

NOTES FOR LAODICEA EPISODE

We've reached the 7th and last of the 7 church messages—and what a blockbuster it is. They thought they were doing great, but Lord Jesus said they are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked! And yet, after saying he will spit them out, we read the famous “ask me into your heart” verse, which invites these lukewarm Christians to a close intimate relationship with the exalted Christ. Reading this makes us examine where we are really at spiritually. The things we learned when we were there give even greater depth to this powerful passage.

Laodicea is a little more than 100 miles inland from Ephesus and the road has long been a trade route. It is about 12 miles from Colosse, to whom Paul's epistle to the Colossians was written. It was founded around 260 BC by one of the Seleucid kings, Antiochus II (Antiochus IV is the one called Antiochus Epiphanes and he is the one who defiled the temple in Jerusalem about 100 years later). Laodiceans were indeed rich and there were many Jews living there. Cicero, a famous Roman who died about 50 BC, wrote that 20 lbs of gold was confiscated, that was sent annually to Jerusalem. The Laodicean Jews were sending more than \$1 million per year in gold to Jerusalem! The city was on a major trade route and produced prized black wool. There was a medical school and a theatre that seated 8,000. During the reign of Nero the emperor, in 60 AD the city was destroyed by a big earthquake. They didn't accept financial assistance from Rome in rebuilding because they were rich enough to rebuild it themselves.

We have talked before about how the 7 churches were a circuit connected by good roads. Starting at Ephesus, the order of these messages is Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and, finally, Laodicea. My daughter, Madeline, and I, drove it backwards. We left our nice hotel on the water, outside of Ephesus, and drove inland until we got to a nice restaurant. Went to an interesting museum with fabulous statues from Greek and Roman times. Then to our hotel. It's a very touristy area for Turkish people and foreigners because of the hot springs. Pamukkale is a UNESCO World Heritage site on the ruins of the Roman city of Hierapolis which was a very desirable retirement place for Roman officers.

3:14 NIV Amen means “truth, certainty, verily”. You King James readers will recall the many (25 in John) times Jesus said verily or verily verily and went on to make an important statement. When used twice, it is a superlative. That’s the word Amen. Here, he calls himself “the Amen”, the faithful and true witness. Could there be a much stronger statement that the hearers should listen to these words? These are the word of “The Amen”. Other versions say the beginning of God’s creation, because the Greek word archè, which also means beginning, like in the beginning. We use the work in English as in archetype, or archbishop, or, in comic books as arch villain. It could mean first in time or first in rank. Jesus Christ ascended far above all principality and power and was given a name above every name. He is the ruler of God’s creation. He is certainly the beginning of God’s new creation which the book of Revelation describes. It is he who opens the 7 seals. Without his atoning death and resurrection, there would be no new creation for mankind.

3:15-16. In 5 of the 7 messages to the churches, He says, “I know your works”. We will soon talk about the great grace he offers them, but here he is talking about their works. Works are not the opposite of grace; they should be the evidence of grace. Laodicea had bad water. They’ve found an ingenious siphoning system whereby they piped it up from the river below, but that water tasted bad and had a lot of minerals that accumulated in the pipes. They also piped some water down from the mountains near Colosse, about 10 miles away. Neighboring Hierapolis had hot springs that were a big attraction for retiring Roman officers and people would come to soak in the healing waters. We went for a swim in the hot springs, but we couldn’t take any pictures because it is a Muslim country and people swim fully covered and modesty forbids taking pictures. Anyway, the Laodiceans knew they had yukky water and imagine how it stung when it was read to them that Jesus thinks they are yukky like their water. Neither cold, like the mountain waters of Colosse or hot like the healing baths of Heirapolis.

The archè of God’s creation.

beginning; of time, the commencement; of dignity, the first place; government, the highest dignitaries of the State – Bullinger

“In the beginning [archè] was the Word”

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler [archè] of the Jews”

3:15-16. Everyone in Laodicea would have understood this. Nearby Colosse had clean, cool, mountain water. Nearby Hierapolis had warm to hot water with healing properties. Laodicea’s water was piped in from a warm source, but by the time it got there, it was lukewarm. In other words, the city just had bad water. Lord Jesus is comparing them to their water!

What an insult to these proud, vain people! Then, there is the layer of meaning we understand. Hot water can be good. Spiritually fervent, or hot, can be good. Cold water can be good. Jesus likened the spirit to living water, that refreshes the soul. Lukewarm is no good. He just wants to spit it out.

3:16 It is remarkable that the Greek adjectives are in the masculine, agreeing with the angel, not feminine, agreeing with the Church. In Greek the “you” is also singular, as for the angel of the church, not plural, as for the people in the church. This brings up the interesting question of “who or what are these angels”. Why would God give Jesus this revelation and send an angel to John to write it and send it to these 7 angels? Everywhere else in Revelation, angels are heavenly angels. Clearly this has been written and the directive is to have it read to these churches. There are many symbols in these letters to the 7 churches. I don’t really know the answer. The Lord addresses the angel as the embodiment and representative of the Church. Notice there is nothing Lord Jesus says that he would not apply to the people in the Laodicean church.

3:17. If that wasn’t enough, he really lets them have it. I lead a comfortable life. I have prospered and, in some ways, “have need of nothing”. This passage really strikes me and makes me examine myself, as perhaps all of us should. In what do we trust? Our paycheck? Our investment account?

The government social safety net? Our own ingenuity and resourcefulness? At the end of the age, all the worldly systems will be in ruins. The kingdom of Messiah will come and replace them, and their worldly rewards will have meant nothing. Remember the believers in Smyrna in chapter 2? The Lord said, “I know your poverty, but you are rich”. They were poor and under dangerous persecution and their faith and trust were in God to sustain them.

3:18. GOLD [SLIDES] How do we buy this gold and these white garments? Job said, “when He has tried me, I shall come out as gold”. Even with all Job went through, he kept his faith in God’s character, and he kept himself from sinning. We are also reminded of I Peter 1:7

(slide I Pet 1:7), that how we come through our trials is defining our reward in the life to come. Are our trials met with unwavering faith? If our prayers are not answered immediately, does it shake our faith? The Smyrna believers were being tested by the devil and thrown in prison. Lord Jesus says, “be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life”.

WHITE [SLIDES] The Sardis believers who had not soiled their garments “will walk with me in white, for they are worthy”. The Laodicean believers were completely distracted by the world and their own prosperity. They are 200 miles from Pergamon and less from the other churches that are thriving under pressure and temptation, and they are living in the same culture. If we are lukewarm, the devil doesn’t need to bother us, because we are already sidelined.

SALVE [SLIDE] Are we seeing are we hearing. Notice again how specific it is to those people in that city at that time. Some of you watching may have been taught like I was that Revelation is not for the church and these messages to the 7 churches are for “tribulation saints” “left behind” after the rapture or gathering together. [Bullinger Slides]. FF has an entire episode addressing the question of this being written to the church. The short answer is obviously “YES”. John had been commanded to write the vision down and send it to these churches. Can we imagine him not obeying that? Can we imagine these churches not reading this like it was written to them? This message fits them to a tee. Laodicea is ruins now, but then it was rich, it had bad, lukewarm water, and it specialized in eye salve. This message is literally to them!

3:19 He completely dresses them down in his reproof. Then he tells them he loves them. That is why he is reproofing them like this. He is urging them to repent because he loves them.

He is knocking at their heart's door. The message to Philadelphia says he opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens, but he is not doing that here. In meekness he knocks. Even with these knucklehead Laodiceans, he offers to come into their heart and dine with them one on one. Imagine what a remarkable, life changing experience it would have been to have dinner with Jesus one on one! This really makes me examine myself! Do I experience that intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ? Oh, I can quote the right Bible verses that it is Christ in me and so forth. Maybe the Laodiceans could quote those verses too. Knowing what the Bible says is tremendously important—but that is only the start. The grace that has been given to us is a wonderful start. Our works say a lot about what we really believe and that's why he says, "I see your works". What are we doing with our Bible knowledge? What are we doing with the grace that has been given to us? What if you prayed right now for Christ Jesus to show you what this really mean and to come dine with you intimately in your heart?

Imagine a king inviting you to sit on his throne with him! Have you ever read that in any story about kings, except maybe a child sitting on his lap? And then he says it is just like the Father inviting him to sit on His throne! The love of Christ is exceeding abundant above all we could ask or think!

The simple message that comes through is

- You think you are doing great
- You are doing horrible—the worst of any of the churches
 - I reprove those I love and I am reprovng you
 - Repent and be zealous
 - Ask me into your heart for an intimate relationship
- I can give you the highest of honors—to sit on my throne