

One of my favorite moments of the classic stories is when an ordinary person finds out that they are the hero. When the young boy or young girl is found and told that they are not who they thought they were. They are actually the chosen young or the hero of a great tale. Harry discovers that he is actually a wizard. Rand is the dragon reborn. Frodo must save all of middle earth. Arthur will be king and Aurora that she is the long lost princess.

These stories have captured humanities attention for thousands of years. Because there is part of us that wonders and imagines what that would be like. To find out that you are not an ordinary orphan but something more.

This morning we will read the last of the letters to the churches. This letter goes to the church in Laodicea. And they will find out that they are not who they think they are. It's actually bad news at first. They are worse than they think, but there is the invitation that they can be better than they imagine. This same letter is coming to us. I want us to look at who Jesus is, Who we are, and then who we could be.

Turn with me to Revelation 3:14-22

### **I. Who Jesus is: Jesus shows us who we are (v. 14)**

Each of these letters has begun the exact same way.

This last one is not any different.

We begin with another vision of Jesus.

Verse 14, **"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.'"**

Jesus is the amen.

Jesus is the faithful one.

He is the only one who is faithful.

Everyone else might be mostly faithful.

Jesus is the only one who is always and forever faithful.

He is never not faithful.

And Jesus is the true witness.

What He says about us is true and He does not lie.

And He has been a witness to our whole lives, the lows and the highs.  
He knows everything about you.  
He has numbered the hairs on your head.  
And because Jesus is infinite and incomprehensible, He knows your future.  
He knows what you will do and who you can be.  
When Jesus invites us into the future.  
When He proclaims that this is who we could be, He is a faithful witness.  
He is telling us what He has already seen.

He is the beginning of Creation.  
This is a reminder that Jesus was there at Creation.  
He helped shape us in our mother's womb.  
Our very existence is dependent on Christ.

Now why have we spent all this time talking about Jesus?  
I thought this sermon was supposed to be about who we are?  
Can't we talk about me?

John Calvin, one of the reformers, wrote a massive book called *The Institutes of Christian Religion*.  
It was his magnum opus and surveyed all of theology.  
But he begins by saying all human knowledge is either about God or ourselves.  
And that we cannot know ourselves without thinking about God.  
And that we cannot think about God without learning about ourselves.

This is why every letter has started with Christ.  
Because you cannot know who you are before you know and recognize who Jesus is.  
And the more that we understand the truth of who God is and who Jesus is, then we will be able to understand and know the truth about ourselves.  
We were made in the image of God, and we cannot know what that means without knowing Jesus.  
And we cannot know God unless we understand those made in His image.

And this is part of the Laodicean church's problem.  
They have not been looking to Jesus.  
They have forgotten the truth of who God is.  
And because of that they have forgotten the truth about themselves.

## **II. Who they truly are: Without Jesus, we are nothing (v. 15-17)**

Jesus does not hold back in this letter.  
He tells the church exactly the truth about who they are.  
Last week, the Philadelphian church did not hear anything negative.  
They only were encouraged and blessed.  
Laodicea does not hear anything good.  
They only are rebuked and they are only told how they are failing.

And that might seem harsh but is necessary.  
Because some people have to hear the harsh truth.  
They are so deceived if Jesus told them one good area they were doing something in, then they would ignore the rest and assume everything is fine.  
This is why the church does not hear anything good.

Verse 15, **"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!"**

Jesus exposes the truth of their works.  
They are like lukewarm water.  
Some have interpreted this as either on fire for Christ or far from Him.  
As if the hot option is full of the Spirit and the cold one is being a non-believer.  
I have thought this in the past as well.  
But that does not seem to be what Jesus is doing.  
Because especially in this day, both hot and cold water are good things.  
And this is true today.  
We love a cold drink or a hot cup of tea or coffee.  
After all, why would God want people to reject Him?

This actually would have struck a chord immediately with the city.  
Because their city was well known for having some water problems.  
The city of Heirapolis was only six miles away.  
And it was known for having hot and warm healing waters.  
Colossae was ten miles away and close to the mountains.  
They got their water from the snow that would melt and it was always cool and refreshing.  
But Laodicea reportedly had no real water source.  
Their water had to come through Roman aqueducts from miles away.  
So the actual water in the city was not hot or cool, but lukewarm.  
Jesus is pointing to an actual reality in their city.  
Probably something that they all ignore and pretend is not a problem.

We have pretty hard water in our house.  
And I have never really minded what my water tastes like.  
So, sometimes people come and visit our house and we buy them bottled water so they can have something nice to drink.  
And I just roll my eyes at them because hey this water is fine who cares.  
I would have fit right in Laodicea.  
I probably would have said alongside them who needs cold or hot water.  
Just drink it.  
They are ignoring a spiritual problem worse than their physical one.

Verse 16, **"So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth."**

They have a spiritual problem.  
Their works are not fine.  
Their faith is not good.  
They are a church in danger.

This part is a little graphic, where Jesus says that He will vomit them out of his mouth.  
Part of this is probably because lukewarm water that is left standing by itself is more likely to make you sick in those days.

At least, that is what they believed at the time.

But this is also a reference to Leviticus 18.

This is a chapter on the need for sexual purity among God's people.

And here, God repeatedly says that if they will not obey,

If they will not follow His commands, then He will vomit them out of the land.

It is a graphic way to say He will send them into exile and they will lose the promised land.

It is an echo of that promise.

The path they are walking on is not a path towards being blessed by God.

They are heading down a path of being spit from God's mouth.

The next verse really spells out exactly why.

And Jesus describes who they truly are.

Verse 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."**

They have been deeply deceived.

Their own image of themselves is as those who have it all together.

Who need nothing.

But the truth is that they are a mess.

The first false truth they believe about themselves is that they are rich.

But they are not in need of nothing.

But they are in terrible need of Jesus.

Laodicea was a proud and rich city.

They were an important trade city with incredible wealth.

They minted their own coins in the city.

They had so many banks that even the wealthy and famous, like the Philosopher Cicero left their money in the city.

The city did have to deal with earthquakes and was completely destroyed by one not long after Nero's death.

Because it was such an important city the Empire offered assistance and to help rebuild the city.

But Laodicea said no thank you.

The city actually said no we don't need your money. We have enough.

And they were so arrogant and so proud that they didn't take free money when offered because they felt like they had so much they didn't need help and they didn't need to back.

And so they rebuilt their city on their own completely.

This is the attitude, the city, and it seems like the church itself also has.

They believe that they are rich and they don't need help.

This is precisely why Jesus said who are those who are rich it is hard for the rich to enter into the kingdom of God.

It is hard for those who are rich and for those who have it all together, and for those who have never faced hardship, and for those who are prosperous to be Christians because they think that they do not need God.

They have a false sense of who they are and their security comes in what they have and who they believe they themselves to be.

But they have forgotten who they really are.

So why God says you think that you are rich you think that you are this you think that you need no help at all, but you are wretched and you are poor.

The reality is that they are in deep spiritual need.

The rich rarely come to Jesus because they do not think that they need him and they are fine on their own and they are so mistaken.

Their eyes have not yet been opened to help where they are.

The letter says that they are to be pitied.

They are not somebody that everyone should look up to and want to be like.

This is actually everybody should feel bad for you.

They should be sad when I see the reality of this church.

And they are blind.

There is a deep spiritual blindness that has afflicted them.

They are walking around with massive logs in their eyes, and they don't see them and they don't notice.

They need to wake up and recognize who they are.

Somebody who is blind needs help.

Even in our modern world 2000 years later, those who are blind need assistance and they need help because there's so much of our world that is not accessible to them.

And then we do not make our whole world easy on those who are disabled.

We don't make it easy for those who need more help.

Now imagine your blind in the Roman empire at this point in time.

How much help do you think they would need?

Jesus is saying they think they're fine and they're proud and they're strong and they feel so awesome about how great they are but the reality is that they are stumbling around a blind and they are walking into things.

They need help.

They are naked.

They are like the emperor with no clothes.

They have paraded around the city.

They have paraded around Christendom assuming everything is wonderful.

But it is not.

Nakedness is also used over and over in the Scriptures to describe the shame of sin.

Adam and Eve discovered that they were naked in the garden and were ashamed.

In the Old Testament judgment often comes in the form of judgment.

God says that he will expose the nations nakedness.

This is what God is saying to the church.  
They are naked and they should be ashamed of themselves.

All of this paints, a picture of who the church is in reality.  
Because they have a false sense of who they are.  
They think that they are rich and strong and respectable an important pillar  
of the community and a great church and got us so lucky to have them.

But they are more like the disgusting water you would find on a swamp  
with green algae all over the top of it.  
And they are wandering through life with tattered clothes, blind, stumbling  
into everything and completely naked and shameful.

They need to recognize the truth so that they can turn to Jesus.  
You see this is why we need the reminder of the gospel. This is why we  
have to look to Jesus.  
Because in the gospel, and when we look at Jesus, he holds up a mirror to  
ourselves.  
And we have to be willing to look in the mirror to acknowledge the reality  
of what we see.  
When you look at Jesus and then you look at yourself, you notice your  
flaws and you notice your feelings.

This part of the point of the gospel is that it shows the truth about us.  
There are times the gospel can seem harsh when it says you are wretched,  
pitiable, naked, blind, and full of shame.  
It doesn't sound very affirming or uplifting.  
But there are times we need the truth. We need it unvarnished.  
The gospel tells us the truth about ourselves. It tells us that without Jesus,  
we are a mess and we are broken.

And those who sit and think that they are fine.  
Those who think that the gospel is just for those with deep trauma, who  
need a crutch.



Or that the gospel is just for those who are fools and you have not read enough and are not intelligent enough  
Or who believe that the gospel is for those who are weak and you can't do things on their own.  
If that's you, then you are like Laodicea and Jesus will spit you out of His mouth.

And there are some who are here thinking you don't need the gospel at all because you haven't really seen that much either you need to look in the mirror.

You need to look and you need to compare yourself and examine your works and examine your life and compare it to your neighbor or to somebody that you don't like you need to compare it to the glory in the righteousness of Jesus.

You need to compare it to perfection and see where you stand and where you really fall.

Listen, the hope of the gospel is not just that you are terrible and you are awful and look at how bad you are

How many of us when we look in a mirror or do we look and we see things that we don't like?

We see things that we wish that we could change?

We see parts of our body that that if we could afford, if we had access to it, we would fix that or we would change that or we wish that God would do something different to us ?

We wish we didn't have to be as we were and as we are now .

The hope of the gospel the hope of Jesus is that this is who you truly are right now, but you don't have to stay this way.

You could actually be something more.

### III. Who they could be. With Christ, we are everything (v. 18-22)

The reason again that Jesus point to see the problem with who they are, though that they can see they can be better.

And it's not that they can be better on their own strength through their own ability.

It's not that this is better is something that they can achieve it is instead of something that God offers.

That this image that they had of themselves can be true, but they have to come and get it from Jesus.

Verse 18, **"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich,"**

Jesus, tell him come and buy God's gold so that they can be truly rich.

They believe that they are rich because they have gold in the bank because they have money because they have jewelry because whatever it is the riches that they have, but there are true riches that God offers And the true riches that they want can be theirs.

But they need to come and buy them.

How can they buy them?

How can we purchase things from God?

Well, the good news they are free because Jesus already purchased them for us.

Jesus has already paid the price for us.

And up in the storeroom of heaven, there is a vast treasury of riches and blessings

In the story of heaven, there is righteousness and forgiveness and salvation and eternal life

All of these things are there and Jesus paid for all of it when he died on the cross, and when he came back in the resurrection.

And for us to gain it, it is free. All we have to do is admit that we don't have it. To go up and ask Jesus for it.

Isaiah 55 says the same thing, come and purchase from me without price Because Jesus paid the price so we don't have to.

If we wanna be truly rich, we have to go and get our riches from Jesus and from Jesus, get the gold that has been refined and will last.

Because all of the gold and all of the money and all of your investments and whatever places that you have, your investments in your retirement is going to be burned away and pass when Jesus returns.

**"and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen,"**

The next part tells us about the white garments .

We've heard about these white garments before.

An interesting thing to point out is Laodicea was known for their black garments and their black wool.

There's an interesting cultural thing.

God says, I know you think that you have these great garments, but you were actually naked.

You need to be clothed and I will give it to you.

That just as God clothed Adam and Eve after they noticed their nakedness, he will clothe us.

Jesus can take away all of your shame and all of your guilt that you feel.

I don't know about you, but I have carried a lot of shame in my life.

I've had a lot of shame and condemnation for bad decisions that I have made for secrets that I have kept for ways that I failed in abandoned and rejected God.

But God offers that He can clothe you that you do not have to be ashamed.

He offers these clothes so that one day when Jesus returns and we stand before the white throne judgment of God and the books are open at all

our deeds are read we don't have to melt in a puddle on the floor so embarrassed.

Instead can stand clothed with no shame.

And we can have no shame not because that we have done nothing wrong, but because Jesus has done nothing wrong.

Because Jesus has clothed us

**"and salve to amount your eyes, so that you may see."**

And He offers them something to help them see.

They are blind, but Jesus offer something to approve it from their eyes.

Repeatedly in the gospel, we see instances of Jesus healing the blind.

There's a moment where Jesus take some spit and spit in the dirt, and he rubs it into the man's eyes and then he can see

And that's gross we wonder why we can't do that that's disgusting.

I don't fully know why he did it but here is what I do now.

I know that the spit in the mud that Jesus offers is greater and more powerful than anything this world can give you.

To us, it seems like life and spit and mud and grossness, but if we have eyes to see it is what it can help us not be blind.

Do we care for you about the world has to offer and what we think it can heal from us when Jesus is the only one who can.

Jesus is the one who can remove the blinders from her eyes.

Jesus is the one who can help us see the world is it always meant to be seen.

Jesus is the one who can help us see ourselves not as we are now, but it is Jesus Jesus.

In all of this, Jesus and God offered to us so that we can be as we were meant to be so we can be as Jesus wants us to be .

Verse 19, **"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent."**

Again, this is an invitation.

Because Jesus loves us.

Jesus loves the church and love to see you.

Jesus loves us and He loves you before you clean yourself up before you get yourself together.

Sometimes in the teenage movies, the romances, the girl goes through a transformation and a makeover, and then the cute Finally sees her and likes her.

That's not how Jesus is.

Jesus saw us and He loved us and He died for us even when we were a naked, wretched pitiable mess.

And because Jesus loves us, He disciplines us and He corrects us.

God disciplines those that He loves.

The reason that I discipline and I try to correct my children and I try to teach them how to be better even though it is painful and hard is because I love them and I care for them and I want them to grow up and into be incredible people who love God, you don't have character.

If I didn't love them, and if I didn't want that for them, I just let them do whatever they wanted cause frankly they'd be easier on me.

Got speaks and talks to Laodicea this way because He loves them and He wants them to be what they can be.

And the way to get there is that we have to repent.

We have to listen to the rebuke of God.

When Jesus comes and he says you are sinners but stand up, I forgive you go sin no more that's what we need to do.

Repentance is one of the parts of faith.

It's not just that we say OK Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross for my sins and trust in you for my salvation Forevermore.

It is also that we were pent and we turned away from our sin so we don't continue in them anymore.

Instead, we follow Jesus.

Now Jesus calls for them to be zealous.

He doesn't want them to be lukewarm anymore. He wants him to be passionate to be zealous to be on fire for Jesus.

We shouldn't just be lukewarm and act like OK yeah I guess I'll follow Jesus. We should be zealous for following Jesus.

Plenty of us are zealous for a lot of things that we're not jealous for Jesus.

We might be zealous about football, but our favorite sports team.

We might be zealous about our favorite TV show

Certainly, plenty of people are zealous about our political opinions.

Tell you I wish I had half the zeal for Christ that some Christians seem to have for politics.

I wish some of us would be more zealous for the kingdom of God than we are for the kingdoms of this world.

Verse 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."**

Such a beautiful image that's offered to us

Jesus stands out the door and he is knocking.

Jesus is knocking on this church that is lukewarm and is going about their business and his lost and Jesus is just knocking say hey let me in I can take care of this.

Because even when we think about repentance, we can picture weeping and ashes and tearing our clothes and pouring ashes over our head and digging down and changing everything.

But the reality is the first step in repentance. It's just opening up the door to let Jesus.

The first step in repentance is acknowledging. I've been keeping Jesus at a distance and I just want to give him a chance.

He stands and he knocks and he calls.

Maybe you act like I do when someone strange knocks on my door and I'm sure that they're selling something. I just pretend that I'm not home.

And I hear them knocking  
I can see them looking in the windows  
And I'm just hoping they didn't see me and they will go away.

Look Jesus is standing there and He is knocking.  
And He will not give up after once or twice.  
Jesus will not give up and walk away after a few minutes.  
Jesus will stand and stand and stand, and he will stand for your whole life  
waiting for you to open it.

And even if you wait 50 years before you decide to let Jesus in, he will not  
say I've been out here a long time I've been in the rain woof you finally  
answered.  
Jesus will walk in and he will sit down and he will eat with you.

The image of eating is one of close, intimacy and fellowship.  
It is part of what we do when we come in communion and we get to eat  
with Jesus.  
So the scriptures call that we are partaking with Jesus when we eat.  
It is not just a simple of fellowship that we are actually in intimate  
fellowship and eating and drinking with Jesus.

Jesus does not keep us at a distance  
Instead, He invites us close to come and be with him.  
In this invitation is here and it is here even for those who are far off even  
for those who are broken and even for those who think that they do not  
need it.

Verse 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. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."**

The one who conquers is just the one who repent and invite Jesus in.  
It's the one who listens and who eats the call in the invitation of Christ

And that one doesn't just get The Fellowship with Jesus they get to come and sit with Jesus and rule with Jesus.

They get to be on the throne with Jesus and to enjoy Jesus forever

And it's not because they're so amazing it's because Jesus conquered because of Jesus faithfulness he sits beside God, the father and rules over all of the heavens and all the Earth and if we let Jesus in, he will not just sit with us at the table he will invite us to come and just sit with him.

There's a reversal that's happening here as well.

Adam and Eve in the garden were invited to come into a rule to exercise dominion over creation to sit on the throne of the Earth to rule it.

All of humanities has been given that job and how well have we done?

Well, just look outside just read the news lately. Thousands of years we have done a very poor job. In many places we have desecrated we have ruined the land that God has given to us. We have not ruled well.

And yet, and yet he will invite us to rule alongside him and new heavens

This is the gospel. This is who we can be with Jesus.

Jesus stands at the door and he knocks if we only let him in if we only repent and turn from our sins everything could be different.

We can be all we were meant to be.

All our deepest desires and fiercest longings can be met by Christ.

I pray, and I hope that we have years to hear and nice to see that we see Jesus at the door that we hear him knocking and that we let them in.