



Sunday, November 19, 2023
Revelation 3:14-22

Out of all of the messages to the churches that we have read so far, the message to the church in Laodicea is by far the most popular one - which is likely due to its connection with two specific verses. It is here that we read the famous line that Jesus stands at the door of our heart knocking to be let in and also where we first read the specific term 'lukewarm' as it relates to Christianity. Now the pattern with all of the churches so far, is that Jesus opens up by commending them first for the things that they are doing well, and then moves on to the challenge or discipline next. However, this is the only church where Jesus does not do that. Instead, there is no commendation here. Jesus doesn't have anything good to say about the church in Laodicea which means that this is a church that is in dire straits.

Revelation 3:14-22 (NKJV)

"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,

'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit

with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

22 *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

As I look at the first verse here, I’m reminded that throughout the course of these messages to the seven churches, when Jesus introduces himself, He uses various imagery such as the first and the last, the one with the sword in His mouth, the one who holds the seven stars....and so on and so forth. Each identifier has been directly connected to the specific context of the church that He was talking with. And now that Jesus has come to the last church, I think it is very fitting that He now introduces himself as the God of the Amen.

I’m not sure that the church of today understands the word ‘Amen’ all that well. You see, for us, the word Amen is primarily a word that is used when we are concluding a prayer. Some of us even double up and instead of saying, just Amen, we like to say Amen and Amen - which is next level ;)

However, historically, the term Amen speaks to the finality of that which has just been spoken of, or prayed for but it does so in a way that is far more than just a conclusion at the end of a statement or prayer. We first see the connection of God and the term Amen in Isaiah 65 which conveys the idea that God is a God of complete and utter truth. In Hebrew thought, saying, Amen was a way of acknowledging that something was valid and binding. It was a way of saying that something was utterly trustworthy, and a foundation upon which to build. So by Jesus using this term, He is reminding the church of yesterday and today, that He is the utterly trustworthy foundation of life and His words are valid and binding.

Now, as I mentioned before, we often only use this word as a response to something that we are in agreement with, or at the end of the prayer but we never use it as an introduction. It really doesn’t work well as an intro.....unless of course you are Jesus, who now uses this term now BEFORE the message, not after as one would seem to think appropriate. Again - this speaks to the authority of Jesus as both the beginning and the end. Not only are His words to be trusted after they are spoken, but even beforehand because He is the Source of all life - or as He puts it next - the beginning of God’s creation - the author and finisher. The Amen and the Amen.

So Jesus is reminding the church in Laodicea that the words that He is about to speak are valid and binding. And He doesn’t pull any punches either. In fact, He starts off by going straight to the core of their being by using the statement that they are neither hot nor cold, but are lukewarm, and as such, His response is to vomit them out of His mouth.

This is certainly strong language and obviously where we get the terminology, lukewarm Christianity from. This is the verse, and this is also the context. However, modern day Christianity hasn't quite been able to get this one right in light of the context. We often hear the message that we are to be hot for Christ, but not cold. That lukewarm Christianity sits on the fence between hot and cold and that cold is the worst you can be and hot is the best you can be and lukewarm is somewhere in the middle. However, when the term lukewarm is viewed in light of the context in which it is used a clearer picture of what Jesus means here begins to emerge:

Laodicea was situated in a region that was well-known for its water resources. Within just 9 km's were the hot springs of Hierapolis, which were literally a 'hot-spot' for tourists and the neighbouring Laodiceans themselves. The hot springs were well regarded for the medicinal and therapeutic properties that they provided. 15 km's in the other direction sat Colossae, which was also known for its springs - but this time, not hot springs, rather their's was the wonderful cold, refreshing spring water. And so because of the close proximity, the Laodiceans would have been well acquainted with both the hot springs and the cold springs.

However, it's important to understand that the water in Laodicea itself was very different. You see, the water from the hot springs flowed across the neighbouring valley where it spilled over a cliff that was sooo encrusted with calcium carbonate that it appeared white. That water eventually made its way into Laodicea, but by this time, it was now no longer hot, medicinal nor therapeutic anymore, but super-saturated with minerals from the journey and was now lukewarm to the touch. History teaches us that they defined this water now as tepid and putrid. And, for the unsuspecting person that would try and drink it, the taste was so revolting that it would cause them to spew it out of their mouth. In some cases, for those that had ingested it, it could have even induced vomiting.

And so, this is the context in which Jesus now calls the church in Laodicea, lukewarm. They were no longer hot and therapeutic which is what the hot springs were good for. And conversely, they were neither refreshing and cold as the waters of Colossae were known for. They had essentially lost their purpose and had become indifferent and complacent. They were neither hot nor cold. They were over-saturated and lukewarm, and therefore not good for anything.

So to be clear, it's not that hot is good and cold is bad like we've often heard. It's actually that both hot and cold are good but lukewarm is bad because each speaks to fulfillment of purpose. God wants you to be hot like coffee because lukewarm coffee in the morning is just gross. He wants you to be hot like a frying pan because lukewarm doesn't cook. He wants you to be cold like ice cream because lukewarm ice cream just doesn't work. It's all about purpose.

And so, the problem in Laodicea wasn't necessarily their absence of spiritual activity but that they were apathetic and indifferent to it. They just didn't care enough to give it their all.

In today's world we use the term pew-sitters. Which comes from a mindset that says - I've accepted Jesus Christ already and I show up to church and I give a few bucks so what else is there... This mindset is indifferent to deeper relationship with Christ or the purpose He has for us as lights shining in the darkness.

This mindset seems to be addressed by Jesus in the next section where He says that He stands at the door knocking - waiting for someone to let Him in. Which is a really interesting thing for Jesus to say here, because often we view this statement in terms of an evangelistic call to the unsaved to become saved.

But it's not just that is it?

The context is clear that Jesus is not addressing non-believers here and calling them lukewarm. He is speaking to the church. A group of believers that it seems at one point were hot and cold for Jesus, but have now grown indifferent, complacent and apathetic to the cause of Christ. He's calling them lukewarm and He's standing at the door knocking waiting for them to answer. Which again, is imagery that is masterfully crafted by Jesus here, because the imagery is not one of judgement on these people, but one of invitation. He's not condemning. He's calling. He's saying there's far more to Christianity than what they've settled for.

That the 'gold' they've been hoarding is the wrong type of treasure. That they should be storing up Heavenly treasure instead. Laodicea was well-known for its special black wool that was literally used to clothe the whole city, but Jesus is saying that they have been focusing on the wrong garments and that although they are clothed, they are spiritually naked. That the eye medicine that they were known for producing might help with their sight, but it isn't giving them the spiritual clarity that they need. That in all three of these areas, they are deserving of judgment. But amazingly, Jesus doesn't condemn them. He stands at the door and knocks, saying: 'I want to dine with you and you with me.'

Which, if you have been paying attention, is especially interesting, because in one sentence, He is spewing them from His mouth, and now He is inviting them to partake in a meal together, which involves putting food in their mouth. Which is quite intentional I feel because the harshness of the vomit imagery is offset nicely by the invitation to share a meal. We see the extremes of Jesus

here, which is important, because even as this whole vision first took place, John experienced the extremes of Jesus as well. He saw Jesus the warrior with eyes aflame, and sword in mouth, ready to rightly pronounce judgment, and that put a fear in him like nothing else ever had, but in the same vision, we see the tender, loving hand of Jesus, reaching down to assure him, and to care for him. Yes, Jesus is the righteous judge, but He is also a tender and loving father.

And we see that last aspect here, in this invitation to dine with Him. In the first century dining together like this wasn't necessarily about the food. It was a means of connecting at a deep level.

He was calling them deeper - saying there's more. There's intimacy. There's relationship. You can know Me. You can trust me. You can believe me. I'm here.

It's a similar reminder as in Psalm 23 isn't it?

Psalm 23:5 says:

'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...'

Whereas both verses talk about a deeper and more intimate relationship with Christ, the verse in Revelation is an invitation to start that journey and Psalms is an invitation to re-engage that journey especially when the challenges of life are mounting.

However, as with many of Jesus' messages so far, before any of this can take place there is a timely and appropriate call to repentance which is seen in verse 19.

'Repent' is an amazing word. In the Greek, it is the word: 'metanoēō' which means to change one's mind or to reconsider. You see, there's a difference between saying I'm sorry and repenting. Whereas both recognize wrong-doing, repentance seeks to change the mindset that causes that behaviour and therefore turn from the mindset that leads to that behaviour, whereas simply saying I'm sorry just focuses on the action and not so much the heart behind it.

(Relate to kids)

Points to consider:

Jesus is standing at the door of your heart and knocking. Will you let him in?

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