

Our Lord's Lenten Words to Laodicea & to Us
Sermon based on Revelation 3:14-22
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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Introduction: We Can Relate to the Sinners in Laodicea

The Apostle John once wrote—at the beginning of Revelation: *Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven-fold Spirit before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.* Amen.

Dear fellow followers of our Lenten Lord:

How is it that the rest of the world views us Americans?

Have you ever paid attention to that? I'm guessing probably not. Most of you are probably like me. I haven't really done any traveling abroad. And even if I did, I'd be doing sightseeing; I probably wouldn't take the time to ask folks what they think of us.

But from what I've read, it seems like the rest of the world views us Americans as rich and decadent—wealthy and lazy and self-centered. Do you think that's true of us? It's hard to admit it, isn't it? But I guess I'd say it's honestly true: We are – generally – wealthy and lazy and self-centered.

And that means we can relate to the Christians nineteen hundred years ago in Laodicea. The Laodiceans lived inland in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. Theirs was a prosperous area—along a major trade route, known for its textile, medical, and banking industries. Apparently the Laodiceans had grown wealthy, lazy, and self-centered like us.

Theme: Our Lord's Lenten Words to Laodicea & to Us

And so it is that tonight we consider: OUR LORD'S LENTEN WORDS TO LAODICEA & TO US. It's not going to surprise you, I'm sure, to hear the Lord both rebuking and comforting us in this section of Scripture.

Part #1-A: The Laodiceans & We Are Lukewarm

God's Word to us tonight is Revelation, chapter three, verses fourteen through twenty-two. That's on page nineteen hundred seventeen of your pew Bibles. This is the last of seven letters Jesus instructed John to write to the churches in Asia Minor.

And it starts this way: *To the angel*—and remember, that's probably basically the pastor, who would relay this to his congregation: **To the angel of the church in Laodicea write** the following. **These are the words of the Amen.** He's the one who will have the last word – the “Amen” – on absolutely all things. *These are the words of the faithful and true witness.* What he testifies to—we need to listen to. And: *These are the words of the ruler* – really, the very *initiator* – **of God's creation.** We owe ourselves to him. We owe the world to him. So, we need to listen to him.

Now, what does he have to say to the Laodiceans—and also to us? **I know your deeds**—specifically: **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** – really, literally, *vomit you out of* – **my mouth.**

Hmm. What does that mean? What does it mean that they were lukewarm—and why was that so bad? Well, I think I've usually heard this interpreted to mean that the

Laodiceans were not energetic enough – they didn’t hoot and holler enough – about their religion. But that’s not really what this was getting at originally.

Instead: oh, it would go something like this. Cold water—now that’s useful: it’s refreshing to the taste, and some effort has gone into delivering it cold. And hot water—that’s useful, too: you can use it for cooking, and a lot of effort has gone into getting it hot. But lukewarm water—that’s just there: you can’t cook with it, you don’t really want to drink it, and nobody has put any energy into it.

And that’s what the Lord is getting at with the Laodiceans. They’re just kind of there. They’re not putting any energy into growing their relationship with him. Consequently, they’re also not very useful to him. They’re lukewarm, and it’s time for him to spit them up.

Now, how about us? Are we cold, are we hot, or are we lukewarm? Well, I guess each of us has to answer that for himself. But let me ask some questions to help our evaluation.

Are you a genuinely cool Christian? Do you refresh others? When they are crying out for love and forgiveness, do you deliver to them the compassion and pardon that Jesus has given to you? Or are you just kind of “there”—sort of lukewarm?

Maybe you are a demonstrably hot Christian. Are you cooking for Christ? I mean: do you live to serve him? Whether you are a student or a retiree, a parent or an employee: Is your life’s goal to serve Jesus Christ? Or are you just kind of “there”—sort of lukewarm?

Well, I can answer that for me. I am all too lukewarm. And I know why. I entered this world dead in sin—at room temperature. I’ll leave this world dead from sin—at room temperature. So, I’m lukewarm, and God should vomit me – and vomit you – out of his mouth.

Part #1-B: The Laodiceans & We Are Poor, Blind, & Naked

We’re a lot like the Laodiceans then. And the similarity doesn’t end there. Listen to the next verse. The Lord addresses the Laodiceans: **You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing”**—what with all their trade and textiles and doctoring and banking, right? **But** – Jesus adds – **you do not realize that you are wretched** – pathetic! – **pitiful, poor, blind and naked.**

And how about us? Does our wealth blind us to our poverty and sightlessness and nakedness—the way it did for the Laodiceans? Oh, of course it does!

Think of it this way. Either we feel comfortable financially or we don’t. If we feel comfortable financially, we say, “Ah, I’ve got more than enough. I can feed, clothe, and shelter myself and my family. I own my home—and my vehicles. My kids’ education is accounted for. My retirement is accounted for. I even have money to eat out and take an occasional vacation. I’m a happy man. I’ve got it made.” In money we trust! But the very next day, we could die—and we can’t take it with us.

Now, that’s if we feel comfortable financially. Of course, most of us don’t. And if we don’t, we say, “I don’t know whether I can continue to take care of myself and my family. I barely keep up with the bills. I’m not saving up enough for my kids’ education. I’m not saving up enough for my retirement. I’m really worried.” And it’s the same effect, isn’t it? It’s still: in money we trust!

But we have earned not one penny: to pay toward paradise. We are blind, and we can’t find our way to heaven. We are naked, and our sinful shame is exposed. We are wretched, pathetic, and pitiful—just like the Laodiceans were.

Part #2-A: Christ Has Enriched & Clothed & Healed the Laodiceans & Us

So what was Jesus' advice to them—and what is Jesus' advice to us? First: **I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich;** second: **I counsel you to buy from me white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness;** and third: **I counsel you to buy from me salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.** Now, let's take those one at a time....

First: Get *gold refined in the fire*, Jesus says, *so you can become truly rich*. And where are we going to find that gold? The Bible says: *it was not with ... earthly silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ*. Christ's blood is our gold! When we get to the gateway of heaven and we are asked, "Can you pay the purchase price for entrance?" you and I will say, "Yes, I believe Christ paid his blood for me already a very long time ago," and God will say, "Yes, welcome—welcome to your new home!"

Secondly—secondly: Get *white clothes to wear*, Jesus says, *so that you can cover your shameful nakedness*. And where are we going to find those white clothes? The Bible says: *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*. When you and I leave this world – as unclothed as we entered it – on our way to glory Christ will clothe us with his righteousness, and with warm and glowing white robes, we will enter heaven.

And thirdly—thirdly: Get *salve to put on your eyes*, Jesus says, *so that you can see*. And where are we going to find that salve? The Bible has Jesus saying: *For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see*. When you and I are wandering through this world, and we cannot find our way, it's Jesus who reaches out, takes us by the hand, touches our eyes, restores our sight, and says, "See—see the course I've charted out for you; see the way to glory; I will walk you on the way; I am the way; you stick to me, and we'll stay the course, until we arrive in glory."

Part #2-B: Christ Has Supplied a Royal Banquet to the Laodiceans & Us

So, why does the way seem so difficult? Jesus answers that, as well—when he concludes: **Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.** And why? It's so that we will **be earnest, and repent.** Jesus issues this invitation—an invitation with the power to lead us to accept it: **Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice – in my Word – and opens the door – with energy given by the Holy Spirit – get this! I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.** More than that: **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.** And finally, for whom is this promise? **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

So, despite their many sins, Jesus earnestly sought to visit with the Laodiceans and to make his home with them. He's done the same for us!

Christ has come to us tonight. By his Word he has knocked on our heart's door, and his winsome gospel voice has said, "Let me in! Let me in—to dwell with you. Let me in—to love you and pardon you and comfort you."

But there's more. Christ has prepared a supper, so that he might dine with us and we with him. Jesus says, "Here's my Supper—neither soup and sandwiches (as good as those are!), nor meat and potatoes, but my very body: genuine food for your soul, and my

very blood: genuine refreshment for your spirit. Take and eat and drink these—they are now yours, and I am yours, and you are mine.”

And there’s more. Christ promises that finally we will sit with him on his throne. So, this guest we entertain is a royal guest—the King of kings and Lord of lords. This one with whom we banquet is Supreme Ruler of the Universe—who will do all things for us. We need never to worry again!

Conclusion: We Can Relate to the Christians in Laodicea

So, how does the rest of the world view us Americans? – Like the Laodiceans: as rich and decadent, wealthy and lazy and self-centered. And too much that is true. But we American Christians have a glorious Heavenly King—who has dwelled with us and dined with us, and he will do so eternally.

So for him, far from being lazy, can’t we be on fire—on fire to serve him all our lives? For our Savior, far from being self-centered, can’t we sacrifice ourselves—sacrifice ourselves in order to serve others until our death? For our Savior, far from being rich and decadent, can’t we use our wealth, all our weath—until he shares with us his wealth forever? Amen.

The Apostle John once wrote—to continue his Revelation: *To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever.* Amen.