

In our series on the book of Revelation, we've been working our way through the 7 letters that Jesus wrote, to 7 churches in, what in Bible times, was called "Asia" – today we know it as "Western Turkey".

And each week, as we've read these letters, I've said "It's going to be like waiting for the mail man to come.", because these letters are not just written for the churches in Turkey in John's day – they're also written for the church of today. And as we read these 7 letters, one or more of them, will be a letter from Jesus to our church. And so, once again, this week, we can be asking ourselves the question "Is this letter, a letter from Jesus to us?"

Today, we've reached the final letter – the letter to the church at Laodicea.

It is (without a doubt) the best known letter out of the 7 – I suspect for 2 reasons:

1. Firstly, it has a very well-known verse, which is usually taken right out of context, and used (not at all) how it was intended: V²⁰ **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.** And we'll talk more about that verse when we get to it.
2. And the second reason I believe it gets preached on so often, is because the greatest frustration for a preacher / minister, is to be the pastor of a church who have got no

go about them, and they see this as an urging “Don’t be lukewarm – be **hot** for God...

Now, before we read the letter itself, let’s have a bit of a “Lonely Planet” look at Laodicea:

Laodicea was a very wealthy city. It was the banking capital of Asia Minorⁱ (modern day Turkey), and it was a trade centre to boot. If you wanted to make money in Asia Minor, you’d go to Laodicea to do it, because that’s where wealth could be found. In the year 60 A.D.ⁱⁱ, Laodicea was razed to the ground by an earth quake. And, although financial help was offered, for the rebuilding, they refused to accept it. This city was so wealthy that it wouldn’t accept help from anyone – its pride wouldn’t let it.

Now, Laodicea was famous for several products. One of these products was its clothing industry. The garments that they made were from the dark, lustrous wool of their local sheepⁱⁱⁱ. And the clothing industry also brought much wealth into their city. I reckon if designer clothes in 1st century Asia Minor had their labels on the outside, we would’ve almost certainly, been able to see “Genuine Laodicean garment” stitched as a badge of status upon the clothes of the wealthy.

So their city was famous for its wealth, but it was also famous for its health. And that’s what we often find: Where money is, there also, is an obsession with quick fixes for our health, where people try to buy their health, and try to buy a few more years to live...

Economists in Australia are rightly, very concerned for our budget bottom line... As our wealthy population is getting older, we expect the Government to spend more and more money on keeping us alive, just a few more months or a few more years... And by doing so, we are saddling our children and our grandchildren, with a debt that they'll never be able to pay off... And because our population are so wealthy, one of the fastest growing industries, is the health supplement industry, and alternative medicines – anything that gives us a promise of a longer life, or a healthier life – we've got the money for it, and we'll pay for it – no matter how little evidence there is, of its proven effectiveness...

And Laodicea, had an obsession with health. In their city was a temple to the god of “Men”, M-E-N, who was their god of healing. They were also famous for their pharmaceutical industry. From Laodicea, you could buy a tablet, which you would grind into a fine powder, add a bit of water and mix into a paste. And this paste, when applied to the eyes was said to be a remedy for weak and ailing eyesight.

They also had a local health spa. A few miles out of town was a natural spring. The water from this spring would bubble up through the limestone, and would emerge from the earth, piping hot^{iv}, and full of minerals.

So, have we got some kind of picture of what the city is like? All of these archaeological details, for us, will help to make the letter live. So let's look at what the letter itself has to say.

Revelation 3:14–22 (ESV)

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.

15 " 'I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! **16** So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. **17** For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realising that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

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

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. **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.' "

Out of the 7 churches, there were 2 of them, to whom Jesus had nothing good to say. The first was “Sardis”. And their only good thing that they had, was their reputation, but their reputation was false... They had a reputation for being alive, but as far as Jesus was concerned, they were almost dead... And now we come to Laodicea...

And out of all of the seven churches Laodicea is in the **worst** state of the lot of them. Even though Sardis was about to die, there were still some within the church at Sardis who maintained their passion for the lord.... But not in Laodicea. In Laodicea, Jesus couldn't find a single person who had remained faithful within that church.

I mentioned V20 before **Behold, I stand at the door and knock.**

And usually, when we hear this verse being preached on, it's used as evangelical verse, to represent Jesus knocking on the heart of the unbeliever. But sadly, that's not what this verse is about at all. Jesus is standing, knocking on the door of the church. “Open the door. Let me in.”. Imagine that. The Lord Jesus Christ, knocking on the door of church, and not being let in. But we'll come to that later.

The letter begins with Jesus describing Himself as, **the Amen, the faithful and true witness**. To say that he is the amen means saying “truly”, “indeed”. What Jesus is

saying is **completely** trustworthy. And the words that He is giving are the words of a faithful and true witness.

We live in a world who so easily take offence, there aren't too many true witnesses around. We live in a world, where we are used to hearing "spin"... Where something that's awful, is made to sound "Just not quite so bad"... And even most pastors of churches (myself included) find it very difficult to honestly call people in their church to account, for their bad behaviour, because we're afraid that we'll offend them, and that they'll leave the church...

How many people do you know, who will tell you the honest truth about yourself... Or maybe more to the point, how many people will you **allow**, to tell you the honest truth about yourself? Would we ever listen to them??? Or are we filled with so much self-righteousness and self-justification, that we would never listen to them...

There's not many people who will tell us the honest truth, but Jesus will.

He won't flatter us. Nor will he denigrate us. But he tells it as it is. Have you ever felt your life being laid bare before the Lord. When you've been confronted by some truth about yourself?..... It happens to me all the time. So much of what I read in the Bible jumps out at me and convicts me of something that's in my life, and I thought I had been right, but God's there saying, "You were wrong, Michael. You've sinned.". And I know I've told you before, "Usually the main person I'm preaching to, when I prepare a sermon, is myself."

And maybe when you hear a sermon, and you are confronted by the sin in your life, you need to repent of:: This is Jesus, telling us the absolute truth, being a true and faithful witness.

And so, in V.15, he starts telling the Laodicean church the stark truth. Jesus knows their deeds. He's been watching. And as he's watched, he has found that they are lukewarm. They are neither hot nor cold.

Living in St George, you know very well, what lukewarm water is like...

If you live near the bore, the water that's piped to your house, is piping hot... And you can actually drink it. If your house is way at the other end of town, by the time the water gets to you, it's quite cool... And the bore water is drinkable when it's cool... But if you're like us, you're far enough away, it's no longer hot; But you're not far enough away, that it's cold... And so the bore water at our place, is tepid – it's at a temperature, that if you drink it, it makes you sick...

On our farm at Goondiwindi, it was the opposite way around. It was a semi-artesian bore, but it came up under its own pressure. The water would come up from the sandstone layers 550 feet beneath the surface. And it was very high in minerals...

But this water would come out from the ground, lovely and refreshingly, cool. And I used to love walking up to the bore head, turning on a tap, and drinking this lovely cool mineral water. If you wanted to boil it, you could drink it too. But at the other end of the farm, the water wasn't quite so nice. The

water used to run through a black polyethylene pipe, buried only a few inches under the ground. And this pipe ran for about 3 km. On a hot summers day, at the end of that pipe, this bore water was tepid. It was lukewarm. And you could try to drink it, but you would gorge.

And that's what Laodicea was like to Jesus. He'd prefer that they were hot or cold, but because they were lukewarm, he would spew them out of his mouth. He literally said that their church made Him sick....

Why? Why did the church at Laodicea make Jesus sick? Well, there were two things. "Indifference" and "independence".

Firstly, indifference. It seems, that Laodicea were a respectable church... And as with most of these letters, Jesus is talking about their witness... It is costly, to be a witness for Jesus... And a church, that isn't witnessing to the community, is a church that makes Jesus sick...

And He says here, one of the most strangest and confronting statements: ¹⁵ " **I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!**
¹⁶ **So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.**

Are you getting this: Jesus would rather that they be cold (and get right out) rather than being half-hearted about being His disciples... That's confronting... You know, we might talk about ourselves or other Christians, in terms of them

“backsliding” – “Oh, they still have a faith – they just express it in their own quiet way...” Really????

Lukewarm Christians make Jesus sick... He'd rather they weren't in the church at all... I don't know why He said that – I could guess::: If **true** disciples of Jesus would die witnessing for Him, when “lukewarm” becomes the new normality for a church, it's no longer a true witness...

How were they lukewarm? – Their independence.

The church at Laodicea said “I need nothing. I've got all I need”. What do you think their prayer life would be like with an attitude like that? The prayer life of a church is best – it is most powerful – it is most active,..... when a church realises that it has nothing.... When a church realises it has nothing, **that's** when it begins to pray, and that's when Jesus makes it rich.

And so the people of Laodicea came to church out of a sense of patronage, rather than a sense of privilege^v. Do you know the difference? Patronage says I support that church. Privilege says that church supports me.

How do you come to church? In a sense of patronage? Or a sense of privilege? I support that church... Or; That church supports me...

The church at Laodicea, were the opposite to the church at Smyrna: The church at Smyrna, were poor, but to Jesus they were rich. Physically, they had nothing, and they were suffering, but spiritually they were rich. They were faithful to God They were faithful witnesses, and they were suffering

because of it... but to them, Jesus was going to give the crown of life...

But now, here's Laodicea – the opposite... They saw themselves as being “rich”... **I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing**, but Jesus said, you don't realise, **that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.**

They thought they had all these physical blessings, but God doesn't look at the physical. He looks at the spiritual. He says, you think you're wealthy – well you're bankrupt. **wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.**, and you don't even know it.

You see, they thought that the wealthy people were those who had a good bank balance. But **truly** wealthy people are those who have been refined by God's holy fire. He says “You buy all this stuff from your town because you're wealthy. Come and buy this stuff from me because you're poor.”

You think you're wealthy, well your wealth will not buy you forgiveness of your sins. You're proud of your famous black garments for the outside, well I'll give you a white garment for your inside. I will make you pure.

You've got the fancy eye slave that you export to the nations. Yet you're blind. I will give you eye salve that will open your spiritual eyes. I will help you to see things the way that I see them.

.....

V19 represents something that we in the church often don't want to hear. Jesus rebukes and disciplines His church. And he doesn't do it because he gets a kick out of it. He does it because he loves us. *Until I became a parent, and loved my children so much that I **had** to punish their misbehaviour, I could never truly understand how much Christ **must** punish a wayward church because He loves it.* And so Jesus says to this church, **be zealous and repent**. Be fair dinkum this time, and change the way that you live out your Christianity. Be passionate about your faith.

And now we come to the most confronting verse in the whole passage. And as we talk about it, I want you to see this picture "Light of the world" by Holman Hunt. V²⁰ **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.**

What's confronting about this verse is that Jesus is standing at the door of a church, and knocking. Anyone can let him in and nobody has. Not a one. Did you know that in a lukewarm church, **one person with a hot faith can make all the difference.** One person with a hot faith can shake up the whole show.

The story is told of a black man, in North America, who was visiting another town, and tried to go to church and they wouldn't let him in. Outside the church, he sat down on the footpath and cried. Soon a man dressed in shining white clothes happened past and asked him "Why are you crying?"

To which the black man replied “They won’t let me in”. The man in white, shining clothes said “I’m not surprised. I’ve been trying to get in there for years, and they won’t let me in either.”, And then he vanished.

Jesus is standing at the door of a church and knocking. And the knocking is an invitation for any of the Christians in that church to let him into their hearts. To let him reign supreme in their lives this time.

Why won’t people answer the door? Have you ever gone to someone’s door and knocked and not been let in? Why won’t people open the door?

1.

Well, they may be too absorbed. Have you ever gone to visit somebody, and you’ve knocked on their door. You know they’re home. You can hear the TV going. You know they’re home, but you just can’t get their attention? They’re too absorbed in what they’re doing. Believe it or not, a church can be so absorbed in what they’re doing that they don’t even notice when Jesus is knocking at the door. (so full of their own activities; programs)

2.

Another reason that people don’t answer the door is because they’re too afraid. It is a sad state that the world is in when our elderly won’t answer their door for fear of a home invasion.

But spiritually, Jesus knocks on the door of a church, and some people are afraid of what He's going to require of us.

- They're afraid of what they have to give up
- Afraid of the safe, self-sufficiency they might have to let go of
- Afraid of the mission He might send them on
- Afraid of the public repentance that might be required of them
- The fear of failure
- The fear of commitment
- The fear of depending on somebody other than themselves

And so some people are too afraid to answer the door when Jesus knocks.

But there's no need to fear Him. Jesus isn't like some kind of a traveling salesman who's going to try to rip us off.

3.

Others won't answer the door because they're too ashamed. Have you ever rung the doorbell, and the people have told you later that they were in the shower and couldn't come to answer the door. Or perhaps they had their hair in curlers, or didn't want to be seen in their dressing gown. They were too ashamed.

Well, some people feel that they're not good enough to be a disciple of Jesus... And so they just stay in the background, feeling they're not worthy. But you know, if we wait until we are worthy,..... we will be waiting forever. That's why Jesus

died on the cross for us. He died, so that he could take away our shame.

4.

And others won't answer the door because they feel they don't need to. They feel they don't need the one who's knocking... They're self-sufficient, and they don't want that visitor interfering... They've got everything under control...

And some of us may be so filled with pride, that we don't rely on Jesus, or His church...

And so Jesus stands at the door and knocks. If anybody lets Him in, they have a relationship with him. And it's a two way relationship. **I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.** You know, one of the most amazing things is that God saves us for His sake, as well as for our sake.

And if anyone should open the door to Jesus, there is a reward. He says, "If I can sit on the pew with you, you can sit on the throne with me."

And that's the letter to Laodicea. **19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.**

How do you react when Jesus reproves... When the Word of God; or when His Holy Spirit reveals your sin, how do you

react??? When's the last time you've gone through serious repentance?

What about in the light of what this letter is saying about the sin of self-sufficiency, instead of depending on Christ.... And you understand (don't you?), that to depend on Christ, is to also depend upon your brothers and sisters in Christ....

And what about the sin of "indifference"? - where we believe in Jesus, but we're all very ho-hum about it....

- I know Christians – (even ministers), who are far more passionate and far more enthused, and far more vocal about their footy team, than they are about Jesus...
- There are Christians who are far more passionate about their farms than they are about Jesus...
- I know people who are more dedicated to their jobs than they are to Jesus.
- And many are more committed to their families than they are to Jesus....

Jesus reproves and disciplines because He loves...

I guess the question is, "How do we respond to His rebuke?"

"How do we respond to His discipline?"

Jesus is standing at the door, and He's knocking... **be zealous** – be fair-dinkum – be hot for God... and repent...

Questions.

-
- ⁱ Barclay William “Letters to the seven churches” (p.111)
 - ⁱⁱ Barclay William “Letters to the seven churches” (p.111)
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Barclay William “Letters to the seven churches” (p.112)
 - ^{iv} Pawson David, recorded sermon on this passage.
 - ^v Pawson David, recorded sermon on this passage