

The Seven Letters of Highly Effective Churches: Laodicea

All Saints Sunday

November 1, 2009

{ We start with showing the video “1/2 Worship.” If you want to see the video I mention showing, you can either click on, or copy and paste the following link in your browser and then watch "Worship 1/2 CD Info" (it should be the first choice in the list).

<http://www.sermonspice.com/search?q=1%2F2+worship&topic=All> }

You can probably already tell just from that video where we’re going today with the 7th church in the opening chapters of Revelation. Today we are looking at the church in the city of Laodicea. I invite you to open your Bible to Revelation Chapter 3, beginning with the 14th verse. Let’s take a few moments to set the context.

First, you can write Colossians 4:16 in the margins of your Bibles. Laodicea was not only the recipient of the letter to the church in Colosse, but they also had a letter sent to them as well. This letter in Revelation is their third ‘warning’, if you will, from God.

Laodicea was located about 45 miles southeast of the church we looked at last week, Philadelphia. Laodicea was known for four things: it was a rich banking center of the world at that time; it produced black, glossy, and expensive woolen garments; there was a medical center in Laodicea that made eye salve; and for all of this – it had no water supply of its own!

Water for Laodicea came through an aqua-duct from hot mineral springs. By the time the water reached the city of Laodicea, it wasn’t hot any more, but rather lukewarm and full of minerals and impurities. In fact, physicians at this time would use this lukewarm water to induce vomiting.

Lukewarm water, especially lukewarm water full of impurities like the water full of minerals that flowed into Laodicea, isn’t any good for anything. Lukewarm worship, the kind that we saw in our video this morning, isn’t any good for anything, either. The church at Laodicea was lukewarm in their worship to, and devotion of, Jesus. And the result of their lukewarm-ness was clear: they were about to be vomited out of Jesus’ mouth. Yes, yes, you heard it right. This message could almost be sub-titled, “The church that made Jesus sick!” They made Him want to vomit (and that is a literal rendering of the Greek that reads ‘...spit you out of my mouth.’)

You can make a couple of notes in your Bibles. The word ‘hot’ in verses 15 and 16 means boiling hot. This is the kind of hot that is churning, bubbling. It’s the kind of boiling hot that purifies. This is what Jesus was looking for from this church – and is still looking for from highly effective churches today: a boiling hot faith and fervency for the things of Christ that would have a purifying effect.

How did the church end up in this place?

First, Laodicea had lost their vigor: verse 16 says it all: *So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.* You see, the lukewarm Christian or church is comfortable, complacent, and does not realize his need.

Second, the church in Laodicea had lost their values. Verses 17 to the first part of verse 18 say, *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;*

The Laodiceans boasted that they were rich, when in fact they were poor – remember Laodicea was a wealthy city and a banking center. Perhaps we have here a hint of why this church declined spiritually: they had become proud of themselves and had begun to measure things by human standards instead of by spiritual values. They were, in the eyes of the Lord, “wretched, and miserable, and poor.” If you were to go back in time and ask the people at the church of Laodicea to tell you about themselves, they would have been more than happy to give you a tour around the town and their meeting place, show you all the nice stuff they had, and tell you all about what they were doing; yet Jesus said He was about to vomit them out of His mouth!

Third, the church had lost the covering of Jesus and His sacrificed blood for their sins. Let’s take a look at the second half of verse 18, “*{I counsel you to buy from me} ... white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness...*

Just like the children’s story, “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, this church thought they were clothed in splendor when they were really naked, and in those days that meant to be defeated and humiliated. They were defeated and humiliated, and didn’t even realize it. The Laodiceans could go to the market and purchase fine woolen garments they made with their own hands and say, “Look at us and how good we have it”, but that would not meet their real need. They needed the white garments of God’s forgiveness through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Finally, the church had lost their vision. The ending of verse 18 says, “*{I counsel you to buy from me} ... salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.*

The Laodiceans were “blind.” They could not see reality. They were living in a fool’s paradise, proud of a church that was about to be rejected. Remember, Laodicea was a place where eye salve was manufactured, and the people took great pride in that, yet here is Jesus saying, “No, you need salve for your spiritual eyes – the ones that really count.” You can write 2 Peter 1:8-9 in the margins of your Bible. God tells us in these verses to continue to grow in Him, and learn more and more about Him:

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, {“these qualities” refer to the ‘growing in Godliness qualities’ mentioned in the previous verses in first Peter} they will keep you from

being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

When we are growing with Jesus, we are effective and productive; in other words, we are a highly effective Christian. The church at Laodicea did not continue in knowledge and an ever-deepening faith with Jesus, and they were nearsighted and blind.

Jesus ended this letter with three special statements:

First, an explanation: *“Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline.”* (Rev. 3:19a). Think about that for a second, because that’s pure grace right there. He still loved these lukewarm saints, even though their love for Him had grown cold. He planned to discipline them as proof of His love, and you can write Hebrews 12:5-6 in the margins of your Bibles, *“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and he punishes everyone He accepts as a son.”*

Highly effective Christians in highly effective churches will be rebuked and disciplined by Jesus as they need it so they repent, turn to Him, and come out on the other side stronger than they were.

Second, Jesus gives an exhortation: *“Be earnest, and repent!”* (Rev. 3:19b). The church at Laodicea had to repent of their pride and humble themselves before the Lord. We don’t repent because God doesn’t know what our sins are, we confess and repent to turn away from sins so they are out of the way and God’s blessing can flow into our lives.

Finally, Jesus gives an invitation: *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.* (Rev. 3:20–22).

So what do highly effective Christians and highly effective churches do with all this today?

One, we need to be honest about our condition before God. We need to be honest about the worship we are giving God. Is our attitude to Jesus like the songs we saw in the video this morning? Here’s the thing: God *knows* us. He knows us better than anyone else. It is very dangerous for someone to think they are right when they are wrong, and even more dangerous for someone to refuse to learn the truth from God’s Word.

Second, after being honest, in order to become a highly effective Christian and have a highly effective church, we need to totally surrender to Jesus. Give to Jesus the things we cling to, the things we hold on to in our hearts that are not in line with His word.

Third, what really marks someone as a highly effective Christian, or a church as a highly effective church, is the prioritization of the relationship they have with Jesus. It takes precedence over everything – and everyone – else.

The good news is we don't do this alone. Jesus' death and resurrection means those who repent can have forgiveness of their sins and the filling of the Holy Spirit. It's through the Spirit's power in the life of the believer we are able to become highly effective Christians. It's through the Spirit's power in the life of a church that a Christian church can become a highly effective church.

Because these letters in the opening chapters of Revelation come from Christ personally, they take on significance as God's final word to the church. All the letters to all the churches in Revelation end the same way – with a final appeal to all individuals who will hear and act on what they've been told by Jesus Himself.

They also all end with a promise. Promises from the mouth of God Himself to the overcomers; to those who listened and learned. The ones who:

- Will get to eat from the tree of life (Ephesus)
- Will not experience the second death, that is, hell (Smyrna)
- Will receive a white stone marking them innocent with a new name given to them (Pergamum)
- Will be given authority over the nations (Thyatira)
- Will never have their name blotted out from God's Book of Life (Sardis)
- Will be a pillar in the temple of God and will have the name of Jesus Himself put on them (Philadelphia)
- Will sit down with Jesus on His throne (Laodicea)

Not a bad deal, huh?

The first lesson for a highly effective church is from the letter to Ephesus and it was love Jesus for who He is and what He's called us to.

The second lesson for a highly effective church was from the letter to Smyrna, and it was don't compromise.

The third lesson for a highly effective church was from the letter to Pergamum, and it continued the theme of not compromising: overcome the world.

The fourth lesson for a highly effective church was from the letter to Thyatira, and it was hold on. Hold on to the truth of the Word of God.

The fifth lesson for all Christian churches around the world from the letter to Sardis is stay awake; don't rely on the past.

The sixth lesson for a highly effective church from the letter to Philadelphia is walk through the door Jesus has opened before you! Walk through and continue to grow in knowledge and in love with Jesus.

The final lesson for a highly effective church is from this letter to Laodicea, and it's simply this: be hot for Jesus! Be fired up about who He is and what He's done for us, and share it with everyone!

Will you pray with me, please?

Lord Jesus, thank You so much for Your Word, and these letters to the seven churches. From Genesis to Revelation You instruct, guide and teach us to be highly effective Christians.

Send Your Spirit to those who call on Your name throughout the world so they may become on-fire Christians for You; children who are boiling hot for You and because of that are useful to You and the ministry You've called each of us to in our individual lives.

Thank You for loving us too much to leave us alone. Thank You for discipline and rebuke because it means You haven't yet 'spewed' us out of Your mouth. If You didn't love us, if you had already written us off, You would not care enough to warn Your churches around the world and throughout time to call us back to You.

Holy Spirit, we pray for all Your churches where the Word of God is taught in purity and truth. Move in the hearts of all who are in these churches to ignite a fire and passion in them. We also pray for those churches where this is not the case, and where people gather more for the purpose of simply being with one another rather than learning and growing and being changed by You. Continue to work on these churches all around the world to bring them to what You would have them be: highly effective churches making impacts on their communities.

Lord Jesus, we pray it in Your name,

Amen