

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 18:11:2003

Reading: Revelation: 3:14-22

EXPLORING THE FUTURE

9. IT MAKES GOD SICK

Imagine a doctor being lukewarm about your disease. You feel sick so you drag yourself off to his surgery. He feels your pulse, takes your temperature and says good-bye. You say, *'Well just a minute, what's wrong with me Doctor ?'* He looks up from the papers on his desk and says *'What's wrong with you ? Oh, there's nothing to worry about. You've a bad case of bubonic plague.'* You look at him in astonishment and say, *'But aren't you going to give me an injection or put me in the hospital ? People don't just walk around with bubonic plague do they ? Its catching, isn't it ? What about my family ? What about all those people in your waiting room ? What about me ? People die of bubonic plague, don't they ?'*

The Doctor just looks at you mildly and says, *'That's all right my friend. You have to die sometime. It might just as well be bubonic plague as cancer or a coronary. Diseases don't interest too much. Now, if you needed surgery, well that's more my line.'* Imagine a Doctor being lukewarm about disease.

Imagine a church being lukewarm about Christ. It makes as much sense. Yet such was the church at Laodicea. Now on the outside, this church looked eminently successful.

Giving was up. Attendance was up. Activities were up. But Christ saw with X-ray vision into the heart and soul of this church. With divine omniscience, He got a completely different reading. Here's what He saw, unveiled before His eyes was a church that was neither hot nor cold. They were something in between lukewarm. And its lukewarmness that makes Christ sick.

In this letter from Christ addresses the sin of lukewarmness. This is a serious call to spiritual fervency, heart devotion, and holy zeal. Here is a solemn command to be on *fire* for Christ, not lukewarm. This lukewarm church was situated in a very important city. It had been founded by Antiochus the second and named after his wife. Laodicea was a very common name for women.

(1) COMMERCIALLY LAODICEA WAS FLOURISHING:

That was due to two important factors.

(a) ITS POSITION WAS INFLUENTIAL: Strategically located, Laodicea occupied a critical juncture on the major roadway that ran from Ephesus in the west to Phrygia in the east. Situated in the fertile Lycus Valley, it formed a tri-city combination with Hierapolis, six miles to the North and Colossae, ten miles east. Yet, it was definitely the hub, the judicial seat of the district. When a great earthquake in 60 AD levelled this and other surrounding cities, Laodicea refused government aid to rebuild, boasting that it had "*need of nothing.*"

(b) ITS PEOPLE WERE INFLUENTIAL:

It was to the banks of Laodicea that merchants and businessmen from all around came for financing their business abroad. Moreover this city contained a large number of Jews who added to its wealth and prestige.

(2) MEDICALLY LAODICEA WAS FAMOUS:

It was the seat of a famous medical centre, boasting a leading school of medicine. A

well-known eyesalve that helped cure eye diseases (tephra phrygia) was developed by the physicians here. No doubt Christ has this in mind when He counsels the church, "*Anoint thine eyes with eye salve*" (3:18)

(3) AGRICULTURALLY LAODICEA WAS FRUITFUL:

The surrounding countryside was famous for a certain black woolled sheep and this black wool would become woven into expensive garments. Consequently, they were a fashion conscious town with the latest styles. In the face of that the Lord says, "*Buy white raiment that thou mayest be clothed.*" (3:18)

(4) SPIRITUALLY LAODICEA WAS FALLING:

The first converts in this city probably came to Christ through the ministries of Paul and Epaphras. (Acts 19:8-10 Col 4:12-13) But however they may have prospered in those early days the church had now fallen on bad times. Consequently the Risen Lord sends this church the sternest of the seven letters. Concerning the church at Philadelphia Christ had nothing bad to say, concerning the church at Laodicea Christ had nothing good to say. How searching this must be for Prophetically speaking (1:3) there is brought before us the church of today. Our own age.

This Laodicean period is characterised by the phenomenon of people dictating what will be taught rather than submitting to the authority of the Word of God. The name "*Laodicea*," means "*the judgment of the people*," or to put it loosely, "*the people's right's*." Today instead of people submitting themselves to the judgment of the Word of God, we have people submitting the Word of God to their own judgment. This is the age of compromise within the church. The church of the 21st century is fast becoming a lukewarm church, a church nauseating church in the eyes of the Lord. Once the church exhibited a burning desire to evangelise the world, to reach the lost. Today, that desire has cooled in many churches. The church in the 21st century is drifting away from Biblical truth. Once it was unheard of that professing Christians would suggest that the killing of unborn babies should be condoned, or that practicing homosexuals should be ordained to the ministry. Yet these things are taking place today at an accelerating rate. Truly, this is the age of Laodicea, for which Christ has nothing but blame.

(1) THE CONDITION OF THIS CHURCH

What this church thought of itself was one thing, what Christ thought of this church was another thing. There is a big difference in (3:17) between "*thou sayest*," and "*thou art*." We can fool some of the people some of the time, but we can never fool Him any of the time. Now in order to see the condition of this church I want you to see how Christ relates to it. Notice:

(a) WHAT THE RISEN LORD REMARKS:

" I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot, I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." (3:15-16) The Greek words here are striking and we're left in doubt about their meaning. "*Cold*," means icy cold and "*Hot*," (*zestos*) means boiling hot, but the word for "*lukewarm*," means "*tepid*," (*chiliaros*) and things which are lukewarm and tepid have a nauseating effect. The city of Laodicea was a thriving and prosperous city but it had one drawback and that was its water supply. Their drinking water had to be brought in from nearby towns to meet their needs in Laodicea.

" There were two outside sources for their water Hierapolis and Colossae. An aqueduct brought some of their water six or seven miles from Colossae. This water was cold and good for drinking. Conversely, Hierapolis was famous for its hot underground springs. But there was just one problem. By the time the hot water of Hierapolis was brought to Laodicea, it had cooled off along the way. It was lukewarm and had lost its warm temperature. Likewise,

by the time the cool water came from Colossae, the same change occurred. No longer cool and refreshing, it was insipidly lukewarm." Now the same was spiritually true in the church. The Risen Lord says, "*Thou art lukewarm.*" (3:16) To be lukewarm means to be half and half. Half cold, half hot. Blow cold, blow hot. Such a person is half-hearted toward Christ. A fence-straddler. Not wanting to commit one way or another. One foot in the world, one foot in the church. Someone with no zeal, no fire, no passion, and no heat. Could this be you ? Does this describe your heart ? Are you lukewarm ? Indifferent ? Apathetic ? Is the glow gone ? Is your passion missing ? Are you lukewarm about the Scriptures ? Are you lukewarm about Prayer ? Is there is a burning passionate zeal in your heart to be in the presence of God ? Or are you bored to death with prayer ? When you get on your knees is the thrill gone ? Do you even pray at all ?

Are you lukewarm about witnessing ? Are you no longer burdened for the lost ? Do you ever care that lost people are on their way to an eternal ell ? Are you lukewarm about serving Christ ? Has your ministry lost its passion ? Have you become indifferent and callous in serving others ? What is the temperature of your heart this ? Are you on fire for the Lord ? (Lk 24:32)

(b) WHAT THE RISEN LORD REQUESTS:

" I would thou wert cold or hot." (3:15) Why does Christ say this ? Because the negative effect of a lukewarm Christian upon unbelievers is devastating. A lukewarm believer is the worst advertisement for Christianity. When a lost sinner sees the lukewarm Christian who is worldly, he reasons, "*Why do I even need to be saved ? If this is what being a Christian is all about. I don't need Christianity. He's no different than me.*" The Risen Lord cannot tolerate this respectable nominal skin deep religiosity which is so widespread among us. He wants disciples who will go all the way. Indeed lukewarmness makes God sick, thus we notice:

(c) WHAT THE RISEN LORD RESOLVES:

" I will spue thee out of my mouth." (3:16) The word here for spew (emeo) means to "*vomit, to throw up.*" If this condition continued without change Laodicea would not continue as a church. God is saying, "*When you are indifferent and lukewarm about Me, you make me sick to My stomach.*" God is not some kind of impassioned accountant in heaven, simply making marks in His divine ledger, running the universe in a cold, calculated way. He is someone with deep emotions, passionate zeal, and a loving heart.

The Lord wants to have a personal, intimate relationship with us. But a lack of heart is utterly repugnant to Him. Christ says, "*Get off the fence. Come out and out for Me. Or be out and out against Me. Just don't be indifferent. Get hot, get cold, or get out. Lukewarmness makes Me sick to my stomach.*"

(c) WHAT THE RISEN LORD REVEALS:

What is the cause of this indifference toward God ? Why were they lukewarm ? Christ exposes the problem when He says, "*Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.*" (3:17) They were plagued with worldliness, materialism, and a smug self-sufficiency. Here were people absorbed with the things of this world. Climbing the social ladder. Advancing their career. Getting ahead in the world. The latest fashion style. Buying things. They lived for these pursuits. Pointedly the Risen Lord had to say to this shop-till-you-drop bunch, "*and knowest not that thou art wretched*" (3:17) "*You think you're well attired, but you're naked ! You think you're getting ahead in the world but you're broke ! You think you're something special, but you're wretched ! You may think you're happy but behind you're plastic smiles, you're miserable.*"

Isn't it amazing that we can be so deceived ? Its when we think we've got out act together spiritually that we've lost it. Whenever we think we have no need is when our need is the greatest. My our greatest need is to see our need. Without a proper self-knowledge we have no hunger for God. Could this be you ? Where are you spiritually this ? Are you hot, cold, indifferent toward the things of God ? Where are you ? Now is there any hope for a church like Laodicea ? Well, notice:

(2) THE CHOICE BEFORE THIS CHURCH

The Lord sets the choice before this church. Will it elect Gods dealings in grace or His dealings in judgment ? Christ says in "*I counsel thee and repent.*" (3:18-19) If this church was to be brought from lukewarmness to wholeheartedness,

(a) THE LORD'S PLAN MUST BE ACCEPTED:

Christ is speaking here to externally conscious, materialistic believers who are more excited about buying and shopping than about worshipping and praying. They are more passionate about temporal things than spiritual. To these Christ says, "*You need to do business with Me. You need what only I*

can give you. Instead of stockpiling material things, you need to acquire from me spiritual things." Well, what were these things ? What did Christ's plan entail ? Well He tells them there must be a return:

(1) TO SPIRITUAL VALUES:

" I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich." (3:18) This speaks of spiritual riches. The church at Smyrna was materially poor but spiritually rich (2:9) but Laodicea was materially rich but spiritually poor.

Which would you rather be like ? Smyrna or Laodicea ? Do you need to return to spiritual values ?

(2) TO SPIRITUAL VIRTUES:

" And white raiment that thou mayest be clothed."

(3:18) The Laodiceans did not need the sleek black wool of their city, rather they needed to be clothed with the white garment that Paul speaks of in when he says, *" Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."* (Col 3:12-14) Do you need to return to spiritual values ?

(3) TO SPIRITUAL VISION:

" And anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see." (3:18) This church was blind. They could not see reality. They were living in a fool's paradise, proud of a church that was about to be rejected. The apostle Peter teaches that when a believer is not growing in the Lord his vision is affected. (2 Pet 1:5-9) *" Diet,"* has a bearing on the condition of ones eyes, in a spiritual sense as well as a physical one. These people could not see themselves as they really were. Nor could they see the open doors of opportunity and they were blind to a lost world all around them. What did they need ? The illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. Do you need to return to spiritual vision ?

(4) TO SPIRITUAL VIGOUR:

" Be zealous therefore and repent." (3:19) The word *" zealous,"* means to be on fire. It pictures something reaching the boiling point. Christ is saying, *" Turn your life around, and get on fire for me again. Rekindle your heart*

toward me before I have to discipline you." Do you need to return to spiritual vigour ?

(5) TO SPIRITUAL VICTORY:

" Be zealous therefore and repent." (3:19) The Risen Lord is saying, *" Come, resubmit your life afresh to Me. Turn away from the things of the world. Repent of your preoccupation with your career, your house, your family, your recreations, or whatever else. Get refocused on Me. Repent and be zealous."* Are you prepared for that ? To renounce the life of pride, apathy, complacency, and indifference ? Do you need to be move up a gear ? My if we are going to move from lukewarmness to wholeheartedness (a) but

(b) THE LORD'S PERSON MUST BE RESPECTED:

The Risen Lord hammers home this plan by informing this fellowship of who He is. For only a startling self- disclosure of Himself could shake this church out of its spiritual lethargy. So here it is, *" And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans,"* as if to say that the church at Laodicea was none of His, it was the church of the Laodiceans. Look at what He says. (3:14) Do you see how the Risen Lord describes Himself to this church ?

(1) HE IS THE TRUTHFUL ONE:

" The Amen." (3:14) The word denotes that which is true. When someone makes a statement we often say *" Amen."* We mean *" that's the truth."* Here Christ is saying, *" I am the truth." (Jn 14:6)*

" Amen," implies certainty, veracity, and sincerity. Christ's words are absolute, unchangeable truth. This church needed to understand that Jesus Christ is the personification of truth. The ultimate reality. All other truth is measured by Him. His words are the divine standard. What He says is to be utterly relied upon. His words are to be embraced without reservation. No doubt Christ identifies Himself this way to this church because what He says will be a jolt to their system.

(2) HE IS THE FAITHFUL ONE:

" The faithful and true witness." (3:14) Now a witness is someone who testifies to what is true. Christ speaks the truth about what He has seen or heard. What He sees in the life of this church, He will faithfully testify to them.

He will neither exaggerate nor suppress any of the truth. He is fully reliable to communicate the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

(3) HE IS THE POWERFUL ONE:

" *The beginning of the creation of God.*" (2:13) This does not mean that He is the first created being. Such an idea is theological heresy. Rather, this means that Jesus is the Creator (arche) of all creation. It was He who flung the stars into space, it was He who reared against the skyline of the world the mighty Himalayan range. " *All things were made by Him.*" (Jn 1:3) Can we therefore ignore His plan ? Can we treat Christ with contempt ? He who is, " *The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.*" (1:13) It seems the church at Laodicea did for the city is now a waste and of this once famous church nothing survives. He who has removed the candlestick at Ephesus, has spued Laodicea out of His mouth. Will He do the same with us ? (1) (2)

(3) THE CHALLENGE TO THIS CHURCH

Look at (3:20-22) We often use these verses to lead lost people to Christ, but the basic interpretation is to the believer. The Lord Jesus, the Risen Lord is outside the church at Laodicea pleading for individuals to give Him His rightful place. He challenges this church with,

(a) HIS PERSON:

" *Behold I stand*" (3:20) He did not delegate a celestial being to bring this message to Laodicea. He comes Himself. The Bridegroom seeks His Bride, and all the communion that should spring from her union with Him. In the Song of Solomon the Bride said, " *I sleep but my heart waketh,*" and then she recognised the Bridegrooms voice, " *It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh saying, open to me, my love.*" (Song of Sol 5:2) Surely such condescension should evoke a response from His people ?

(b) HIS PATIENCE:

" *Behold I stand at the door and knock.*" (3:20) Or as the sense of the verb has it, " *I have taken my stand.*" He knocks through circumstances and He calls through His Word. For what is Christ appealing ? He is challenging us with,

(c) HIS PURPOSE:

" *If any man and he with Me.*" (3:20) To us supper is not a main meal. The Greek ate three meals in the day. Breakfast (akratisma) was only a slice of bread dipped in wine. Lunch (aristo) was seldom eaten at home. It was a quick meal eaten in the city square or wherever a man happened to be. But supper (deipon) was the main meal of the day. This was the meal at which a man sat and talked. There was time now, work was over. The Risen Lord wants to have Unhurried, Unlimited, Unspeakable fellowship with us. Tell me, have you supped with Christ today ?

(d) HIS PROMISE:

" *To him that overcometh (that is to the one who overcomes lukewarmness) will I grant His throne.*" (3:21) The Lord Jesus is looking forward here to the time of His Second Coming. When He returns, He will usher in His kingdom on earth, and at that time, our Lord will surround Himself with those who have been faithful to Him in this lifetime. All who have served Christ in this lifetime will be assigned places of special responsibility and will sit on the thrones to share in His millennial rule. One day the saints will rule and reign with Christ on the earth. (Matt 19:28 1 Cor 6:3 Rev 20:4) My with such a glorious future before us, how could we possibly be lukewarm toward Him ?

If He suffered, bled, and died on Calvary's Cross for us, how can we be indifferent toward Him ? The message is clear. Lukewarmness toward Christ is a gross sin against our Lord. Could it be that the greatest need of the church is to get fired up for Christ ? Is this your greatest need ?

For did you notice that the challenge from the Risen Lord is a *Personal* one. " *If any man.*"

(3:20) " *To him that overcometh.*" (3:21) In this Laodicean age the Risen Lord is taking up individual believers, for God can do great things through one man or woman totally given over to Him. So in each of these seven letters the Lord of the Lampstands lays emphasis on a different mark which should characterise a true and living church.

Do you recall Ephesus ? Love ! Smyrna, Suffering.

Pergamos, Truth. Thyatira, Holiness. Sardis, Reality. Philadelphia,

Opportunity. Laodicea, Wholeheartedness. My is this not where we are

today ? Does this not describe the church of the 21st century ? Lukewarm !

Does this not describe vividly the respectable, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today.

Our Christianity is flabby and anaemic. We appear to have taken a

lukewarm bath of religion. Earnestness, zeal, fervour, fire, passion These

are the qualities we lack today and greatly need.

A church building once caught on fire. The entire neighbourhood ran down the street to see then church aflame. The fire was so intense that there was no hope of saving the buildings. Present among the bystanders was the town atheist. He was known for his unbelief and his cynical attacks on the church. As he stood there watching the church building burn, one of the members saw him and sarcastically said, '*What are you doing here ? I never thought I'd see you at church.*' The atheist replied, '*You'll have to excuse me. But I've never seen a church on fire before.*' Is this not what the world needs to see ? Is this not what the Lord longs to see ? A church on fire. Not lukewarm or indifferent. But full of believers with a red hot love for Christ. " Any man any woman on fire for God."