



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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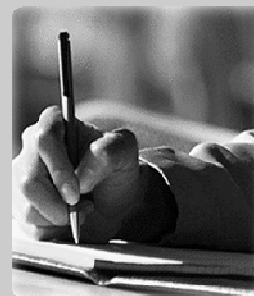


You've Got Mail: The Seven Churches In Asia HG86: Laodicea: Everything & Nothing

Revelation 3:14-22

Home Group Study Notes

12th January 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

At the start of a New Year, many people resolve to live life differently in the year to come. What 'spiritual resolutions' are you planning to introduce in your life for the year ahead? Share your hopes with your Home Group!



Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: The dramatic imagery of verses 15-16 leaves a great impact on many who read these words of Jesus. What is your immediate response to what Jesus has to say?

2: The Laodicean's were guilty of compromising their faith. Are your assumptions and aspirations for your Christian life simply a reflection of your culture and context or are they shaped by Biblical principles?

3: What lessons might the church in the Western World, as well as Emmanuel, learn from verse 17?

But it's striking to me that, after addressing the whole Laodicean church together, Jesus begins here to speak of 'anyone'. This implies that the invitation to open the door is addressed to each church member individually; that each one needs personally to put complacency aside and open himself to Jesus' love. Each one has their name on an invitation to the dinner, which will mark the beginning of a new relationship with Him. This message is not just about Jesus' relationship to the individual - it is the church, which he wants to transform. It is a picture of Jesus knocking at the door of the Laodicean church, asking to be let in. What an indictment – Jesus wants to be let into his own church!

A black South African discovered that he was not welcome in a 'white' church. In his anger and despair he cried out to God and, in return, he was comforted by a vision of Jesus who said to him: *'Never mind, brother. I've tried to get into that church for years, and I haven't managed it yet!'*

Remember how Dave Edmunds sang in the 70's: *'I hear you knocking but you can't come in!'* Will we open wide our doors so that Jesus may enter in or will we continue to lock him out with several bolts, three padlocks and two chains for good measure!

Jesus coming isn't a threat, but a precious promise to those who will invite him in. In vs20 he says of the present: *'I will be with you'* and in vs21 he says of the future *'you will be with me'*. This is an image of sitting together, of conversation and intimate sharing and of the believer 'who overcomes' offered a place seated at the throne of the risen Jesus. We must never forget, however, that it is to believers that this invitation is offered. The call to conversion is not addressed to those outside the church, but to those at the very heart of it. It is possible, then, to be a follower of Jesus, but to be so victimised by peer pressure, so shaped by the times and tides of our culture, that our distinctiveness are lost altogether. The only solution is to open the door once again to the risen Jesus and to begin a conversation with him that will not just jump-start our enthusiasm, but will change our perspectives and alter the fabric and flavour of our lives.

Conclusion: This is a fitting end to our exploration of the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor. If the water coming into Laodicea crossed a six-mile aqueduct, the truths of God coming into our culture must cross two thousand miles and as many years. There is every danger of heat-loss on the journey. But we are made the same offer today as was made then - intimate access to the very source of life itself. If we compare ourselves to some of the situations and martyrdom's we've looked at during the course of this study, and the way many Christians in other parts of the world continue under immense oppression and persecution and poverty – we know that to be true. Living as we do in the most comfortable generation in the history of the world, in one of the richest nations on the planet, in churches that have grown wealthy over many years, we need, perhaps, more than ever to hear the words of Jesus. Vs22: *'Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.'* My prayer for 2014 is that all of us may find a new passion for Jesus and the mission to the world we are called to share for, as our Text 2014 reminds us ...

“As we know Jesus better, His divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life.”

2 Peter 1:3

Of course, there's no virtue in poverty for its own sake and there are some wonderful examples of wealthy people who are generous with their money and their homes, and without whom the church's mission would be in a sorry state. But the numbing effects of prosperity are a snare to us all. Remember Jesus words that: *it's easier to thread a camel through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*

And so the whole clutter of materialism can so easily blunt our spiritual awareness. We don't have to pray for our daily bread because we know it's waiting for us at Waitrose. Gradually and unnoticed, our everyday lives can continue without much attention to God.

And what is true for individual Christians is also true for churches. They can come to rely more on the wealth of their traditions, the stability of their income and the efficiency of their systems than on the inspiration and empowering of the living God. However, Jesus can make the church in Laodicea truly rich with the kind of gold which he offers. Where they have been relying on their wealth for present comfort and future security, the risen Jesus offers alternatives to both. But it is 'gold refined in the fire'. Gold becomes pure only by the refining process, which burns out the impurities. The Laodicean Christians can't expect to find true riches without pain.

From Blindness to Vision: The Laodicean church, whilst claiming to cure the blindness of others, was afflicted with a blindness which prevented them seeing all that was happening to them, vs17. For example, they must have known about the sufferings experienced by some of the other churches in Asia. But they showed no sign of sympathizing with their fellow Christians in other places. Perhaps they even took their own affluence as a sign of God's favour on them and suspected that if other Christians suffered it was probably their own fault.

The Laodicean Christians believed what those they met each day believed. They were able to say *'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing'* vs17. They had grown comfortable and complacent in their wealth but the deeper truth, that they were *'wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked'* was hidden from them. They should have seen it and they didn't. That kind of blindness is a common disease today.

From nakedness to being clothed with Jesus' character: In this city of fine clothes, the church is 'naked' vs17. But Jesus can clothe it, not with black robes but with white, the clothing of the heavenly kingdom (see Rev. 3:4-5). (I have to say that I can't stand grunge/gothic black fashion – it's so depressing isn't it? I also struggle with clergy dressing all in black!). In Revelation 6:11 Christian martyrs are given white robes. And in 19:6-8, when the 'wedding day of the Lamb' finally arrives, his bride the church is given 'fine linen, bright and clean', to wear. This fine linen signifies the righteous deeds of God's people. Only Jesus can make people fit to share in God's kingdom. Only he can transform proud, self-sufficient people into Christians whose righteous character reflects his own. A church is naked when it fails to wear the character of Jesus.

Promise: Just as a parent knows that children can only learn some lessons 'the hard way', so Jesus suggests that the rediscovery of his love will only come through the discipline of suffering for, despite its desperate complacency, the church is an object of Jesus' love. Vs19: *'Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.'* The very harshness of his criticism is a mark of the love, which longs for the best and is satisfied with nothing less.

Vs20 is probably one of the most well known verses in Revelation: *'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.'* It's probably best portrayed in this picture 'The Light of the World' painted in 1853 by William Holman Hunt.

4: Are you showing a quality of life which reminds people of Jesus' compassion, His lack of self-concern, and His ability to let people know that they are valued to God? What areas in your life do you need to 'clean up'?

5: In verse 20, Jesus was knocking at the door of the Laodicean church to be let in. In what ways might Jesus be knocking at the door of Emmanuel as we enter 2014?

6: It is suggested that these 'Seven Churches' represent seven types of churches that exist at any one time and that congregations move from one to the other. Out of the seven churches in Asia Minor which, do you think, is most similar to Emmanuel and why? In what areas might we need to change?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



You've Got Mail: The Seven Churches In Asia **HG86: Laodicea: Everything & Nothing**

Revelation 3:14-22

Home Group Sermon Notes

12th January 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: Laodicea (Pamukkale) was situated about 100 miles east of Ephesus and stood on the southern side of the Lycus valley. Laodicea was part of a tri-city area, closely associated with the cities of Colossae (ten miles to the east) and Hierapolis (six miles north across the valley). Churches in all three cities are mentioned by Paul in Colossians 4:13. Laodicea was a prosperous city, namely, because of its position at the junction of major routes and was noted throughout the Roman province. They were:

A wealthy banking centre. Laodicea was known as the banking centre of Asia. When much of Laodicea was destroyed by earthquake in AD 60, it was rebuilt from their own resources, declining the usual financial help from Rome. Wealthy citizens financed building programmes: the new stadium for gladiatorial contests; the heating of covered walkways; and piped oil for massaging at the public baths.

A centre of medical excellence. Laodicea boasted a medical school and was noted for its eye and ear ointments. This was a powder made from various ingredients, including zinc compounds, which are still used in eye ointments today. Galen, the 2ndC medical authority, from Pergamum, wrote: *'You will strengthen the eyes by using the dry powder made of Phrygian stone, applying the mixture to the eyelids without touching the surface of the eye inside. For this is what women do every day, when they make their eyes glamorous.'*

A flourishing clothing industry. The Laodiceans promoted a fashion in black glossy fabrics made from the natural fleeces of a breed of sheep they bred themselves. Strabo described it as follows: *'The country around Laodicea produces sheep remarkable not only for the softness of their wool ... but also for its raven-black colour.'* Garments were called 'Laodicean', as we might speak of an Arran sweater or a Cashmere jumper.

And so, Laodicea was a kind of Bank of England; Harvey Nick's and Moorfields Hospital all rolled into one. And all of which helps to explain some of the references we come across in this letter.

Greeting: Jesus reminds them that his words, vs14: *... are the words of the Amen and faithful and true witness.* (see 1:5; 19:11). And Jesus was about to tell the Laodicean church the truth about its spiritual condition and its unwillingness to face the truth. *The ruler of God's creation* is a reminder of who Jesus is and the authority he holds in God's kingdom as the Son.

Address: Vs15-16: *'I know your deeds that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth.'* We know the church at Sardis was known as a cold but dead church.

The church at Philadelphia was hot and alive but here in Laodicea the church is neither hot nor cold. It's neither one thing or the other.

This dramatic image, in which the Christians in Laodicea are described as lukewarm and threatened with instant expulsion from Jesus' mouth, will be familiar to many of you and it is for this, above all others, that this letter is best remembered. However, the key lies in understanding the culture and context of what is being described here and the way it relates to the Laodicean Christians and the world around them. Laodicea's water supply was inadequate. Whilst each of Laodicea's neighbours had access to clear, tasty water, its own water, though safe enough to drink, was more likely to provoke vomiting than to be drunk with pleasure because of high deposits of calcium carbonate. We know that water was pumped over a six-mile aqueduct, from nearby Denizli and did, in fact, arrive in the city lukewarm. If it came in from the hot springs further up the hill, it had cooled by the time it hit town. If it came in from the cooler sources further downstream, the sun warmed it on its journey to the kitchen. Either way, by the time you got to drink it, it made you want to spit it out.

This dramatic image is a remarkable statement about the way things work in the world, in our lives and in our churches. As the water travels it both loses its own heat and takes on the temperature of the environment through which it passes. It can no longer have an impact on its environment, because it has been acclimatised to it. And that is the point that Jesus is driving home to the Laodicean church.

By labelling them lukewarm, Jesus is not complaining about their lack of enthusiasm, or suggesting that hot enthusiasm and cold resistance are preferable to half-heartedness. Just as the city has no water, which can supply life and health, so the church is behaving in a way, which serves no useful purpose. The effect of their conduct on Jesus is like the effect of the city's water supply: it makes him sick. And so, in this context, the letter to Laodicea is not an appeal for zeal so much as a call to conversion: a challenge to live a life that is determined, defined and made distinctive by the wisdom and power of God.

Challenge: In proud and affluent Laodicea, the church was as self-satisfied as its pagan neighbours. They thought they had everything, however, Jesus challenges this assumption in vs17: *'You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.'* Jesus' words here skilfully play on three things of which the city was proud. However, all the banks, pharmacies, and looms in the city cannot provide for its needs. The church at Laodicea had taken on the character of the city in which it was placed. God's people have been squeezed into the mould of the surrounding society. And the problem with a church like Laodicea is that it is blissfully unaware of its own tragic condition. It is a church in danger. So the exposure of the church's emptiness is followed by an invitation: 'I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see' (vs18). In pointed contrast with the pride in what they have gained by their own achievements, Jesus invites them to 'buy from me' what no one else can supply and to move:

From Poverty to Riches: We've already thought about how 'well off' the Laodiceans were and how pleased they were with their achievements. Their smugness about their wealth has a remarkably modern ring. Increasing prosperity has a numbing effect on Christians as much as anyone else. We come to take it for granted that our standard of living will continue to rise. We adjust our expenditure to take account of our pay increases. Even though we don't quite keep up with the Joneses, we prefer not to lag too far behind them.