

Laodicea: The City Of The Closed Door

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[0 : 00] Two words today, which I think on the basis of this passage represent the two possibilities of how you can live your life.

And the way it goes is like this. And it's either hype or hope. And you have to decide which way you want to live.

And this passage of scripture will tell you what the possibilities are in both these areas. Well, it begins with...

I want just to tell you, once upon a time I went to see Anne of Green Gables at the Royal Alec Theatre in Toronto. And the distinguished old man who was the adoptive father of a postman, who was the adoptive father of Anne of Green Gables, turned out to be somebody I'd gone to high school with.

So we had all the kids there with us and we were in this great theatre and I thought, well, I'll go out backstage afterwards and see my friend.

[1 : 07] So we watched the play and totally fell in love with this magnificent young lady with the red hair, Anne of Green Gables. Then I went out backstage afterwards to see my friend.

And backstage there was a shrieking bitch. Who was none other than Anne of Green Gables.

And it was awful. The comedown was so complete. You know, you've given your heart to this person and then you suddenly discovered what you were up against.

Well, that has a lot to do with this word. Because this word, I don't know if it is actually derived from or just related to, but the word is hypocrite.

And a hypocrite was once a totally honorable profession known as an actor.

[2 : 18] And it comes from a Greek verb meaning somebody who gives the answer. And the reason you go to the theatre is so that somebody can give you some answers with respect to some of the mysteries of life.

And so, I never cough to like it up to talk, honest. So I never think about it until I get here.

Anyway, this word actor was a perfectly honorable word until it hits the pages of the New Testament. And then it becomes a quite dishonorable word.

And people are condemned by being called hypocrites, actors, pretenders. So, when, if you saw the province this morning, you saw that Lothair Bluto, the actor who played the part of an actor, who broke through to his real self in the story, when he acted the part of Jesus in Jesus of Montreal. So, you see, he was an actor, he played an actor, and then he acted a part, and in acting that part, he broke through, presumably, to some kind of reality.

[3 : 41] The best possible interpretation of the play might say that he started out with hype and ended up with hope, from acting a part to some kind of real experience of something that was close to the meaning of life.

Now, the city is, you know, is kind of a stage, and on this stage, we all, in Shakespearean style, have our part to play.

So that I could ask each one of you up here, and you could stand up before this group, and they would be able to tell you whether you're in development, or life insurance, or law, or medicine, or teaching.

They could tell a whole lot about you just by looking at you before you even opened your mouth.

Because we all know what part we have to play in the city, and the city demands we play that part through till the death, and we learn how to do it.

It's not something we almost take on subconsciously. There are people in the city who try and express their individuality with anklets, headbands, crescents, pendants, scarves, headdresses, armlets, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, signet rings, and nose rings, and earrings.

[5 : 09] Do you know who I'm talking about? That is almost a direct quotation from the third chapter of the book of Isaiah, written 700 years before Christ.

That's another part you can play in the city. And there's always been people like that, I presume, who've tried to play that part as a kind of protest against conformity in the city. But even in our attempts to be nonconformist, we become even more conformist. There's more and more height builds up. The harder we try to escape from it, the more we're caught up in it. So what you have, if you look at this word hypocrisy, is you have the evolution of a perfectly respectable word from an actor, one who's called to answer or to respond, someone who stands up in front of you to give answers to questions, someone who develops the skills of rhetoric and oratory, someone who can really act a part. And, you know, the devastating story of Adolf Hitler, who was brought in to be an actor and a mouthpiece for the National Socialist Party.

[6 : 29] But because he acted so well, he developed a tremendous following and became the leader of it. Hype he understood and was really better at it than anybody else, perhaps, in the world at that time.

And so you get Gerald Regan, or what was his name? Ronald. Who used his skills as an actor to really do quite a significant job.

You get, you know, the stories that come out about John F. Kennedy of, you know, don't ask what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.

And he stirred up the imagination of a whole generation. And only now, you know, do we now have all sorts of, all the hype is gone and the biography is written.

And you realize that there was a lot of hype in the whole process. A hypocrite now, instead of being someone whom we respect as an actor, is someone whom we've come to despise.

[7 : 52] Someone who has learned to pretend. Someone who has lost touch with reality. Well, Jacques Ellul, in commenting on this, says that the hypocrite does not act out a comedy, but he does not know who he is.

And because of this, always shows only a false appearance that he believes to be his truth. And he deceives in being himself deceived.

But in this, he shuts himself up in a situation that he does not try to leave. In other words, he ultimately is committed to his hypocrisy.

And what Ellul points out is that the great danger about hypocrisy is that the hypocrite believes it to be the truth.

And that's the truth about himself. That's who he really is. And he plays out that part. Well, having gone through all this, I would like you to know that I am a hypocrite.

[9 : 11] The next paragraph is you too are, so don't... Don't get carried away by this. I just want to draw you in for a moment on this.

That I'm trying to give an answer I know better than I do. I'm very anxious to be well thought of.

And if hype produces it, then hype is used. I often leave here on Wednesday very depressed for fear that some of you have seen through me.

And all the hype that is used is broken down. What if you had discovered as the nightmare of my life that I was wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked?

If you could see that. Now, we have a kind of covenant that makes life in the city possible and that is that you overlook that in me and I overlook it in you and so we can all carry on with this hype simply because it's the only way we can work.

[10 : 22] There isn't there isn't any serious alternative to it. So that when you come to this question, you see, the one place where we tend to think hypocrisy starts is when you go to church.

And I've met thousands of people in my life whose integrity finds expression in saying that they won't go to church because they know who they really are and they understand that if God is real and they are who they really are then going to church would only be a pretense in which they were trying to fool God and fool other people.

So they maintain their integrity by never going to church. I ran into it late last night almost or the night before when someone told me of a person he knew as a child who drank heavily on Saturday night and prayed earnestly on Sunday morning and that that was the breaking point for him as far as church life was concerned because of the hypocrisy that was involved.

Well, I'm sure you've all done that. The difficulty with that argument is that you end up by saying I prove that I'm not a hypocrite by staying in bed on Sunday morning and I'm not sure that that proves a great deal about anything but there it is.

It's that question. Now it's in the city of Laodicea that Jesus who is the Lord of the church comes and breaks through this central problem of the Christian community.

[12 : 09] Is the Christian community a community that produces spiritual hype or does it provide hope?

Which kind of a community is it? Now you know how difficult that is. So when Jesus who is the Lord of the city and the city is committed in principle to hype as being the only way that it'll work I once had a couple of wardens in the church I had back in Toronto some years ago and one of them was a general contractor and one of them was a developer and I went to visit them both one day one in the morning and one in the afternoon and I went to the developer to see him because I knew he was broke.

he was facing the end of his business and he was near to bankruptcy and I went into his office where there were Persian carpets on the floor fresh cut flowers in beautiful vases a receptionist who had nothing to do but to make sure you were looked after when you got in there and the thing was really beautifully done and I knew that he was in real trouble financially I then went to see the general contractor who actually is the man who puts up the tall buildings in downtown Toronto and he lived in a kind of his office was in a makeshift office like a rabbit warren with no expense nothing done to make the place glamorous at all and I asked them why this contradiction and one of them says well we have to build buildings and they don't want to think of us as extravagant so we have to have this kind of an office even though they were building the Bank of Montreal building at the time and the other one said we have to collect money and therefore we must maintain this now that's just part of the covenant that exists in the city that is there and it's universal

I mean that's just it's a kind of universal phenomena but what happens you see is that and this is what Elul says is that if you're locked into it so that you're deceived by it yourself you're in real trouble and that's what needs to be broken through so when Jesus addresses the church the city of Laodicea the church in the city of Laodicea he sees the general covenant of hype by which the city lives it has a great medical school which has produced an eye ointment which is coveted throughout the Mediterranean world it is a great banking center that has enormous wealth simply because it is a banking center and being high up in the mountains it's they have some special sheep up there that produce lovely wool that produce lovely garments and so the garment industry and the banking and the medical school are something of which the Laodiceans are extremely proud and around which their economy is built

Laodicea is a twin city with Colossi so it's very much a New Testament city well Jesus comes to them as in the description he is the all men the faithful witness the beginning of God's creation and he comes and he he is the one who affirms the truth of God in the midst of the city well how does he do it well he gathers out of the city a collection of people called the church in Laodicea and he uses them to demonstrate to the rest of the city what's going on so he says to them you are neither cold nor hot you are lukewarm and I would like to spew you out of my mouth terribly critical this is Christ speaking to

[16 : 41] Laodicea the city through the church of Laodicea and to be neither cold nor hot means that you desire nothing you feel no lack you do not see your real situation before God and you aspire to nothing and hope for nothing you have arrived you are there and nothing can make its appeal to you because you already have it and that's what he says to them then then he goes on and says that you project yourself and this is the hype you project yourself in this way he said I am rich I have prospered I need nothing that's the image that is created and the image that we all try to create and try to maintain rich prosperous and needing nothing and Jesus says in fact you are wretched pitiable poor blind and naked you are without hope so committed are you to the hype which has satisfied you that underneath it all you really don't have any hope except to maintain the hype that's all you can do and so

Jesus stands as it were at the door and knocks and says this in a sense this beggar this despised and rejected person Jesus Christ stands at the door of the church of Laodicea and says come to me and I'll do something for you I'll give you gold refined by fire so that you will be rich beyond all your imagination and the city full of hype could not answer anything but you're not serious he says to them I'll give you clothes white garments to hide the shame of your nakedness from being seen

and they who are robed in in all their finery they say a shame these happen to be you know this is a \$800 soup this is a what do you mean nakedness and you know you can you can see so often I mean it because we don't see ourselves but we can see it in other people easily how hard they work to pretend something to be true that is not true and how often they use clothes to do it well Jesus says I'll give you a different kind of clothing white garments that will in fact hide you from the shame of your nakedness and I'll give you salve to anoint your eyes so that you can really see the way things really are that's Jesus saying that to them and that's what he wanted to say to the whole city of Laodicea there is something different than the hype of saying I am rich I have prospered I need nothing Jesus says you really can be rich and you really can be clothed to cover your nakedness and your eyes really can see what the truth is if you want and then he says what he's there to do

I I reprove and chasten you so be zealous and repent that Christ is there to reprove and chasten in a sense to tear away all the hype to tear through it all to reduce it to nothing in order that they can by that be chastened and in that experience they can find a place of repentance and be zealous to come to that place of repentance repentance in their life and so that you have that picture of a city that is full of hype and a beggar who stands at the door and says you know do you want gold do you want clothing do you want ice off

I am the purveyor of it Jesus points to himself and that's when you get that magnificent picture that is known all over the world where Jesus stands and says to them behold I stand at the door and knock if anyone open the door I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me and that's you see that's where you go back to Elul's definition of what hypocrisy is he believes sorry because of these because of this he always shows only a false appearance and he believes this false appearance to be his true true for him not for anybody else but for him or her he deceives in being himself deceived but in this he shuts himself up in a situation that he does not try to leave we keep the door closed from the man who says do you want to be rich I have gold beyond your imagining do you want to be clothed I have white garments that will really cover your naked

[23 : 21] I have eyes solved so you can really see what it's all about and we've closed the door and we have to open the door at considerable cost I think to us I think it's considerable cost because Christ says I mean this is such a tremendous powerful picture because there is one sense in which what Christ says could not be more condemning more totally condemning than what he says to these people you're neither hot nor cold you're lukewarm you deserve to be spewed out of my mouth you say you are rich and have prospered and need nothing and you are in fact wretched pitiable poor blind and naked he describes that with great eloquence he says that's who you are he says to us that's who we are so that nothing could be more condemning of our hypocrisy not just our individual hypocrisy but our corporate hypocrisy nothing could be more condemning but he gives us that shot to the head so to speak because his purpose is to reprove and chasten us so we will be zealous and repent and then the most gracious humble loving picture probably of Christ in the whole of the New

Testament follows on behold I stand at the door and knock if you will open the door I will come in and sup with you and you with me so he makes it very personal and he doesn't leave us with a lot of variables to consider either we maintain the height by keeping the door shut or we come to the place where opening the door we can deal with Jesus who says that he will exchange a living hope for a passing hype and that threatens us I'm sure and that's why this very eloquent picture has been so important to the

Christian church all down through history that we come under the condemnation of Christ and in the same time we come we are made the most eloquent offer and that offer we need to respond to personally when he says behold I stand at the door or knock are our hypocrisy which invariably we can identify with in somebody else and just as invariably are incapable of identifying in ourselves and and therefore when the knock comes you you have to I think you have to sort of say well what what is it and I'd like you to consider that let me say a prayer Father we thank you for this word from you under which it is your purpose to reprove and to chasten us in order that we might come to that we might be zealous and repent you show us the hollowness of our self-sufficiency and self-deception and the reality of the offer that you make to us in the person of Jesus Christ who stands at the door and knocks that we may open to him the door of our hearts and lives of our world and that he will come in he will be with us and he will sup with us and we with him and beginning from that place we will encounter the reality of our own lives in relationship to him

and the hope which only he can give grant us that by your grace we may realize that hope and we ask in his name amen