

Our lesson this morning from Revelation chapter three is the final letter of seven addressed to the churches in Asia. All the letters were revealed to all seven churches and contained both positive and negative comments about their spiritual status. We can only imagine how each church must have felt when their faults were exposed for all to read. Unfortunately, this final letter to the church in Laodicea, doesn't have a single good word to say in its favour.

It's probably the best-known of all the seven letters. And one that is preached on, more than any other text in Revelation because verse twenty is usually employed as a proof text for evangelism. 'Behold I stand at the door and knock,' with allusion to Christ knocking on the door of the human heart.

Therefore, it is used as a challenge to those who are not of the Christian faith. However, some scholars argue that it was not addressed to those who have no faith but for those who do. Because it is a letter written specifically to the Laodicean Church. Christ is knocking at the door of the Church and in all seven letters he reiterates: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

To put Laodicea into context, it was a city founded by a ruler who named it after his wife. Such was his deep love and devotion he wanted her to be remembered for all eternity.

The city of Laodicea developed into an extremely wealthy trading and banking centre for Asia minor. It was known as one of the wealthiest in the world. So rich, it was said, that in AD60 when the entire region was destroyed by an earth quake, the inhabitants were so proud of their accumulated wealth, they refused financial support from Rome and rebuilt the entire city using their own resources.

Its main export was rich jet-black cloth, woven from the luxuriously soft glossy wool, of the sheep that grazed around Laodicea.

It was also a region renowned for health. And some of its eminent physician's names were imprinted onto its coins. There was an excellent healing centre there and it was famous for medicines, particularly a type of eye ointment.

A few miles away across the plain there was a piping hot spring that collected mineral salts on route, but by the time it reached Laodicea it was lukewarm and then turned cold as it meandered down into the sea. And in this letter Christ accuses the Laodicean church of being neither hot nor cold but lukewarm. And the problem with lukewarm mineral water is that it acts as an emetic and it can make you sick.

So why does Christ accuse the Laodicean church of being lukewarm? There was no great evidence of persecution, paganism, heresy or immorality there. What does he see that is so terrible that it makes him sick?

He identifies 3 characteristics that all begin with the letter 'I'.

The first 'I' is indifference. And indifference demonstrates a total lack of respect and care. It means disinterest, apathy and complacency. And nothing causes more damage to a church or to a relationship than indifference. It is the greatest insult. And the way to truly injure a person is to appear as if you just couldn't care less about who they are or what they think.

The second 'I' was independence. The name Laodicea may be translated into two words: people *and* right. In other words, it is the people who rule, judge and decide for themselves.

The church in Laodicea was so rich and independent, they believed that they could simply buy everything and everyone. It was attended by business magnates who boasted and flattered each other to gain social advantage. They were self-sufficient. They didn't need God.

The third 'I' was ignorance. They were utterly and profoundly ignorant and blind to their real status before God. And so, Christ states in no uncertain terms:

You think you are wealthy - but you are spiritually bankrupt.

You pride yourself on your magnificent garments - but you are shamefully naked.

You think you are healthy - but you are blind.

In fact, you are wretched and pitiful.

And so, we might ask, 'Did Laodicea listen to what the Spirit says to the churches?'

The ancient city itself now lies in ruins and the history of the Roman Catholic church records that it eventually became a titular see. That is a dead or redundant diocese.

And yet, Christ in his love, grace and compassion didn't just leave them to self-destruct. Those whom he loves he rebukes and through godly leadership in this letter he offered them a way to redemption through repentance.

'Because I love you I am going to chasten you. Instead of self-sufficiency, I will give you true gold, that comes through the refining fire of suffering. I will give you pure white garments to wear. I will give you ointment for your eyes that you may really see yourself and see me.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.'

Christ knocks but will never force his way in, he waits to be invited. He says, 'If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.'

And it will be a sincere, loving and mutual relationship. We will sit down together and share what we have, including my throne, if you so choose.