



## 11 – The Letter to the church in Laodicea.

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

We have looked at and investigated the letters in the Book of Revelation to the other churches, and we have discussed how these letters apply not only generally to the entire church today, but we have seen how each of the letters can apply to us and to our own daily relationship with the Lord. Some theologians apply each letter to a different time period in the church Age while other theologians relate these letters only to the churches to which they were written, but if we follow either of those courses we miss the point of these letters being written and included in the Bible, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. As Paul states in his

letters to Timothy:

“The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. <sup>17</sup> It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone,” **2 Timothy 3:16-17. TLB**

He also explains to us that these letters to the churches were written to warn us of many things, but one of the most important is that there will be people in the last days who will act immorally and without the interests of God at heart, rather they will act out of self interest and use the church as a stepping stone to their human aspirations, **1 Timothy 4:1-5.**

Laodicea itself was located near the modern town of Denizli in Turkey. At the end of the first Century it was the wealthiest city in Phrygia. It prospered under the Romans who allowed its trade to expand; consequently, in general Laodicea had an effect on the Roman Empire. It was widely known for its banking establishments, a medical school that produced a world-renowned eye ointment, and woollen textile industry. Its major weakness was its lack of a reliable water supply. At one time an aqueduct was built to bring water to the city from hot springs. But by the time the water reached the city, it was neither hot nor refreshingly cool - only lukewarm. The church had become as bland as the tepid water that came into the city. It is therefore no wonder that the theologians apply this particular letter to the age in which we are currently living, where our banking and finance industry has led us into so much ill-planned commitment built on debt.

### **Jesus is .....**

Jesus was, in theory, the head of the church in Laodicea, He knew exactly the situation of this church. His first words as the introduction to the letter are precise and still challenging to us today.

“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.” **Revelation 3:14.**

The Amen indicates to us that He is the One True God. There is no other God but Jehovah, the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If we have not responded to God's call or if we have compromised His Word or dabbled in other practices, this is a warning, **Isaiah 65:11-16.** Our God is all-powerful, true and trustworthy. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. He is the faithful and true witness, the only One Who is to be believed. He will neither dilute nor distort the Truth. He is the author of Truth, its very personification, whereas Satan is a liar, there is not an iota of truth in him. When he lies, it is perfectly normal; for he is the father of liars, **John 8:44.** When Jesus says something to us it is Truth, and if we accept it, it will operate in our lives for our own good. He sees through all the shallowness in our lives and His eyes penetrate all the disguises and traditions we try to hide behind. When Jesus dictated this letter to the church at Laodicea, He had only their good at heart. He loved those people just as He loves us today. He has provided the environment in which each of us can thrive, but it is our own choice as to whether or not we will accept His provision for us,

### **2 Peter 3:8-10**

He is the ruler of God's creation. The word 'Ruler' can indicate either or both of 'first in point of time' – the Beginning, or 'first in rank' – Ruler. He is both the Beginning and the Ruler of all of Creation. After all, He was the executive creator of the Universe, **John 1:1-5.** We tend to forget that Jesus knows all that we do and think, **Psalms 139:3-4.** He even knows the intentions of our hearts, so when He wrote to the

Laodiceans, He did so because He had their best interests at heart, He loved them, and He wanted them to change their ways. There was so much for them to achieve in their lives, so many people's lives that these Laodiceans could have changed, if only they would have listened! **Revelation 3:15-16**

### Hot or cold?

Lukewarm water makes a disgusting drink. The church in Laodicea had become lukewarm and thus distasteful and repugnant. The believers didn't take a stand for anything; indifference had led to idleness. By neglecting to do anything for Christ, the church had become hardened and self-satisfied, so consequently it was destroying itself. Don't settle for following God halfway! This is not God's plan for our life. Jesus said that He came to give us Life and Life in all its fullness, **John 10:10**. Let Jesus fire up our faith and get us into His action. Jesus wants us to be one or the other, hot or cold. In either of these cases, Jesus can work with us. If we are hot (passionate) in terms of the Gospel, Jesus can send us to any person or to any place and we will have an immediate effect. Not everyone with whom we come into contact will become a Christian immediately, but only those whom Jesus has already chosen for us to reach; time and prayer can change this. It is certainly His will that no one will perish, **Matthew 18:14**.

A missionary went from Blackburn, Lancashire to India to reach people for the Lord. He worked hard and preached the Word of God everywhere he went, but apparently to no avail. Just as he was about to give up to return home, a man heard and listened to what he was saying and decided to put it into practice. He gathered others around him, and they were told what he had heard. Before long, a small church was born in India. Today that little church has grown and has produced over 8,000 more churches across the sub-continent. That man's sons, David and Peter Prakasam are now the leaders of the Indian Pentecostal Assemblies, based in Coimbatore. Some of the pastors of those churches have no outside support. They walk and cycle miles each day between their fellow Believers many of whom do not even own a Bible, to encourage them and to teach them the Word of God. What an incredibly fulfilling way of life!

It was to such a simple, exciting and fulfilling way of life that Jesus called the Laodiceans, but His calling fell on deaf ears as the cares of this world choked them and deprived them of the life that they should have been proud to live. What about us? How do we measure up against the way in which Jesus has called us to live our lives? We have all been individually called and we each have responsibilities, but often that can be an excuse for us not to be involved as we should in the work to which we have been called, **Philippians 3:13-15**.

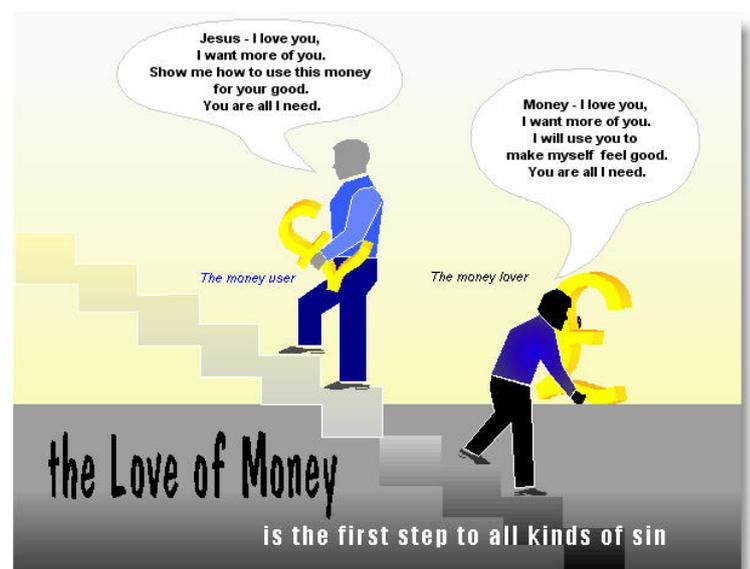
So what had caused these people to be in their present state? It seems they were sucked into the environment in which they lived. They started to live like those around them who had nothing to do with Jesus. That surely can equally apply to us today? **Revelation 3:17-18**

Remember that Laodicea was the centre of the Banking and Finance Industry in that area, so it can teach us much in the area in which we live today. Jesus never said that money is the root of all evil. On the contrary, He lived in the world and used money to live and to help those around Him. He paid His taxes to Caesar, and He needed a Treasurer to keep track of his finances. That Treasurer, Judas, was a thief and embezzled some of their gifts diverting for his own use some of what came in. What Jesus taught and what Paul passed on to Timothy was:

"man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness," **1 Timothy 6:9-11**.

What is our focus?

These Laodicean Believers had acquired wealth and fame through their financial, commercial and educational activities, and they were proud of it. They said to themselves that they no longer needed anything. Humanly speaking they could see their lives planned out ahead of them with not a care in the world. But actually they were only looking at things from a worldly point of view, just as we sometimes do.



"But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." **Revelation 3:17.**

It would be hard to find a stronger or more expressive term of revulsion anywhere in the New Testament. Jesus had put His finger on their problem. They had lost God's perspective on the world allowing themselves to be lulled into a false sense of security and were marked by complete compromise. They had wanted the best of both worlds just as often happens to us today. The world can – and will – change. Then where will our priorities be? What will we rely on for our security? If we were to lose everything, on whom could we rely? Would we remember the Word of God? Would we know enough of the Word of God to remember? Are we hanging on so loosely to our possessions that if we were to lose them, it would make no difference to the main focus of our lives? Jesus told the story about a wealthy farmer who was in a similar position and on looking at his prosperity said, "I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones" and God's response was,

"You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." **Luke 12:16-21.**

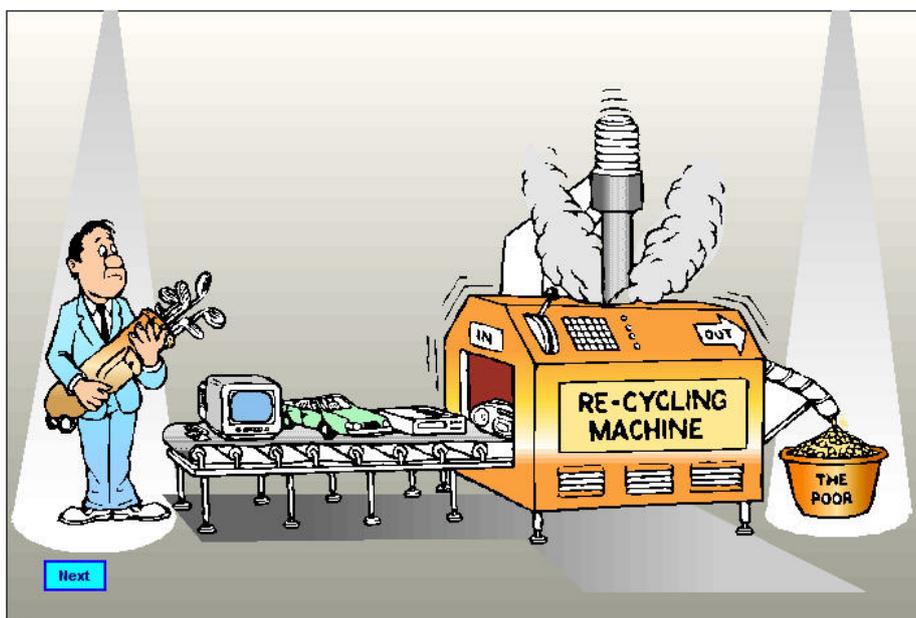
### **The solution**

Jesus provided the solution to the Laodicean Believers, **Revelation 3:18**, one that they would have readily understood. The meaning of white clothes is simple, they represent salvation. These are the garments in which we will be presented before Jesus; the purity of white because of what He has done in redeeming us on the Cross, and because we have accepted this He has now become Lord of our lives.

These white garments entirely cover our shameful sin, replacing it with the glorious righteousness of Jesus Himself.

The church needed a restoration of spiritual values. Gold to be 'purchased' from Jesus can be related to the finest of refined gold, but Jesus never said that this gold would be 'spendable'. This gold would be something with which to build for eternity. Paul reminds us to build with care, as the only foundation is Jesus Christ. We have to use gold, silver and costly stones, as the quality of our work will be shown for what it is, when it is refined and revealed with fire. Only what has been built with Jesus' gold will survive and the builder will receive a reward. Clearly this gold is something to be coveted and sought after. Surely we should do whatever we can to buy this gold from Jesus! There must be a return to Jesus Himself, which cannot be bought by money but can only be purchased by repentance and yielding to the Holy Spirit.

The Laodiceans' vision had become murky and they were not seeing clearly that they needed a restoration of spiritual vision. As Christians, they had allowed the ways of the world to encroach on their lives; their focus had shifted from the Redeemer to the liar. They had become convinced that all that mattered was to physically provide for the future; but in becoming convinced they had forgotten that material things are subject to change, whereas the things that mattered were the things of eternal value. So what did Jesus say was the solution?



The Laodiceans were convinced that their eye medicine would cure eye disease. They were familiar with their world-renowned ointment, so Jesus said that they should buy ointment from Him to put on their spiritual eyes. Their earthly eyes could be looked after with earthly medicine, but their spiritual eyes required spiritual medicine. "Where there is no vision, the people perish." **Proverbs 29:18 KJV.** God wants to give us a vision of heaven and hell,

to restore our sight. Where were they to obtain that sort of salve? From the same place that we can obtain it. From the Word of God – Jesus Himself! Where are our priorities? Are they based on the sure foundation of Jesus or on our own human priorities? To the rich young ruler, Jesus said this:

‘If you want to be perfect, go and sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’<sup>22</sup> But when the young man heard this, he went away sadly, for he was very rich’. **Matthew 19:16-22 TLB**

He gave him ample opportunity to realign his priorities, but for the rich young ruler this was the saddest day of his life. Jesus had offered him the most exciting future that could be, and He offers that to us. But for the rich young ruler, his attachment to possessions was his sticking point. He could go no further because of them. What is our sticking point? It might not be possessions; it may not be family, but is it? If we face up to what is our final frontier with Jesus, and then recognise that the smallest thing that He offers is greater than our greatest human desire; then we are in possession of the key to an exceptional future followed by glory in eternity. Will you face your future with Jesus? Many people think that as Christians they will live forever in perfect peace, but Jesus has this to say to the Laodiceans and we need to remember that because it applies to us in our day and location:

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent”. **Revelation 3:19**

A rebuke from the Lord comes because He loves us. He wants us to become more like Him and the only way is to remain in His love and that involves the occasional rebuke and some discipline. The purpose of each is that we may repent. Repentance is not always easy especially when it comes because we want to go our own way, but Jesus encourages us to be earnest in our repentance – to be serious about it. It involves forsaking the things on which we have set our selfish and foolish human desires, and instead going God’s way. His way is higher and much better. Jesus was and is zealous for His church.

“Zeal (the fervour of love) for Your house will consume me.” **John 2:17** ESV

He wants to be involved in it at every turn, He is its Head.

### **The door**

He writes to the church at Laodicea saying,

“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.” **Revelation 3:20**

Surely it is with deep sorrow that He finds Himself excluded from the thing that is dearest to His heart, His church. He is pleading with individuals to give Him His rightful place. This verse is often used to picture a person inside his or her home locked in, with a handle only on the inside. Jesus stands outside knocking on the door to gain entry. It is said that Jesus wants to gain access to the life of a person who is not yet a Christian, and it is taken out of context for this purpose with amazing effect. It would be hard to number those who have given their lives to Jesus as a result of this verse, but its real purpose in the proper context is to explain that Jesus has been excluded from His rightful position as Head of His church – His Body!

Holman Hunt’s picture clearly depicts this verse showing Christ as the Light of the world, wearing a crown of thorns standing outside a fast bolted door of someone’s heart patiently knocking and calling for admission. It illustrates the door with no handle on the outside, showing that it is up to the person on the inside to open the door to Christ.

If you are one of those to whom Jesus is speaking through this verse, then put your life right. Open the door of your heart to Jesus and let Him come in, to take over the places from which He has so far been excluded and make Him Lord. Welcome Him, allow Him to realign your desires with His, and walk with Him for the rest of your days serving Him and following Him to the end of time. You will never, ever regret it! Jesus promises here that if we open our hearts to Him He will open heaven to us.

### **Overcomers.**

Again the last words are to the overcomers in the Laodicean church:

“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.” **Revelation 3:21.**

But be aware that this type of overcoming comes at a price, a price that is well worth paying, for it pays both temporal and eternal dividends. Are we willing to pay it? Consider what Jesus said

"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. <sup>29</sup> And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. <sup>30</sup> But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." **Matthew 19:28-30.**

We have to be very cold towards Jesus not to respond to the offer to sit on His throne and to obey Him as He directs our lives, when we have that as our reward!

The real question that we need to ask ourselves as we read and analyse this comparatively small letter to the church at Laodicea is this: 'Do we hear what the Spirit is saying to the church of which we are a member?' (**Revelation 3:22**) because He is saying it to each individual member of that church, no matter where they are or what state the church is in. If we overcome the obstacles that Satan places in our way, keep our zeal for His Body burning through the power of the Holy Spirit, then at the end of our lives, we shall sit with Jesus on His throne, and it will have been entirely and completely worthwhile. The alternative is to stay lukewarm, as were those in the church at Laodicea. To be spat out of the mouth of Jesus would be an horrific ending to a life full of potential.

## **11. Revelation 3:14-22 – The Letter to the church in Laodicea – Challenge Questions**

- 1. Read the Notes and the Bible Verses** referred to in them. Highlight the points that 'speak' to you and be prepared to share in your group.
- 2.** Write beside the name of each church a list of the problems it had, then, in a separate column, write Jesus' proposed solution for each of these problems.

Ephesus

Smyrna

Pergamum

Thyatira

Sardis

Philadelphia

Laodicea

Our own church

### **Read Revelation Chapter 4 – Heaven.**

- 3.** Why do you think that there was a door standing open in Heaven?
- 4.** Can you write down another Bible reference in which John hears a voice like a trumpet?
- 5.** What did Jesus want John to see? What was he to do with the information that he discovered.
- 6.** What event did John experience that every Believer will eventually experience?
- 7.** Describe the scene in Heaven. Who was sitting on the Throne?
- 8.** Who are the Elders described in **Revelation 4:4**? Why were they dressed in white?
- 9.** What do the Gold Crowns represent? What did the Elders do with the Gold Crowns?

**10. Revelation 4:5** describes seven lamps blazing before the Throne. What do they represent?

**11.** Before the Throne of God was a sea of glass as clear as crystal. What is the sea of glass? Why does the Bible use the simile of crystal?

**12.** Can you put forward a suggestion for the living beings being described in such detail? Ezekiel had a similar vision described in **Ezekiel 1:5-10**. Compare the two descriptions.

**13.** What did these creatures do? Describe in your own words what they said constantly.

**14.** What did the Elders do when the creatures were active?

**15.** Do you anticipate having a crown in Heaven? How will you get it, and what will you do with it once you have it?

**16.** What words did the Elders say?

**17.** Sum up in one sentence your reaction to the picture of heaven