

Handout 7: Revelation, Chapter 3:14-22 (Talk 7)
David Crabtree, Reformation Fellowship, August 8, 2021

I. Introduction

- A. What we will do today
 - 1. We will look at the last of the seven cities.
 - 2. Make some comments on the letters as a whole
 - 3. Talk about some implications

- B. We have looked at the first six cities.
 - 1. Ephesus—they can identify false teaching, but they have ceased loving one another as they ought.
 - 2. Smyrna—they have been suffering and will suffer more, but they are rich.
 - 3. Pergamum—although they live in a place of spiritual darkness, they have bravely faced their opposition, but they have not denounced compromising the faith.
 - 4. Thyatira—they have done some good things, but they have a woman in their midst who encourages others to compromise their faith.
 - 5. Sardis—they exhibit a self-confidence and resulting complacency that has historically plagued their city. They need to wake up and repent.
 - 6. Philadelphia—although they have been rejected by the Jews, Jesus, who holds the keys to heaven, will welcome them and vindicate them.

- C. Laodicea is an outlier
 - 1. It is unlike any of the other letters.

Again, this letter stands comparatively apart from other parts of the Revelation itself. It is unique in that the introductory words of Christ are not drawn from the Patmos visions of 1:13 ff. Nor are there the usual obvious parallels with the final vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. And even the imagery here is largely distinct from that which finds recurring echoes elsewhere in the book. There are several points of contact with the other letters, but the underlying thought and background are subtly different or sharply contrasting. And whereas the other six letters fall by subject and character into three convenient pairs, this has no clear affinity among them. (Hemer, p. 185)

- a) He has nothing positive to say about the church there.
 - (1) And yet it is not particularly harsh.
 - (2) I find it encouraging.

II. Laodicea

A. Geographical setting

1. Laodicea was located on a plateau in a large plain.
2. Two rivers to the east created the easiest routes up onto the huge interior plateau.
 - a) Important trade routes to the inland portions of Asia Minor

B. Historical setting

1. Founded by Antiochus II (261-246 BC).
 - a) He named it after his wife Laodice.
 - (1) He divorced her in 253 BC.
 - b) Part of Hellenization program
2. Became part of Pergamum
3. Came under the control of Romans
 - a) Under the Pax Romana, it became very prosperous.
4. In 60 AD, the city was completely destroyed by earthquake.
 - a) They turned down an offer of help from Emperor.
 - (1) They rebuilt using their own money.

C. Social setting

1. Wealthy
 - a) Funded arts and sciences
 - b) Famous medical school
2. Antiochus brought 2,000 Jewish families from Babylon.
 - a) A large Jewish minority developed in Laodicea.
 - (1) They appear to have been well assimilated.
 - (2) No evidence of tensions between Jews and Gentiles

D. Distinctive features of Laodicea

1. Banking center
2. Known for its medical school
 - a) Tied to the worship of Asclepius
 - b) Associated with a temple (Men Carou)
3. Manufactured widely-known medicines
 - a) Eye salve that was famous (Phrygian powder and oil)
 - b) Spice nard for ears
4. Manufactured fabric that was made from black wool
 - a) A superior material
 - b) They bred sheep to produce black wool.
5. Bad drinking water

- a) There was a lack of good water in this area.
 - (1) Nearby Colossae had good, cold water.
 - (2) Hieropolis had very warm water, rich in minerals.
 - (a) This water was considered to be very healthy, although hot.
- b) Laodicea had lukewarm water that was slightly emetic.
 - (1) It was neither healthy nor good tasting.

E. No real threat of persecution

III. Revelation 3:14

14 *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:*

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

A. To the angel of the church in Laodicea

B. From the Messiah—"the Amen"

- 1. This is related to two passages in Isaiah.
 - a) Isaiah 43:10-12

Is. 43:8 *Lead out those who have eyes but are blind,
who have ears but are deaf.*

Is. 43:9 *All the nations gather together
and the peoples assemble.
Which of them foretold this
and proclaimed to us the former things?
Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right,
so that others may hear and say, "**It is true.**"*

Is. 43:10 *"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD,
"and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.
Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.*

Is. 43:11 *I, even I, am the LORD,
and apart from me there is no savior.*

Is. 43:12 *I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—
I, and not some foreign god among you.
You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "**that I am God.***

Is. 43:13 *Yes, and from ancient days I am he.
No one can deliver out of my hand.
When I act, who can reverse it?"*

- (1) God is holding a hearing to prove his incomparability.

- (a) He calls for his people to be his witnesses (Cf. 42:18-25).
 - (i) He calls out the nations to participate in the hearing.
 - (ii) They are told to bring forth witnesses to prove that the gods predicted and brought about events in the past.
 - (iii) So people can know that their gods are gods who control history.
- (b) Then God brings forth the people of Israel to be his witnesses.
 - (i) God has revealed and saved and proclaimed.
 - (ii) The Israelites are his witnesses “that I am God.”
 - (iii) So that others may hear and say, “It is true.” (Amen)

b) Isaiah 65:15-17

Is. 65:15 *You will leave your name
to my chosen ones as a curse;
the Sovereign LORD will put you to death,
but to his servants he will give another name.*

Is. 65:16 *Whoever invokes a blessing in the land
will do so by **the God of truth**;
he who takes an oath in the land
will swear by **the God of truth**.
For the past troubles will be forgotten
and hidden from my eyes.*

Is. 65:17 *“Behold, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.*

- (1) This passage is talking about the two fates of the people of Israel.
 - (a) Those who are children of God in name only
 - (b) Those who are truly children of God
 - (2) God will be the guarantor of blessings and oaths.
 - (a) Because he is the God of certainty, reliability, promises
 - (i) He is the God of truth (“the God of Amen”).
 - (3) All the messiness of the past will be forgotten.
 - (a) God will create a new heavens and a new earth.
 - (i) The past will be forgotten.
2. This builds on the description of the Messiah in Rev. 1:5 “... and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.
- a) Rev. 1:5 ties together the notion of Jesus being a faithful witness, firstborn from the dead, and ruler of the nations.
 - (1) Those ideas are all repeated in Rev. 3:14.
 - (2) In Isaiah, these ideas are also present.
 - (a) Isaiah talks about how Israel is God’s faithful witness,

- (i) But Jesus, who died on the cross was the very best witness.
 - (b) Isaiah talks about a new creation,
 - (i) But Jesus is the firstborn from the dead which inaugurates the new creation.
 - (c) Isaiah talks about the nations being submissive to God,
 - (i) But Jesus will be the ruler of the kings of the earth.
3. Jesus is being described using attributes that, in the OT, are ascribed to God.

IV. Revelation 3:15-18

15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 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. 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.

A. Critique

1. I know your deeds.
 - a) Jesus is intimately aware of the state of things in the church in Laodicea.
2. Jesus knows they were neither hot nor cold.
 - a) They are like their domestic water supply.
 - (1) Hieropolis had hot but healthy water.
 - (2) Colossae had cold and good tasting water.
 - (3) Laodicea had lukewarm and sickening water.
 - b) They are the worst of all worlds.
3. Jesus is about to spit them out of his mouth.
 - a) Probably a reference to the emetic effect of the water
4. They think they are rich, but they are destitute.
 - a) This is just the opposite of Smyrna.
 - b) They have wealth, but they don't realize that is of no value.
 - c) They lack the self-awareness that brings humility and repentance.
 - d) Jesus says they are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.
 - (1) The last three correspond to some of the distinctives of Laodicea.
 - (a) Poor—Laodicea was wealthy, a banking center.
 - (b) Blind—Laodicea had a famous eye salve.
 - (c) Naked—Laodicea manufactured a highly sought-after black cloak.
5. Jesus urges them to come to him to get the spiritual equivalent of each of these products.

- a) Jesus offers a gold that is refined and purified by fire.
- b) Jesus offers white clothing—purity and righteousness.
- c) Jesus offers a salve that cures spiritual blindness.

V. Revelation 3:19-22

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20 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.

21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

- A. Jesus' appeal to the church in Laodicea
 - 1. It is a surprisingly gentle and welcoming response.
 - a) Jesus loves them despite their flaws.
 - b) His rebuke and discipline arise out of his love for them.
 - c) He calls them to repent.
 - 2. Jesus is readily available to respond to their repentance.
 - a) He is just outside the door knocking and encouraging them to respond.
 - (1) All they have to do is open and welcome him in.
 - (2) If they do, he will come in and eat with them.
- B. Reward
 - 1. The one who overcomes will sit on the throne with Jesus,
 - a) Just like Jesus sat on the throne with God, after he overcame.
 - 2. This could suggest that the Laodiceans, who are currently at the bottom of the totem pole, will be elevated to a position of ruling.
 - a) This is the only possible hint of suffering on the part of the Laodiceans.
- C. Let the one who is willing to hear this critique take it to heart.
- D. Jesus speaks to them almost as he would to non-believers.
 - 1. It seems they haven't betrayed him.
 - a) They never really embraced him.
 - 2. Jesus is ready and willing to take them in, if they will just show interest.

VI. Some comments on the letters to the cities as a whole

- A. These letters are difficult.
 - 1. They are written into a specific context known to the writer and the readers.

- a) Each letter uses allusions that are specific to that city.
 - b) We have some background information, but it is not clear that it is the background information we need.
- 2. The understanding I have presented is highly speculative.
- B. Some observations
 - 1. Not a very positive evaluation overall
 - 2. Jesus is blunt.
 - a) He isn't mean.
 - b) But he isn't gushing; he isn't as affirming as I would like.
 - 3. Very few specific criticisms; but the listeners at the time might have known exactly what was being referenced.
 - 4. Jesus is constantly talking about deeds.
 - a) What people claim counts for little.
 - 5. But Jesus is patient,
 - a) Just as God is patient.
 - b) This is a very important characteristic.
 - 6. The poorest communities are the healthiest.
 - a) The wealthy struggle.
 - 7. Jesus is not reluctant to see the hand of Satan in the persecution of believers.
 - a) We will see most clearly why this is in chapter 12.
 - 8. By my reading, the greatest challenge to the churches is the temptation to compromise the faith.
 - a) To downplay or hide one's Christianity in order to be accepted by the Jews
 - b) To engage in pagan religious practices in order to be accepted by society as a whole

VII. Nicolaitans—Balaam and Jezebel

- A. I think it is the same basic body of teaching.
 - 1. The letter to Pergamum equates them.
 - 2. Balaam and Nicholas can be seen as semantic equivalents.
 - 3. Jezebel and the Balaamite both encourage the same set of sins.
- B. Basic idea
 - 1. Eating meat sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality (as a part of pagan religious practices) are not inherently incompatible with Christian faith.
 - a) How could this possibly be justified?
 - (1) The council that met in Jerusalem (Acts 15) prohibited these things.
 - (2) My speculation—how eating meat sacrificed to idols could be justified:

- (a) The pagan gods are nothing.
 - (b) Meat sacrificed to pagan gods means nothing.
 - (c) So, Christians should be free to eat meat sacrificed to idols.
 - (3) I assume that a similar approach could be used to justify sexual immorality as a religious practice.
 - (a) I don't know enough about this.
 - b) Paul's critique: But it culturally communicates something.
 - (1) These practices communicate that the pagan gods are worthy of worship.
 - (2) This is incompatible with Christian faith.
 - (a) No Christian should communicate this.
 - (i) This means you are lying with your actions.
- C. Under the pressure of persecution, it would be difficult to resist doing everything possible to avoid the consequences.
 - 1. Just for being a Christian you could be
 - a) Ostracized
 - b) Deprived of a job
 - c) Beat up
 - d) Jailed
 - e) Tortured
 - f) Killed
 - 2. And yet what God wants is people who will testify with everything that they do that God is who he says he is.
 - a) No matter what the cost
 - b) People whose lives are an "Amen"

VIII. Study in compromise (Daniel 6)

- A. A look at how Daniel dealt with this issue
 - 1. Daniel was a high-ranking official in both Babylonian and Persian empires.
 - a) There is no indication that this was wrong.
 - (1) We were not called to be untainted by the sinful world around us.
 - (2) Even Jesus paid taxes to the Roman authorities.
 - b) But this put Daniel in a position where a conflict of values was likely.
 - 2. Daniel 6:1-10

Dan. 6:1 It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2 with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. 3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither

corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

Dan. 6:6 So the administrators and the satraps went as a group to the king and said: “O King Darius, live forever! 7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. 8 Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.

Dan. 6:10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

- a) Daniel made enemies.
 - (1) Some were envious of his position.
- b) His detractors could find no wrongdoing on his part.
 - (1) He was a trustworthy, honest, competent servant of the Emperor.
 - (2) Their only chance to incriminate him was to make following the law of YHWH illegal.
- c) They made prayer illegal.
 - (1) They knew Daniel habitually prayed three times a day.
- d) Daniel could have easily avoided getting in trouble.
 - (1) Discontinue praying
 - (2) Pray silently and inconspicuously
 - (3) Pray at a different time or place
- e) But this would have eliminated an opportunity to demonstrate that his highest loyalty was to God.
 - (1) This was a God-given opportunity to testify to God.
- f) So, he didn’t deviate from his typical practice.
- g) I can imagine someone giving him this counsel: “God does not want you to throw your life away. He has given you wisdom and a platform to do a lot of good. Praying the way you have customarily done is not a moral imperative. Just pray silently and the threat will go away.”
 - (1) This would have sounded good to him.
- h) How Daniel must have reasoned: “My opponents introduced this law as a way to get rid of me. They know that worship of YHWH is the cornerstone of my life. They know that I will not compromise that worship and that I will go to my death because of it. For me to change my practice to avoid death would be to communicate that my worship of YHWH is not the cornerstone of my life. I can’t do that.”
 - (1) Daniel saw this as a God-given opportunity to demonstrate concretely (risking his life) that God is who he says he is and he is worthy of our worship.

IX. Implications for us

- A. To the statement “YHWH is God”; we are to be the “Amen.”
- B. How do we do that?
 - 1. We can say so.
 - 2. But actions speak louder than words.
 - a) So, live in obedience to God with every action.
 - (1) Sometimes this does not cost us much.
 - (a) It takes effort.
 - (b) There can be some social cost.
 - 3. But situations can arise where the cost is great.
 - a) It can cost us our lives.
 - (1) There are places all over the world where being a Christian can get you in a concentration camp, or get you killed.
 - (a) China
 - (b) North Korea
 - (c) India
 - (d) Nigeria
 - (e) Sudan
 - (f) Turkey
 - (g) Iran
 - b) And it could happen here.
 - 4. Can God be trusted to see us through whatever comes?
 - a) That is what it means to say, “YHWH is God.”
 - b) We have to be convinced of and stake our lives on the very thing we are claiming to be true.
 - 5. May God grant each of us strength, endurance, and faith.