

Study Guide: The Church in Laodicea

Revelation 3:14–22

Sermon Summary

The letter to the church in Laodicea closes out the seven letters in Revelation 2–3 with a sobering warning and a gracious call. Laodicea was a church that thought it was doing well. They said, “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.” But Jesus, the Amen, the faithful and true witness, saw the truth. They were not spiritually healthy. They were lukewarm, self-satisfied, proud, and blind to their true condition.

The danger for Laodicea was not that they had nothing. The danger was that they thought what they had was enough. They had become focused on their works, wealth, reputation, and outward appearance, while Christ had been pushed outside the fellowship of His own church.

Yet Jesus did not leave them without hope. The One who had every right to spit them out of His mouth lovingly called them to repent. His correction was not cruelty but mercy. “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19). Christ offered them what they could never provide for themselves: true riches, righteousness, spiritual sight, restored fellowship, and the promise of reigning with Him.

This passage reminds the church that we do not exist for our own praise, comfort, programs, reputation, or success. The church exists because of Christ and for Christ. Everything we do must call one another and the world to behold our God.

Main Idea

A church may appear rich, successful, and secure, but if Christ is not central, it is poor, blind, and in need of repentance. Yet Christ lovingly calls His people back to Himself and gives them everything they truly need.

Key Truths from the Sermon

1. Jesus tells His church who He is.

Jesus introduces Himself as:

The Amen — He is the final word, the true fulfillment of all God’s promises.

The faithful and true witness — He sees rightly, speaks truthfully, and judges perfectly.

The beginning of God’s creation — He is the source, ruler, and goal of all creation.

Laodicea needed to remember who Christ is because they had forgotten who they were without Him. The church does not exist apart from Christ. We are gathered, redeemed, restored, and sustained by Him.

2. Jesus knows the true condition of His church.

Laodicea said they were rich and needed nothing, but Jesus said they were “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” Their outward confidence hid inward poverty. They were so focused on what they believed they had that they could not see what they truly lacked.

This is a warning for every church and every Christian. It is possible to be busy with good-looking things while drifting from the glory of Christ. It is possible to speak much about the church while making little of Christ.

3. Lukewarmness is a failure to use the gospel rightly.

Laodicea understood lukewarm water. It was neither healing like hot water nor refreshing like cold water. In the same way, the church had failed to be what it was called to be.

The gospel should bring healing through repentance and growth. It should refresh weary saints and encourage love and good works. But Laodicea had become useless in this way because they were trusting in themselves rather than Christ.

4. Pride pushes Christ out of His rightful place.

Revelation 3:20 is often used as a picture of Jesus knocking on the door of a person’s heart for salvation. In context, Jesus is speaking to His church. The tragedy is that Christ is outside the fellowship of the church that belongs to Him.

Laodicea had replaced worship of Christ with confidence in themselves. They were saying, “Look at what we have done,” instead of, “Behold our God.”

5. Christ’s correction is an act of love.

Jesus’ rebuke is strong, but it is also loving. He says, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.” Christ loves His bride too much to leave her in sin, pride, blindness, and shame.

His remedy is not for them to work harder in their own strength. He calls them to come to Him for what they lack: refined gold, white garments, and salve for their eyes. These point to true holiness, righteousness, and spiritual sight that only Christ can give.

6. The call is simple and serious: repent and return to fellowship with Christ.

Jesus calls the church to be zealous and repent. Repentance means turning from pride, self-sufficiency, and empty works and returning to Christ as the center of worship, fellowship, obedience, and life.

Christ’s desire is fellowship with His people. He calls them to open the door, to hear His voice, and to share communion with Him.

Going Deeper Questions

1. What does Jesus' description of Himself in Revelation 3:14 teach us about His authority over the church?
2. Why is it dangerous for a church or Christian to say, "I need nothing"?
3. What are some ways churches can appear successful outwardly while drifting from dependence on Christ?
4. How can good things — programs, facilities, numbers, community involvement, reputation — become dangerous if they become the focus?
5. What does it mean for the church to be useful like hot or cold water?
6. How should the gospel bring both healing and refreshment within the church?
7. Why is Revelation 3:20 especially heartbreaking when read in context?
8. How does pride push Christ out of His rightful place in our worship, fellowship, and service?
9. Why is Christ's discipline a sign of His love rather than a contradiction of it?
10. What does it look like to "be zealous and repent" personally? What might that look like corporately as a church?
11. What does Christ give His people that they can never provide for themselves?
12. How does the promise of sitting with Christ on His throne encourage faithful repentance and endurance?

Scripture for Further Study

Isaiah 55:1 — Come, buy and eat without money and without price.

Matthew 5:3-16 — Kingdom citizens are poor in spirit, mourn sin, hunger for righteousness, and shine for God's glory.

Luke 9:23 — Disciples deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Christ.

John 15:1-11 — Apart from Christ, we can do nothing.

Romans 1:18-25 — Sin suppresses the truth and exchanges God's glory.

1 John 1:5-10 — Fellowship with God includes walking in the light and confessing sin.

Hebrews 12:5-11 — The Lord disciplines those He loves.

Revelation 19:6-9 — The marriage supper of the Lamb.

Personal Reflection

Take time this week to honestly ask:

Where am I tempted to believe I “need nothing”?

Am I more impressed with what I have done than with what Christ has done?

Do my words, priorities, and service say, “Behold our God,” or “Behold my stuff”?

Where is Christ lovingly calling me to repent?

How can I return to deeper fellowship with Him?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the Amen, the faithful and true witness, and the ruler over all creation. Forgive us for the times we trust in ourselves, our works, our resources, or our reputation instead of resting in You. Open our eyes to see our true need. Give us true riches, clothe us in Your righteousness, and restore our fellowship with You. Make us zealous to repent and quick to worship. May our lives and our church call others to behold our God. Amen.

Family Worship Guide

Main Passage

Revelation 3:14-22

Memory Verse

Revelation 3:19

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

Big Truth for Kids

Jesus lovingly corrects His church and calls His people to repent and trust Him.

Simple Summary for Children

The church in Laodicea thought they were doing great. They said they were rich and did not need anything. But Jesus saw the truth. Their hearts were not close to Him.

Jesus said they were lukewarm, like water that is not hot or cold. They were proud and trusting in themselves instead of Christ.

But Jesus did not leave them without hope. He lovingly called them to repent and come back to Him. Jesus gives His people what they truly need: forgiveness, righteousness, and eyes to see the truth.

Family Discussion Questions

1. What did the church in Laodicea think they had?
2. What did Jesus say they truly needed?
3. What does it mean to be proud?
4. Why is Jesus' correction loving?
5. What does it mean to repent?
6. How can our family remember that we need Jesus every day?

Family Activity: "Need Nothing?" Jar

Place an empty jar on the table. Give each person a few small slips of paper.

On each paper, write or draw something people might be tempted to trust in more than Jesus, such as money, being good, having lots of things, popularity, talents, or being busy.

Put the papers in the jar and talk about how none of those things can save us or make us right with God.

Then read Revelation 3:18 and talk about what Jesus gives His people that they cannot get for themselves.

End by praying:

"Jesus, help us not trust in ourselves. Help us trust in You."

Family Worship Plan

Day 1: Jesus Sees the Truth

Read: Revelation 3:14–17

Talk About: The church thought they were rich, but Jesus saw they were poor and blind.

Ask: Why is it good that Jesus always tells the truth?

Pray: Ask Jesus to help your family see what is true.

Day 2: We Need Jesus

Read: Matthew 5:3–6

Talk About: Jesus says the poor in spirit are blessed because they know they need God.

Ask: What does it mean to know we need Jesus?

Pray: Thank God for giving grace to needy sinners.

Day 3: Jesus Lovingly Corrects

Read: Revelation 3:19 and Hebrews 12:5–6

Talk About: Jesus corrects those He loves.

Ask: How can correction be loving?

Pray: Ask God to help your family receive correction with humble hearts.

Day 4: Repent and Return

Read: Revelation 3:19–20

Talk About: Jesus called the church to repent and return to fellowship with Him.

Ask: What is one sin we need to turn away from?

Pray: Confess sin and ask Jesus to help your family walk with Him.

Day 5: Christ Gives the Reward

Read: Revelation 3:21–22

Talk About: Jesus promises that the one who conquers will sit with Him on His throne.

Ask: Why is being with Jesus better than anything else?

Pray: Praise Jesus for conquering sin and death for His people.

Family Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for loving Your church. Thank You for telling us the truth, even when it is hard to hear. Forgive us for trusting in ourselves. Help our family repent quickly, listen to Your Word, and remember that we need You every day. Thank You for giving us forgiveness, righteousness, and fellowship with You. Amen.