

## Religious La-La Land

### Revelation 3:14-22

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

#### I. Introduction and Background:

- A. Our text for today is found in the latter part of Revelation chapter 3 if you'd like to be turning there. The Book of Revelation (the Revelation of Jesus Christ as given to the Apostle John was addressed to seven named churches in Asia Minor. And in chapters 2 and 3, we have recorded seven different letters that the Apostle was directed to send to the "angel" (or the messenger or pastor) of these churches. Today we will be examining the letter that was addressed to the 7<sup>th</sup> church, the church at Laodicea.
- B. Some believe that these 7 churches represent 7 successive periods of church history but this seems to be mere speculation by men rather than supported by scripture because the cited conditions within each of these churches was not only true then but can be found over and over again in every church age. And this makes it very relevant to us.
- A. While addressed to specific churches which all existed at that time, we know that these letters were shared among all of them. And it's noteworthy that at the end of each of the 7 letters, we find the same statement repeated. Each letter ended just as we will see in today's text in Rev. 3:22, with this statement: "***He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.***" Now that describes to whom Christ is speaking to within the professing church. Notice that "churches" is plural. So, Christ, speaking through the Holy Spirit, delivers these various encouragements and rebukes for the benefit of (and to be heeded by) those given spiritual ears to hear and heed all that is contained in all 7 letters – tho se born-again believers within the professing church of every age. So with that, let's focus on God's message for those He saves as we consider this letter addressed to the church at Laodicea.
- B. If you compare the letter to Laodicea with the other six you might well conclude this church to be the worst of the bunch and therefore representative of the worst that could be said of the professing church in any age. As I use the term "professing church" today, I am referring to all who call themselves Christians or claim to be of the Christian faith – some of whom truly are but many among them are exposed by these letters to be false professors. In each of the other six churches, Christ finds something to commend while also finding something to condemn in all but two of them. But He says nothing commendable about the church at Laodicea. And yet, as lifeless as this church (which professed to believe on Christ) is characterized, there were some of God's sheep among them as this is written for their benefit. You'll see that from our scripture this morning.

C. Well, I selected this passage for today's message because I found that the description of the church at Laodicea is so relevant to us in that it is such an accurate description of the majority who profess to believe on Christ in our day. You can see that I've titled today's message "Religious La-La Land." That expression, "La-La Land," originated from the zany, wild behaviors so often associated with Hollywood in Los Angeles (or L.A. as in La-La Land). Over the years the phrase has become more commonly used to describe any state of being that is totally out of touch with reality. If someone is under anesthesia, or if their behavior is erratic, or if they are zoned out on drugs, it's not uncommon to hear someone say "He (or she) is in La-La Land." And while I hope this title will stir up curiosity to prompt folks to listen, know that I don't mean to be flippant concerning this very serious subject. And I don't intend this to be demeaning in any way. And you can know that's not my intent because I readily admit that I too was once in "Religious La-La Land." From scriptures such as Ephesians 2 and elsewhere, God declares that spiritually speaking, we all (even those who are saved) begin our lives on earth as spiritually dead, blind sinners, out of touch with God's reality – in other words in "Religious La-La Land," so to speak. So with that, let's begin with Revelation 3, verse 14 where John is told...

## II. Verses 14-16:

A. Verse 14: ***And unto the angel <or pastor> of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;***

1. Christ here identifies Himself as "***the Amen.***" He is the Judge of all and has the last and final word in all things. And you can bank on His declarations and promises as we read in 2 Cor. 1:20, "***For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.***" "Yea and Amen" means absolute and unchangeable – the final word.
2. He identifies Himself as "***the faithful and true witness.***" That means He is perfectly loyal to His true church and trustworthy and honest. We can rely on His words. It's interesting that this phrase mirrors the description of Christ as "***the faithful witness***" as found in Rev. 1:5. I mention this because there we have the picture of Christ in the midst of His church as it is symbolized by the seven golden lamp stands. And so as He rebukes the professing church at Laodicea, He does so as the faithful witness who abides with His true church – Who will call out and deliver His sheep even in the midst of such abject blindness that you'll see characterized Laodicea and as is prevalent in most so-called "Christian" churches of our day. Who are these with whom Christ abides in the midst of to defend and deliver? They are those to whom He writes, who have been (or shall be) given the spiritual ears of God-given faith. He's faithful and shall not fail to deliver every single one for whom He lived and died.

3. And lastly He identifies Himself as “*the beginning of the creation of God.*” Recall how Christ is described as the Word in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of John’s Gospel, “*1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2The same was in the beginning with God. 3All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*”
4. So, take heed. This is the God-man talking who is faithful and true and whose declarations are Yea and amen, absolute and unchangeable! And He says this, beginning in verse 15...

III. Verses 15-16: “*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 16So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*” To be neither cold nor hot describes an awful condition of the heart and mind. It describes a professing “Christian” who either is or has become half-hearted, apathetic, or indifferent to the things of God. It could describe one who rather not delve into the gospel doctrine of God’s sovereign grace in Christ as he or she figures all religion that comes in the name of Christ is about the same. And yet these so described are found in the professing church. So clearly they are engaged in some level of religious activity, at least in its external form. This condition could describe a true believer whose zeal and fervency over the Gospel has diminished to such a state and to whom this is a rebuke and a call to repentance to rekindle their love for Christ and the Gospel. But persisting in this lukewarmness would expose one who is actually unregenerate – a lost person who merely professes to believe on Christ – one who ultimately will be spewed out of His mouth – rejected.

Laodicea was especially known for its wealth as it was a great commercial and financial center in Asia Minor. One commentator wrote that it was “the home of the millionaires” which would probably be equivalent to “the home of billionaires” in our day. So the citizens there were rich and knew it and they are said to have developed an unbearable “I’ve-got-it-made” attitude that often accompanies great wealth. And the verses that follow indicate that this attitude had spread within the professing church as well.

Within the church, they presumed that their being financially blessed was an indicator of their being spiritually blessed – a sign of being favored by God, not just materially rich, but spiritually rich as well. They had arrived. They presumed to be saved and have that all secured, buttoned down and taken care of. So by their way of thinking, they were not in need of anything (again, as the verses that follow will show). They were not in need of any correction, admonitions or rebukes, believing they could afford to be lukewarm about those things. This may well describe those who are always ready to compromise, to cry peace to one another with the attitude that all is well – that “We’re all good, church –going Christian folks here.”

This attitude is an obstacle that stands in the way of our interest and willingness to objectively consider anything contrary to our current understanding of how God saves sinners (our gospel) as we presume to be in need of nothing. With folks who make no pretense of being religious, who might well be described as “cold” with respect to the Gospel, you can sometimes get a hearing as perhaps they become concerned over their eternal destiny. With sincere, true believers who have been humbled under God’s Gospel of grace who might well be described as “hot” here, a fellow believer can fellowship and rejoice. But with these professing “Christians,” which one writer described as “...we’re-all-such-very-good-folks-here-in-Laodicea” people, you typically find them unreceptive. And listen – that’s true of all of us are until God by His Spirit shows us our desperate need of Christ through His preached Gospel. God makes His people receptive or willing in the day of His power (Psa. 110:3).

Now this faithful and true witness, God (who knows all), declares this unvarnished truth to them – not that He has spewed them out of His mouth, but that He will except they come to Him in repentance as the verses to follow will show. God here communicates not that He is grieved or angry with them but rather thoroughly disgusted – nauseated. Lukewarm water can turn your stomach and lukewarm religion turns the proverbial stomach of the Lord and sickens Him. Now as we move to verse 17, we see their disconnect with God’s reality as He tells them...

IV. Verses 17-18: ***Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: <sup>18</sup>I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.*** This counsel is directed to professing “Christians” who are out of touch with the reality of their own spiritual state in what today I’m referring to as “Religious La-La Land.”

A. Verse 17: From these 2 verses we can see that they had equated their material riches with a presumption of being spiritually blessed because Christ is describing their true spiritual condition. Those with material wealth knew they weren’t financially poor, but they were not aware of their spiritual poverty. Now note that the counsel of verse 18 is given, not just because they say (as in thinking to themselves) that they are rich and in need of nothing, but because that is their self assessment and because that assessment is 180 degrees out of touch with the reality – the truth concerning them as declared by the all-knowing, true and faithful witness. They think they have it made while in reality they are “...**wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.**” This describes the spiritual condition that we all begin life’s journey in as spiritually dead sinners. That’s why as Christ told Nicodemus, “...**Ye must be born again**” (John 3:7b). Consider first how by nature we all are:

1. Wretched – This word denotes someone in deep misery, afflicted with that which has serious side effects. Have you ever wished you could be as zealous and used by God as someone like the Apostle Paul? Well, here’s how Paul described Himself, Paul – a redeemed, born-again believer who was used mightily by God. In Romans 7:24-25 he wrote, ***“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?<sup>25</sup> I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”*** We are afflicted with sin so as to be wretched in our very sin nature. We’re born sinners with Adam’s fallen nature and consistent with it, we actually commit sin, being wretched sinners – seriously afflicted. And we can’t cure that but thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord there is deliverance.
2. Miserable – Consider how by nature we are all miserable. This word is better translated ‘pitiable’ as in one ‘to be pitied.’ This description fits the multitudes who continue along their merry way with a false sense of security in religious La-La Land, i.e. - totally oblivious to the reality of their spiritual condition. It’s like thinking you’re a great athlete while everyone else knows you to be uncoordinated and clumsy as an ox. It’s like thinking you’re healthy as a horse while others know you’re dying of dreaded disease. It’s like the ugliest girl in school expecting to win a beauty contest. We pity such sadly mistaken folks. And this delusion concerning the spiritual state which is initially common to all of us by nature is far more serious. To remain so mistaken here is to rush headlong toward eternal judgment with the false expectation of being saved only to hear the reality from Christ saying (as He did to those in Matthew 7), “I never knew you. Depart from me...” This describes those who think they are in fine shape but who in reality are miserable for they are on the road toward getting what every sinner deserves – an eternity of misery.
3. Poor – Consider how by nature we are all spiritually poor. But not all are “poor in spirit.” Christ said in Matthew 5 that the “poor in spirit” are eternally blessed, as He declares “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” To be poor in Spirit is to be humbled under God’s Gospel so as to discover our spiritual poverty. As guilty sinners, before the holy, inflexible justice of God against Whom we’ve sinned, we owe a debt that we cannot pay. This word translated “poor” is used to express the extreme opposite of “rich.” It indicates one who is bankrupt, insolvent, and destitute because they have nothing to pay or remit for the debt due unto their sins. Nothing but the precious blood of the God-man could pay (and has paid) the debt to God’s holy justice for the remission of sins so as to justify those for whose sins Christ died. God’s justice has been satisfied for them but not due to anything done by, in or through them. God doesn’t save His dear children because they believed or because of some decision they make or because of anything done by or in them. As poor sinners we have nothing to offer. And yet God’s adopted children will all without fail believe on Christ, but that is solely owing to the blood-bought gift of faith they are given. Christ purchased His true church with His own precious blood.

4. **Blind** – Consider how by nature we are all blind. Remember in Matthew 13 the disciples asked our Lord why He spoke in parables and in verse 11, ***“He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.”*** And then in verse 13 He adds, ***“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. <sup>14</sup>And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, (E-zay-us or Isaiah) which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: <sup>15</sup>For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; [They are in need of nothing] lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. <sup>16</sup>But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.”*** We must have blessed eyes – the spiritual faculties of life that we might see, and hear and understand with our hearts the truth of how God saves sinners by grace through Christ alone. And starting out as spiritually dead, we can’t see, hear, or understand spiritually. ***“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*** (I Cor. 2:14).
5. **Naked** – Lastly, consider how by nature we are all spiritually naked. Nakedness is a Biblical metaphor of our shame and our exposure to the wrath of God justly due unto our sins. We need clothing that we can’t make or buy for ourselves. Like Adam and Eve we naturally presume to hide our nakedness by our own doing – akin to their sewing together fig leaf aprons. But God showed them that would not suffice as He killed an animal and clothed them with animal skin, showing that blood had to be shed, picturing the shed blood of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. To imagine ourselves saved because of something we do, some decision we make, or by our own efforts is to attempt to meet God’s requirement of righteousness. But God declares through His prophet in Isaiah 64:6a, ***“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;...”*** Those rags of our own self-righteousness won’t cover us. We need the white raiment of the very perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. God tells us in Acts 17 that we all shall be judged by that very righteousness. Your righteousness must equal that of Christ. That means we must have the very merit of Christ’s obedience unto death, His perfect satisfaction to God’s law and justice (that’s His righteousness) imputed or charged to our account, just as the sins of all who are saved were imputed or charged to Him so that He could bear the just punishment for them. (Quote 2 Cor. 5:21).

In our fallen nature, we are naked and exposed. To be accepted before a holy God, we must be found with His robe of righteousness as described by Isaiah when he said, ***“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.”*** (Isa. 61:10).

B. Verse 18: So heed the counsel of Rev. 3:18, because spiritually (in and of ourselves in our fallen sinful natures) we all are Laodicean-like: spiritually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. And His counsel is to buy of Christ “...**gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear;**

1. When we consider that Christ, the Wonderful Counsellor as He is called in Isaiah 9, instructs them to “buy” we may logically wonder how and with what if we’re truly poor. The word translated “buy” is derived from the Greek word agora, the market place. The emphasis is on the taking possession of something. Salvation must be bought and this counsel is to come to Christ and take possession of the riches Christ has bought for God’s elect. This “buying” is coming to Christ to receive rather than to give. This is free grace! Christ is saying, “Come to me and take possession of the white raiment of My righteousness.”
2. The poor, destitute sinner “buys” just as commanded in Isaiah 55 where we read beginning in verse 1, “**Ho, [or listen up] every one that thirsteth, [who sees their need] come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; [the poor in spirit] come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. [This is the call of the Gospel] <sup>2</sup>Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. <sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” That’s the counsel Christ is giving in Revelation 3. We come to Christ in the manner we often sing of in the refrain from that grand old hymn, “Rock of Ages,” “In my hand no price I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling.”**
3. Christ counsels to buy of Him “**gold tried in the fire.**” The riches of God’s grace in Christ are like gold. As gold is tried in the fire, the grace of God comes to sinners in salvation as the fruit and effect of their Substitute and Savior having endured the fire of God’s wrath in their place. Like gold, the grace of God in Christ makes poor sinners rich before God. They have all the riches that His infinitely valuable blood could purchase for them. That’s to come into possession of the incorruptible, everlasting treasures of eternal life.
4. The “**white raiment**” symbolizes the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed or reckoned to His people and received by God-given faith. As Romans 10:4 declares, “**For Christ is the end [or finishing or fulfillment] of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.**” This speaks of our justification before God whereby we stand accepted in God’s beloved Son, clothed in His righteousness whereby we shall not be ashamed, but rather by which we have boldness to enter into the very presence of God. God accepts me based on a perfect righteousness which this sinner had no part whatsoever in producing! This “**white raiment**” symbolizes the purity of these so clothed in having the merit of His perfect obedience unto death (righteousness) imputed.

As that same old hymn puts it, “Be of sin the double cure. Save from wrath and make me pure.”

5. And then at the end of verse 18, He adds, “...*and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.*” To have your eyes anointed with eye salve is to no longer be spiritually blind. This salve is the Gospel of God’s grace made effectual as God the Holy Spirit gives life and opens the eyes of blind sinners through this preached Gospel to see the glory and the value of Christ and His finished work on the cross – His blood and righteousness.

Look with me now at verse 19 where Christ adds...

#### V. Verses 19-22:

##### A. Verse 19: *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*

Now here’s how we know that God still has a people among these churches. He doesn’t say how many He loves, but He does rebuke and chasten all those He loves. To these He commands them to forsake their lukewarmness and be zealous and repent. This is in keeping with Hebrews 12 where we’re taught that those whom the Lord loves He chastens. Look at the wondrous grace and mercy on display here as some among those who are so thoroughly disgusting as deserving to be spewed out of His mouth, are addressed as objects of His everlasting love. And then Christ says in verse 20...

- ##### B. Verse 20: *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.* Like me, you may have heard this presented as if Christ was knocking on your heart’s door and if you will only invite Him in you’ll be saved and enjoy the eternal fellowship that supping with Him suggests. But this is not Christ begging sinners to allow Him to save them. It is the general call of the Gospel that goes out to all without exception. Notice that it’s His voice that is taking the initiative, not the person on the inside of the door. No one called Him. This is Christ calling His own sheep to faith in Him and repentance from their dead works and former idolatry through His Gospel that is preached to all. That means He’s knocking today whether you have ears to hear Him or not. As recorded in John 10, Christ told the Jews gathered there that He was the good shepherd who would give His life for the sheep. And then down in verse 26 He added, “*But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.*”<sup>27</sup> *My sheep hear my voice, [that means those who persist in their unbelief never hear His voice and Christ adds] and I know them, and they follow me:*<sup>28</sup> *And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand,*” His voice is the Gospel of God’s grace wherein the glory of God and the righteousness of God are revealed (Rom. 1:16-17). Christ takes up residence within the hearts of His people by His Spirit and by His Word so as to “sup” with them, meaning to have close, unbreakable, eternal fellowship with all those He saves.

C. Verses 21-22: *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.* <sup>22</sup>*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.* As I already mentioned concerning verse 22, some version of both these 2 verses are found in the other letters to the churches. He “*that overcometh*” describes the sinner saved by the grace of God in Christ. The one who overcomes is one who conquers. And this victory over sin and Satan was all singlehandedly accomplished by our Lord and Savior as believers are told in Romans 8:37 how, “*Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*” We can never conquer or overcome in our own power and goodness, but only by the power and goodness of Christ as our Lord and Savior. And all whom God saves in Christ are made kings and priests together with Him to reign with Him (Rev. 1:6, 5:10) – with Him who alone is our sovereign King and Great High Priest.

## VI. Closing:

Well as we close, I want to remind you that all of us by nature within the professing church, apart from true God-given faith and repentance, are Laodicean-like. Certainly I can understand the offensiveness that accompanies the suggestion that you might be living in “Religious La-La Land” so to speak, but it’s important for us to understand that we all start there. And but for the grace of God we all remain there unless and until God exposes the reality of our sin problem to us and the only remedy – a problem that only the imputed righteousness of Christ can address. We won’t seek the sure cure unless the disease is properly diagnosed and understood. I’m not talking about joining or identifying with a church of so-called “Christians” but I’m talking about fleeing to Christ for all of our salvation, seeing our desperate need for His righteousness to have been made ours. By faith we “buy” or trade all our mistaken notions that have us imagining that salvation is at least in some way or to some degree conditioned on ourselves – we trade that for God’s Gospel of grace wherein we see that all the conditions for our salvation were fully met by Jesus Christ as the Substitute, Surety, and Savior of His people.

If you profess to be a “Christian” but you can’t identify a time when you too were living in the “Religious La-La Land” of the Laodiceans wherein you presumed to be just fine and spiritually in need of nothing, only to discover that you were in reality spiritually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – then I beg you to think again. Before we’re given spiritual life in the new birth we are all out of touch with the reality of our spiritual state. So if you’re unable to identify with these as accurate descriptions of your former self, then the only thing you can reasonably conclude is you must still be out of touch, still groping around in spiritual darkness. And there’s nothing more pitiful than to be found like the majority of these Laodiceans, totally out of touch with their lost spiritual state.

So if like me in years past, you think the real difference maker in your being saved is because of something you did or some decision you made – because you believed something, or you prayed some prayer, or you joined some church, or you got baptized (Notice the common word in each of these descriptions is a reliance on something YOU did), then clearly you too presumed to have the wherewithal (to be rich enough) to make the difference in your own salvation. So you're really in need of nothing. That describes someone oblivious to their spiritual poverty and their desperate need of God's mercy and grace in Christ – that which is impossible for you to provide for yourself – the perfect righteousness of God in Christ by which all shall be judged.

Believers, rejoice that God has spoken to us through His gospel to show us how desperately we needed His mercy and grace in Christ. If someone-you hearing this message, can't yet identify with mercy beggars such as we, I pray God will deliver you as well from the "Religious La-La Land" that permeates the professing church of our day.

Let's close with the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 verses of that great hymn, Rock of Ages.

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.