

Revelation Extra: The Church at Laodecia

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[0 : 00] To the angel of the church in Laodicea, write the words of the Amen, the faithful and the 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. I need nothing. Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, 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 yourselves and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen. 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 in to 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 sit down with my father on his throne.

[1 : 09] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. I want to ask you in all of our locations to please just take a moment and pray and ask God to really speak to us this morning.

Would you do that? Let's pray together. Father, we really do need this word. And reproof and correction is for our good.

So come and Holy Spirit just do supernatural surgery in our hearts through this letter. Pull the weeds in our heart out that take us away from just a brokenness and dependence on you.

I need you to come and do what I clearly don't have the power to do. And so just speak. Help us hear. Help us see what the Spirit says to the church.

And I ask it in Jesus' name and God's people said, Amen. Amen. You may be seated. For 12 months of her life, Kirsten had no reflection at all.

[2 : 39] She wasn't a vampire. She just, like many of you, struggled with her self-image. Struggled with her physical appearance.

Struggled with her weight. This was something that she'd struggled with all her life. In her teenage years, she was plagued with eating disorders. When she went to college at UCLA, the focus of her study was looking at the expectations of beauty, particularly for women in the workplace.

She was absolutely obsessed with this deal. And where things really came to a head for her was when she got engaged. She, like many brides-to-be, started becoming obsessed with having to be a certain weight by her wedding day.

Of having to fit into that wedding dress. Of having to look perfect on that day. Can you imagine that? I mean, for all of us, can you imagine going 12 months, an entire year, without looking at yourself in the mirror? For six months leading up to her wedding, and six months after her wedding, she never saw her reflection.

[3 : 51] She covered the mirrors in her condos. She didn't look in store-side windows when she walked down the street. If somebody took a picture of her, she refused to look at the picture. All because she did not want to see herself the way she really was.

I want you to hear me this morning. I'm not being critical of her. And I'm very, very sensitive to the real struggle that many people do have with their appearance.

But when I heard that story, I thought, my goodness, she reminds me of me. In fact, she reminds me of all of us.

That is, I think we all have the same tendency that Kirsten had. We have the tendency to try to avoid looking in the mirror. Only for most of us, it's not an actual literal mirror.

It's just all kinds of other mirrors that God places in our life. So, for instance, for some of you, you cringe at the idea of having a performance evaluation because you don't want to receive any feedback at all.

[5 : 02] For some of you, you refuse to go to counseling because you don't want anybody getting involved in your issues. You avoid going to the dentist because you know he's just going to tell you 17 times to floss.

You don't want to hear that anymore. There are some people that look for churches where their ears can be tickled because they don't want to hear about sin.

Do you see what I'm saying, faith family? We do the same thing Kirsten did. It's not with actual mirrors. It's just with everything else in life.

We go to great lengths to avoid our reflection. And, of course, if we do that for very long, you know what happens, right? You start becoming disillusioned with who you really are.

You know people like this. They don't think they have an alcohol problem, but everybody else in the family does. They don't think they have an anger issue, but everybody's walking on eggshells around them.

[6 : 07] They think they're super nice. Everybody else thinks they're a jerk. They think they're good enough to get to heaven. And they have no idea how lost they really are.

Faith family, I really need you to hear this this morning. I need you to come in and hear this. It is dangerous to avoid the mirrors that God puts in our life. Because we don't want to see ourselves for how we really are.

We don't want an honest, true reflection. And that, listen, that's exactly, I mean exactly what had happened to the church at Laodicea.

Let me show it to you in the text. Look at verse 17. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.

In other words, that's your view of yourself. Not realizing that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Talk about your disillusionment.

[7 : 05] Talk about having a false image of self. Talk about not looking in the mirror lately. Laodicea thinks they're good. They're fine.

They're prospering. But God wants them to take a closer look. Which is why Jesus reveals Himself in the introduction the way He does.

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.

Now by week seven you know how this works, right? The introduction of each one of these letters is revealing Jesus in a specific way to a specific context to this specific church. So we're asking the question, what does this mean?

And then how does it relate specifically to that particular church? This idea of the amen. We understand this word, right? If you've been around church even just a little bit, you've either heard this word or you've used this word.

[8 : 10] Let's kind of warm you up a little bit, okay? Lakeville venue, I want you to participate here. In Jesus' name. Amen. That was pretty weak, all right? And all God's people said.

Amen. That's better. He is risen. Amen. You better amen that one, all right? The preacher makes a really good point and you say. Amen. You'd better.

I'll come kick you, all right? So you use this word, right? It's a common word. We use it at church. Well, the word we use it really as a statement of affirmation.

The word actually comes out of Isaiah 65 where God is revealed as the God of amen, the God of truth. Verily, verily, truly, truly, amen, amen, I say to you.

Now, again, we use the word to say, like, he is risen. Amen. That is, it is true. It is right. Yes. At the end of the day, it is a word of truth.

[9 : 12] What's Jesus saying? I am truth. Amen. All right. Good. That's good. Good, good. I am the way, the truth, the amen, and the life.

Jesus says, I am truth. Now, because he's truth, what are the implications? Look at the next phrase. The words of the amen, that is the truth, the faithful and true witness.

In other words, because he is truth, everything he says is true or truth. Do you see? He's the true witness. He's the faithful witness.

Everything he says is spot on. He's never said anything that's not accurate. When he gives a witness, it's right. Why? Because he is truth.

And what gives him the authority to be truth and speak truth? Next phrase. The beginning of God's creation. That phrase means the origin or beginner of creation.

[10:12] In other words, right here, hopefully this will be helpful. Who better to define your reality than the one who defines all reality?

Do you see how that verse works? Because he is the creator of all things. In the beginning was the word. The word was God. The word was God. He created all things.

He is therefore truth. And when he speaks, it's accurate every time. He's the amen, the true and faithful witness.

Why? Because he's the origin, the beginner of creation. Which means this, faith family, if you've zoned out, zone back in. If you want a really accurate reflection of who you are, look in the mirror of amen.

If you want a true witness as to who you really are, you have to look to Jesus. And what he says about you is spot on.

[11:13] The problem is we don't want to see our reflection. Do you understand, faith family, that because of sin, our default position, spiritually speaking, is to avoid the mirror?

Are you with me? The Bible puts it this way. Light came into the world, but we hated the light because our deeds were evil. We loved the darkness. In other words, we don't want to look. I don't want to see.

I would rather just be left to myself. This is why Proverbs says things like this. Proverbs chapter 1 verse 7. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

They don't want to hear. They don't want to listen. They don't want to see. Proverbs 15, 12. A scoffer does not like to be reproved.

Proverbs 5 verse 12 and following. And you say, how I hated discipline. My heart despised reproof. I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors.

[12:21] I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation. Don't you see? Our default position is we don't want the witness.

We don't want the reflection. Why do you think that's so? Just think for a minute. Why would we be resistant to look in the mirror?

Why would we be like Kirsten and just kind of say, I think I'm just going to kind of put the cover over it so I don't have to see? I'll give you one word. Are you ready? Pride.

Pride is why we don't look in the mirror. It's why we avoid counseling because I'm fine. Why would I need a counselor? Right? I'm good. Somebody asks you if you have anything that they can pray for you about and you're like, no, I don't really have anything.

Ask them to pray for your lying. Right? Because you're lying. You're not okay. Everything's not right.

[13:24] But have you ever said that or heard people say, no, there's really nothing in my life to pray for? Hello? Are you aware of your life at all? But what's there? What's that an expression of?

It's an expression of pride. Things are fine. I don't really need anything. We avoid the job review because after all, I work with a bunch of num-nums who wouldn't know how to evaluate me accurately anyways.

Pride, pride, pride, pride, pride. Augustine called it the mother of all sins. And this is why Jesus reveals himself the way he does to Laodicea.

I'm the amen, the true witness. I give an accurate witness to who you are and you need to hear it because of your pride.

Three things you need to write down. We know a lot about Laodicea historically, so now we're beginning to see how this relates to Laodicea. Three things jot down. Number one, they were known for their clothing industry.

[14:21] Laodicea had black sheep. I'm no biologist, but I'm pretty sure they produced black wool. I went to seminary for that, all right?

And they took this black wool and they made this garment that was very, very durable. It was almost like our denim in terms of durability. And Laodicea became famous everywhere for this garment, for this wool-like material.

Number two, not only clothing, but also medicine. Laodicea had developed an eye salve. It was really more like a powder because in the ancient Near East, you would have a lot of eye infections because of all the dust.

And so almost as common as like headache medicine, people needed eye medicine to protect them from those infections. And so because of this, Laodicea became a well-known medical community with some of the greatest medicine inventions there in Laodicea.

Here's the third thing, financial institutions. Laodicea was known for their red gold. And not only were they known for their gold, but notice on our map, do you see how Laodicea is kind of the last stop out of town as you're going east?

[15:37] Well, because of this, Laodicea became a place of exchange for currency. So if you were going out of Asia Minor into other places, you would have to exchange your money, right?

So because of that, it became a very reputable place of banking and finance. So what are the three things? Say them out loud.

Lakeville venue, you can too. Number one was clothing. Number two was their medicine. And number three was their banking. That's exactly right. So let me translate all that.

You ready? They're filthy rich. They got money coming out of their ears. They are, I mean, think of like Silicon Valley, California in our day.

I mean, one of the richest places in America. San Jose, San Francisco, that area. They have an enormous amount of money. In fact, they're so rich.

[16:34] In 17 AD, when an earthquake destroyed Laodicea and Rome tried to step in and offer them aid to rebuild. Do you know what Laodicea said? No, thank you. We'll rebuild this on our own.

Which is unheard of. That's crazy. But they didn't need anybody. They didn't need it. That's why you see in verse 17, they think they don't need anything at all.

Do you see the point I'm trying to say? What was true for them socially was also true of them spiritually. They don't feel like they need anybody.

We're self-sufficient. And evidently, this pride and independence and self-sufficiency had led them to the point where they didn't even need Jesus.

Verse 20. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come in to him and eat with him and he with me. In other words, they've shut Jesus out.

[17:34] Now, you've probably heard this verse used before in evangelism. Anybody heard that before? I guess I'm okay with that. It's not really an evangelistic verse per se.

You've probably seen the picture. Jesus is standing at the door and the doorknob is on the other side. And he's knocking on the door, looking in the window like a stalker. And so we sing, oh, how he wants to come in.

Oh, how he wants to come in. The doorknob's on the other side. If you just don't. You know, it's like that's not what Jesus is saying here at all. Right? The issue here is not one of salvation.

The issue is this. This church had become so disillusioned by their pride, they had shut Jesus out. Why would you need Jesus when you've got you? And your bank account.

[18:37] And your health. And all your relationships. And all your beauty. And all your power and authority. And all your success. And all your morality. Why in the world would you need Jesus if you're fine in yourself?

They had said to Jesus what they had said to Rome. We're fine all by ourself.

And of course, you and I would never say that to Jesus' face. But we sure would live like that. There are 10,000 crutches in your life that you are leaning on to prop yourself up rather than falling on your knees before God.

Amen? Jesus addresses this pride and self-sufficiency in a church. And now he tells us where it's going to lead.

In other words, if you're a Christian, you're a church that functionally thinks I'm fine by myself, here's what happens. Verse 15. I know your works.

[19:57] You're neither cold nor hot. Would that you either be cold or hot, so because you're lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

You've probably heard this talk before as well. How many of you have heard it taught it this way? There's those hot Christians, right? Man, they're on fire. You know, they're like the, they get in heaven first.

You know, they're just zealous and passionate. And man, they are as committed as you could possibly be. But then there's those cold Christians. And they've rejected Jesus. They're running from him. They're prodigals. Prophodigals. Maybe they're not even, maybe they're not even believers at all. And then there's those lukewarm people. You know, they're on the fence. They're one foot here, one foot there. They can't really commit. And so here's what Jesus is saying. So they will teach. Jesus would rather you be cold and just go ahead and reject him than be lukewarm and ride the fence. [20 : 55] You ever heard it taught that way? I don't think that's what is happening here at all. Number one, because it doesn't make any sense. Jesus would rather you reject him than ride the fence?

What? No, that doesn't make any sense. And number two, that's not how the Laodiceans would have received this metaphor. The Laodiceans, and if you've ever studied this church, you probably know this.

But the Laodicea is in the Lycus River Valley. Here's a map so you can picture it. It's six miles south of Areopolis. They are known for their hot springs. And their hot springs were used for healing. That's very common in these days and understood that. They're also ten miles west of Colossae. Colossae is known for their mountain cold springs, which was used for refreshment. Now, here's a picture of kind of the aqueduct system remains of how Laodicea got their water. They got their water from Areopolis and Colossae.

[22 : 03] The problem was by the time the hot water got there, it was no longer. By the time the cold water got there, it was no longer. Which meant you couldn't use it for healing.

You couldn't use it for refreshment. It was useless. It was useless. And we kind of have an idea of that. I mean, some of you really like hot drinks.

Maybe you have to have your coffee in the morning. Some of you more weird people like hot tea. I'm not one of those. But some of you like that. Maybe you boil water and you use that. Others, you know, you use cold drinks. You know, there's nothing more refreshing than a cold drink after a workout, after a basketball game, after working in the yard, whatever it may be. Some of you have zoned out. You're like, I'm thirsty. But imagine yourself at a coffee shop and you order and then they ask you that question, would you like that hot or cold?

[23 : 07] Look at them and say, I have a better idea. I'd like mine lukewarm, thank you.

I mean, they will look, what are you talking about? Nobody orders that. You see, listen, Jesus is not saying, I would rather you reject me than ride the fence.

He's saying this, a church or a Christian that functions independently from me is useless to me. Oh, that you were hot, I could use that.

Oh, that you were cold, I could use that. But Laodicea, you're just like your water, useless. Do you want to be useless to God?

I hope not. But here's how you do it. You want to know how you can be useless to God? Like this. Live your life in your own strength rather than the strength that God provides.

[24 : 13] Go to work tomorrow morning thinking you are your own provider rather than praying, God, give me this day my daily bread. Do evangelism like it depends on your skill and talent and ability rather than the spirit of God.

Be the kind of church that thinks it will accomplish the mission based on the power of its budget rather than the power of prayer. A church that has become independent from God is not useful to God.

That's a powerful word. And the reason that's a powerful word is because nothing frightens me more than to think of all that's happening at Berean.

And we think for a moment that we're doing it in our strength. Because there's a lot that can be happening. But if we think this is about us, we are not useful to God.

Here's why. Put it on the screen. Self-sufficiency is anti-Christian. It's a great place for an amen. Because it's true. Why is self-sufficiency anti-Christian?

[25 : 35] Here's why. Because you were not saved because of your works. You were saved because of His work.

It is by grace you've been saved through faith. It is, say it if you know it, not of yourselves. It's a gift from God so that no one will boast.

The whole Christian life is a dependent life. Don't you see? Independent Christian is a contradiction of terms.

There's no such thing. Our entire life as a Christian is, God, I need you. I need you every hour. I need you every day.

I need you for everything I have in life. Don't you understand? An independent Christian is as useless as a toothbrush in Tennessee. You'll get that later.

[26 : 43] If you don't know me, I'm from Tennessee. I'm allowed to say that, all right? But get that imagery. You are useless.

You're not hot. You're not cold. You're lukewarm. But not only are you useless to me, you disgust me. Look at the language of verse 16. Because you're lukewarm and either hot nor cold, I'll spit you out of my mouth.

I kind of think you know what that's talking about. Have you ever had that nauseous feeling like you ate something, you drank something, and like you just... It was all you could do to hold it down, right?

You just... You felt it coming up, and it's like, ugh. I'll never forget. I'm going to... On the basketball team in high school, going to an away game, riding in the back of the bus.

I reached down to pick up what I thought was my Mountain Dew bottle. Don't get ahead of me. And I picked up my friend's Mountain Dew bottle, right? Remember, I'm from Tennessee. And I realized once I took a drink that it wasn't Mountain Dew, it was actually my friend's spit cup for tobacco.

[27 : 55] I know. Anybody grossed out now? Like, anybody have that feeling inside like, I think I'm about to hurl?

All right? Put it down, all right? All right? That feeling that you're feeling right now is the exact same feeling God has when you think you don't need Him.

Here's as simple as I can put it. Let's put it on the screen. Pride makes God puke. I don't know why you're laughing at that, all right?

Pride makes God puke. Self-sufficiency brings divine nausea. He can't. There's no room in God's stomach for someone, some church, or some nation that thinks it doesn't need God.

Amen. This is why we need the gospel, Faith Family. It is why we need the gospel. And so now in the application of this letter, Jesus points out at least two things that I want to show us.

[29 : 15] Of how the weeds of self-sufficiency can be uprooted in our life, right? I mean, I certainly don't want to be the kind of church or person where God's just like, no.

I want to be used of God. Do you want to be used of God? Well, get over yourself. Well, how do I get over myself? How do I rid myself of these weeds of pride and self-sufficiency?

Two things. Number one is this. It won't shock you, but I'll show you it in the text. It's, you need this morning and every day to look into the gospel mirror.

You need to look into the gospel mirror. Let me show you this where I'm getting it from the text, and I think you'll see it. Where is this idea of looking into the gospel mirror?

Go to verse 17 and watch what happens. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

[30 : 17] Here's point number one. The gospel, Jesus, reveals who we are without God. So you come in your fancy clothes and all your technology and all the wealth that you've accumulated and everything that you have, and you walk up to the mirror like you are a peacock.

You are strutting and you are proud, and what you see reflected back is who you really are, which is naked and blind, and you are pitiful, and you are a sinner that deserves eternal separation from God.

That is who you are apart from Jesus Christ. I don't care how much money you got in the bank. I don't care what you have, what you deserve is separation from God forever.

But the gospel doesn't leave us there, does it? That's why you have verse 18. What then do you see in the mirror of the gospel? It's not just who you are apart from God, but then verse 18, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich.

White garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen. Salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Do you see what God is saying here?

[31 : 35] Do you see what Jesus is saying here? He's saying this. In Christ, you can be rich, not in gold, but in God. In Christ, you can be clothed, not in wool, but in righteousness.

In Christ, you can have sight, but not because of medicine, because of faith. Don't you see? You have all that you need, not in yourself, but in me.

That's the gospel. When you walk up to the mirror of the gospel, what you're going to see is, I am naked, I am blind, I don't deserve anything but hell, but, but, but.

Not of myself, but because of Christ, because of His righteousness in me. I am rich, I am clothed, I can see. It is all I need in someone else.

Because of what He's done on the cross and through the empty grave. Do you see the gospel there? I know I say, I'm like a broken record up here.

[32 : 45] But I'll just continue to say it. If you don't constantly look in the gospel mirror, your heart will become prideful, and your life will become useless. Preach, preacher.

If you don't look in the gospel mirror daily, frequently, your heart will become prideful, and your life will become useless. Because you can't stand at the gospel mirror and boast.

Let me say that another way. You can stand at the gospel mirror and boast. You're just going to boast in Jesus. But you won't be boasting in yourself. Laodicea.

So look in the gospel mirror, and here's the second thing to help weed out that self-sufficiency is listen to godly counsel. I don't have much time. Let me just show you it in the text so you know where I'm getting it.

Verse 18 talks about I counsel you. That is, you need to listen to the instruction I'm giving. Look at verse 19. To whom I love, I reprove. And discipline, which is the same idea of receiving instruction, certainly in the book of Proverbs.

[33 : 57] Be zealous and repent. Now, verse 20. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door. So it's very clear in the text this idea of listening, of hearing counsel, reproof, listening to the voice of Jesus.

Short and sweet. Not only do you need to look into the gospel mirror, you need to listen to godly counsel. Brother, sister, Lakeville venue, the problem with blind spots is you can't see them.

And we have got to open ourselves up to the counsel of God that often even comes through others. Listen to what Proverbs talks about.

Proverbs 10, verse 17. Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life. But he who rejects reproof leads others astray. Skip to Proverbs 12, verse 1.

Proverbs 12, verse 1. Whoever loves discipline. Do you love discipline? Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge. But he who hates reproof is...

[35 : 10] Say that with me. You said it, not me. Actually, the Bible says it. If you don't start loving, pursuing, and receiving the godly counsel of others in your life, you are biblically stupid.

You may think of yourself wise, but you are a fool. Why? Because God is putting mirrors in your life. You're just not looking at it.

Wisdom takes the counsel of Jesus through others, through his word, and receives that. Here's why. I'll wrap up after this.

Notice this on the screen. This is important. Because receiving instruction should lead to repentance of sin, which leads to restored fellowship.

Do you see? I will come in and eat with him and he with me. Do you see that? Restoration. Man, God, help us see this. Help us see this. Pride shuts Jesus out.

[36 : 24] But when we receive the instruction of others and of God and we're humbled, well, that being humble is an act of repenting of our sin, turning from our pride.

And what happens as a result of that? Communion with Jesus. Isn't that beautiful? I hope I said that with clarity. Communion with Jesus is coming from repentance.

And repentance is coming from receiving counsel and instruction. Well, notice how the letter ends.

Verse 21, Jesus says, 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. Simply put, here's what Jesus says. Laodicea, what you have forgotten. Berean, if this is true of you, here's what you've forgotten.

You've forgotten my kingdom. What do you mean I've forgotten the kingdom? You see, Jesus, through the greatest act of humility, namely taking up a cross, the greatest act of brokenness, taking up a cross, Philippians 2 is exalted and given a name that is above every name.

[37 : 45] Don't you see, Laodicea, the way up is down. The first in the kingdom won't be the people who bought reserved seating.

The people who will sit on thrones in the kingdom are the ones who don't even deserve to be there. And they know it. But if you will humble yourself and be broken and get over yourself, guess what? You will sit on thrones. The last, don't forget Berean, is who is first. I'll close with this.

1863, President Lincoln calls for a national day of prayer and fasting. And I want you to listen to what he says.

Just think of all the things that are raging with war and fighting and all that's taking place. And tell me if these words sound familiar. Come in close and listen.

[38 : 51] It is the duty of nations as well as mankind who owe their dependence upon the power of God to confess their sins in humble sorrow with the assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy.

Now listen to this next statement. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming grace.

Too proud to pray to the God that made us. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has grown.

But we have forgotten God. That, faith family, is the church of Laodicea.

Have we become so self-sufficient that we unknowingly have become absolutely useless? Maybe we do very well this morning to stop and take a real close look in the mirror.

[40 : 16] And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray.