Laodicea

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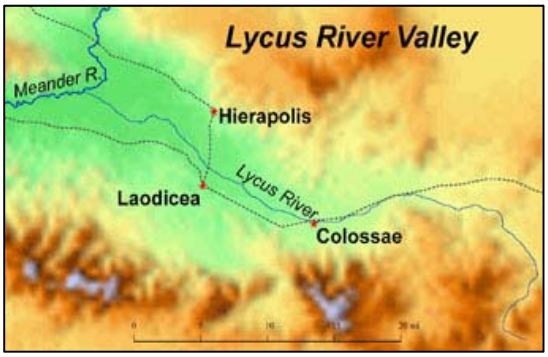
Laodicea Rev. 3:14-22

1. The Introduction

The location and the city in 75 A.D.

Laodicea is on the Lycus River. Near Laodicea lies mount Cadmus ~8000 ft. It is covered with snow in winter. It is about 10 miles north-east of Colossae and about 100 miles east of Ephesus. The Lycus River flows into the Meander River that wends its way out into the Aegean Sea.





About 4 miles out of Denizli is the ruined city of Laodicea. Laodicea was on the great Roman Road running east from Ephesus right across what is Turkey today into northern Syria, Iraq and through what is now Iran. Later it is usually called the "Silk Road" originating in China. Roman legions and great amounts of commerce travelled up and down this road.

Just above Laodicea there is a large spring. In Roman times it was called Hierapolis, but now it is called Pamukkale. Out of it flow copious amounts of very hot water with a high density of calcium carbonate dissolved in it. Even in cold weather it is a good place to have a hot bath in the open air. Over the centuries spectacular cliffs of limestone pools have been deposited. They form an amazing spectacle. Busloads of tourists visit them every day.


Ruins in Hierapolis


Pamukkale


Pamukkale

There were a number of churches in the Lycus Valley:

- Hierapolis on the north side of the Lycus River
- Laodicea on the south side of the river
- Colossae about 15 miles further up the river

About this time, the apostle John had been pastoring in Ephesus. Archippus was the pastor in Colossae and Philemon was probably part of the congregation. Papias was the main leader in Smyrna along with Polycarp.

Laodicea was founded as a city by Antiochus (one of Alexander the Great's generals) ~250 B.C. Later it became a Roman garrison town. It is called Laodicea after the wife of the first Greek governor. (There are other 'Laodiceas' in eastern Turkey, in Syria and in Lebanon.)

Today in the city are the remains of what was a Roman theatre, Roman baths and a gymnasium. There are bits of broken statues among the ruins. Originally there were many beautiful monuments.

In the first century, Laodicea minted its own coins and the inscriptions on the coins indicate that most of the people in power in the city worshipped Zeus, Apollo and the Roman Emperor. The Romans made it a free city – i.e. no taxes.

It became a very rich city on this strategic road. "Millionaires" lived and worked there – the equivalent of "the city of London" or New York's Wall Street. It was also famous for its wool industry. **Angora wool,** which is very soft and completely black, was (and still is) produced there.

Laodicea was also an assizes town so there were law courts. About 7,500 male Jews above the age of 21 lived in the town. We know this because of the amount of tax sent annually to the temple in Jerusalem before it was destroyed in 70 A.D. (the Temple Tax). The Jews were given free citizenship because they were known to be good traders and traders brought wealth. This number of Jews resembles the number living further up the Lycus River in Colossae.

In 60 A.D. much of Laodicea was destroyed in an earthquake. The Roman Emperor offered finances to rebuild the city, but the Laodicea leaders replied that they had enough resources to rebuild it themselves. With the angora wool a major garment industry had developed. We know of four different types of garments that were made and sold widely. They were a proud city! This might be commendable in material things, but it is completely disastrous if carried into the spiritual realm.

Laodicea was also a well-known **medical centre**. It had a medical school, but its main fame was medicinal products, one was the Tephra Phrygia – a tablet exported all over the Roman Empire. The tablet was crushed and mixed with olive oil and put on the eyes to heal any eye disease.

The Water Situation

Laodicea had a major disadvantage as a growing city since it had an inadequate water supply. The Lycus River didn't have sufficient water and with Colossae upstream as well as smaller villages, it was somewhat polluted. So a large aqueduct with two enclosed channels (very large pipes about a metre wide) was built from the hot springs at Hierapolis/Pamukkale to Laodicea. Some of this aqueduct is still visible today. This water emerges out of the ground steaming hot, but by the time it gets to Laodicea it is tepid – lukewarm – neither hot nor cold.

Laodicea was an interesting city. It represents the last of the seven churches. It is perhaps the church that represents the last period of church history – the state of the church before the return of the Lord Jesus.

Who planted the first church in Laodicea?

We don't know for certain, but many think it may have been Epaphras who worked in Colossae, in Laodicea and in Hierapolis (Col. 1:7-8; 4:12-13). Some have thought that Philemon lived in this affluent city. But how the church started and began to grow we don't know. We do know there was an ebbing away of their initial spirituality. Unlike the previous six churches, **this church didn't receive any commendation from the Lord**. The Laodicean church failed to contribute any transformational benefits to this urban community that appeared to live for its own glory.

Neither did they make any effort to reach out to the rural communities around the cities. There is no evidence of cultism or immoral cults in Laodicea. Their chief occupation was making money! So instead of making a strong impact on their community, **the church allowed the community to strongly influence her**. The believers in the Lord Jesus were neither hot (like water to make hot drinks in winter) nor cold (to make cold drinks in summer). They were lukewarm like the water laden with minerals they had to drink from the aqueduct. So they were double-minded. They had an interest in making money and in being disciples of the Lord Jesus. But they had no spiritual ambitions. They just sought comfort and peaceful coexistence with the society in which they lived.

So these believers lived surrounded by a great deal of material wealth, but they were experiencing great spiritual starvation. The Lord Jesus invites them to a great spiritual banquet and to eat with Him. But in effect, the believers in Laodicea said, "We don't need your help!!" This church thought they "had it all" both spiritually and in material wealth and all the time they were getting wealthier.

In effect, they said, "Whatever we have gained, we will keep and we don't need anything." So the believers were very self-absorbed, very pliable and very prosperous. It was a city of compromise.

A Broad Interpretation of the Seven Churches as seven periods in church history in many parts of the world

In Jewish symbolism seven represents fullness and completeness. So, from a spiritual point of view, each of the "seven churches" has its own characteristics. All churches in all times and cultures have one or more of these seven spiritual characteristics. So the Lord Jesus is speaking to all churches in all cultures and in all times. You may ask why not Antioch or Rome or Corinth or Jerusalem? They were all famous churches. But these seven churches in Revelation are seen as representative of all churches everywhere at some time. This section of Revelation ends with, ***"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*** (Rev. 3:22)

The Seven Periods

a) The Ephesian Period

Paul spent two full years in Ephesus and God did some amazing miracles through him during that time. (Acts 19 esp. v. 11-20) Apollos was converted there. Timothy was a pastor there and so was John the apostle who lived there after the Jewish/Roman War of 70 A.D.

So an "Ephesian-type" church has a great start – often with significant leaders, but this is followed by a cooling of love, devotion and zeal. So there is the warning of the danger of abandoning their first love. After any great period of revival there is the danger of **a waning love**.

b) The "Smyrna-type" church

The Lord Jesus had no fault to find with this type of church. It is all praise and encouragement. The "Smyrnan-type" church is a church experiencing terrible suffering with much martyrdom. In the first three centuries A.D. the church experienced terrible oppression by the Roman Empire. In many parts of the world today many churches are going through periods or waves of martyrdoms. The Lord Jesus is speaking to these churches now just as He did then.

c) The "Pergamum-type" church

"You are now seated where Satan's throne is." To the world, this type of church was dominated by the doctrine of Balaam – the exaltation of the clergy dressed in gold and purple – church leaders leading man into battle (the Crusades were a result of this type of church). It is a period when the church identifies very much with the world.

d) The Thyatira period of a church

This is when the church is ruled by a 'Jezebel'. (See more of a description of this period in Rev 17.) The church becomes a harlot committing adultery with the nations. She likes chains of gold, the colour red and she lives like a queen. But at the same time there is a faithful remnant – servants of the Lord Jesus – who are put to death. History estimates over 50 million Europeans were killed during the murderous period of the pre-Reformation and the Reformation Wars. This includes the Teutonic Knights advance of "the church" by their swords into Eastern Europe.

e) The Sardis period

This was the period when there were believers in Europe *"who have not defiled their garments"*. I can think of people like Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, John Knox in Scotland and some of the great Cambridge martyrs who were burnt at the stake – Thomas Bilney (from Trinity Hall) – Latimer who preached in Cambridge and was a student at Queens College.

At that time there were in Cambridge Tyndale (studied at Oxford and then moved to Cambridge), Jaye, Barnes, Coverdale, Frith, Cranmer, Ridley, Rowland Taylor, Thomas Arthur and Matthew Park most of whom were martyred.

Many great leaders stood up to preach the Gospel fearlessly later in English history – especially in the great awakening: the Wesleys, Whitfield, Count Zinzendorf of the Moravians and a host of others who clearly preached a Gospel of the Lord Jesus.

f) The Philadelphia period

I think of the Western missionary movement – people like William Carey, Adoniram Judson and Hudson Taylor. In China there were people like Watchman Nee and John Sung. In India there were people like Sadhu Sundar Singh and Bakht Sing. There were also many faithful witnesses in many African and South American countries. These are examples of those who believed that the Lord Jesus had ***"set before them and open door"***.

g) The Model of the Laodicean Church

This is when the church says, ***"I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing"***. But the Lord Jesus says, ***"You don't know you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked"***. It is easy to see some churches fit this description. They have today's equivalent of the "gold, silver and accumulation of wealth of the world". This model of the church can't say, ***"Silver and gold have I none"***. So it can't say, ***"In the name of the Lord Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk"***. (Acts 3:6) The Lord Jesus is outside this church and is knocking on the door. The model of the Laodicean church is a church at ease in a period of wealth, affluence and apostasy.

These periods/models often co-exist in time and in every church group/denomination through the ages. In every church there are "Ephesian believers" whose love is cooling off. There are many churches in the world today where "Smyrnan believers" are paying for their devotion to the Lord Jesus with their lives. In our churches in Cambridge there are "Thyatiran believers" or "Sardisian believers". There are also "Laodicean believers". The Lord Jesus is walking among His churches – up and down the rows of seats. He says to us today, ***"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."***

Many see the "Western churches" in North America and northern Protestant Europe in a sort of Laodicean period for the last 40 to 50 years. This is clearly a generalisation!

So there were seven churches and seven conditions existed in them. These conditions still exist today. The great question is, 'are we being faithful to our calling (Rev. 1:20)? Is our lampstand burning bright?'

- Sardis, Laodicea — The world seems to be triumphant, but the light hasn't completely gone out. It is merely flickering.
- Ephesus: The light is still shining, but the flame is getting smaller.
- Pergamum, Thyatira — The light is shining, but it is not as bright as it could be.
- Smyrna, Philadelphia — The church is being a light bearer and the believers are loyal to the Lord Jesus.

The attacks on our light come from three directions:

- ✓ **Persecution**: the sword, wild animals, the state, imprisonment, false accusations etc.
- ✓ **The pressure of "Emperor" worship** – conformity to the state culture
- ✓ **The power of our carnal natures** joining in with the immorality within the culture to secure social position and the "pleasures of life".

The Characteristics of the Church in Laodicea

This is the saddest of the seven letters, but it is the letter of exquisite beauty. It has a wonderful tenderness. You sense the heartbeat of the Lord Jesus and His yearning for these deceived believers.

- **<u>It was an indifferent church</u>** it was indifferent to the truth and the teaching of God through the Bible. For the Laodicean "believers" one religion was about as good as another. I don't think they saw Christianity as a 'bad' religion and it had some value as a sort of civic betterment programme – a sort of "pay your debts and don't kill anyone" teaching. It was a sort of "love your mother" attitude and similar sentimentality that many in current English culture suppose to be the Christian faith. But this form of Christianity makes God sick! His judgement is terrible, ***"If only you were hot or cold!"*** He would prefer "cold" Christianity to the sort He found in Laodicea. It had failed to find in the Lord Jesus the source of its true wealth, splendour and vision. Of the seven churches, this church was in even worse condition than Sardis where there was at least a glimmer of hope.

  Psalm 95:10: ***"For forty years I loathed that generation*** (the generation that had fled Egypt under the leadership of Moses) and said, ***"They are people who go astray in their hearts and they have not known My ways."***

  Psalm 2:4 speaks of God's derision, ***"He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision."***

  The Laodicean church-goers were untaught and most didn't care. What do "believers" believe? What do "believers" stand for? What is the goal of the church? In fact they thought you could worship money/wealth and the Lord Jesus at the same time.

  Cambridge has many overseas visitors. Can they tell the "believers" here in this city from everyone else? A lukewarm church lives in "the world". It is part of the world and worships and loves the same things as the world. It is very difficult to tell the difference between the "believers" and the "non-believers".

  So the Laodicean church-goers, in their tepid state – neither hot nor cold – thought it unseemly to be enthusiastic about God and the Lord Jesus. His work of atonement for us on the Cross seemed to their cultivated tastes to be offensive. We British are keen and excited about all sorts of sports. Many are enthusiastic about entertainment, art, literature and many other things, but when it comes to the Lord Jesus and His people, there is often no zeal, no enthusiasm and nothing but a deadness of soul and spirit.

  How passionate the world is! Business is in earnest about making a profit. The military is in earnest in its training and having the best equipment. Athletes are passionate about training for the Olympics. But we, the followers of the Lord Jesus, are often apathetic, lethargic and lukewarm! As followers of the Lord Jesus there should be a fire in our bones, a moving in our souls, a stirring in our hearts. Love for God is the total commitment of our lives, but so often it is not! We are tepid and lukewarm.

- **<u>They were self-deceived</u>**

They said	**The Lord Jesus said**
We are rich.	You are poor.
We have increased in goods to make us happy.	You are wretched and miserable.
We have need of nothing.	You are blind and naked.

In the ancient world, the shame of nakedness was **the ultimate humiliation**. (2 Sam. 10:4; Is. 20:4; Ezek. 16:37-39; Nahum 3:5) Culturally this is still true in the Middle East. To be clothed in fine clothing was to receive high honour (Dan. 5:29; Esther 6:6-11; Gen. 41:42). And finally, they were blind. Only the Lord Jesus gives real vision. (Jn. 9:29)

They were filled with self-content and self-satisfaction so they said, "We don't need God, we don't need other people, we don't need anything. We are complete and sufficient in ourselves." Humanism is very common today – "We can do it without God .... We don't need to pray, we don't need to repent, we don't need to ask and we don't need anything. We are self-sufficient and self-content." This was the spirit of the Laodicean church.

- **<u>The Lord Jesus was outside the church – knocking</u>!**

  In so many churches the Lord Jesus has been outside knocking for a long time! When He came the first time, the Jewish people as a whole refused to accept Him. ***"He came to His own and His own people did not receive Him."*** (Jn. 1:1). With great sadness He asked, ***" … when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith in the earth?"*** (Lk. 18:8) Will there be any one of us "His people" watching and waiting with eager expectation for His coming? Will there be any "believers", any true devotion at the appearing of the Lord Jesus? Sadly, He is often on the outside of "His people" and not on the inside.

  "If any man hears My voice ... I will come in to him. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne." The letter is addressed to all members of the church, but it is always an appeal to the heart of an individual. ***"He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*** The appeal is always singular. Faith is individual. It is to ***"him who overcomes"***. ***"If you*** (singular) ***are faithful to death, I will give you*** (singular) ***the crown of life."***

  So every believer in the Lord Jesus must hear. We can't hide under the cover of being a regular church-goer or "I attended Sunday School when I was a child." Our faith only functions at an individual level. When we hear a preacher or listen to others in the home group, we must each ask, "What are You asking me to do Lord Jesus in response to what You are saying to me". Hearing is always individual. We only eat for ourselves. We only sleep for ourselves and we can only repent for ourselves and trust God for ourselves.

  What is the state of our church – of the churches in Cambridge and the UK? Are we like Smyrna or Laodicea? In the sight of the Lord Jesus, these Laodicean believers were wretched, pitiable, poor, naked and blind. The believers were enjoying some earthly wealth, but they were really in deep spiritual poverty. Their city manufactured the best garments from their special wool and clothed everyone, but in the eyes of the Lord they were shamefully naked. Their shame was seen by Him and by the whole host of heaven.

  The city was very famous for its doctors and the medicines they produced had no equal. So many people went to Laodicea seeking for healing. But the city's believers were the blindest of them all, for they had no spiritual sight. They couldn't behold the face of the Lord Jesus and be satisfied in Him. They were in serious need of spiritual medicine so they would be able to recognise the eternal values of heaven. We read in 2 Peter 1:9, ***"For whoever lacks these qualities is so near-sighted that he is blind and short-sighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins."***

  They had no consciousness of sin. They were like the rich young man going into the temple to pray. They would never identify themselves with the man who said, ***"O God, be merciful to me, a sinner."*** (Lk. 18:13)

  They had "arrived"! "We are all good people in Laodicea." But in fact they were tepid, flabby, half-hearted, limp and always ready to compromise. You can't do anything with such people. It is little wonder that the Lord Jesus said in effect, "I can't stand you!" Nowhere else in the Bible does God reveal such a feeling. The Lord Jesus wasn't angry with them. He was disgusted with them, nauseated to the point that He said, ***"I will spew you out of my mouth"***. Their religious belief was a sham – a pretence filled with hypocrisy.

2. The Offer the Lord Jesus makes to individual Laodicean believers

The descriptive words of the Lord Jesus arrest our attention concerning Himself, ***"These are the words of the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of God's Creation."*** This is a

declaration of **His essential glory**. The contrast is obvious. To these believers in Laodicea, in their abject failure, He addresses Himself as the One who is incapable of failure. The statement has three parts: **the positive**, **the relative** and **a declaration of authority**. ***"For all the promises of God find their Yes/Amen in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory."*** (2 Cor. 1:20)

The Positive:

- **He is the Amen**

The root meaning of the word in Hebrew is 'building up' or 'nursing'. But the derived meaning in the 1st century A.D. is 'that of which something has been established'. So to say "Amen" expresses the truth of the absolute stability and correctness of everything God has thought and spoken. As a title, it equals the statement the Lord Jesus made, ***"I am the truth"***. (Jn. 11:6) He didn't ever say, "I teach the truth" or "I declare the truth" or "I explain the truth". **The Lord Jesus <u>is</u> "the Amen"** – complete truth expressed in person. So the "Amen" spoke with absolute truth. (Is. 65:16)

- **He is the Faithful and True Witness**

The Lord Jesus spoke with fidelity as a true witness and so He spoke with authority. What He says is completely true. The believers in Laodicea had failed in their witness and the Lord Jesus comes to them as the Faithful and True Witness. In Col. 1:15 and 18 (that Laodicean believers would have read) it says, ***"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn*** (i.e. heir) ***of all creation. And He is the Head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be pre-eminent."***

If we ever question the deity of the Lord Jesus, it is good to go back and ponder this great declaration. It is impossible to keep this statement in the Bible if the Lord Jesus is anything less than God. So the Lord Jesus has a rank infinitely beyond that of a prophet, a priest or a king. He speaks with the authority of **the Cause** and **the Creator of all**.

The Lord Jesus went on to say, ***"I know your works!"*** But there was nothing to praise or commend! There was nothing good at all – just numb, frozen believers. True love is like fire. (See the Song of Solomon 8:6) As we experience it, our hearts begin to burn within us. (Lk. 24:32) The Lord Jesus assessed the situation and pronounced the verdict: neither hot or cold, but lukewarm indifference. He gave a warning as to what would happen if there was no change, ***"I will spew you out of my mouth"***.

The Laodicean believers were materially rich, unlike the believers in Smyrna who knew they were poor. See Hosea 12:8, ***"Surely I am rich; I have found wealth for myself"***. So these believers were in appalling ignorance. In fact they were beggars in desperate need.

The Lord Jesus likens Himself to a merchant in a crowded market where buying and selling went on from dawn to dusk. His voice was loud and clear, "I counsel you to buy from Me". He might command, but He would much rather persuade. ***"Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."*** (Is. 55:1)

He had **"gold"** of the very highest quality. If they would take it, it would give them wealth beyond all telling. He would also give them **white raiment**, for to be naked was the ultimate humiliation in an honour shame society. Here are two examples:

- Gen. 41:42 – the story of Joseph taken out of prison in rags by the Pharaoh who clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a chain about his neck.
- Is. 20:4 – the other extreme – the King of Assyria will lead away captives, ***"Both young and old, naked and barefoot with their buttocks uncovered – the nakedness of Egypt"***.

The Lord Jesus would give light to the blind who were living in darkness. His healing was so much better than the local eye salve! Would they come and buy His wares while the market was still open? Only the Lord Jesus gives real sight. (Jn. 9:25)

"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline." (Rev. 3:19) There are few more tender words of God's love for us His erring believers! ***"For the Lord reproves him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."*** (Prov. 3:12) God loves when others would loathe. Not even the tepid can quench His love! He said, ***"The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I come from God"***. (Jn. 16:27)

But these believers had become conceited because of their material wealth and the independence it gave them. If they did have ears to hear, how they must have blushed with shame at the extreme poverty of their wealth, at their blindness to all His splendour and at the blasphemy of their own declaration of independence. The Lord Jesus speaks to them both as the Cause of Creation and the Ruler of Creation. He speaks as the Source of Infinite Energy – the originator of all God's creation.

He speaks no words of commendation to these believers. He describes the church as it thinks it is and then He reveals in detail **the actual truth about the church**. He sees the church not by external issues (the outside) but by its real spirit – what it really is in contrast to what it thinks it is. He strips these believers of all their false appearance that was deceiving many, but couldn't deceive Him.

Then the Lord Jesus offered them alternative values to these worldly superficialities, ***"I counsel you to buy from Me, gold refined in the fire, so that you may be rich and white garments so you may clothe yourselves and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see."*** (Rev. 3:18)

These believers needed gold, white garments and eye salve. The bankers, clothing manufacturers and medical ophthalmologists couldn't supply these necessities. The deep tragedy for these believers, as for so many churches everywhere, was that the only real Provider had been left outside.

The **believers** needed **gold – an emblem of faith** (1 Pet. 1:6-7) ***"In this you rejoice, though … for a little while … you have been grieved by various trials so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ."***

The believers also needed **white raiment** – the emblem of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus that can only be received by wearing white robes washed in "the Blood of the Lamb". In Rev. 7:14 we read, ***"They have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb."***

Finally, the church needed **eye salve** to heal their spiritual vision. So the Lord Jesus called for genuine repentance. (Rev. 3:19) His love and His grace can never be fully appropriated without it. One of the most serious attacks in the 20th century and now in the 21st century is the danger of preaching forgiveness without repentance.

But these believers still had a chance to repent, for the Lord Jesus still loved them (v. 9). He has already presented Himself as the origin of God's creation and as such, He is able to go right down into the chaotic abyss of this church's failure and make them anew. He had already done this for the universe. The question is: ***"If she will?"***

The Lord Jesus has already introduced Himself as the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness. He sees exactly what is going on in Laodicea and declares the exact truth of the situation. He says He is the source of the entire creation (Rev. 21:6; 22:13; 1 Jn. 1:1; Col. 1:15-18). So He says to the believers in Laodicea, "You need to become new creations. You need new hearts. Come to me and be saved."

So although He is thoroughly disgusted with this church, there is great grace here. He doesn't say, 'I **will** spit you out of my mouth', but '**I am about to** spew you out of my mouth'. He is still waiting still watching. He is severe in His condemnation, but also tender, kind, loving and gracious. He has great compassion because in reality they were pitiable and wretched like cringing beggars – blind and naked. He doesn't command, He counsels them to buy from Him gold refined in the fire, white garments and eye salve.

What is salvation? It is to have the right possessions. Is. 55:1-3 says***, "Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come buy and eat. Come; buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread and labour***

for what does not satisfy. Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear and come to me; hear that your soul may live and I will make with you an everlasting covenant."

- **The Thrones – i**n this passage there are two thrones:
  - ✓ **God the Father's throne**: the throne of the Omnipotent God, invisible, unapproachable, eternal and totally awesome. (Rev. 4:1-6)
  - ✓ **Another throne: the throne of the Lord Jesus**, Our Brother, made in ***"the likeness of men"*** (i.e. like us). In the future He will be our visible King, our reigning Lord and all the power of the Kingdom is in His hands.

The Old Testament foundation of this promise is Ps. 110:11 ***"Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool."*** This promise is given to the Messiah – the Lord Jesus. Amazingly He has stretched it to us His disciples. ***"Truly, I say to you, in the world, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on 12 thrones …."*** (Mt. 19:28)

This is the last and crowning promise for the Overcomer – that is all of us! God will grant each victor the right to sit with the Lord Jesus on His throne. This is amazing – better than being on His left or His right in the Kingdom. (Mt. 20:21) We will share His throne even as He shares His Father's throne for He is the supreme Overcomer who is **now already** seated on the throne of the Ultimate Majesty.

On the evening before His death the Lord Jesus said, ***"Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*** (Jn. 16:33) He was exalted, ***"To the right hand of the Majesty on high."*** (Heb. 1:3) John writes of ***"the throne of God and of the Lamb."*** (Rev. 22:11) Paul asked the Corinthian believers, ***"Don't you know that the saints*** (i.e. believers) ***shall judge the world?"*** (1 Cor. 6:2) This is fulfilled in Rev. 20:4, ***"Then I saw thrones and seated on them those to whom authority to judge was committed."***

All this is totally amazing! The highest place in eternity is within the reach of us who are among the lowest. Please don't think that when we get to glory we will rest in eternal idleness! No, not at all, we will have an intense and thrilling life. 1 Cor. 6:3 says we shall judge angels! We know only very little of what is in store for us, His people. But it will be truly wonderful beyond compare.

3. The Lord Jesus is Knocking at the Door

The Lord Jesus has a commendation for each church except Laodicea. For them He only has words of rebuke and condemnation. There is no approval at all! Yet it is in this context we find Rev. 3:20!

At rare times in Saudi Arabia in the burning hot desert (over 50° C) after a sudden rainfall, you can find just a small area of blue/purple irises growing! They are there just a day or two then they die, but the seeds remain for the future. It is astonishingly beautiful!

So in the midst of the sad judgement on these wayward disciples, there are these amazingly tender, gentle, loving words. We see the Lord Jesus close to us, just outside our door. It is an astonishing reality that He comes so near, even knocking on our door. In Rev. 1:12-16 there is a description of the Lord Jesus as John saw Him. It is an amazing description of the Lord Jesus in glory. He is the one who is standing at the door and knocking.

At one time they had the Lord Jesus at the centre of their church, but when they became rich, they felt no need of Him and pushed Him outside! But what can any church do without the Lord Jesus? There are many churches today trying to exist without His presence. The result is always despair and disillusionment. Even so, the Lord Jesus stands at the door and knocks. Can we discern His voice from all the deafening noises of the world? When He is invited in, He will sit with you and show you how very hungry you really are. He will open your blind eyes so you will recognise Him in all His glory. ***"The one who conquers, I will grant to him to sit with Me on My throne …."*** What a huge contrast to, ***"I will spit you out of My mouth."*** **This is the most beautiful of all the promises** He gave to the seven churches. He promised a tree of life, a crown of life, a white stone, authority over the nations, white garments, but the very best of all is the reward of sitting with the Lord Jesus on His throne! He eagerly seeks to share His right to the throne with those who will allow Him to reign in their hearts.

Rom. 8:7 says, ***" … and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him so that we may be glorified with Him."***

After the Lord Jesus died on the Cross, He was buried, rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven as the Conqueror over the spiritual powers of darkness and evil and He sat down at the right hand of His Father in heaven. He was and is and forever will be triumphant. But this isn't all! The throne of the Lord Jesus welcomes all overcomers, but no compromisers. Those who enjoy a deceptive rest on earth will not share His throne in heaven.

The glorious fulfilment of the promises of the Lord Jesus are clearly seen in Rev. 20:4-6 and 22:5, ***"Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of the Lord Jesus and the Word of God …. They will see His face and His name will be on their foreheads … for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign for ever and ever."***

He is knocking and knocking. Not only that, He is calling, ***"If any man hear my voice"***. We are on the inside and can't take the initiative. God's sovereign grace keeps Him at the door continuing to knock. When a person repents and opens the door, the Lord Jesus – the Lord of glory – enters. ***"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word and My Father will love him and We will come to him and make Our home with him."*** (Jn. 14:23) How very wonderful! He descends from His throne in glory to come to us who are so very poor and pitiable.

Learning about Our Seeking Lord Jesus

In His earthly ministry The Lord Jesus was constantly, ***"Seeking and saving those who were lost"***. Now He is in glory, but He is on the same mission. ***"Behold, I stand at the door and knock."*** He is Our Seeking Saviour. But notice how 'aggressively' He seeks!

- Like the shepherd seeking to find the sheep that was lost (Lk. 15:1-7)
- Like the woman searching her house, sweeping the boards on the floor seeking the lost coin that was probably part of her dowry (Lk. 15:8-10)

So the Lord Jesus seeks us today. Why? He loves each one of us! Never have the impression that He holds us at arm's length! The opposite is true. He seeks us. But He never violates our moral freedom. He stops at the door of our lives to attract our interest and ultimately our love. He never forces an entrance. The King of Glory never violates a person's freedom. He waits until we open the door.

In Matthew 18 there is an event when the rich young ruler (a man of great potential) turned away from the Lord Jesus and the Lord let him go. He will never violate our choice or our will. The decision is ours to make. He never saves a person who doesn't ask Him to save them. Ask, open the door and let the Lord Jesus come into your heart, into your mind and into your life.

Does He just stand and knock at the door of those who are seeking Him or those who have their theology all correct? What if you tell Him you are a bad person? ***"Behold, I stand at the door and knock."*** What if you say, "I'm not interested. I don't want to believe"? He answers, ***"Behold I stand at the door and knock."*** What if you say, "I am lost. I've drifted too far away. My heart is calloused and hard." Still He pleads, ***"Behold I stand at the door and knock."***

The reality is, if you are alive there is a yearning Saviour, the Lord Jesus, knocking at your door! He continues to knock. He calls to 'any man' not to the whole church. It is an appeal to the individual. His promise to us is that if we open the door He will ***"come in and will eat"*** with us. To "sup" was to take part in the main meal of the day and it was usually a long and leisurely affair, not a hurried snack. He continues, ***"And he/she with me."*** This implies active and continuing fellowship.

At least in the Near East, a common meal together binds a guest and host with strong ties of trust and goodwill. It is a sign that feuds and disagreements are healed. It is a proof of mutual acceptance.

When God breaks bread with His people it is a wonderful sign of confidence and communion between us on earth and God in heaven. There is a superb lovingkindness in the promise to come and eat/drink with us. His presence within is the sovereign guarantee of acceptance and fellowship with God.

The Almighty Redeemer pledged to drink the wine of a new and glorious covenant, ***"In the kingdom of God"***. (Mk. 14:25) ***"Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."*** (See Rev. 21:5 for the completion.)

Remember the story of the two bewildered disciples going home to Emmaus on the evening of Resurrection Day. (Lk. 24:13-35) The Lord Jesus met them, but they didn't recognise Him. When they got to their home, they invited Him to stay with them. He did so and sat at the table. He took bread and blessed it and gave it to them. ***"He was known to them in the breaking of the bread."***

So the Lord Jesus wants to sit down at our table and eat with us. Why? To refresh our spirits, to fill us with love that passes understanding and to give us a joy no one can take away and a peace the world can never give.

"I … will sup with him and he with Me." (Rev. 3:20) The Lord Jesus reverses the whole process. ***"Blessed are those servants the Master finds awake when He comes. Truly I say to you, He will dress Himself for service, have them recline at table and He will come and serve them."*** (Lk. 12:37)

The same glorious fellowship is seen in the Old Testament song when the bridegroom assumes the role of a host towards his bride***. "He brought me into his banqueting house and his banner over me was love."*** (Song of Solomon 2:1)

Then the Lord Jesus will comfort us with His great love for us and enrich us with His own untold wealth. He will clothe us in white raiment and anoint us with His vision. How can a whole church invite the Lord Jesus in rather than just an individual?

There is a remarkable illustration in the Old Testament that I think is helpful. It was the day when Moses removed the Tabernacle of the Lord of Hosts and pitched it far away from the "camp". In so doing he excommunicated the whole nation from the covenant. Then Moses called those who sought the Lord to this new site of the Tabernacle for a new dedication. As the people returned to the "presence of God" in the Tabernacle, they returned one by one to a commitment to obedience and a desire to have fellowship with God.

There came a day when the Lord Jesus excommunicated the whole Hebrew nation and indeed the whole world. It was the day on which he suffered "outside the camp". He rent the veil and called all people into the inner place of worship by calling them back to Himself. Those who are following Him enter into the Holy of Holies.

So for anyone in Laodicea who "opened the door" to the Lord Jesus – invited him into their life – their life became, in Old Testament terms, the Holy of Holies. The crisis in our churches worldwide is due to the exclusion of the Lord Jesus. But if anyone opens the door of their life, He comes in to reign!

In the Gospels there is a story of a man who was excommunicated from the synagogue for his testimony about what Jesus had done for him. When Jesus heard of it, he went and found the man and asked, ***"Do you believe in the Son of God"?*** The man replied, ***"Who is he Lord that I might believe in him?"*** The reply came with great strength and love, ***"You have seen Him and it is He who is speaking to you. The man replied, 'Lord I believe!' And he worshipped Him."*** (Jn. 9:35-38)

The man had been cast out of the place of worship, but he had found the one true centre of worship. Over the last 2000 years many believers have been excluded from churches, temples, mosques and other centres of worship. But in inviting the Lord Jesus into their lives they have never been sorrowful. At times we may have to leave our "Laodicean-type" church and open the door to the Lord Jesus. To find Him is far better than to find a great stack of gold bars or have clothing of such quality we never need to be ashamed and ointment for our eyes that broadens our outlook and creates new visions.

- Faithfulness overcoming apostasy
- Truth overcoming falsehood
- "Decorated poverty" overcome by infinite wealth
- Compassion and devotion overcoming hypocrisy

"Behold I stand at the door and knock." Open the door of your heart (your life) and the Lord Jesus will come in and sup with you and you with Him.

How does the Lord Jesus knock on the door of your life?

He knocks in many ways:

- Through His Word in the Bible
- Through being among happy believers living in joy and friendship
- Through hymns and songs that take on a special meaning for us
- Through the media and an assessment of where our culture is going
- Through a growing awareness of the uselessness of living a sinful life, our failure and neglect
- Through every bitter disappointment, every suffering and every tear that falls
- Through every tender/happy memory of childhood and the love and prayers of our parents
- He knocks on our door when we get married and when children are born.

Paul says, ***"It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance."*** (Rom. 2:4). So in many ways the Lord Jesus ***"stands at the door and knocks"***. We have to wrench our lives away from His voice, choke our souls and do violence to our spiritual life to turn away from God. Why is this so? God has made each one of us with a capacity to love Him, to reverence Him and to worship Him.

The Eagerness of the Lord Jesus to enter into our lives

God speaks through Isaiah, ***"Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters and he who has no money come and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without any money and without price. … Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourself in rich food. Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near***". (Is. 55:12)

Salvation is at your door. You don't have to buy it. You don't have to follow a strict programme of reform. The Lord Jesus is at your door! Open it and He will come in. Holman Hunt painted a famous picture that hangs in St Paul's Cathedral in London. It is of a broken down, neglected cottage. Thistles have grown up to the height of the windows. Grass is growing on the path to the door. Trailing vines and weeds are everywhere. The hinges look rusty. And there outside the door stands the Lord Jesus in royal robes. He has a lantern in one hand and the light from it falls on every crevice of the old door. With the other hand He is knocking on the door. So the Lord Jesus stands there knocking on the door and the glory of that light falls on the neglected cottage. There is no handle on the outside. You can only open the door from the inside.



Handley Moule was a great evangelical leader in England. He died in 1920. For a while he lectured at Ridley Hall in Cambridge. In 1901 he became Prof of Divinity in Cambridge University. He wrote:

Come in, O come! The door stands open now.
I know Thy voice, Lord Jesus, it is Thou;
The sun has set long since, the storms begin;
'Tis time for Thee, my Saviour, O come in!

Come even now. But think not here to find
a lodging, Lord, and converse to Thy mind.
The lamp burns low; the hearth is chill and pale;
wet through the broken casement pours the gale.

Alas, ill-ordered shows the dreary room.
The household stuff lies heaped amidst the gloom,
The table empty stands, the couch undressed;
Ah what a welcome for the Eternal Guest!

Yet welcome, welcome now. This doleful scene
is e'en itself my cause to hail Thee in.

This dark confusion e'en at once demands
Thine own bright presence, Lord, and ordering hands.

I seek no more to alter things or mend,
Before the coming of so great a Friend;
All were at best unseemly and 'twere ill
Beyond all else to keep Thee waiting still.

Then, as Thou art, all holiness and bliss
come in and see my chamber as it is;
I bid Thee welcome boldly in the name
of Thy great glory and my want and shame.

Come, not to find, but make this troubled heart
a dwelling worthy of Thee as Thou art;
To chase the gloom, the terror and the sin:
Come, all Thyself, yea come, Lord Jesus, in!

Martin Luther said, **"Before my conversion, had you knocked at the door of my heart and asked who lives there, I would have said, 'Martin Luther lives here.' Had you come to see me, you would have found a monk with his head shaved, sleeping in a hair shirt and under his head two tables of stone and a scourge hanging down the side of the bed. But now if you knock at the door of my heart and ask who lives here? I will reply, "Martin Luther no longer lives here. The Lord Jesus lives here now."**

There is light for the darkness. There is gladness for mourning. There is joy for sorrow. There is hope for despair. There is cleansing from sin. There is forgiveness for transgressions. Instead of the dark hopelessness of life, there is glory!! Would you open the door? It is as simple as that! Just open the door of your life and say, "Please Lord Jesus come in!" Then give Him control of every moment of your life. He will come in and stay there for ever.

Anyone who comes, even from a 'tepid church' like the one in Laodicea, and opens the door of his/her heart and life to the Lord Jesus giving Him the right to sit on the throne of that life, finds that He is prepared to walk straight in. Just as the father received the prodigal son, so the Lord Jesus will receive even the worst offender. (Lk. 15:11-32)

The Lord Jesus was speaking to believers whose supreme wrong was that they were (and some still are) attempting to take everything easy. They had no compassion, no enthusiasm for being a disciple of the Lord Jesus. They needed to learn to ***"Overcome … as I overcame"***. How did the Lord Jesus overcome the subtlest temptations?

In the wilderness Satan said to Him, ***"To you I will give all this authority and their glory … if you worship me. It will be yours*** (all the kingdoms of the world)***."*** (Lk. 4:1-8) Satan was offering an easy way, without the Cross. His own disciples gave the Lord Jesus the same suggestion, "Spare Yourself, why do you need all this outpouring of your life in great passion and compassion?" Even in Gethsemane we catch the tempter's voice behind the temptation, ***"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me."*** The temptation was very great. But He overcame it. He sat down with His Father on His throne having gone through the trial, the scourging, the Crucifixion and worst of all taking upon Himself the sin of the whole world.

Now He says to these Laodicean believers, these complacent, self-satisfied, lukewarm, tepid people, "Overcome, as I overcame. Be zealous. Be 'hot' and you will sit down with Me on My throne."

Lukewarmness, being tepid, contradicts all that we profess. It denies what we believe. It is better to be frozen, abandoning all interest in Biblical truth, than to pretend to believe, to sing about these truths and yet be tepid. We do more harm by our lukewarmness than by an open denial of the Lord Jesus.

There are people who call themselves 'evangelical', but have no heart or will to do evangelism. They hinder the progress of the Gospel. There are believers who quarrel with each other over the forms in which they express the truth, but they never stretch out a hand to save the lost. There are believers who love to split hairs about election and free-will, yet there are billions of people who have never heard the good news and they do nothing to rescue them.

What does the Lord Jesus say to such people? ***"I am about to spew you out of my mouth"***. The Lord Jesus loathes the unimpassioned regularity of a believer who professes to believe the facts of the Christian faith but doesn't yield himself to the great claims lying within these truths. In some sense, 'lukewarmness' is the worst form of blasphemy. I wish all tepid churches would call themselves clubs! Let tepid believers leave the church! For there is this truly awful possibility that the Lord Jesus is excluded from His own church!

He suffered immeasurably for us all and He is suffering still:

- He was forsaken by the Father as He became sin for us.
- He was excluded from His nation by the blindness of its leaders.
- He was excluded from the world that He created by the apparent victory of the forces of evil.

And now He is excluded from His church by the tepid indifference of those who imagine they have everything while in fact they have nothing!

He still knocks! The amazing tenderness and patience of the Lord Jesus! He is insulted and excluded from His church and He is ready to spew them out of His mouth as something utterly disgusting, yet He waits, still knocking at the door, willing to enter in and have fellowship with even one person.

The **only cure** for lukewarmness is re-admission of the excluded Lord Jesus. As we exclude Him, He confronts us by His faithfulness to us. Our slackness needs to be replaced by a conviction concerning His complete authority over us. Our poverty is then replaced with His wealth; our 'frost' with the mighty power of His great enthusiasm. Our spiritual sickness leading us near to death is replaced with the life of God that is in His presence. There is no cure for lukewarmness in the church except the re-admittance of the Lord Jesus!

Listen to the Son of Man as He walks amid the lampstands. Let us plead with Him to say all that He has to say to us. The Lord Jesus knows. He says, ***"I know …."*** What He commends is our chief reward. Let us listen to what He complains about and respond with true and deep repentance. Let us listen to His words of counsel and then act in quick obedience. What **He wills** is the very best for us.

4. What happened to the Church in Laodicea?

There is evidence that after this message from the Lord Jesus came to the church in Laodicea, they did repent and began to be effective in the transformation of their town. The city continued to prosper materially.

In 367 A.D. a major Christian Council met there from the churches in what is now western Turkey. By this time the Roman Empire had been "Christianised" and the semi-worldly, semi-religious concepts of a "Laodicean spirit" entered into Byzantine Christianity as the Eastern Roman Empire deteriorated and the city declined. The Seljuk Turks captured and destroyed the city in 1097 A.D. The Byzantines recovered it briefly in 1119 A.D.

Then during the 4th Crusade the Crusaders set up a Latin-speaking church (the Christians in Turkey were still Greek-speaking). This church was "Roman Catholic" as opposed to Greek Orthodox. It had its capital in Nicaea.

In 1402 A.D. the Tatar Emperor Tamerlane and his Mongol troops captured Laodicea and completely devastated it. Then finally the Ottomans defeated the Tartars and captured what was then mainly a ruined village!

Soon after this the Ottoman Turks started to build the city of Denizli about 4 miles away from the ruins of Laodicea. They used many of the usable stones in their building. So the site of the seventh church met its foretold doom. Gone now are the riches, the famous medicines and the fame of Laodicea. Not even its memory is preserved by present-day dwellers. There are no signs at all!!

While visiting a team of "workers" in Denizli, we went out to these ruins for a picnic and a time of prayer. As we were singing, a small group of goat herders (teenage boys) came near to see what we were doing. We gave them each a Gospel in Turkish. The others on the team who spoke Turkish fluently pointed to the ruins and asked them, 'What are these?' They answered with a puzzled look, "Tash" (stones). How could it have been otherwise? Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, ***"I will spew you out of my mouth."***

The church of our age is confronted by a similar warning! The Catholic Church had a Bishop of Laodicea until 1968, but the bishops never lived there after the Crusades. It was an interesting city and it represents the last of the seven churches and perhaps the last period of church history – i.e. the world-wide church before the return of the Lord Jesus.