

- ***READ Revelation 1:1-3*** John states plainly that there are blessings that will come to those within the seven churches of Asia Minor who read and keep what is written within this revelation that is given to John by Jesus. Some of these churches (Smyrna & Philadelphia) would be blessed or made happy by those words that are words of encouragement from Jesus. They would be thrilled to know that their Savior was aware of their struggle and He desired to strengthen them as they continued to conquer the evils of this world. Other churches (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, & Sardis) might be saddened to know that they were falling short of Jesus's expectations for them, but even being made aware of such a shortcoming was certainly a blessing for it allowed them the opportunity to change. And even with the admonishments, each of the struggling churches were said to have a few disciples among them there were hanging on in faithfulness when the rest of the church might have been going off the way of godliness.
- However, all of that changes when we get to the final message directed to a church of Asia Minor that is found in **Revelation 3:14-22** that is written to the lukewarm church in Laodicea. When we look at the messages to Smyrna and Philadelphia, we find messages that are entirely encouraging to those brethren because there are no words of admonition. However, this message to Laodicea is the exact opposite for there are no words of encouragement and only words of admonition. How could the opening verses of the Revelation be true for even such a church as this? Again, the fact that they are receiving communication from Jesus to alert them to their issues is a blessing because they now have the knowledge that can lead them to being better for their Lord. Before we get into the details of Jesus's message to Laodicea, let's look at some historical background that can clue us into some of the things that are found with this text.

I. Historical Background Of Laodicea

A. Located about 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia in the Lycus River Valley.

- This river valley contained three cities including Laodicea, the southern most city that is written to in **Revelation 2,3**. Hierapolis was about six miles to the north while Colossae was about ten miles to the east. Paul's letter to Colossae makes mention of these other two cities that were located in the Lycus River Valley.
- Laodicea was founded around 250BC by Anitochus II, and he named the city after his wife, Laodice, whom he would later divorce. His intent was for Laodicea to serve as the gateway for the region of Phrygia as people moved north from the southern regions.

B. Laodicea was a very wealthy city because it was an important center for trade and commerce.

Producing soft black wool, banking, and medicine were its specialties.

- This ancient city sat at the intersection of two major trade routes which contributed to Laodicea becoming the wealthiest city in Phrygia. Much of this wealth was built upon three major industries: wool, banking, & medicine.
- Being located in the river valley allowed for sheep to feed on very fertile ground. Along with very careful breeding, the citizens of Laodicea were able to harvest soft, glossy black wool that would be used to make fine clothing and rugs that were coveted throughout the world at that time.
- The location on the trade route allowed for Laodicea to gain traction as a hub for banking. Many older citizens would retire to Laodicea for its stability in the financial realm.
- A medicinal school was located not far from the city, and it is most famous for having produced an eye ointment known as Phrygian powder that had been mixed with oil.
- Just how wealthy was Laodicea? It was wealthy to the extent that it refused the help of Rome following an earthquake in 60AD. The Roman Historian Tacitus wrote, *"Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us."*

- C. It had a major problem in not having a clean or steady source of water to supply the needs of the city.
- For all of the success of this city, it did have one major downfall which was its water resources. The city was built in a location that would be able to take advantage of the trade routes, but it didn't account for the difficulty of obtaining water for the city's needs. Hierapolis didn't have this problem because it had natural hot springs, Colossae had natural cool springs supplying her needs, but Laodicea's closest resources were with polluted or inconsistent.
 - This forced the city to have to go at least 5 miles away to collect water through an aqueduct and pipe system, but these pipes would often fail. Even if the water did reach the city, it was often dirty, tepid, and simply unpleasant to drink.
- D. The New Testament does not tell us of the establishment of the church in Laodicea, but Paul does write of this church being closely associated with the church in Colossae.
- Like many of the other churches found in **Revelation 2,3**, Laodicea might have been founded during Paul's time in Ephesus as people heard the Gospel and took it back to Laodicea with them. It does not seem that Paul founded this church directly based upon Paul saying that many of them had not seen his face in **Colossians 2:1**.
 - It is possible that Epaphras (**Colossians 1:7**) and Archippus (**Colossians 4:17**) were leaders within this church, but we can tell pretty certainly that this church had a close relationship with the church in Colossae since they were to share letters that had been written to each of these churches. (**Colossians 4:15,16**) It is possible that some of the issues that were present within the Colossian church had found its way into the Laodicean church.
- E. The remains of Laodicea are found in the village of Eskihisar, Turkey.
- It is interesting to me that the two cities (Smyrna & Philadelphia) that have either endured or survived the longest out of the seven addressed contained the two churches that were only commended and encouraged without rebuke or admonishment.

II. Jesus's Message To Laodicea

- A. He begins by establishing Himself as the One who is and knows the truth and is the source of all of their material wealth.
1. Similar to the message to Philadelphia, this message to Laodicea breaks away from the pattern that is found in the first five messages of alluding to the way that Jesus is described in **Revelation 1:12-16**. This time Jesus Himself as *"the Amen, the faithful and true Witness."* This description might seem weird to us since we use the word "amen" to confirm something that has been said in a prayer, sermon, or even a conversation. So why does Jesus use this word as a noun to describe Himself? The other descriptions help us to recognize that Jesus is putting great emphasis on Himself as being the one who only knows that which is true, and by declaring Himself as *"the Amen"*, He is declaring Himself as truth. This could be a reference to **Isaiah 65:16** where God is referred to twice as *"the God of truth."*
 2. Additionally, we might recall from the Gospels that Jesus would often state *"Truly, I tell you..."* To say this is often would be an understatement since He is found to be doing such over 75 times. This all simply goes to say that Jesus is establishing Himself as someone who is bringing truth to the table, and the Laodiceans would do well to give careful attention to what He is saying to them in this message. His words will be faithful and true just as He Himself is.
 3. He then speaks of Himself as the *"Originator of God's creation."* If there were some similar issues present in Laodicea that were in Colossae, then this description would be a direct contradiction to those that claimed that Jesus was a created being and not eternal deity. This was something that Paul focused on in his high and exalting praise of Jesus in **Colossians 1:15-20**. Or it could be that Jesus is simply reminding these brethren where all of their material possessions find their origins.

B. He rebukes the Christians in Laodicea for being lukewarm and not recognizing the reality of their awful spiritual condition.

1. What truth did Jesus see that He so desired to clue the Laodiceans into? In a word, Jesus wanted them to know that they made Him want to vomit based on their spiritual state. What was this spiritual state? Well, it was much akin to their water issues. They were not hot like the springs of Hierapolis, and they were not cold like the natural springs of Colossae. Instead, they were like their own waters which after traveling through miles of pipes had become dirty, tepid, and unappetizing. They were contaminated and disgusting and unable to satisfy the thirst of their Lord. They were making their Lord sick and nauseated. This was a picture that would have immediately resonated with the Christians who lived in this city.
2. So what did Jesus mean with His use of this imagery? He states that He wishes they were either hot or cold. Obviously, our Lord would prefer for His people to be spiritually on fire for Him, showing obvious signs of the Spirit's influence upon them through repentance and bearing strong fruit for God. But if that isn't the case, then Jesus is saying that He would rather them being straight up cold in their religion. Why would Jesus rather have a cold faith than a lukewarm faith? It must be because those who are cold in their faith are willing to admit that they have rejected Jesus as their Lord and the Bible as the inspired Word of God that holds authority over them in their lives.
3. Such a thing isn't seen in the life of the person who is lukewarm. Instead of being on fire or completely cold, those who are lukewarm could be compared to those that Paul wrote of in **II Timothy 3:5** who are, *"holding to the form of godliness but denying its power."* They are like the Pharisees who Jesus describes in **Matthew 23:27,28** as *"like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity. In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."* They very well might be those whom Jesus refers to earlier on in **Matthew 7:22,23**. *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?' Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!'"*
4. What made all of this even worse? It must have been the fact that these brethren were seemingly unaware of the reality of their spiritual condition! *"For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked."* (**Revelation 3:17**) How does someone get to the point where they are so woefully ignorant of their decaying spiritual condition? Could it be that their material wealth lulled them into a false sense of security? I find it not coincidental at all to see that the materially poor Smyrnans were declared spiritually rich (**Revelation 2:9**) while these materially wealthy Laodiceans were pronounced spiritually poor! And not just poor but also wretched, pitiful, blind, and naked. What a horrible spiritual state these disciples were in! They were so far away from their Lord and they didn't even know it! There can't be a worse state.

C. He advises them to buy spiritual gold, white clothes, and eye ointment from Him so their spiritual condition would be improved.

1. Surely these words might have been shocking to read within the church in Laodicea, but there was hope given by Jesus through Him offering advise as to how this church ought to proceed as they moved forward. The King had every right to judge this sickening church on the spot, but He instead shows patience, grace, and mercy towards them by offering them spiritual remedies that only He could provide to them.

2. Jesus tells them that they need to **"buy"** three things from Him, and each of these three things ties into aspects of life in Laodicea that would have surely contributed to their lack of spiritual awareness and false sense of security. Remember, they seemingly had their trust in their riches and material wealth, but Christ calls them to come to Him to gain what was truly needed. This was a message that had been called out by the prophets who were foretelling of the coming Messiah who would bring every spiritual blessing upon mankind. ***"Come, everyone who is thirsty, come to the water; and you without silver, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without silver and without cost! Why do you spend silver on what is not food, and your wages on what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and you will enjoy the choicest of foods."* (Isaiah 55:1,2)** These brethren thought they had everything they needed to be rich, but Jesus was coming to them and mercifully offering what was truly needed. What was Jesus telling these brethren to buy from Him?

- a) ***"Buy from Me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich..."*** They had been valuing and trusting in material gold, but Jesus calls upon these brethren to value and trust in something that was far ***"more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire..."* (I Peter 1:7)** which would be their faith. Through faithfulness to Jesus, these brethren would attain a wealth that would extend beyond this life and into eternity.
- b) ***"Buy from Me...white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed..."*** Instead of walking around in dark robes that were stained by their spiritual failures that left them spiritual naked, Jesus implores these brethren to purify themselves from sin through repentance and be covered by white clothes that represent the purity and sanctity that Jesus expects of His followers.
- c) ***"Buy from Me...ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see."*** Lastly, Jesus tells them to buy ointment from Him that would allow for their eyes to be cleaned and able to now see the true state of their spirituality. These members of this church had been blinded by hypocrisy and maybe even heresy, and they were in desperate need of their eyes being opened so that they might see their shortcomings and through God's strength make the proper corrections. They needed to wash away their blindness in order to see and embrace the truths of Jesus.

D. He states that His rebukes come from a place of love, and He desires that they repent and open the door for Him to come in so that He might eat with them.

- 1. Again, we must recognize that these were some difficult words for these brethren to read, but Jesus reminds the readers and hearers that He was putting forth these rebukes because of His deep and abiding love for these people. There is a possibility that they would never be aware of their decayed spiritual state if not for Jesus addressing this message to them in this Revelation, and He most certainly was willing to do so because of His great love for them.
- 2. Yet, we must note that this love does not look over their shortcomings, but it demands that they become zealous for God and repent of their lukewarm service to God. This love is seen in Jesus standing at the door and knocking for them to let Him in. His long-suffering nature is surely seen in His coming to them in this message, rebuking them, and offering hope through the proposed remedies. He was not desiring for these to perish, but He only wanted for them to open the door through repentance. **(II Peter 3:9)**
- 3. If they were willing to do such a thing, then Jesus says that He would ***"come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me."*** The simplest understanding is this being a call from Jesus for those in this church to open the door so that Jesus might have fellowship with them again through their faithfulness and obedience.

E. He concludes the message by telling all who conquer that they will gain the right to sit with Him on His throne.

1. For those in Laodicea and even ourselves...there remains this tremendous promise of Jesus that through our faithfulness, perseverance, and conquering we will sit with Him on His throne in the same manner as He sat down at the right hand of God following His conquering of this world in **Acts 2:33**, and it echoes the words of Paul in **II Timothy 2:12** where he writes, *"if we endure, we will also reign with him..."*
2. This is a promise of eternal reigning with Christ, and it is but another aspect of eternal life that has been promised by Jesus to all who conquer in each of these messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor. How can we be but motivated and encouraged when we consider these great promises?
 - a) *"To the one who conquers, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7)*
 - b) *"The one who conquers will never be harmed by the second death." (Revelation 2:11)*
 - c) *"To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it." (Revelation 2:17)*
 - d) *"The one who conquers and who keeps my works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations—and he will rule them with an iron scepter; he will shatter them like pottery—just as I have received this from my Father. I will also give him the morning star." (Revelation 2:26-28)*
 - e) *"the one who conquers will be dressed in white clothes, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name before my Father and before his angels." (Revelation 3:5)*
 - f) *"The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never go out again. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God—the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God—and my new name." (Revelation 3:12)*
 - g) *"To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Revelation 3:21)*

Though a message of strong rebuke and admonishment, there was hope for those in Laodicea who had allowed for lukewarm faith to become their standard mode of operation. They could repent and become zealous again for their God so that they might reap the eternal blessings that are reserved for the faithful who have conquered their world through their faith and trust in the one true King. While these messages had a primary audience with these churches in Asia Minor, may we ever remember that their truths are timeless and continue to hold great value even for us today. May we open our eyes to the true nature of our spiritual health and go to Jesus for that which will cause us to be made whole in those places where we are lacking. May we all be zealous as we live for Jesus in all things.