

A Church in Trouble
Revelation 3:14-22
August 6, 2017

I'm going to read today's text two ways. First, I will read it from the New International Version.

"To the angel 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 either one or the other! So, 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 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 come 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."

Now I'm going to read the same verses from The Message, a Bible paraphrase which tries to give the feel of what the original audience would have sensed.

*Write to Laodicea, to the Angel of the church. God's Yes, the Faithful and Accurate Witness, the First of God's creation, says: "I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold, you're not hot – far better to be either cold or hot! You're stale. You're stagnant. You make me want to vomit. You brag, 'I'm rich, I've got it made, I need nothing from anyone,' oblivious that in fact you're a pitiful, blind beggar, threadbare and homeless. Here's what I want you to do: Buy your gold from me, gold that's been through the refiner's fire. Then you'll be rich. Buy your clothes from me, clothes designed in Heaven. You've gone around half-naked long enough. And buy medicine for your eyes from me so you can see, really see. The people I love, I call to account – prod and correct and guide so that they'll live at their best. Up on your feet, then! About face! Run after God! Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you. Conquerors will sit alongside me at the head table, just as I, having conquered, took the place of honor at the side of my Father. That's my gift to the conquerors!
Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches."*

Can you imagine a church that makes Jesus sick? Can you imagine being a member of a church that makes Jesus sick? That was the condition of the church in Laodicea. That church was sick and it was making Jesus sick. What was going on in that church was utterly displeasing to our Lord. The church was in serious trouble. Worse than that, they didn't know they were in trouble.

We need to look at the church of Laodicea. We need to fully understand their problem

so we don't find ourselves in the same position. There have been many churches that have fallen into the same trap as Laodicea. Many of these churches have long since shuttered their doors. Some are still with us, but they are no longer effective for the Lord. The ones that are left have dried up into a shell of what they were at the height of their glory. So, it's important we learn the lessons from this church in trouble.

What was the problem with this church that so troubled Jesus he was ready to completely reject them? The problem sounds simple, but its implications were deadly. The problem with the Laodicean church was complacency. The church was lukewarm.

Suzanne likes to go to Biggby coffee. They offer a variety of hot coffee concoctions. They have lattes and flavored coffees. They even sell iced coffee. However, the one coffee you can't get at Biggby is lukewarm coffee. That's because lukewarm coffee is stale coffee.

The church in Laodicea was a stale church. They had lost their freshness and they didn't know it. Jesus was about ready to abandon the church that had abandoned him. Many of today's churches have the same problem. They've lost their freshness. They are neglecting the things that please God.

Let's look closely at the Laodicean church to see the cause of their dilemma. At the time our text was written, Laodicea was known for three things. The town was a busy banking and trade center. That made Laodicea a wealthy city. Laodicea was also known for the production quality black wool cloth. And, though we don't know a lot about it, Laodicea was known for a eye ointment.

The church bragged about its wealth. "We're rich. We have everything we need. We are self-sufficient. We're happy with the way we are and there's no need to change anything about us." Unfortunately, their comfortable conditions made them lose their need for Jesus.

It's a dangerous thing when a church becomes happy with the status quo. It's a sign of internal decay when a church begins to feel it has it made. The Laodicean church had left Jesus behind and was depending on their status and their wealth. Money can corrupt a church just like it can corrupt a person. The Laodiceans had kicked Jesus out of their church and they didn't realize it.

In the text, Jesus gives the Laodiceans a wake-up call and he doesn't do it with politically correct terms and feel good language. Jesus reads them their pedigree. He tells it exactly as he sees it. He tells them to forget all those nice things they think about themselves. Jesus tells them they aren't wealthy, strong, and vibrant. He says they are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

That's how Jesus sees any church that becomes content. That's the condition of a church that tries to exist without Jesus. That's how the people of that church look to him when they begin to do the things they want and ignore the things Jesus wants. Even

today, the people of such a church are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

The bad news is that's an ugly state of affairs for a church. The good news is there is a solution for that state of affairs. Jesus offers his solution, the only real solution, to the problems of the church at Laodicea.

Jesus tells them to solve their problem of poverty by buying gold from him. Their poverty was spiritual, not physical. Therefore, to correct their spiritual poverty, they needed to receive real riches from Jesus - riches with eternal value.

Jesus tells them to solve the problem of their nakedness, they need to buy clothes from him. They need the clothes of his righteousness to cover the nakedness of their sin.

Jesus tells them to forget the eye ointment they produce, and buy real ointment from him. The ointment Jesus offers will open their eyes which have been blinded by earthly things. This is ointment to cure their spiritual blindness.

The message Jesus delivers is pure and simple. He tells them to turn away from the things they can produce. He invites them to take hold of the things that only he can give. Too many people confuse the temporal with the eternal. Whatever we can produce on our own with someday pass away. But everything we can produce with and by the power of Jesus will last forever.

There has been much talk about how we can reach those outside of these walls with the love and message of Christ. The truth is, we can't grow God's church by ourselves. We can't accomplish kingdom things unless the King of kings is running the show.

We must never be content with the ways things are. The church can never be too full. The only way to reach the lost is for each and every one of us to personally take the message of salvation to another person. That can require a new level of strength and courage for many of us. That new strength and courage is available only from Jesus. If we try without Jesus, we will fail.

Jesus says that only what he gives us can make us a proper church. Only by complete dependence on Jesus can the will of God be accomplished here. We must be a church in complete dependence on Jesus. There must never be a day when we sit back and say, "We're finished. We've reached our goal."

Jesus tells the Laodicean church he still loves them. If Jesus didn't love them, he wouldn't take the time to offer to help them out of their condition. He tells them there is a simple solution, "Repent and turn back to me." That is still the answer for any church that has strayed from the mission of "Go and make disciples."

The only true power source for the church is Jesus Christ. If we, as a church and as individuals, want to carry out the will of God, we must be sure we are relying only on the power of Jesus working in and through us.

Finally, Jesus says he is standing and knocking at the door. He's on the outside because the people had become so content they kicked him out of their church. They weren't openly mean to Jesus - they just ignored him. They didn't feel they needed him.

But, Jesus asks them to let him back in. The same thing applies for individuals. Many people have put Jesus on the outside of their hearts, or they have pushed Jesus off into a corner so he won't be a bother in their busy lives. Jesus offers the same thing to them, "Repent and turn back to me."

The church at Laodicea no longer exists. In fact, the whole city is nothing more than a pile of stones. It makes you wonder, if the church had listened would it still be here today?

I pray that our church will never lose its dependence on Jesus. I pray that each of us will always look to Jesus for the strength and courage to carry out God's will in our lives.