

# REVELATION

Seeing, Knowing and Serving Jesus Christ  
Today at the Edge of History

Chapter 3:14-22 (2:1-3:22)

## Text: Revelation 3:14-22 - To the Churches: Laodicea

### To the Church in Laodicea

<sup>14</sup> "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. <sup>15</sup> I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white

clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

<sup>19</sup> Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. <sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

### The City of Laodicea

It is a sad commentary, but this city's church is the only one to have added a word to the English dictionary: *Laodicean* means "indifferent or lukewarm, esp. in regard to religion"!

Laodicea, the last of the seven Asian cities mentioned by name and by letter in Revelation, was founded in the 3rd century B.C. by the Syrian ruler Antiochus II and named for his wife, Laodice. It was one of the three so-called "sister cities" along the rich Lycus river valley which included Heiropolis (six miles across the river) and Colossae (ten miles up river). The wealth of the city was seen in its many banks and especially attested to after the devastating earthquake of A.D. 61 when the people there refused any governmental assistance and rebuilt using their own resources. Laodicea was also noted for its textile industry and its dark black and soft local wool. It was the regional center for medical arts, and its famous eye-salve was exported widely.

Jesus' reference to lukewarmness may have been intended to call to mind an annoying fact of life in Laodicea. Water had to be piped in through aqueducts, and by the time it got to the city its freshness was gone. Or it could point toward the famous medicinal hot



Ruins of Laodicea with Ancient  
Aqueduct Cross-Section in Foreground

springs of Heirapolis or the revitalizing cold springs of Colossae.

Prior to John's writing from Patmos around A.D. 96, Laodicea had been evangelized in the 60's during the Apostle Paul's two-year

Ephesian ministry (see Acts 19). Most likely it was Paul's colleague Epaphras who actually visited the city in person, but the Apostle clearly considered them part of his mission field, and he sent them greetings through the Colossians (see Col. 2:1 & 4:12-16) with special mention of a church meeting in the home of a woman named Nympha. Paul instructs the Colossian Christians to read their letter to the Laodiceans, and he offers evidence that he may have written a separate letter to the believers there.

During the intervening 30 years the church's spiritual condition apparently declined, and a major factor in this was more than likely their abundance of material wealth. So the Lord's harshest word of warning criticism is reserved for them: *I'm about to spit you out of my mouth!*, and He doesn't have a single word of commendation. However, He does offer an amazing word of invitation: *Look! I'm standing at the door knocking!*

**Read & Reflect - 3:14-22**

*“Jesus Christ produced mainly three effects-- hatred, terror, adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval.”*

- C.S. Lewis, God in the Dock, p.158

**First Reading/First Impression:** This is the most well-known of the seven letters. Why do you think this might be so?

**Second Reading/Main Thought:** Why is Jesus angry with the Laodiceans? What motivate His anger? (Why does He bother to speak to them at all?) How does this help us understand God’s anger and wrath in general, throughout the Scriptures (including what is to come in Revelation) and in the world today?

**Search**

Verses 3:14-22 - Fill in the chart below from the contents of the Laodicean Letter.

Church	How Jesus Presents Himself	What Jesus Knows	What Jesus Has Against Them	What Jesus Calls Them To Do	Warnings	Blessings
<i>Laodicea</i>						

## Apply - 3:14-22

1. What are some ways churches might “leave Jesus on the outside” demonstrating a “lukewarm” faith in Him today?

2. What could a church member do to help remedy this situation?

3. What is the most meaningful insight you have gained from this group of letters, “what the Spirit says to the churches?” What do you intend to do about it?

## Notes on Revelation 3:14-22

**Introduction:** This is the most famous of the seven letters, and it contains the most famous phrase: “Behold I stand at the door and knock.” While this is an image that has been effectively used in the context of evangelism (inviting Christ into our life for the first time), it is important to bear in mind that this letter is written to a group of Christians. Thus G. Campbell Morgan, the famous British preacher, called Laodicea “the church with Jesus on the outside.” This letter then serves as a startling reminder that churches can and do find themselves at times operating as though Jesus were not their Lord or even part of their organization.

v.14 - **“Amen... faithful and true witness... ruler of God’s creation”**... Jesus’ climactic self-identification here, unlike the other letters centers not on what Jesus has or does but on who he is... **“Amen”** is a Hebrew word which is so much more than a simple prayer-ender. In Isaiah 65:16 God is referred to as “the God of Amen.” It means “Yes! So be it!, This is truth!” or “May this become truth!” As it says in 2 Corinthians 1:20, Jesus is the “Amen/Yes!” to all of God’s good promises... **“Ruler”** is the Greek word “*archo*” again. It could be translated “beginning.” Jesus is the source before, and the authority over, all creation. A moving hymn to this transcendent reality of who Jesus Christ is, which the Laodiceans must have known, is found in Paul’s letter to the Colossians (1:15-20).

v.15 - **“I know... neither hot nor cold...”** This may well be another example of Jesus’ use of local geography to make His point (see intro. on p.1) that the Laodiceans lack commitment to His Lordship (because they are leaving him out—see v.20). He calls them to be agents for healing (like hot water) or for refreshment (like cold springs), and they are neither. This interpretation seems more likely than the idea that Jesus would actually prefer them to be “cold” toward Him.

v.16 - **“...spit you out...”** Literally “vomit.” The harshest word of warning for a church that needed to hear it. Their lack of commitment, their mild approval of Him, their passionless faith and hedged trust Jesus finds nauseating.

v.17 - **“...rich... do not need a thing”**... Self-sufficiency was the spirit and the motto of this wealthy city (see p.1)... **“...wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked...”** Jesus contrasts their spiritual condition before God with the city’s pride in the eyes of the world with words pointed at their famous banks, eye salve and garment industry.

v.18 - **“Buy from me”**... Jesus’ gold and eye salve bring lasting, heavenly wealth and sight. His clothes are “white” (pure) and cover not just human bodies but human shame (this points all the way back to Genesis chapter 3 where God provided Adam and Eve with skins for their physical nakedness but they had nothing to cover their shame).

v.19 - **“...love... rebuke and discipline”**... Jesus’ motivation for his harsh words, then and now, is love.

*“Jesus has now many lovers of His heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of His cross. Many He has who are desirous of consolation, but few of tribulation. Many He finds who share His table, but few His fasting. All desire to rejoice with Him, few are willing to endure anything for Him. Many follow Jesus unto the breaking of bread; but few to the drinking of the cup of His passion. Many reverence His miracles; few follow the shame of His cross. Many love Jesus so long as no adversities befall them. Many praise and bless Him, so long as they receive any consolation from Him.”*

- from The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a’ Kempis (1380-1471)





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## The Divine Comedy: The Almighty King Who Knocks

"The tragic is the inevitable. The comic is the unforeseeable." This is what author Frederick Buechner says. And if he is correct, there has never been a better comedian than Jesus Christ.

***"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and will dine with him and he with me."***

Two words in this verse warrant closer investigation. First, "dine." This word, "DEEPNAISO" in Greek, implies an intimacy of fellowship on the highest order. In Middle-Eastern/oriental culture there is a level of human closeness associated with the table that we Americans have difficulty finding even in our bedrooms. So, Jesus is not suggesting that He and the Laodiceans ought to "do lunch" sometime: He is offering to share something very special with them--blissful intimacy. The other word is "knock." The Greek word is "KROUO" which refers to a rather polite kind of knocking, rapping with the knuckles. There is another word which could have been used, but wasn't: "KOPTEIN." It refers to a more violent kind of knocking, heavy blows, pounding with the fist.

Jesus graduated from the "School of Hard Knocks." In fact, He is that School's Valedictorian, for no one has been knocked around more cruelly and unfairly. Yet He offers back "soft knocks." We see this in so many of His "valedictory addresses" throughout the Scriptures. These are revelations of the unforeseeable and thus comedy routines in the fullest and highest sense. The Laodicean Letter is one of His best!

"Behold!" Jesus says. The NIV translates this word "Here I am!" It could also be rendered "Look!" "See!" or "Listen!" But if it were up to me, I might choose to translate it "SURPRISE!!!" Surprise! is that a polite knock we hear? It looked like Jesus the angry judge for a moment there, but now it is Jesus the Unforeseeable Comedian who takes over.

The "lukewarm" Laodiceans, and we like them, ought to foresee something terrible--our just desserts! Never could we imagine that what awaits us is... just desert!... a sweet confection of intimate affection--an intimate affair with the most special of guests whose sparking eyes, broad smile and warm arms all enfold us in His love. This is what we could never expect! This is the height of comedy! Watch out Bill Cosby! Watch out Robin Williams, and Rodney Dangerfield, and Jim Carey, and David Letterman! Jesus is gonna make us laugh in a way you funny folks could only dream about.

*It is noteworthy that although each letter is addressed to a different church, the concluding formula refers to "the churches." That is, the message to each church is at the same time a message to all churches.*  
- Bruce Metzger, **Breaking the Code**, p.46

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### The Seven Letters of Revelation

#### Key Thoughts for Churches Today

1. Keep hold of your "first love" Jesus Christ.
2. Be careful about your teaching.
3. Do not tolerate religious and moral compromise.
4. Watch your actions and let them demonstrated the sincerity of your desire to live up to God's high call in Christ.
5. Don't leave Jesus on the outside of your activities and decisions and so become lukewarm in your faith!

#### *As all the churches hear the words to each church, what are they called to do?*

1. Remember. Repent. Redo (Remember who and whose you are).
2. Don't fear suffering: Be faithful until I come.
3. Repent of doctrinal compromise (turn around).
4. Hold fast to what you have in me. Reject moral compromise.
5. Wake up from spiritual deadness. Strengthen what remains.
6. Look! Look at Me! Hold fast!
7. Don't settle for lukewarm living! Come to Me for what is valuable, what looks good and what heals. Open the door for Me.

#### *What purposes do the letters serve for the unfolding of the rest of the Book of Revelation?*

- A. Focus the overriding issue of the Book: **Loyalty to Jesus Christ.**
- B. Put the whole of the Book into the context of a "love letter."

Beginning - *You've lost your first love.*

Ending - *Look! I'm standing at the door and knocking!* (reference to Song of Solomon 5:2)

Middle - *Going the "both/and" way is what I call "adultery"* (language of love again)

Building up to Chapter 19... two reasons for celebration

1. *The harlot is thrown down!* (Symbol for the ways of the world in opposition to God)
2. *The marriage feast of the Lamb begins!*

[The overarching question: Which will it be for you, for us, the way of the "harlot" or the way of "The Lamb?"]

22:17 - *"The Spirit and the Bride say 'come!'"*

**Revelation is one overwhelming picture to impress on us one fundamental issue: A love relationship with the Beginning (Arche) and the End (Telos) of the Universe! That is the pastoral purpose of the Book.** - Darrell Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge*