***Laodicea

RV58-02***

Please turn to Revelation 3:14-22. We are beginning a new section. We are now studying the letter to the church in the city of Laodicea. This is the first in that series.

**The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia**

This would be a good time to stop and review to see where we have come from and where we are going, and what our connection is of what we're doing. The book of Revelation records seven letters from the Lord Jesus Christ to seven local churches which actually existed in Western Asia Minor in 96 A.D. when the letter was written. This is the area which we know today as modern Turkey. While these seven churches existed in a small geographic area, they experienced an unbelievable variety of spiritual problems and of conditions within these local churches. So, the condemnations and the exhortations of Jesus Christ to these churches serve as guidelines for divine viewpoint local church ministry throughout the church dispensation. We have learned an enormous number of guiding principles from the letters we have studied thus far on how to cope with problems that Christians on the local scene will be facing, and do face, throughout the church age.

**The Letter to the Church at Ephesus**

The order of these letters is analogous to the developments in church history since Pentecost. The first three letters have the relationship of reflecting a progressive development in that church history. The first letter was to the church in the city of Ephesus. The church in Ephesus compared to conditions that existed in the apostolic times. This historically covered the period from the day of Pentecost to 100 A.D., at which point, John (the last of the apostles) was dead, so the apostolic foundation of the church had now terminated, and all the apostles were gone. So, the apostolic period of the church was over. This was a period of the writing of the New Testament Scriptures, and was a period of extensive missionary activity.

**The Letter to the Church at Smyrna**

Directly out of that Ephesian condition of the local church, there historically evolved the next era, which was represented by the church in the city of Smyrna. The second letter was written, therefore, to the church in that city. The Ephesians era progressed into the era represented by the letter to Smyrna. This was a historical period now of 100 to about 312 A.D. The Smyrna period was a period of great persecution of Christians by civil government. This is when the Roman Empire increasingly stepped up the attacks upon Christians with the hope of wiping out Christianity once and for all.

**The Letter to the Church at Pergamum**

Out of the Smyrna condition arose the third period represented by the church in the city of Pergamum. Historically, this was a period of about 312 to 600 A.D. This was a period of amalgamation with the world, when the civil government of the Roman Empire simply took over Christianity, and made it the Department of Religion of the government, and from then on, Christianity became rapidly contaminated with a pagan religious system. At this point, we have four more letters that come. They come from the Pergamum period, and they all continue running. They start at different points, but they continue running throughout the church age right down to the tribulation.

**The Letter to the Church at Thyatira**

The first of these was the letter to the church in the city of Thyatira. This was a period that began in 600 A.D., and it goes to the period of the rapture. This was a period of amalgamation of biblical Christianity with the Babylonian mystery religion, which developed into what is known today as the Roman Catholic Church. This was a period of great corruption, consequently, of biblical Christianity. This condition, of course, still continues today.

**The Letter to the Church at Sardis**

Then, farther on down the line, things move along till we come to another church; that is, another period of church history. That is the Sardis period. The letter to the church in Sardis begins about 1520 A.D. This is the period of the Protestant Reformation, which began around 1520, and represents the restoration of sound Bible doctrine, but unfortunately, while they got back to Biblical orthodoxy, they neglected the key feature of the New Testament church, which is the ministry of God the Holy Spirit. So, very rapidly, while they had returned to the truth, they returned to a truth that became a cold orthodoxy. It had no relevancy to the life of the people. Although you knew what was true, it did not function in your personal life. That situation, of course, continues to this day. We have these great formal religious systems that have truth without personal reality.

**The Letter to the Church at Philadelphia**

Then we came to the next period, which is represented by the church at Philadelphia. This period began about 1750 A.D., and this was the period of the return to Bible study and the beginning of the modern missionary movement. It is hard to believe that with all these ages, certainly during the Dark Ages, that there was this period where the Bible simply was a neglected book. But once the printing press was invented, and once the Reformation had taken place, there was a resurgence in the study of the Bible. It began in earnest about 1750. The result of that was the great areas of truth, which had not been recovered in the Reformation, were now recovered with this revival of Bible study. The whole realm of prophetic truth, which had been totally neglected in the Reformation, was now the area of restoration, particularly the marvelous truths that refer to the church as the body of Christ, and all the privileges and honors appertaining thereto, as members of that group. So, that continued, and it was represented in the Philadelphia church.

**The Letter to the Church at Laodicea**

Then, in about the year 1900, there began a final and seventh period of church history (the Laodicean), which is represented by the church in Laodicea. This is a period of the rise of religious liberalism and of apostasy from New Testament doctrine. The core question became: Is the Bible the Word of God; or, as beginning in about 1900, theologians began to say, "The Bible *contains* the Word of God?" The latter meant that in the Bible are some things that are not truth, and that are not the Word of God. And by some means (mostly human reason), you must ferret out what is truth and what is not. You must distinguish between that which is the Word of God, and that which is the word of man. All of this is structured on this premise: that human beings wrote the Bible; human beings are fallible; therefore, human beings cannot write an infallible Bible.

But the problem with that syllogism of logic is that God made it very clear in Scripture that the Holy Spirit was superintending what was written, so that He overrode indeed the fallibilities of the human authors and prevented them from recording what was error. As you know, this is where the argument has come to a climax now. The heated argument is the inerrancy of Scripture: Is the Bible a book without mistakes, in terms of those original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts? Once you compromise on the inerrancy of Scripture, and once you compromise on the fact that God is really omnipotent, and, in spite of human fallibility, He can produce a Bible that is free of all error, then you are on your way into the Laodicean church condition: and, it's gross. I mean, you're going to read here some of the strongest language such that it is going to be hard for you to believe that God the Holy Spirit is actually quoting Jesus Christ correctly. But He is. The Lord makes it very clear what He feels about this Laodicean condition. This is where most of religion is today. This is where most of so-called churches are today. They are in the Laodicean condition.

So, Ephesus went to Smyrna; and, Smyrna (from persecution) went to Pergamum (accommodation by the world, and seeking the respect and acceptance with the world. From that ran lines of church history development, which will continue right up to the rapture of the Thyatira church, where Christianity becomes amalgamated with paganism. In the Sardis condition, there is a return to the doctrines of Scripture, but without the functioning of God the Holy Spirit in the lives of people, so that it becomes indifferent cold orthodoxy. In the Philadelphia church, there was the restoration of Bible study, and a restoring of God the Holy Spirit to His functioning in the life, not only of the local church, but really more importantly, in the life of the individual believers, so that the individual Christian knows what in the world the third person of the Trinity is all about. And I guarantee if you're here now, and you don't know what the role of the third person of the Trinity is in the church age, then you're pretty well out of anything significant relative to the Christian life. He is the key. The Philadelphia period represents that, and that goes on to the rapture. Then came the great apostasy represented by this period of Laodicea. That's the area to which we have come today.

**The Angel**

So, we're coming to Revelation 3:14 now, as we begin this letter: "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans." That should be better translated: "And unto the angel of the church *in* Laodicean, write, 'These things say the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.'" Verse 14 begins with the word "And." This is the Greek word "kai." It's a conjunction, and it indicates to us here that another letter is about to begin. So, when John hears that, he grabs his pen and he listens. He is the Lord's secretary. Jesus Christ is dictating to him. He addresses this to the "aggelos." The "aggelos," as you recognize, is the word which is translated from the Greek into English, and we get our English word "angel." This word does refer to spirit beings which have been created in a category above human beings, and they are the servants of God. In large measure, they serve God as messengers. So, this word "angel" is also translated as "the messenger of God," because angels are messengers.

**The Pastor-Teacher**

In this case, it's speaking about the messenger or the communicator of the church in Laodicea. Therefore, that refers, in this context, to a human person. This is the person who is the pastor-teacher of the local church in the city of Laodicea. So, you may call pastors "angels" if you'd like, as well as all the other things that you are inclined to call them. But anyhow, the messenger or the communicator is the one which is addressed here.

This pastor-teacher receives the divine communication from Jesus Christ. Then he passes the information on to his congregation. That is, of course, the simple basic elementary structure of the local church – the grace system of perception which God has set up for Christians to go from zero status, when they come into the Christian life in divine viewpoint, to super grace (maximum status) when they have developed spiritually through the intake of doctrine into the soul. The key feature of that is the local church with the Bible and a pastor-teacher communicator of that truth.

**God the Holy Spirit**

The Lord Jesus Christ is addressing this local church through its pastor-teacher elder, and that signifies to us that that is an important office in God's administration. It is an office which many people are trying to belittle today, and trying to eliminate. I read an article recently that was critical of the pastor-teacher concept, even though the Bible is very clear that there are those responsibilities in Scripture. The argument of the article was, if that's true, then what does that leave for God the Holy Spirit to do? That doesn't leave anything for God the Holy Spirit to do. Well, you know, anybody who has ever sat under a genuine pastor-teacher ministry; who has sat under genuine exposition of Scripture; and, who has been taught the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, would simply shake his head at a remark like that and say, "How dumb can you be?" While this man is writing for an important periodical, I knew that he was spiritually pretty dumb, or he wouldn't have made a remark like that.

It is God the Holy Spirit, who is the teacher. The person who happens to be giving the information is simply the agent of communication, but it is God the Holy Spirit that must make spiritual phenomena real to the believer. For that reason, we constantly caution you before a service begins: "Make confession of known sins. Use 1 John 1:9 so that you're in a position of fellowship with God the Holy Spirit, where He can be communicating God's truth to you as you hear it explained." If you don't do that, you might come to some kind of an intellectual grasp apart from the reality of the spiritual phenomena. You cannot learn the Bible unless you are a Christian. You cannot learn the Bible as a Christian unless God the Holy Spirit is your teacher. Until He is free to be your teacher, He cannot teach you, no matter how much you read the Bible, or how much you sit in church.

So, the office of the pastor-teacher is given great dignity in this very approach of all these letters. It's a clue to us that it is a key feature of the forward motion of the individual believer. The pastor-teacher, therefore, bears authority from God, but his authority is to the degree that he is faithful to the teachings of revealed Scripture. He doesn't bear authority in the local congregation because he's a social gadfly, and you can always count on him to be out there at the social events with you. He is not somebody who is always promoting some little social thing. He is not one of the good old boys that drops by your home and sits around and chit-chats and drinks your root beer with you. He is an authority because he explains the Word of God. If he doesn't do that, he is nothing, and he bears no authority.

He is simply to reflect that which Jesus Christ made so clear, and that so impressed the Pharisees. When they listened to Jesus speak, He made it clear to them that He was conveying a message that had been given to Him by the Father, and He conveyed it, therefore, with the authority of one who knew that He had a message, and He knew that it was the truth, and He knew, therefore, what He was talking about. And the people who sat around and listened said, "Never have we heard one speak with such authority." He was not a man of authority for anything else that He did, except the fact that He communicated true truth from the living God. So, Jesus Christ makes a point of contacting the chain of command within the local church operation through its executive head on the local level: *the* elder – the single (one) elder in every local church who is the pastor-teacher and who bears the authority from God to convey the Word of Truth in the power and the illuminating work of God the Holy Spirit. He is the messenger of the church.

**The Church (an Organism and an Organization)**

Let's look at that word for "church" again that you know so well: "ekklesia." This is a noun. It's a technical word used in the New Testament for the church as the body of Christ. We call that an "organism." It's a living thing. It is also used for the church as a local assembly of believers, and we call that an "organization." The word "ekklesia" refers both to the organism, the universal church as the body of Christ; and, it refers to the organizations found in various geographic areas where Christians gather and organize themselves together to pool their capacities for the study of the Word of God, and for the propagating of divine viewpoint truth.

This refers to a group which is called out by God the Holy Spirit. This actually comes from two Greek words. The first part of the word ("ek") is a preposition which means "out." And the second part of the word ("klesia") here comes from "kaleo," which means "to call." So, these are the out-called ones. They are the ones who have been called out of what? Out of the mass of humanity. They've been called out by God the Holy Spirit from the mass of unsaved humanity. But a specific group is called the "ekklesia." These are only those who were called out between Pentecost and the rapture.

Somebody recently came up and told me that he never realized before that, in the New Jerusalem, there would be a distinctive role for the church to play. You're not just going to be one of the crowd up there. If you have not yet grasped that: that you are the royalty there; that you're the royal family of God; and, that you are the consort of Jesus Christ, the King, then you've missed it. The New Jerusalem role that you will play is a magnificent role that is different from what the Old Testament saints will enjoy – the tribulation saints or the gentile saints. You, as the royal family of God, are a distinctively called-out group from all of the mass of humanity. You will have privileges and responsibilities such as others in the New Jerusalem do not have.

So, this word is used of a special group that God has called. I want to stress the fact that He has called us. While you are royalty, and royalty that's far, far superior to the royalty we've been hearing about in the news recently, I don't want you, on the other hand, to get so arrogant as to forget the fact that you were not born into royalty. You were born into considerably less. The reason you are in that position is because God called you out. So, you're an "ek kaleo." You're a called-out one. You're an "ekklesia." You're a special group with God. You like to stand in church, and we like to sing the hymn, "I found Him. Oh, I found Him," and you sing it with zeal and enthusiasm. I just want you to know that when you found Him, you weren't looking for Him. The reason you found Him is because He came looking for you. He pulled you out of this mass of this sloppy, death-ridden, hell-bent destined group of the mass of humanity, and He put His finger on you and said, "You, I'm going to change from a worm into royalty." That takes some doing. That's exactly what He has done for us all. So, to be part of the church is to be part of a unique group.

**The Church, Israel, Gentiles, and Angels**

This word is sometimes used in reference to Israel. The Bible uses it once in the New Testament as a church in the wilderness, which means a called-out group in the wilderness. And, of course, you see how they were called out of Egypt, and how they were called out from among the nations around them. But in the New Testament, God the Holy Spirit takes a word, which was in common use in the Greek world, and He gives it a technical meaning in terms of the New Testament church, which is a totally separate body from Israel. So, don't confuse that. Israel is not the church. Israel is distinctively different from the church. Israel begins in eternity past; Israel has a program; and, it goes right on into eternity. It moves right along, and it is Israel all along. The church has a beginning out here; it starts; it goes along; and, it comes out into eternity. When you get there, it's still the church. When Israel gets into eternity, it's still Israel. You have the gentiles. They have a program; and, they go on into eternity. When they get there, they're still gentiles. They're gentiles all along. And the angels have a program. God has a plan and a program for the angels. They go along. When they get to eternity, angels are still angels. And all along, they're angels. It is very important to recognize that that's how the Bible reveals the truth about these distinctive groups: Israel; the church; the gentiles; and, angels.

The nature of one's local church is very important to your spiritual development. During the church dispensation, the church is the key feature for the development of your personal spiritual life. Your maturity and your effectiveness in serving God the Father, and consequently, your earning rewards in heaven, are directly related to the kind of church you go to. If only all these people running around in churches ever understood that. That's why you do people a great service if you get yourself a fistful of those introductory Berean tapes and pass them out. It happens to be a tape with 30 minutes on each side. One side tells people how they may security eternal life and go to heaven. But the other side, equally important, if they are Christian, tells them what's at stake for them, now that they are a Christian, relative to their understanding of the Word of God.

You should see what has happened as believers have taken that tape to Christians who were muddling along in some run-of-the-mill, zero, nothing church, which could not understand what its mission and calling was and what it was supposed to be preparing people for, and they listened to that second side, and suddenly they realized what the Christian life was all about. Their first reaction was rage and indignation and anger over the years that they had squandered in spiritual wilderness, and of the people who had misled them – perhaps sincere people themselves. Then it swung to desperation, as they realized what spiritual zeros they were. Then it swung to hope, as they realized that you can begin storing the truth of God within your human spirit. While it will take two or three years to make the progress, and to make the forward motion to get to any kind of status of development, as long as you have breath in your body, you can make forward motion. And they began, and they went from anger to hopelessness; to zeal; and, ultimately to capturing the high ground of the spiritual life where God now has a container built in their soul through His Word into which He can pour His grace.

**A Container of Spiritual Maturity**

The reason most Christians do not experience the blessings (and I mean the prosperity, in every sense of that word) of God is not because God is withholding it, but because our Father cannot pour it out because there's nothing to pour it into. Most of you have enough sense not to pour a glass of milk out for your child without first putting a glass there to pour it into. You know that it's going to be a profitless venture to pour it out unless there is a container to take it. I'm going to tell you that God is just about as smart as you are, and He's not going to pour out super grace blessings upon people who do not have the container (spiritually in their soul) to receive it. Those of you that have built it, you know what I'm talking about. You sit there and wonder how in the world, and why in the world, the Lord prospers you and blesses you, and things fit together, and life is significant, and He moves you from one destiny (from one horizon of achievement) to the next – from one marvel to the next, because you've got a container into which He can pour His super abounding grace.

So, your local church makes a big difference. If that church doesn't know what in the world it's supposed to do, you're going to get hurt. The greatest thing you can do for Christians is to try to alert them to that, and to try to make it clear to them how all that fooling around in churches where they're being starved spiritually, and where all they're getting is a big dose of spiritual malnutrition, is going to hurt them not only now, but for all eternity. And it's all so unnecessary, but they won't know it unless you tell them. I'll guarantee it. There are plenty of people sitting here now who came to that realization. You went through this whole pattern yourself. Finally you exploded into the thrill of the realities of the grace way of life, and as a member of the royal family of God.

There is for you, as there is for all of us, and as there is for every believer in the church age, a right local church with its right pastor-teacher. Your business is to find your right local church and your right pastor-teacher, and then your business is to stay with it. If you ever find the right one, until God moves you geographically, and while the local church and the local pastor are faithful to the truth of the Word of God, the normal situation is that that remains your right local church. Anytime you drift off, it's going out into wilderness time. That's time logged out of the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit. That's time logged out of temporal fellowship and the storing of rewards. When you have done that, you can always look back and say, "Boy, here's the segment I spent away from my right church and my right pastor-teacher, and it has cost me this; I lost this; I squandered this; and, it was just wasteland, because that's how the living God works."

So, this is no small thing – this dignifying of the means of God's communicating to the individual believer, through the local church and through its pastor-teacher. In Laodicea, there was a lot of trouble. This is the worst church of all in some respects. There were some terrible things that had developed here, and it was all because of the local church's understanding of itself; of what it tolerated; of what the congregation tolerated; and, of the pastor-teacher's own failure toward them, or they would not have been in this mess. So, make your connection with your right church and your right pastor-teacher. And once the connection is made, it's like marriage: you view it as a permanent alliance.

**Laodicea**

"Unto the communicator of the local church in." The next word is "in" which is the Greek word "en." It is a preposition indicating location. It's in the city of Laodicea, which looks like this in the Greek: "laodikia." This is a city in Asia Minor in the Roman province of Phrygia on the south bank of the Lycus River, that famous valley through that part of Asia Minor. It was located in what is the central part of modern Turkey, up on a plateau 100 feet above the river. The ancient city was rebuilt by the Greek ruler Antiochus II in the middle of the third century B.C., and he renamed it after his wife, "laodice." That's where it gets its name "Laodicea." This city was situated on the convergence of three important Roman roads in this part of Asia Minor. As you know, in great empires of the ancient world, the key to those empires was always the roads. The Romans had learned this lesson; they learned it well; and, they were great road builders. Some of the roads that they built are still in existence today. But the Romans knew that roads were necessary for the authority of Rome to be effectively exercised at a distance.

So, this city had the happy circumstances of being located where three major roads intersected in the Roman Empire in that part of Asia Minor. It, therefore, became a way station for the extensive shipments by which Rome was exploiting the territories to the east of Syria and of Palestine. It was, furthermore, a military outpost, and consequently, it had a condition of great stability. So, with these factors, it became a major trade center, and the city became fantastically prosperous. Laodicea, first of all, was not a poor man's town. Laodicea was a prosperous city.

It became the center of banking and of industry. It had a lot of money changing because, again, of its location. It would exchange one unit of money for another from various areas of the ancient world. This city became so wealthy that, after it had experienced an earthquake in 60 A.D., it rebuilt itself entirely by the funds of its own citizens, apart from seeking government aid from Nero (who was the emperor at the time) and from Nero's government who was offering that assistance. They rebuilt the city without government aid.

This city prospered, in large part, from the fact that it had a wool from a famous black sheep. This is a sheep which is, apparently, no longer in existence. But this sheep produced a wool that had a glossy appearance to it. It was extremely soft. So from it, they produced a glossy, soft, black, woolen cloth which is used in the manufacture of clothing and of carpets. It was very much desired in the ancient world. It was a very big selling item.

This city had a flourishing medical school – a medical center. It researched and produce compound mixtures as medicines. It was not just: "Do you have a cold? Let's give you a shot of garlic in your nose and see how that works." Or, "If you have this condition, we're going to hang this around your neck." They began putting together various herbs and various chemicals, and producing compound medicines. They had come to the point where they were that sophisticated in their medical research. Of course, this was necessary for the treatment of more complex illnesses and diseases. They had an ear ointment that was of great therapeutic value, and was widely sought.

One of the things that they were particular noted for was an eye salve to treat eye ailments, which were extremely common in the ancient world. This was one of the major diseases of one kind and another, associated with the eye, that people suffered from. And here in this medical center, they came up with an eye salve that was a great relief in the treatment of these eye ailments. It was called the Phrygian Powder, because they were in the province of Phrygia, and it was made actually in the form of a tablet. It was to be ground up and made into a poultice. That was how it was used.

I want you to remember that, because, as the Lord Jesus Christ addresses this letter, these background facts about the city are going to start popping out, because He talks to them in terms of what was common knowledge. He talks to them in terms of things that were important to them; the things they were acquainted with; and, the things they were used to. We're addressing now a church really considerably different than the other churches because we're talking to the financial fat cats. They were not an exclusive group. They were the general run of the population in the city. Therefore, this letter is steeped in valuable information for those who have come to material prosperity. It's the one thing that the writers of Scripture constantly try to put people on guard to – that believers who prospered materially were believers who are now easy targets for the devil if they were not careful.

This city had its own coins that it issued. They dignified their medical center (their medical research) by putting on the coins the medical image of the staff with the serpents twisting around it. This was the staff of Aesculapius, which was the medical staff in the ancient world.



They also would imprint on these coins the names of their prominent physicians.

The city was noted for some warm springs. Actually, the springs were pretty hot, but they had a system of bringing it from outside into the city in square concrete viaducts that they had built, and they would lose a great deal of the heat along the way. So, by the time they got into the city, they were warm, but they still had a therapeutic effect. The one thing about them, however, was that if you drank the water, it made you throw up. So, it felt good to your ailments, and it had value, but they said, "Don't drink the water." That's where that expression originated: "Yeah, but don't drink the water" – right here in Laodicea, because it had such disastrous consequences when you did.

It was one center of Rome's imperial religious organization. The god that they particularly worshiped was Zeus, or Jupiter. They also had a strong Jewish community, along with various other ethnic groups, which is, in part, why the city of Laodicea was so prosperous. It was not a single strain of humanity as was so often true in the Roman Empire. There were people who had come from different places, and with them, as in the United States, where our population has come from various parts of the world, also came skills and abilities and insights and qualities that, when brought together, produced an infinitely stronger and more productive lifestyle than when these people functioned separately. That was true in Laodicea. It was of varied ethnic groups that had come together. And one of the big groups were these Jews.

They minted their coins in association with other commercial centers: Ephesus; Smyrna; and, Pergamum, for example, because they were such a wide distributor in the financial world. They had such a wide influence in the financial world that they didn't just have their coins locally, as most of these cities in the ancient world did, but their coins were in association to be used in other cities. It was a broader currency to be used across border lines.

One of the headquarters of the department of the internal revenue of the Roman government was, obviously (you might expect), located here in Laodicea, which was one of its more offensive features. The spirit of this city could be characterized by the fact that there were no extremes. As you read about this city, and you read about what ancient writers say about it, one of the things that comes through was that they were not too much this way, and they were not too much that way. They were just lukewarm. They were right here in the middle. They were middle-of-the-roaders. As you moved around through the society of Laodicea, you understood that these people were not for the things that they were in favor of, and they were not against the things they opposed. They were just down the middle of the road. There was just no extreme. They were lukewarm. Ancient writers recognized this as characteristic of the citizens of this city.

I think that this seems significant because it contributed to their financial success. They were inclined to being inclusive; they were inclined to broadmindedness; and, they were inclined to tolerate what was necessary – to do what they had to do in order to prosper. Therefore, they tried to avoid extremes.

**The Letter to the Laodiceans**

The apostle Paul was concerned for the Christians in Laodicea. He asked that the Christians in the nearby city of Colossae, to whom he had written a letter, greet the Laodicean Christians, and he asked them to exchange letters from him with them. It's an interesting note in Colossians 4:16-16, where we have this referenced. Paul says, "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. When this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you also read the epistle from Laodicea."

Now, this may be telling us that the apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church of Laodicea. Obviously, we don't have that letter today. There was a fake letter that was circulated during the Middle Ages as Paul's letter to the Laodiceans, but the genuine letter we do not have. This, of course, tells us that that letter (if he did write a letter to Laodicean), while it was filled with spiritual guidelines and directives like a commentary on doctrinal truths, was not a letter which was written under the superintendency of the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, was not an inspired letter, and, therefore, was not preserved by God the Holy Spirit, but was permitted to be lost.

So, in any case, whether he actually wrote them a letter or not, he was concerned for them. He had enough contact to know what was going on in this city, and what the problems were of this congregation. He tried to get some influence to them through the close-by city of Colossae and the believers that were there.

The word "Laodicea" is kind of interesting, perhaps, in its origin. It comes from two Greek words. One is "laos" which means people. The other is another noun: "dike," which means judicial judgment. So, when you put it together, what you have is "people judgment." That is the judgment of the people. Interestingly enough, what this city's name stresses is the opinions of people – the human viewpoint of man. Laodicea was the place where the congregation of believers was obviously more interested in the opinions of fallen man than that of a holy God.

So, John says to this church of the Laodiceans, "Write." This is the word "grapho." This is the word for recording a message on paper. John is the Lord's Secretary. He's taking dictation. This is in the aorist tense, which always indicates that a point action is thought of; that is, at the point at which Jesus Christ dictates, John is to write. Here you have exact dictation. This is not how the Bible was written. Inspiration, the superintendency of the Holy Spirit, does not mean dictation. The writers of the Bible use their own vocabulary. They talked in their own way, but they were preserved from error. In this case, however, you have a portion of the Bible which has been delivered to us from God via dictation. John is not using any of his own words. He is simply recording what Jesus Christ says to him. As Jesus speaks, he writes. It's active voice because John does the writing. This is in imperative mood, which is a command. John is told, "Pick up your pen and write."

Then the Lord Jesus Christ proceeds to identify Himself to this church. To every church, He identifies Himself in a way that that church needs to know Him. There are various things that are true about the Lord, and, interestingly enough, every church has been approached in a way that they needed to think about Jesus Christ. He is talking to prosperous people. He is talking to people who make things happen. He is talking to people who, because they have financial capacities, can make things happen. These are people who are the movers of vast issues in our society.

If you saw that program on rich people on television recently, it was quite interesting to hear one very wealthy man say, "We are more important than the government. We are more influential than the government." ... Money makes things move. The people that we're talking about in this city were used to making things happen. Most of us have never been in that position. So, we don't know what it's like. As I listen to these programs, and hear about these people of great wealth, I realize that this is a world that I really don't know anything about. As I'm reading, I have no frame of reference. I try to enter into it. I try to think about it. I don't really know how in the world one would act under those conditions; what you would do; how you think; and, what your character qualities would then proceed to be, when you had the thing that in this world is a powerful club – wealth. These Christian people, these early brethren of ours, had it. And Jesus Christ comes to them, and He presents Himself in a way that rich people need to know Him. He says that He is: "The Amen; the faithful and true witness; the beginning of the creation of God." Those words are fraught with fantastic meaning in identifying the Lord to people who have been prospered.

While you and I are not the richest people in our country, we are the richest people, even materially, in the world. Most of the countries of the world are dealing with human beings who do well if they have $1,500 in annual income. We are, therefore, in exactly this church-of-Laodicean condition. I don't want you to think that the next few sessions you're going to be able to breathe easy because this isn't going to apply to you. It's going to apply to you within the context of the standard of living that is characteristic of the American society. Had you been living in the time when John wrote this, with your material possessions, you would have been living like royalty, as well as being royalty.

So, we'll take this up next time – these identifying characteristics of Jesus Christ. If you and I learn to think of Him in these terms, it will help us to know how to be prosper materially, and not tear up our lives in the process of enjoying what God is pouring into the container that we have created in our souls through our response to His Word.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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