

# Laodicea

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]      Revelation chapter 3 to the last of the seven letters to the churches and we know and recognize that these letters don't just have a significance to their original recipients but to all of us.

And what a letter this is! What a great letter to finish these seven letters! Or maybe not such a great letter as we think about it applying to ourselves. It's absolutely bursting with God's truth. It's full of intrigue, it's full of love, it's full of wisdom, it's full of surprises, it's full of drama. And I wonder if you received, imagine if this was to the church in St. Columbas. I wonder what we'd think. Probably be quite appalled by it.

I was like, imagine I'm speaking like that about me, about us. We might be hurt or offended. We don't expect such honesty or do we? We look for honesty, don't we, from Jesus Christ because He knows our hearts and lives and that's the great thing. It reveals His passionate heart and we love the imagery of this particular letter. It's solemn, it's cutting but it's full of love and full of forgiveness as well. I just want to look at one or two things about this letter and apply them, the principles at least, to our own situation. I don't know how you would describe the church in Laodicea. I've described it as the cocky church because it seemed to be that there were really quite self-indulgent and quite a church that was full of self-importance and self-love.

And I almost can imagine, if you could personalise each of the churches so that they were an individual, you could almost imagine Jesus writing this letter to this church in Laodicea and you could almost imagine her kind of looking at her fingernails and kind of polishing them saying, yeah, yeah, okay, what have you got to say? Kind of disinterested in what Jesus would say, much more interested in just themselves and what they're thinking, what they're doing. You know, I'm sure Jesus got a message for the churches but really, we're doing great. The Lord will love us. It'll be a great message you'll have for us and you can almost see that. You know, Jesus doesn't need to speak to us especially. We've got it sussed. We're doing well. We're independent. We're giving plenty of money up to central funds. Everything's going good. People in the congregation are flourishing.

Businesses are going well. God's blessing us all over. We're independent. We're rich. It's great. No need for anything and yet God speaks into that situation and you know for us, we might immediately say, well, exactly that's shocking, isn't it? Really imagine thinking like that and imagine being a church like that but we know that sometimes in our lives consciously or otherwise and usually maybe otherwise, we're doing the same thing. We read God's word like it's for everyone else. We read the challenges and the searing light of Christ's vision into our own hearts. We think it's not really for us. It's for other people. We go about our lives without reference to the Bible. We don't see the need for prayer. It's insignificant. We're not committed to maybe God's word and God's people and to praying individually or to praying together. And we think, well, it's okay. I think as Finlay was mentioning this morning, truth for every individual, if applies to you then that's fine but this is really not for me. I'm busy with my life. Things are going well. Not sure if I want a discipline of God's word or of God's people or of God's service or of God's witnessing. I don't know if I want that in my life but things are going fine.

[ 4:10 ] And it may be that spiritually we might not articulate that but that practically if we were to analyze our last year or our last month or our last six months of life, that's what it's looked like spiritually. We've just been independent. We haven't been relying on God. We haven't, we've forgotten what it is to pray. We only pray in a dire emergency and we feel self-satisfied and contented with our lives. Well, Jesus here reveals for this church, this church that thought it was rich, he reveals something very startling. He reveals a great lack in their lives. He doesn't look at them the way that they look at themselves and there's a great lesson therein, isn't there for us, that we often make judgment spiritually based on our own understanding and maybe sometimes our own comparison with other people. But what Jesus wants us to do is to be confident enough and rely enough on him to allow his gaze into our hearts and listen for his judgment on our lives and his analysis of our spirituality lest we become independent and self-righteous or arrogant or separated from him. It's a great danger. That is what Satan will do in our lives. He will constantly encourage us to not be childlike and dependent in faith and in relationship with Jesus Christ. What does Jesus say? Jesus is the risen Savior, the Son of God, the one who will come back and will, is on the throne of the universe even at this moment. What does Jesus say? He says, well, you know, you're a lukewarm. It's a great description. We can all, we all understand that the way. It's a great description, he says. He says, you know, I don't like the way that you've become. He says, you know, you think you're rich, that you don't need anything and partly because you're wealthy. It's a, it's a, it's a snare, isn't it, of wealth that we don't need God. We don't need Christ. That's why Jesus said it's harder for a rich person to enter in the kingdom of heaven than it's for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. He's not condemning riches, but what he is saying is he's saying there's a danger there that riches make us self-sufficient.

And that's how they felt, self-sufficient. And Jesus says, well, I find you spiritually lukewarm. He says, I prefer if you were, now this is very interesting, Jesus said, I prefer if you were cold or hot. He says, you would actually prefer them if they were outright, atheistically secular and unbelieving, I think, that's what he's saying there. It's easier maybe to work with that at one level, startling thing to say. Or I would prefer you hot. That is spiritually on fire, wholehearted.

He's not talking about mad fanaticism, but just a wholehearted devotion to the living God. I'd prefer if you were that. But the moment he says you're in that ghastly place of lukewarmness, middle of the road, Christianity, neither hot nor cold, tepid, limp, flabby, nominalistic, no passion, no love, no fire, just there kind of like a large lump of nothing in the middle.

In the middle of the road, lukewarm. And he doesn't, it's a really strong image, it's a really strong picture that Jesus uses here. Do you know what it's like? He's presumably in images about food, really. You know, a hot meal gone cold is like just kind of lukewarm. You don't want to eat that.

We got pork belly this week, and pork belly is great stuff, but it's full of fat. But we kind of cooked it and put it in, well, we, the royal we, I didn't really cook, I ate it, but Katrina cooked it. And a great sort of barbecue sauce and all that kind of stuff and got rid of a lot of the fat.

[ 8 : 57 ] And Nara did, what'd you call it? Nara did, got rid of all the fat, anyway, and ate some of it. And then it was too much to eat in a one-hour, so put in the fridge with the barbecue sauce. Then in the morning when it's cold, just a layer of fat, shouldn't be saying that. On the top, you just couldn't eat that, because it had just gone kind of, well, that's what happens when you go lukewarm, you just kind of turns your stomach, you couldn't even have to get rid of that fatness on the top. If you go into a restaurant and you ask for a salad, and one of these blistering hot Scottish days that we're so used to, and it comes out and it's kind of been lying, room temperature, and the lettuce is all kind of miserable in. You just don't want to eat that kind of meal, because it's either hot gone cold or cold warm up, it's just not a pleasant picture. And Jesus uses that and says, that's how I feel about you spiritually. I want to emit you out, that's the original word that you have there, spew you out of my mouth. It's to God, a spirituality like that is nauseating. It's disgusting, he says.

He wants to reject that from himself. And you know that's a very strong, powerful picture, because the reality is as Christians is that we are in Christ. It's not just that Christ redeems us and saves us and holds our hand, but we become very much part of Christ, one with Christ in salvation, and he gives us his Holy Spirit, and he's close to us. And yet in this condition, he finds it hard to live with Christians, because they just are embracing so many things that he finds offensive and clutching on to sin and selfishness in a way that makes him want to reject them from his life.

And it's just a picture that he's giving. He's not saying he will do that, but it's a picture he wants to give them and to remind them of their situation. He knows exactly what they think. You know, you say, I'm rich, I've acquired wealth, I don't need a thing. But he gives a different verdict on them, he says, but you do not realize that spiritually, he says, you're wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. You see, they had the wrong emphasis in their lives.

They reckon they have all the seven churches would be envied because they were rich, they were doing great. Apparently, Mlea de Silla was the centre of a strong medical industry, and one of the things they produced was iSALV. And so they had this great industry where they were putting iSALV all around the world. It was a strong market economy that they had there.

They also apparently had a strong fashion industry, a very fashionable place to be. And they had this going for them. And so they were kind of top-notch people. They were right up there in the social elite. And that was brought into the church as well. But Jesus uses these pictures which say, you've got wealth, but I'm saying spiritually you have poverty.

[ 12 : 29 ] And even though you think things are great, I'm saying you're pitiful. And though you have iSALV to sell, I say you're blind. And though you've got the greatest fashion in the world, I say you're naked spiritually and all these things. He's using what is a reality, a net experience, and in their lives. And he's turning on its head and applying it spiritually and reminding them that he sees beyond all of these things that sometimes we give great significance to in our lives. The reminder being again, things are not always as they seem. And what the word of God counsels and what I counsel myself and you to do is always to examine ourselves in the light of Scripture, not by comparing ourselves to what everyone else is doing around us, but in the light of Scripture and the condition of our heart, not our success, not our wealth, not our social standing, but our spiritual laser heart before God. So he makes that declaration and that opinion to them, but then he gives them his own counsel. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you can become rich, quite close to where you notice he's carrying on the same kind of pictures about their own what they would know about in their own industry, their own business, quite close to where so you can cover your nakedness and solve on your eyes so that you can see me.

What is he telling them to be salivating? They've got this great industry. They're selling this stuff all over the place, but he's talking spiritually to them. Basically he's saying, look up, look in and look out.

Look up, buy from me gold, spiritual wealth. That's what he's pointing them to. He's saying, I'm not really interested in your social standing, but I want you to be spiritually rich. Isaiah 55, come to me all you are heavy thirsty, come to the waters, you have no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor, what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good in your soul, delight in the richest of fear. So he's encouraging to come to him for spiritual wealth and to put aside materialism and the worries of materialism and remind themselves as we need to remind ourselves that our treasures are in heaven, invaluable and measurable. Now, not for a moment was Jesus or is Christianity saying that wealth or jobs and all these things are unimportant, but the recognition is that these are not what we live for, that they are part of life, that they are part of God's gift to us, but that we live because we have something imperishable, something of much, much greater value, something of great spiritual value that nobody can take from us and that is that inheritance with him and that company, that forgiveness, that grace and that newness which nobody can take away, look up, he says, buy gold from me. You don't have no idea how rich you are. Nobody notices us, nobody sees us, we're not noticed by the world, but Jesus says you have outstanding riches in me, spiritually and without me there's utter and complete poverty and he says, look in as we'll look to yourself and cover your shameful nakedness and he says, do so with white clothes to wear and again, I think there's maybe an illusion there to the fashion industry because apparently in

Laodicea they were famous for their black wool and he's kind of giving the opposite picture and saying, look there's white spiritual clothes, he's asking them to remind, he's reminding them of the spiritual purity that Jesus alone can give, the righteousness of Christ which covers us, which of course the picture is an external covering but the reality is it's a covering of our heart, a covering of our sin, it reminds us that we are new people from the inside out.

They had no need for Christ, no need for his cleansing but he was exposing their shame and exposing their need for Jesus Christ. You see without that righteousness we remain spiritually naked, not maybe to the world around us, we might be morally upright, we might be good people in the very best sense of that word humanly speaking, but Jesus says without me you are spiritually exposed and I can see every motive and every thought and every self-centered motivation that's in our lives and he says you need my righteousness, you need that clothing because without that the cross is meaningless and if the cross is meaningless the devil this evening laughs at our Christianity, he laughs at the ludicrousness of a Christianity without the cross. The cross remains for us absolutely central and so he encourages us to look not only look up, look in but also to look out, save to put in your eyes so that you can see.

[18:15] Not with the famous ointment from Leodicea but with spiritual vision so that we can see our own need, we can see the beauty of Christ, we can see the need of those around us and we can be kind and gentle and caring and compassionate and seeing the need of others before our own need and reveal the glory of Christ as we serve him and as we follow him.

There are so many pictures isn't there in the Bible of Jesus doing that kind of thing of touching the eyes of the blind so they could see and when people come to Jesus Christ for the first time when they're born anew and they're born a fresh they'll often say for years I just didn't understand, I didn't see, didn't see my need and we're looking for Christ constantly in our lives to grant us the ability to see but as he sees that's what you want to do, that's what I want to do to be in a place where we're looking and seeing what Christ sees and that's that constantly is pushing us towards Jesus and our need for him on a daily basis to make the decisions that come from seeing as he sees in our lives. So Christ's Council is look up, look in and look out and as we close his we see also his invitation maybe slightly more than can I say an invitation maybe it's more of a command. Those who my love I rebuke and discipline so be earnest and repent here I am I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and he with me. We've got that great command really for our lives to be again and if you look back through the seven letters you'll find I think all but one of them referring to the need to repent that is just to turn around towards God again and to do it earnestly that's a great word is it's quite an old-fashioned word I don't think we use that word very much today to be earnest but it's a great word he wants us with our hearts genuinely individually to be people who turn back to him because he loves those who do so and those he loves he rebukes and disciplines because it's a mark of love because he wants us to be more like him and he wants us to turn to him what a great saviour he is it's a very strong attack isn't it and yet it's done with such gentleness because he loves his own and he sees it exactly as it is we talked about God maybe not in church but we talked I talked with someone recently about God being good the importance of knowing and remembering that God is good he is a good God but he's God he still is God and as a good God he's also it's almost if he wasn't God it would be a battle for him wouldn't it but because he's God he's good but he also sees everything so he needs to be honest he sees what we're like and he sees our needs so that's why he says what he says not to oppress us not to enslave us not to beat us back but because that's what he sees he says I know I know what you're like I know what you're trying to what you think is important but I'm saying this is what important and I know you think you're rich and wealthy and things are great I'm saying they're not you're never in touch with me you're never near you say you're Christians but you never speak with me you're more concerned about about selling your eye salve and about wearing the best clothes for the next fashion parade that there is but you have no time for me and I was there on the cross so that you would see that these things are secondary to being in relationship with me these things are insignificant ultimately and he reminds them of the seriousness of turning back to him because he is the one who stands at the door of our hearts and because he wants to keep us from the inevitable sadness and regret and pain of ignoring him in

our lives and going our own way I stand at the door and knock very personal words from the living God very touching very condescending I stand at the door and knock your life your heart mine and he wants us to recognize that because he what the picture is that he gives here is that he feels on the outside I'm standing he says at the door of your life but he's on the outside I'm on the outside I'm the living God I'm knocking here I'm wanting to gain access to give you that life that Satan has taken from those who turn away but I feel out of communion you know when we come to Christ that is primarily what it is it's to be in communion with him to be in fellowship with him and he's saying but when we're lukewarm we're choosing to close the door we're choosing to keep him out and he says this is the this is the Lord of glory and he says

I'm wanting renewed fellowship with you are you telling me you can't pray you can't speak to me that you don't have time to allow me to mold and change your heart this is the king of glory and he's asking for fellowship with us how astonishing is that for us he wants that quality time with us he wants us to be those who overcome the temptation to remain lukewarm and sit with him and I think this is a future reference but I think there's also a present reference to sit with me on my throne just I overcome and sat down my father on the throne I think there is a sense in which we we're we sup with him spiritually and we want it to be near him and we do that because it reminds us of our eternal home I was reading just very briefly a book on prayer this afternoon and it's an old book and the guy was writing saying giving various encouragements to pray and one of the things he said was pray until you I think I mentioned it in my own prayer pray until you are praying which I thought was a very perceptive thing to say because I think very often I've come away from prayer five minutes later I realized I actually didn't pray there I went through the motions I spewed out to use a similar expression a shopping list of requests but I wasn't in fellowship with Jesus Christ I didn't take time to think who he was I didn't I didn't get to the place where I prayed until I prayed and I think that's significant for us we can it's like having toast walking down the street or sitting your feet under the table and having a full breakfast I think there's a great difference you know where we kind of talk to God in the run

I'm not saying there's not a time for that a place for that but he he wants us also to be in that place where we're in rich fellowship with him and just soaking up his company and that requires time and energy so he stands at the door of our hearts and he encourages us to overcome and I think that invitation also goes out to those who are not Christians and if there are any who are not Christians here this evening I say again when I said it this morning what must I do to be saved is the question they say is Jesus Christ as close and he longs for fellowship with his lost sheep and he longs to be for them to see their need of him above everything in life whether it's fashion or whether it's wealth or success and by this world standards he says I want to give you genuine riches genuine sight and genuine clothes as it were to wear spiritual clothes to wear that will be acceptable and that last day when all will stand before the judgment seer Christ and that righteousness which alone will satisfy that day so it's a great challenging living message for ourselves and may it be that we see the gentle powerful strong but loving and patient but urgent demand of Jesus who is at the door of our lives looking for entry looking for his lordship to be enthroned in our lives I mean let's bow our heads and pray Father help us we pray to hear your word and to respond to your voice and to recognize your judgment on our condition in our lives not be satisfied with our own particularly if our own ideals keep us from you or keep us from our relationship with you enable us to follow you with all our hearts and souls and to as it were be at that great feast a spiritual feast with you help us buy your grace to overcome and when we are tired and weary as we often are keep us from either blaming you for that or ignoring you as a means of refreshment and reviving so bless us as we sing our partings so together and continue with us in Jesus name amen