

Things to Come

#5 The Letter to the Church of Laodicea (3:14-22)

I. The City of Laodicea

Located about 45 miles southeast of Philadelphia and ten miles away from its sister city, Colossae. Laodicea sits up on a plateau at the crossroads of two important trade routes. It was vulnerable to attack because its water had to be piped in through aqueducts that could be easily blocked. Some of the water came from hot springs and had to be cooled along the way. Some water came from a cooler source and that had to be warmed up a bit along the way.

Laodicea had a large Jewish population. It was a wealthy city, known for its banking industry, its soft, black wool and its medical school.

The city is mentioned four times in the New Testament: Col. 2:1, 4:13, 15, and 16

II. The Church

The New Testament does not record how it was founded. Most assume it was established during Paul's time at Ephesus (Acts 19:10). Paul wasn't the actual founder. In Col. 2:1, he wrote that he had not yet even visited Laodicea.

Some believe that Epaphras founded both the church at Colossae and Laodicea. Others think that Archippus (see the book of Philemon) was its pastor because he was named as the bishop of Laodicea in a 4th century document.

III. The Speaker

Christ identifies Himself using three key phrases:

A. The Amen

This is an unusual term, used only once in the NT. It means to affirm in truth. It refers to that which is fixed and certain. (See Isa. 65:16 and 25:1)

It also carries the idea that Christ is the one who confirmed all of God's promises (See II Cor. 1:20)

B. The Faithful and True Witness

Everything Christ says is true. (See John 14:6)

C. The Beginning of the Creation of God

Christ is the "first born," not in the chronological sense, but in the sense of preeminence. (See Ps. 89:27)

He is also the source or the origin of all creation. Through and by Him, everything was created. (See Col. 1:15-17)

IV. The Condemnation.

Notice that Christ's evaluation of this church is the exact opposite of the church's own self-evaluation. They think they are rich and without needs.

- A. Christ assesses them on the basis of their deeds. Our deeds either confirm or deny our true spiritual condition. They are a reflection of our heart. (Matt. 7:16)
- B. He condemns them for their lukewarm spiritual attitudes. It is a serious assessment. They are not real believers and He wants to vomit them out.

Consider Romans 10:2 "For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge."

- C. He also condemns them for their self-deception: "you don't know..."(consider the rich farmer in Luke 12:16-21)
 - 1. You are "wretched," "pitiful," and "poor"
 - 2. You are "blind"
 - 3. You are "naked"

V. His Concern

- A. Christ addresses those same three needs:
 - 1. Buy from me the real wealth you need- a faith that is more precious than gold (I Pet. 1:7)
 - 2. Buy the white garments you need to cover the nakedness caused by sin. Contrast Isa. 64:6 and Zech.3:3-4 with Isa. 61:10.
 - 3. Use the eye salve to anoint your eyes. Blindness always represents a lack of spiritual understanding. (Matt. 15:14, II Cor. 4:4 and I John 2:11)
- B. His appeal is based on love (a deep emotional love)

This kind of love includes reproofing (to expose and convict) and discipline (punishment). See Prov. 3:12, I Cor. 11:32 and Heb. 12:6
- C. He is actively pursuing their hearts

The Greek tenses suggest: "I have stood" (been there for a time) and "I am knocking" (a gentle and repeated request)
- D. He is offering an intimate kind of relationship. Dining like this was a significant occasion that allowed for very sweet fellowship among the closest of friends.

VI. His Promise

To the victorious, He promises the right to sit down with Him on the throne. (Consider Mark 16:19 and Rev. 22:1) This is the promise that we will reign with Him. (See II Tim. 2:12 and Rev. 5:10)

VII. So What?

Consider Matthew 7:21...It is not enough to be "spiritual." We must be "born again" (John 3:16).

- A. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Rom. 3:23
- B. The wages of sin is death. Rom 6:23
- C. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom. 5:8
- D. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Rom. 10:13