

7 Churches Tour – 2019 - Laodicea

Introduction

- 45 miles south of Philadelphia is Laodicea, a very wealthy commercial city. When an earthquake destroyed the city in 60AD, the city leaders refused imperial aid and rebuilt the city with their own resources.
- An expensive black wool was processed and turned into prized garments and ruffs. Laodicea was famous for its medical school and eye ointment made from local ingredients. Laodicea had its own banking system with their own local currency, and would issue commercial letters of credit. It was a financially self-sufficient city.
- It was also a resort city. Hot springs bubbled out of the hills a few miles away from the city, but by the time the water reached the city via aqueduct, it was tepid, lukewarm, sickening to drink but suitable for bathing in.
- Yet, this is the last of the 7 churches, so Jesus introduces Himself as “The words of the Amen....” This is His last word to the churches, His last counsel, His last reproof, His last appeal, and His last promises.

The Message to the Church of Laodicea

- **Rev. 3.7-13.** There is no commendation for the Laodiceans. Jesus cannot find anything positive to say about this church! He speaks not as a suitor seeking to woo or as a businessman seeking to close a business deal or as a politician appealing for votes. Jesus speaks as the “faithful and true witness.” The Laodiceans’ spiritual condition is desperate – there is nothing redemptive about their situation, so Jesus speaks directly if painfully. The emergency of souls and shortness of time demand this direct yet loving approach from Jesus.
- Jesus rebukes them for their spiritual self-sufficiency (“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing” v. 17) which mirrors their material wealth and financial self-sufficiency.
- The Laodiceans no longer have the porous selves of the Reformation era – open to the Holy Spirit, the ministry of angels, the experiences of grace and love. They have buffered selves, insulated by their wealth against the ups and downs of life, and impervious to appeals of the Holy Spirit. No longer open to the transcendent, as a modern singer once sang, the Laodiceans are now living as a “material girl in a material world.”
- Laodicea’s gold means nothing to Jesus – it is impure and filled with worthless dross. Her eye-salve may sell well, but the Laodicean church is blind to her own spiritual poverty and the shame of her nakedness before God. Laodicea stands before God in her own human self-sufficiency and self-righteousness, yet is tragically unaware that before God, even her most beautiful clothing is as filthy rags.
- Jesus counsels the Laodiceans that if they want true riches, they must buy from Him (v. 18). He counsels them to obtain “white robes” from him, which are later described as the “righteous deeds of the saints” (Rev. 19.7-8). Those righteous deeds come from Christ Himself, for He is “Yahweh Tsidkenu,” the “LORD our Righteousness” (Jer. 23.6). The eye salve is the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 16.8-10).
- What does it cost to “buy” from these blessings? Can grace, love, righteousness and the Holy Spirit be purchased? “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55.1). Christ’s gifts are free in terms of coins, dollar notes, checks, wire transfers or credit cards – yet they cost everything – our whole hearts.
- The promise from Jesus (3.20) indicates God will never force these gifts on His people. Rather, our ears are to be open to Jesus’ knocking, and of our own freewill we open our hearts to Jesus. His knocking is not a polite knock – it is a pounding, indicating the lateness of the hour and the severity of the crisis (Song of Sol. 5.2).
- 3.20 also implies that Jesus waits outside the doors of the Laodicean church, asking to be allowed in. He is appealing to self-satisfied, self-sufficient, self-righteous and self-centered post-moderns whose secular, post-biblical buffered existence renders them almost impervious to the work of the Spirit and the experience of being born-again. For such Laodiceans there is hope – He comes, He stands, He pounds, He waits, He hopes.

Conclusion

- As the Laodiceans open the doors of their hearts to the Messiah, they may also enter the open door of heaven (4.1) into the very presence of God and participate in the joy and worship and love of His eternal kingdom.
- Yes, God can take even these smoky Laodiceans, the candlestick that emits more soot and smoke than light, and transform them so they “shine....like the stars forever” (Dan. 12.3)
- He comes. He stands. He pounds. He waits. He hopes. The One who loves us and freed us from our sins by His blood. How will we respond?