

**Revelation**  
**Laodicea: A False Gospel**  
**Revelation 3:14-22**  
**October 10, 2021**  
*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher*  
*Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas*

Well tonight, we come to the last of the seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor. It's the letter to the church in Laodicea and, without question, it is the most misinterpreted and misunderstood of the seven letters. When I was growing up, this letter was regularly used to challenge believing Christians to be fully committed to Christ. "Don't be cold. Don't be lukewarm. Be hot." That's true, of course. We ought to be zealous in our faith, but that's not what Christ is saying to this church at all. In fact, it misses the whole point of the letter. So, it's important that we study it together.

As we have worked our way through the letters to the seven churches I have, in each case, tried to identify sort of the core theme, the distinguishing mark of that particular church, and this is where we landed. We studied the church in Ephesus: the church of loveless fidelity. The church in Smyrna: the church of faithful suffering. Pergamum: undiscerning tolerance. Thyatira: extra-Biblical authority. Sardis: dead Christianity. And the last time we looked together at these letters, we studied Philadelphia: a church of enduring faithfulness.

Tonight, we come to the last, to the most famous, the most infamous, the church in Laodicea. Let's read it together. Revelation 3 and I'll begin reading in verse 14.

"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have no need of anything," and you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, 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 the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to apply to your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore, be zealous and repent. 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. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit with Me on My throne, as I also

overcame and sat with My Father on His throne. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

If I were to encapsulate the theme of this letter that Christ dictates to the Apostle John to be read and shared with the church in Laodicea, it would be this: Christ warns His church that they have abandoned the Biblical gospel and have embraced in its place a gospel based on human merit and good works. So, I have entitled the church in Laodicea with the moniker, “a false gospel.”

Now, with the other six letters we've used the outline that Christ does and so, we'll do the same here. And so, let's begin with the introduction to the letter - the command to write in verse 14. Notice how verse 14 reads, “to the angel of the church, in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God says,” this. Now, you'll notice, as with the other six letters, this letter is addressed to the angel of the church - referring to the key leader or leaders, the elders of the church.

So, let's begin, then, with the character of the city. Notice, He says to the angel of the church in the city of Laodicea. Now, here is its location. The city was about forty-five miles southeast of Philadelphia on the same postal road and it was about a hundred miles east of Ephesus. You can see on the map that it's directly east of Ephesus on the main trade route that the Romans built into eastern Asia Minor. It was one of two. It was at the crossroad of two major trade routes which made it essential for trade and for communications. And here is, by the way, the buried gate to Ephesus this exited, the city of Laodicea and these gates, you would have walked out to head west to the great city of Ephesus.

The city itself was built on a raised plateau - about a half mile square at about three hundred feet above the plane of the Lycus Valley. It was the most important. The city was the most important city of three. Here's another view, by the way, of just some of the ruins. They have, in recent years, done a lot more excavation. There are a lot of pictures I could show you, but they really don't factor into what we're going to study together but here's one picture that gives you a main street even with the modern convenience of a gutter, a sidewalk. We learn so much and our civilization really reflects theirs in remarkable ways. But the city of Laodicea was part of a triad of cities. Hierapolis was six miles north. Colossae was ten miles east. And so, this was the Tri-City area of Asia Minor.

Now, the city of Laodicea had two very significant problems. The first problem was earthquakes. It was in a region prone to earthquakes. In fact, in 68 AD an earthquake virtually destroyed the city of Laodicea this for about thirty-five years before John writes this letter. But because of its wealth, Laodicea

received no financial aid from Rome for the rebuilding and, in fact, their wealthy citizens put their funds together and rebuilt it even more spectacular than it had been before. The Roman historian Tacitus writes, "the city, without any relief, from us recovered itself by its own resources." The other major problem the city had was it had no water supply. Built on the plateau, there was no water anywhere to be found. Instead, they piped their water in via a mostly underground aqueduct from Denizli. It was about six miles south and it dropped about three hundred and fifty feet from that city to the city of Laodicea. The problem was the quality of the water that got there because it was not a wonderful temperature - we'll talk about that in a moment - but it also had a lot of mineral deposits. Here is a portion of the aqueduct that has been resurrected. You can see these are stones with a channel, a tunnel, cut through the middle of them. Here you can see a little more of a close-up. You can see how they were connected, and the water ran through that center hole. Now, once it got into the city, it was spread through a series of pipes. Here's a clay pipe, but you can see how much sediment came with the water that came into the city. That is calcium deposits. And you can see how much those pipes could close up because of the calcium deposits that came with the water. There is another. You just get the feel of how bad the water was, both in temperature – we'll talk about that in a moment - but also in terms of the quality of water.

Now, because the city was fed by an aqueduct from six miles away, it meant the city itself was vulnerable to siege since a hostile army could locate. Even though much of it was underground, they can easily locate the water supply. They could cut it off and the siege would be quickly ended. And so, the city sort of got used to negotiating. They became they became better at diplomacy than at war because they really couldn't endure siege very long.

The city was founded by the Seleucid King Antiochus II. We know he founded the city before the year 253 BC because that's the year he divorced his wife, Laodice, after whom he named the city. So, the city was founded before that. Because of a Roman treaty in 188 BC the city changed from Seleucid control. It came under the control of a nearby city Pergamum, which we've already studied the letter to the church there. But then in 133 BC, Pergamum, along with Laodicea, came under direct Roman rule and that began, for this city, a history of loyalty to Rome. Laodicea eventually became the administrative and judicial center for the entire region.

Now, it was a very prosperous city, and it was driven by three chief industries because it was at the crossroads of two major trade routes. It became a very wealthy city and that wealth led to a significant

banking industry in the city of Laodicea. In fact, Cicero, the first century Roman philosopher, famously writes that he cashed his letters of credit in the banks in Laodicea. It was a very, very wealthy city.

The city was also known for the unique wool that was produced by its sheep – soft, raven-black wool. Some of the locals speculated the reason for the black wool was the water the sheep drank, not likely, but that was the speculation. The wool was used to produce several kinds of garments and even carpets that were widely distributed and it made Laodicea famous. In fact, it became known as Laodicean wool or Laodicean garments because of the fame of this industry.

Its third major industry was the famous school of medicine connected with a nearby pagan temple. The Temple of Men Kaoru which simply means, “the god of the valley.” And this god was considered to be the god of healing. This medical school followed the writings of a man named Herophilus who taught that diseases were complex, and they required compound medicines. Because the diseases themselves weren't simple, you put different kinds of medicines together to make the medicine that would help the disease. The school was particularly famous for a medicine for curing, eye diseases and improving sight called the Phrygian powder. It was made of copper, zinc, and several herbs mixed together and then put - interestingly enough - into a long loaf of bread. And that loaf of bread was then affixed as a bandage to the eyes to hold the medicine in place.

All three of those industries are important because they factored into Christ's letter to this church.

Now, the religion of this city was, like most of the cities around, syncretistic. They worshipped a combination of local and Roman gods. The primary worship of this city was of Men - pronounced “mean” - and Zeus. There were also a lot of Jewish people in the area. Some estimated as many as seventy-five hundred Jews who were living in Laodicea. And so, of course, Judaism was a big part of the worship there as well.

Now, going back to our text, that's a little background of the city itself, but let's consider the history of the church there. Verse 14 says, “to the angel of the church in Laodicea.” The New Testament tells us nothing about the founding of this church, but like the other six churches, it was likely founded during Paul's stay in Ephesus in the early 50s AD. That's recorded in Acts 19:10 where, from Ephesus, he reached out to all the surrounding areas. Likely, though, this church was not planted by the Apostle Paul, but by his traveling companion, Epaphras. He founded the church in Colossae, according to Colossians 1:7. Epaphras also evangelized both Laodicea and Hierapolis, the Twin Cities. Remember the three cities together. And so, we know that Epaphras founded the church in Colossae, and we know, according to

Colossians 4:13, that he also evangelized the other two cities. And so, it's very likely that this church was planted by Paul's traveling companion Epaphras. When Paul wrote his letter to the nearby city of Colossae, Colossians, he had still not visited this church in Laodicea himself, according to Colossians 2:1. Later, it appears that he did. So that's the history of the church.

Let's move on, then, and as we continue to look at the introduction to this letter, at the description, Christ gives of Himself. Verse 14 says, "to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God." Christ introduces Himself to this church with three descriptions.

First of all, He is the fulfillment of all of God's promises. Notice verse 14, He says, I am, "The Amen." Now, that is likely taken from Isaiah 65:16. This is what we read in Isaiah 65:16, "because he who is blessed in the earth will be blessed" - listen to this - "by the God of truth; And he who swears in the earth will swear by the God of truth." In Hebrew, the God of truth is the God of, "the amen." "Amen," is actually a Hebrew word. If you didn't know you knew any Hebrew, you do, see. Hallelujah, there's one Hebrew word - "Praise Yah" or "Praise Yahweh." and Amen. It means, the Hebrew word, "amen" means to confirm, or to verify. So, what is Jesus saying about Himself? He is saying that "I personally confirm or verify all of God's promises." Reminds me of what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:20. He says, "as many as are the promises of God, in Christ, they are yes; therefore, also through Him is our amen to the glory of God through us." Christ is the fulfillment of all God's promises. He is, "The Amen." - the One who confirms, verifies, ensures those promises to us.

Secondly, He introduces Himself to this church as the source of all God's truth. Again, in verse 14, He says, "the faithful and true Witness." This title really further defines the first term, "The Amen," and here Jesus says, "I am a Witness." I'm a witness of who God is, and what God has said, and I am a faithful and true Witness. I'm a genuine Witness, I'm authentic. And I am faithful to tell you exactly what is true and what God has said. Jesus is the truth, John 14:6, and He always speaks the truth. He is the source of all God's truth.

Thirdly, He describes Himself as the Origin of all God's creation. Verse 14, He says, "the beginning of the creation of God." Now, our translation can be a little bit misleading. It can imply, in some way, that Jesus was the first person that God created, and some have tried to use this text in that way. In Greek, however, it's very clear. The Greek word that's translated, "beginning," here means ruler, "arche." It's ruler. It's one who is preeminent over. Or it can also mean - as I think it does here and most

commentators would agree - source or origin. He is the Source or Origin of creation. He's the One who created all things. And, of course, this fits well, doesn't it, with John 1:3? He's the One who created everything and without Him nothing exists. And the same thing with Hebrews chapter 1.

Now, this concept of Jesus as the Source, the Origin of all of God's creation, would have been well known to the Laodiceans because they would have read the letter that Paul wrote to their sister Church in Colossae. Turn to Colossians 1:15. Speaking of Christ, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn" – meaning, the one with the highest rank over all creation. Go down to verse 18. "He is also the head of the body, the church." And, notice this, "and He is the beginning." That word, "beginning," is our word arche. Here, it probably means the source, or the preeminent one in the church. And, of course, in this very same letter, Christ describes Himself, as the source or origin of all of God's creation. Look back at verse 15 again. "He is the firstborn of all creation" - the preeminent one over all creation. Verse 16, why? "For because" - here's why – "by Him all things were created, both from the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him." Paul leaves no doubt to the Colossian Christians that the pre-Gnostic idea that was circulating through the church that Christ was some sort of created being not equal to the Father is absolutely not true. He is not a created being. "All things were created by Him and without Him" - John 1 - "nothing was created that has been created." In other words. He created all things but He, Himself, is self-existent. He was not created.

Now, the fact that Christ introduces Himself in this way begins to give us a tip off to what may very well, have been happening in the church in Laodicea. Remember, it's very close to the church in Colossae and what was the church in Colossae hearing from the false teachers? This sort of pre-Gnostic idea that was, you didn't need to be saved from your sins. You just needed to arrive at a higher level of knowledge and Christ, well, He's important but He's not God. He is the first of God's created order and so Paul addresses that in Colossians. And the fact that Christ introduces Himself this way to the church in the Laodicea begins to make us think that the same problem exists in this church.

Now, that brings us to the body of the letter - the state of the church. We've seen the introduction in verse 14. The body of the letter - the state of the church in verses 15-20 - here is the heart of Jesus' letter. Verse 15, "I know your deeds." The body of each of the seven letters begins with those same words but, unlike most of the churches, our Lord has nothing good to say about this church. Instead, He begins with a correction of the sin in verses 15-18 and this is really the heart of what He has to say. Let's sort of break this apart and work our way through it.

First of all, we see here in this correction of the sin, Christ's illustration of their spiritual condition. Verse 15, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot." Our Lord here describes their spiritual condition by comparing it to the city's water supply. Remember, six miles north was the city of Hierapolis, one of the Tri-Cities, was famous for its hot springs that were regularly visited for the sake of seeking healing just as hot springs today are believed to have some therapeutic power and people go where these hot springs. The same thing was true in the ancient world in Hierapolis, a nearby city. Ten miles east of Laodicea was the city of Colossae. Colossae was famous for its cold drinking water - the only source of really cold water in the entire region. But Laodicea, you remember, piped its water in from six miles away and the water arrived not fully cooled from the hot springs in that place but rather lukewarm and filled with those mineral deposits that I showed you a few minutes ago in the slides. The combination of the lukewarm, sort of tepid water, combined with the minerals cause both Herodotus and Xenophon historians to mention the water in Laodicea and call it, basically, undrinkable.

So, Jesus is using their water situation to illustrate their spiritual condition. But here's the question: what does He mean? What does it mean to be spiritually hot, spiritually cold, or spiritually lukewarm? Well, there are two primary views.

The first view is that these temperatures describe different levels of spiritual zeal. Under this view, cold refers to unbelievers - those who are completely spiritually uninterested. Hot refers to believers who are spiritually zealous for the Lord. And lukewarm also refers to true believers but those who are not so spiritually zealous, and the Lord wants them to be. Now, the problem, there are two major problems with this view. This is the most common. This is what I grew up being taught but there are two major problems with this view. First of all, it's very unlikely that Christ would say that He wishes lukewarm believers were unbelievers. That's pretty unlikely. Also, this view was unknown in the early church. We may speak, because of this letter, of people's spiritual temperature - their being hot or cold - but that's not referenced in any of the early church writings. There's no reference to this concept, this idea. The second possibility of these temperatures - second view - is that these temperatures describe the spiritual benefit of true believers versus false believers. Again, you remember, the hot water from the hot springs in Hierapolis produced physical healing, and the cold water in Colossae was refreshing. Don't miss the if a well water and hot water were beneficial. In this context, hot refers to believers providing spiritual health to others and cold refers to believers providing spiritual refreshment for others. In other words, true believers bring benefit into the lives of the people they interact with. But Laodicea was full

of false believers who were lukewarm. They were spiritually useless. They produced no spiritual benefit whatsoever. Now, when you consider the rest of the description of this church, as we'll see in a moment, this second view is far more likely because, as we will see, the church in Laodicea, by our Lord's own words, was filled with unbelievers. But who were these unbelievers that are lukewarm?

Well, there are two possibilities and, I'll just be honest with you here, there are many who say that the unbelievers in this church, that we're going to see in a moment, were unbelievers with a false profession in the true Christ and the Biblical gospel. In other words, they're those who were embracing the true Biblical Christ - who said they were embracing the true Biblical gospel. And it was the Biblical gospel, but they were making a false profession. They weren't true believers in that true Christ and true gospel. The other view is that these are unbelievers who had embraced a false Christ and believed a false works-based gospel. Now, I really believe the second is true and let me tell you why. First of all, because it's highly unlikely that everybody in the Church of Laodicea, if in fact that church preached the true gospel, that everybody in the church had made a false profession. That's pretty unlikely. Also, when you look at how the rest of the letter identifies these people and what Christ offers them, it seems clear that we're talking about false believers - those are the lukewarm ones - unbelievers who worship a false Christ and have come to believe in a false works-based gospel.

So, let's go back to walk our way through. We've seen Christ's illustration of their spiritual condition. Secondly, Christ's judgment because of their spiritual condition. Verse 16, "so because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." Now, that is a very polite translation. We actually get our English word, "emetic," from the Greek word for spit here. In other words, the medication that's used to induce vomiting. Literally, this word that's translated, "spit," means to vomit or to throw up. There are two ideas, I think, that that Jesus is making here. One, is that the spiritual condition of this church sickens Him and, I think the way it's expressed it implies impending judgment. Literally, the Greek says, "I am about to vomit you out. I'm about to throw you up." It implies, "I'm about done with you as a church." Now, remember this was, at one point, a true church that embraced a true gospel and to the ministry of Epaphras back in the early 50s and this is in the mid-90s. But over time, this church had apparently drifted from that true gospel and Christ says, "listen, if there aren't changes then I'm going to throw you up. You're no longer going to be a part of My body. You're going to be excluded from the true church all together." Christ would soon reject this church as a true church. He was about to vomit them out of His mouth. That's the judgment that He implies here.

Thirdly, notice Christ's diagnosis of their spiritual condition. Verse 17, "because" - here's the reason that He makes that they make Him sick - "because you say" - literally, you are continually saying. This was their consistent claim - "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing." Now, of course, as I already noted to you, physically, literally the city was a city of great wealth. Its banking industry made that obvious. But this isn't a claim about their material wealth. This is a claim about their spiritual condition. "I am rich, and have become wealthy." It's a very interesting expression and I'm not going to take you through all the ins and outs of it. But here's how the linguists sort of paraphrase it: I have gotten rich on my own. That's really what it says. "I have gotten rich on my own. I am a self-made man and I have need of nothing." Obviously speaks of their spiritual complacency. Just as Laodicea of the city had not needed help from Rome to rebuild their city after the earthquake in 68 AD, the people in this church were convinced that they didn't need any help from God. "We have gotten rich, spiritually rich, on our own." That was their flawed view of themselves.

But Christ goes on to describe their true spiritual condition as He Himself sees it with His piercing omniscience with five adjectives. The first two are general. Notice verse 17, "and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable." The only other time in the New Testament this word, "wretched" appears is in Romans 7:24 when Paul says, "wretched man that I am!" "Miserable," comes from the Greek word for pity. It means to be in a pitiable condition, deserving of sympathy because of your pathetic circumstance. That's the overview, as Christ sees it, but the next three adjectives are specific, and they explain why - these adjectives explain why - they are miserable and wretched. And Jesus' specific diagnosis of their spiritual problem is tied to their three leading Industries - the industries for which Laodicea was famous. And together these serve as metaphors for being unregenerate, unredeemed, unsaved.

Notice, first of all, they were spiritually bankrupt. "You are poor." By the way, the word used for, "poor," there is a word that describes those who are reduced to begging. He really says, "you have nothing. You think you have. You are self-made. You don't need anything. You have gotten rich on your own." But Christ says, "I am telling you; you are beggars. Spiritually, you have nothing." And then He says, you are spiritually, "blind." You are blind. Again, keying off that that medicine for which they were famous - the eye salve. And then He says, you are spiritually naked- playing off of their garment industry made from that famous black wool. So, Jesus says, "listen, you really think you've arrived. You think spiritually that you are self-made. And I'm telling you, you are spiritually bankrupt, you are spiritually blind, and you are spiritually naked." Clearly, this description by our Lord means that all of those who belong to the church

in Laodicea were what? They were unredeemed. Why? Because they'd embraced a false gospel. Look at verse 17. It's so clear. Look at what Jesus says. They were consistently saying, "I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing." Clearly, they had embraced a works-based gospel in which they depended on their own merit, their own effort. It's also possible that, like the neighboring church in Colossae, they also had bought into a flawed view of Jesus Christ that He was a created being in this sort of pre-Gnostic idea. And, certainly, they had embraced the false gospel that came along with that. The reason the church in Laodicea was lukewarm and brought no spiritual benefit to those who belong to it or to their community is because they embraced and taught a false Christ and a flawed gospel.

That brings us, then, to Christ's prescription for their spiritual healing in verse 18. "I advise you to buy from Me." Literally, Jesus says, "I counsel you." It's really an interesting expression. You know, Jesus, in these letters, is often commanding but here He says very gently, "let Me give you some advice." He says, "you need to buy something from Me." Obviously, when Christ says, "to buy," He was playing off of their banking industry. He didn't mean that we can buy, or earn, or merit salvation. He just told them, remember, that they were spiritually bankrupt. They were beggars. They had no resources to buy these things. No, this is irony. The Lord told these people who lived in a city known for its physical wealth to buy from Him spiritual things that they could never afford.

What does He mean, "buy from Me?" I think Christ clearly has in mind the same idea as Isaiah 55:1 where we read. "Hoy! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine, and milk without money and without cost." And then the context the Being offered. And what Isaiah's saying is, "listen, you can buy salvation but without money without cost, come get it." So, he's saying it's an invitation to receive it freely. It's like Romans 3:24. We are justified. We are declared right with God. How? "As a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Or as you heard quoted several times this morning in the baptisms, Ephesians 2:8-9, "by grace you have been saved through faith and that" - meaning, either faith or all of salvation - "is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works so that no one may boast." It's God's gift. Buy the gift. How do you buy it? Without money. Nothing you can do. You come to Christ, "buy." The key expression there isn't, "buy." The key expression there is what? "From Me." Only Christ gives salvation through His Spirit and His word. We have to seek it directly from Him. That's what He's saying.

Now, just as poor, blind and naked, all describe being lost and unregenerate, the three resources that Christ encourages us to buy from Him are, on the other hand, metaphors for salvation. And again, these three spiritual resources point back to those industries that made Laodicea famous.

First, He says, “seek from me,” or, “buy from Me gold” verse 18, “gold refined by fire so that you may become rich.” Gold that has been purified, that's the real thing, that's really pure. There's a lot of discussion about what this gold represents spiritually. The big picture is clear. He's talking about salvation in the broadest sense. But specifically, I think this refined gold represents true saving faith. 1 Peter 1:7, “the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold, which is perishable even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, and glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Faith - true saving faith - is like gold, isn't it? If you've come to have true saving faith, you understand that. There's nothing more precious to you in life than the fact that God has given you faith to believe in Jesus Christ. It's like pure gold. Jesus says, “if you want real saving faith, there's only one place you can get it.” He says, “buy it from Me.” If you're here tonight and you don't know Jesus Christ, let me tell you, you're not going to get there on your own. There's only one place to get what you need and that's for you to humble yourself, and throw yourself at Christ's feet, and cry out for His mercy. “Give me what I don't have.” What? “I have no money to buy. I'm a beggar. I am spiritually bankrupt.” Remember, that's where the Beatitudes begin, right? That's where the spiritual journey of a believer begins. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Literally, “blessed are the beggars in spirit for to them belongs the Kingdom of Heaven.” The only way you get into Jesus' kingdom is you start by recognizing your own spiritual poverty. “God, I have nothing You want. I have nothing I can give You to buy my way into Your favor. There's nothing I can do. There's nothing I have done. There's nothing I am. I am a beggar. And here I am begging, ‘God be merciful to me the sinner like the publican in Jesus' story.’” He says, “buy gold from Me” - true saving faith.

Secondly, He says, “buy white garments.” Verse 18, “buy from Me... white garments so that you may clothe yourself and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed.” Remember, the city was famous for its black wool and it's expensive garments, and they had plenty of them, but they were spiritually naked. In the Old Testament, nakedness symbolized God's judgment. If you were stripped of your clothing, it was like the bottom of the barrel. It was as far down as you could go. You can read about it in passages like Isaiah 21:2-4, Ezekiel 16:36, Ezekiel 23:10. You're naked, He says, and “shame,” meant to be completely disgraced, deserving of divine punishment. It says, “you need to buy white garments from Me so that you can cover the shame of your nakedness.”

Now, throughout the book of Revelation, being clothed in white garments describes those who are clothed in righteousness. Look at Revelation 7:9. “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes, and peoples, and tongues,

standing before the throne and before the Lamb” - watch this – “clothed in white robes,” and they cry out, “salvation to our God...and to the Lamb.” Go down to verse 13.

Then one of the elders answered saying to me, “these who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?” I said, “my lord, you know.”

I don't know.

He said to me, “these are the ones who come out of the great tribulation.”

So, these are tribulation saints - those saved out of the tribulation period. Notice this.

And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Jesus says, “buy those clothes from Me. Give up your fine black wool garments and recognize you need white clothes.” What are they? What do these white garments represent? In context, remember, we're talking about people who are lost obtaining God's salvation. And so, what are these white garments? They're the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. They're the fact that we are not clothed any longer in our filthy garments of sin but, because of justification, because we've been declared right with God, we now wear His righteousness. He says, “buy from Me white garments. You need to cover the shame of your spiritual nakedness by receiving the gift of My righteousness.”

Thirdly, He says, “you need eye salve.” Verse 18, “buy from Me eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.” Again, Jesus refers here to one of their leading industries in the eye salve for which their nearby medical school was famous. But what does this eye salve represent? Well, clearly, again, He's talking about salvation in its largest sense. And so, here we're talking about the spiritual illumination by the Spirit to understand your need of the gospel, and to understand the gospel itself. They had embraced a flawed gospel and a false Christ. And He says, “you need to buy from Me the eye salve that will allow you to truly see things as they are.” It's hard to read this without thinking of John 9. You remember Jesus' interchange there with the man who was born blind. And in verse 39 of John 9, Jesus said - this was His sort of summary of that encounter - He says, “for judgment I came into this world so that those who do not see” - that is, those who are spiritually blind – “may see.” So, if you recognize that you are spiritually blind and you come to Christ and say, “give me sight. Give me spiritual understanding. Help me to know how to know God, how to know You, how to live in a way that honors and pleases You,” He says, “I came to give sight to people like that.” But then He says, “and that those who see” - that is, those who think they already see spiritually on their own – “may become blind.” Their blindness

just grows worse. The more you think that you can get there on your own, by your own understanding, that you can create your own sort of system, your own sort of approach to God your own sort of self-prescribed religion, the blinder you're going to get. The only way you will ever see is to come to Christ, admit your spiritual blindness, seeking spiritual eyesight from Him.

That brings us, then - that's the correction of the sin - that brings us to a call for repentance in verses 19 and 20. Verse 19 says, "those whom I love, I reprove and discipline." Now, some read that verse and conclude that these people must be true believers and it's true, this expression taken from Proverbs 3:12 is used, in some places such as Hebrews 12 of God's discipline of His own children. However, these two words "reprove", and "discipline" are also words that are used of unbelievers. For example, God reproves unbelievers in John 16:8. Jesus says, "the Spirit, when He comes, will convict the world." The word, "convict," is the word here translated, "reprove." He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. This word, "discipline," is also used of unbelievers. For example, in 2 Timothy 2:25, we are with gentleness to, "correct." That's this word discipline. We are to correct those who are in opposition and, perhaps, God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. And He says, "those whom I love." Again, some say, "well, it must be believers." But remember, our Lord loves unbelievers. He loves unbelievers. Not in the same way that He loves believers - He has a special love for His own, for the elect - but He loves unbelievers. Mark 10:21, you remember Jesus in His interaction with the rich young ruler who never came to faith, who just like these people in Laodicea were unwilling to let go of their wealth, to really humble themselves. Unwilling to admit his need of grace and to believe Jesus looking at him felt a love for him. And of course, John 3:16, "for God so loved the world." I think that means God loves humanity and I'm in good company. John Calvin himself - no slouch when it comes to the sovereignty of God in salvation – interpreted it the same way.

So, in context then, verse 19 is speaking of unbelievers and Jesus is saying, "out of my love for you, even unbelievers. I am reproving you. I am instructing you in this letter." Verse 19, "therefore, be zealous and repent." There must be a zeal or eagerness to get right with God. You remember how the Old Testament puts it again and again and I encourage people to sway. You know, some people are, they're wimps. They give up so easily spiritually, you know. It's like, well, I've been praying so well. How long what? About 30 minutes. What does the Old Testament say? God says, "seek Me, search for Me with all your heart." And when you search for Me with all your heart, then what? "You will find Me". That's the idea here. Be zealous and that zeal has to be accompanied by Biblical repentance.

What is Biblical repentance? It is Godly sorrow for your sin and a resolve to turn from it to God.

The New Testament call to Salvation always includes a call to repent. Faith and repentance come together. Acts 20:21, Paul says, "I solemnly testify" - here was his ministry – "of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." So, Christ said, "listen, you're lost. You've embraced a false Christ, a false gospel. Buy from Me the goal of true saving faith. Buy from Me the white garments of imputed righteousness rather than your own filthy garments of self-righteousness. Buy from Me what you need. Buy the eye salve to really understand your sand and do understand the gospel. Repent. Zealously pursue Me and repent."

And Christ followed the command of repent with a gentle invitation in verse 20. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Now, this has often been misunderstood as Christ standing at the door of a person's heart and knocking. And that's a nice idea. And, you know, of course there's a famous painting that sort of put that out there. But in the context, the door here is not the door to your heart. In context, it's the door to the church in Laodicea. This church was so completely filled with unbelievers that Christ was on the outside continually knocking, continually trying to enter the church that was called by His name. It's a tragic picture. "Behold, I stand at the door, and I knock." "I'm outside the church because you've embraced a false Christ and false gospel."

That tragic picture is followed by a personal invitation. Verse 20, "if anyone" - now, we are talking individuals there in that church in Laodicea – "hears My voice and opens the door" -If just one person in the church in Laodicea would hear Christ's invitation in this letter and repent, He says – "I will come into him and will dine with him and he with Me." The word for "dine" refers to the evening meal, the main meal in the first century. It was a wonderful time of relaxation and fellowship. It wasn't like that, you know, that 30-minute stop at the fast-food restaurant. It was a time to sit down and enjoy God's goodness. And enjoy one another. It's like the meals when I grew up. You know, my family, there were ten of us and my parents and they went on at times. Dinner was a special event. It could go on for two and a half three hours and it's not that we ate a bite every moment, you just sat and talked and let food digest and ate a little more and it was an event. That's like this event. That's what Christ offers. "I will come in to him and will dine with him." Christ will enter His church and will enter into fellowship with the one who is truly repentant. This meal Christ refers to here pictures forgiveness and reconciliation now, but it also pictures the promise of a future meal, literally a meal with Christ. Whether it's the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19, which we'll study together when we get there, or whether it's meals during the Millennium referred to in Luke 13:29, Luke 22:29-30. It's a promise of all of

that. Fellowship with Him now. Reconciliation with Him now. And someday actually being with Him and, like the disciples, having a meal together.

Listen, if you're not a follower of Jesus, Christ invites you, He advises you, He counsels you to go to Him and seek these things from Him. That's what the Bible calls faith - when you believe enough in who Christ is and what He can do that you go to Him, and you seek these things from Him. He says, "come." And you do so zealously. Seek Him with all your heart. Repent. Turn from your sins seeking forgiveness in the change of your heart from Him. He says, "I will respond. I will sit down and have a meal with him with her." That's repentance.

That brings us to the final part of this letter, the conclusion of the letter, verses 21 and 22: an exhortation to each believer.

First of all, there is a call to overcome. If you're a true believer and you just keep on believing, you're an overcomer. Every believer is an overcomer, and every believer will inherit all the promises made in all seven letters. To those who overcome in Laodicea the promise to true believers, to those who overcome. Notice verse 21, "he who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne." He will sit with Christ on His throne. That's Christ's promise to us. Think about that for a moment. This is a promise of being continually with Christ. It's a promise of being honored by Christ. It's a promise of ruling with Christ - ruling with Him during the thousand-year millennial reign. Chapter 20:4: "I saw thrones and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them." It goes on to say, "they came to life, and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years." And the same thing will continue in the New Heaven and the New Earth. Chapter 22:5, "there will no longer be any night and they will have no need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun because the Lord God will illumine them, and they" - the Saints - "will reign forever and ever." Jesus says, "they'll sit with Me on My throne." He goes on in verse 21 to say, "as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." Of course, the references to Psalm 110:1. "The LORD says to my Lord: 'sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" The point, folks, is that we share in Jesus Christ's victory. We are with Him. We are honored by Him. And we rule with Him forever.

The letter ends, as they all have, with a call to listen in verse 22. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This is a challenge to everyone who hears or reads these letters to pay close attention to what the Spirit is continually saying to all the churches through His work. It's a call to every Christian to hear every letter.

So, what are the lasting lessons from Laodicea? What do we learn from this letter? Let me just give them to you very quickly.

Number one: a church that embraces the true gospel can turn to a false gospel within a single generation. The church in Laodicea was planted in the early 50s AD. John writes Revelation in the mid-90s, forty-five years later, and there's not a single believer in the church. That should give us pause.

Secondly, everyone who professes an unbiblical Christ, and an unbiblical gospel must repent and believe the true Christ and the true gospel. This is this is Christ's invitation. In Matthew 7:13 and following Jesus said, "avoid the wide gate that leads to destruction." How do you choose the wrong gate to heaven? Well, the next verses explain how. It's because of false prophets who were standing at the wide gate going, "this is the way. Come this way to heaven." You need to turn to the biblical Christ and the biblical gospel.

Thirdly, everyone who professes the true Christ and the true gospel, but whose life is not marked by obedience to Christ must truly repent and believe. This is the next part of Matthew 7 where He says, "many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord. Wait a minute. We know you.'" And Jesus says to them, "depart from Me. I never knew." And, you know, a lot of a lot of people live in fear. Is that me? Is that me? Listen, you don't have to wonder, Jesus explains who they are. The very next phrase He says, "you who work lawlessness." And then He goes on to tell the story, remember, of the one who built his house on the sand, the one who built his house on the rock. What's the rock? It's not Christ in that parable. It's obedience to Christ's commands. That's how you tell if you're the real thing or not. You're not saved by obedience, but you can tell whether or not you're really the real thing based on your obedience to Christ's commands. If you're not living in obedience to Christ, don't kid yourself. Don't kid yourself. Repent and believe.

Number four: those in churches that embrace a false Christ, and a false gospel are not true Christians. Oh, there might be a few here and there. People ask me, "what about the Roman Catholic Church?" You know, you think there are believers in the Roman Catholic Church? My response to that is yes. There might be true believers in the Roman Catholic Church, if they either don't understand what Roman Catholic Church teaches, or they don't believe it. But they're not true believers if they have understood and embraced the false gospel that Roman Catholicism teaches. Be careful. Same thing with the prosperity gospel.

Number five: we must evangelize churches like the church in Laodicea that are connected to the Christian church but teach a false gospel.

Number six: as a church, we must guard the truth of the gospel. How do you do that? How can we, as a church, make sure we're not like the church in Laodicea? Well, we need to maintain a definitive doctrinal statement. We need to continue to evaluate all potential teachers and elders against that doctrinal statement. We need to continue to ask our existing elders and teachers to reaffirm their agreement to that doctrinal statement. We need to ask them to affirm without hesitation or equivocation that they agree with that doctrinal statement. We need to ensure the doctrinal statement continues to be changeable only by the entire church so a handful of people can't change what this church believes about the gospel. We need to maintain a careful membership process that requires potential members to read and affirm the doctrinal statement, to share their testimony of a viable faith in Jesus Christ. And we need to continue to actively identify false versions of the gospel in the larger culture. Folks, we have to be on guard.

And then, finally, number seven: Christ still extends an invitation to truly seek Him in faith and repentance. Listen, if you're here tonight, and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, did you see His heart? You see the invitation? He truly extends this invitation to you. He says, "come to Me, seek Me, and buy without money these things from Me. I'll give them to you if you'll humble yourself and you'll come." My plea to you, tonight, is to abandon your self-righteousness. Abandon your pride. Humble yourself. Come as a beggar to Jesus Christ saying, "I have nothing to offer you, but my sinful self. Save me. Redeem me. Forgive me. Change me. Make me Your own." And His response is, "I will come into them and dine with them."

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for our time together tonight. I pray that You would use it for our spiritual good. Lord, Help us to see the heart of our Lord, to have that heart for those who are embracing false gospels, false Christs, and Lord, help us as a church and as individuals to be so careful, to be ever vigilant. Lord, thank You for the fact that You have saved us, You've given us true saving faith, You've given us imputed righteousness, the righteousness of Christ Himself, and You've given us spiritual vision to see things as they are through Your Spirit and Your word. Lord, we are truly rich, and we thank You for Your grace in Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.