

HOT? OR COLD?

TODAY'S NEW TESTAMENT READING IS SPEAKING TO THE LAST OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES SPOKEN TO IN THE BOOK OF REVELATIONS, THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA. (LAY-O-DA-CEE-A).

THE TOWN OF LAODICEA WAS ABOUT 100 MILES INLAND FROM EPHESUS. THE CITY WAS A MAJOR CENTER OF COMMERCE. IT WAS KNOWN FOR ITS WOOL AND CARPETS AS WELL AS AN EYE OINTMENT. TO PUT THEIR WEALTH IN PERSPECTIVE THE CITY REFUSED AID FROM ROME AFTER A LARGE EARTHQUAKE. ONE MORE FACT THAT BRINGS ALIVE THE WELL-KNOWN WORDS OF THIS CHAPTER IN VERSES 15 AND 16 “ *I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth....'*”

THE CITY OF LAODICEA HAD NO LOCAL WATER SUPPLY, AND BECAUSE OF THAT THEY HAD AN AQUEDUCT THAT BROUGHT WATER FROM SIX MILES AWAY! BY THE TIME THE WATER ARRIVED IN THE CITY IT WAS TEPID, LUKEWARM, AND DISTASTEFUL. THE ANALOGY DRAWN IN THESE VERSES WOULD HAVE BEEN WELL UNDERSTOOD BY THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA. ANYONE LIVING TODAY IN DES MOINES AND THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES THAT USE WATER FROM THE WATER WORKS WOULD UNDERSTAND A REFERENCE TO THE SMELL OF WATER IN THE SPRING TIME DUE TO WINTER RUNOFF OF DEBRIS.

THIS IS THE ONLY CHURCH OF THE SEVEN THAT WAS SPOKEN TO SO HARSHLY. THE “HOT AND COLD” REFERENCE DID NOT REFER TO PASSIVE OR ENTHUSIASTIC. NO, **THE GREEK WORDS TRANSLATE TO MEAN A WAVERING OF, BEING FOR OR AGAINST, AN EITHER OR CHOICE.** REMEMBER THE FIRST CHURCH SPOKEN TO WAS EPHESUS AND WAS CHASTISED FOR **ABANDONING OR LEAVING THEIR FIRST LOVE, THAT LOVE THAT CHRIST SHOWED US** BY HIS EXAMPLE IN MINISTRY. NOW HERE AT LAODICEA THEY ARE REMINDED OF GOING BACK TO THE BASICS.

THERE IS AN UNSPOKEN REALITY HERE – **THE CHURCH HAS BECOME INSTITUTIONALIZED LOSING THEIR ZEAL FOR THE GOSPEL AND REACHING OUT. IT HAD BECOME A SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTION. THE PEOPLE HAD BECOME WEALTHY AND IN THEIR WORDS “IN NEED OF NOTHING. BUT THE WORDS SPOKEN TO THIS CHURCH WARNED THEM THEY WERE REALLY WRETCHED, MISERABLE, POOR, BLIND, AND NAKED!!!**

COULD THIS CHURCH AT LAODICEA BE THE PICTURE OF THE MODERN CHURCH? HAVE WE, THE CHURCH “LOST” OUR FIRST LOVE. HAS OUR WEALTH AND COMFORT ALLOWED US TO DO MORE THINGS THAT LEAVE NO TIME TO PRACTICE OUR FIRST LOVE? **DO WE EVEN SAY “I HAVE NEED OF NOTHING” -EVEN THE CHURCH, EXCEPT WHEN IT FITS OUR SCHEDULE?** NO PRAYER TIME, NO BIBLE READING TIME, NO TIME FOR OTHERS? OUR MEETINGS ARE MORE ABOUT THE BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH – MONEY AND THE PHYSICAL THINGS THEN THE REAL BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH, THAT BEING SPIRITUAL BUSINESS. I AM NOT SAYING THERE IS NOT A PLACE FOR TAKING CARE OF THE PRACTICAL, BUT IT SHOULD NOT DOMINATE OUR CONVERSATIONS. **IF SOMEONE SAT IN ON A MEETING WOULD WHAT IS DISCUSSED MAKE THEM WANT TO RETURN AND ATTEND? OR WOULD THEY SAY “I HAVE ENOUGH OF THAT AT WORK, I DON'T NEED ANYMORE OF THAT”?** OUR “BUSINESS” IS TO **“MAKE CHRIST KNOWN IN THE COMMUNITY AND AROUND THE WORLD”.** THAT IS WHAT IS ON JESUS' HEART, HIS FIRST LOVE, PEOPLE!

I ATTENDED A MEETING RECENTLY WHERE THERE WAS THIS DISCUSSION THAT CENTERED AROUND ALL THIS STRUCTURE BECAUSE THE CURRENT STRUCTURE WAS NOT WORKING. AS I SAT THERE I THOUGHT I COULD NOT IMAGINE JESUS SITTING DOWN WITH HIS DISCIPLES IN SUCH A MEETING!!! I WAS REMINDED OF THE VERSES IN ISAIAH 29:13 *"And so the Lord says, "These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote."*

THE MAINLINE CHURCHES ARE CONTINUING TO LOSE MEMBERS, AND NOT NECESSARILY TO OTHER CHURCHS, PEOPLE ARE JUST DROPPING OUT. WE SAY WE ARE RICH AND NOT IN NEED OF ANYTHING, BUT HOW ABOUT THE PEOPLE BEYOND THE CHURCHES' WALLS?

JUST PICK UP A PAPER OR TURN ON TV AND IN A SHORT TIME YOU KNOW SO MANY, MANY PEOPLE ARE HURTING. ARE WE REACHING OUT TO THE COMMUNITY? OVER TIME, HAVE WE BECOME ALMOST CALLOUS AND DECIDED IT'S TOO OVERWHELMING? **JUST IMAGINE WHAT THE YOUNG CHURCH FACED IN THAT FIRST CENTURY, TALK ABOUT OVERWHELMING!!! JUST LIKE THEM, WE TOO HAVE A GOD WHO'S DESIRE IT IS TO SEE THAT LOST SHEEP COME INTO THE FOLD.** 2 PETER 3:9 *"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."*

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN EVANGELIST ON A PODIUM SPEAKING THE WORD, AS BILL HYBELS SAYS IN HIS BOOK JUST WALKING ACROSS THE ROOM TO TALK TO SOMEONE IS EVANGELISM. SEEING THAT VISITOR AT OUR CHURCH OR PERSON WHO HAS NOT BEEN HERE FOR A WHILE, STOPPING YOUR CONVERSATION AND GOING OVER CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!!! **OUR FIRST LOVE SHOULD BE OTHERS,** WE ARE HIS DISCIPLES AND HE IS OUR EXAMPLE. THINK ABOUT IT, **JESUS DEALT WITH PEOPLE ONE ON ONE NUMEROUS TIMES, EVEN THE PHARISEES.** HERE A SHORT STORY WITH A LOT OF TRUTH IN IT.

A pastor accepted a call to a new church. Among the leaders of the church was a very conscientious deacon. Desiring to get some knowledge of the membership as quickly as possible, the new pastor called on this elder deacon to go over the church roll with him. The deacon brought his own roll neatly recorded with pertinent information about each person-birthday, anniversary, etc. He was able to tell the pastor the occupations, hobbies, and activities in the church among various other things. This was quite helpful to the new pastor. As the pastor looked at the list, he noticed various names had **SD** written by them. His curiosity got the best of him and he asked what the letters meant. "Well, the deacon responded, **"That means these folk are spiritually dead."**

If churches or church members are just going through the motions with a maintenance kind of attitude, the church ends up devoid of spiritual life. **When the place of worship becomes a gathering of people instead of an encounter with God, something is seriously wrong.** The church was born when the Spirit of God descended on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and its life comes from the Spirit. When the Spirit is quenched (Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thess. 5:19), the church begins to lose life and power. When sin is confessed, and church members get right with God and with each other, then the Spirit infuses new life-revival!

WE MUST CONTINUE TO CARRY THAT FIRST LOVE AND ENTHUSIASM OF THE PEOPLE THAT WITH GOD'S INSPIRATION BROUGHT THIS CHURCH UP FROM THE GROUND WHERE IT HAS STOOD FOR OVER 140 YEARS. THEIR FIRST LOVE, THAT OF GOD AND A SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, DREW THEM HERE DESPITE THE COLD OF WINTER OR THE HEAT OF SUMMER. WOULD WE BE STILL DRAWN HERE IF

THERE WAS NO AIR CONDITIONING OR CENTRAL HEAT? OR WITH ALL THE COMFORTS DO WE “HAVE NEED OF NOTHING”?

THE PEOPLE AT THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA HAD NO PROBLEM WITH DOCTRINE, BUT THEIR DRIVE WAS GONE, THEIR DESIRE TO “GROW IN THE LORD” HAD EVAPORATED, AND THEY HAD BECOME “BENCH SITTERS” NOT SUPPORTIVE OF THE VISION GOD HAD GIVEN THEM. DOES THIS SPEAK A WORD OF WARNING TO TODAY’S CHURCHES? IS THE CHURCH WITHOUT “POWER” THE POWER OF GOD IN OUR LIVES?

ANY CHURCH WHERE I HAVE SEEN GROWING THERE IS A “ELECTRICITY” IN THE AIR AND IN ITS PEOPLE. THEIR SOURCE OF POWER IS GOD!!! WHEN WE DISCONNECT FROM THAT POWER THERE WILL BE ONLY DARKNESS LEFT. I HAVE SEEN FIRSHTHAND A CHURCH DISCONNECT AND NOT FOLLOW ITS PURPOSE WITH ZEAL AND CONVICTION, ESSENTIALLY BECOMING LUKEWARM, AND SOON WHAT HAD BEEN A VIBRANT CHURCH OF PEOPLE DWINDLED TO A SMALL NUMBER, BEFORE THAT GROUP RETURNED TO WHAT GOD DESIRED THEM TO DO. ONCE THEY REALIZED THAT THERE WAS RENEWAL IN THE CHURCH.

WHEN A CHURCH LIKE THE ONE AT LAODICEA IS LUKEWARM, THE PEOPLE BECAME SATISFIED JUST WHERE THEY WERE, WHEREVER THAT WAS. A CONTENTMENT SET IN, A PRIDE AND THAT ADDED UP TO A LACK OF PROGRESS AND GROWTH. THE PEOPLE REMAINED AT THEIR “PLATEAU OF COMFORT”, AND HAD LITTLE IF ANY DESIRE TO BE USEFUL FOR GOD OR ANYONE ELSE!

THE WORDS THAT CONTINUE TO AMAZE ME—**GOD, DESPITE OUR SHORTFALLS, CALLS US BACK TO HIM.** IN VERSE 18, HE OFFERS THE TOTAL OPPOSITE OF THE WEALTH, CLOTHES, AND MEDICINE THEY WERE KNOWN FOR. FIRST, GOLD REFINED BY FIRE, THE PUREST KIND. **GOD DESIRED A FAITH THAT WOULD STAND UP TO THE “FIRE” OF EVERY DAY.** SECONDLY, TO **PUT ON A WHITE GARMENT,** OF COURSE, OPPOSITE OF THEIR FAMOUS BLACK WOOL OF A ROYAL NATURE. THE WHITE GARMENT WAS **A SIGN OF HUMILITY AND BY PUTTING THE WHITE GARMENT ON ONE WOULD CAST OFF THE OLD AND DIRTY “CLOTHES” OF SIN.** NO MORE NAKEDNESS, BUT YOU BECOME CLOTHED WITH CHRIST AND HIS VERY NATURE. THE LAST ITEM, **THE EYE SALVE, WOULD DO MORE THAN JUST HEAL, IT WOULD OPEN THEIR SPIRITUAL EYES TO NOT JUST SEE BUT TO UNDERSTAND SPIRITUAL THINGS.** WE ARE OFFERED ALL THIS BY CHRIST THROUGH GRACE. HOWEVER, **JUST LIKE THE LAODICEANS, WE MUST TURN BACK TO GOD, ACKNOWLEDGE OUR SIN, AND REPENT.** THIS IS OFFERED BECAUSE WE ARE LOVED BY GOD AND HIS SON JESUS CHRIST.

WE ALL ARE AWARE OF THE DEPICTION OF VERSE 20 IN THIS READING. THE PICTURE HANGS IN OUR NARTHAX OF **CHRIST KNOCKING AT THE DOOR. THE DOOR IS OUR HEART AND IN THE PICTURE THERE IS NO KNOB WE MUST OPEN THE DOOR FROM WITHIN FOR CHRIST.** NOTICE TOO, THAT THERE ARE **THORNS AND THISTLES AROUND THE DOOR REMINDING US THAT CHRIST COMES TO US DESPITE OUR SIN.** GOING BACK TO THE WORDS OF THE VERSE, CHRIST TELLS US THAT IF WE OPEN THE DOOR, OUR HEART TO HIM, HE WILL COME IN TO US. THEN THE END OF THE VERSE SAYS “AND WILL DINE WITH HIM AND HE WITH ME” IN THE JEWISH TRADITION SHARING A MEAL WITH SOMEONE WAS **ULTIMATE HOSPITALITY** AND THE MEAL HAD STRONG APPLICATION TO THE TEMPLE AND INTIMACY. THERE IS THE IMPLIED THAT **CHRIST WILL REFRESH US WITH GRACE AND HIS SPIRIT.** WHY WOULD WE BE LUKEWARM AND DEBATE WHETHER TO INVITE CHRIST INTO OUR HEARTS AND DAILY LIVES?

THIS WAS THE PROBLEM OF THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA, BEING “LUKEWARM” NOT FOR OR NOT AGAINST. I WOULD USE THE TERM “BEING ON THE FENCE”. GOD’S DESIRE IS FOR US TO BE “ALL IN”, TO BE AN ACTIVE CHRISTIAN, TO BE GREEN AND GROWING. A CLOSING STORY...

Walt Disney was a dreamer. His crowning vision was EPCOT; Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. He envisioned the perfect city of 20,000 using all of the most modern advances technology. One problem, Walt Disney died before his dream was ever realized. His dream was so big and complex and outside the box that no one else in the Disney company ever caught the dream and had no idea what to do after Walt was gone. What Walt Disney intended as a living breathing perfect city turned out only to be an entertainment center. Disney’s world would only become a place to visit.

Jesus left a blueprint for His church so vast, so marvelous, and so innovative—a living breathing expanding organism that would permeate and transform the whole world.

The problem is, that as time went on, **His followers lost the vision and couldn’t wrap their minds around such a magnificent plan. Rather than a community of loving, passionate followers of Christ dedicated to demonstrating the power of the Christ-transformed life in a dark world, they began to do what they knew best, build buildings and run organizations and develop entertainment centers that would hopefully draw the crowds to hear the story but miss the transforming power of Christ.**

IS THE “LAODICEA CHURCH” ALIVE AND WELL TODAY, “LUKEWARM”, BEING NEITHER FOR OR AGAINST? THE LAST WORDS OF REVELATIONS CHAPTER 3 ARE "*Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.*"

WE ARE THE CHURCH, ARE WE LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT? AMEN.