

7 Letters to 7 Churches: Laodicea

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[0:00] And now, for one of those moments between a pastor and his congregation that will be forever immortalized. Goat cheese makes me gag. Goat cheese crumbles on a salad. Gag. Goat cheese melted on a pizza. Gag. I heard that. I'm ignoring it. Goat cheese smeared on a bagel. Gag. Goat cheese is revolting to me. Now, I know some of you may be thinking right now, you're like, oh, the poor pastor. Let's have him over and we'll try to sneak some goat cheese in on him. I'll tell you what. I have this finely tuned goat cheese radar. I can pick it up 300 yards away. There's no getting it by me. Well, that's what makes me gag. What makes you gag?

[1:10] And is it possible to make our Lord and Savior Jesus gag? And the answer to that question is yes.

This morning, we're going to see the gag reflex of our risen, radiant, and reigning Lord. He is going to vomit this church out of his mouth.

He makes him want to gag. This church of Laodicea. Something triggers his gag reflex.

It's a lukewarm, complacent church. A good-for-nothing church makes the risen, radiant, and reigning Jesus nauseous.

What is complacency? Well, complacency is like Ebenezer Scrooge before he was transformed. It's this smug self-satisfaction that thinks all is well when all is not well.

[2:22] Let your eyes fall in the middle of verse 17 in which Jesus quotes someone in this church saying, I need nothing.

Complacency. Smug satisfaction. For a Christian to say, I need nothing, is a contradiction.

And it's revolting to Jesus. It makes him want to gag. This letter isn't just a criticism of a complacent church. It is that.

And it would do us well to have ears to hear. But this letter, it also offers the cure to a complacent church. And that cure is knocking on their door.

For the last several weeks, we've been making our way through the book of Revelation. And the seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Jesus, the risen one, had appeared to John on the island of Patmos, who was there because he was exiled for witnessing to Jesus.

[3:34] And Jesus appears to him and has him dictate seven letters to these seven churches in what's now present-day Turkey. And he tells them to write these words down and then distribute them all to the seven churches so that all these churches can hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

And what we know is that each of the compromise that's tempting them is lukewarmness, complacency.

So what is Jesus going to say to this complacent, lukewarm church? This church that's indifferent to him, that's ignoring him, that's functionally put him out of the church.

What's he going to say to them? I believe the chief threat to our church today is this threat, complacency.

That we've got it all together. That all is well when not all is well. That somehow we begin to blend in, shrink back, shut up, and become indistinguishable from the non-believing culture around us.

[4:48] That's our biggest threat that we face. And Jesus, we're going to see him not only gag, we're going to see him grace.

The way we keep Jesus from gagging is to throw open the door of complete surrender. It's the only way to respond to his grace.

There are seven features to this particular letter to Laodicea. We've seen them in the other letters. It's a similar structure. There's a little bit of difference here. I want to bring us through each feature starts with C.

So let's start with feature number one, the church in Laodicea. This church that's gagging the risen, radiant, and reigning Christ.

Let me give you a little history. Maybe you don't know this. In the book of Colossians, Paul wrote that in 62 AD. In at least four places in that book, Paul references the church in Laodicea.

[6:04] Chapter 2, verse 1. Chapter 4, verse 13, 15, and 16. In fact, the letter to the Colossians, they were to read, and then they were going to send that letter 10 miles to Laodicea.

And the letter that Paul wrote to Laodicea, they were to send back 10 miles to Colossians for them to read. We don't have that letter to Laodicea, though. Makes you wonder what Paul wrote to them, doesn't it?

All this to say, by the time that Jesus is dictating this letter to John to give to these Laodiceans, it's 34 years later. Roughly one generation.

One generation to become complacent. To become lukewarm. What happened?

Well, in large part, what happened has to do with the city that it's in. Laodicea was in a river valley, but the water was awful.

[7:06] It was terrible water for them to drink. In fact, there is still this stone pipeline coming into Laodicea today, in which they pumped water in.

But Laodicea was even in this fertile valley with lousy water, they were on this crossroads of these trade routes. And so this city was a banking juggernaut.

It was a banking center. Very rich. Very rich. A lot of gold. More gold here than any other city know what to do with. In fact, just to give you a sample of it, in 60 AD, there was this earthquake in the region, and it basically raised Laodicea, as well as some of the other cities around it.

But Rome comes in and says, Laodicea, how can we help? We can fund it. We can help you rebuild it. And Laodicea said, nah, we can self-fund it. We can self-build it.

This city was loaded. People were coming from all around to do their banking in Laodicea.

[8:17] It was a banking center. And they were finding their security in the amount of gold that they had. But this is just not a banking center.

This was a fashion center. They were producing some pretty, lovely clothing. And this fertile river valley that they were in, they raised sheep in.

And these sheep produced a fine, glossy, black wool that was world-renowned. And so if you're living in Laodicea today, or you're, let's say, in Ephesus, and someone walks up in this really nice kind of black, glossy wool outfit, and you're kind of like, where's that from?

I mean, get the tag on it? It says, made in Laodicea. You're like, ooh. It's like made in Paris. Made in New York. Not made in Kenosha.

It was status. A lot of self-style going on here. They were finding identity in this textile industry.

[9:26] They were known for it. It was a lovely wool. It's just not a fashion center. It was a medical center, too. They had a medical college in Laodicea at the time.

And they specialized in ophthalmology. They were helping people see better. They were producing this eye salve, this eye gauze with phrygian powder that was used to help people see better.

They were self-healers. Man, this banking center, and so there was security of gold.

It was a fashion center, so they had this sense of identity and style and status. And it was a medical center. They could set their hope on what medicine could avail itself to.

Abundance. Affluence. It's ripe to be self-sufficient. To think that we've done all this.

[10:36] I don't know about you, but is this starting to sound a little familiar? Of all the cities, Laodicea is most like American culture.

High values on wealth. High values on clothing. High values on health. And a high value on self-sufficiency. Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps.

Get her done. Every city posed a unique compromise to the church living there. And Laodicea was posing a temptation to compromise along the lines of complacency.

Finding your security in gold. Finding your status in what you wear. Finding your, putting your hope in what some kind of medicine offers. Those are all good things in their own.

But when they become ultimate things, they're taking the place of someone else. This is why throughout these letters, we see Jesus repeatedly calling these churches to overcome.

[11:43] To conquer. To overcome the temptations to compromise. Because ultimately, compromising means putting Jesus on the outside.

And it makes him want to gag. This is the church. Now let's look at the Christ. The second feature. And Jesus has something specific he wants to say. And he wants to make sure this church knows who's saying it. So we read in 3.14.

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write the words of the amen. Can I have an amen? The words of the amen. The faithful and true witness.

The beginning of God's creation. He is the amen. Now when you hear the words amen, you're probably thinking, well I say that when I'm done praying. Amen.

[12:45] And you know what you're saying? You're saying, make that true. May it be. So be it. Jesus would use this word not at the end of a sentence, so much as at the beginning of a sentence, when he'd say something like this.

Truly, truly, I say to you. Amen, amen, I say to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you. Truly, truly. Amen, amen, I say to you. What he's saying is, this is the truth.

And so when Jesus says, these are the words of the amen, he's saying, these are the words of the final word. The last word. The true word.

And then he goes on to say that these are the words of the faithful and true witness. He's used that in 1-5 and he will use it again in 1911. But he's the ace witness.

The witness that you call in and you have complete trust in. He is, words are faithful, reliable, they're true, they're accurate. What he has to say is the definitive statement on it.

[13:56] He is the ace witness. That's why Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7, when he teaches the Sermon on the Mount, he says, as anybody hears my words, and he builds his life upon my words, it's like a guy who builds his house on the rock.

Reliable, accurate, true. He is the amen. He is the ace witness speaking to a situation.

And he's the beginning of God's creation. The Greek word is the word arche. A-R-C-H-E with a little thing over the E.

Arche. We see this word shown up in Colossians chapter 1 verse 18 where Paul writing to the Colossians says that Jesus is the beginning. And when you hear those words, the beginning of God's creation, you may be thinking, first in a sequence.

But that's not what it really means. What this arche of God's creation is, it's the fountainhead of creation. The source of all that follows after it.

[15:08] And so, understanding it that way, do you know what Jesus is really saying here? I am the creator of God's creation. It's what Paul says in Colossians 1 verse 17, all things were created through him, Jesus, and for him, Jesus.

And the Laodiceans would have had that in print in their place of worship. They had gotten that letter. Here's why this is so significant.

Jesus, as the arche of God's creation, the source of it all, he's the all-sufficient one.

He's got everything that they need. And so, when they say, I need nothing, it makes Jesus gag. I'm the arche of God's creation. How can you say that? So, this is the one speaking to this church.

[16:15] The amen, the ace witness, the arche of God's creation. And he makes a claim, the third feature, claim. It's in verse 15.

I know your works. I know your works. He's virtually said the same thing to every one of the six churches up until this point.

He's, chapter 2 verse 2, chapter 2 verse 9, chapter 2 verse 13, chapter 2 verse 19, chapter 3 verse 1, chapter 3 verse 8, and here in 315, I know your works.

I know what's going on. I see everything. My fire eyes see everything. I know you. I know your city. I know the pressures to conform and compromise that you are facing right now.

He knows it all. And he also knows what it's like to be tempted to compromise. Matthew chapter 4, Satan tempts Jesus three times to compromise.

[17:16] In Gethsemane, Jesus prays and is faithful to God's call to die for his people on the cross and not compromise.

Jesus knows. He knows what they're facing and he knows what it's like to be tempted to compromise. He knows that this church, he knows it is compromising.

He knows that this church has been making one compromise after the next for the last three decades and drifting into a comfortable complacency of cluelessness.

He knows. it's a good thing that he knows.

He knows. Our Lord, risen, radiant, and reigning is on the lookout for his church. He knows.

[18:22] He's the amen. He's the ace witness. He's the archae of creation. He knows the Laodiceans' works. They make him want to gag.

And he knows our works. That's the claim. Now, let's turn to the critique. I certainly don't want to make Jesus gag, do you?

No. Let's see what he has to say in this critique, this rebuke. And this rebuke takes up the most of this passage, verses 15, 16, and 17.

And in this, I want you to see his critique covering three things. He addresses the nauseating condition of this church. And then he goes from there and he talks about the notorious cause of that condition.

And then, if that's not enough, he addresses this not-so-obvious complication to the condition. Bear with me. Let's start off with the nauseating condition of this church.

[19:33] We read in verse 15, I know your works, you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot.

So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. Did you notice three times Jesus uses explicitly hot, cold language?

Did you notice that? He's making a point. He's appealing to something that all of these Christians in Laodicea would have been able to relate with.

Hierapolis was a city six miles away. They had these hot springs and they were very helpful medicinally. And so here was a use for hot water that got something good done.

And then in Colossians, Colossi, about ten miles away the other direction, there was this cold mountain river water that would come out cold and clean.

[20:29] And that cold water had a function in that city. It was good. It was useful. But in Laodicea, they had petrid, putrid, lukewarm water that was of no use.

And so when Jesus says, hey, you're either, neither hot nor cold, what he's saying is, I've got no use for you. water. You're useless.

This metaphor of temperature related to water is a metaphor of usefulness. And so when he says, with that you were either cold or hot, he's saying, I wish I could do something with you.

But you're good for nothing. You're finding your security in gold. You are finding your worth in your style.

You're putting your hope in this medicine or things like that. You're blending in. You're shrinking back.

[21:40] You're shutting up. You're adrift. Good for nothing. These Christians in Laodicea, they were spiritually indifferent to Jesus.

They were spiritually complacent regarding Jesus. They were lazy about Jesus. And Jesus knows their works and it makes him want to gag.

Did you see that in verse 16? So because you are lukewarm, good for nothing, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

What a picture. Literally, to vomit you out. Whatever is the cause of this is revolting to Jesus.

The lukewarmness is symptomatic of a deeper rooted issue. And so we've looked at the nauseating condition of lukewarmness, this complacency that has come from just blending into the culture.

[22:52] Now let's look at the notorious cause in verse 17. This is all part of his critique. Jesus says, for you say, that word for is important.

You're lukewarm because of this. for you say, quote, I am rich. I have prospered. I need nothing.

Now, is being rich wrong? No. 1 Timothy 6 says, it's the love of money that is the root of all evil. It looks like they were loving money a little too much. They're trying to find their security in their bank account. They were saying, I have prospered.

The idea behind that is, hey, I've seen some measure of success. In the Laodiceans' eyes, I've kind of arrived. You should see my resume. And did you notice all the I's?

[23:54] I am rich. I have prospered. I need nothing. If there was a flag to be flying over the church of Laodicea, it wouldn't be, Jesus is everything.

It would be, I need nothing. The motto of the self-sufficient. It is a manifestation of pride.

I don't need anything. I've got it all covered. And Jesus finds it nauseating. Because the archa of God's creation has everything they truly need.

We go on to read in verse 17. You say, I'm rich, I've prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

And here's the rebuke. Here's where it comes in strong. You think you're this, not realizing you're really this. And what he describes is a contradiction.

[25:15] They think that they have arrived. But Jesus is saying, you're not even close. That word wretched, it's better to paint a picture of it.

Imagine downtown Chicago, the magnificent mile, and you see all the wealth and the lights and the classy people wearing really nice clothes and people seem to be pictures of health.

That's who they thought they were. And what Jesus is saying, you're not downtown Chicago, you're Aleppo, Syria. Have you seen pictures of Aleppo, Syria?

these tan, sand-colored apartment buildings, multi-stories high, bombed out, windows burst, rebar all over the place, piles of rubble stacked, rubble stacked everywhere, plundered, desolate, ruined, that's wretched.

Jesus is saying, you're nowhere close. You are in great need. need. And the Laodiceans were thinking that, hey, we've arrived, we're impressive, we need nothing.

[26:35] And Jesus is like, no, you're wretched and pitiful. You need help. You're in great need. And then Jesus goes on to say three things.

You're poor, you're blind, you're naked. You're not rich, you're poor. And he's not talking about jingle money, he's talking about in God's economy, they are spiritually, seriously in deficit.

And they're not prospering, they're blind, they don't see. They're not seeing the world as God sees the world. They don't have the spiritual sight with which they must be seeing.

They're blind. They don't see what's going on. And they're naked. Before God, Coram Deo, they are completely exposed before Him.

Shameful nakedness. They're not well dressed. They're exposed. The difference is what the world thinks versus what God thinks.

[27:40] God's perspective. And Jesus has given both barrels. What He's saying is, you're a living contradiction. It's making me sick.

Remember John 15, 5? Matt alluded to it in his prayer. Jesus says, I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

But apart from me, you can do nothing. And these Christians in Laodicea had pulled up the flag, I need nothing.

They thought that apart from Him, they could do everything. It's not true. So Jesus is pointing out this contradiction that He can see, but they seemingly cannot see.

The notorious cause of their lukewarmness is their self-sufficiency. It's their pride.

[28:49] It's thinking that there's something when they're not. And we know that God opposes the proud. Nobody gives grace to the humble.

There's a not so obvious complication to this condition.

Jesus points it out, says it, for you say, I am rich, I have prospered, I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiful, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

You see, this condition of spiritual complacency in a church, do you know what it does? It's like glaucoma.

You can't see it. You can't see it when you're in the midst of it. You don't recognize the condition that you're in.

One of the greatest challenges that I can face pastorally is trying to help people see things that they don't have eyes to see. See? This is the critique.

[29:59] It's a nauseating condition. It's a notorious cause, self-sufficiency, and it's a not so obvious complication. They can't see it themselves.

That's why Jesus is pointing it out. So they've compromised. They've blended in. They've shut up. They're not talking anything about Jesus to anybody. They're indiscriminate or indistinguishable from the culture that they were in. And Jesus criticizes them for it.

He rebukes them. But He doesn't stay there. This criticism moves to correction in verse 18.

This is the fifth C. and it's a corrective counsel. He's so classy. Jesus is so classy. He says to them, 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 yourselves and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

[31:14] The key words that you need to see out of the gate in verse 18 is from me. I counsel you to buy from me.

It's diametrically opposed to the three eyes of verse 17. I am rich. I have prospered. I need nothing. Jesus is saying, no, no, no, no, no. You need, you need something, and you need to get it from me. What he offers, we can't produce ourselves. Only he can. And there's three items that he says we need to purchase for him.

And by the way, the buy language, he's just riffing off the Laodicean culture. He's like, hey, you know what? You've been buying over here. Stop it. Buy from me now. I've got what you need.

The first one is buy from me gold refined by fire. You're poor. I've got the gold. And he's not talking about the gold on the periodic table of the elements.

[32:16] He's talking about a different kind of gold that is extremely valuable in God's economy. If you flip over to 1 Peter, you'll see it. 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 6 and 7, we read this.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials. Verse 7, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it's tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

What is this gold that Jesus is offering refined by fire? It is a witness. It is a faith. It is a steadfast, overcoming, proven faith in Jesus that gives you the guts to speak of him even if it makes you poor. Flip over to Revelation chapter 2, verse 9, to the church in Smyrna. I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich.

Spiritually rich. They had faith that had been proven through suffering, and it's cost them.

[33:56] It's cost them wealth, and Jesus is saying, oh, you're rich in my eyes to those in Smyrna, and ironically, he's saying to those in Laodicea, you may be loaded with gold, AU, on the periodic table, but you are poor in my economy.

You see, the Laodicean banks couldn't offer these Christians what only Jesus can. He said, buy it from me.

The second item Jesus wants to sell us to give us is white garments. In Revelation, white garments are connected to holy living, and they're given to God's own.

And what makes them white is that in chapter 7, verse 10, is that they are washed white in the blood of the Lamb. these white garments, these are what cover a sinner in the eyes of God.

It forgives all of our sin. These are the very white, righteous garments of Jesus himself. By the way, this is the clothing of the citizen of the New Jerusalem.

[35:18] Jesus has it. It's not going to come from the Laodicean wool industry. It's not about being made in Laodicea.

It's being washed white by Jesus. It's being given His righteousness. They were naked.

He's got clothing. They were poor. He's got the gold. And they were blind. And He's got the eye salve, the gauze, to anoint their eyes so that they could see.

See what? Not the stock market. Not the Dow Jones in Laodicea. To see the conflict raging all around them.

To see as God sees. To see as Revelation shows us. The whole book. God pulling back the curtain and allowing us to see the spiritual conflict that is raging all around us.

[36:25] Jesus has the gauze to give us eyes to behold as things are really, truly. It gives us eyes to see through the world's false security in its riches.

It gives us eyes to see through the world's false sense of status in success and style. It helps us to see through the world's false hopes in things that can never truly heal us permanently.

Jesus says, buy these things for me. He counsels us to buy these things from him.

It's like he's a salesman in saying, I've got things for you that will blow your categories. But here's the deal. Who can buy them?

Who's got what it takes in their account to buy the gold that Jesus is offering, the garments that Jesus is offering, the gauze that Jesus is offering?

[37:38] Who can buy those things? None of us can. And that's the point. It's all by grace. It's all by his kindness.

He offers to you gold refined in the fire. He offers to you white garments and a healing gauze for you to truly see and it's all by his grace.

He himself has already bought it by his blood and now offers it to us all. You see? It's only him that can offer us these things.

Laodicea doesn't offer it and America doesn't offer it either. You see? There's more to this counsel.

In verse 19 Jesus wants to make very clear that we understand that that church and our church understand his motive for rebuking them and correcting them. You see that in verse 19?

[38:42] He says this. Those whom I love I reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent. Those whom I love I reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent.

This is all love for his church. This is Jesus loving his church. He's saying you've bought a false bill of goods now you come and buy these things from me.

This is what you truly need. Repent turn from your self sufficiency turn from all these false promises and shifting sands of culture and come be zealous for me be passionate for me receive what I have to give.

He hasn't given up on this church. He's on the verge of spitting them out but he hasn't given up on them. I love you.

The tone of this is strong but it's strong love. That's the corrective. Buy from me.

[39:46] I love you. Which brings us to the sixth feature the cure. Verse 20. The cure is knocking on their door.

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. Jesus is their cure.

That word behold it shows up all throughout the book of Revelation. See look behold Jesus is saying behold I am right there knocking.

I want to come in. Notice where Jesus is. He is outside of the church. He's on the other side of the door of this church.

They in their self sufficiently have essentially pushed him out. And what Jesus is saying is no I want in. Despite his gag reflex Jesus in grace knocks on their door.

[40:54] Did you notice in 320 he says I stand at the door knock if anyone hears my voice and opens it. Wait hear his voice. What's he saying? Verse 15 I know your works.

Verse 16 you're lukewarm. Verse 17 you're wretched and pitiful poor blind naked you don't see what I see. Verse 18 I have what you need.

I've got the gold I've got the garments I've got the gauze I got it all for you it's grace. Verse 19 I love you. I love you.

Did you hear his voice this morning? whoever hears my voice anyone who hears my voice and open the door what is this door?

Well imagine with me that this door has engraved on it two words complete surrender when you repent you open this door of complete surrender all the way to Jesus the amen the ace witness the archa of creation and he promises to come in and when he comes in you are essentially saying oh Lord come in it's all yours every room in my life is yours you're not going to let them in and walk

them by your entertainment room that's yours you're not going to walk them by your bedroom Jesus that's yours where you do your finances it's yours Jesus complete surrender if anyone hears my voice and opens that door and that door needs to get opened every day because every day you're in need of the gold of an uncompromised witness every day you are in need of garments of untarnished holiness every day you are in need of the gauze of an unobstructed vision for how things really are we're in daily need to open up this door complete surrender and he promises that if anyone opens this door to me

[43:20] I will come in I will come in and I will eat with him and he with me it's a picture of peace it's a picture of shalom it's a picture of intimate fellowship of Jesus on the inside not the outside of Jesus with his people providing for all of their needs it's a little foretaste of the marriage supper of the lamb that is to come how's that for grace how's that for grace we make him want to vomit because we reject him he wants to come in and give us what we need most himself let me in we make him gag he offers us grace isn't it beautiful isn't it amazing the closing call

I'll just sum it real quick it's what he's been closing with every one of these letters the one who overcomes the one who conquers the one who opens the door of complete surrender to me he will sit with me on my throne it's a position of honor and power I don't really get what it all means other than we're going to be reigning with Jesus which seems like it's awesome but if this is the reward it tells you how much our Lord Jesus values uncompromised faith that overcomes a complacent culture what a reward over the last several weeks we have been looking at these letters and we've been seeing week after week Jesus is our risen radiant and reigning Lord who is worthy of our lives and then we see week after week that there's some kind of challenge some kind of temptation to compromise and they abound today and week after week we've heard him call us to overcome overcome overcome trust in me keep your line of sight on me keep your heart set on me I'm your risen radiant and reigning Lord because he has overcome and he was seated at the right hand of his father on high and if he has overcome he has the grace for us to overcome this morning are you feeling like you may be making Jesus gag well you may be repent let him in because he's standing at your door in grace knocking asking to come in and to give you what you need to overcome let's pray Lord God Jesus we recognize we're in a culture where compromise abounds in a variety of ways and one of them is to drift into complacency Lord we confess our self-sufficiency individually and as a church and we welcome you in Lord Jesus in your rightful place at the center of this church you are Christ our King and it's in your name we pray Amen you one trust