

The church in Laodicea

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[0 : 00] I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom, and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, like a trumpet, saying, Write what you see in a book, and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters.

In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun, shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead, but he laid his right hand on me, saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one.

[1 : 24] I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this.

As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

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 were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, 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, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

[2 : 35] 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.

I wonder how you deal with uncertainties in life. Perhaps just saying it fills us with dread and anxiety. Enough to trigger thoughts of panic purchase at the supermarket, maybe.

[3 : 52] Or perhaps one or two of us might find the prospect of uncertainty actually rather exhilarating. But I take it at the very base level. All of us enjoy stability in life.

And we like to feel in control of our future. And we like to know that tomorrow we'll have a place to stay, food to eat and clothes to wear and so on. We like to feel secure.

Now economists love stability, don't they? Every time there's a whiff of uncertainty, the pound takes another dive. Yes, I can sense some of your eyes rolling already.

They want to know the future is secure. But in a world constantly in flux, full of political upheaval and financial uncertainty, how can we be secure?

Well, if we're to ask the world around us that question, one response might be to work towards financial independence, to become self-sufficient, so to speak.

[4 : 53] The idea is that come what may, whether it's a no-deal Brexit or any geopolitical or economic event, we could still maintain our comfortable lifestyles and not having to economize on our choice of food, what we buy, our children's education, or where we go on holidays and so on.

That there would still be plenty in our nest egg for our families and us to live on. We seek security. We'd like to be financially independent.

We want to be self-sufficient. And in Dulwich, and of course in a city like London, that wherever there's so much wealth, really, self-sufficiency seems to be the goal of so many of us today.

And indeed, 20 centuries ago, in well-to-do regions of the Roman Empire, it was much the same. They too wanted security, financial independence, self-sufficiency.

Now today, we're looking at the last of the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, and the spotlight now turns to the prosperous church of Laodicea. It's in what is known as Western Turkey today.

[6 : 07] And Revelation is a book that peels back a corner of the cosmic curtain so that we can have a glimpse of what is happening behind the scenes in the heavenly and eternal realms.

Now, as we've seen in previous weeks, in chapter 1, Jesus reveals himself to John as the glorious, eternal king of the universe. And in the middle, in chapter 12, Satan wages war against God.

And one day, in chapter 20, Satan will finally be locked up for good. But in the meantime, Satan is angry against the church because he knows his time is short and he desperately wants believers to turn away from God.

In other words, all Christians are in the middle of a massive worldwide spiritual battle. And therefore, if we call ourselves Christian, we would do well to heed the warnings here and hold on to the hope written in these pages.

But perhaps you're here today and you wouldn't necessarily call yourself a Christian. Well, if that's you, why not consider what's being said in this book? Because right from the very beginning of Revelation, in chapter 1, verse 3, God has this promise for us.

[7 : 21] Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy. That is the book of Revelation. And blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

Now, if you've been with us for the last six weeks or so and been following the talks online, you know by now that these letters to the seven churches are sort of like report cards, a spiritual health check for the church, for God's people, if you like.

But even before the start of the report, Jesus wants us, Jesus wants a reader to know that he has absolute authority in marking the report. So the first thing we ought to notice is that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is Lord. Look with me at verse 14. 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.

In a sense, Jesus starts with his qualifications. The word Amen, which is also the word Christians use to end prayers, meaning true or truth. And here, Jesus Christ is the very words of truth himself.

[8 : 38] He's the only one in history to have lived and died in perfect obedience to God and risen on the other side to be the faithful and the true witness of the gospel.

He is the beginning of God's creation. Now, that doesn't mean that Jesus was a created being. No, he shares the same title as God the Father. In chapter 1, verse 8, God the Father is known as the Alpha and the Omega.

And in the same chapter, in verse 17, Jesus is the first and the last. And then to remove any shadow of doubt, at the end of the book, in chapter 22, verse 13, Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

Same titles as God, bookending the pages, which we call Revelation. So it means that Jesus is the first resurrected from the dead. The new creation starts with Jesus Christ.

He rules over everything. And the implication is that as we read this report card, we ought to have the vision of Jesus that was read by Philipppa in our first reading. It's the glorious vision that John recorded in chapter 1, starting from verse 12.

[9 : 58] Look with me as you flip to it. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. And on turning, I saw seven golden lampstands.

And in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow.

His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace. And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand, he held seven stars.

From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun, shining in full strength. When I saw him, that's John, I fell at his feet, as though dead.

Jesus, so majestic and awesome, that the apostle John could only collapse at his feet, as if dead. In other words, Jesus is Lord.

[11 : 04] So we would be gravely mistaken if the vision of our Jesus in our hearts is baby Jesus in a manger, gentle Jesus, meek and mild. No, Jesus is Lord.

He is a majestic, powerful, awesome, big, eternal God. And that vision of Jesus is the one we ought to have as we go through this text, and as we assess our spiritual health.

Now normally report cards have a what's going well column, and a things to work on column, or something to that effect. The report cards of all the other churches have something under the what's going well column.

Even the church in Sardis, who had a reputation of being alive, but was actually dead, even they had a few people who were worthy, who have not soiled their garments.

But in this report card to the church in Laodicea, the what's going well column is completely empty. Jesus, the glorious king of kings, has zero good things to say about them.

[12 : 10] Ouch. The church in Laodicea thought they were in great shape, but actually they were failing miserably. So why were they failing, and what might be lessons for us?

Well, the second thing I'd like us to notice is that self-sufficiency is fatal. Self-sufficiency is fatal. Now look down with me at verse 15, at Jesus' report.

I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. With 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.

Now it's probably worth saying that cold or hot may not be referring to degrees of spiritual fervor. The fact that Jesus would, rather than cold, rather than lukewarm, suggest a measurement of something other than just spiritual temperature.

Rather, cold or hot probably has more to do with spiritual effectiveness, or usefulness. Now in Roman times, Laodicea was a wealthy city, but she lacked a good source of water.

[13 : 20] She was part of a tri-city network, her sister cities being Colossae and Hierapolis. Now Hierapolis was famous for hot spring baths, which was calming and soothing and medically useful.

Colossae had cold water, which was refreshing and pleasing to drink. But Laodicea had to pipe water through an aqueduct from elsewhere, miles away, filled with calcium carbonate deposits.

And because of that, by the time the water finally arrived at Laodicea, it was lukewarm and disgusting. Not warm enough for nice spas, and not good enough for a refreshing drink.

It's lost its effectiveness. It's no longer useful. And that's exactly Jesus' assessment of their spiritual health. Useless.

Leaves a bad taste in the mouth. Their works were unpalatable, sickening. Jesus was about to spit them out. In fact, spit out might be a kind way of putting it.

[14 : 24] The word vomit comes out of the Greek root of this word. Jesus was about to vomit them out, to reject with extreme disgust. The Laodicean church made the majestic, awesome King Jesus want to puke.

Now this is a massive stop sign by the side of the road. Stop! Go no further. You'll go over the cliff. Watch out.

Don't be deceived by the false promise of self-sufficiency. It's fatal. The Laodicean and spiritual state was precisely the opposite of their own assessment.

Now here's what Jesus says in verse 17. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, and blind, and naked.

They thought they were rich, but they're actually wretched and bankrupt. They thought they prospered, but in reality they're blind and they couldn't see the cliff that they're about to go over. They thought they lacked nothing.

[15 : 38] In fact, they were stark naked. Now, nakedness is an expression God used often in the Old Testament to accuse Israel or other nations for participating in idol worship, which is committing spiritual compromise.

And for us, living in this wealthy part of the world, I wonder if we're also blinded by the false promises of self-sufficiency. Have we been so focused in pursuing financial gain that we've taken Jesus out of our driving seat and put him in the passenger seat or in the back seat?

Money can buy many things and solve many problems, but gradually do we depend on money more and more and Jesus less and less? I take it that this warning of self-sufficiency doesn't exclusively apply to money either.

I take it that it applies to other areas in our lives too. Anything that gives us a sense of self-sufficiency run the risk of compromising our faith, leading us to eternal ruin.

Now, in our term card, we say that we depend on God for everything, so we make it a priority to meet and pray together. Do we attend prayer gathering because we think somehow we might own brownie points from God?

[17 : 01] That in itself is relying on ourselves, not effective. Or do we go because we really desire and depend on God for everything?

Like really, really desire to depend on God for everything? What about socially? Do we seek our sufficiency from the approval of others? Or do we rest in the assurance we already have in Christ Jesus?

Satan wants us to be self-sufficient, but don't be deceived. Beware of the false promise of self-sufficiency. It's fatal.

Now, the first half of the report card is a massive stop sign. The rest of the letter, wonderfully, is full of hope and promise. Hence, the final and main thing I'd like us to notice is that Jesus is true sufficiency.

Jesus is true sufficiency. Now, all of us have sought self-sufficiency one way or another and we've not been dependent on Jesus.

[18 : 11] Yet, the wonderful news is that Jesus invites anyone who succumbed to Satan's false promise to turn back to Jesus once more, to seek true sufficiency, in him.

Instead of buying valuables in the world, buy treasure from Jesus' marketplace. See what the Lord offers in verse 18. 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.

Laodicea, may have been infamous for their vomit inducing water but they were famous for their wealth being the banking capital in the region and she was also famous for a local black wool which was made into fashionable clothing anything from Burberry's or Versace's or Hermes or the other vans or super drives of Nike's of the day.

Laodicea was also famous for a medical school from which an eyesight repairing salve or ointment was developed. Now all these things were not bad things in themselves but what they really needed what we really need isn't our DOSH or designer wear or contact lenses but Jesus Jesus himself.

Seeking sufficiency isn't the problem. The problem is that we seek it outside of Jesus. Right quest wrong direction. In the modern age where we have instant access to nearly everything in our fingertips it can be hard to see that we're actually in desperate need for Jesus.

[19 : 56] There's Deliveroo if we're hungry or Amazon if we're pining over yet another pair of shoes or it's entertainment we want there's YouTube or Netflix. One of Satan's craftiest exceptions in this modern age is to blind us with convenience so that we no longer feel in need of anything.

No longer feeling desperate for Jesus. Convenience itself is no bad thing but don't be deceived true sufficiency true sufficiency is not in things but in Jesus alone.

So rather than spending our evenings trawling through the internet looking for fulfillment in what we buy what we wear what we watch where we go for holidays etc. Why not spend that time reading the Bible where eternal treasures are found finding sufficiency in Jesus.

Don't be deceived by self-sufficiency true sufficiency is only found in the Lord Jesus and Him alone. Our very lives depend on it.

Now if Jesus' stone warning is a stop sign verse 19 is a U-turn sign. It's a call to turn our quest for sufficiency in the right direction to come back to Jesus.

[21 : 21] Look with me at verse 19 Those whom I love I reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent. Now repentant is about seeing the folly of our self-sufficiency and seeing our great need for Jesus.

Zealousness is to share passionately about Jesus with others without feeling ashamed. And with both repentance and zealousness together it's to walk no longer in our own self-sufficiency but to trust completely in His sufficiency in everything.

It's doing things His way instead of ours. To care for the things that Jesus cares about and to hate the things that Jesus hates. It's not just cling to Jesus privately but it's to cling to Him publicly too.

And therefore zealousness and repentance are two sides of the same coin and because none of us obey God perfectly it's an ongoing keep on doing it kind of thing. How do we respond to His call?

Will we repent and be zealous for Him? Or will we ignore Him and keep on driving over the cliff? And to help us see what repentance looks like Jesus paints this moving scene in verse 20.

[22 : 47] 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. Now you may already know this but in the ancient world to eat with somebody represents a close fellowship with one another.

Thus how extraordinary then that Jesus would choose to relate to those who hear His call in this way. The majestic awesome eternal King Jesus.

A Jesus so glorious that the Apostle John could only collapse at His feet as if dead. That Jesus knocking at our door asking to dine with us. It's the invitation of the U-turn.

Now in the 2010 film The King's Speech with Colin Firth and Geoffrey Rush there was one incredible scene where the newly accessioned king and queen knocked on the door of the humble terraced suburban home of the Loges waiting to be allowed in.

And once the king and queen entered the home Mrs. Logue was caught utterly surprised jaws open rendered speechless. Yet she managed to muster this appropriate question.

[24 : 02] Will their majesties be staying to dinner? And in an even more profound way we have King Jesus himself waiting for us to open the door and let him in.

Our wretched bankrupt naked blind self sharing a meal with the majestic glorious risen King Jesus. How utterly utterly inappropriate.

Yet that's exactly why Jesus' promise is so gloriously beautiful. And in a sense the question we ought to consider asking is the same as Mrs.

Logue's. If we hear Jesus knocking at the door would we leave him outside? Or would we invite his majesty to dinner knowing Jesus is everything we need?

And I suppose it means if our sufficiency is in Jesus it should be rather liberating. It means being liberated from beating ourselves up for not getting the A-level results we wanted.

[25 : 11] It means being liberated from the stress of keeping up appearances on social media. It means being liberated from bad parenting anxiety or being liberated from the pressures of work and so on.

Because ultimately Jesus is our true sufficiency. Yet Jesus is not finished with this promise yet. That profoundly beautiful scene is followed by an extraordinary promise.

Look with me at verse 21. 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.

The picture of the gospel is a true rags to riches, pauper to ruler story. Jesus who is himself God made himself a servant for us and was perfectly obedient to God, even to death on a cross for us.

He rose to vanquish sin and death and God exalted Jesus, sitting him at God's right hand, ruling over everything. And the extraordinary promise is that if we are followers of Jesus, though we start from nothing, our destiny will follow his, conquering sin and death and we'll sit on his throne, ruling everything forever.

[26 : 36] forever. So as Satan, angry Satan wages spiritual war against us using all his weapons of geopolitical upheaval or financial uncertainty or also our comfort and our conveniences, where do we rest our sufficiency?

Look to Jesus because he's none other than the risen, majestic, awesome, conquering, glorious, eternal king of kings. Don't be deceived by Satan and his false promise of self-sufficiency.

It's fatal. But true riches and eternal sufficiency are found in Jesus and him alone. one. Third Cheap■ struggling with self-sufficiency.