

Laodicea, the last city of the book of Revelation, was a very large and very prosperous city. It was prosperous because it sat on the intersection of a couple of major trade routes, and it had a lot of very important industries in the city that were big in the area. Laodicea was known, for example, for its clothes. It had a very strong wool production there. Laodicea was also known for its banking. You could get money if you needed it. Laodicea had a very large medical school, very famous for its eye salves which were supposed to help people restore failing eyesight. But I think the best example of the great wealth of Laodicea actually came from a disaster that happened to the city, because in the year 60 A.D., the city was almost completely destroyed by an earthquake. And afterwards when all the other cities were looking for outside help to rebuild their city, Laodicea did it all on its own. It didn't need any kind of outside help. It didn't need anyone to help them rebuild. And so Laodicea then was a city where people lacked nothing. It was a city where a person could live a very good life indeed.

But there was one major problem in the city of Laodicea, and that was they didn't have a local and steady water supply. The city had been built where it was because of the trade routes, not because of any of the natural resources in the area. So what little water they did have in the city and around it was nowhere near enough to support a population that large. And as a result, they had to bring the water in from a spring six miles south of the city through an aqueduct. And that would already be bad enough, but the water that they brought in wasn't very good. It was filled with all kinds of minerals, things like alum and lime. We would call it very hard water today. And this very hard water had so many minerals in it that it was really pretty unpleasant to drink. It was the kind of stuff that you wouldn't want to drink unless you had to. And to make it even worse, by the time that it got to the city through that aqueduct and through all the pipes, the water was lukewarm. Now, you may have had water in a jug sitting out in the sun all day that you've taken a drink from. Maybe you were out in the field or maybe you were just working outside all day, but when you go to drink that warm water, that lukewarm water, it's not all that pleasant, is it? Yeah, it quenches your thirst, but that's about it. It's not very satisfying otherwise. Now imagine you take that water out of that jug, make it extremely hard, maybe even a little bit cloudy or dirty because of all the stuff that was in it, and you had the daily water of Laodicea. Positively disgusting in some cases.

Now, if you went up north to the city of Hieropolis, there were hot springs there. And hot water is good for something, right? Hot water you can use for medicinal purposes. Hot water you can use for cooking or cleaning or whatever it may be. You can do something with hot water. And if you went east to Colossae, just a short distance away, you could get cold water there, the cold and pure waters of the river that ran through that city. Cold water is good for something too. We like to drink it. It's very satisfying. You can do something with cold water. But what you do with lukewarm water? Not much, really. If anything, you have to heat it up so maybe you can use it for cooking, or you have to let it cool down over a long period of time--because they didn't have refrigerators--in the hopes that you could drink it later. But as it was, lukewarm right out of the fountain, it was positively useless.

And that's how Jesus described the church in Laodicea: lukewarm and useless. He says in verses 15 and 16: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth." It's like Jesus came to the city of Laodicea looking for some kind of refreshment. If he had found cold water, that would've been refreshing. If he had found hot water, that would've been

invigorating. But lukewarm water? All he could do was spit it out of his mouth. It was disgusting to him. It made him sick.

But why would Jesus speak this way about the church in Laodicea? It seems so harsh to say this of that church. What is it that made the Laodiceans lukewarm? What made them lukewarm, Christians, was the fact that they didn't realize just how much they had become like the world. They didn't realize just how dangerous their situation actually was. It's as Jesus says in verse 17: "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." The Laodiceans thought they were rich. They thought that they were filled with good works. They thought that they were living as the Christians that they were called to be. But they weren't. You couldn't tell the difference between them and the world around them. If you had gone into the city of Laodicea to pick them out of a crowd, you probably couldn't do it. Because being a Christian often means that our lives are not going to be easier. Our lives aren't even going to be the same. Being a Christian means that our lives will become a lot harder in some ways. Being a Christian and following after Christ means that we will have to be different from the world, and that's not always easy. But the Laodiceans were not willing to pay that price. They were unwilling to do what it took to be Christians, and so you couldn't even tell that there were Christians in that city. Jesus came looking for refreshment, but instead found nothing to satisfy his thirst.

And Christians, Jesus warns us so often against the world. He warns us so often to not be like the world, because Jesus knows how tempting the world is to us. Jesus knows that the world makes many promises to us, promises that we might be tempted to go after. The world, for example, promises us happiness, often through the gold and the silver of the world. It's nice to have nice things, right? We all know that feeling of having something new, even if it's just new to us, like a new car or new television, whatever it may be. That feeling of being excited, of being satisfied, of being able to try out all the new little features, it's always really nice, isn't it? It's nice to have nice things. But it's so easy to focus entirely on those things, to become so focused on them that that's all that were looking for. To think that our happiness consists in our things, in the things which we have, the possessions that we own. But we so quickly forget, Christians, that these things will not last. They will break down. The excitement will wear out. They'll be destroyed one day. And after we're gone, whose will they be? Certainly not ours. The world promises us happiness, but it fails to deliver on that promise.

The world also promises us acceptance, community, belonging. It says we can be part of something, something bigger than ourselves. And it's always so nice to be part of something, isn't it? To know that there are people who like the same things that we like, who do the same things that we do, who think the same way that we do. It's nice to feel like we belong to something. And the world often promises these things to us. The world promises us that we can belong. And it's often a lot easier than being a Christian, isn't it? Because being a Christian means that we have to be different, that we are sometimes cut off from the world, that sometimes we can't be a part of those around us. But if we seek our community, our acceptance, our belonging in the world, pretty soon that can lead us away from God, even if we don't intend it to. We make an excuse here or a compromise here, and pretty soon we find ourselves going a whole day without ever having prayed or even read the Bible. And maybe when we realize what has happened, we try to fix it. We're going to do better now. We're really going to try! But then suddenly we lose steam, and we find ourselves lagging, not doing what we said we were going to do. Because that's the

problem, Christians. The world always leads us away from God. And friendship with the world is enmity with God, as James tells us. And what do we do if we gain the whole world, if we find everything that we wanted in the world, but lose God along the way? It's another promise the world simply cannot keep.

And the world promises us fulfillment too. It promises us the answers to all of life's questions, that we can find something that will satisfy us, that will lead us and enable us to live our lives to the best that we can. But we become so focused on what the world promises that we always keep our eyes focused right here, right on what is in front of us. We start to become focused on the day-to-day kind of living, thinking that maybe we can just work hard enough to get the things that we want, to find the answers that we need. But in the process we lose sight of eternity. We lose sight of God. And the answers that the world gives, the fulfillment that it promises, it doesn't last either. It doesn't satisfy us. Soon we are looking for something else. It's another promise the world simply cannot keep.

Because, Christians, the world's promises are empty. They will come to nothing. But Jesus promises us something far greater than the world can ever give. We find the true treasures, the things which truly last, in God alone! As Jesus says in verse 18 of our reading: "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see." So Jesus promises us something better than earthly gold, Christians. Earthly gold, earthly silver will crumble into nothing. It will ultimately turn in to dust. We can't take it with us. But the gold that Jesus gives, the gold of his Word goes on forever. It's like we said in the psalm: God's Word is worth more than gold, even much fine gold. It is something that we can take with us. It is something that will not crumble into dust. The Word of our God endures forever. And Jesus promises us something far greater than earthly clothing. Because all the clothing of this world, even the finest clothing, will wear out. It will turn into nothing. But the garments of Christ's righteousness which he gives to us through his blood will be ours forever. They will never wear out. We will be dressed in Jesus in heaven forever. And Jesus promises us something far greater than any earthly medicines, any earthly fixes. Earthly medicines may not even help. They may even make things worse. And honestly, even if they do make us better, it's only for a short time. But when Jesus opens our eyes, Christians, we will see eternity. We will see God. And when Jesus heals us in eternity, it will be forever. It will never come to an end. Jesus promises us something far more than this world can ever give. The treasures of Christ last forever.

And so Jesus comes to us today to ask us a simple question: which way will we go? Will we go with him? Will we follow after him? Or will we follow after the ways of this world? Jesus says in verse 20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." Jesus is knocking on the door of his Church. Will we open the door to him? Will we let him in and turn away from the things of this world? Or will we try to shut him out, to keep him out so that we may stay with the things of this world? And Christians, make no mistake here. Jesus is not weakly knocking at the door, hoping that we might let him in. Jesus is the master of the house, and he is seeking entrance to what is his. He is going to come in one way or another. As James chapter 5 says: "Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door." If we try to keep him out, if we try to bar the door against him, Jesus is going to come in

anyway, but in judgment, just like he's going to judge the world. But he calls to us today to open the door to him so that he may come in and restore us, to make us what we once were. Jesus comes to give us the true treasures which will never come to an end.

So Christians, let us turn away from the empty promises of the world. Let us open the door to Christ who brings the true riches, the riches of his love, the riches of his righteousness. And then we will sit with him on his throne in a glory which will never come to an end. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches!

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation, turn us away from the empty and vain promises of this world so that we may find what truly matters in you and in your Word; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.