

Text: Rev. 3:14-22

Title: "The Son of Man's Local Church at Laodicea"

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Intro: Last year the CEO of a new blood-testing company called Theranos was in the news. In 2015 *Forbes Magazine* touted Elizabeth Holmes as the top example of their richest self-made business women, estimating her net worth at \$4.5 billion. A year later, *Forbes* revised their estimate of her net worth to zero. Evidently, the tests created by Theranos came under investigation for inaccuracies. So the business woman everyone thought possessed \$4.5 billion actually owned nothing at all.

This last letter to the church at Laodicea reads like a *Forbes* article's revision of an estimate of the wealth of this local church ministry. The estimate that needed revision is the church's own estimation of its prosperity. The One who does the revision of that estimate is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His church; and He knows the true value of the fruits of their ministry (v. 15, "I know thy works").

Unlike the letters to the other churches of Asia Minor, this letter to Laodicea contains no encouraging word from the One who knows their works. Even in Sardis, where rebuke comes swiftly and forcibly, there were a few names that had not defiled their garments. There is no mention of the faithful of Laodicea here. The error that gripped their hearts was pervasive and undetected. This morning we will look at the Son of Man's glory in the church, the Son of Man's correction of the church, and the Son of Man's reward for the church.

I. The Son of Man's glory in the church (v. 14).

Ill: This church had a glory to it that had little to do with the Son of Man's glory in the church. The glory of the church in Laodicea was very much like the glory of the town of Laodicea. The historian Tacitus remarks that after an earthquake destroyed the city in A.D. 60, the citizens of Laodicea were able to rebuild without outside financial aid. Laodicea was a banking center. It had a lucrative wool industry, famous for its woolen carpets and its woolen garments. So material wealth was the glory of this city, and it was also the glory of its local church.

Appl: The glory of the Son of Man has nothing to do with the amount of money He accumulated while here on the earth. As the ultimate example of the One who sold everything He had and gave it to the poor (Matt. 19:21), Jesus told would be followers that the Son of Man has no place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20). The glory of the Son of Man was comprised not of material treasure, but spiritual treasures. Jesus mentions three treasures of His glory in His church:

1. He is the Amen.

Amen is a good Bible word. When someone says, "Amen," he means that what he is referring to is true and certain, and that he is in full agreement with it. We have seen the word already in our study of Revelation (1:5b-7).

2 Cor. 1:20 explains for us the sense in which Jesus Himself is God's Amen in the local church, "For all the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." Jesus is our church's Amen because His person and work has made all of God's promises to us certain and true. Have you been tempted to doubt a promise of God this week? I have. What do we do when tempted like that? We remember that Jesus is the Amen. Up to now,

God has kept every promise He ever made in the person and work of Christ, and He is not going to suddenly stop doing so now.

2. He is the faithful and true Witness.

It is striking to me how often in the Gospels in passages where Jesus refers to His own witness or testifying, He does so to people who have rejected that witness. This is a major theme in John's Gospel. He told Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, 'We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness'" (John 3:11). Over and over again the faithful and true witness of Christ is rejected.

Men love darkness more than light because their deeds are evil. Still, Christ was sent into the dark world as a faithful and true Witness, and as such He told His disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, so send I you." Has our witness been faithful and true? I know that it can be discouraging when men love darkness rather than light. We cannot change that, but we still need to follow our Savior's example and be faithful and true witnesses for Him.

3. He is the Beginning of the creation of God.

Materialism is really the desire to own and possess more of God's creation for yourself. It is the glory of Jesus in the church that He is the Beginning of creation, meaning that creation began with Him. Anything and everything we may desire to possess in this world comes from the Creator, Jesus Christ. Its availability to us began with Him. So when we give back to Him, we are only returning what He first gave to us. Do we see the glory of Jesus in our local church this morning as the source of every good thing we

may possess? The local church in Laodicea did not understand that, and so they needed some correction from the Beginning of the creation of God about materialism.

II. The Son of Man's correction of the church (vv. 15-20).

Ill: The city of Laodicea was cross-river from Hierapolis, which was known for its hot springs. As the water from the hot springs flowed into the valley from Hierapolis, it cooled and became lukewarm as it left limestone deposits along the way. It may be that illustration that the Lord had in mind as he describes the spiritual condition of this church. They were not cold, they were not hot, they were lukewarm.

Appl: And Jesus is clear that lukewarm is in an important sense the worst of the three possible conditions (vv. 15b-16). He says he wants to spit them out of His mouth.

A cold church is a church that has no zeal for their apostate ministry. A hot church is a church that has tremendous zeal for their orthodox ministry. A lukewarm church is a church that has no zeal for their orthodox ministry. We can see how this is worse than having no zeal for an apostate ministry. Jesus says He will spit this lukewarm apathy out of His mouth.

Ill: Horatius Bonar, *Words to Winners of Souls*: "The mere multiplying of men calling themselves ministers of Christ will avail little. They may be but 'cumberers of the ground.' They may be like Achan, troubling the camp; or perhaps Jonah, raising the tempest. Even when sound in the faith, through unbelief, lukewarmness and slothful formality, they may do irreparable injury to the cause of Christ, freezing and withering up all spiritual life around them. The lukewarm ministry of one who is theoretically orthodox is often more extensively and fatally ruinous to souls than that

of one grossly inconsistent or flagrantly heretical. 'What man on earth is so pernicious a drone as an idle minister?' said Cecil. And Fletcher remarked well that 'lukewarm pastors made careless Christians.' Can the multiplication of such ministers, to whatever amount, be counted a blessing to a people?"

Appl2: The Laodiceans, pastor and people, were lukewarm ministers of the gospel. What can account for this lukewarmness? Jesus answers that question for us. They did not understand their desperate need for Christ because they lived in materially comfortable conditions (v. 17). Jesus knew better (vv. 15, 17); He was not fooled. He did so in love (v. 19), not in hatred. And, as though in attendance at a church business meeting, He gently and caringly takes counsel with His local church about how to correct these problems (v. 18). He tells them to do two things:

1. Buy from me (v. 18).

Jesus tells this materialistic church to do some worthwhile shopping. It is as though He owns a mall of spiritual blessings, and He wants His church to know that He is open for business. The wonderful thing about Jesus's mall of spiritual blessings is that everything there is given to us by grace, and we can receive it as a free gift by grace. Isaiah put the purchasing process this way, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Look at what the Lord has made available to us as a church for the taking:

- a. The true riches of gold tried in the fire. These are the difficult trials the Lord allows to test our faith (1 Pet. 1:7, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be

found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ"). We can see why we need counsel to purchase something like that, can't we? It is an investment that will pay dividends for all eternity.

b. White garments to cover your shame. Laodicea was famous for their black wool and the silky soft black garments that were made with that wool. Jesus counsels not to take pride in those materially beautiful clothes. Instead, seek a covering that is white, the one that covers our shame. This is the Lord's ability to wash us from the spots of the world upon us and to relieve the shame we feel when those spots are on us.

c. Eye-salve that will make you see.

Ill: So often the problem with our perception of the situations we face is that we do not think we need help as we look at them. I am thankful for my glasses, but I can remember the reluctance I felt before being willing to go to the doctor for that help. I thought I could see ok. Thinking I could see well caused me to see poorly.

The same thing happens to us spiritually. See John 9:39-41. Have we told the Lord how blind we are, how much we need the help of His Word and His Spirit to see? Or are we convinced in our flesh that we know perfectly well the right course of action?

So Jesus tells them first to buy from Him. And then he also tells them to

2. Open the door (vv. 19-20).

It is interesting that after Jesus invites us to buy eye-salve that we may see, He says, "Behold" (v. 20). He tells us what He wants us to see. He wants us to see Him standing at the door on the outside of this ministry in Laodicea knocking and asking to come in. Evidently, our lukewarm indifference and satisfaction with material prosperity can shut Jesus Christ out of our lives and ministry. We invite Him in again only when that zeal for His work in our lives and ministry returns, only when we are willing to repent for being so neglectful and careless (v. 19). He will chasten to produce that effect.

III: The picture here reminds us of Solomon's desire to see his bride in the Song of Solomon 5:2, "I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Tragically, the bride does not respond quickly enough to her groom's knock, and her opportunity for that fellowship is lost (v. 6). Jesus knocks, but not forever.

III. The Son of Man's reward for the church (vv. 21-22).

Appl: The reward is to sit with Christ in His throne. Our reward is just like Jesus's reward to sit with His Father in His throne. Those blessings are linked here, because the first is dependent on the second. We are overcomers only by virtue of the fact that Jesus overcame our sinfulness by dying on the cross for our sins and purchasing our redemption. We overcome by faith in Him. He overcame by perfect obedience, a sinless sacrifice, and a powerful resurrection.

Conclusion: Jesus gave you ears this morning, and having done so He wants you to listen to what God's Spirit has said in these letters to the churches. The most important thing

you can hear from each one is that you must be an overcomer. John tells us elsewhere how to become an overcomer: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5).

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching