

THE CHURCH OF FOOLISH FOLKS – Revelation 3:14-22

Introduction

Welcome to My Thoughts and the seventh and last segment of the Revelation Churches called The Church of Foolish Folks, the Church at Laodicea. Open your Bibles to the Book of Revelation 3:14-22. So far, we have talked about:

- **Loveless Church at Ephesus**
- **Persecuted Church at Smyrna**
- **Compromising Church at Pergamum**
- **Corrupted Church at Thyatira**
- **Dead Church at Sardis**
- **Faithful Church at Philadelphia**

Hans Christian Anderson immortalized the tale of the Emperor who had a great love for clothes. He was always in the market for anything new, exotic, and fashionable.

Tale of Being Foolish

One day two crooks, hearing of the Emperor's obsession with clothes, came to his city. They claimed to be weavers of a remarkable cloth with magical properties. To those who were wise and had the finest taste in clothing, the cloth would have an exquisite beauty, but to the incompetent and stupid, the cloth would be invisible.

Of course, he had to have a suit of clothes made from such a cloth, so the crooks were hired. When anyone would come to inspect their work, they would pretend to hold up the cloth, "oohing and aahing" over its supposed beauty. Of course, not wishing to appear stupid, everyone agreed the cloth was more beautiful than any other, and pretended they could see it.

The day came when the Emperor would wear his new clothes. He was to march at the head of a grand procession in his new suit. Although the King was completely naked, everyone, including the King, made a great show of admiring his new outfit.

The public anxiously awaited their first glimpse of their King in his new clothes. While all the grownups went along with the grand deception, one little boy pointed out the truth. "The Emperor isn't wearing any clothes," and it was true. Everyone knew it, including the Emperor. However, unwilling to admit it, he continued the procession under the illusion that anyone who thought he was naked was either incompetent or stupid.

The Lukewarm Church

In the city of Laodicea was a church blinded by a grand deception. They conducted ministry in their city, believing they were clothed in God's finest. It was a wealthy church – Laodicea was

Wall Street, Madison Ave, and Palm Springs all rolled into one. I imagine the members came to church in gilded chariots, and I'm sure their choir wore the finest robes money could buy.

The services made everyone feel comfortable and encouraged. All the most influential people in the community loved to attend, and you never had to worry about the pastor offending anyone with His sermon. They probably thought that everyone could see how they were rich, increased with goods, and needed nothing. Only the incompetent and the stupid, the jealous and resentful, could see it otherwise.

As we will see, Jesus saw things differently and rebuked this church. In fact, this is the last message of Jesus to His churches, and He has nothing positive to say about this congregation at all. Let's consider some of the problems of this congregation and not repeat them.

14 "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 into 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." ' ' "

1. WILLFULLY IGNORANT

"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:" – Revelation 3:14.

Jesus begins by reminding them of who He is. In most church cultures, people would say “Amen” when the preacher was preaching. When a person said “Amen” they were saying they agreed with the point the speaker was making.

Jesus started many of His own statements in the Gospels using this exact same word when He would say, “Truly, truly I say to you.” The point is Jesus not only speaks the truth, but He is the truth. Somehow the church at Laodicea seems to have forgotten that. He takes it further and emphasizes that He is the **“faithful and true witness.”**

Jesus is the Faithful and True Witness

A true witness must satisfy three essential conditions:

- 1) He must have seen with his own eyes that of which he tells.**
- 2) He must be absolutely honest, so that he repeats with accuracy what he has heard and seen.**
- 3) He must have the ability to tell what he has to say, so that his witness may make its true impression on those who hear.**

Jesus Christ perfectly satisfied these conditions, which means His testimony can be relied upon to be completely accurate. There is one more quality that Jesus points out to the church – He is the “ruler of God’s creation.” The word “ruler” might be better translated “source” or “beginning.” The point is that the one addressing the church at Laodicea is the Creator of the Universe.

- **“All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” - John 1:3.**
- **“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” – Colossians 1:16-17.**

I think the point is clear – Jesus is the One who is true – Jesus is the witness that can be relied upon – and Jesus is the Lord over all of creation. Now there is nothing that He says here that the church at Laodicea had not at one time known and taught – but something had changed all that.

Stay the Course

The Apostle Paul had mentioned them in Colossians 2:1 and 4:16-17. Not only had he written them, but reminded their leaders to stick with the program Jesus had given to him. While we don’t know all the details, the church at some point began to stray away from the faith and fall into teachings and practices contrary to God’s will.

Now why is this so important for us to know? Because any church has the potential to become like this church if we are not diligent to stick with God's truth. We must constantly acknowledge Jesus in the way He is presented here. I am convinced this church not only strayed away, but made a conscious effort to do so, like many in our own day are doing.

At this church, while we never want to fall into the trap of legalism, we also don't want to fall into the trap of teaching what you believe is of no consequence.

2. WOEFULLY INDIFFERENT

An estimated 500,000 tons of water rush over Niagara Falls every minute. On March 29, 1948, the falls suddenly stopped. People living within the sound of the falls were awakened by the overwhelming silence. They believed it was a sign that the world was coming to an end. It was thirty hours before the rush of water resumed. What happened? Heavy winds had set the ice fields of Lake Erie in motion. Tons of ice jammed the Niagara River entrance near Buffalo and stopped the flow of the river until the ice shifted again.

Something similar happens to a church that is indifferent to God's truth. The flow of God's power and wisdom is blocked by our choice to ignore Him. Unfortunately, that's what happened at Laodicea.

"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" – Revelation 3:15-17.

Geography of Laodicea

This had a background and a local meaning for the people in that day. Being down in the valley, they had difficulty getting water in Laodicea.

If you would go look at the ruins today you could look south toward the Phrygian mountains, some of which are very high. There is an abundance of snow on top of those mountains. The Laodiceans built an aqueduct to bring that cold water down from the mountains. When the water left the mountains, it was ice cold, but by the time it made that trip all the way down the mountains to Laodicea, it was lukewarm. And lukewarm water isn't very good.

Down in the valley where the Lycus River joins the Maeander River, there are hot springs. The springs are so hot that steam is produced. The Turkish government has capped it and is using it today. It's the hottest water you can imagine; a lot of it is just steam. However, when they would take this hot water up to Laodicea, by the time it got there, it was no longer hot. It had become lukewarm.

Are You Hot or Cold?

When Jesus said to the Laodicean church, "You are neither hot nor cold," they knew exactly what He was talking about. They had been drinking lukewarm water for years. Water left the mountains ice cold, and it left the springs steaming hot, but when they received it, it was lukewarm and sickening.

Jesus said that this church was neither hot nor cold and He would spit it out of His mouth. Literally, "vomit" it out of His mouth.

- **A cold church is a church that denies the basic doctrines of the faith. It is given over to formality and is carrying on in active opposition to the Word of God and the gospel of Christ. You find today in liberalism that they are in active opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ.**
- **Hot refers to those with spiritual fervor and passion like the Christians in Ephesus. The Laodicean church was neither cold nor hot – just lukewarm.**

Jesus says, "I won't tolerate it. You need to move to one side or the other and quit riding the fence. You'd be better off being a total non-believer than trying to live your life with a moderate type of faith."

Don't Be Deceived

He points out that they've fallen for the "**Emperor's new clothes**" deception. They think they've got it together. They are the envy of the other churches, but truth be known, they are in the most wretched state of all.

I am truly saddened by the church at Laodicea, both the one we're reading about, and the ones that exist in our present culture. Either choose Christ or reject Him, don't continue trying to play church when you don't even believe in the fundamental truths that the church was founded upon.

Well, so far this has been kind of depressing, so let's move to the good news. Even with all they had done to turn away from Christ, we learn that they are...

3. ULTIMATELY LOVED

I am always amazed by the grace of God – both in my own life and in the lives of all those God has shared His grace with down through the centuries. Jesus has just rebuked this church with extreme severity because is what they needed to hear, but then He offers them grace.

“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” – Revelation 3:18-22.

Notice the gold Jesus offers has been purified; the garments He extends are pure white; and the ointment for their eyes doesn't just soothe, but heals.

He is calling the church to repent and turn back to Him and He promises to make everything as it once was. To forgive them and make them whole. Jesus is trying to convince the church that what they need, more than anything else, is to receive the sacrificial love that He is offering to them.

He stands at the door to their church, and the door to their hearts and ours, seeking to gain entrance so that He can show them once again what it means to be unconditionally loved.

CONCLUSION:

I've been profoundly moved as I've studied for these messages and I've been greatly impacted with the similarity of these churches we've studied with the church of today.

One thing stands out to me more than ever. I don't think it is any accident Jesus ends on this note. What He is telling us is no matter how far we have strayed, no matter what we have done, there is still hope. Hope for God's church and hope for the world.

What we can and must do is share that hope with everyone around us. That is the message to the churches of Revelation as well as the message for our church today, Amen!

I am Dale Van De Bogart and I fully agree on God's Word!

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