were rich in material things, but they were poor in heavenly treasures. They were occupied with material, earthly, and temporal things rather than with the spiritual and heavenly, and eternal verities of God. They thought that in having wealth, they had all they needed. Rich people are apt to be deceived people. Absorption in wealth is perilous to piety. They thought they were rich, when in reality, they were poor. It is by no means uncommon for people to fancy themselves to be what they are not. In lunatic spheres you may find dwarfs fancying themselves giants, and illustrious heroes, paupers thinking they are millionaires, and poor beggars, kings of the first order.

Man's thoughts of himself are vain because of incompetent judgment, as well as a corrupt heart. Here was a church which had an utterly mistaken view of themselves. Her members thought themselves as well-off as need be. They not only thought well of themselves, but they spoke well of themselves, and other people credited them with what they said; hence, they were self-complacent, and well-satisfied. Being self-centered, self-satisfied, self-sufficient, and overconfident, they became proud and boastful. Although Christ was outside the church, they dared to feel their importance. They regarded their powers of accumulation as worthy of praise. The statement, "I am increased with goods," indicated that they were considered as self-acquired, and, therefore, provocative of self-praise. However, it is always good to remember that God is not concerned with what we have. It is what we are in Christ.

The Laodiceans claimed that they did not need anything. Their spiritual lethargy had reached such a stage as to obliterate any sense of need. They had neither time for Christ nor a desire for His presence. The moment any church loses its sense of dependence upon Christ, it starts on its road to failure. The world tends to create an attitude of self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency. To feel a need of nothing is to exclude prayer, Bible study, and worship, which practices are most valuable to proper relationship with Christ. God pity the self-satisfied. In the sight of Christ, any self-satisfied church is in a desperate plight.

2. Ignorance.

"And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked." Notice the striking contrast between the conception that these people had of their own condition, and their actual state as Christ, the Omniscient One saw it. They felt that they were happy because "increased with goods," but Christ said, "Thou art wretched and miserable." "Wretched" means oppressed with a burden. The burden which they carried was the very wealth which they imagined carried them. We have often heard of a church being heavily burdened with debt, but the one at Laodicea was burdened with wealth. "Miserable" means pitiable. The heart of the Lord was moved in pity toward them. "Poor" means as a pauper by the highway side is poor. From Christ's standpoint of wealth, the church at Laodicea was a cringing beggar, possessing nothing worth the having. "Blind" is perhaps expressed in our word "nearsighted", and means lacking vision, lacking light, devoid of the sense of the far distance, confined within narrow limits. "Naked" means utterly destitute. They were stripped of the clothing of glory and beauty, which should have adorned the church.

Christ said, "And knowest not." The actual condition of this church before the Lord was absolutely unknown to it. It is clear that these people, though they

professed to be Christians, really knew nothing of the grace of God in salvation. They were depending on themselves and their material wealth rather than on Christ. Christ was deeply grieved over the plight of the church. He was on the verge of casting out the church from her position of witness bearing.

VI. The Counsel.

"I counsel thee." What did Christ counsel the church members at Laodicea to do?

1. "Buy gold of Me."

The rich church needed the true riches that Christ only could give. They could not buy them in the world's market, but they could get them in faith's mart where buying is merely taking. The exhortation to buy need not present any difficulty because Christ has the treasures of grace, and the wealth of heaven at His disposal.

2. "Buy raiment of Me."

The naked church needed the true righteousness that Christ only could give. They could not buy it from the world, but they could have it from Christ. He pleads with them to be clothed in white raiment, which typifies God's righteousness imparted unto the believer in Christ. Such clothing makes one acceptable unto God in the Beloved.

3. "Buy eyesalve of Me."

The blind church needed true sight that Christ only could give. It could do what their famous eyesalve could never do. The Laodiceans manufactured eyesalve to anoint the physical eyes, but they needed the divine eyesalve -- the Holy Spirit -- to anoint their spiritual eyes.

VIII. The Correction.

Christ called for the correction of the condition in that church. He challenged them to repent with regard to past errors, and to be zealous for Christ henceforth. The lukewarm church must warm up and repent. It must respond to God's love and be warmed by God's affection for it. It must not remain as it is. It must get right. It must open the door to the knocking Christ and let Him in. But, the church is to open its doors to Christ by the individual members opening their own hearts to Him.

O, for an eye to behold Christ's beauty and person; O, for an ear to hear His message; O, for a mind to discern His will; O, for a heart to yield to His fulness; O, for a desire to do His will; O, for a will to obey His Word; O, for a courage to propagate His faith; O, for such grace as will enable the working out of His perfect will in and through His saved ones!