

# St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 28th Feb 2010

## Past Imperfect Future Tense! - The message of Revelation

### A Message for the Church – Laodicea 3: 14-22



#### Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

This week we come to the seventh of the seven churches in the province of Asia Minor - Laodicea . Laodicea was situated at the junction of two valleys and three major roads and therefore was one of the richest commercial centres of its day.

Noted for its expertise in banking, its famous medical school and its manufacturing of clothing from distinctive local black wool. It was situated near to today's popular tourist site of Pamukkale where hot water springs pour over limestone cliffs creating white and turquoise pools to dramatic effect. The water at Pamukkale holds a clue to the Laodicea's one weakness – a lack of a good water supply – water could be warm and brackish!

Out of all the seven churches it is to the Church in Laodicea that we find the harshest words written, in fact that there is no commendation at all for them - verse 15 brings us straight into the 'complaint' – read v15-18. Here is a church that has lost its vision, a church that existed for its own sake – neither hot nor cold, a church that was spiritually blind and naked. That Christ would prefer even a rejection of faith to the way that this church expressed their faith is truly shocking! That there may be more hope for the strident antagonist than the coolly indifferent is a wakeup call in the extreme. Rich, self reliant, comfortable, inward looking, complacent – being such a 'lukewarm' church was a denial of all that Jesus was himself and all that he demanded of his disciples, his church his Bride.

But the good news for the church in Laodicea and for the church today is that even though we may be lukewarm and there is nothing to commend us for, Christ does not give up on his Bride - he's still there ...loving the Church...and calling the church afresh to repentance – read v19-20. We all love the picture Holman Hunt paints to bring this text alive but the Rev Mackenzie a Scottish Reformation Preacher and evangelist explored it with powerful story-telling to dramatic effect –read about this at: <http://www.reformation-scotland.org.uk/articles/ behold-i-stand.html>.

The letter to the Church in Laodicea has much to say to the Church today but in specific it brings three 'I' words from Christ into the heart of our church: I know your deeds, I counsel you, I will come in.

**I know your deeds** – v15. Here lies a call for transparency, for the reality of a church that is a 'what you see is what you really get' church. Recently in the press there has been much discussion on the effect of internet porn on our children and the harmful effects of early sexualisation. Decca Aitkenhead in the Observer writes " the only visible group still fighting adult porn are distressed Christians who post copious but forlorn reminders all over the net about sin. For a political perspective you would have to search to the very margins of feminist debate. It is as if an entire generation of research into the effects porn has simply been forgotten leaving us with porn galore and not the faintest idea what it does." Yet despite such Christian protests a recent internet survey on porn and the church revealed that 50% of men and 20% of women admitted to having a regular secret porn habit! Internet porn may not be our hidden habit but equally harmful are secret grudges, jealousies, bitternesses, hatreds, and other harmful habits that we think only we know about. On the surface it seems as if all is well but underneath...before God we are revealed as "wretched, pitiful poor blind and naked" v17. I know your deeds...

**I counsel you** – v 18 . The Lord says I know your deeds...the very secrets of your hearts and though I should 'spit you out' for your hypocrisy..I still love you. So we are called afresh to come to Christ and to buy gold from him, gold refined by fire. Grace Turner in her book 'The Kings Gold' explores the meaning of such a gold "I have thought about the bride of Christ in what may be her finest and most testing hour. Is she drawing wealth from the King's purse or is she pursuing 'fools gold' that may crumble and prove worthless currency in time of war?...True wealth is to be found in curious places and God is preparing and training his bride for battle; he is calling her to seek real gold. So often this is found in pain and tears, in faithful submission during periods in the desert, when with Job we say 'when he has tried me I shall come forth as gold" Job 23:10.

**I will come in** – v 19 The Lord says don't be afraid...like a loving parent with a child, those he loves he rebukes and disciplines As his children we are just called to be earnest ...to be real and to repent. Back to Holman Hunt's picture for a moment, Jesus is knocking at the door, if we open it he **will** come in! He won't after taking a look inside say "no way I'm not coming in there!", He won't say "Sorry I thought you were someone else! Good bye!" He promises to come in.



**Witness: Before discussion, read the Bible passage and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer and ministry.**

1. *That Christ would prefer even a rejection of faith to the way that this church expressed their faith is truly shocking! That there may be more hope for the strident antagonist than the coolly indifferent is a wakeup call in the extreme.* What is your reaction to this statement?
2. "What you see is what you really get" How much does this describe the church, our Church, your small group, you?
3. What is your reaction to the statistics regarding Internet Porn and Church Members? For help with this particular issue especially if we are personally caught up in it go to Care Website: <http://www.care.org.uk/Group/Group.aspx?ID=17166>
4. Explore Grace Turner's question "*I have thought about the bride of Christ in what may be her finest and most testing hour. Is she drawing wealth from the King's purse or is she pursuing 'fools gold' that may crumble and prove worthless currency in time of war?*"
5. What is real gold and where can it be found? What is fools gold?
6. How does being rebuked and disciplined by Christ actually play out in our lives?
7. Act of Meditation – Duplicate a copy of Holman Hunt's picture. Spend some time thinking and sharing and praying.