

Checkin' Out My Walk
#32 Laodicea - Jesus Christ > He Is All You Need

History & Background: Laodicea

- (1) Founded by Antiochus II sometime before 253 BC; named after his wife Laodice
- (2) Laodicea was part of a tri-city area, closely associated with the cities of Colosse and Hierapolis.
- (3) The founders built Laodicea in the Lycus valley where two major trade routes crossed.
- (4) Located on a high plateau and very secure from enemy attack.
It remained neutral and its posture was of compromise. Why compromise?
- (5) Crucial to this city was its water supply. There were some local streams in the area but as the population grew and developed they were inadequate. In fact some of them dried up in the winter. Result> water must be brought in. Since there was no ready source of water in the city it had to be piped in through aqueducts.
Water from the hot springs in Hierapolis 6 miles to the north and from Colosse located 10 miles to the east was brought into the city.
The water carried by those pipes was so charged with impurities it dropped much of its load in flow. The calcium carbonate gradually clogged the pipes. The water was collected in a central water tower and distributed through the streets by pipes radiating from it. The water tower and sections of the terra cotta pipes are still visible even today. Thick deposits of calcified impurities can still be seen almost choking the surviving section of the pipes.
Water arrived foul, dirty, and tepid - lukewarm, like the people in the church.
Note: What is the result of relying on outside sources for the water [LIFE] ?
Our focus IS NOT on Jesus who is the SOURCE of our LIFE. Rob His Preeminence!
Note: This had an impact on their military strength. Even though they were fortified architecturally, an enemy could conquer them by sealing off the aqueduct and hold the city under siege until the water ran out. So it never became much of a military power.
Consider: What is "clogging up" my vessel? Is the "river of living water" flowing through me contaminated with impurities, unconfessed sin, misplaced priorities?
Am I compromising with the world and the enemy? = Defeated Christian
Am I counting on the wrong practices and disciplines to enrich my experience?
Am I not experiencing victory through Jesus Christ?
- (6) It seems Laodicea had a large Jewish population. Every year male Jews over 21 had to pay a temple tax as part of their religious duty. It amounted to half a shekel. Archaeological records show the governor of Laodicea in 62 BC put a stop to any exporting of gold from Laodicea. He needed it to back the currency.
The Jews always paid their tax with gold. All the Jews in a local town would put their taxes together in one lump of gold. In spite of the order they sent their gold back to Jerusalem to pay their temple tax. When the Laodicean authorities confiscated it,

they weighed it in at what amounts in our terms to about twenty pounds = about 7,500 shekels. That's only the males over twenty one, plus the females and the children > significant number of Jews.

- (7) There is evidence the people liked to be entertained. The ruins indicate the city had a gymnasium, a large racetrack, three lavish theaters, lavish public baths and fabulous shopping centers.

Note: In the US there is a concentration of buyers, sellers, and products; jammed parking lots and crushing crowds with millions of dollars being spent by people buying things they don't need with money they don't have. Americans spend more than 30 percent of their income on luxury items, compared to less than 10 percent just forty years ago. Statistics on personal consumption published by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reveal that Americans' spending on recreation rose from 42.7 billion in 1970 to 246.8 billion in 1988—a 477% increase! Consumer Debt went from 167 billion in 1975 to nearly 660 billion in 1988. That's a whopping 295% increase!

- (8) Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake in 61 AD. The city, so wealthy and self-sufficient, rebuilt their city with their own resources, refusing an offer of aid from Caesar. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote about this: "Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources and with no help from us."

Note: It demonstrated a self-sufficient attitude that would have detrimental spiritual results if carried over into their relationship with the Lord.

- (9) This church was wealthy and ruins of her buildings can still be seen. Nothing is known of the ministry of this church outside of Laodicea. Were they self-centered? Evangelistic? Missionary?

- (10) The city was famous in its day for three primary characteristics.

1. *Finances* - Known throughout the Roman Empire as a center of banking and finance. They took pride in rejecting Rome's offer of financial help and rebuilt the city far more beautiful than it had ever been and they did it with their own funds.
2. *Fashion* - Renowned for the soft, black wool which was considered a luxury item and sought after for clothing and rugs. Laodicean factories made at least four different kinds of outer garments from this wool, garments that were exported to "department stores" all over the world. This export is part of what helped keep the Laodicean coffers full to overflowing.
3. *Pharmaceuticals* - The medical cult of Aesculapius, god of healing, was located here. A famous medical school in Laodicea produced a tablet sold all over the Roman Empire. It was crushed, mixed with water to form a paste which was rubbed into the eyes and was supposed to cure a variety of eye problems. People came from all directions to obtain this eye salve.

Ray Stedman: "Laodicea was sort of a first century Bank of America, Macy's, and Mayo Clinic all rolled into one."

The church in our time: People who call themselves Christians but reflect our modern culture of materialism, consumerism, self-sufficiency, do-your-own-thing kind of independence and individualism, religiosity, and apostasy.

The Lord Jesus came to this rich, powerful church and said, "*Laodicea, You Make Me Sick!*"

Christ's Proclamation to Laodicea -

Rev. 3:14 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the Creation of God:

Paul mentioned Laodicea 4 times in his letter to Colosse.

Col. 2:1-4 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.

Col. 4:16 Paul requests that "after this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans." The letter to the Colossians was intended for Laodicea as well.

Kidnapped Convert > Col. 2:8-10 BEWARE lest any man cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, after the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not after the teachings Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. You are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power.

Warning: Do NOT let your hunger for a more fulfilling Christian experience cause you to trust in a teacher, a group or a system of thought more than in Jesus Christ.

He is your hope and your true source of wisdom.

Truth: Only by being connected with Christ through faith can anyone have eternal life. Only through a CONTINUING connection with Him can anyone have power for living. Jesus Christ has absolute supremacy and sole sufficiency. He is the fullness of God.

Challenge: Spiritual Transformation = Spiritual Maturity = Deeper Walk With God

Means & Methods: Combining ideas from other philosophies & religions > some elements of paganism & mysticism > some elements of Christian doctrine = Syncretism which endeavors to harmonize and unite many avenues and come up with a superior religion.

Resulting Heresy: Finding other ways to God; Denying Jesus as God & Savior - They do not just deny Jesus; They DETHRONE Him!

Problem: Looking for ways to meet the challenge in all the wrong places!

Not plugged in to the Source and Power who gives Life, Maturity & Transformation

The Heresy In The Church Of Colosse:

The heresy promised people a close union with God that would bring spiritual perfection.

But you must enter into the prescribed teachings and ceremonies. The wisdom gained would release you from earthly things and put you in touch with heavenly things.

False teachers were promoting a heresy that stressed self-made rules. They also sought spiritual growth by discipline of the body (asceticism) and visions (mysticism). This search created pride in their self-centered efforts.

| <u>Heresy</u> | <u>Reference In Colossians</u> | <u>Paul's Answer</u> |
|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Spirit is good. Matter is evil. | 1:15-20 | God created heaven & earth for His glory |
| One must follow ceremonies, rituals, & restrictions in order to be saved and/or perfected. | 2:11, 16-23 3:11 | These were only shadows that ended when Christ came. He is all you need to be saved and mature. |
| One must deny the body & live in strict asceticism | 2:20-23 | Asceticism is no help in conquering evil thoughts & desires; it leads to pride |
| Angels must be worshiped | 2:18 | NO! Christ alone is worthy of worship |
| Christ could not be both human & divine | 1:15-20; 2:2-3 | Christ is God in the flesh! He is the Eternal One, Head of the Body, 1 st in Everything; Supreme |
| One must obtain "secret knowledge"* in order to be saved or perfected. Not available to everyone. | 2:2, 18 | God's secret is CHRIST himself. He has been revealed to ALL. |
| One must adhere to human wisdom, tradition & philosophies | 2:4, 8-10 3:15-17 | By themselves, these can be misleading & shallow because they have human origin. Follow what Christ taught! |
| It is even better to combine aspects of several religions | 2:10 | You are complete through your union with Christ; All-sufficient |
| There is nothing wrong with immorality | 3:1-11 | Get rid of sin & evil because you have been chosen by God to live a new life as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus. |

*Secret Knowledge: The Gnostics were "in the know" when it came to the deeper things of God.

(1) Since they believed matter was evil, they falsely concluded a holy God could not come in contact with evil matter. (2) They believed in a powerful spirit world that used material things to attack mankind. (3) They attacked the person and work of Jesus Christ and taught He was not the very Son of God come in the flesh. They claimed they were not denying the Christian faith; they were only taking it to a higher level.

Truth: When we make Jesus Christ only part of a total religious system or philosophy, we cease to give Him the preeminence.

Col. 1:18 ...that in everything, He might be preeminent.

When we strive for spiritual perfection or fullness by means of formulas, disciplines or rituals, we go backward instead of forward.

Beware of a "deeper life" teacher who offers a way for a deeper walk that bypasses devotion to Jesus Christ. Many believe that some person, system or discipline can add something to their spiritual experience. Paul says you already have ALL you need in Jesus Christ.

In All things, He must have the preeminence!

True spiritual growth comes from within as we are transformed by the Holy Spirit and the living, active Word of God. Nothing else needs to be added for spiritual maturity.

Spiritual growth is NOT by addition; it is by NUTRITION. You grow from the inside out!

So Christ says: "The Lord who has created everything, the faithful and true witness to the Word of God, the one in whom all spiritual promises are fulfilled says this.

1. Jesus is the Confirming One: The Amen: This is an OT title for God.

Isa. 65:16 So [it shall be] that he who invokes a blessing on himself in the land shall do so by saying, May the God of truth *and* fidelity [the Amen] bless me; and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth *and* faithfulness to His promises [the Amen], because the former troubles are forgotten and because they are hidden from My eyes.

It points to Him as the end, the finality and certainty of all things.

Col. 2:3 With Jesus Christ there is no further search needed for truth for in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The words to follow were truth the hearer would neglect at his or her own peril. At His imminent return, He will finally fulfill all God's promises which still remain unaccomplished.

II Cor. 1:20 For all the promises of God in [Jesus Christ] are Yes and in Him Amen to the glory of God by us. [All God's promises and all God's covenants are guaranteed and affirmed by the person and work of Jesus Christ.]

2. Jesus is the Confronting One: "The Faithful and True Witness"

This church had a flawed vision of itself. Christ emphasizes His own faithful and true character because they lacked these two qualities. Jesus has come to reveal their true state as He sees them. He stripped them and us of all our false appearances and pretentiousness, rationalizations and excuses.

1. Their testimony lied about Him. He came to set the record straight.

A true witness is a reflected example of the life of Jesus Christ in word and behavior.

2. This stresses our need for honest examination followed by an honest confession to God which demonstrates a genuine desire for a change.

3. Teaches us the need to be in His Word which reveals our true condition.

Heb. 4:12 For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

John 17:17 The Lord said, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

He uses this title referring to His glorious return, and His work of judgment of the nations.

Rev. 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He that sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He does judge and make war.

3. Jesus is the Controlling One: "The Beginning (source) Of The Creation Of God" Jesus Christ is the origin, the cause, the Creator of all things (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17; Rev. 1:8; 21:6). He is the Creator of this earth, now fallen under the curse of sin through rebellion to Him. He is also the Creator of the coming kingdom and the eternal state of a new heavens and earth in which dwells perfect righteousness (Isa. 65:17). He declares that by His resurrection, He allows the beginning of a creation which, this time, will be eternal.

Truth: Being God like His Father, Jesus always existed, and created everything:

John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.

Heb. 1:2 God in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds.

Col. 1:16-17 For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.

Rev. 22:13 I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.

The hope of the church and the Biblical message that enables people to weather life's storms and grow through them is gratitude for what happened at the cross of Christ combined with a passionate confidence in what will yet take place at His blessed coming. Surely, the only source of real stability in this present is a deep thankfulness for the past work of the Savior combined with a confident expectation for the future glories promised by Christ.

Ps. 34:1-3 I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise *shall* continually *be* in my mouth.

² My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear *of it* and be glad.

³ Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.

Prayer - Col. 1:9-10 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.