

Revelation 3:14–22

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[0 : 0 0] seven churches. We are in Revelation chapter 3, verses 14 to 22. Revelation 3, 14 to 22.

And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you are either cold or hot? So because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, 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, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, as Mary indicated, today we do finish our series, spring series, in the book of Revelation, seven letters to seven churches. Next week, we'll commence the summer series, which is, in one sense, uncovering or rediscovering God's goodness, the story of Joseph and his brothers. So we'll turn our attention to the Old Testament and next week in Genesis 37, but we've got a wonderful summer ahead of us. I want to title this closing message to this church of Laodicea, getting Jesus back to the dinner table. That's what I'm trying to convince you of this morning. I want you to leave here convinced that it's time, that today's the time to get Jesus back to the dinner table. He stands there in verse 14 at the head of our text as the end and the beginning, as the faithful and true witness, and he likens the inner workings of this local church in Laodicea to the uncomfortable visceral churnings that one feels in the depths of your abdomen immediately prior to becoming violently ill. And this is in contrast to all the other churches the church in Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Philadelphia, even the incompleting works of the church of Sardis, all had things to commend themselves to the Lord. But now you've come to the last church and it seems as though he saved the worst for last. This church had nothing to be retained in Jesus, not a thing. In them, in them, there was no nourishment at all.

Look at the word picture our Savior gives of this church. It can be found right there at the back end of verse 16. Throw your eyes on it there with me. He says, I will spit you out of my mouth.

Laodicea, then, was a local congregation that quite literally made Jesus sick to his stomach. Now, this is especially good to know if you're not a Christian here this morning.

[4 : 0 1] You might say, finally, I walked into a church and my supposition has been acknowledged because the church makes me sick to my stomach.

And you're in good company, at least in this sense, that there are churches that make Jesus sick to his stomach. Maybe you have something in common with him after all.

Can you see him as he speaks of himself in the text? He says, I'm not a Christian.

I will spit you out of my mouth. This is an unsettling truth. It's especially unsettling given all the giftedness and God-given advantages that Laodicea had to work with.

This was not a disadvantaged, underserved context. Let me just throw a few before you. This church had a really healthy beginning.

[5 : 40] They were planted, founded, signed their names on their covenantal vow to be a church under the preaching of Epaphras. We know this from the book of Colossians.

Epaphras is referred to by Paul as a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf. He's also referred to as one who struggled on this church's behalf in prayer.

What a start. Founded by a beloved colleague of the Apostle Paul who ministered the word and prayed for that beginning. They had other advantages.

In the literary sketches left to us by historians of the time, Laodicea was, quote, situated on a plateau in the fertile valley of the Lycus River on a prominent trade route.

And it was Tacitus who recorded that this city, when the great earthquake of A.D. 60 took place, asked for no money to be given to it to rebuild from Rome.

[6 : 43] Did it all internally from their own resources. Now, yes, they turned down the governmental loans in order to take care of themselves, as good Laodiceans would do.

Other fragments of historical text tell us that Laodicea was replete with wool factories.

They had black sheep. There was a special black wool that they would actually dye and that they would move all through. They were a wonderful export for that.

And by all accounts, we are also told that Laodicea was home to a significant medical school. Think we've just got a wonderful medical school just a few blocks from us here.

It was made famous by Demosthenes, who ingeniously and quite successfully mixed ointments as cures for those who were suffering with troubled eyesight.

[7 : 43] So here are the advantages then of this church. They were the beneficiary of a wonderful founding pastor and beginning. They had an abundance of money.

They had access to the latest and best medicines. And they were the envy of the first century world of manufacturing and exports, a hundred miles inland from Ephesus, along three primary routes.

Much like Chicago takes you north or east or west, so too Laodicea had not the stockyards, but the wool factories that clothed the country.

And yet, verse 16, I will spit you out of my mouth. What on earth went wrong?

How does an advantaged and affluent church, one that you and I would probably, on the surface of it, think about joining and desire to be a member of, end up as the one among the seven that makes Jesus wretch?

[8 : 52] Had they lost their first love, like Ephesus? Did they become a both-and church, like Pergamum?

Had they fallen asleep and needed to wake up? Had they embraced immorality? No, none of these things get to the bottom of it. Let's make this clear. Their sickness was that of self-sufficiency.

Oh, I'm in now. Their sickness was that of self-sufficiency. I know this because of what he says in verses 15 through 17.

Take a look at it. I know your works. You're neither hot nor cold. Would that you were either hot or cold. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I'll 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.

- [9 : 57] Self-sufficiency is what made Jesus leave the table. We ought to slow down and slow walk the aspects of self-sufficiency.
- Jesus found them, verses 15 and 16, to be neither hot nor cold. How are we to understand this?
- At a first and initial reading, you might think this is simply a metaphor. And it distinguishes between those who are cold-hearted versus those who are on fire for the Lord.
- In that case, the coldness would be a negative attribute. The heat would be a positive attribute.
- But that's not always the way metaphors work. I mean, I think hell itself is referred to as a burning furnace. A rather negative attribute on what would be a positive indication here.
- [11 : 08] There must be something more going on here. Others have looked at this phrase and done some historical, archaeological, sociological digging in the text.
- And goes, you know, Laodicea needed water to run to it from a distance. And there were hot springs on one side and cold on the other. And by the time the water arrived in that town, it was lukewarm and therefore good for nothing.
- It's possible, but where's the so what nature of that as a statement? It might be better to follow those New Testament scholars who point to the idea here of hot and cold as primary elements.
- Cold and hot both have positive power. In fact, we know that both of these are positive because he says, I wish that you were either cold or hot.
- I can do something with that. I played sports, basketball through college. Sprained a lot of ankles.
- [12 : 20] Later ruptured two Achilles. Playing the game I loved. Must have kept me from the NBA. No, that's not really true. After practice, I used to put both of my feet in our dorm, our dorm wastebaskets.
- Because we'd just fill them with ice and water. Ice, something cold, had the ability to be effective, therapeutic, helpful to a sprained ankle.
- A heating pad is likewise productive and effective if you have a bruised muscle or a sore back. Cold and hot are elements that are useful.
- What Jesus is really saying is, you're not useful to me. You're not effective for me. You've lost your potency.
- You've lost your potency. Especially given his goals for healing a sin-sick world. The human heart. And we know that the connection is there then between this and their wealth.
- [13 : 30] By verse 17, for you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. Their ineffectiveness, their self-sufficiency, their uselessness is rooted in their wealth, in their perceived wealth.
- Well, in their real wealth, in a material sense, but impoverished means in a spiritual sense. I have prospered.
- I am rich. I need nothing. Their affluence either made them think that they were themselves the animating agent that got God's work done around the world.
- Which can happen to those with money. You begin to think, well, I am the animating agent for God to be able to do things.
- As though he needs me. Or, if that's not the case, and we don't know, then they were simply, the wealth had kind of settled into them, and they were now apathetic to what God was actually accomplishing in the world.

- [14 : 44] They weren't actually putting their resources to the work that he would, thought he had entrusted it to them for. Third, whatever the issue is with their affluence, Jesus' direct speech which follows sets the record straight.
- I mean, they have this three-fold, did you notice it? Three-fold self-perception. I'm rich. I've prospered.
- I don't need anything. From Rome, the government, or anyone else. I can do it. I do it. In fact, I'm supposed to do it.
- And then it's followed by a five-fold use of a part of speech we would call an adjective.
- And Jesus finds their three-fold statement reversed when he says, not realizing there. Take a look.
- [15 : 47] You can see it. Verse 17. His words, not mine. Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. This is his actual take.
- This is the wake-up call. The wretched there is interesting in the original language. It contains a definite article.
- You are the wretched one. Yeah, it's pretty strong. Pitiable. Wow, I don't know very many people of affluent means, myself included, who normally go to bed at night thinking I'm the one to be pitied.
- I see people every day that need to pity. And that I could pity. But Jesus says to this church, you are pitiable. It is the self-sufficient church that makes Jesus sick to his stomach.
- And it's the final three adjectives, especially, that hint at their own situation. Did you catch it? He says you are poor, blind, and naked. Poor, in contrast to their saying, I'm rich.
- [16 : 58] Blind, in distinction from their own medical school that had actually produced salves and ointments to help those who were troubled in sight. Naked, in regard to their own manufacturing of wool that actually clothes the country.
- What about our church? I'm talking about us this morning. Nobody matters other than the people in the room. What would Jesus think of Christ Church Chicago?
- Or, what does he think of you as an individual? You don't want the moniker of this church written across your life.
- Is it possible that you and I turn his stomach?
- The Lord we just sang to, is it possible that we make him uncomfortable? Does he experience heavenly visceral churning in the lower section of his abdomen?
- [18 : 18] Does he feel as though he needs to push himself back from the table because he's on the verge of becoming violently ill? Does he feel as though he's on the other side of his abdomen? We should at least sit long enough on a Sunday morning to entertain the possibility.
- You know, virtue from a public speaker requires not holding back things that would be useful to the listener.
- No matter how hard those truths may be. It's a virtuous thing to say, let's stop five minutes here this morning and consider those hard truths.
- While money can be an effective agent to propel gospel growth, it can be a dangerous commodity in the hands of a self-reliant soul.
- We, you, and I can do many things with money. And money can do many things with us. And they're not all good.
- [19 : 41] Medicine. Medicine is a wonderful cure for the physical ailments and illnesses.

And I can't think of, at times, better uses of money than to continue to do research and to develop things which would help. But it is ineffective if the problem stems from internal sin.

If the multiplication of inappropriate cells is proliferating in my spiritual soul, medicine isn't going to get it done.

While a manufactured ability to create and clothe many. I think of this black wool that was significant here.

I think of, I can still see like Steve Jobs dressed in black. I'm in the middle of the Elon Musk biography by Walter Isaacson.

[20 : 52] And it's funny when he goes into his various companies which are just explosively doing all kinds of amazing things. Isaacson will refer to the 20 other people in the room.

Likewise, dressed in black t-shirts. I mean, if you have the manufactured and creative ability to clothe many. But what if our industry actually leaves us naked because we failed to purchase the imported purity and beauty of Christ?

See, these are worth thinking about. Money, medicine, manufactured, creative force, entrepreneurial force to alter the world for good.

All good unless it leads us to a sense of self-sufficiency. And it's difficult, isn't it? I mean, I've raised five children.

I'm now watching my children raise nine grandchildren. Got you by six. And counting. I wanted my girls especially to be strong, independent women of God.

[22 : 13] We need strength. We need beauty. We need dignity. We need a certain sense of right independence. And yet, and yet, and yet. Independence and freedom.

Productivity. Planning. Putting things away. Enabling the family later to do what it needs to do. Can. Can.

Be it a spiritual hindrance if we are not raising our children to be dependent. To be needy.

Self-deception. Self-deception. Let me put it this way. Makes for a bad elixir. And when swallowed, it results in self-sufficiency.

And when our self-deception concerning our self-sufficiency settles into the stomach of our Lord, it requires nothing less from him than this violent expulsion.

[23 : 20] Expulsion. So where does the church go for help like this? Where do you go? Where do I go? Where do we go?

If you kind of sense, I've championed self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency. Yet self-sufficiency is the cause for Jesus leaving the table.

Then what is it that brings him back? Fortunately, the text doesn't waste any time in telling you. The unsettling reality of our self-sufficiency is followed in verses 18 and 19 with counsel concerning what would be nothing less than Christ-like dependency.

Let me put it that way. The movement of the text, the self-sufficiency of our soul, finds a remedy through the counsel of our Lord who would push us toward Christ-dependency.

There it is, verse 18. I counseled you. I advise you. You got a financial advisor? Let me tell you, Jesus is your spiritual advisor this morning. And he's saying, I'm going to advise you on something.

[24 : 40] As you multiply your efforts and get so much good done in the world, I need to advise you. You need to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich, white garments 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 jealous and repent. This is where you go. This is where I go. In a word or two, it's that very last phrase.

Be zealous and repent. That's what he would say to the self-sufficient soul. Turn around. Get going the other direction. Get off the road. Repent.

How? What does that look like? Well, in the text, it's that little phrase there, buy from me. Wait a minute, you and I say.

Other people, they're the ones who depend on me. I don't... See, here's the deal. In a nutshell, we must stop believing that we are self-made men and women.

[25 : 53] We must stop thinking that our role, earned on account of our own merits, makes us the self-glorified provider for others.

Jesus would have you instead see yourself in the condition of being a purchaser. You need something. And if you don't order it, you're going to be in a bad way.

And he says, buy from me. We must see ourselves as buyers at times, spiritually, not providers.

We're the ones with needs. You have needs. You're not just the one who supplies everybody else's necessities. We're not so much donors.

Lord, help us. I hate the phrase. We're not giving units. We're not donors as we are debtors. As we are men and women who have been entrusted.

[27 : 05] And it's all his. Let me get it as clear as I can. You need Jesus. I need Jesus. We need Jesus much more than Jesus needs us.

And that's got to settle in to where it's like, yeah, I actually own that. I actually own that. I need him more than he needs me.

Do you sense it? Do you know it? Do we believe it? Do we ever turn to him for gold and garments and medicinal goods? And what am I doing if I'm buying gold from him?

I mean, what is that about? What does it mean to be putting on garments that are purchased for him? As though he's my online store that the Amazon Prime box will come in with my clothing.

What does that look like? What does it mean that he actually prescribes ointments that will enlighten my life to see what I really need to see instead of just the material world that's in front of me?

[28 : 07] I'm going to put it like this. This is what it looks like to buy gold from him. Psalm 19. The law of the Lord is perfect. The testimony of the Lord is sure.

The precepts of the Lord are right. The commandment of the Lord is pure. The fear of the Lord is clean. The rules of the Lord are true. More to be desired are they than gold.

Come on, say it. More to be desired are they than gold. Even much fine gold. Oh, I bought an engagement ring, didn't I?

Some 40-some years ago. And I bought the best one I could buy. And I bought a 14-karat gold thing around it and whatever it was. But there's also people that got much fine gold.

I don't know what that is. I haven't been there yet. The law of the Lord, the word of God, is what you buy from him. Amen. Psalm 119, 72 puts it this way.

[29 : 10] The law of your mouth is better to me than a thousand pieces of gold and silver. Just think of it that way. The law of his mouth. Can you see the irony?

That which comes forth from his mouth for you. In distinction from that which he has to repudiate from us.

This is what it is to buy gold from God. To put his word in your heart. Not merely read. Let me put it this way. I think somehow for the church in Laodicea, somewhere along the line they stopped giving themselves to God's word.

I don't mean that they didn't read it. I don't mean that. I mean that they viewed themselves as not really needing it anymore. They had other things to get by.

You know, I write a lot in my Bible. I don't know if you do. I'm constantly writing. Some people are like, I never touch my Bible. I'm like, no, I'm writing in it all the time.

[30 : 17] And so as a result, I keep getting all these things in the columns. And I've often thought, wow, what a great thing if I just kept that one Bible all the way through life and hand it down to my kids and be like, wow, look at all that.

But what I found is actually about every four months or so, I have to get a different Bible. And I'll tell you why I know it's time for me to get a different Bible to write in. When I start opening up my Bible to see what I had to say about a particular text.

Oh, now that's dangerous. See, you open up your Bible to see what you have to say. It's time to get a new Bible. I'm about due again. The word of the Lord.

Buy it. Buy it. It's better than gold. Much fine gold. What about garments?

How do I buy garments from him? Well, notice here, they were famous for the export of wool, black, clothed the country. And here he says, you know, you're going to get something white for me.

[31 : 21] What he's really referring to here is purity. Purchase the purity of Christ. And allow the spirit to begin to animate that in your life.

The impurities of our decisions need to be refined under the burnished bronze of his own feet who walk this road in perfection.

By purity from him. The old hymn, Rock of Ages, says it best. Wow, I'm really tempted to sing it.

I'll kind of half do it. It won't be a spoken word. It won't be a hymn. Nothing in my hand I bring.

Simply to thy cross I cling. Naked come to thee for dress. Helpless look to thee for grace.

[32 : 28] Foul eye to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die. That's purity.

It comes from him. I don't have it. I can buy Alan Edmond shoes with lax waists, but they don't got it.

I can get a jacket from Hart Schaffner Marks. It's not pure, although it may be beautiful wool. I got to buy the purity of Christ.

He's got to clothe me from the inside. And you too. Applying ointment prescribed by him.

How do I buy ointment? Jesus healed many blind people. Some he even did with the simplicity of dust and spittle. Wow.

[33 : 33] I guess he had it on the medical school in Laodicea. But all of his miracles of the blind receiving sight were meant to do two things.

They were meant to verify him as God's messenger and to validate the message that he could actually give you spiritual sight. Go to Jesus. You might just say that this morning.

If you're a non-Christian and you like the beginning of this sermon because you know Jesus was sick of things that you're sick of, let me tell you this. This is also true. You see things, but not all things clearly.

Only he does. He does. And he can give you more sight than simply the critical analytical spirit of the hypocritical church. He can give you sight that says, I need him.

I need to learn more. I need to come to him. He does all this. The entire posture then is one of weakness.

[34 : 29] You know, it's one of our seven stated values here. We call it the irony of weakness. Like, who are we as a people? We're weak. We're depending on God for prayer. We're depending on God for helping us in our suffering.

We have to depend on God. Now, here's the interesting thing. The irony of weakness is naturally known by those who are weak. But that value is especially important for those who are affluent and have expanded opportunities.

May it never leave our life. The amazing thing about Jesus, though, and I'm pushing to the end, is that having pushed back from the dinner table in Laodicea and maybe having left your home entirely, he's more than willing to return.

He's more than willing to say, I'll come back. Look at verse 20. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

Look. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come into him and eat with him and he with me. And the one who conquers, I'll grant him to sit with me on the throne as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne.

[35 : 49] Wow. And notice it says there anyone. Come on. Anyone. It doesn't say now if the whole church does it. We have some kind of long, three-night-long prayer meeting of confession parading across the platform and everyone in the church does it.

I'll come back. He says, you know what? The whole church may not be coming, but you can. If anyone comes, whosoever will comes. Anyone comes. Anyone comes.

He's knocking. At the door of your heart. The door of the Christian's heart.

Let me put it as clear as I can. And this self-sufficiency, which is remediated by Christ dependency, is for the hope of restored intimacy.

Yeah, that's the movement. Restored intimacy. That's what the I wills are there. Did you catch them? There are two of them in the text. I will come into him and eat with him.

[37 : 00] Verse 21. I will grant him. That's the promise. Two of them. Now, I don't want to spend much time on the second one, but I will allow you to sit on my throne, he says.

That's the I will of shared rule. Wow. You've got to be kidding me. He's the ruler of rulers.

He's willing to put you on his lap. The way I sat on my dad's lap and drove 120 miles across Wyoming, 120 miles an hour, whatever it is we were doing.

When I was little, we didn't have seat belts. Yes. He'll let you share his rule, but I want to shut this thing down on this first will.

The I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me. This is not the I will of shared rule. This is the I will of sweet fellowship.

[38 : 00] He says he will be seated once again at your table. He's coming to your house. This comes back getting Jesus back to the dinner table.

The good news of the text is he's willing to come to your house today for dinner. So you don't need to despair of your self-deficiency. He stands at the door of your life today and he knocks.

He's ready. He's willing. He'll re-enter. You made him sick and he can't wait to have supper with you. They're both true. But bringing Jesus back to your dinner table is entirely dependent on you getting up and answering that door.

Now there's times my buzzer rings and I don't answer it. Some of you today he may have rung your buzzer and you're going to walk out and say great to have been here but I'm not getting that door.

But for all who do your life changes. There's restored intimacy. But you've got to get up out of your seat and get the door.

[39 : 23] Look what's sitting before me today. He says, I'm willing to come and eat with you and here's the Lord's table that says, I'm here.

I'm here. Will you come to me? I can't think of a better word picture to alter the opening of the sermon.

How the affluent, abundant, self-satisfied, self-reliant, self-sufficient soul is turned upside down through the humility of spirit that rises from a chair, waits in a line, arrives at the door and takes him.

The Lord's table beautifully expresses our need, your need, to acquire the spiritual benefit that only Jesus has for you. Just as it will provide intimacy and fellowship with him, this table functions as a medicinal cure for the illness that rests within us.

We digest him for if left to our own sufficiency, he can only throw us up and out. Our Heavenly Father, we come now to the Lord's table thanking you for it.

[41 : 01] We don't want to make you sick. we're tired of viewing ourselves as the ultimate providers for all that have need.

We have needs too. So as we come to you today through this meal, we pray that you would strengthen all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That having saved many, you would now sup with anyone who comes. we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.