

'You are lukewarm - I spit you from my mouth!' What more is there to say? Laodicia is the only church in these seven letters that has no good points. Ephesus, even though it had lost its love got praise for its hard work; Sardis, told they were dead and dying, still had some people that were true. Laodicia - nothing!

This is not true! Well, not quite. Jesus did not say 'I spit you from my mouth.' That is how I first read it. He said, 'I will spit you from my mouth.' Jesus gives them a second chance. He keeps the door open. This is something we need to learn from these scriptures. Firstly to make sure we have read the words correctly. Secondly, not to turn our backs completely on people - God's people.

In spite of this lack of anything good to say of them, Jesus still loved them. He loved them so much that he spoke to them, reminding them who he was, and imploring them to listen to him, to follow him. Surely they had once done that - there was a church, a congregation there in Laodicia. Even though they were pathetic, even though their commitment was weak, Jesus still loved them. *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. Those whom I love!*

The important message for us, for me, is not to turn our backs on them, not to write them off - give them a chance, leave the door open. That is the challenge for me, possibly it is a challenge for you.

In the Cuban crisis of some years ago now, Kennedy gave Khrushchev a way out - he left the door ajar. I was a young man then and this was an awakening for me of political manoeuvres - that is political with a small 'p.' How to deal with difficult people and events. Kennedy had the Russians in a corner and he could have kept them there with just two options - back down and submit to his demands or come out fighting. To have backed down in the international spot light would have been very difficult for Khrushchev. To have come out fighting would have meant a world war - probably a nuclear one. Instead Kennedy found a 'back door' for the Russians to retreat through. He offered a way of saving face.

In many ways this followed Jesus' example with the Laodicians. This is what you are doing wrong, this is what you should do, please do it. But please note, I am not saying Kennedy was doing God's work, I am not making a political statement, I am just giving a modern example of worldly lives that seem to me to follow God's instructions for how we live and conduct our lives. And, of course, the Cuban crisis did not follow the story of Laodicia, nor any other example in the bible. Our challenge is to try to get inside God's head, to get a glimpse of his wisdom, and to apply it to our lives, to the situations and events that are unfolding around us.

Hopefully none of us here will need to make decisions on nuclear armaments and war, but we do need to follow God's instructions for our daily lives. Here then, is a simple instruction. Firstly, love people -for they are God's people. Secondly be firm with those who go astray; BUT, and this is a very important final part of this instruction, always give people a chance to put things right - keep the door open.

Since Christmas we looked at each of the seven letters. This is the last letter. So let us review the letters as a whole. You have a handout giving a precise of them. On one side of the sheet is a table giving the structure and main points of each letter. On the reverse is a list of what each sermon sought to bring out. The sermons are all on our website if you wish to revisit them - though today's will take a couple of days to be posted.

## Structure of the Letters

The letters all follow the same pattern, though some miss out one or two sections.

The basic structure is:

A **standard intro** 'to the Angel of the church of .....

The 'angel' could be the pastor of that church or it could be the spirit of that church. I guess it does not matter much to us today. The message for us can be both to us as individuals, and also to us as a church body.

What we here in Christ Church received a letter addressed to the Angel of Christ Church? What good points would it say about us? What would be the bad points? It is something we need to consider.

## **Description of Jesus.**

Each letter describes Jesus in different images and languages. There are references from the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the OT, the Scriptures Jesus read and quoted. The references to the number 7, implies purity and wholeness; the stars, the lampstands, the eyes of flashing fire and the feet of burnished bronze all have a very OT feel about them - the God of awe and wonder. But we also have more recent, NT, references - 'who died and rose again to life.'

We also have the future held out to us. Jesus is the 'amen,' the master of the end times; he holds the key to the door of heaven; he decides who will pass through this door, and who will not!

## **Good points.**

Jesus then goes straight to the church's good points - if they have any! Jesus is positive, he may want to tell people off, but he firstly acknowledges that they have good points, and he thanks them for this.

This is something we can all learn to do in our daily lives - remember to look for people's good points and tell them about them. This is true for individuals and for groups.

The good points included love, faith, hard work, perseverance. They also had *being true to Jesus*, not following those who try to change the words and meanings of Jesus.

## **Rewards.**

For the good points, Jesus rewards. The rewards are listed in different ways, there are OT references - book of life, manna - and there is also looking forward to being given a new name, a new identity chosen by God.

## **Bad points**

It is only after giving praise does Jesus turn to digressions. Laodicia is the only church that does not have any praise - perhaps that is why it is the last letter. The emphasis of the letters is being with, following Jesus, it is not about being told off.

But if things are wrong, they must be dealt with, they cannot be ignored. This is another important lesson we need to heed from these letters. Jesus lists very clearly what they are doing wrong. Simply many of them take their eye off the ball - like a footballer volleying a cross, and thinking how he will celebrate afterwards; or a snooker player who is also worrying about where the white will go. Both can be good players, both can do the job, but they allow themselves to be distracted, to not concentrate of the prime objective. In these examples, the object ball needs to go in the net, in the pocket. Every else is secondary.

Be aware, these mistakes will be recorded! But how we then respond, how we react, that is what really matters.

My examples are of someone not concentrating. This can happen to a group, a congregation. This is what happened to Thyatira; they had love and faith, but they did not focus on Jesus and thus allowed false teaching and practices - evil - to creep in. So we must keep focussed! But the message is also to those who lead people astray, AND who will not repent. For them:

## **Punishment**

The punishment is severe - let us be in under no delusions as to God's mercy, and his punishment. Punishment is:

To be banished, rejected.

To be condemned by Jesus' words.

To suffer torment and death.

## Exhortation

Jesus does not finish his letters on a low, with punishment ringing in our ears. No, Jesus is positive, he urges us, he exhorts us.

Stay with Jesus, return to him, and this will bring:-

## Reward

The rewards are about the 'now.' There will be a limit to suffering, death will not hurt us.

The rewards are also about the future - we will be in heaven, we will be with Jesus, we will sit and eat with him.

What better future could anyone look forward to?

Let me tell you about Mary-Ann. She had given her life to Jesus as a young woman. I met her when she was 80 and she became my spiritual adviser and a friend. She hoped to get to 90, but the Lord said no, and she died when she was 89. I saw her about two weeks before she died, by then, she had cancer, she was only awake for about one hour each day, during which she was washed and eat, so I only had a few minutes with her.

In those few minutes Mary-Ann said how she was looking forward to seeing her Lord, her time on earth was nearly done, she needed to hand over her mantle to others, me included. That mantle was to tell of the good news of Jesus, to do the work of the Kingdom. This is the mantle Elijah gave to Elisha; this is the mantle that Jesus gave to the twelve - to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick; this the mantle Jesus gave to pairs of disciples, the seventy-two, *to heal the sick and to tell people the kingdom of God is at hand*. This is the mantle that has been handed from generation to generation. This is our work today, to be compassionate, to tell people of Jesus, AND to look forward to being in heaven.

## Overview

The 7 letters are from Jesus - be in no doubt about that.

They are an MOT for us individually, and as a church.

They challenge us, do we:

Believe in God?

Believe Jesus is the Son of God?

Believe Jesus can save us?

Believe Jesus is the only way to salvation?

There are only two answers! A YES, or a NO.

What is your answer?

| Church  | Jesus   | Good points                 | Reward                                       | Bad points      | Punishment                  | Exhortation                       | Reward |
|---------|---|-----------------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|
| Ephesus | Holds the 7 stars in right hand.<br>Walks among the | Hard work.<br>Perseverance. | Eat from the Tree of Life in God's paradise. | Abandoned love. | Removal of their lampstand. | Repent - return to how they were. |        |

|              |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |
|--------------|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|
|              | 7 lampstands.   | Spiritual discernment<br>Sound teaching<br>(no compromises).   |   |  |   |  |  |
| Smyrna       | The first and the last.<br>Died and rose again.   | 'Rich' in spite of poverty, slander and persecution.   | -   | -  | -   | Do not be afraid of suffering.<br><br>Overcome evil.   | Crown of Life.<br>Limit their time of suffering.<br>Not be hurt by death.  |
| Pergamum     | Has sharp, double-edged sword.  | Remain true whilst living in city of Satan.<br><br>Upholds Jesus' name.<br><br>Note. Pergamum centre of Zeus and emperor worship | Given hidden manna.<br><br>Given a white stone.<br><br>Given new name.        | Pagan practices creeping in.<br><br>Unsound teaching and hence practices.                                  | Jesus' will fight them with a sword in his mouth. | Repent!  | -  |
| Thyatira     | Son of God, eyes of flashing fire, feet of burnished bronze.  | Love and Faith.<br><br>Service and perseverance.<br><br>Healthy and growing.   | -   | False teaching leading to immorality.  | Those who follow this teaching will suffer.       | Hold to what you have in me.   | Authority over nations.<br><br>Morning star (Jesus' presence).   |
| Sardis       | Holds the 7 Spirits of God and the 7 Stars.   | A few are not soiled.  | To walk with Jesus, dressed in white.<br><br>Name in Book of Life.            | Are dead and dying, deeds incomplete.<br><br>(Apathy, indifference, self-satisfaction).                    | Jesus will come like a thief among them.          | Remember what they have heard, obey it, repent!  | -  |
| Philadelphia | Holy and True.<br><br>Holds key of David.<br><br>Controls the Door position (heaven) - open or closed.. | Despite little strength, have kept Jesus' word and name.<br><br>Endured patiently.   | Enemies will fall at their feet.<br><br>Jesus' love.<br><br>No hour of trial. | -  | -   | Hold on to what you have.<br><br>Overcome evil.  | Not lose their crown.<br><br>Made a permanent pillar in Temple of God (be in heaven).<br><br>Name of God, name of new Jerusalem, Jesus' new name, will be written on them. |
| Laodicia     | The Amen.<br><br>The faithful and true witness of God's creation.                                       | -  | -   | Lukewarm.<br><br>Blind to true condition.<br><br>Think they need nothing because they are materially rich. | They will be spat from Jesus' mouth.              | Buy the gold of Jesus - refined by fire.<br><br>Put salve on their eyes.<br><br>Be earnest and repent.<br><br>Listen to Jesus' call.<br><br>Overcome evil. | Be rich and wear white clothes.<br><br>'See.'<br><br>Jesus' disciplines those he loves.<br><br>The door opens, Jesus eats with them.<br><br>Sit with Jesus on his throne.  |

Sermons:

[www.christchurchineham.org.uk](http://www.christchurchineham.org.uk)

| Letter  | Sermon Title | Preacher    | Main Comments   |
|---------|--------------|-------------|---|
| Ephesus | A True Love  | Ian Bentley | God knew their deeds - they had weeded out false teachers, BUT had lost their love for Jesus.<br><br>Paul (1Cor:13.2) wrote 'if I have not love, I am nothing.'<br><br>Jesus calls us:<br><br>REMEMBER your love.<br><br>REPENT - change direction immediately. |

|              |                         |                        |   |
|--------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---|
|              |                         |                        | RESUME what you did when you first knew me.   |
| Smyrna       | Faithful in All         | Richard Turnbull       | The letters are from Jesus - remarkably resistant to passage of time.<br><br>They encourage us in our faithfulness AND expose our discipleship as weak and complacent.<br><br>Profound Christian Truth: not that material riches are wrong, BUT true riches come from a relationship with God. Often it is when we suffer that we experience 'God with us.' Trust in Christ alone.<br><br>From suffering blessings flow. We might be tested in this country, but God's blessings will flow on us. |
| Pergamum     | Holding on to the Truth | Gordon Randall         | Much pressure was on the Christians to compromise their faith - we need to RECOGNISE where we compromise in life.<br><br>REPENT immediately!<br><br>Jesus offers a REWARD to those who heed his warnings.   |
| Thyatira     | A Holy People           | Ian Bentley            | 4 good deeds - love, faith, service & perseverance.<br><br>BUT tolerates immoral teaching & practices.<br><br>Jesus called Jezebel to repent, she didn't, thus Jesus caused her and her followers to suffer.<br><br>Stay as true disciples and we will rule the nations!  |
| Sardis       | Really Alive            | Margaret Locke-Wheaton | On surface the church looked well but they were dead.<br><br>The challenge is to look at our lives and our church to see if we are alive.<br><br>3 bits of advice:<br><br>1 Wake up - recognise not really alive<br><br>2. Strengthen - build on what is good<br><br>3. Remember - back to basics, remember the reason we are here, what is at heart and what we are here for.  |
| Philadelphia | Persevering to the End  | Ian Bentley            | The city is alive and exciting - and tempting! But the church stays true to Jesus.<br><br>Following Jesus is the way to heaven, because he has that authority, AND he gives this to his followers.<br><br>Following Jesus can mean being 'on the outside' in the world.<br><br>Jesus stays with us thro' trials AND points us to a future in heaven.  |
| Laodicia     | Depending on Christ     | David Josey            | Be positive, search for Jesus & follow him.<br><br>Use 'the letters' as a personal & a church MOT.<br><br>Be encouraged, Jesus loves us.<br><br>Stay in Fellowship - under God.   |

### Letters are from Jesus.

The book of revelation was written to assure these Christians who were living in a world opposed to the message and church of Jesus Christ the ultimate truth that God is in control. One preacher put it like this, "And that is the great reality which this book points to continuously: the Lord reigns; His nature is unchanging; His word is dependable; His power is unrivalled, it is limitless and indestructible. And the Church on earth needs to know that, needs to believe it, needs to live in the light of it because that is the only way that grace and peace flow into our lives."

Two of the churches are NOT criticised - interestingly, both are materially poor and are persecuted!