



When I was a kid growing up in a farm town, every so often one of the farmers would phone my folks and say, *“Harold, we are killing chickens. If you come out and help kill'em, pluck'em, you can hav'em.”* So dad, a city boy from England, would head out to the farm, with mom, to do the dastardly deed. One day, I joined them and was allowed to participate. The chickens would be caught early in the morning and then the farmer's wife would methodically remove their heads. Here's where the amazing part happened, (at least for a 10 year old boy). With their heads gone, these chickens would run around the yard like crazy. I just couldn't believe it; it just amazed me! It made my dad face turn the palest shade of grey. Once, I asked why the chickens did this. The answer was, *“They don't know they are dead yet!”*

Turn in your Bibles to Revelation 3:14 - 22. Today we are going to study a church that was like a bunch of chickens running around with their heads cut off. Why do I say that? Because, despite the fact that there was much activity in the church, Jesus said they were spiritually dead. They just didn't know they were dead yet! If my illustration made you sick to your stomach, (like it did to my dad,) well I guess it accomplished it's purpose as scripture says this church made Jesus sick in His stomach as well.

### Checking Our Mail

This is the last sermon in our series on the 7 churches in the book of Revelation. Let me give you a quick review and tell you the grades Jesus gave each church:

1. **Ephesus (+ -):** A church that worked hard, made sure that theologically they were teaching the truth BUT they had lost their First Love. Jesus told them that they needed to *recall* how they had first walked with Jesus when they were first saved and do it again.
2. **Smyrna (+ +):** A church that was very poor financially and was going through persecution, (remember the great Bishop Polycarp was burnt at the stake.) God said, *“Know I will never leave you and that not only am I proud of you, but know that you standing for me will have a profound impact on those around you.”*
3. **Pergamum (+ -):** They were a University town that had to deal with the line that *“all thinking people believe such and such.”* If you don't believe that way you are not modern and an outdated thinker. Jesus said My word is true and you need to live by it.
4. **Thyatira (+ -):** They had people in their church that were teaching wrong things and doing wrong things sexually and because they were friends, they didn't want to deal with it. Jesus said He will not let sin in a church go without judging it. So He called them to understand that Truth is more important than just being *nice*. We need to stand up for what God says is *right*.
5. **Sardis (+ -):** They were a church who had been caught up in many things going on in their community and life and had let a few committed Christians carry the load in the church. Jesus reminded them that He would come like a thief in the night and so everyone needed to act like a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
6. **Philadelphia (+ +):** Was a small poor church who wondered what kind of an impact they could make in the world. But because of (i) how they loved each other and (ii) how

they had a passion for the lost, Jesus said I will open a door of opportunity which no one can close. Last week, we said that we want to be like this church.

And now the courier has reached the final city on his journey – the City of **Laodicea**. It's sad to say He didn't leave the best for last as this church receives a (- -) grade from Jesus.

### **I. The City of Laodicea**

Laodicea was a very, very wealthy city founded by Antiochus II who named the city after his wife Laodicea. It is 45 miles south of Philadelphia. The city was strategically located where three highways converged, thus, it was highly commercial. It was well known for its banking industry, for refining gold, its manufacture of black wool, (which was the hottest fashion of the day,) sold for an astronomical amount of money and a medical school that produced an eye ointment that sold worldwide. The wealth in the city had been used to build theatres, a huge stadium, lavish public baths and fabulous shopping centers. Sound familiar? Sounds like any Canadian city. This city was so wealthy that when an earthquake almost destroyed it in 17 AD, its wealthy citizens refused help from Rome in rebuilding the city. If you were a real estate agent at the time, it wouldn't be hard to sell Laodicea; it was a great place to live. The only real negative about the place was its lack of a water supply. (We will deal with the details regarding this shortly.)

The church here in Laodicea was most likely founded by Paul. He actually wrote a letter to them that was lost (Xref. Colossians 4:16). It had a wealthy church made up of Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Revelation 3:14 – 22, *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:*

*These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

### **II. The Lord**

As you will recall, each time Jesus is to speak to a specific church, He introduces himself in a way that will help them understand better what He wants them to grasp. In Revelation 3:14, He describes Himself using 3 words:

(i) **The Amen:** This is the only time in the Bible where this term is used as a title for someone. We use the word Amen at the end of our prayers; it means ‘*so be it*’ or ‘*let what I just said come to pass.*’ It means that God has the last word and that what He says is absolutely accurate. What Jesus is saying to them is that, although what I am about to say will shock you; you need to know that it will be absolutely true.

(ii) **Faithful and True Witness:** He is saying if you didn’t catch it the first time, when I say something, it is completely true. You can count on it. But, don’t miss the subplot here. A witness is only needed at a trial. Who is on trial? The church of Laodicea.

(iii) **Ruler of God’s Creation:** It is what Colossians 1:16, 17 speaks about, “*For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*” Sometimes when someone gives us information, we would rather not hear our first comment is what makes your evaluation so right? So Jesus adds to His credentials the fact that He has stood in the midst of all time from the very beginning of creation and therefore, His evaluation of the church will be one based on the wisdom of the ages.

So he begins by saying, “*Understand that what I am about to say will be true, balanced and backed by the wisdom gained through the observation of history.* “

### III. The Church

#### (i) Who they Where

As we said before, this church was a very wealthy church, the fashionable black wool, the wonder drug eye salve and the gold smelting left everyone in that city very well off. So this church had the funds to do whatever they wanted and it would seem it was a church that was busy doing many things they felt were important. And somehow because of their standing in the financial community, this church was not being persecuted for their faith like many of the other cities we have been looking at.

There is something else about this church that struck me the other day. If you do the math you will find out that this church would have probably been full of 2nd generation Christians, whose parents first found faith, as Paul, on his missionary journeys traveled through this city. These were people who grew up in the church, in Christian homes who didn’t know what it was like to live outside of faith and the fact that God loved them and Jesus died for them was just something they had always believed. Maybe, like many of us here today, their faith came easy to them.

I am a second generation Christian. My parents came from homes where faith wasn’t taught. The passion that dad had for Jesus and his burning desire to see people who had to live without faith, find faith was powerful. His conversion at a YMCA in Winnipeg after living through WWII as an airman with no faith was a life changing and amazingly precious to him. Sometimes, I believe that it is harder to be a 2nd/3rd generation Christian because we haven’t seen the amazing change in our lifestyle upon conversion or more importantly we take for granted that God loves us, Jesus died for us and we never have had to live life without His help and care. The result can easily be like this church. We take faith for granted; its wonder doesn’t overwhelm us and so we let faith be one of the nice things in life have instead of being

that thing around which our life revolves. Can you stop for a few minutes and recall again what it cost Jesus to come and die on the cross so we could have our salvation and eternity that was secure? Think for a moment what it would be like to face the death of a loved one with no hope of seeing them again. Think what it would be like to face all that you will walk through with only your own strength.

I remember one day when Billy Graham said, *"I used to feel bad that because I grew up in a Christian home I didn't have a testimony of what God saved me out of and then I realized I had a testimony of what Jesus kept me from and that my faith was a profound gift from God that I should never take for granted."* For us who are 2nd/ 3rd/ 4th generation Christians, we need to stop and look again at how wonderful and life empowering our faith is and never take it for granted like they did in this church.

## **(ii) What God Said**

What amazes me about this church is that they didn't seem to have a clue about what God thought about their church. They were merrily going along thinking that because things seemed to be going well in their church and their life that God must be pleased with what He was seeing. They were meeting their budget, had a growing attendance and was busy doing things. But Jesus says in Revelation 3:15, 16, *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."*

Have you ever by accident picked up a cup of day old cold coffee, took a mouth full and couldn't help but spit it out. This passage goes even farther than that, for the Greek word used here is actually stronger than *'something in your mouth causing you to want to spit it out.'* It goes back to the picture of my dad watching the chicken decapitations; it made him sick down deep to his stomach.

Jesus is saying to them, *"When I watch how you are living out your faith, the depth of commitment you have how I only 'kind of fit' into your life, how you gossip and treat others, it makes me want to throw up."* Jesus doesn't say this because He wants to hurt them; his comments are meant to jar them back into reality. You see, as with us He loves us too much to leave us where we are when we are far from Him. The unloving thing would have been to leave them alone; while the loving thing was to call it the way He saw it so they could do something about it. He gives them a check list they can walk through to help them figure out what to do about this:

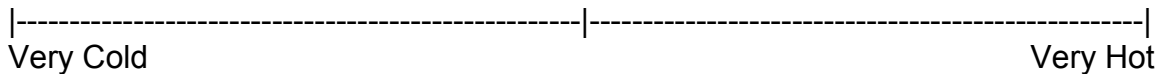
### **1. Check Your Temperature. (Revelation 3:16)**

In Jesus' comments was an allusion to something the church knew very well. As I said a while ago, the city of Laodicea had a water problem - they had none. So, using pipes they brought HOT water 6 miles through an underground aqueduct from the city of Hierapolis which had amazing hot springs and then store the water in underground cisterns much like the ones we saw in Istanbul so it could be used in their daily lives. Then they brought in COLD water through similar pipes 10 miles from the underground springs in Colossae.

The problem was that by the time the hot water traveled the 6 miles from Hierapolis, it was only lukewarm when it arrived it had lost its heat and by the time the cold water had traveled from Colossae it was lukewarm as well. If you have ever come inside after skating or hiking at 20 below you know that a lukewarm coffee doesn't cut it and if you are climbing a mountain on a hot day you know that lukewarm water disgusts you not refreshes you. Added to the problem was that, because the lukewarm water sat

in those pipes so long, often the growth of bacteria led to stomach infections that made them throw up. Jesus is saying, *“You know from your own daily life experience what lukewarm water tastes like and how dangerous it is. Folks, you need to know that is what I feel like when I look at how you are living out your faith as a church right now. You have become complacent, comfortable, caught up in a sin or if you are honest with yourself, your actions and words to others have caused your heart grow cold and it has taken the spring out of your spiritual step and the warmth out of your spiritual heart.”*

In your sermon notes you will find what I call my Cold Coffee Scale:



Cold Coffee Scale: One side is very very cold spiritually and on the other side is very very hot spiritually. If Jesus sat down with you, (maybe pulled in a couple spiritual leaders from the church,) where do you think He would place you on the scale of how cold you are spiritually or if your faith is burning with a passion which would make Jesus smile?

Look at verse 15, *“I wish you were either one or the other.”* It is interesting that He says that He would rather have us *‘cold spiritually’* than lukewarm. Because then we wouldn’t be fooling ourselves that we didn’t need to do business with God. This is where the church and you and I need to start. We need to ask as we take our spiritual temperature, if as a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Christian or a person that is struggling with some things right now, would Jesus be pleased or not?

## **2. Check Your True Bank Account. (Revelation 17, 18)**

You see they had made an error that we can so easily make today, we conclude that because we are doing ‘OK’ financially that God must feel we are OK spiritually. **One does not equal the other.** Yes, God blesses some people financially. But, know that your bank account or lack of a bank account is not a gauge of spirituality. Actually, if you are doing ok financially right now, you may be able to remember back when things were so tight that toilet paper or paper towel were a luxury and those were times, when because you had no where else to go but to the Lord that your walk with Him was deep and life filling. So don’t make the mistake the church of Laodicea made when they used their bank accounts as the gauge to how well they were doing spiritually because Jesus said they were wrong in their evaluation. Sometimes, when we are doing well financially it may be easier to depend on WHAT we have rather than WHO we have in Jesus.

## **3. Check Your Sight. (Revelation 3:17)**

With His tongue firmly in His cheek, Jesus asks a church, whose city is known worldwide for their eye salve that heals blindness, if they have looked in God’s mirror to see themselves as Jesus sees them. It is so much easier to see what is wrong in someone else’s life than our own, isn’t it? Having taken your temperature, checked your true bank account, now we need to (put on our glasses) look in the mirror and ask

that Jesus will help us see ourselves as He sees us. Are we like the church in Laodicea so convinced that what we are doing is right that we haven't stopped to see how Jesus sees us? Are we blind to what is really happening in our life?

#### **4. Check the Front Door.** (Revelation 3:19, 20)

A minister was visiting a person from his church, he knocked on the door a number of times and because he heard someone in the house he stuck his head in the door and yelled, "Is anyone home?" To which a lady yelled back, "Is that you angel?" To which he replied, "No, but I work for the same company."

The picture here is that because of our busyness, our desire to do things our way or because we are too far away from God to hear Him clearly, Jesus says I will make a house call and I will stand at the door of your life and knock. And I will keep on knocking until you finally decide to open the door so we can talk. Now, know that while this passage has been used to describe how Jesus knocks on the door of the heart for people to accept him for the first time, that this is even a stronger picture. It is a picture of Jesus knocking on the door of a church or a Christian who has shut the door, bolted the door of their life and for all intent and purposes and left Jesus out of their lives.

Here we have the Jesus who died for us, chased us until we caught him, promised us eternal life, walked with us through so many ups and downs of life knocking, pleading, standing out in the rain and begging to enter our lives again. In this instance, begging the church to let Him into 'their' church for it certainly wasn't 'His church' anymore.

This ought to send a chill down your or spine. OH GOD, PLEASE NOT ME, PLEASE NOT HERE. Look why He wants to come back into our lives in Revelation 3:20, 21, "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. 21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.*" He wants to sit down with us, as friends, at our table and do life with us and talk as friends again together. He also wants us to sit with Him, (again as friends,) on His throne in Glory with He and His Father God. What a wonderful offer!

Can I ask you after checking your temperature, your true bank account and your sight, what is keeping you from opening the front door of your life and letting Jesus really come in again, in new depth? Are you happy where you are living, especially if you don't see Fruit of the Spirit in your life? What are you hanging on to which is more precious than sitting as a friend over hot coffee with Jesus?

Most of you know of Holman Hunt's picture, "*Christ Outside the Door.*" Some may not know that when it first came out, a critic saw his painting and in a new article, wrote about how stupid it was that he had forgotten to put the door knob on the outside of the door. By doing that he missed the whole point of the picture.

The only way the door can be opened is if we open it from the inside and let Jesus back into our lives. So this morning, what has Jesus said to you as we have been looking at this passage of scripture? Has He said you are like the Philadelphian Christians - keep up the good work? Or is He saying, we need to talk, so let me in to do some business and go deeper as friends? It is your move - it is your life - open the door.

One final thought. Do you know why the coffee cups up front have lost their warmth and the cold glass of Pepsi has fallen to room temperature? It is because they are standing alone in this large room. If these coffee cups were sitting in the baptistery full of hot water, they would hold their heat much longer. The reason why God places us in denominations as Churches and in Church communities as individuals is so that we may stay warmer longer together. We need to do business as individuals with Jesus and then live together in community so we will stay on fire for Jesus.

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