

Eastertide Revelation Letters #7

Letter to Laodicea

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Rev 3:14-22

This is the last sermon in a series reflecting on the letters in the book of Revelation to the seven churches in Asia Minor.

First, I have some questions for you to ponder:



Question 1: Do you have a distorted perception about yourself? I think we could all answer “yes” to this.

Jesus talks about this in **Matt 23:27**: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. **28** In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Most of us try to curate a particular perception of ourselves out there and we don’t want people to know what is really going on inside of us. Even if we’re introspective and think we’re working on our sin, we still have this. Where is this distorted perception in myself?



Question 2: How do I interact with the stuff in my life? Do I act like a small child when there is a single toy that another child wants?

Matt 19: 23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. **24** Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

Previously when we have talked about this passage, we have thought of Rod, our retired pastor, who, when he got a new car and said it’s “God’s car” and actually says he (theoretically) hits it with a hammer so he will get over the “new car feeling.” This week, I got to drive a new car that someone else owned and I imagined I owned it and needed to hit it with a hammer in order to follow Rod’s example. This made me panic a bit!

We are very wealthy people, even the poorest here among us. But the call to discipleship is to let go of everything and follow Jesus and let Him own and provide everything.

You might be distracted by the idea of a camel going through the eye of a needle. We don't really know what the eye of the needle is: is it a small gate opened at night that only 2 people could pass through to keep invaders out? Or was it really a needle? We don't know but either way, the point is made: What is it that I'm holding onto that I don't want to let go and that I think is mine, that I have gotten it for myself? Where is my blindness and sickness?

In this world, there is so much that comes in our eye gates: what we read, what we are aware of (not just through our eyes). Jesus connects these two ideas:

Matt 6:22-23

22“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy,^[a] your whole body will be full of light. **23** But if your eyes are unhealthy,^[a] your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

I won't want to be a downer but Laodicea doesn't get any positive feedback from Jesus; instead he has some hard things to say. Hear these words and ponder

1. your perception of myself.
2. What don't I want to let go of?
3. What is going into my eye gates and how might it be shaping me internally?



On the map, Laodicea is the last church on the mail route.

Notice that Laodicea is off the beaten path and has **no access to water**. They get hot springs from Hierapolis and cold springs Colossae.

Laodicea is known banking and their large stadiums that hold almost 100,000 people.

They manufacture black wool and have become wealthy from it; they also have hospitals and are well known for an eye salve that helps people see better. Note that the god of these hospitals was a snake which you can still see in the emblem wrapped around the cross on today's ambulances. So know they are big and wealthy and their name means "justice, power for the people." When this city was destroyed by a (different) earthquake in 60 AD, they refused help from the

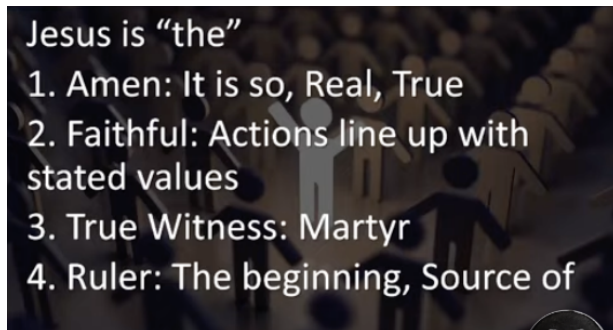
Romans. There is a 6-11 mile distance between the three cities of Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae.

To the Church in Laodicea

14 “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of Amen, the faithful and (THE) true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.

Jesus always introduces himself in these letters; he has no problem telling details about who he is: he is very clear about his identity. It is important to know who he is so we can know who we are in relation to him and what he is asking from us and offering us. Let’s go through these words he uses for himself:



Amen: Truly, It’s true, it’s reality...THE reality is really saying “I am.” When you say amen to something, you are saying *it is true, it is reality, make it so*. It’s a serious word! Jesus says he is THE amen.

He is also the **faithful** one: his actions line up with his stated values: he always acts according

to what is real: he is and does reality.

He is the **true witness**: when he walked the earth, he was the witness to God. If you saw him, you saw the father. When Pilate asked him if he was the son of God, he said “I am.” He is a true witness. This is where we get the word for martyr.

He is the source of God’s creation: this is important because Laodicea is a rich church. My experience with the wealthy is that they don't listen to people who don't have a pedigree: people with money and power don't listen to people who don't have money and power. Jesus is saying that HE is what is true and real: they HAVE to listen to him. He was in the beginning and created them.



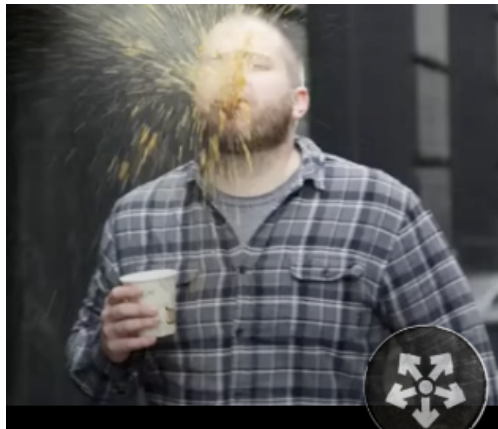
Moreover, most of the time, we experience life like this: storms and anxieties and things that don’t go the way we want. We might want to believe otherwise, but this is our state. We need a pole that isn’t going anywhere, a pole we can hold onto. Jesus wants

Laodicea to grab hold of him volitionally in the midst of the storm and know they aren't going to move. This is important because my experience of (my internal) world is that it often feels chaotic and I am not in control of anything. Jesus says, "NO, you aren't, but you can hold onto me."

15 I know your deeds,

Jesus says this to every church: it's like he's giving each church assessment test that measures their fruits of the spirit! He knows their deeds and, for Laodicea, he found that they are neither.

that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.



I grew up thinking **Hot = on fire for Jesus** and **Cold=dead, against Jesus**. However, this didn't make sense to me because how could he want them to be totally against him rather than lukewarm? I think instead, **hot water = healing** and **cold water = refreshing**. As the water traveled from Hieropolis and Colossae, it was lukewarm when it reached Laodicea. As Jesus looked at their fruit, he wanted them to be healing or refreshing. When the water arrived at Laodicea, it was full of bacteria and polluted and would make them vomit unless they boiled it first. Jesus is

saying that they have become so polluted that all they are good for is vomiting. You might have tasted this at some point: you drink half your \$6 iced coffee and later come back and it's lukewarm and not drinkable. He is saying this is his experience with this church.

When I read this, however, I don't think that I'm lukewarm...but when I accurately assess myself, I have to conclude I am neither hot or cold. This is an invitation to honestly assess ourselves as a community and as individuals to find the pollution. Jesus goes on to say:

17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

They don't **realize** these things; they are very egocentric. I've been reading a book analyzing the differences in generations: what strikes me is that technology makes us more individualistic and makes our lives easier. Every generation gets more technology and we get caught up more in OURSELVES and how we don't "need" anything. The church in Laodicea doesn't realize they

are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Laodicea was a city of peace; They think they are wealthy with great eye salves and hospital; they are the fashion center of Asia Minor. How could they be wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked?

The important thing is the word “REALIZED.” When I look back on my own life, I see so many places where I was blind. I didn’t realize how my choices were impacting my daughter and my family. This is an invitation to REALIZE the impact of the things I believe and consume. Our perception of ourselves, our unwillingness to let go of things, what we are willing to let in our eye gates: these all impact us and the people around us.

But there is a remedy:

18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

This gold is not literal **gold**: it’s what is actually valuable.

A **white robe** to cover their nakedness: this represents purity and a right standing.

All they need to do is ask for the righteousness of Jesus to cover their shame. This is important. Realize what is going on with you and ask for God’s covering. Then he will open their eyes.

The **real salve** is to look at Jesus and see what is really real. They need to acknowledge this and step into this and embrace it. They need to fix their eyes on Jesus.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus is the one we struggle with the most at the Village; we are very distractible. We end up clouded with distorted perceptions. The invitation is to fix our eyes on Jesus.

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.

I love this because it refers to Proverbs and Hebrews about the connection between parental love and the need to discipline our children. God is giving hardship to them so they will repent.

EARNEST (zealous) is an unusual word not often used: a modern translation might be: “be super excited about the rebuke and discipline!(?) They should be eager for correction because it

helps them see what is real and true and be moved in the right direction. But really, it's good to be invited to change and then see what happens.

The incentive is:

20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

This is a vigorous knocking, not a light tapping. Jesus is saying he is on the outside and he wants in. He is saying this to us, too. He is saying he wants intimacy and a relationship with us. It brings us closer together. Eating together is a healthy place to share this relationship.

And there is more!

21 To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

As I read this, I realized Laodicea was like the first church, Ephesus, who lost their first love and was just practicing Christianity with rules but no heart. In Laodicea, they also lost their first love



but didn't even practice without heart: they just threw religion out the door and focused on their power, wealth, and prestige. Jesus is saying they need to stop acting like adults who think they know everything. They need to be like children who run to the door when they hear a knock and invite Jesus in and have dinner with him and he will let them sit on his lap.

The recent podcasts I've done with my dad remind me of this. I've felt more and more like a 12 year kid with my dad. I have gotten to share some conversations with him that I haven't had ever or in a very long time. Jesus is inviting the Ladoceans to sit with him and share with him in his power and not worry about it: Just let him in. Don't have a distortion about what this really is: Take seriously his words because everything is HIS. Let go of it!

We live in a culture that is so geared to using your eyes to keep yourself entertained and focused somewhere besides Jesus. This invitation is to be a kid, fix your eyes on Jesus, and be excited for discipline because what we really want is holiness and freedom.

