

Revelation Series – “The Letters/Sermons of Jesus”
Revelation 3:14-22 – Letter to Laodicea

Each letter/sermon/oracle has a specific format:

1. *Command for John to write*
2. *Statement of who Jesus is*
3. *Affirmation/Exhortation/Rebuke/Challenges*
4. *Promise for faithfulness*
5. *Decisional challenge to faithfulness*

Seven Letters’ themes:

1. Ephesus – challenge of leaving first love
2. Smyrna – tested but remaining true
3. Pergamum and Thyatira – compromise – truth/falsehood (inside pressures); truth and falsehood (outside pressures)
4. Sardis – sleeping church – “wake up” – lulled into false security – going through motions – “you think alive but dead”
5. Philadelphia – open door – God honors steps no matter how small – walk the talk

3:14a “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write...”

The Place/Context/who Jesus is addressing/to whom John is commanded to write – Laodicea – the setting of each church – important – every context unique

Laodicea as a very prosperous city

- Devastated by an earthquake in 60 A.D.
- Rebuilt without Roman Army
- Banking Center
- Home of large textile industry
- Center of commerce
- Medical school location
- Praised for eye salve “Phrygian ointment”
- No natural water source – all water had to be brought into the city via aqueduct – 10 miles away
- Actual archeological evidence of 23 ft water towers being used to store the water
- 6 miles to the north – Heropolis – place of valuable and rare hot springs – therapeutic and purified – but as you can imagine, mineral water is tepid and foul tasting
- Within 10 miles – Colossae – place of cold springs – naturally indigenous cold water in a world without ice

One of, if not the dominant metaphor used in this text has to do with water (if you get this wrong, may lead to misunderstanding of what Jesus is getting at). Keep those water temperature metaphors in your mind when you go through this text.

3:14b – “The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this...”

The statement of who Jesus is – this is the only letter that does not refer to something in opening vision of Jesus from 1:9-20. But what does appear are references to 1:5-7 – the Amen, faithful/true witness, beginning – all proclaiming Jesus’ divinity

3:15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 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...”

Usually starts out letter with something positive – what are the other positives? Look at other letters:

- Ephesus – 2:2 and 3
- Smyrna – 2:9
- Pergamum – 2:13
- Thyatira – 2:19
- Sardis – 3:1 (other not positive opening)
- Philadelphia – 3:8

Usually, Jesus starts out with something positive...some commendation but NONE here – but Jesus gets straight to the point. This letter in Revelation has a literary parallel to Galatians

Exhortation – “I know your deeds” (vs. 15) - observations of Jesus – remember, Jesus sees us, knows us, has opinion about us.

Exhortation - So, Jesus observed the Laodiceans. He knew their actions and what did he find? He found they did not measure up...in fact, can’t soft-pedaled that...Jesus wants to vomit! You’d be hard pressed to find a denunciation with any New Testament parallel. No other church was condemned in terms so strong.

Conclusion – Laodicea was worst of churches...two reasons for that:

Reason #1 – Acquiescence to culture – spiritual accommodation/complacency - Vs. 16-18

Two main interpretations of this “lukewarm” metaphor:

1 – Older, traditional view – “cold, hot, lukewarm” are different levels of spiritual fervor and/or commitment

2 – Alternative interpretation – within last 60 or so years – is that it is not the temperature that is as important as the negative implied condition of the water supply (which stood in contrast to Colossae and Hierapolis) – something is disgusting/disagreeable about the water (hence, “vomit”)

Reason #2 – Self-sufficiency vs. Dependence/Trust in Jesus

3:18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

Word “advise” here only used one other time in New Testament – John 18:14 – high priest Caiaphas advising the Jews at Jesus’ trial saying it is better that one man die for the entire people – there’s power in those words (Jesus is ruler) but decisional aspect too.

THAT’S why in the Decisional aspect of this letter, where Jesus says essentially, ” TAKE A STAND”, apparently all that Jesus has confronted, all the prosperity and self-sufficiency, has caused apathy and lethargy and not vitality and passion.

19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

After saying vomit, this is surprising – a powerful statement of love. The personal love/grace Jesus has even for this church, is astounding. The worse of sin – can be forgiven, healed.

Reprove and discipline – implies relationship – discipline is a huge issue in Bible. God loves so he disciplines – Hebrews 12

Repentance in the context of 3:20:

3:20 - Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

3:20 isn’t about evangelism. It is edification and confrontation intended for Christ followers. These Christ followers...us as Christ followers! You see, Jesus is going to keep knocking until something changes – until they/we make a decision.

That’s why Jesus tells them as he does us to **repent** - the word *metanoia* - defined as “a shift of mind.” One author wrote, “To grasp the meaning of ‘metanoia’ is to grasp the deeper meaning of ‘learning,’ for learning also involves a fundamental shift or movement of mind.” “Metanoia” is the New Testament Greek word used for repentance. True repentance, this shifting of the mind from faulty mental models, is a prerequisite for operating appropriately in our world, and an attitude of ongoing repentance is key to redemptive, transformational thinking.

- Why – because it leads to dependence upon Jesus and keeps us in a position where we have open hands and hearts and NOT closed fists and hardened hearts

The only real riches, the only real answers to complexities in life, come from being in that dependency upon Jesus. So, “metanoia” ... Jesus calls us to repent early and often! It is not a one-time event, but a lifestyle. As we confess what has gone wrong, we can go on to the next step—a joyful one—of receiving forgiveness and getting a renewed sense of hope in the midst of the complexities.

The white robes we receive from Christ show us that we, too, are given a second chance. When we are clothed with Christ, God sees his own white clothes on us.

- We are accepted. We can take confidence in God’s loving favor. We can stand up and walk. Clothed in white robes, we stand in a safe environment, free from accusation, comfortable in the presence of God.

3:21 - He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”