

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church, Part 1

Scripture: Revelation 3:14-18

Code: 66-14

Now let's open our Bibles to Revelation chapter 3 and we come to the last of the letters to the seven churches, the letter to the church at Laodicea, the church that made the Lord Jesus Christ sick...the lukewarm church.

These letters, as you know, are directed at seven churches, actual churches, historical churches in actual cities in Asia Minor. But they transcend their time and space and they become model letters to various kinds of churches that exist in all eras of church history. They illustrate for us the character of churches in our own day, in fact since Pentecost. And Laodicea, is the last, is the worst. Five churches with serious problems have already been addressed and they are on somewhat of a descending scale. As you move through the seven letters, remember two of them had no condemnation, that's Smyrna and Philadelphia. The other five progressively degenerate.

There was Ephesus, the church still strong doctrinally, but the church that left its first love. There was Pergamos which had not denied the faith but was tolerating sin. There was Thyatira where there was still some good things going on but full-blown compromise with evil had taken place and the majority seemed to have been involved. Then there was Sardis, a church with only a few genuine believers, a church which had a name but was actually dead.

And now at the bottom, if you will, is Laodicea. This is an unsaved church. In fact, if there were any believers in this church they aren't even referred to in the letter at all. It is a church that is characterized by lukewarmness which becomes a metaphor for being non-saved people. Laodicea has the grim distinction of being among all seven letters the only one in which Christ has nothing good to say. It is unmitigated, unspared condemnation. There is in this church apparently absolutely no redeeming feature. This is the unsaved, unregenerate false church.

Also, because of the nature of the church this is the most threatening epistle. This is the most blistering rebuke. And it is sent to a proud church.

Now the richness of this letter will become apparent to you as we endeavor to examine it. It begins in chapter 3 and verse 14 and runs to the end of the chapter. In order to understand, however, the richness that is contained in the letter, you really have to understand some background. And we're going to work our way through that background, listen carefully and it will make the whole letter come alive to you.

First of all, we begin in verse 14, "And to the angel," that is the messenger, the one who was to deliver the letter, the word angel, angelos, being angel or messenger. This was the seventh of the messengers that had received these letters from the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos. And as they moved from city to city, each one would arrive at his own church with the letter for that church. We don't know whether each of them had a copy of the whole of the apocalypse, the whole of the revelation. But we do know that each one would have a copy of the letter specifically for their own church. This being the seventh, this man must have made the journey by himself. Alone he travels to Laodicea to give them a letter which surely he has read and reread.

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write," and here we're introduced to the correspondent. "The amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God, says this." Now you remember that in each case the letter begins with an identification of the one who writes, none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. You also remember that for the most part the identifying characteristics are taken from the vision of Christ that is given in chapter 1.

However, in this case this is a somewhat unique introduction. The Lord identifies Himself here in three titles. He calls Himself the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

First of all, the amen. That is a unique title. And it probably reflects a Hebrew original. Back in Isaiah 65:16 it says, "The God of amen." That's Hebrew for truth, or affirmation, or certainty. God was called the God of truth then, the God of certainty, the God of affirmation. Whatever God says is so, whatever God says is true, whatever God says is certain therefore He's the God of amen.

Now the word "amen" is often used in Scripture as a word to affirm the veracity of a statement. Sometimes it is used before a statement and when it is it is usually translated "verily, verily," or "truly, truly," but in the Greek language, for example, it is "amen, amen." You often see before some very significant statement "amen, amen." And there it is to affirm the truthfulness of what is to be said.

Sometimes you see it at the very end. And at the end it is to seal the certainty of what has been said. Amen means firm, fixed, certain, faithful, unchangeable. Those are all words that surround the meaning of amen.

Now how is Christ here the amen? Well we could say that He is the amen in the sense that He is God. If God is the Old Testament amen, certainly Jesus Christ being God in human flesh is the New Testament amen. But there's more to it than just the reference to deity. He could have chosen a number of things to refer to Himself as God, but choosing the amen takes it a step further. He is the amen because He is true, He is the amen because He is certain.

But more than that, more specifically even than that general affirmation, Scripture tells us in 2 Corinthians 1:20 a very important truth. It says, "For all the promises of God in Him are amen." All the promises of God in Him are amen. What does that mean? That means that all God's promises and all God's covenants are guaranteed and affirmed by the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament God said I will forgive your sins. God could never do that if it were not for the person and work of Christ, right? Because forgiveness was purchased by His atoning death. All of the promises that God made to take men and show them mercy and loving kindness, grace and give them a Kingdom and a hope and an eternal life are bound up in Jesus Christ fulfilling His work. So that everything that God ever planned or purposed for man, everything that God ever promised for man finds its amen in Jesus Christ. God's promises are all certain in Him. They all become sure in Him. And so, Jesus Christ is God's amen, the one who confirmed all the promises.

Then He identifies Himself as the faithful and true witness. This further elucidates the same line of thinking as the word amen. As I noted, amen has reference to truth and certainty and He follows that up by saying He is the faithful and true witness. Not only is Jesus by His work the amen, or the one who makes the promises of God certain, but every time He speaks what He says is also true. What He did puts the amen to punctuate the promises of God, what He says is always true. He is the faithful and true witness. He is completely trustworthy. He is perfectly accurate. His testimony never fails to be reliable. In fact, in John 14:6 He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." He is, of course, the perfect true witness.

Back in John chapter 3 in verse 31 we read this, "He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all...speaking of Himself...what He has seen and heard of that He bears witness and no man receives His witness. He who has received His witness has set His seal to this, that God is true." Jesus comes, He speaks. Men reject Him. But whoever accepts what He says is saying God is true. He is the amen of God, He is the faithful, true witness who speaks the very Word of God. He is then living verification and confirmation of the promises of God in everything He does and He affirms the truth of God in everything He says. He is absolutely true.

And this is a good way to begin the letter because it affirms to the people in Laodicea that He knows what He's talking about. That whatever assessment He gives of the church is absolutely accurate, that whatever promise He offers the church is absolutely affirmed in His perfect work. When He rightly assesses their unredeemed condition, He is a faithful and true witness to that condition. When He offers them the promise of fellowship in verse 20 which is a promise of salvation, He can offer that because He is the amen who seals the covenant of God, the promise of God.

The third thing He says about Himself is He is the beginning of the creation of God. The English here, frankly, is a bit ambiguous. But that ambiguity disappears when you understand what He

means by what He says. When He says He is the beginning of the creation of God, He doesn't mean that the first thing God ever created was Him. He doesn't say He was the first creature God ever created. He says He is the beginning of the creation. What He means by that is He is the source of it. He is the power by which creation began.

It should be noted for you that this letter sent to the church at Laodicea has much in common with Paul's letter to the church at Colossae. They were very close together. In fact, you could say that three cities were sister cities...Hierapolis, Laodicea, and Colossae. Apparently there was a heresy in Colossae about Jesus Christ. And that heresy said that He was a created being and not at all God. It wouldn't be too hard to surmise that that heresy that depreciated the deity of Jesus Christ had gone up the road a little bit and hit Laodicea. And when Jesus says here He is the beginning of the creation of God, He is the arche, He is saying essentially the same thing that Paul said in Colossians chapter 1 verse 15, "He is the image of the invisible God, the prototokos of all creation, of all those who have ever lived He is the supreme one." And of course, in His humanity He did become man. But he says, "By Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created by Him and for Him. He is before all things...that is prior to them...in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body of the church." Here it is, "He is the beginning."

Apparently there was some question about Him because obviously Jesus had become a man, was born. He, of creation, was the prototokos, the supreme person ever born. But though He was born as man He always existed as God and while as man He had a beginning, as God He was the beginning. And so here, I believe, is a very important note. I believe the reason you have an unsaved church in Laodicea is because they had an errant doctrine about Christ. It was their heretical Christology that produced an unregenerate church. And what our Lord is saying to them in this letter is you must understand who I am, I am the one who has confirmed all the promises and covenants of God, I am the one who speaks truth and only truth and I am the beginning of the creation.

Colossae was ten miles away. Those two churches were sister churches. It is very likely that whatever Christological heresy had filtered its way into the Colossian church and attacked the deity of Christ, and reduced Him to a created angelic being had also affected the church in Laodicea. This church had bought in to that erroneous view of Christ and consequently was unsaved and lost. That is a tragic thing. But always you will note the damning error is the error about Christ, is it not? Start naming the cults and what is in common with all of them? They deny what? The deity of Jesus Christ.

When Paul was closing the letter to the Colossians, verse 16 of chapter 4, the last little part of Colossians, he said, "When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans." Why? Well they must have been into the same error. And then he says, "And you for

your part, read my letter that is coming from Laodicea." That would have been the epistle that we know as Ephesians...most likely. So whatever was going on in Colossae probably had spilled over, only the church in Colossae was fighting it and the church in Laodicea had bought it.

So when He calls Himself the beginning, He is the arche, that is the beginner, the originator, the initiator. It's the same idea as in Revelation 22:13 where He says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." He is the first, He is the Alpha, He is the originator, He is the beginning. John put it this way, "By Him were all things made that were made."

So, the Lord Jesus Christ is preeminent as the amen, as the faithful and true witness, and as the creator. He is sovereign, saving God, the uncreated source of creation.

So, the letter begins, "The Lord who has created everything, the faithful and true witness to the Word of God, the one in whom all spiritual promises are fulfilled says this..."

Now I want to talk a little bit about the city, the city of Laodicea because it's absolutely essential and fascinating to understand this city. It was located in the Lycus River Valley, the southwest area of Phrygia. Of the seven cities in the letters, it is the most southeasterly. It is 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia and would be about directly east of Ephesus about 100 miles. So these seven letters traverse a little bit of a loop in Asia Minor. Hierapolis, one of the sister cities six miles north, Colossae, ten miles to the east and south a bit. Because of the Lycus Valley being one of the most common routes of travel to the west, people obviously wanting to travel through a valley rather than across mountains.

Laodicea became a very important city. Anytime these cities were on a trade route they became significant. Not only was it a significant city on the east/west trade route, but it was also a significant city on the north/south road from Pergamos and Sardis, moving south to the coast. So they were crisscrossing all these people who went east and west and north and south and coming through the city of Laodicea. It had been founded by Antiochus II in the third century B.C. He named it for his wife.

The modern name of this Turkish city is Eskee Hizar(?), still there. Eskee Hizar means in Turkish "the old fortress," named for some of the ancient ruins. It is interesting to note that it had a large Jewish population and that large Jewish population probably was the starting point for the development of the church. You say, "Where do we find that it has a large Jewish population?" Quite, interesting. Every year Jews had to pay a temple tax, didn't matter where they lived or where they were, they had to pay that, that was part of their religious duty and they had to pay that temple tax, any male Jew over twenty-one. It amounted to half a shekel. In 62 B.C. Flockus(?) the governor put a stop to any exporting of gold from Laodicea. We have this in archaeological records. He needed it to back the currency. So he said no gold can be exported out of Laodicea.

Well, the Jews always paid their tax with gold. They would do this, all the Jews in a local town would get together, they would put it all together in one lump of gold, that's how they would pay their tax, one lump package of gold. In spite of Flockus' order they sent their gold anyway back to Jerusalem to pay their temple tax. The Laodicean authorities confiscated it and they weighed it in at what amounts in our terms to about twenty pounds. Twenty pounds would be equal to about 7,500 shekels. So you can see that there were quite a number of Jews. That's only the males over twenty one, plus the females and the children. Significant number of Jews.

These Jews existed in the midst of a pagan culture. They had probably come there because they were entrepreneurial and wanted to start their businesses. And they found themselves in the midst of pagan culture and morality and they became mixed with it. And if you read in the Talmud, you will read, interestingly enough, about Laodicea. And you will read that Laodicean Jews had come to the apex of ease and laxity. It probably was that Jewish contingent that was the first point of evangelization. That was certainly Paul's normal process and though Paul never went to Laodicea, when the church was founded there it was probably founded something along the path of his kind of strategy which was to go to the synagogue first. There would have been a synagogue there for sure with that many Jews, a very large one.

Now there's something else to know about this city and I think it's fascinating. Crucial to this city was its water supply. There were some local streams in the area but as the population grew and developed the local streams and rivers were inadequate. In fact some of them dried up in the winter. And so water had to be brought in. Well the only way they could bring it in there was by an underground aqueduct. And being very enterprising they managed to build an aqueduct and the water flowed down this aqueduct into the city of Laodicea. It did have an impact on their strength militarily because anybody could come along and conquer them by just cutting off the water supply, finding where the aqueduct was, identifying it, sealing it off and just sitting out and waiting until the siege of the city accomplished its end as the people had no water. And though it was fortified architecturally, an enemy could find the aqueduct and leave them rather helpless. So it never became much of a military power.

Kenneth Dodders(?) written some interesting things about this city and he says this, "They couldn't use the Lycus or the Maeander Rivers for drinking because they were too dirty. Besides, the Lycus River often dried up during the dry season. Most of the springs in the area are hot springs full of gasses and other chemicals. The Laodiceans had no choice, they had to pipe in water from a distant spring through twin lines of stone pipe, each stone was about three feet across and hallowed through the middle. The water carried by those pipes was so charged with impurities that it dropped much of its load in flow. The calcium carbonate gradually clogged the pipes. The water was collected in a central water tower, then distributed through the streets by pipes radiating from it. The water tower and sections of the terra cotta pipes are still visible even today. It is evident, at least, that the water it

carried was bad, for thick deposits of calcareous impurities can still be seen almost choking the surviving section of the pipes. So whatever water finally got to the city was dirty, impure.

Another writer says the orientation of the aqueduct has suggested to archaeologists that the springs at the modern town of Denzilly(?) five miles to the south were the source. So here ran this little aqueduct to get them water. This was a major issue because a city can't exist, obviously, without that.

A second key feature that's going to come into play in the letter that dominates the city is the commercial aspect. There are several things you need to know about the commercial aspect of the city. First of all, it was a banking center...it was a banking center. It was very wealthy apparently because it was on the crossroads, north, south, east, west, it became a business hub and it became a banking center for people moving in all directions to put their funds. They became so very wealthy that when in 60 A.D. the city was totally flattened by an earthquake, Rome offered to give them some money to rebuild and they refused it saying they had plenty of their own. The people of Laodicea prided themselves in rejecting the offer of financial help from Rome and rebuilt the city far more beautiful than it had ever been and they did it with their own funds.

Tacitus writes, "Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources and with no help from us." Tacitus, the Roman historian. And so they were extremely wealthy.

A second feature in the commercial area had to do with the wool industry. Laodicea became famous for its wool industry and the major product, this is very interesting, was a soft wool that was glossy black in color, shiny black. It was used for clothing and it was used also for weaving into carpets, both locally and after export.

The third key feature about the city in a commercial sense was its medical school. It had about thirteen miles north of the city a very famous medical school. It was basically established in connection with an ancient temple that was associated with the god identified later by the name of Aesculapius, the god of healing who is still around in old medical literature. The medical school had famous teachers, but the thing that was most prominent in the medical school was they developed a certain salve for the eye. And people from all over that part of the world when they had an eye ailment would come to this medical school near Laodicea to get the eye salve that they would then put on their eyes which would bring some measure of comfort and healing.

So as you look at the commercial aspect of Laodicea you see finance, black wool and eye salve. And all three of those industries play a major part in this letter. And so does the water supply.

The third thing I want to mention about is the church. "He says to the angel of the church in Laodicea," now there's no record of the founding of the church but we can sort of put two and two

together. While the Apostle Paul was ministering in Ephesus his friend Epaphras evangelized the Lycus valley. And he even evangelized Laodicea, that's in Colossians 1:7. Out of Ephesus where Paul was building this sort of mother church, people were going and founding other churches and Epaphras went to Laodicea about a hundred miles to the east and a bit south and founded the church there. By the time Paul wrote Colossians in the early sixties, he had not personally visited Laodicea or Colossae for that matter. He told Philemon, you remember, in verse 22 of Philemon that he wanted to come and visit Colossae. He said he would be soon released and be able to come and visit there.

So Paul never went there. It is possible that Archippus, a son of Philemon, was a real leader in that church in Laodicea, as well as in Colossae since the churches were associated with one another in proximity.

So the church was founded during the same period of time as the others in the ministry of Paul in Ephesus. As we noted earlier, it got infected with a deadly heresy that misrepresented the deity of Jesus Christ. I think that's inherent in the title there and in the situation in the church--corrupt, unsaved, lost.

Sardis was dead but had a few living, worthy believers. Thyatira was compromising, sinful and idolatrous, but had some who held the truth. Laodicea was a church that was absolutely no church, it was tares without wheat. Somebody asked the question, "Well what about the messenger? Was he genuine?" Probably, probably was. It may well have been that a messenger had to be selected from somewhere else to take the letter, we don't know.

In each of these letters we've also come to a fourth point, the commendation. However, there is no commendation here so there's nothing to say. Verse 15 He says, "I know your deeds, period, and I've got no comment." There isn't anything to say to commend anything you do.

So that takes us to the condemnation. And the condemnation is very important, verses 15 and 16. "I know your deeds that you are neither cold nor hot. I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." Whoa...strong language. I know your deeds. I know them intimately and I know them infallibly. I know your deeds. Just a footnote on that. Deeds always reveal what a person is...always. "By their fruits you shall know them." Romans 2 verses 6 to 8, Paul makes it as clear as anywhere in the Bible, "God will judge you on the basis of your deeds." "God will render to every man according to His deeds." "To those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, He'll give eternal life. To those who are selfishly ambitious and don't obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, He'll bring wrath and indignation."

You say, "Wait a minute, I thought we were saved by grace and faith and all of that." That's right, we are. But whether we are saved or not shows up in our deeds. James says the same thing. Your faith is made known by your works.

So He says I know your deeds and therefore I know your heart. I can see by what you do what you are. That is a very important statement with sweeping implications in the New Testament. A person who is a Christian manifests it. A person who is not manifests it.

And then the statement, the most relentless, overpowering rebuke yet. And the rebuke says, basically, "I spit you out of My mouth because you're lukewarm." This takes us back to our comments about the water supply. In Hierapolis, six miles to the north, there was some famous springs, hot springs. In fact, they were one of the most well-known and popular places for healing. The water was hot and you went there and sat in that water and it had therapeutic power. It is still used today. Hierapolis had hot water and that hot water was therapeutic.

In Colossae, ten miles south and east, there was a cold stream. We learned that the stream was perennially running and perennially cold like typical water that flows from the high mountains. That water was thirst quenching. That water was famous because of its cool, clear character.

They didn't have the hot therapeutic water of Hierapolis and they didn't have the cold clear refreshing water of Colossae, they had the foul, dirty, tepid water that flowed for miles through an underground aqueduct. It wasn't hot and it wasn't cold. Not hot enough to relax and restore, not cool enough to refresh and quench. Laodicea couldn't provide the refreshment of Colossae, it couldn't provide the healing of Hierapolis. Its lukewarm water was absolutely useless. Any visitor who came there who wasn't used to the stuff would put it in his mouth and immediately emit it, spit it out.

And the word "lukewarm," chliaros, is simply a word for tepid water. One historian says, "The water supply of Laodicea was derived from an artificial pipeline, bringing water which was literally lukewarm and so impure as to have an emetic effect."

What is the spiritual significance of this? Simply that the Laodicean church made Christ vomit. It was a sickening church. Some churches make the Lord weep. Some churches make the Lord angry. This one made Him sick. Back in chapter 2 and also in chapter 3 we saw His anger toward some churches, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis. But here He's sickened.

Now how are we to interpret these three categories? What does cold mean? Well that's not too tough. Cold means spiritually cold, open outright rejection of Jesus Christ, repudiating the gospel. He says you're not cold, I mean, you're just not openly, outright, rebellious, rejecting Christ and repudiating Christianity.

But on the other hand, what does hot mean? Zealous, spiritually alive and awake and eager and fired up, as it were, for the Lord. He says you're not that either. You're not boiling for...with spiritual zeal for the Lord, nor are you openly outright cold.

There are many in the world who are completely cold to the things of Christ. The gospel leaves them absolutely unmoved. It arouses no spiritual response. They have no interest in Christianity, no interest in the church. They make no pretense. They certainly aren't hypocrites. They don't even go near things that have to do with Christ. They are lost and they could care less. They don't want to hear the Word of God at all.

On the other hand, believers are marked by a response to spiritual truth and they're zealous and they're fervent. And He's saying metaphorically, I can take it if you were like Hierapolis because then you'd be real. I could even take it if you were like the cold water of Colossae. That's better than being the foul water of Laodicea, lukewarm. Who are they? Professing Christians...go to church, claim to know the Lord, but aren't saved. They're content with self-righteous religion. They're hypocrites playing games. They're the kind of people described in Matthew 7 where Jesus says, "Many will say unto Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord,' and I will say unto them, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you. You may have done many works in My name and prophesied and cast out demons, but I don't know you.'"

They're like those in 2 Timothy 3:5 who have a form of godliness but without power. They're like the Jews in Romans 10 who have a zeal for God but not according to a true knowledge. They're just hypocrites touched somehow by Christianity but not belonging to Christ. And there is something obnoxious about them. They nauseate Christ. They make Him sick.

There's much more hope, frankly, for one who has been untouched by the gospel. There's much more hope for one who has made no pretense of knowing Christ. Do you understand that? Than there is for the one who makes the pretense but his life illustrates that he's not really honored Christ at all. In fact, I would say there's no one farther from the truth in Christ than the one who makes an idle profession without real faith. He is really in Satan's hands. They had bought a satanic lie about Christ. They were in religion up to their neck. They called it Christianity. They said they were a church. Satan was in control.

In the history of the church and in my experience, no one has been harder to reach for Christ than a false Christian. Satisfied with the measure of his good works, satisfied with his attitude toward God and they sit in churches across the world. It would be easier to win a harlot, it would be easier to win a criminal, it would be easier to win an agnostic or an atheist, it's easier...Jesus certainly said...to reach the Publicans and the harlots than it is the Pharisees and the Sadducees. There's more hope for the salvation of an atheist than a spoiled half-hearted conceited hypocrite who thinks he knows the

truth and pretends to accept it. Like the Pharisees, they don't feel their need. They have that lukewarmness of religion. They sense no chill. If they were cold enough to feel the bitterness and the severity of their sin, they would be more readily brought to the knowledge of Christ. But these conceited self-deceived hypocrites, this lukewarmness made Christ sick.

John Stott once wrote, "The Laodicean church was a half-hearted church. Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the twentieth century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so wide spread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic, we appear to have taken a lukewarm bath."

This is a people who aren't saved. But it's not an outright rejection. It's not a repudiation. It's not a hostility toward the Lord Jesus outwardly. They probably named His name. But I submit to you that Jesus said, "I would rather have you cold than like this. I'd rather you be a prostitute than a Pharisee. I'd rather you be a sinner who knows his sin than a hypocrite who doesn't recognize it. I'd rather you be a Publican beating on your breast saying...God, be merciful to me, a sinner...who feels the coldness of his lostness than a Pharisee who says...I thank You that I'm not as other men." Anything is better than lukewarmness.

But there was even something worse than being lukewarm and that was their self-deception. Look at verse 17. Here's the second condemnation. "Because you say I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." Look at that, first part of the..."Because you say." Do you remember the study we did in Matthew chapter 7 and we talked about the "if we sayers" and the "if we doers"? If we say...if we say...if we say, Jesus said doesn't mean anything. What matters is if we do, if we do, if we do. It's not the people who say, it's the people who do the will of My Father.

So here are the "if we sayers" again, the unregenerate religionists who want to name the name of God and the name of Christ and show you everything they've done and He says they're doing it again, they're saying...and here's what they're saying, "I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing."

It reminds me of the rich young ruler, does it you? Matthew 19? As I told you, Laodicea was a very wealthy city. It had material wealth, it gave its people a false security. They were famous for that wealth and apparently the church thought it was wealthy, too.

You say, "Were they talking about money here?" No, no, I don't really think they were talking about money. I think they thought they were rich in spiritual reality. I think they thought they had spiritual riches. Let me go a step further. I think the heresy in Colossae was a form of incipient Gnosticism, a sort of a preview to what later became known as Gnosticism. And Gnosticism comes from the word gnosis which means "to know." In other words, there were people who believed that they had attained

to the ascended knowledge. Christ was not enough for them. They had gone beyond Christ. Christ was just an emanation from God, an angelic being on a descending ladder of beings that go from good to bad. And He was somewhere up in the good category.

The gnostics said, "But we have ascended beyond the simplicity of Christ. Christ is only a part, a component. We have reached the ascended knowledge. We have gone beyond that. And that's why Paul in Colossians chapter 2 so explicitly says of Christ, "In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and you are complete in Him and don't you let anybody spoil you through philosophy and empty deceit and think there's something more elevated than Christ." That same heresy had found its way over here, no doubt, and these people are saying, "We are the ascended ones." If this isn't the typical, hypocritical, liberal line. "All of you mindless fundamentalists. All of you people who just believe the simplicity of the Bible are not educated. You're not erudite. You haven't attained to the ascendent knowledge." We are anti-intellectual.

No, they had spiritual pride. They were rich. They had become spiritually wealthy. They had attained the ascended knowledge. They had gone past that simple belief about Christ that these uneducated and non-trained Christians believe. They think they're spiritually rich. So they said I am rich, that's their state, and have become wealthy, that's...that's the process to that state. They did it by themselves. I'm rich and guess who got me there? Me. And I have need of nothing. That's a self-righteous works system, isn't it? I've attained it all. I've reached the elevated level.

This is the hardest person to reach. The intellectual apostate, the intellectual unsaved hypocrite who stays in the church. Liberal churches flood our country, Europe, Canada, the world...full of people who think they have ascended beyond. They have an aberrant view of Christ. They see Him not as the creator God. They have an infatuation with their own intellect and assume that they have been elevated beyond the simplicity of fundamental truth. And they have developed a self-righteous work system that makes them think they are the spiritually elite who need absolutely nothing. And when you come with the simple gospel, they laugh.

These are the ones, by the way, in the words of Jesus, Matthew 7:13 and 14, who are on the broad road. It's a road of religion that says heaven but it ends up in hell. They're the ones who build their house on the sand in Matthew 7:24 to 27.

So He says to them, "You say...Ha...and you don't know." Boy, that's got to be a blast. You say you have all this spiritual stuff and you don't know anything. The truth is you are wretched and miserable. Why? Because you are poor and blind and naked. Whew...you are wretched, that's your state. You are miserable, that's your condition. Because you are poor and blind and naked.

Here we see it clearly. The lukewarm condition is lostness. It is the sickening condition of thinking you are spiritually rich when you're bankrupt, of thinking you are beautiful when you are wretched, of

imagining you are to be envied when you are to be pitied, of believing you see clearly everything when you see nothing. You are stone blind...a feeling you are clothed in spiritual finery and you are stark naked. That's what He's saying. You've got it exactly opposite.

You may have a bank account in the spiritual bank, you may be wearing the shiny black wool, and you may have the eye salve, but you're poor, you are poor and you are blind and you are naked.

This is a person to be pitied. That's what it means, miserable and wretched. You have no riches. You have no clothes. You have no vision, no sight. Spiritually naked, spiritually blind, spiritually bankrupt. This is the message I would preach in a liberal church.

Verse 18 gives us the command, this is fascinating. Listen to this command. "I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire that you may become rich and white garments that you may clothe yourself and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed and eye salve that you may anoint your eyes that you may see." Whew...now you see how the industry of that city comes into play? I advise you, I'm giving you some counsel. Isn't the Lord gracious? He says you make Me sick but My grace compels Me to give you an invitation.

He could have turned them into cinders by the breath of His mouth. But it's an invitation to a church full of hypocrites. And it reminds me that they still are worthy of an invitation, are they not? From a gracious God? He says you need to buy from Me.

Well you say, "Now wait a minute, what do you mean buy?" Well it's the same kind of buy as Isaiah 55 verse 1, you remember that wonderful chapter which is an evangelistic appeal. In Isaiah 55:1, let me just read it to you so you'll have it exactly as it was written. The call of God to the unregenerate sounds like this, "Oh everyone who thirsts come to the waters, you who have no money come, buy and eat." Did you get that? You who have no money, come buy and eat. So this is the kind of thing you can buy when you don't have anything. You come and buy it. You say, "Now wait a minute, if I don't have anything, what do I buy it with?" Are you ready for this? The only thing you have is...what?...your own wretched condition. So that's all you can offer.

So you come and you say I'll give You me for You, is that a deal? Jesus said that, what will a man give in exchange for his soul? What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, can he give that in exchange for his soul? No. What can you give in exchange for your soul? Only yourself, that's what repentance is. I renounce myself, I yield myself, I give myself to You.

And He says, "I want you to buy three things. You give yourself to Me, that's the price, all that you are for all that I am, and first of all, I'll give you gold refined by fire that you may become rich." Pure gold refined by fire, no impurities. Ah, they thought they were rich in spiritual truth, they thought they were rich in spiritual reality, they thought they were transcendent, you know. They were bankrupt.

He says I'll give you spiritual gold, I'll give you the spiritual riches, I'll give you what is pure and what is valuable and what is priceless. I'll endow you with such spiritual riches you never dreamed of. I'll give you a true and tested faith.

First Peter 1:7, "The proof of your faith is more precious than gold." What is the gold He's talking about? I think a real faith, a true faith. First Timothy 6:18, James 2:5 lend credence to that interpretation. I think He's saying come to Me and just give Me yourself and I'll give you a pure faith, a true faith, a proven faith that is priceless gold. What does that mean? A real relationship to Me, a genuine belief that affirms that you're a true Christian.

Then He says, "Buy white garments that you may clothe yourself." Get rid of those black ones. Get a white one. Back in Isaiah 61:10 Isaiah said that God wants to clothe us with the robe of His righteousness. We know in chapter 3 of Revelation verse 4 He said that people who walk with the Lord will walk with Him in white for they are worthy. Over in Revelation 7:9 you see the saved multitude and they are in white robes. And over in chapter 19 verse 8 it says that she is clothed in fine linen, white or bright and clean and this fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. So He says I'll give you a true faith, a pure faith, a saving faith, a confident faith and then I will give you righteousness. I'll give you a righteous nature and I'll give you righteous acts.

And then He says I want you to get some eye salve to anoint your eyes so you can really see. You know what they used to do? There was some kind of a powder that they found, it's called in some history books "Phrygian Powder." And they knew that if they placed it on the eye it had a very soothing effect, a therapeutic effect, actually a medicinal effect. And so what they would do is they would put that powder in some coarse dough and then they would place that coarse dough on the eyes and somehow they would seal it so it remained there for a length of time. It brought healing and restoration to the eyes. And He says to them, in effect, "You think you see but you don't see. But if you come to Me I'll give you eye salve and you'll see."

Salvation is the gold that makes people spiritually rich in faith. Salvation is the white robe that covers our sinful nakedness. Salvation is the eye salve that gives us the knowledge of God and of His truth. What's He offering? An abiding faith, an abiding righteousness, an abiding understanding. You are poor, you are blind, you are naked. Let Me fix that.

All that comes together when the sinner offers the price which is himself and when he repents to follow Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the wonder of this text. We thank You for its insightfulness for what we have learned, what we've seen. Thank You for the elucidation of this truth to help us understand churches around us all over the place that are like this Laodicean church, they make You sick, they

make us sick. But even though they made You sick, You still were gracious and You said if you'll repent I'll make you rich, I'll clothe you and I'll give you sight.

Father, give us that same sickening feeling when we see those churches that have blasphemed the name of Christ, that have substituted false spiritual knowledge and that have developed a system of self-righteousness which makes them smug and self-satisfied. May we be nauseated by them. May we want nothing to do with them and yet may we have the compassion of Christ to call them out of their condition, to help them see their poverty and their nakedness and their blindness. It isn't easy for someone like that to be saved, better they were cold, better they were cold...but even so, we must faithfully call them to repentance. And may we do that as You give us opportunity. And may there be some people in churches like that who hear this message tonight or on tape or on the radio somewhere down the line when it's played, who in hearing come to truth and in giving themselves as the purchase price they are given in return gold, a white garment and eye salve. Be gracious, Lord, to many caught in Laodicean churches. For Your own glory we pray. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).