

“The church with a bad taste in Jesus’ mouth.” (7)

A newly appointed elder was visiting the homes of the members. At one house it seemed obvious that someone was at home, but no answer came to his repeated knocks at the door. And so he took out a card and wrote ‘Revelation 3:20’ on the back of it and stuck it in the door. When the offering was processed the following Sunday, he found that his card had been returned. Added to it was this cryptic message, ‘Genesis 3:10’. Reaching for his Bible to check out the citation, he broke up in gales of laughter.

Revelation 3:20 begins ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock.’ Genesis 3:10 reads, ‘I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid, for I was naked.’ And I’m wondering today what excuse we would give if Jesus came knocking at our door. We have almost come to the end in this series of sermons on the seven churches of Asia Minor. And I don’t know about you but I have personally felt really challenged at times, not only to exam myself and my walk with Christ but also challenged in terms of being a part of the Lord’s church.

Revelation 3:14 “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write.” Now out of all the churches written to in Revelation 2+3 I think it’s sad that the church in Laodicea has been the most studied and preached. The church that made famous the shocking saying of Jesus, ‘I will spew you out of my mouth!’

The town itself lay around 43 miles southeast of Philadelphia and the Laodiceans were a rich community. They were famous for glossy black woollen garments and for their famous eye-powder. This powder was exported all over the world in tablet form. It was then ground into powder and used to relieve eye complaints. Phrygia was one of the areas in Asia Minor where eye diseases were rampant.

The city is located in the Lycus River Valley together with Hierapolis and Colossae. This valley is a natural route of travel from east to west. The city was founded by the Seleucid king Antiochus II and named for his wife Laodice about 260 BC. It has a famous aqueduct and the water that was piped to Laodicea was rich with calcium which over time would cause the pipes to clog. The engineers designed the aqueduct with vents covered with stones that could be removed periodically for cleaning.

There were also many stadiums, one which is still preserved today. This one at Laodicea was built by Nicostratus and dedicated to Vespasian in AD 79 according to an inscription found in it. The stadium is circular at both ends and the total complex was 900 feet long. Used primarily for running races, the length of the track was fixed at 600 feet.

Now this church was planted and received the Gospel not from the apostle Paul but from his helper Epaphras during the time Paul was in Ephesus. Colossians 4:12+13 “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.”

So let’s get into our text for today to discover what Jesus has to say to this congregation. Revelation 3:14 “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.”

Jesus begins by describing Himself as the ‘Amen’ and usually when we think of the word, Amen we automatically think it means ‘so be it.’ But here it doesn’t mean that, in describing Himself as the ‘Amen’ Jesus is saying that He is the firm One, the definite One. In other words, Jesus is the One who is steady and unchangeable in all His purposes and promises.

He also says, ‘He is the faithful and true witness.’ You see loved as we go through this letter you will soon see there was nothing distinctive about the Laodiceans. They had no ‘witness’ and they were not faithful to the testimony they had concerning Jesus. They really stood for nothing, they weren’t concerned with heresy, and they weren’t concerned about being heretics. After all to become a heretic takes energy, and they didn’t have any energy.

Jesus says, He is the faithful and true witness, whose testimony of God, to men, ought to be received and fully believed. But Jesus also has another testimony and that is the testimony of men to God and that too will be fully believed because Jesus is the true witness. Now notice what else Jesus describes Himself as, He says, He is “the ruler of God’s creation” Now the KJV uses the words, ‘The beginning of the creation of God’ which can be very misleading.

You see the word ‘beginning’ here doesn’t mean that Jesus was the first thing created as some people like to believe. It means Jesus is the ‘cause’ or ‘source’ of the creation of God. We looked at that a few months ago in our studies of Hebrews. Hebrews 1:1+2 “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”

Jesus is reminding the rich, self-reliant church in Laodicea where all the blessings come from. [Have you ever seen a wild pig eating acorns?](#) I mean those animals just eat and eat and eat but they never once look up to the tree to see where the acorns are coming from. Pigs are expected to eat the acorns without looking up to see from where they came but people are supposed to be better than pigs, [aren’t they?](#) [Matthew 5:45](#) “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Every human being is blessed by God but [how many look up to the heavens to give thanks to God? How many people actually recognise that the Creator of the sun and the rain is the One who gives us these things?](#) That was the main problem in the church in Laodicea, it was their church, not the Lord’s.

Jesus immediately identifies their problem and it was a problem of possession. It was their church and they did as they pleased, and they never considered the will of the Lord. And by the way I pray some of our brethren could grasp this concept. Too many times Christians act and talk like the church belongs to them and not the Lord. There are times when some Christians are just too quick to judge who is right with the Lord and who isn’t.

Jesus says, He is the steady, unchangeable One, He is the One who is faithful and is the true witness. He is the One who is the source of all blessings and it’s His church, not ours. [Revelation 3:15+16](#) “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.”

Once again we’re reminded that Jesus sees and knows everything that every Christian is doing or not doing and He sees the congregation as a whole. He says, you Christians in Laodicea are ‘[neither cold nor hot but lukewarm](#)’. They were lukewarm, which doesn’t mean they were going from cold to hot but they were actually going from hot to cold.

I don’t know about you but there is something horrible about the taste of lukewarm water. And whenever I have tasted it, I always want to spit it back out of my mouth because it tastes so bad. You see the hot springs of Laodicea were not really hot but comfortably warm and so it was good for having a bath in but horrible to drink.

But let me ask you, [did Jesus want them to become cold? Would He really rather have had them cold as to lukewarm?](#) Well, that’s what He said and maybe He said it that way simply to stress the horror of their position. [And what was the horror of their position?](#) They were neither hot nor cold. In their present state they couldn’t claim they hadn’t known, they couldn’t claim that they have never been moved.

And so in that way, it would have been better for them never to have been moved than having been moved to become moderate. [2 Peter 2:21](#) tells us concerning false teachers “It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.”

And so to these lukewarm Christians Jesus says, you are neither cold nor hot but lukewarm and because of that, I’m going to reject you, I’m about to spit you out of my mouth. In other words here is a church which had lost their passion for the things of the Lord. They had become indifferent and apathetic. They had reached a place where they were going through the motions, but they were unmoved by the things of the Lord. They didn’t care too much about the cross of Jesus, they weren’t really interested in what the Word of God meant.

They didn’t really care about the condition of the lost people around them. These Christians were not burning hot with passion for Jesus, neither were they totally dead and cold, they were somewhere in between. And loved ones, please don’t underestimate the dangers of becoming a church like this. You know the kind of church I’m talking about, [don’t you?](#)

The kind of church where the people believe the right things, and they come in and out of the worship assembly but they aren’t any different or inspired when it’s through. They’ve heard it all before and are totally unmoved by it. And from an elders or even a preacher’s point of view, this is a difficult and frustrating church to work with.

I would personally would rather work with an ice cold church under which the Lord could build a spiritual fire. Or a church that had too much zeal, which the Lord could tone down a little, than to try and work a bunch of people that are just satisfied with what they are doing and where they are at.

And it is that kind of church which is the hardest kind of church to move for the Lord. Where Christians just don't care, if people are saved, fine. If they aren't, that's fine too. If the preaching is good, great, if not, well, that's OK too. Those are difficult attitudes to work with loved ones because that kind of church misrepresents the Lord. Because we know that Jesus was a man of passion and He was on fire and it showed in His life and ministry. His disciples were passionate men and they lived lives burning with passion for the Lord Jesus too.

And so if the church here at Great Barr ever becomes indifferent and unmoved and unconcerned, and so ultimately gives a false impression of the Lord, I pray that the Lord will forgive us and help us get out of that mind-set.

**Revelation 3:17** "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."

Someone said, 'Let your words be few and sweet. It's better this way when you come to eating them.' How many of us open our mouths only to change feet? You see the trouble with God is, He always hears what we say and He has this tremendous memory. The trouble with us is, we have such large mouths and so little worth the saying. This church said of themselves, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.'

Jesus said of His apostles and still says to us today in **John 15:5**, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." The church in Laodicea is guilty of the 'atheism of the pound'.

Now what do I mean by that? Well I mean, in comes the pounds and out goes God. This is a church that thought it could can buy its way to congregational success. And we still see this happening in congregations today. We'll hire the best preacher, we'll hire best youth minister. Our meetings will be held by the best visiting evangelist. We'll hire the best song-leader we can find and build the fanciest or finest building. With this all accomplished the results are bound to follow, with God or without Him and no doubt, 'results' will follow. God says in, **Psalm 50:12** "For the world is mine, and all that is in it." The Laodiceans say, 'they are rich.' God says in **Genesis 1** 'let there be' and they said, 'we need nothing.'

Jesus tells them they are, 'wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.' Can you imagine how you would have felt if Jesus had written these words to you? You go and speak to a well-educated man and tell him he is ignorant and knows nothing and see what kind of reaction you get. You go and speak to the wealthiest person in the world and tell them that their money is actually just made of paper. You watch the reaction of **David Cameron** when he goes to a hotel only to be told that his room was never reserved for him and someone else is in it.

I remember a story about a small church in Scotland who were informed the prime minister would be attending their service on Sunday. The preacher was advised by the elders to preach something appropriate. And so he did and he went on to say that 'if the prime minister doesn't repent of his sins and turn to God, he would go to hell.' The truth is we all hate to see ourselves for how we really are.

Jesus says to this church, 'You are not rich, you are totally poor'. He says, 'You are not blessed, you are wretched' which means afflicted. 'Pitiful is what you are', Jesus says. All their wonderful medicine for which they were famous for, to help eye complaints can't help them, they are blind. Their beautiful black, shiny garments which covered the bodies of so many, even in foreign lands, can't hide their own embarrassing nakedness. Loved ones, these are strong words, and we need to remember that how we see ourselves may not be how God sees us.

Jesus goes on to say in **Revelation 3:18** "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". The town of Laodicea had a banking centre but sadly its vaults didn't hold the gold of God. Their gold was the type of perishable gold which Peter describes in **1 Peter 1:18**.

And yes like I mentioned a moment ago, their black garments covered the body but as we know, God's white garments covered the soul. **1 Samuel 16:7** "The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." And so Jesus sees and looks at the heart and He tells them that their famous eye medicine can't deal with real eyes, the eyes where you can see the real you.

Now like I said, these are strong words and we need to ask ourselves **why is Jesus saying all this? Revelation 3:19** **“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.”** We all know that discipline is needed spiritually as much as it is needed physically. Our Scripture reading this morning was **Hebrews 12:4-13** and we saw very clearly the reason why obedience and discipline are so necessary.

We know that God wants to mould us and help us to look more and more like His Son Jesus. But we need to understand that discipline is not something God does **to** us but discipline is something which God does **for** us. **Hebrews 5:7+8** **“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.”**

If God did that for Jesus, and for our benefit, **don’t we want God to have His way with us to help us grow in obedience to Him? James 1:2-4** **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”**

You see our problem is that we want to get out of the trial too early, we want it over and done with. But God is working in us, and because He loves us, He is trying to produce perseverance in our lives, He is trying to help us become mature where we lack nothing. And so when discipline comes our way, it may be because we’re heading off in the wrong direction and we may need to think seriously about it and turn towards God again. And so Jesus goes on to say in **Revelation 3:20** **“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 that person, and they with me”.**

I was reading a story the other week about a little girl who was with her father at an art gallery. They both stopped to look at the portrait of **‘Jesus knocking at the door’** by **William Holman Hunt**. Jesus looked a little weary and she wanted to know from her irreligious father who the door-knocker was. **‘Jesus’** he said rather sharply. **‘Is he tired?’** she asked. **‘Looks like it,’** he answered more patiently. **‘Why won’t they let him in?’** **‘How do I know, baby, now come on.’** He replied to her. And now with his conscience at work, later in the day, His daughter asked, **‘How come they wouldn’t let Jesus in, dad?’** Irritated, he said, **‘I told you I don’t know!’** And so that night, on her way to bed she asked again, **‘Why wouldn’t they let Jesus in?’** A soft answer in a subdued voice, replied, **‘I guess because they’re bad, kitten. And foolish.’** After a goodnight kiss and on her way to the bedroom, she said, **‘Well, we’d let him in, wouldn’t we, daddy!’** That night he lay wrestling with the question on his mind, **‘Why don’t I let him in?’** and then he did what he needed to do and let Jesus into his life.

If you’ve already been immersed into Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins but your slowly drifting drifted away, **why don’t you come home again?** You see loved ones, this passage of Scripture was written with people like you in mind, **why don’t you let Jesus back in?**

Now there are some who teach what they call the **‘sinners prayer’** and the Scripture they use to support this idea is this very verse. Now there is a great variation when it comes to the **‘sinner’s prayer’**, but most say something like this, **‘Jesus, I now realize I have sinned against you. Please forgive me of my sin. Please come into my life and change my heart. I want you to be my Saviour. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.’**

Let me ask you, **who is Jesus speaking to in Revelation 3:20?** He’s not speaking to non-Christians but He’s speaking to people who have already become Christians. Now if you’re not a Christian this morning, let me ask you, **why don’t you let Jesus into your life?** There’s not one teaching anywhere in the Bible about saying a prayer to become a Christian.

And so if you’re not a Christian, then simply read all of **Acts 2** and see what they believed and did in order to have their sins forgiven and then go and do the same. You see Jesus in an effort to get back into His church, is standing knocking at the door. And He says, **‘If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me’.**

**Do you see how our relationship with Jesus is so personal?** Fellowship together, eating with one another. Jesus will knock and He will wait, but He will not break down the door. It must be opened by you and that’s because Jesus won’t enter anyone where He is not invited. And notice that although Jesus is speaking to the whole church, He actually addresses them individually, He doesn’t say, **‘if everyone’** but **‘if anyone.’**

Now why is that important? Well simply because as a church, we can drift away, but it only takes one Christian to invite Jesus back in to their lives again to get the church moving in the right direction again. And to the person who repents and opens the door to Jesus, Jesus goes on to say in **Revelation 3:21** “To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

Isn't God a graceful God? Isn't God a patient God? He's about to spit them out of His mouth because of their lukewarm attitude and their self-sufficiency but! But He says, if they repent and change their attitude towards their Lord Jesus then He will bless them richly. This church seemed to be absolutely overrun and overcome with lukewarmness and self-confidence.

And yet it was possible by the rebukes and warnings of Christ that they might be inspired with fresh zeal and vigour, and might come off conquerors in their spiritual warfare. Think about it, God is a God who wants to forgive. And if they repent, then all their former faults will be forgiven, and they will have a great reward. **And what is that reward? 'They shall sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame, and have sat down with my Father on his throne'.**

We know that Christ Himself had met with His own temptations and conflicts. And we know that He overcame them all, and was more than a conqueror. And we also know that Christ's reward was to be seated in glory with the Father on His throne. Jesus is saying that those who are conformed to Christ in His trials and victories shall be conformed to Him in His glory. And He says they shall sit down with him on His throne, on His throne of judgment, on His throne of glory to all eternity. **Isn't that worth changing your attitude for? Isn't it comforting to know that God really does want to reward us for our faithfulness?**

**Revelation 3:22** “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” **Are we listening church? Have we listened to what the Holy Spirit has been saying to us through all of these letters?** All seven letters have closed with a demand for our attention. And please don't think that all the instructions, rebukes and corrections we've read about over the past few weeks were written just for each of these individual churches. They are written for all the churches of Christ, in all ages and in all parts of the world.

And I'm sure we've recognised ourselves in some of those letters and if we have, we have no excuse on how to deal with it. If it is positive, then we continue to give thanks to God whilst serving Him faithfully but if it is negative then we need to repent and turn back to God's ways. **1 Peter 4:17** “For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household.”

May we strive to always do what is right in the eyes of the Lord and may we also be ready and willing to repent as individuals or as a congregation. The rewards for faithfulness are just too great to lose out on loved ones. I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon that we have almost come to end of this sermon series. And that's because there is one more sermon I think will be useful for us all to hear and take note of.

And so next week, we're going to ask the question, **what would the Holy Spirit say to us today?** And so until then, stay blessed, stay focused, and stay in Christ.