



# LAODICEA

## REVELATION 3:14-22

### **Catching up on the Story**

We've reached Jesus' final letter to the churches. These letters have contained a mixture of praise and admonishment. As is often the case with people and organizations, the churches can do better in their Christian witness. The constant, however, is the cultural forces surrounding these early believers.

The churches are constantly tempted by economic, religious, and political idolatry. These three forms of idolatry are all connected in the first-century world. The area's economy was controlled by trade guilds who worshiped patron gods at meetings that often turned into drunken debauchery. Without participating in the trade guild meetings, putting food on the table would not be easy. Not only were they encouraged to worship the patron god of their trade, but emperor worship was also an important part of civic involvement. Failure to offer the appropriate act of worship could label the person a subversive and thus a danger to the state.

By and large, each church Jesus addresses is tempted to accommodate to the surrounding culture as a way to ensure survival. Some of the churches did better than others. The whole of these seven letters makes it abundantly clear that Jesus wishes that we confess him as Lord above and before anything or anyone else, even if it costs us everything.

### **Revelation 3:14-22**

<sup>14</sup> "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation:

<sup>15</sup> "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup> Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. <sup>19</sup> I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. <sup>20</sup> Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. <sup>21</sup> To the one who

conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

### **Discussion Questions**

Read the text aloud. Then, read the text to yourself quietly. Read it slowly, as if you were very unfamiliar with the story.

1. In verse one, Jesus refers to himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation.” Why do you think he describes himself the way? What does the word “amen” mean?
2. Both hot and cold water have a use, depending on their context. What do you think Jesus meant when he said that the Laodicean church was lukewarm? Which temperature do you think Jesus wanted the church to be? Justify your answers.
3. Jesus says that he’s about to spit them out of his mouth. What might that imply?
4. Laodicea was a wealthy city situated at a critical crossroads. They were famous for their textiles, healing eye salve, and banks. Reread verse 17. What does the first half of the verse say about how the Laodicean church saw itself? In the second half of verse 17, Jesus describes what they are. Why would Jesus describe them that way? How do you think the church felt when they heard those words?
5. What do verses 18 and 19 mean?

6. Verse 20 is a famous verse that has been immortalized in paintings and evangelistic tracks. The image is often thought to communicate Jesus' desire to enter the nonbeliever's life. Given the context in which it is spoken, is this an appropriate interpretation? If so, why? If not, how would you interpret the image Jesus uses?
  
7. How are we similar or dissimilar to the Laodicean church?
  
8. How should we respond to an encounter with this passage?

### **So What?**

While all of the letters have been challenging for us to read, as they have all had something specific to say about how we live in this world, the letter to the Laodicean church hits a bit too close to home. We have been blessed beyond measure. We have money and possessions in abundance. We may not have said it out loud, but we have whispered to ourselves, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing."

I'm not saying that wealth is wrong. I believe God blesses us so we might turn around and bless others. Instead, we cling to what we have in a spirit of self-reliance. That's the American dream, isn't it? By the sweat of our brow, we can do or accomplish anything we set about to do. If we get knocked over, we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. We begin to believe that we don't need God to live. The church starts to think that we don't need God to succeed.

Again, working hard is good. God wants us to work hard and use the gifts he's given us to make the world better. But we have to let the Spirit refine us. We must put off self-reliance, placing ourselves in God's loving hands. Only then will we be able to sit with Christ at his banquet table.