

Danger!
Revelation 3:14-22
#8 in a Series on What Jesus Is Saying to the Church
Faith Community Church, September 16, 2007

Introduction

Please open your Bibles to Revelation

One of the ways we can test our commitment to following Christ is by examining where we stand in relation to the attitudes and morals of our culture. When culture moves away from God's word, in which direction does our life track? Which path do we follow? Are our lives more conformed to the world we live in or are we living under the authority of what God says?

I just made reference to a bulletin insert about how people – especially older people – can be susceptible to fraud. Being seduced by unscrupulous people can be hazardous to your financial health. So too being seduced by our culture is ruinous to our spiritual health.

Note that in each of these letters, the churches are spoken of as being “in” the city, not “at” the city. It is not merely a reference to geography, it is a matter of living within a culture that was largely hostile to the Christian faith. The churches faced the danger of becoming like the culture, rather than living distinct from it. And that is what happened to the Christians at Laodicea. So this morning we will talk about the danger that they faced, because it is a danger we face, and how we can overcome the seduction of our culture.

What We Can Learn from the Letter to Laodicea

1. First, we need to see the qualifications of the Messenger.
 - a. We have read a description of Jesus in Revelation 1:9-20.
 - b. In these letters, elements of Christ's character are related to the special needs of the churches.
 - c. The words used in 3:14 tell us that Jesus is qualified to give his evaluation.
 - d. Last year I fell and hurt my leg. I had people give me their assessment of what was wrong with me, but the people who were qualified did the best job of diagnosing the problem and the treatment. So while I could take all kinds of advice, it was those who were qualified who I needed to listen to.
 - e. We need to cultivate that attitude toward Jesus and his word, so that when he speaks to our condition, we are willing to listen and respond, because he is more qualified than anyone because he speaks truth and knows us – he made us.
2. In order to understand what Jesus says, we need to understand the culture of the city.
 - a. Several of these seven letters contain references to characteristics that the churches seemed to share with the city. We saw that with the church at

Sardis, for example (living on the past and being impervious to intruders). When Jesus speaks to the church in Laodicea, he makes a connection between the culture and the church.

- b. Laodicea was known for three major industries: banking, a rich black wool, and for the healing arts, in particular a salve that was used to cure eye diseases.
 - c. Laodicean people were prosperous, to the point of being self-sufficient. When the city had been destroyed by an earthquake, the people refused the help of Rome and rebuilt a city that was greater than it had been.
 - d. Jesus connects this self-sufficiency to a serious problem in the church, and because of the temptation to self-sufficiency that prosperity brings, it is something we need to pay attention to this morning.
3. What was the condition of the church?
- a. Jesus immediately focuses on their works and says that their works are neither hot nor cold, but are in fact lukewarm, and that this lukewarm condition would result in their being spit out of his mouth.
 - i. One of the things that characterized Laodicea was the poor quality of its drinking water. Close by the city of Colosse enjoyed cold clean water. Heiropolis, another city close to Laodicea, was known for medicinal springs that brought healing to and soothed those who hurt.
 - ii. The water from Laodicea had to be brought in from six miles away by means of an aqueduct, and by the time it reached the city it was lukewarm between that and the minerals in the water, it was undrinkable. In fact, if someone tried to drink it, they would throw up.
 - iii. Jesus uses this characteristic of the city to make the point – instead of being a cool drink or a healing spa, your works are worthless.
 - b. What caused this? Verse 17 tells us what the church thought of itself – they were rich, they had prospered, they needed nothing.
 - c. But Jesus disputes their analysis – he says that in fact they are wretched, that they are pitiable, that they were poor, blind and naked.
 - d. Here is the point: It is possible to be a Christian and live as if we don't need Jesus? We have what we need, so we don't need him to help us. We know what we ought to do, so we don't need the guidance of his word. We're doing alright in this world, so we don't need his help or his direction. We put him on a shelf, tip the cap to him, and live in our own resources. I'm rich. I'm doing ok. I don't need a thing.
 - e. Is that really something that Christians do? Do we really say those things? Not deliberately, perhaps, but we can live self-sufficiently when we fail to cultivate a relationship with Christ through his word and prayer. We can feel that we are doing ok because we're doing ok in the eyes of our culture, and yet in Jesus eyes we have become useless. We make no contribution to the kingdom of God.
4. So Jesus offers his counsel. Read again verses 18-22. Jesus offers some words of counsel that we need to listen to, just as the Laodiceans did 1900 years ago.

- a. In verse 18 he challenges them to see themselves for what they are and realize that they need him.
 - i. A friend of mine once called an exterminator to come to his home. When the man had finished treating the house, he got in his car, rolled up the windows, and set off a bug bomb in the car! After the cloud cleared, my friend asked him if doing that was safe. He replied that it was perfectly safe, but my friend told me that in fact the man's hair was falling out and he had lost a bunch of teeth. Maybe there was no connection, but it seemed to my friend that this exterminator was self-deceived as to his well-being.
 - ii. We can do the same thing – we can be self-deceived, or deceived by our culture, into thinking that we are in good shape, doing quite fine, but in reality we are spiritually impoverished. And the answer is a major shift in values.
- b. To tell someone “You make me so sick that I want to throw up” is an incredibly painful thing to hear. Most of us have at least at some point had someone talk to us this way. And it hurts. But Jesus explains in verse 19 that his words are meant to discipline and correct, and they are spoken not to hurt, but to heal because he loves his people. And he urges them to be zealous – be serious about this – and repent.
- c. And in verse 20 he tells them how.
 - i. Look at what Jesus says: It's a picture of a person eating by himself, while Jesus knocks on the door. And if that person will open the door, Jesus promises that he will come in and enjoy a meal with him.
 - ii. What is that a picture of? This is not an invitation to a sinner to open their heart to Jesus (despite the fact that this verse is so often misapplied in our evangelism). This is an invitation to a person who has closed Jesus out. Opening the door leads to relationship.
 - iii. Look at your life. Do you hear Jesus calling to come in because your decisions are made without him, your life is lived chasing your own desires, you don't cultivate a relationship with him through prayer, the Scriptures, the community of faith? Don't live in blindness. Jesus is calling us to open the doors of our life and let him in where he belongs. Will you do that?
- d. Look at verse 21. “The one who conquers” is a term that is used to identify a person who is truly a believer, who truly belongs to Christ. And those who truly belong to Christ will show that their faith is real by responding when Jesus knocks. If in our hearts we want to persist in living to ourselves, we simply show that we really don't belong to him. After all, Jesus himself said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).
- e. And so, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Or as one translation puts it, “the one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (NET).

Responding to the Words of Jesus

To be honest, none of us does this perfectly. As long as we are in this world, there's a battle for our allegiance. Our culture wants to shape us, and so does our Savior. But we win the battle to the extent that we live in fellowship with Jesus, following him.

If you've not been doing that, will you do what Jesus says? Be zealous, repent, open the door and invite him in.

If you are here this morning and you have never trusted in Christ, the primary issue for you is not cultivating a relationship with Christ. There's a major barrier that prevents that, and only by admitting and turning away from your sin and trusting in God's offer of forgiveness through Christ can that barrier be removed. I hope you will believe in him today.