

Sent: Wednesday, October 27, 2021, 3:52 PM
Subject: Last Nite's Study on Revelation 3:14-22

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me!" (Revelation 3:20)

Last nite, we completed our study of the second part of the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 2-3), dealing with the "things that are"--and, specifically, what He (Jesus) had to say to the "seven churches," which are representative of, and therefore pertinent to, all the churches down through the ages of time, including to the church today! Jesus, while still on this earth, told His disciples, in Matthew 16:19: "...I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it!" And these letters are in keeping with that intent!

Last nite, we considered His message to the last of the seven churches--the church of Laodicea (in Revelation 3:14-22)

The city of Laodicea was located, like for all cities of the seven churches, in modern-day Turkey--about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia, and 90 mile east of Ephesus. It was, we are told, one of the wealthiest cities in the world at that time, and one of the most important commercial centers in the region--specializing in banking, in the production of black woolen clothing, and in health care products (including a noted "eye salve")! A lot of wealthy and well-to-do people apparently lived there! In fact, we're told that when a severe earthquake literally destroyed the city in 60 B.C., the people were so wealthy that they didn't feel that they even needed any help from Rome to repair it!

But the city also had a water problem! And an inadequate supply forced it to build an aqueduct, both to the nearby city of Colosse, which had cold water, and to the city of Hierapolis, which just happened to reside on hot springs, and thus could only offer hot water! But by the time the water reached Laodicea, from both directions, it turned out to be "lukewarm" (ironically) and wasn't easy to "stomach"!

It was in this setting that the church of Laodicea was founded--apparently through the ministry of a man named Epaphras, who "labored" with the apostle Paul. Paul wrote to the Colossians about how he was a "beloved fellow bond-servant," and of his "deep concern" not only for the Colossians, but for "those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis" as well! History tells us that he was ultimately martyred for his faithful service for Christ!

The Lord identified Himself to the church of Laodicea (in Revelation 3:14) as "The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, and the Beginning of the creation of God"--highlighting, among other things, His sovereignty and the certainty of His words which followed! The Laodicean believers also must have been familiar with Paul's letter to the Colossians, delivered at least a generation earlier, where Paul described Christ as the "image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...by Whom all things were created"--therefore the source and "owner" of all the material things of life in which the Laodiceans so reveled!

As was the case for all the churches, the Lord "knew" all about the church, and the people of the church, of Laodicea! "I know your deeds (Revelation 3:15 says)...that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold (note the reversal of terms), I will spit you out of My mouth!" Wow!

But He goes on! "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see!" Wow! Walvoord notes: "He gave the most scathing rebuke to be found in any of the seven churches"! (Do you think the people of the church of Laodicea "got the picture"?)

And so, the question! Was Jesus addressing "believers"? True believers? Is it possible that the members of the church of Laodicea could be true believers and yet so "lukewarm"? So far off base as Christians? So indifferent to spiritual things? So, caught up with the world? And not even realizing how much they had strayed from following the Lord?

Walvoord writes that "it is evident that Christ was directing this message to those of the church that were actually born again but whose lives had taken on the same lukewarm characteristics as those around them" (and, metaphorically speaking), so much like the very water of the city itself)? Walvoord continues: "The fact that they are reprovved and about to be disciplined is evidence that they were true children of God!"

So, the Lord's "advice" for them "...to buy from Me gold refined by fire" so they might be rich, and white garments" to cover their nakedness, and eye salve so they might see!" Wow! "Buying" things from the Lord that they couldn't buy, at any price, in the marketplace? Gold "refined by fire"? And "white garments" (in contrast with the "black" woolen garments manufactured, and available, in the city), to "cover their nakedness"? And an "eye salve" that could truly make them "see"? Christ is obviously referring to the spiritual counterparts of the physical item which He alone could provide!

And "buying" it all from the Lord?

All of which draws us to the words of the prophet Isaiah (in Isaiah 55:1-2)--"Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk; without money and without cost! Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me and eat what is good! And delight yourself in abundance!"

And the words of the apostle Paul, in Ephesians 1:18 (Scripture that also would have been available to the church of Laodicea): "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe!" I want to say "Wow"!

But there's more that the Lord would require of the church of Laodicea! Revelation 3:19 says: "Repent!" Along with the reminder that the Lord "reproves and disciplines those He loves"!

Hebrews 12:5-11 says (beginning with a quote from Proverbs): "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives! It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness! All discipline for the movement seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruits of righteousness!"

And here's an interesting bit of wisdom! I Corinthians 11:31-32--"But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged! But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world!" (Sounds like a better way to deal with it!)

Then we have, in verse 20, one of the most sobering--yet beautiful--verses in the Bible! Jesus pictured as standing at the door of...Wow, the church of Laodicea! "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me!"

Church of Laodicea! Anyone home? Anyone there? Can you believe Christ standing outside the door of the church (unlike the "open door" of the church of Philadelphia)--awaiting an invitation to come in and become the center of worship, adoration, and love! Where He belongs and wants to dwell! And this applies to us, individually, as well! And also, can be viewed (as it normally is) of Christ standing at the entrance of an unbeliever's heart, ready to come in and make His life-changing presence manifest!

Well, the Lord's words to the church of Laodicea ends--as it does with all the churches--with a great promise to those who "overcome"! Granting the gracious--and unbelievable--opportunity for them (and us!) to "sit down with Him (someday) on throne"! Wow!

Gotta quote Walvoord one more time: "In the church of Laodicea there was so much that was so obnoxious to God and so little that was commendable! And yet Christ extended His personal invitation to them even as He extends to all who will receive Him today!"

So completes our study of the seven churches! Remember them?

- The church that lost its first love--the "loveless" church of Ephesus!
- The materially poor, but spiritually rich, "persecuted" church of Smyrna, with whom Jesus found no problem to highlight!

- The "compromising" church of Pergamum, where some members were influenced by the teachings of Balaam, and the Nicolaitans, and started sacrificing to idols, and engaging in immorality!
- The "corrupt" church of Thyatira, which tolerated Jezebel, who claimed to be a prophetess, and overlooked acts of immorality and eating things offered to idols!
- The "dead" church of Sardis, whose members were sleeping on the job and had their (white) garments soiled with the filth of the world!
- The "faithful" church of Philadelphia, which was given an "open door" for witness, and persevered, and manifested "brotherly love"!
- And, finally, the "lukewarm" church of Laodicea, where the riches and comforts of this world caused them to miss seeing their need for trusting the Lord fully and caused the Lord to want to "throw up"--but offering grace and mercy in the final analysis!

So, which of the seven churches is most like the church today? John Stott has written: "Perhaps none of the seven churches is more appropriate to the 20th century church (and 21st century church probably even more) than the church of Laodicea! It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today! Our Christianity is flabby and anemic! We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion!" Wow! Say it ain't so!

Well, that's it for our lessons on the churches per se! On to Revelation 4 and "the throne room of heaven" and other "things to come"!

May we always keep an open door to the Lord!

Lowell