

A LUKEWARM CHURCH

Revelation 3:14-22

Christ looked down from heaven on the church of the Laodiceans, observed its condition, saw its needs and sent it the message which is recorded in the passage which we shall study now. There are seven things to which I shall direct your attention.

I. The Christ.

Here we have one of the most select unveiled splendors of Christ. So fully did He fulfill the Word of God, do the will of God and perform 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 fulfillment of divine declaration, the certainty of divine truth and the finality of divine authority. God says "Amen" to what Christ says. What Christ, Who is infallible and immutable, says about the condition of the church of the Laodiceans is final and cannot be controverted.

2. The Perfect Witness.

"These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness." A 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 earth was to reveal God to men and to witness to them. 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. In the case of each person 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 is no counterfeit in Him. He is absolutely reliable. He sealed His testimony with His blood. He is trustworthy; therefore, we should trust Him implicitly.

3. The Eternal Creator.

"These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." The expression "the beginning of the creation of God" as used here means "the author or the moving cause of the creation of God." "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (or hold together)" (Colossians 1:16-17).

The thought of originality lives in this phrase, "the beginning of the creation of God." That is consistent with the account of creation as given in John 1:1-2: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." Not a thing would have been except 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. It was founded by Antiochus II, who was King of Syria from 261-246 B.C. 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 flowing through the city, and many of its citizens became quite wealthy.

A considerable portion of the wealth of Laodicea came from the wool industry. The surrounding countryside was world famous for a certain breed of black-wooled sheep. The wool which these sheep produced was celebrated for its richness of color and fineness of texture.

Laodicea had a great medical school and it was famous for the use of two kinds of medicine. One of them was a certain ointment which was used to cure sore ears, and the other was a famous eye powder.

So prosperous were the inhabitants of Laodicea that when the large and beautiful city was practically destroyed by an earthquake in 60 A.D. it was promptly rebuilt without any appeal being made to the Roman emperor and senate for the customary subsidy. They had too much self-respect, pride, initiative and industry to accept the proffered aid from the imperial government. They reconstructed the city entirely by their own efforts and at their own expense. One cannot help but admire them for their self-reliance in this particular matter.

The Laodiceans were so rich that they refused to accept help from anyone. Believing that money could buy anything, and having so much of it, they seemingly thought that they could get along quite well without the help of man or God. They made the tragic mistake of giving much thought to the adornment of their bodies and completely forgetting the adornment of their souls. They put their trust in material prosperity, outward luxury and physical health. They tried to build a lasting civilization on material benefits. In a sense that is what the welfare state seeks to do today. It is easy to act on the principle, Give people better housing conditions, better working conditions and better wages; look after their health as it has never been done before; and then the golden age will dawn and all will be well.

But these things are not all. The man who receives better housing and better health must also be changed. The aim of Christianity is not just to change conditions, but to change men. If men are changed, conditions will ultimately be changed. The church at Laodicea stands as a warning to those who remember that man has a body, but who completely forget that he has a soul. It stands as a warning to all who leave God out of their lives.

III. The Church.

Christ did not see anything in the church at Laodicea which He could commend, but there was much about it which merited His censure. He rebuked it more severely than He did either of the other churches in Asia Minor. He rebuked it sharply, not because He was completely disgusted with it, but because He still loved it and had great hopes for it. The attitude of the members was most objectionable to Christ.

IV. The Condition.

Christ said, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot." While this statement was in the form of a wish, it was in reality an expression of regret. There was a company of avowed disciples gathered together to form a fellowship, to maintain Christian worship and to advance the cause of Christ. Although they cared enough to hold together an external fellowship and to maintain all outward church proprieties, the living Christ was not permitted to have His rightful place among them. While they did not deny the faith nor disregard Christ's claims, they did not have the devout spirit, the self-sacrificing love and the fervent zeal which would make a church glow.

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, a condition which was more obnoxious to our Lord than any other. Lukewarmness is far more offensive to Christ than coldness. Those who have "made a profession" and then settled down into a state of self-complacency are the most difficult people to reach. Due to their satisfaction with themselves, there is little chance of the arrow of conviction piercing their souls. This half-and-half condition is all too common among those who call themselves Christians.

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 earthly and temporal things rather than with the heavenly and eternal verities. They thought that wealth was all that they needed. Rich people are often deceived. Absorption in wealth is perilous to piety. They thought they were rich, but in reality they were poor. It is not uncommon for people to fancy themselves to be what they are not. Even in lunatic spheres you may find dwarfs fancying themselves to be giants and illustrious heroes, paupers thinking they are millionaires and poor beggars thinking they are kings of the first order.

Men's thoughts of themselves are vain because of corrupt hearts and incompetent judgments. The members of the church at Laodicea had utterly mistaken views of themselves. They thought they were as well-off as they needed to be. They not only thought well of themselves, but they spoke highly of themselves. Others also credited them with their own estimation of themselves. Therefore, they were self-satisfied and complacent. Being self-centered, self-sufficient and over-confident, they became proud and boastful. Although Christ was outside their 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, but with what we are in Christ.

The Laodiceans claimed that they did not need anything. Their spiritual lethargy had reached such a stage that it obliterated any sense of need. They did not have any time for Christ or any desire for His presence. The moment any church loses its sense of dependence on Christ it starts on its road to failure. To feel that one does not need anything is to exclude prayer, Bible study and public worship, with practices are most valuable to a 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 "near-sighted", 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.

The actual condition of this church before the Lord was absolutely unknown to the members. It is quite clear that, even though they professed to be Christians, they really did not know anything about the grace of God in salvation. They were depending on themselves and on their material possessions rather than on Christ. To be sure, 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 members 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 plead 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. He 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.

VII. The Correction.

Christ called for the correction of the pitiable condition in that church. He challenged the members to repent with regard to their past errors and to be zealous for Him ever after. The lukewarm church members were admonished to respond to God's love and to be warmed by His affection for them. It was necessary that they get right with the Lord. It was important that they open the door to the knocking Christ and permit Him to enter. The hearts of individuals also need to be opened to Christ.

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!