

Laodiceas Spiritual State

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to the book of Revelation in chapter 3, and we can read at verse 20. Revelations 3 and at verse 20.

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. And so on. Now we're going to continue on the theme that we had this morning, which we introduced by reminding ourselves that in every aspect of our lives, there are times when we need to pause and to reflect.

Times when we need to take stock where we have come from and where we are going. Adjustments that we have to make. And these letters were written, or this revelation was given to John concerning these churches in order to do certain things for them.

To encourage them if they needed that. To correct them if they needed that. To do whatever they had need of. So that they would readjust themselves and refocus themselves and so proceed to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 22] And in many ways when we look at these letters and these messages to these churches, Christ in a sense is doing a kind of SWOT analysis of these congregational churches.

He is looking at strengths and weaknesses and opportunities and highlighting these so that the church is equipped to go forward to serve.

And we want to look at this message to the church in Laodicea, which is the last of the messages. And perhaps enable ourselves to go through that kind of process by exposing yourselves or allowing yourselves to be exposed to the word of God as we have it written here.

And to introduce us into that, I want to see that in this passage, we have first of all, the empowering presence of Christ.

And in verse 14, we read that description of Christ as he is speaking to this church. The words of the Amen, the faithful and through witness, the beginning of God's creation.

[2 : 26] And in that description of the Lord Jesus Christ, he is someone who is absolutely reliable. He is the Amen.

He is the Yes of everything that God has said. If there is any doubt in anyone's mind concerning what God has said, the Lord Jesus Christ removes that doubt.

He himself is the truth. He is God's Yes. Yes to all that God has said. And yes to all that he has said himself.

He is reliable. And as the one who is reliable, he is an example to follow. He is the faithful and true witness.

And this primarily doesn't tell us what Christ is as he tells this church what they are. it arises out of these words that we read in the prophecy of isaiah where god tells israel that they are his witnesses and here the son of god takes that description to himself he is the faithful and true witness in other words he is the example of faithfulness to the word of god and to everything that god has sent him out to do in the world so we want a good example to follow as those who are the children of god here is the lord jesus christ and as the one who's such a good example he is the one who is the empowering presence of his church he is the beginning of god's creation he was rewarded for his faithfulness he was raised up by god and he was set at god's right hand he was empowered with the holy spirit of god he was given that power for the church and in that new creation not in the original creation but in the new creation which emerges from his resurrection and from his outpouring of the spirit of god he is in this church as the one who gives the power as the one who enables his people as the one who enables them to be the kind of witness that he was and as we move in to think of what the lord jesus christ says about this church remind ourselves that we are called to serve and we are called to be witnesses and we are called to be faithful witnesses and as those who are called to be faithful witnesses as surely as the son of god had his reward so we will have our reward also but the main thing for us to carry with us is that here we have the empowering presence of christ in the church at laodicea the second thing we notice from this passage is that we have a claim of spiritual prosperity and laodicea it was a prosperous city it was on the main trade route between the coast at ephesus into inner asia and because of that it was an important trade center and that made it a place that was filled with wealth for example when the city was destroyed by an earthquake in 8060 the city was able to be rebuilt by those who occupied it without depending on resources from anywhere else it was a wealthy city and it was a wealthy city for one or two reasons and the first of these is that it was well known for its medical school it had created an eye ointment which was hugely helpful to restore sight to those who had a particular eye disease and they were famous for that not just in laodicea itself but they exported that ointment and these medicines in order that these that cure would reach to people beyond their own boundaries they were wealthy because of that they were also wealthy because of the woolen industry that we find that we would have found in laodicea it was famous for a black glossy

[7 : 21] wool which was exported to make garments in different parts of asia and in the surrounding world and through these exports of the wool and of the garment there was considerable wealth wealth gathered in to laodicea the trade guilds associated with pagan temples so they had all of this wealth and all of these resources and all of these exports and income to the city and all of that was worked through the trade guilds at the pagan temples it was a wealthy city and the church in the wealthy city of laodicea it made this great claim to spiritual prosperity in verse 17 for you see this is what she thought of herself she said she said she said she had prospered from what was seen around her but from her own understanding of what was happening to her she was rich spiritually she had grown up to a level of spirituality where she didn't lack for anything she had everything that she had need of you are rich you have prospered and you have prospered and you have need of nothing there was nothing and no area in her experience where she could find that she had a lack or an inadequacy there was nothing about her christian experience where she would see that she had a need she had a high opinion of herself she made a great claim and that great claim was based largely on wrong theology and was based on wrong theology because of the misunderstanding that because she was wealthy it meant that god was prospering with us and if we read for example in hosea chapter 12 concerning israel and ephraim here is ephraim who has prospered and gained much and advanced much and in her own estimation there is no wrong or no sin found in her in other words she has prospered because she is faithful to god and the church in laodicea is exactly like that it has material wealth and that material wealth is to her an indication of her spiritual riches and she is gloating in that sense of being the kind of super christians in the world in which she lived a claim to spiritual prosperity and we have to see that in the world in laodicea that it was a difficult world and a complex society to live in much as her own is today but i wonder as we expose ourselves to the word of god i wonder if there are times when we come to this kind of conclusion conclusion that we make this great claim that we know much that we have much and that we have need of nothing that we have no need of enriching that we have no need of counseling that we have no need of direction

that we just have no needs and that we set ourselves up as a super kind of christian who has taken strides ahead of everyone else and consider ourselves to be so far advanced a claim to spiritual prosperity thirdly we have a declaration of spiritual bankruptcy and the faithful witness the son of god the king of the church who has created the church in whom the church find its origin he is looking down at this church that has raised itself up in this glory and when he looks down at this church he sees this church as an object in a particular way and that object is wretched and putty looking at this church through the eyes of the son of god he sees a people not who are rich not who have no who have no needs and who lack nothing but as a people who are to be pitied sometimes in different areas of life we see people like that they are to be pitied and sometimes that's the case because people fall into situations perhaps through their own fault and they are to be pitied because of the situation to which their behavior has brought them and that's how the son of god sees the church in Laodicea pitiable and pitiable because of her condition she is poor and she is blind she is not rich at all she doesn't have the riches that she thought she had that she claimed she had she doesn't have the central riches of that glorious inheritance which Christ has purchased for his people she didn't live in dependence upon the riches of Christ she was poor he is the one who being rich for our sakes became poor so that we through his poverty might be made rich but the son of god has gone through that process for the good of this church in Laodicea so that she would be rich so that she would receive the riches freely from his hand but instead she has found herself content in her materialism and she finds no place for the riches on the table of the gospel that with which she was satisfied before and that for which she has no place now she is poor and blind she cannot see the glory of Christ any longer she can no longer see the attraction of Christ and the attraction of the riches of Christ she can no longer appreciate what Christ has done for her and the core problem of the church in Laodicea boils down to her unfaithfulness to her saviour you are blind and naked and if we are to understand

that description in the light of the Old Testament teaching it tells us this about Israel the people of God they were described by God as naked when they were unfaithful to God and when they went to worship at the pagan temples they were clothed in shame because of that and they were in the eyes of God stripped bare of all that clothed her in his beauty as they went to worship at the pagan temples and as the Son of God comes to make this declaration concerning this church he comes right into the core problem that she has become unfaithful to him and she has done that through perhaps the greatest and most subtle sin of all she has done that through compromise because to be part of the trade girls at the pagan temples required at least annually that there was some kind of subscription to

Caesar and in some way to be part of what was taking place in the trade girls they would have to say in some way that Caesar is Lord and that of course was in direct conflict to the fact that Jesus is Lord but the people in Laodicea found no problem with going to engage themselves at the trade girls even though it meant compromising their faith because they saw it as something necessary for their progression and for their wealth and for their material comfort every day it was by and large acceptable to go and participate in such things and Christ in that way puts his finger on the core problem they had traded away the spiritual riches of their salvation in Christ and they had done so because they compromised with the pagan world in which they lived and I think it's fair to say that in every generation of the church there is the great temptation to compromise every generation every society has its own temptation and that great temptation to compromise is always close to the experience of the faithfulness of the church of Christ perhaps you need to ask yourself as I need to ask myself as we were exposed by the word of God this evening am I a compromiser am I prepared to compromise in every area of my life in order to participate in the activities of an ungodly world

God am I prepared to compromise my faithfulness to the son of God who became poor so that I would be rich am I prepared to compromise faithfulness to him in order to be part of an ungodly world at its own pagan temples and pagan trade guilds and the many ways in which there are ungodly activities in the world a compromise that always leads to the bankruptcy that Jesus describes here Paul speaks in writing to the Corinthians you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils it's a contradiction it cannot happen you cannot possibly live both lives it's a route and a road to the bankruptcy that they experienced here and such was the depths of that bankruptcy and such was the impact of their unfaithfulness on the son of

[20 : 11] God their savior the Lord Jesus Christ that they were on the precipice of being spiritual castaways in verse 15 we hear what the son of God says to them I will spit you out of my mouth I would that you were cold or hot see what he thinks of her behavior he is wishing in a sense that she was something that she is not and the expression used speaks to us of something that he wishes for but it's just not going to happen it's that longing on his part for her to be something that she is not and he has the ability to come right down to her experience in Laodicea to raise what he's saying to describe her condition from her everyday life and as he speaks of her being cold he speaks of the absence of that which is refreshing and renewing he speaks of that refreshing water which was absent in

Laodicea and for that reason the people of Laodicea they had to duck their water in from some other place and not too far away there was a place called Colossae and in that place there were these fresh cold water springs to which people would go for their refreshment for their renewal and to sit and to overcome their fatigue and all the distresses and stresses of life there was that opportunity and availability in Colossae and the church in Laodicea should have been the same she should have been filled with that water of the spirit concerning which Christ says that if anyone drinks of the water I shall give him he shall never thirst that refreshing power which this church in Laodicea had lost I wish you were cold

I wish you were hot that you would have that warmth about you which was also lacking in their relationship with him and in their relationship with the world in which they lived that warmth of the love of Christ and in another neighbouring place in Hierapolis it was famous for hot water springs that were therapeutic for those who were bathed in them they had properties which gave those who were unwell refreshed them and renewed them and brought them through a kind of healing process and Christ is saying to the church in Laodicea that she should have been that warmth of the love of Christ in the world in which she lived in the city in which she lived she should have that impact on the world as she should also have that refreshing influence on the people around her but instead of that she's lukewarm she's neither cold nor hot and and and and as people and

Laodicea would do as they drank the water that was found in Laodicea itself it was undrinkable it was unpalatable they would spew it out so the Son of God is drawing attention to the great danger into which their spiritual bankruptcy has brought them that they're on the precipice of being cast out of the kingdom of heaven and of losing the riches of Christ all together and we need ourselves surely to be on our guard compromise leads to the kind of emptiness that Jesus describes but compromise also leaves us open to this great charge and to this great threat and no matter how much we think that compromise is the means of witness and of effective witness not only is it a non-existent witness it's a witness of the wrong kind it brings the wrong impression of what

Christ has done it gives the wrong impression of the riches of Christ and because of that our saviour who has loved us and given himself for us he declares that we're in danger of being cast out of our relationship with him that is hanging on a spiritual thread because of our unfaithfulness to him and our compromise with the world a declaration of spiritual bankruptcy fourthly the announcement of a spiritual marketplace and we have the grace and the mercy of Christ in that despite all that he has said he is giving advice to those who belong to this church I counsel you in verse 18 to buy from me gold refined by fire and so on there is or there are spiritual transactions that they must go through in order to recover and to restore themselves they are on the edge of being thrown out of his kingdom but here is a door that opens for them to come back to where they were and for them to do that they have to purchase these commodities they have to trade in this marketplace they have to become engaged in activities which they have left behind and which perhaps are new to them they are to come and to buy and the commodities that they are to buy are commodities that fit and that suit exactly the needs that they have they are they are wretched and poor and they are to buy gold to make rich the gold the most precious of all minerals the gold that we see in the temple and in the tabernacle that covers everything that belongs to

[27 : 36] God gold is precious it's precious to God it tells us who God is and what God is and the kind of God he is and they are to buy gold for themselves and they are to buy gold that's refined by fire a gold that has gone through a purifying process a gold that has the impurities removed from it a gold which shines in which the son of God can see his image they're going to be covered with that gold which reflects the riches and glory of Christ and repeatedly in the Old Testament that gold that is refined to bring the impurities out of it is a process through which the people of God go for example in Malachi chapter 3 they go through that process of cleansing of purifying of removing the impurities so that in the presence of God they come with sacrifices that are righteous and that are accepted by God it's a painful process of purifying so that after purification the end result is acceptance before God and here is a church that has associated itself with the pagan temples here is a church that has made itself poor through that association and through this message that the

Son of God brings to them they are to go through a costly process where they're going to separate themselves from the activities of the pagan temple in order for them to enjoy the riches which is theirs in Christ Jesus and for those whose material prosperity depended on their association with these pagan temples and trade girls that was a costly process they had to lay everything aside they had to give so much up in order to have the riches through which they were going to be acceptable before Christ but then they were going to be rich that which they had lost and given up was to be restored to them the riches of Christ and tonight if I've compromised and if I become unfaithful and if I found myself far from

God the beginning of that process in returning will be a costly one and a painful one there will be associations that will have to be broken there will be relationships that will have to be questioned there will be behaviour that will have to be analysed before the word of God that is the lamp of God and all of these things mean that as I go through the process I'm going to be faced with various issues various behaviours various activities that I must say I must leave behind and Moses counted the treasure of God and the riches of the kingdom more than the treasure of

Egypt he counted the cost and there was nothing to be compared with the riches and the treasure of the kingdom of Christ buying gold we find in the fire we have to be prepared for a costly painful activity the second thing they were naked and there to buy white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen the white garments that speak of purity and of spotlessness and of being without stain the white garments that the church in sardis had and they were counted worthy by God and they would stand before him in white because they were counted worthy and here were a people who knew so much about black garments because of the way in which they had gathered wealth through their woolen industry and here they're faced in their everyday lives with a message from God that reminds them of their need to be clothed in white to separate themselves from their very activities which have removed from them the presence of Christ and give to them that faithfulness that turning not only away from what had marred their relationship but now turning in faithfulness to the

Lord Jesus Christ Israel was naked when she was worshipping in the pagan temples her return was a picture of a bride returning stainless and white and here the church in Laodicea is not only to turn away from the things that spoiled and that robbed her of her spiritual inheritance but also at turning to the God whom she had forsaken in her compromise with the world and as we look to examine ourselves in the light of what God is saying to this church as we expose ourselves to the path back from compromise we're not going to stop by turning away from the things that were wrong by turning away from the very things that sucked us in and that sucked the empowering presence of

[34 : 31] God out of our Christian experience we're not only going to turn away from them we're going to turn to the very person who is the source of that empowering presence we're going to buy garments white garments so that we will have our shame covered and clothed and the third thing is that they're going to buy eye ointment so that you may see they knew what that meant in material terms they knew what that meant for people who were blind but here they are recognized by the son of God as those who have become blind and Paul in writing to the Corinthians reminds us concerning the ungodly that the God of this world has blinded their minds and here is a church who has been blinded to the glory of

Christ to the beauty of Christ in such a way that she has lost sight of the need to be faithful to him and her indebtedness to him and she is to buy the ointment that will wipe away all the darkness and all the grit and all the things that spoil her vision of Christ so that she may see so that she may be able to understand so that she may be able to perceive exactly what the word of God is saying so that as a church which came to a wrong conclusion because of bad theology will be a church which will come at last to see things with the eyes of God's word and to see things as God himself sees them eye ointment so that they may see a process which brings us to find direct replacements for what we have lost and the grace of God is in it remarkable that no matter how far

I go no matter what I become involved in that God and Christ in addressing me and in bringing me back to where I should be is reminding me through all of the stages that everything that I've lost can be regained and replaced by following through the process the pain and the cost and every way in which adjustments have to be made that if we follow the path if we trade in the marketplace we will find exactly what will meet us in our needs and what will bring us to recovery and finally there is the invitation to renew acquaintances and when we come to the end of this letter we will see something that's glaringly obvious perhaps and that is that

Christ is on the outside of the door and that raises a huge problem because the counsel that he's giving to this church he is saying to her come by from me or we could say come by from beside me and that highlights the whole problem there are these spiritual commodities available which she has need of for a recovery they are to be found beside the son of God from close association with him but remarkably through her behavior he has been made to stand outside of the door behold I stand he says at the door and knock he is trying to find his way back into her experience he is trying to attract her attention as one whom she has put on the outside perhaps that's the most awful thing of all from your own point of view this evening that as you try to go through the process and try to find the way back and try to follow the steps that the one glaring thing that's missing is the son of

God himself and when you stop and pause and hear what he has to say you realize that you've put him on the outside and that every way in which you lived your life that it resulted in sending him away and so tonight he is knocking at the door of your heart he wants access he wants back in to your heart and to your life and he's asking you to hear his voice to be alert to what he has to say to recognize that he's at the door door I was sitting in my studio this afternoon and I kept hearing odd noises and never thought anything of it but I stopped to listen more attentively and

[40 : 45] I realized that the doorbell wasn't working but there was somebody feebly knocking at the door he had been there for some time before I realized he was there and because of the clutter in our lives as we live in this world so often the voice is speaking but we're not hearing we're not hearing because we're not listening we're listening to so many other things tonight there is this invitation which he wants to leave with you he wants to renew fellowship with you he wants if you open to him to come in with you and he will sup with you and you with him you will sit in that renewed covenant relationship where he will say this people is my people and where you will say that he is this

God is your God and surely above everything else that's what's precious and that's where true riches lie and tonight I'm not going to allow anything to stand between me and having the riches and having the presence and having the passion who will supply me with all of the spiritual commodities I need to restore my Christian experience to what it ought to be and so I hear his voice and I hear it as the one who is the great example as we said at the very beginning that if we're faithful we shall also be rewarded and that so he closes the letter I will grant to him who conquers to sit with me on my throne as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne that is a reward of his presence here in this world and there is the greater reward of being enthroned with him and by him so we leave this world and enter into the great spiritual banquet where we shall be satisfied in his presence forever more amen let us pray eternal

God we ask that you will help us to hear your voice we ask that you help us to understand where we are we acknowledge that so often we come to wrong conclusions and we find ourselves struggling along life as we do we ask you oh Lord our God to come and to lift us up to come and to speak in our ears and come and enable us to hear your voice and come and empower us so that we may do all that is necessary to recover and to have restored to us that fellowship with you and your living presence through this commune season and enabled to live our lives as those who treasure your presence more than everything else as we go through this world here is O Lord we ask and pardon as we pray for Jesus sake Amen