

## THE THINGS PRESENT, REVELATION, 2:1-3:22

### INTRODUCTORY NOTES

- Thomas Constable, *Jesus Christ sent this letter to shake the Laodicea Christians out of their self-sufficient complacency and to exhort them to self-sacrifice for higher spiritual goals* (cf. Col. 2:1–2; 4:16).
- Kendell Easley, *The church of Laodicea is guilty of such self-sufficiency that they must repent and receive Christ's provision of righteousness in order again to experience intimate fellowship with him.*
- Grant Osborne, *Once more the guardian angel is asked to intercede with the church and remind them that they as God's community are a heavenly phenomenon and must answer to heaven for the way they are conducting themselves.*
- William Barclay, *Laodicea has the grim distinction of being the only church of which the risen Christ has nothing good to say.*

### THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA, REVELATION 3:14-22

#### A. Destination - Laodicea (3:14a), **And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:**

##### 1. Background

- a. William Barclay, *In the ancient world, there were at least six cities called Laodicea, and this one was called Laodicea on the Lycus to distinguish it from the others. It was founded in about 250 BC by Antiochus of Syria and was named after his wife Laodice.*
- b. It was located ninety miles due east of Ephesus and forty-five miles southeast of Philadelphia.
- c. Charles Ryrie, *It was a wealthy city, able to rebuild itself in AD 60 without the aid of Rome (or God!). It was also a medical center known for an ointment for treating ears and a powder for the eyes.*
- d. It was a center for banking and textiles.

##### 2. Progress of the Gospel

- a. Charles Ryrie, *The church, like the city, put its trust in material things rather than spiritual.*
- b. J. Ramsey Michaels, *Its congregation was the only one of the seven, with the possible exception of Ephesus, to receive communications both from the apostle Paul and from John of Patmos.*
- c. Walter Elwell, *In prosperity men too commonly decay, and the Christian community of the city had become infected with the spirit of the place . . . They were business folk, proficient in more than one industry; but what they needed was to do business with a strong and demanding Lord, to open their eyes to a commerce where their boasted wealth was trash, and to realize from whom they could draw real gold, buy clothing to cover their shame, and discern true riches.*
- d. Grant Osborne, *The city's religion was syncretistic, combining local and Roman gods, and it had a large Jewish population that accommodated itself to Hellenistic ways.*

#### B. The Lord (3:14b), **The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.**

##### 1. The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness

- a. Charles Ryrie, *The risen Lord presents Himself to this church as "the Amen" (confirming all that He says), "the faithful and true Witness: in contrast to all the false prophets . . . .*
- b. John Walvoord, *The word "Amen," meaning "so be it," refers to the sovereignty of God which is behind human events* (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20; Rev. 1:6). *In speaking of Himself as "the faithful and true Witness" Christ was repeating what He had said earlier* (1:5; 3:7).
- c. Warren Wiersbe, *The Lord presented Himself as "the Amen," which is an Old Testament title for God* (see Isa. 65:16, where the word truth is the Hebrew word amen). *He is the truth and speaks the truth, because He is "the faithful and true Witness" (Rev. 3:14).*
- d. Kendell Easley, *In the Old Testament God is literally, "the God of the Amen" ("the God of truth," Isa. 65:16), who is completely trustworthy and truthful. Now this designation is applied to Christ and contrasts vividly with the untrustworthy Laodiceans. As early as Revelation 1:5, John called Jesus "the faithful witness."*

##### 3. The beginning of God's creation

- a. Charles Ryrie, . . . *indicating His priority over all creation; cf. Col. 1:17). He is the unalterable standard by which all must be measured.*
- b. John Walvoord, *As "the Ruler of God's creation" Christ existed before God's Creation and is sovereign over it* (cf. Col 1:15, 18; Rev. 21:6).

- c. Mark Hitchcock, *Some have mistakenly twisted this title [the beginning of God's creation] to mean that Jesus was the first being that was created by God - that He was the beginning or initial stage of God's creative acts. This heretical view of Christ is not what this title means . . . Jesus is not the first of creation. Rather, He is before all creation. He is the uncreated Creator. John wrote the same thing in John 1:1-3.*
- d. Warren Wiersbe, *"The beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14) does not suggest that Jesus was created, and therefore not eternal God. The word translated beginning means "source, origin" (see John 1:3; Col. 1:15, 18).*
- e. Kendell Easley, *Christ as supreme Creator and Ruler of the universe has every right to critique his wayward church.*
- f. John Phillips, *He it is who flung the stars into space, plowed out the basins of the sea reared against the skyline of the world the mighty Himalayan range. Not a blade of grass grows without His permission; not a speck of dust moves. He is the origin of the creation of God, the all-controlling One, the dynamic Christ.*

### C. Condemnation (3:15-17)

#### 1. Jesus declared disdain for their works (15-16)

- a. Jesus identified their spiritual condition (15), ***I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!***
  - 1) Charles Ryrie called their condition, *gross indifference . . . Near Laodicea were hot mineral springs whose water could be drunk only if very hot.*
  - 2) Mark Hitchcock, *Jesus' reference to different temperatures for liquids is derived from local imagery related to the water supply in the area. There three key cities in the Lycus Valley - Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. Colosse, which was about ten miles east of Laodicea, was known for its cool, refreshing, life-giving waters. Hierapolis, which was six miles north of Laodicea, was famous for its hot springs that were sought out for their medicinal healing powers. The water in Laodicea, however, was in-between - it was lukewarm.*
- b. Jesus' response to their spiritual condition (16), ***So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.***
  - 1) Charles Ryrie, *When lukewarm, it became nauseating, as this church had become.*
  - 2) Mark Hitchcock, *Hot and cold both depict believers who are useful to the Lord, just as the hot water from Hierapolis and the cold water from Colosse were both useful and beneficial . . . Jesus is telling the believers at Laodicea that like their water supply, they are barren and useless to Him at this time and make Him sick. The remedy is for them to repent and return to the Lord.*
  - 3) Robert H. Mounce, *[Laodicea] was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary, nor healing for the spiritually sick. It was totally ineffective.*
  - 4) Thomas Constable, *The Lord's spitting (lit. vomiting) His people out of His mouth" (v. 16) does not mean that they would lose their salvation. The Scriptures nowhere teach this possibility (cf. v. 19) . . . Jesus did not mean that He would rather that we be spiritually cold than that we be spiritually lukewarm either. He did mean that He would rather that we be spiritually refreshing and/or healthful, like cold or hot water are, rather than that we be spiritually bland, like lukewarm water is.*
  - 5) Grant Osborne, *So when Jesus says, "I am about to spit you out of my mouth," he is actually saying, "You make me vomit." . . . Christ is saying in effect, "I wish you were spiritually healing like the hot springs of Hierapolis. I wish you were spiritually refreshing like the cold pure water of Colossae. But you are neither; you are totally ineffective, devoid of works and useless to God, and you make me sick." Such is the shallowness of all too many rich but worldly churches.*

#### 2. Jesus revealed their pitiable condition (17), ***For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.***

- a. The *you in for you say*, could be the congregation in general or the church leader, in particular.
- b. Charles Ryrie, *The phrase "I am rich, and have become wealthy" implies that the church was boasting of getting her wealth by her own effort. In reality she was poor, blind, and naked, though she did not recognize her true state.*
- c. John Walvoord, *Their being lukewarm spiritually was evidenced by their being content with their material wealth and their being unaware of their spiritual poverty.*

- d. Thomas Constable, *The Laodiceans enjoyed material prosperity (v. 17) that led them to a false sense of security and independence. The expression “I am rich, and have become wealthy” is a literary device that inverts the natural sequence for emphasis (cf. v. 19; 5:2, 5; 10:4, 9; 12:10; 19:13). Here it stresses that the wealth attained came though self-exertion. Spiritually they had great needs (cf. Rom. 7:24): they were wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. This self-sufficient attitude is a constant danger when Christians live lives of ease and enjoy plenty.*
- e. Warren Wiersbe, *Perhaps we have here a hint of why this church declined spiritually: they had become proud of their ministry and had begun to measure things by human standards instead of by spiritual values. They were, in the eyes of the Lord, “wretched, and miserable, and poor.”*
- f. Kendell Easley, *This church had deceived itself about its spiritual condition. Because they had depended on themselves, they were impoverished, unclothed, and sightless. Christ rejects whatever a church is or does that is prompted by self-righteousness.*
- g. Grant Osborne, *The problem is clear: The Laodicean church, like its city, was inordinately wealthy. But the problem was not in the wealth as such but in the smug self-satisfaction it engendered. Like so many of the super-rich, they had become self-obsessed and complacent. Jesus words are telling: “You say, ‘I am rich. I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’”*
- h. William Barclay, *The tragedy of Laodicea was that it was convinced of its own wealth and blind to its own poverty. Humanly speaking, anyone would say that there was not a more prosperous town in Asia Minor. Spiritually speaking, the risen Christ declares that there was not a more poverty-stricken community.*

#### D. Exhortation (3:18-19)

1. Jesus calls the church to pursue true wealth (18a), ***I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich,***
  - a. Thomas Constable, *Since they considered themselves to be rich, but were spiritually poor, Jesus urged them to buy—implying self-sacrifice as their currency—the spiritual things that they really needed (cf. Isa. 55:1). Instead of real gold they should buy gold refined by fire, namely, pure spiritual riches (cf. Ps. 66:10; Prov. 17:3; Zech. 13:9; Luke 12:21; 1 Tim. 6:18; James 1:3–4; 2:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12–13).*
  - b. John Walvoord, *They were urged to buy not ordinary gold, but refined gold, referring to that which would glorify God and make them truly rich. Through its banking industry the city had material wealth. But the church lacked spiritual richness.*
  - c. Warren Wiersbe, *Pay the price to get true “gold tried in the fire.” This suggests that the church needed some persecution; they were too comfortable (1 Peter 1:7). Nothing makes God’s people examine their priorities faster than suffering!*
  - d. Kendell Easley, *Gold refined in the fire is genuine gold rather than fools gold. It stands here for righteous character that has been proven genuine through testing. Only Christ can take the self-righteous and make them truly holy.*
2. He admonishes them to seek holiness and spiritual insight (18b), ***and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.***
  - a. Thomas Constable, *Instead of buying the black garments that were popular in Laodicea, they should buy white garments that symbolize righteous conduct, purity, and sacred festal occasions (19:8). Instead of the eye salve that the Laodiceans produced and sold, they should purchase spiritual eye salve, which is probably a reference to the Word of God that enables us to see life realistically (cf. John 9:6; 1 John 2:20, 27).*
  - b. John Walvoord, *Though they had beautiful clothes, they were urged to wear white clothes (cf. v. 4), symbolic of righteousness which would cover their spiritual nakedness. As wool was a major product of the area, Laodicea was especially famous for a black garment made out of black wool. What they needed instead was pure white clothing . . . Then Christ exhorted them to put salve . . . on their eyes. A medical school was located in Laodicea at the temple of Asclepius, which offered a special salve to heal common eye troubles of the Middle East. What they needed was not this medicine but spiritual sight.*
  - c. Warren Wiersbe, *Like the emperor in Hans Christian Andersen’s story, these Christians thought they were clothed in splendor when they were really naked! . . . They needed the white garments of God’s righteousness and grace . . . The Laodiceans were “blind.” They could not see reality. They were living in a fool’s paradise, proud of a church that was about to be rejected.*
  - d. Kendell Easley, *The Laodicean church claimed that it had spiritual insight. Would it recognize its blindness and ask for Christ’s wisdom and insight (Col. 1:9)?*

3. His exhortation is that they experience fellowship with Him through repentance (19), ***Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.***

- a. Thomas Constable, *The Lord reminded His readers that the reason that He said what He did was because He loved them* (cf. v. 9; 1:5; Prov. 3:11–12). They should, therefore, be zealous . . . and repent . . . The only way for spiritually cold people to become spiritually hot in their love for the Lord is to repent (i.e., do an about face).
- b. Warren Wiersbe, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Rev. 3:19a). He still loved these lukewarm saints, even though their love for Him had grown cold. He planned to chasten them as proof of His love (Prov. 3:11–12; Heb. 12:5–6) . . . The church at Laodicea had to repent of their pride and humble themselves before the Lord. They had to “stir up that inner fire” (2 Tim. 1:6, PH) and cultivate a burning heart.
- c. Kendell Easley, *The Lord’s criticism is based on his love . . . This church must repent of its self-sufficiency (the verb form suggests a decisive act) and be earnest (the verb suggests an ongoing attitude). Laodicea now joins the ranks of sister churches Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis in needing repentance* (2:5, 16, 21; 3:3).
- d. Proverbs 3:12, for the LORD reproveth him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.
- e. William Barclay, *The discipline of God is not something which we should resent, but something for which we should be devoutly thankful.*

E. Promise (3:20-22)

1. Jesus offers fellowship to all who accept His invitation (20), ***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.***

- a. Jesus is primarily speaking to believers.
  - 1) Arlen Chitwood, *The first thing which a person must get fixed in his mind when studying the message to the Church in Laodicea is the fact that the Spirit of God is addressing Christians.*
  - 2) Mark Hitchcock, *Individual fellowship . . . the door as the hearts of individual believers within the church who need restored fellowship with their Lord. Christ is outside the church calling the believers within the church to repent and open the door of their heart so that He can restore fellowship with them.*
  - 3) Charles Swindoll, *Though this passage has some application for evangelism, the Lord was primarily concerned here with moving Christians from halfhearted commitment to full-blown repentance.*
  - 4) Thomas Constable, *It is the indifferent Christian whom the Lord urged to open his heart’s door and to invite Jesus Christ in for intimate fellowship . . . This verse expresses a truth taught elsewhere in Scripture, namely, that Jesus Christ desires intimate fellowship with all people* (cf. Song of Sol. 5:2–6; Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10; John 10:10; 1 Tim. 4:10). Consequently I believe that it is appropriate to use this verse in evangelism.
- b. It is primarily an issue of personal fellowship.
  - 1) John Walvoord, *With Christ on the outside, there can be no fellowship or genuine wealth. With Christ on the inside, there is wonderful fellowship and sharing of the marvelous grace of God.*
  - 2) Grant Osborne, *The loving compassion and deep longing is evident. The challenge comes in the demand for personal response, to hear Jesus’ voice, open the door, and invite him in . . . The promise here is acceptance, sharing, and blessing, a deep fellowship centered on reconciliation and a new life with God.*
- c. It is God seeking fellowship.
  - 1) William Barclay, *The unique new fact that Christianity brought into this world is that God is the one who seeks for people. No other religion has the vision of a seeking God.*
  - 2) Bernard (12<sup>th</sup> c.), *However early they might wake and rise for prayer in their chapel on a cold mid-winter morning, or even in the dead of night, they would always find God awake before them, waiting for them—nay, it was he who had awakened them to seek his face.*
  - 3) Charles Ryrie, *It seems unbelievable that Christ should be outside the door of His own church, but this is exactly what verse 20 pictures.*

2. Overcomers will rule with Jesus Christ (21), ***The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.***

- a. Charles Ryrie, *Then to the believer his promised true exaltation in association with Christ in His millennial rule.*
- b. Thomas Constable, *The privilege of reigning with Christ will be the portion of the overcomer . . . Here Christ’s Davidic throne on the earth and the Father’s (and Christ’s) shared eternal throne in heaven seem to be in view. Thus sitting with Christ on His throne seems to be the privilege of ruling with Christ in the Millennium.*

- c. Notable verses on reigning with Christ
  - 1) Matthew 19:28, *Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*
  - 2) 1 Corinthians 6:2–3, *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!*
  - 3) 2 Timothy 2:12, *if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;*
3. An encouraging word (22), ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.***
  - a. John Walvoord, *Once again the invitation to listen and respond is given: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*
  - b. William Barclay, *This saying does two things. (1) It individualizes the message of the letters. It says to every man as he listens to the words of the Risen Christ: ‘This means you.’ ... (2) It generalizes the message of the letters. It means that the message of these letters was not confined to the people in the seven Churches nineteen hundred years ago, but that through them the Spirit is speaking to every man in every generation.*
  - c. Kendell Easley, *“He who has an ear, let him hear reminds us that he does not force us to heed his words. Yet if the words of the risen Lord to John on Patmos are indeed what the Spirit says to the churches, then we neglect them to our peril.*

<b>CONCLUSION</b>
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- Grant Osborne, *It is the quality of worship, the effectiveness of the church’s witness, the conduct and piety of the church’s members. This is the description of a church that pleases God.*
- William Barclay, *The problem of modern evangelism is not hostility to Christianity; it would be better if it were so. The problem is that, to so many, Christianity and the Church have ceased to have any relevance, and people regard them with complete indifference. This indifference can be broken down only by the actual demonstration that Christianity is a power to make life strong and a grace to make life beautiful.*
- Warren Wiersbe, *The letters to the seven churches are God’s X rays, given to us so that we might examine our own lives and ministries. Judgment is going to come to this world, but it first begins at God’s house (1 Peter 4:17). In these letters we find encouragement as well as rebuke.*