

**"Hope in Laodicea"**

**Scripture Passages:** 1) **Matthew 7:7-11**  
2) **Malachi 3:1-7**  
3) **Revelation 3:14-22**

**Review:** How is the health of your sense of hope? John wrote the Book of Revelation in response to the erosion of hope within the seven congregations he served. In Ephesus it was lack of love within the congregation. In Smyrna it was fear of death. In Pergamum it was accommodation to the culture. In Thyatira it was accommodating friends. In Sardis it was blindness to their spiritual reality. In Philadelphia it was closed doors. Each community had some situation that was eroding their sense of hope. How about for you and us? What erodes our hope? What would John write to us?

Today we come to the seventh congregation. These seven congregations in some way reflect the reality of all congregations. We can learn essential truths from these powerful letters. Listen now as John writes to the church in Laodicea.

**Read Revelation 3:14 to 22**

**Laodicea:** In around AD 60 an earthquake flattened Laodicea. The Roman government offered them stimulus dollars to rebuild, but Laodicea turned down any financial help. They were a rich community who could rebuild without outside help.

Laodicea was the Switzerland of its day. It was banking central. Some of Laodicea's wealth came from its textile industry. The area was famous for its black wool and the cloth made from it. There was also a medical school in Laodicea which promoted an industry of medical treatments, drugs, and salves. They were particularly well known for an eye salve that supposedly worked wonders. John used each of these items, gold, cloth, and eye salve to illustrate the dire situation within the congregation. He challenged the congregation to get its gold, its clothing, and its eye salve from God rather than the culture.

**Pride in Laodicea:** The Laodicean people were a prideful bunch who felt they didn't need help from anyone. They believed themselves to be rich in every way with no needs, not even spiritual needs. When that is the case why would you give God the time of day? Why would a person even remember God? God is inconsequential when you have it all. So in his letter John pointed out that their pride had made them poor, pitiful, blind, and naked, vastly different from how they perceived themselves. Their pride was making them blind.

The language here is the strongest to any of the churches. John wrote, "I know you inside and out, and find little to my liking. You're not cold, you're not hot—far better to be either cold or hot! You're stale. You're stagnant. You make me want to vomit."

Most pastors if they used that kind of description about the congregation they were serving would find themselves out on the street. John of course was in prison so he really didn't have anything to lose. We are seeing a similar kind of situation played out in the newspaper stories about St. Luke's in Kalamazoo. Who knows what is real in that situation, but the behaviors described in the paper are nauseating. Pride does that. Pride creates an ugliness that is cancerous to a community.

**Lukewarm Equals Poverty:** Eugene Peterson defines poverty: "When a person or a community has everything it doesn't need and little of what it does need." That definition describes the

people and congregation of Laodicea. They had everything they didn't need. They were rich in every area except the most important area, faith in God. On the outside Laodicea was rich; on the inside they were impoverished. John used the words stale, stagnant and lukewarm to describe their faith.

**Hot or Cold:** Laodicea had one important need that all the money in the world could not provide; that was good water. Laodicea was built on its site because of its strategic location at a major crossroads, but there was not a source of water there. The city to the north had wonderful hot springs which provided marvelous bath water, healing pools, water for hot drinks, a real gift in the era before stoves, microwaves, and coffee makers. The community to the south had fantastic cold water springs. The drinking water there was cool and refreshing. Laodicea's water, however, came by aqueduct. It traveled about 10 miles. By the time it arrived it was lukewarm, it was tepid, it was stagnant and stale. It was good for nothing. Also it was easy to tamper with the aqueduct. You could simply break it or poison it. Laodicea's water situation created a precarious living arrangement even with all their wealth.

**Spiritual Poverty:** John used Laodicea's embarrassing water situation to illustrate their spiritual reality. The church members in Laodicea had a stagnate, stale, lukewarm faith that was good for nothing. Their faith was so impoverished it made John want to vomit, just like drinking their water.

The question raised here concerns whether the living of our faith has an impact, is useful, makes a difference, gets people thinking and talking? Is our faith good for anything? Hot water and cold water are great in numerous ways, but stagnant water is useless. What about our faith?

We may think our faith is strong, real, rich, but is it? Do we have an excitement about our relationship with God that is contagious? Do we have an enthusiasm about our life together that people want to join us? Do we watch the events unfolding around the world and quickly decide how to use our gifts and resources to make a difference? Do we look around the community of Paw Paw and ask how is God calling me to serve right here at home? Do we ask God to lead us into relationships where we can share our faith and point people to the Kingdom of God? Are we energized by the transformation taking place in our own lives or has our pride derailed us? What is the state of our faith as individuals and as a congregation? Would our faith, and the living of our faith life want to make John vomit?

**Run After God:** Through John, the Spirit of God says to us, "The people I love, I call to account—prod and correct and guide so that they'll live at their best. Up on your feet, then! About face! Run after God!"

No matter the state of our faith journey right now, God wants to be in a life giving, life sharing, life changing, world changing relationship with us. We don't know whether the Laodicean congregation was able to embrace the reality of their spiritual un-health. We don't know whether they chose to run after God! We don't need to know. We simply need to know for ourselves and for this church. Will we be a people and a congregation that runs after God? Will we be a bold, risk taking, life giving, world-changing people? Or will we choose to live with a stagnant, stale, lukewarm, good for nothing faith?

**Conclusion:** As we gather at our Lord's Table today, know that the God of all creation, the God who has made all that we see and can't see, the God who knows everything about you, the God who formed you in love right now is knocking on the door of your heart. Will you hear that knock? Will you invite God to be the driving force of your life? Will you let God be the richness you long for? Will you let God work through you to bring healing, light and love to the world?

Without God at the center of our living, our lampstand will have little impact. God is knocking on our door. Will we choose to let God in so that our light will shine? I pray we will. Amen.