

“HERE I AM! I STAND AT THE DOOR”

Revelation 3:14-22

Key Verse: 3:20

“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.”

This is the seventh and the last letter of Jesus. It was sent to the church in Laodicea. This is the only church about which Jesus had nothing good to say. The believers there were rich and prosperous, but they had a lukewarm attitude toward Christ. They had money and they didn't think they needed anything or anyone including Jesus. Jesus told them to open the door of our hearts so that he could come in and have fellowship with them. Their problems are relevant to us today. May God help us to have ears to hear Jesus!

I. TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA (14)

Look at verses 14. *“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.”* The city of Laodicea was located in the valley of Lycus, about 40 miles east of Ephesus and just south of Philadelphia. It was named after Laodice, the wife of Antiochus II (261-246 B.C.), a Seleucid king. Steeped in Greek culture and scholarship, the city was a major commercial, industrial and financial center of Asia Minor. It was famous for its banking and wool products. It had a prominent medical school. The first pharmacy in history was established here. Various ointments to treat skin disease and ENT problems were developed in Laodicea. Their eye salve was famous. Laodicea was the wealthiest of the seven cities to which the letters of Jesus were sent. Just like Philadelphia and Sardis, the city suffered from the earthquake of 17 A.D., but they didn't need financial assistance from Rome to rebuild it. With their money, they built impressive public buildings including a stadium, theaters, luxury bathhouses, and shopping centers.

However, the city had one serious problem—it did not have its own water supply. They had to bring water in through a system of aqueduct from the hot springs in Hierapolis which was six miles away. By the time the water reached the city, it was lukewarm. It was yucky to drink. It was neither hot nor refreshing cold. The lukewarm water tasted like a nauseating, repulsive drink. Without the benefit of treatment technology, the quality of the water was also bad. People suffered from all kinds of skin and eye problems. In addition, the industrial and commercial activities produced pollution even then. For example, the harmful and irresponsible discharges from the cloth-dyeing factories caused skin irritations. These problems in turn led them to invent their pharmaceutical products.

In contrast to Laodicea, two other cities in the Lycus valley had different situations. The city of Colossae which was located 11 miles from Laodicea was known for its ice-cold, refreshing water from the snow-covered peak of Mt. Cadmus. Colossae was the hometown of Philemon and his former slave Onesimus. The other city, Hierapolis,

was famous for its hot springs (Today in Turkey, this city is known as Pamukkale, meaning “cotton castle.” It is a popular tourist destination with its unique terraces of travertine, a sedimentary rock deposited by water from the hot springs). During our visit to Turkey, we enjoyed bathing in a hot spring known for its rich mineral content and medicinal effects. We also saw the ruins of a church standing on a hill. It is called the Martyrium of Philip. Church tradition says that Philip, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, came here with his daughters to proclaim the gospel and was martyred here. All of these cities, Laodicea, Colossae and Hierapolis, are mentioned in St. Paul’s letters. In his letter to the Colossians, he said, “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house” (Col 4:12-15).

How did Jesus introduce himself this time to the believers in Laodicea? He said, *“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.”* Jesus introduced himself as the Amen. We usually say “Amen” at the end of our prayers. We don’t usually consider it as a name of Jesus. But he says he is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. The Hebrew word “amen” means “to be faithful, support, confirm, so be it, or truly.” The God of truth is the God of Amen (Isa 65:16). Jesus is the truth. Jesus is the ultimate ruler of the universe. Jesus is the ultimate faithful and true witness. The Word was in the beginning. Jesus is also the Amen, the final word. He is the Alpha and the Omega. We can put our trust in him.

II. BECAUSE YOU ARE LUKEWARM (15-18)

How did Jesus rebuke the believers in Laodicea? Look at verses 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.”* So what does it mean that the church in Laodicea was lukewarm? You might ask, “What’s wrong with being lukewarm? I like my coffee or tea to be warm, not too hot or not too cold.” That may be true, but the fact that Jesus rebuked the believers for being lukewarm tells us it is not good for us to be neither hot nor cold, spiritually speaking. Jesus said, *“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!”* From this, we learn that the problem of the believers in Laodicea was that they were indifferent to Jesus. They compromised the truth by mixing together hot and cold. They had no passion for the work of God. They were complacent. They were half-hearted. They were self-sufficient. They did not take a stand of anything. Their habitual, nominal Christian life was as disgusting as the tepid water they had to put up with. Jesus said, *“So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”*

Let us heed this warning of Jesus. Have we become lukewarm toward Christ? Let us examine our personal life of faith and also our ministry. Is our personal Bible study lukewarm? Our group Bible study sometimes feels like tepid rather than refreshing. How can we change this? Is our passion for mission on fire? Are we feeling the broken

heart of Jesus to reach out to students with the gospel of Jesus? Or have we become habitual and complacent? As we prepare for the new semester ministry, let us ask these questions so that we may repent our lukewarm attitude toward Jesus.

What might have caused the believers to become lukewarm in their life of faith? Verses 17-18 give us a clue. *“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.”* Material blessings can lead a person to be self-reliant, complacent, and self-sufficient. It is easy to depend on a 20-dollar bill in our pocket than God the Almighty who is invisible. Jesus calls the wealthy Laodiceans wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. He says that we must buy gold from him so we may have the real spiritual treasure. The key words in verse 18 are “buy from me.” Living in our consumer culture, we understand Jesus’ words very well. We love to buy things, even things that we really don’t need just because they are on sale. So what does Jesus mean we should buy from him gold refined in the fire so that we can become truly rich? Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-92) was a wonderful preacher. His sermons inspired people in his time as well as today. One of his biographers (Helmut Thielicke) urged his readers, “Sell all that you have ... and buy Surgeon!” Spurgeon’s sermons were precious. But the gold we can buy from our Lord Jesus is much more precious. The sale items we buy from department stores don’t last long. They perish, spoil or fade. But the gold we get from Jesus has an eternal value. Jesus said in Matthew 13:44, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” The eternal life in the kingdom of heaven is the best bargain we will ever find on sale. It has the greatest value and it is free. Where can you find a better deal than that? Jesus also counsels us to buy the white clothes from him so that we may be clothed in his righteousness. The Laodiceans were proud of their famous eye ointment, but Jesus told them to buy spiritual salve from him so that they could see the truth.

III. HERE I AM! OPEN THE DOOR (19-22)

Look at verses 19-20. *“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 that person, and they with me.”* The Christians in Laodicea probably thought that they were very lucky compared to those in Smyrna and Philadelphia who were undergoing fiery persecutions. Likewise, we sometimes feel fortunate to live in the U.S., not in Sudan, Pakistan, or China where Christians are persecuted severely. But in verse 19, Jesus says, *“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.”* God’s purpose in discipline is not to punish, but to bring people back to him. Jesus rebuked the believers in Laodicea, not because he didn’t love them, but because he love them dearly.

So what can we do to overcome our lukewarm Christian life? How can we have a whole-hearted commitment to loving and serving our Lord Jesus? First we must be earnest. Life is not a joke. We should not take the word of Christ lightly. Then we must

repent. We must repent our self-sufficient attitude. We must repent our complacency. We must repent our materialistic ways of thinking and living. Most of all, we should come to Jesus to have a deep personal relationship with him.

Let us read verse 20. *“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 that person, and they with me.”* The Christians in Laodicea were wealthy and complacent. They did not have Christ’s presence among them. They didn’t think they needed him. They did not maintain personal relationship with Christ. Jesus stood at the door of their hearts and knocked. But they were so busy with the worldly affairs that they did not even notice that Jesus wanted to have fellowship with them. Once again we learn that material blessings and human achievements can become barriers between Christ and us, mainly because we become preoccupied with them and be indifferent to Christ. Jesus wants us to open our hearts and minds to him. He wants us to welcome him into our hearts and our lives so that we can have fellowship with him. Through our personal relationship with him, he wants us to have an exciting, totally committed life of faith.

Jesus is standing at the door of our hearts. He is knocking on the door. What should we do? We must turn off our TV’s and computers and listen carefully, so that we can hear his voice of calling and open the door for him. We need to have the Berean attitude when we study his words. We should hear his wonderful invitation, *“If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”* We always enjoy our eating fellowship with each other. Jesus wants to eat with us. He wants us to have our eating fellowship with him.

How do we know Jesus loved even the believers in Laodicea who were lukewarm toward him? Look at verse 21. *“To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.”* Jesus gave them the same promise of the kingdom of God he gave to the believers in the other churches. To those who are victorious in fighting against complacency, Jesus will give the right to sit with him on his throne, just as he overcame and sat down with the Father God on his throne. Jesus is sitting down with the Father in heaven on his throne. He finished his redemptive work on earth by giving his life on the cross. Jesus is inviting us to be with him on his throne and reign with him. Jesus says in Matthew 10:28: “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Finally, Jesus encourages us, saying, *“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches”* (22).

In today’s passage, we learned that Jesus wants us to overcome our lukewarm attitude toward him and his redemptive work by having a deep personal fellowship with him. May God help us to hear his voice of invitation, when he says to us, *“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 that person, and they with me.”*