

## EP46 Revelation 3:14-22 P1

### *The Church at Laodicea*

#### Overall Theme: Let Me In

##### *Revelation 3:14-22*

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, now says this: 'I know your deeds, that you are now neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 'So, because you are now lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to now vomit you out of My mouth. 'Because you now say, "I am now rich, and have become wealthy, and now have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are now wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I now advise you to buy from Me gold having been refining by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may choose to clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may now see.

'Those whom I now love, I now reprove and now discipline; therefore, you are commanded to now be zealous and repent. 'Behold, I stand at the door and now knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will choose to come into him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 'He who is now overcoming, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 'He who is now having an ear, is commanded to hear what the Spirit now says to the churches.'

### Apostasy Free

What should immediately stand out to us is that unlike those in the church at Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis, these people are NOT using religion to justify anything in their life. They are not hiding behind their religious deeds, they are not comingling their faith with demonic idolatry and encouraging others to do the same, they are not lusting after the riches which religion can provide to them, and they are not manipulating others with their version of spirituality to control and dominate them. They have problems, for sure, but they have not fallen into the **apostasies of Cain, Balaam, or Korah**.

Even though they are clearly defined by the wealth and prosperity of their city, Jesus takes a markedly different approach with them because they are in essence apostasy free, in that they have not given themselves over to other lovers (spiritually speaking that is). Although they may be misinformed, misguided, and lost, they are not using His name and His faith as a platform for their *flesh*; and they are not intentionally blaspheming and denying His name. In that light, we will see an invitation and an approach that is vastly different in tone than what we saw with Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis.

**Yes, God hates religion, but He is in love with the wayward son!**

## Historical Setting

Laodicea was located due east of Ephesus. Thus, we have completed an upside-down U as we traced through these 7-cities.

This letter was written in a very straight forward businesslike manner to those who were used to straight forward business dealings. Laodicea was the banking and financial center of the region and was extremely prosperous. Its citizens were very independent and self-sufficient.

The importance of this city had everything to do with its position. It was located on the road to Ephesus in one direction and the road to Syria in the other. Thus, it naturally became a center of trade between the east and the west.

Originally, Laodicea was built as a fortress, but its "Achilles' heel" was that it had no water source of its own. It received water via an underground aqueduct and stone pipes from Colossae (located 9 miles to the east). It was also situated 6 miles from the hot springs of Hierapolis, as it had no warm water of its own. This obviously made it easy for anyone to seize the fortress; they would just cut off their water supply. So, as good capitalists, they decided that if they could not beat their enemies or hide from them, they would trade with them. As a result, Laodicea became one of the wealthiest trading cities in the world.

When a big earthquake hit the region and destroyed most of the other cities, Laodicea was re-built with no help from Rome. In fact, they refused help, and funded the construction themselves. This city was so opulent that it had two theaters: one holding 15,000 people (the ruins of which are rumored to still have near-perfect acoustics) and another holding 8,000. The seats were even engraved with the owner's names. It also had a large athletic/gladiator arena that had seats for 40,000 with space for an extra 15,000 on its north slopes. Clearly this was a wealthy and prosperous city.

As far as their chief industries, first Laodicea was a banking center and traded in currency. As travelers came from the east to the west, or vice-versa, they would exchange their money in Laodicea for other currency.

Second, they manufactured clothing. They massed produced a cheap outer garment made from soft violet-black glossy wool that was produced from the sheep in that region. Their garments and tunics were widely popular and were exported to many other regions.

Third, they had a considerable medical school and clinic, the center of which was a temple dedicated to Asclepius. The medical school was famous for two things, ointment for the ears and ointment for the eyes. These ointments were made from minerals found in hot springs which were located near the city of Hierapolis (6 miles to the north) and were considered to have significant healing properties. In fact, one of the most important medical treatments was for people with eye disease. The physicians of the area created an eye salve known as Phrygian powder; and it was exported and marketed all over the world.

In short, Laodicea had a robust economy with their version of Citicorp, Urban Outfitter, and John Hopkins Medical Center all active and highly productive.

This city was founded by Antiochus Theos of Syria and named after his wife Laodice. Laodicea comes from 2 words: Lao (meaning people) and dicea (meaning justice) or "*justice for the people.*" But what is also interesting is that Laodice was married to Antiochus Theos, whose name means "*instead of*" (Antiochus) "*God*" (Theos). Therefore, some hold that in this letter we see the marriage of the church to

the Antichrist. It is an interesting observation, but the contents, nor the tone, of the letter support this assumption. Jesus does not address anything regarding the Antichrist, nor the marriage of the church to a system that stands in complete opposition to Christ.

Anecdotal thoughts are interesting and sometimes even fun, but it is critical that we are now having ears to hear what the Spirit is now saying to the church, not what we want to presume the Spirit might be telling us. And therefore, we must stick to the text, to the context, to the **Code**, and to the **Codex**.

Jesus is quite tender with this church and addressed it with a tone quite unlike the religious churches of Ephesus and Sardis; or, for that matter, Pergamum and Thyatira which had all compromised their faith and comingled their lives with religious licentiousness. He did not deal with the church in Laodicea as if they had abandoned God, gone apostate, and married the Antichrist. **He gave them no warnings to that effect.** Therefore, we should avoid inserting ideas into the text that the Spirit has not made clear that He was and is addressing.

As a final historical note, Christianity came early to the city. Paul implies that there was a close relationship between the churches in Laodicea and Colossae, and he clearly had a deep affection for both churches.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, the city collapsed under the earthquakes and tremors which were common in this area, and today it is just one vast plain of ruins; and, in the surrounding villages, the name of Christianity is said to have been forgotten.

## The Faithful Witness

### **Revelation 3:14**

To the angel of the church of Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God, **now** says this:

The only part of this introduction that comes from the descriptions of Jesus found in **Revelation 1** is the part about Jesus being a **faithful witness**. The rest is new.<sup>2</sup> However, this triad (the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God) makes it clear that we all need to pay close attention to what Jesus now says, for He is the “**Amen**.”

### *The Amen*

Jesus is the final word spoken by God to man: “*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*”<sup>3</sup> Jesus’ words are therefore the final statement on all things. He is the **Amen**! Thus, even though those in Laodicea deem themselves healthy, self-sufficient, and capable, they need to pay close attention to this message, for their reality is quite different than what they believe.

<sup>1</sup> **Colossians 2:1, 4:13-16**

<sup>2</sup> **Revelation 1:5**

<sup>3</sup> **Hebrews 1:1-2**

*Faithful and True Witness*

Jesus calls Himself the “**faithful** and **true** witness.” As the Amen, the final word from God, He is going to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He will faithfully reveal all that He has witnessed without exaggeration or error. His words will be fair, evenhanded, impartial, and entirely righteous. In effect, He is being a faithful friend, to speak the truth in love.

*Beginning of God’s Creation*

He also says that He is “*the beginning of God’s creation.*” This phrase has tripped up many skeptics. They read it as if it were a proof text that Jesus is not God but was created by God. Those who read it in this manner have not considered the entire counsel of the Word of God. The way this is to be understood is that Jesus is the One from whom all creation came into its beginning. He is the genesis, or the acting power, of all creation. It all began in Him and with Him. The Greek word translated “beginning” is also translated in other verses as “chief,” “ruler” or “principality.” And this is consistent with what we find presented throughout the scriptures.

*John 1:1-5*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

*Colossians 1:15-17*

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Accordingly, we are to understand this phrase “*the beginning of God’s creation*” to mean that Jesus is the **Alpha**—the origin or the genesis of all things and He is supreme, chief, or first over all creation. His point is that even though they (the Laodiceans) have prospered and have experienced great success in this world, it was not a result of anything they did, it was all Him. He is the genesis of it all. In fact, all that they have endured in their lives came from His hands and His authority. They have Him to thank and to consider for all of it, and He has so much more for them.

**Neither Hot nor Cold***Revelation 3:15*

I know your deeds, that you are **now** neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.

Jesus immediately dives in and goes right to the core issue in this church. There are no compliments or casual platitudes given for this church; rather, it is time to get down to business. Drawing from the geographic surroundings, He says, "*I know your deeds: you are neither cold* (*"psuchros"* – cold to the chill, like the refreshing waters of Colossae) *nor hot* (*"zestos"* – hot to the boiling point like the healing waters of Hierapolis). If their deeds were either cold or hot, then at least they would be helpful to others. But they are neither.

If they were "*psuchros*" or cold, they would be a church who brought life and refreshment to the souls of those who are weary and parched by the suffering and struggles of this life. They would be like a cold cup of water for one who has been wondering in the hot and barren wastelands of life. If they were "*zestos*" or hot, they would bring comfort and healing to others who could come and "bathe" in the warmth of their company; and the fellowship they share would be therapeutic and healing to the soul.

His point is that they are simply not helpful and not useful in this condition to anyone but themselves. They are inert, lifeless, and passive when they should be impacting those who live in their city and all those who come and trade in this city.

## I Will Now Vomit You

### *Revelation 3:16*

So, because you are **now** lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to **now** vomit you out of My mouth.

You can only imagine how blah, nasty even, the city's water must have tasted after traveling 9-miles from its source through stone pipes and aqueducts. Those in Laodicea received their necessary hydration, but there was no delight in it. In like manner, they too are now lukewarm, disappointing, blah, and not particularly appetizing, nasty even to the point of being nauseating. There is no delight coming from their lives.

Thus, Jesus warns them and says, "*I am about to **now** vomit you out of my mouth,*"<sup>4</sup> just like what we might do with nasty water when we were expecting to drink either a nice hot cup or a glass of refreshing cold water. In short, their current spiritual condition grosses Jesus out.

### *What Does This Mean?*

We cannot really be sure since Jesus did not give us any other details, and the **Codex** does not have a connecting image of God spitting something out. Still, the idea of being spued or ejected out of the mouth of God is intentionally intended to be a gross picture that indicates somewhat of a violent, sudden, and convulsive act of disgustingness.

As we all know, vomiting is gross and extremely unpleasant. This is a powerful **WARNING**, different in context, but not unlike the **WARNINGS** He gave to Ephesus, Thyatira, Pergamum, and Sardis. The thought of being ejected violently from God's mouth is horrible. And it being something He is **now** about to do

<sup>4</sup> The Greek word "*mello*" literally, "I will" (rendered in the *present active indicative*) has the idea of expectation, or something that is about to be done; hence, the translation, "I am about to".

brings up an image of one who is heaving, ready to puke.

## Self Sufficiency & Complacency

### **Revelation 3:17**

Because you **now** say, "I am **now** rich, and have become wealthy, and **now** have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are **now** wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

Jesus, the **Alpha**, the "*beginning of the creation of God*," made all things, however, this world and all that it contains was never intended to last. In fact, even now Jesus is busy making all things new, including a new heaven and a new earth.<sup>5</sup> The beauty and wonder of this world is fading faster than we can imagine; thus, God never intended us to be conformed into the image of this world, after its temporary wonders—its wealth, fashion, and physical health.

When He provides such things, it may indeed be a blessing; but when we identify with this creation instead of with the one who created it and who provides it for our use, or when we hide behind what He gives to us, so we do not have to face reality, it grosses Him out. If we build our lives around the things of this world, we become dissatisfying to Him, and we risk Him **now** vomiting us out.

The people of Laodicea had become self-sufficient and complacent, and they did not live as if they were needy for Jesus in practically any part of their life. Their material wealth and worldly comfort undermined their ability to be in touch with their true need for their "**I AM**." They were "blessed" and prosperous. What else could they need?

Here is the rub, whether we have a lot or have a little, Jesus wants us to live needy for Him all the time. Yet, those who have little seem to be naturally more in touch with their practical need to look to Jesus to be their provision. After all, where else can they go? Whereas those who are prosperous often become complacent and convinced of their self-sufficiency. If they have a problem, they can just pay for it to go away or to be fixed. And this creates a dullness in their soul. We must always remember the exhortation which **Yahweh** gave the children of Israel right before they crossed over the Jordan River:

### **Deuteronomy 8:17-18**

Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember **Yahweh** your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Jesus captured this attitude when He said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is **now** the kingdom of heaven.*"<sup>6</sup> Yes, blessed are those who **now** know their spiritual poverty, their abject neediness for **I AM** in all things all the time, and who **now** choose to live in this frame of mind, whether they have a little or a

<sup>5</sup> **Revelation 21:1-5**

<sup>6</sup> **Matthew 5:3**

lot.

## Personal Delusion

Did you pick up the contrast between “*you say*” vs. “*you are*”? They say they are now rich, have prospered, and now need nothing at all; but they are now wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Wow! This is how disconnected with the truth we can become when we are fixated on this life and the things of this world. Their thoughts, attitudes, and measurements about themselves are all wrong. They allowed their prosperity and success to blind them from the truth. And who other than the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, their good friend who knows them so well, could address their personal delusion.

From a spiritual perspective, practical prosperity is extremely treacherous, and few seem to be able to handle it appropriately without getting sucked into its traps of self-sufficiency, self-protection, and personal delusion. Far too often prosperity breeds a sort of arrogance which results in the inability to see or understand the truth of our actual spiritual condition. It also has the impact of artificially securing us or protecting us from others, as we are not dependent upon them or anyone else for our lives.

This is the reason why most wealthy and successful people gravitate to other wealthy and successful people: they all tacitly agree to the rules. No one tries to pry into each other’s lives, and no one takes any responsibility for others. Rather, they all fellowship from the throne of their independent kingdoms of self-sufficiency. No one dares to pop the bubble of personal delusion which surrounds them.

### *Yahweh Is Both Provider & Protector*

In the **Codex**, the book of **Proverbs** captures the foolishness of this idea when it says: “*A rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own imagination.*”<sup>7</sup> **Here is the popular fiction:** wealth can protect a person from harm, from those who are less worthy, from those who want to take from them, and from any other danger or peril in this world.

This fiction often seems to be true, in terms of how this world functions, but it is a fiction, nonetheless. If Jesus decides to lift His little finger of protection from a person’s life, even just the slightest amount, their wealth, prosperity, success, and protection would instantly vanish and be blown away, regardless of how smart they are, how much education they have obtained, how hard they work, or how much they have inherited. It could all just vanish into the wind. The book of **Haggai** makes this point painfully clear.

### ***Haggai 1:5-6, 9, 11, 2:15-17***

Consider your ways! "You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes...You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, **I blow it away**...I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands...

But now, do consider from this day onward: before one stone was placed on another in the temple of

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<sup>7</sup> **Proverbs 18:11**

**Yahweh**, from that time when one came to a grain heap of twenty measures, there would be only ten; and when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there would be only twenty. **'I smote you and every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail.**

The “*beginning of the creation of God*” is the one who is in control over all His creation. Thus, it is foolish to ever think that we are safe and secure with our riches and personal prosperity. If He chooses to smite our sources of provision, they would be smitten.

Let us consider Jesus’ perspective—how He sees those in Laodicea. They are now **wretched** (deeply afflicted, miserable, dejected, or distressed in body, mind, and soul); **miserable** (pathetic, disgraceful, inciting compassion), **poor** (paupers, cringing beggars, completely without), **blind** (where everything is opaque, smoky, unclear, without light), and **naked** (nude, bare, exposed, stripped, uncovered).

I find it interesting that Jesus gives 5 descriptions of their sick condition as, according to the **Code**, 5 is the number that on-the-one-hand depicts the neediness of man, but on-the-other-hand answers that neediness with the **grace** and the provision of God. The truth is that they are completely needy, and Jesus is the answer to their sick condition. He is the **I AM!**

Whenever we cloak ourselves with the temporary things of this world, instead of cloaking ourselves with that which remains, that which comes from **Yahweh**, we become completely deceived and are unable to even see or comprehend that we have a serious problem. In effect, we build our lives upon the sand. As Jesus said, *"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and is NOT now doing them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell — and great was its fall."*<sup>8</sup>

Let’s stop right here and we will pick up in our next podcast with Jesus’ solution to their personal delusion of self-sufficiency.

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<sup>8</sup> **Matthew 7:26-27**