

WILL WE PUT HIM OUTSIDE?
Jesus' Concerns for His Church
Dr. George O. Wood

Our scripture today comes from the book of Revelation, 3:14-22. The title of this message "Will We Put Him Outside?"

"To the angel [or the messenger] of the church in Laodicea write, 'These are the words of the Amen. The faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other. Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 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. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so you can become rich. And white clothes to wear so that you can cover your shameful nakedness. And salve to put on your eyes so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will go in and eat with him and he with me. 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

With this letter to Laodicea we are at an end to the seven letters that are written to the churches of the Roman province of Asia, now western Turkey. Some have looked at these letters and tried to attach a prophetic significance to the letters so that the letters are pictured as some kind of prophetic sequence of unfolding history of the church. Those who take this view for example say Ephesus represents the apostolic age and love was dying out as the apostolic age closed. Smyrna represents the age of martyrs, 2nd and 3rd century. Pergamum represents the age of Constantine when the clergy was elevated over the laity and compromise became part of the church. Thyatira the age of the medieval church and the evils that were in the very wealthy but spiritually poor papacy. Sardis the post Reformation era and Philadelphia the missionary age, the age of the open door. Now Laodicea, the lukewarm church before Christ comes for his people.

There are a couple problems with that viewpoint. I just do it in passing and then we'll get into our message.

One problem is a biblical problem that it doesn't fit the text. The other is a practical matter. I guess it comes as the result of the fact, from my vantage point I like jigsaw puzzles. I know when you're working with a jigsaw puzzle that sometimes there's the piece when it's off to the side looks like it fits. But when you try to put it in it doesn't fit. If you force it it's going to make the whole puzzle come out wrong.

There are some things that don't fit in this picture. For something it would seem that if this is prophecy of unfolding church history that there should be some church that represented the reformation in there. And there should be some church that represented the charismatic Pentecostal renewal, which in the twentieth century has revitalized the entire body of Jesus Christ worldwide. It's also kind of strange that if Laodicea is the church now that simultaneous with that we have seen in my lifetime the greatest expansion of the church of Jesus Christ to ever have occurred.

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The gospel of the Lord as come to more countries and more cultures in my lifetime and penetrated the world to a greater extent than at any time since the apostolic age. Certainly has not been over all a Laodicea time in the church.

I think what you find in these seven letters is you find that the letters were written to real churches in real places in a real first century world. But the principles arising out of those letters apply to all Christians individually and all churches in all countries, in all place at all times. I've found that sometimes all seven churches are present in one degree or another one body. Sometimes they're present in me. There are some days when I'm a Smyrnan Christian. And I'm doing well with my trials and I'm serving the Lord anyway. There are other days when I'm a Laodicean Christian. I'm laid back and saying, I can make it. Thanks God for helping me in the past but I don't think I need you much now. I don't say that consciously but it's an attitude.

As we look at each of the letters to the churches we have applied an outline that has employed the letter C. So we'll do that again today.

First there is the C it Laodicea. There are some references that Jesus makes in the letter that have a unique bearing on the history of the city itself. There are three things about the city that come to bear in the letter. One is that this city of Laodicea was a very wealthy city. It was kind of the Beverly Hills of the Roman province of Asia or the Newport Center. It had the banks and the money. And the reason why it had that was that it lay on major trade routes going East-West and North-South. Over a period of time it had collected enormous wealth and people lived in palaces and split level homes and had three chariot garages!

In fact the city was so wealthy that when it had a major earthquake in 60 A.D. 35 years before this letter was written, a major earthquake, the city rebuilt using its own finances. Didn't have to go outside like Philadelphia did to get the emperor to help out with his money. They rebuilt and were proud of rebuilding with their own wealth.

Think about that for a moment. Suppose an earthquake were to happen in the next few weeks. If you get wiped out with an earthquake do you have enough money to rebuild? Could you replace it all? Most of us don't have those kinds of reserves.

This city rebuilt their whole city out of their treasury. That's how wealthy they were. A Roman historian of the first century said, "Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources and with no help from us." Does it surprise us at all that the church would take on the culture of the city? And that the church would say that the city would feel at ease saying, "I am rich. I have acquired wealth and I do not need a thing." As so often the case that Christians without even thinking about it begin to adapt some of the mentality of the area in which they live. The church at Laodicea was saying the same thing as the city.

Another characteristic of the city was that it prided itself on its clothing trade. Garments made in Laodicea were famous all over the world. We understand that because we live in the day of designer jeans! Here was a city that exported its clothing and it had expensive clothing, which it exported, made of soft black glossy wool grown on a special kind sheep that grazed in the area of Laodicea. It also mass-produced garments.

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To this town Jesus says, You need some clothes. You need white clothes so you can cover your shameful nakedness.

Christians in the town were saying, We've got good clothes. Jesus was saying, but they're all external clothes. They're all things. What you need is a covering that is from God.

A third thing about this city, which comes up in the letter is it was a city known as a medical center. It especially prided itself and was known for its production of an ointment for the ears and an eye salve which was made out of a black powder that was made into a paste form and then become dried. It was in the shape of a little miniature bread roll like a tablet. It was exported world wide and they were known everywhere. You could take some of that powder from that tablet and put it on your eyes if you had glaucoma it would help things go better.

So to those churches Jesus says put some salve on your eyes so you can see.

William Ramsey the great archeologist of the last generation who studied these seven churches like no other person ever studied them said, "There is no city whose spirit and nature are more difficult to describe than Laodicea. There are no extremes and hardly any strongly marked features. But in this even balance lies its peculiar character. It was a successful trading city, a city of bankers, and financiers, which could adapt itself to the needs and wishes of others ever pliable and accommodating, full of the spirit of compromise." It was used to making swaps and deals and compromising so that it had no longer anything for which it strongly stood other than to put more money in the bank. It was accommodating and pliable and filled with compromise. And the church had evidently become like the city.

So now the Lord presents himself to this church and that brings us to the second part of our outline, which is the Character by which the Lord identifies himself to the church.

There are three phrases, which he uses. The first phrase he says, These are the words of the Amen. I would submit to you that that is an unusual way to begin a letter. Amen is the word you put at the end of something. It's at the end of a prayer, at the end of a book, at the end of a hymn. It simply means So be it! You can trust this. It's reliable. It's the explanation point that underlines the truth. It's used in the gospels by Jesus in a very remarkable way because the word Amen is translated in our King James as "verily." So when Jesus is saying, "Verily, verily I say unto you," he is saying actually, "Amen, amen, I say to you." He's putting the amen there right in front of his phrase. Why he's doing this is he's underscoring his authority and his right to speak. The fact of what he says has power and purpose and if we live by it we will find it a reliable guide. And if we don't live by it and don't make him the Amen, the truthful and trustworthy one, then we'll be in for trouble.

So to a church that was a church of compromise that kind of got along with whatever attitude could best make do in a situation Jesus says right at the beginning, I'm in charge. I have the right to speak. And I want you to listen to me.

Last Sunday night I dealt with emotions and said emotions tell us the truth about ourselves. But not necessarily the truth by which we are to live. For example if I get angry that's a very real emotion. My anger is telling me the truth about what I am feeling. But that's not necessarily

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telling me the truth by which I am to live. The scripture then puts guidelines on me in regard to the use of anger. And not letting the sun go down upon my wrath and forgiving and the like.

So Jesus says to this church which is governing itself by relative principles "I am the Amen. I'm the faithful and true witness." A witness is someone who has first hand knowledge of something. Jesus has first hand knowledge of us. He reminds us He's the ever-present witness to our life.

We can never escape God's presence. He is always the faithful and true witness in our life. Like one who truly loves us he has the courage and the will to tell us the truth. That Jesus does with the Laodicea and always with us.

Jesus also calls himself to this church, the source of all creation. The NIV has "ruler of God's creation". The word "source" may be better, typifies what is meant here. Because what Jesus is pointing to is that this church at Laodicea has missed him as the dynamic source of all of its life. The church has become like the city – self-sufficient. Christ needs to remind the church and individual Christians that never are we self-sufficient.

We all have decision moments in our life. Jesus wants to be the source of all those decisions, the source of all creation so that he is directly involved. I find that I spare myself so much agony and trouble when I really take time to wait upon the Lord before making any kind of major decision so that he is at the foundation of that decision. That I know that it's coming out of him.

So he identifies that to a church that is really going off on its own way and doing its own thing and having its well organized program and its well organized ministries but without that special touch of dependency on the Lord.

This brings us to the third part of the letter, which is the Commendation of Christ. The word of approval. At Laodicea of course there isn't any. In the other letters except for one there's always been a good word that Jesus had to say to the church. We live in a day of affirmation. It's important to give people affirmation in family and in church and communities in which we live. But the Lord finds nothing that he can affirm in this church.

This Laodicean church lived in violation of the first beatitude. "Blessed are the poor." They were saying they don't need any help.

The Criticism Christ brings. Verses 15-17. He has two criticisms of the church. One is for lukewarmness. "You're neither hot nor cold. Therefore I'm going to spit you out of my mouth." Some people think you ought to either be a great saint or a great sinner and not be in between. Either get hot and serve the Lord or go out and just be an apostate, a hell-cat. Go out and be wild. Be wild or be good – one of the two. Not in the middle.

The problem with that view is it doesn't accord here by what is meant by this passage. The interpretation of this passage lies in knowing a little bit about Laodicea and knowing how it got its water. It did not have water sources inside the city. Its water was piped to it from outside. And about six miles outside of Laodicea there was a hot sulfur area that produced hot sulphurous water. An aqueduct carried that hot water from the sulfur springs into town. Several miles in another direction it was linked into cold streams that fed cold water into town. But the problem

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with the water supply was the hot water coming in which was not used to drink but was used to bath, the hot water would become lukewarm in the six miles coming down the system so it left the spring hot but it arrived at the town just mild. The cold water would leave the stream cold and it was to drink. When it got to the town you'd want to spit it out!

Jesus uses this as an analogy of the church. He's saying to the church that spiritually there are people come to you and they are worn out and tired out with their life and with sin and they find in the church no refreshing. We need to be that to one another – that warm relaxing caring person. Then there are people who are spiritually thirsty. We're trying to reach tired people, people who are tired of life without Christ and spiritually thirsty for reality. It is our great privilege as well as our responsibility. It is our responsibility – one to one – to be hot water and cold water. Hot water to weary people and cold water to thirsty people. Jesus says I want you to be hot when you need to be hot and I want you to be cold when you need to be cold. But I don't want you half hearted.

There is also a charge to this church, a criticism that it had a false confession – verse 17 “You say ‘I'm rich. I've acquired wealth. Don't need a thing.’” Five words are used – wretched, poor, pitiful, blind, naked. The church was saying something about itself that wasn't true. It was boasting in itself.

I don't know if sometimes the Lord doesn't look at us as a little child and go, “Someday that child is going to grow up and be a mature man or woman!” Someday we're all going to be mature. Then other times he is upset by our false confession – really angry. He says, my church! The word “church” itself, the church of Jesus Christ means that here is a community of people that model his character and are hot water to people who are weary and cold water to people who are thirsty. If the church isn't bearing its confession he is upset with that. He expresses that to the Laodicean church as he does to us.

What Correction does Christ offer this church? Verses 18-20. He asked it to have a new dependence upon him, verse 18. He says that they're to buy from him gold refined in fire, white clothes to wear and clothe themselves so that they can be clothed and put salve on their eyes. In other words he addresses the structure of the town – the city's banking, the city's wool and the city's medicine. He says you need me for these things. How are you going to go out and begin to be a spiritual refreshment to family and to others, to be that hot water and that cold water. By just going out and doing it? No. By reestablishing an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. By coming to him and receiving what he would give us.

Then the Lord asks the church to have a decisive and ongoing response to his love. Verses 19-20. Those I love I rebuke and discipline. It's the fact of life that the best athlete and the finest scholars receive the hardest and the most demanding training. The Christians which shine the most are the ones who will live under the greatest amounts of discipline.

Christ says, “I stand at your heart's door and knock.” We so often use this verse as an invitation to salvation. I've led people to the Lord using this verse. He's knocking. He doesn't bang the door in. He doesn't force it down. He's a gentleman and he waits for you. The door can only be open from the inside. He will never open it from the outside. So you must open the door of your heart to him. That's a beautiful application of that verse. But the context of this scripture says this verse was first written not to unbelievers but to believers. And somehow in their own walk

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with God, things became so busy and they became so preoccupied with so many different things that Jesus would up on the outside of the Christian's life asking for re-admittance.

The literal translation of this verse is this "See! I am standing [or I have taken my stand] at the door and I am continually knocking." This text brings it out. It's a continual knocking going on and on and on. After a while you pay attention. Our concept of Jesus sometimes is so faulty because we think, "I've failed so many times he doesn't want to have anything to do with me." All the while he's saying, "Let me back in!"

Great Jewish scholar said, The one thing that no Jewish prophet or rabbi ever conceived of is the conception of God actually going out in quest of sinful men who were not seeking him but who had turned away from him." The whole idea of God seeking us is such a humbling thing to think of in respect to God. It'd be ok if God just took us back, just to ask God if we could knock on *his* door and get back inside. But far greater than that is God in the person of Jesus Christ comes and knocks at our door in life and wants admittance.

Jesus says, "I stand at your heart's door and knock. I'll go looking for you. I'll look anywhere for you and I'll look as long as it takes to find you. I'm on a quest for you. I want to help you." If Jesus has that attitude, that's a great thing for us to model in our relationship with other people. When we get our relationships broken or damaged with someone else, spiritually we can't afford to let them come to us and set it straight, even if they were the guilty party. Being a Christian involves being like Christ. It means taking the initiative and going on the search and knocking at the door and seeking to repair the relationship. Jesus says knock and if you'll open the door I'll come in and eat with you. "Eat" was a specific word that indicated dinner and indicated hot food and fellowship and family and an extended time for conversation. Jesus says if you'll let me in I'm going to come spend an extended time with you. And you with me.

By saying "you with me" Jesus is saying I've got resources that I'm going to bring to the dinner, resources you need as well.

So he challenges us, the church. That's his close in verses 21-22. It's a two-fold challenge as it is to all of the churches and to us – the challenge to conquer. And a challenge to hear. Conquer, verse 21. And of course we overcome. We recognize what Christ has done for us and by the word of our testimony. But the promise is if we conquer he will give us to set with him on his throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. That's going to be a day – to set with Jesus on his throne.

To a church that a few moments earlier Jesus had threatened to spew out of his mouth, now he's offering them a seat right next to him in his kingdom. He's saying that the highest place is within reach of the lowest. "As far as you have may have gone from me in letting me in your life, in one moment I can bring you so near that you're sitting next to me." No probationary period. We're instantly made united with him.

If I die before Christ comes, don't talk of me in the past tense. If we live in Christ we're always going to go on – living and reigning and ruling with Christ. He's king forever. He wants each of our lives to be a center of spiritual warmth towards those who are weary. That need the nourishing of the presence of Jesus in our lives. He wants us to be that cup of cold water to

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people that are thirsty. He wants us to always have him as the honored guest in our heart and life. He's going to give us a place right next to him.

Father, thank you for this word to our hearts today. We want to say with our inmost being we heard your word, O Lord. Now, Lord as we leave this place in a few moments and go out to live, we want to go out and be exactly what you want. To be in fellowship with you. To touch people in your name. We want this whole church family to be an honor to your name and be known as a people that are dependent upon you, not self-sufficient in any respect. But dependent upon you for yours is the honor and the glory and the kingdom forever and ever. In these closing moments as we share in prayer you do your work in each one of our lives personally. That each of us may appropriate the help we need for whatever need we have. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.