



KIAMA ANGLICAN
CHURCHES

Laodicea: Prosperous Paupers

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Today we're learning about a church. And you might be surprised to hear that this church is one that is disgusting, self-deceiving, and in need of repentance. And yet, even as I say that... The crazy thing is, I don't think they *ever* would have seen themselves in that way. It would've completely shocked them. But that's interesting, because it raises the possibility that *we* could make *their* mistake, either as a church or as individuals. And, like them, we could be none the wiser.

So that makes it worth looking at. Because what I've learnt from these revelation churches is that I can look really good in front of others... and I can fool myself... but I can't fool Jesus...because he sees the way we really are. And if I'm willing to expose the hole in my armor... If you're willing to let the mask slip and look at your own heart... then we both might agree that that's actually a bit scary. Jesus sees who we *really* are, even if we can't see or look at ourselves. Scary!

But the goal *isn't* to scare us. Or not *just* to scare us. Jesus says he rebukes the one he **loves**—verse 19—that's what he says. So he tells us the truth not to hurt, but to help...even if it hurts at the time.

I'm sure that it hurt the Laodicean church.

He says to them, "I know your deeds—you're not cold or hot. You're lukewarm." So you know if you think of the other churches in Revelation, on the one hand you've got the Ephesian church who let **cold** discernment squash love. On the other hand, the church in Thyatira let the warmth of their **love** squash discernment. Both had a problem, because the thing that they were zealous for and passionate about had squashed something else that they also should have valued. But the church at Laodicea's problem is, they don't value *anything* enough to risk letting it squash something else. They're not standing out for Jesus

(with their love), and they're not standing up for Jesus (in their doctrine). They're just lukewarm. I don't know if you've ever tried drinking lukewarm water out of the showerhead? It's kind of gross. And Jesus says that's what this church is like with their lack of... anything...

Verse 16: Jesus says...because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. Well, actually, what he says is stronger than that. The NIV is a bit cute here in translating it “spit.” ‘cause the word Jesus uses actually means to puke, chuck, chunder, blow chunks; we're talking about the technicolour yawn. And I *know* that that's gross, but if it's gross, take it up with the Lord ‘cause he said it, I'm just reporting the news.

And you know, if you *are* a bit offended, put off or grossed-out, lean into that... Because *emotionally* that takes us into the passage. Because I reckon the Laodicean church would have felt the same way. This was a rich town...very well-to-do. Probably not that different to a kind of first century Kiama. They were part of the Roman Empire in Asia Minor, and they were known for their wealth. When the region was hit by earthquakes in 60AD, the empire offered to rebuild, and Laodicea said: *We're good, we can take care of our own rebuild. We'll do it our way; don't worry about us. We want to pick the shade of the sandstone.*

They had wealth, they had means. This is no two-bit town. They were a banking and commerce centre; they were known for their fine-wool clothing, and for their medicines: including their eye ointments. Jesus telling this church that they're “vomit-worthy” would be like visiting some rich dude's estate, and calling his mansion a “shanty.” It's not going to go over well. But he says it. And as their minds go to their wealth and their stuff that makes them *better* than those ‘poors’ in the next town over, like, “we are Laodiceans! We have gold, expensive eye

medicines and fine clothes,” Jesus says, “You’re poor, blind and naked. You just don’t see it.”

The way that Jesus speaks in this bit... it’s actually very interesting. Because (like a lot of the later parts of Revelation), you almost need to *feel it* in your guts to understand what he’s saying. Because logically it kind of throws you for a loop. Let’s look at it...verse 17:

You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

That’s what Jesus says to them. And you can kind of imagine the sort of internal dialogue that goes on for a Laodicean when they hear that. They have gold, but Jesus says that they’re poor. They wear fine clothes, but Jesus says that they’re naked. And they have healthy eyes with their medicine, but Jesus says that they’re blind. For all of their own wealth and means, Jesus says that they’re poor and helpless. He says, “Buy from me gold, so you can *become* rich. Buy from me clothes, so you can *cover* your nakedness. Buy from me salve, *so that* you can see.” And you can imagine they’re just about fuming, exasperated, frustrated; like, “I already am all those things! I already have all those things! What’s the difference in looking to **you** for those things?”

And it’s as though Jesus says... “*Exactly!*” That’s the difference. Looking to him for those things. Going to Jesus for the things that we value, the things that matter the most to us. It’s locating what is *truly valuable* in Christ.

You might think that you're self-made, self-reliant, self-secure... And materially speaking, hey, you live in this postcode; you're probably right. (I'm still talking about Laodicea, of course.) But Jesus says that if you have all that without him...it's empty and wasted. Isn't that *interesting*? He doesn't tell us *not* to be wealthy; he says to locate our wealth and our value in him. To come to him for the things that really matter.

It reminds me a lot of what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:17—*Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they be not highminded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.*

You see the Bible doesn't say that believers should have no material wealth; though Jesus does warn that it's harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Why? Because, like the Laodiceans, it's easy to look at your material wealth and say, "I'm secure, I'm healthy, I'm wealthy, I'm good."

But if we do that, we put ourselves in danger. Because think about the non-Christian who does that: "I'm secure, I'm healthy, I'm wealthy, I'm good."

Well you're not good—not if you're honest with yourself. And neither are any of us. And the Bible says that the soul that sins shall die. There will be a day when our health will fail and death strips us of all our wealth. Whether you're buried in burlap or silk, cardboard or cedar, the worms don't care; you taste the same either way. And it's a slippery slope from the Christian who starts to trust in their wealth over Christ, to the non-Christian who does...the same. What's the path from here to there? Well it's really short! Jesus is already diminished when we lose sight of him (for our money and earthly security); he's just diminished a bit more fully by the point where you ignore him totally.

And **that** is the point where faith fails, death waits, judgment looms, and the grave strips us of all that we formerly loved. So how do we live rightly? How do we live wisely? We go to Jesus for what's truly valuable. We locate our wealth and our dignity and our honor and our value in him. That's his prescription for the Laodicean church. That's the remedy for the hazards of wealth and self-reliance. Because being self-made only works 'til the point where it doesn't. And then in that moment it fails, like it did for all of the great ones in history.

Jesus tells this church, 'be earnest and repent', *metanoete*, change your mind. Change the way you think about things. That's what repentance means. We sometimes get confused and think that repentance is about what we do; it's not, it's about what we think and believe. What we *do* flows out of that. See when I was on firegrounds in January, I could hear massive trees snapping and breaking. I believed (my mind was convinced) that a tree fall was genuinely possible. So you better believe that I wore that glorified ice cream bucket the RFS issued me, and stayed as close to the steel-framed truck as I could. Repentance is a change of our thinking, that leads to changed action.

And Jesus is telling the Laodicean church here that they need to change their thinking. Because they think they're rich, but they're poor. Wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. So how would you know if you're like the Laodicean church? I think that's probably the question that troubles us most, and the one that's most important to explore.

Well it'd be if you have the same symptoms as them; you're secure in your stuff and you're not amped-up for Jesus. You're lukewarm; not hot or cold. You're not known for pursuing love or doctrine, because you're happy where you are. The online chat is idle. The after-church conversations turn to the weather and sport; there's no passion—it's just church. Don't be *weird*. No-one knows what you think about God,

and you don't know what anyone else thinks. It's just not on your radar. That would be a warning. That's Jesus' warning. He stands in the midst of the churches. He knows who we really are. Even if we sing the right songs, parrot the right doctrine and tell people we'll pray for them.

If you want to explore that some more, we can. Ultimately, I think we've got to ask ourselves the hard questions. You've got the best chance of an honest answer that way. Do we value Jesus? Do we locate our value in him? Or are we like the lukewarm shower water?

He loves us with an undying love—a dying and rising love. Surely that's *got* to make a difference!

