

# Revelation 3:14-22

- Laodicea -

**Author: Evert Jan Hempenius**

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## Foreword

- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological notes, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline show some overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Revelation. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand alone.”

## Context

- ❖ The message of Jesus Christ to the church of Laodicea is part of the Book of Revelation. The Book of Revelation is like a large painting. You need to look at the whole in order to understand the details.
- ❖ A brief outline of the Book of Revelation:<sup>1</sup>

<b>Introduction (Rev. 1:1-3)</b>	
	The origin and command to write this Revelation down.
<b>The Book of Revelation (Rev. 1:4-22:21)</b>	
Rev. 1:4-8	The opening liturgical setting.
Rev. 1:9-3:22	PART 1
Rev. 4:1-22:11	PART 2

<sup>1</sup> This outline for sermons is very brief and does not discuss all the (many) different theories about the structures and outlines of the Book of Revelation. Beale (1999) provides a detailed outline. For discussion see Garrow (1997).

Rev. 22:12-21	The closing liturgical setting.
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- PART 1: The risen and exalted Christ and his seven messages to the seven churches in the Roman Province Asia.
- PART 2: The heavenly courtroom and the judgment of God, ending with the descent of the new heaven and earth.

<b>Part 1 (Rev. 1:9-3:22)</b>	
Rev. 1:9-20	The risen and exalted Christ reveals himself to John and to the churches.
Rev. 2:1-3:22	The seven messages to the seven churches of Asia. Jesus Christ knows the deeds of each church and of each individual. He calls them to repent where necessary to prepare them for the things to come, which they need to overcome.

- ❖ There is much discussion about the date of writing of the Revelation.
  - Some commentators propose a date near the reign of emperor Nero (AD 68).
  - Others propose a date during the reign of emperor Domitian (AD 81-96).
    - In the case of the message to the Laodiceans, the outcome of this discussion is of lesser importance. The Laodiceans did not suffer persecution at the moment of writing. Their own faith was weak or lukewarm. They were not prepared for “the great tribulation” (Rev. 7:14).
- ❖ The socio-economical and historical-geographical context of 1<sup>st</sup> century Laodicea is also important. See below.

## Form and structure

- ❖ Each message to one of the seven churches has the same structure:
  - Commission to write.
  - Presentation of the exalted Christ, with references to Rev. 1:4-20.
    - Rev. 3:14 > Rev. 1:5
  - Praises and commendations.
    - However, in this message to the Laodiceans, the praises and commendations are lacking!
  - Calling to repentance.
  - Promise (and warning), with references to Rev. 19-22.
    - Rev. 3:22 > Rev. 22:1-2
  - Calling to listen to the words of the Spirit.

## Theological notes

- ❖ The Book of Revelation is trinitarian (God – Holy Spirit – Jesus Christ; Rev. 1:4-5) in character.
  - God is the first and the last (Rev. 1:8) – Jesus Christ is the first and the last (Rev. 1:17).
  - Jesus Christ speaks to the churches (Rev. 2:1-6) and the churches are summoned to listen to what the Spirit (Rev. 2:7) says.
- ❖ The Book of Revelation is foremost a liturgical book with prayers, doxologies, confessions, prophecies and visions. It shows the heavenly liturgy in images and this liturgy affects the history of this world, when the plagues of God strike this earth. Rev. 4:11 explains why: **“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”**
  - The first priority in the life of every human being is to glorify God.
  - This liturgical book reminds us of the liturgy in the tabernacle (especially) and the temple of the Old Testament. This explains the many references to the altars and the priestly appearances of Christ and some of his angels.
- ❖ The Book of Revelation is also a prophetic book about the past, the present and the future. It sheds light on the past, the present situation of the seven churches in Asia Minor, and the future, culminating in the promise of the new heaven and the new earth.
  - From chapter 4 onwards the judgment of God is the dominating theme. He will do justice (Rev. 4-5; Rev. 6:10; Rev. 21:1-15 and other passages).

## Technical and hermeneutical notes

- ❖ Reading and understanding the Book of Revelation requires:
  - Profound knowledge of the Old Testament.
    - The books of Exodus and Numbers, Ezekiel and Daniel are of particular importance in this regard. These books bear relation to oppression and deliverance of the people of God (Egypt and Babylon).
  - Knowledge of the Greek-Roman world of the first century.
  - Knowledge of figures of speech, because of all the metaphors and other figures of speech.
  - Knowledge of the structure of Revelation (see above).
  - (Elementary) knowledge of Hermeneutics.
- ❖ John received this Revelation from Jesus Christ and at the same time this Revelation reveals the risen and exalted Christ, who holds the keys of (life and) death and Hades (Rev. 1:17). John understood the words he heard and the visions he saw, though sometimes they needed to be explained to him (Rev. 1:19-20).

- ❖ John wrote down what he heard and saw in this book and sent it to the seven churches in Asia Minor, an important province of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. In these seven messages to the churches of Asia, Jesus Christ addresses major aspects of church life. He praises and rebukes them and gives them promises of the life to come. Christians, members of these churches, understood these messages. Twice, people are mentioned by name and they were warned against a movement called the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6; 2:15), active among the churches. These Christians were far more familiar with the figures of speech used in the Revelation than we are nowadays.
  - Figures of speech are not always easily understood by 21<sup>st</sup> century readers. Sometimes they are explained, more often not. Figures of speech allow for more than one explanation and application. That explains the multitude of commentaries and theories.
  - In the process of explaining and applying the prophecies of this book, the interpreter should ask himself two questions:
    - To which exegetical tradition do I belong? There is a plethora of traditions, especially in the Anglo-American World. To mention only three:
      - Amillennialism;
      - Postmillennialism;
      - Premillennialism.
    - Secondly, the interpreter should be aware of his own situation and of the local Christian community. What is my own political-religious situation and how does this situation affect my reading and understanding of the Book of Revelation?

## Exposition

### Verse 14

- ❖ “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write”: The identity of the angel is unknown. It might be a heavenly being, but also a human messenger:
  - **“a human messenger serving as an envoy, an envoy, one who is sent.”**<sup>2</sup>
    - By humans or by God; prophets.
  - **“a transcendent power who carries out various missions or tasks, messenger, angel.”**<sup>3</sup>
    - By God.

The most obvious explanation is a messenger sent by John to the church of Laodicea, carrying not only this message but also a “copy” of the Book of Revelation in order to read it aloud in front of the congregation. So that the members of this church can “hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 3:22).

<sup>2</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000), p. 8.

- ❖ “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.”
  - John is passing on the Words of Jesus Christ.
    - “The Amen, the faithful and true witness.” Jesus Christ is the final Word of God. **“Christ as the ultimate affirmation, the Amen.”<sup>4</sup>**
    - The faithful and true witness refers to Rev. 1:5 and to the crucifixion of Christ. Jesus Christ is the faithful witness unto death (cf. Antipas; Rev. 2:13).
    - He is “the ruler of God’s creation”. He has received all power in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18 and Rev. 1:5). He is not only ruling the lives of people, churches and nations, but also the whole of creation. He is the cosmic Christ (Col. 1:15-20).

Verse 15-16

- ❖ Jesus Christ will judge this world, the church and individuals. He is the living one who knows the deeds which he characterizes as lukewarm.
  - Knowledge of the historical-geographical background of the city of Laodicea illuminates these words. (See the map.)



- Laodicea and the cities of Hierapolis and Colosse (Col. 4:11-16) were situated in the Lycus valley about ten kilometres apart from each other. Hierapolis had its HOT water springs, which can still be visited today. Colosse had its COLD water springs. Laodicea was dependent for its water supply on transport by the famous Roman aqueducts and when the water reached the city, it was lukewarm, especially in the hot summers.
  - Jesus uses the water supply of the three cities to characterize the faith of the three congregations: Hierapolis (HOT), Colosse (COLD), Laodicea (LUKEWARM).

<sup>4</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000), pp. 53–54.

- During warm days HOT water and COLD water are both very welcome as a beverage, but LUKEWARM water isn't tasty and refreshing. It is even unpleasant. Jesus judges this congregation with contempt: "I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

#### Verse 17-18

- ❖ The Christians in Laodicea were wealthy, due to their business in the banking industry ("gold"), the production of medicine ("eye salve") and the black wool industry ("clothes"). Their preoccupation with their business led to a kind of nominal Christianity. It is very revealing when they say: "we need nothing." (Cf. Ho. 12:8; Zech. 11:5)
- ❖ At the same time, they didn't realize that they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. "Wretched and pitiful" is an assessment of their spiritual state, which is caused by their spiritual poverty, blindness and nakedness.
  - Poor: they lack a fervent faith (see also 1 Tim. 6:18).
  - Blind: they lack a spiritual judgment (2 Pet. 1:9).
  - Naked: there is a lack of good works.
- ❖ "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."
  - The Laodiceans were businessmen in trade and in manufacture. They were thinking in terms of buying and selling. Is it therefore that Jesus counsels them **to buy** from him? Is it his way to remind these Christians of the free gift of grace (Isa. 55:1-3)? Does Jesus make use of a positive form of irony?

#### Verse 19-20

- ❖ "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."
  - Look at the contrast: "I am about to spit you out of my mouth" in 3:15 and these words: "Those **whom I love** I rebuke and discipline." He is not rejecting them, but looking after them, as a good shepherd looks for his wandering sheep.
  - "So be earnest," towards yourselves and to me. Is it true that you really need nothing?
- ❖ Try to imagine the reality of these words: "I stand at the door and knock." If somebody is knocking at the door, he is standing outside and trying to get the attention of the people who are inside. There will be some who don't even hear the voice of Jesus, because they are so preoccupied with their own business.
- ❖ But once the door is opened, the communion with Christ will be restored, symbolized by eating together. This might be a reference to the Holy Supper, but the focus is on spiritual communion (cf. Matt. 18:20).

#### Verse 21-22

- ❖ "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

- The cosmic Christ(!) is calling the Laodiceans to repent, otherwise they won't spiritually survive "the great tribulation" (Rev. 14:1-5).
- Jesus sits on the throne together with the Father (Rev. 22:1-2).
  - The LORD received this glory after He had humbled himself and became obedient to death (Phil. 2:5-11).
- ❖ This message is not only meant for this church, but for all the churches. These are words of the Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ and of the Father.

## Application

- ❖ With the introduction of the cosmic Christ, the ultimate affirmation of God, at the beginning of the message to the Laodiceans, John calls these Christians to stand in awe of their Saviour and to listen to his words about their present situation. The same attitude is required of Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, wherever they live.
- ❖ Caveat. Both HOT and COLD are positive designations. In some cultures is a cold attitude a negative trait. The point of comparison is not faith itself. Laodicea is compared with Colosse (COLD) and Hierapolis (HOT). In applying it to the actual situation, it is better to compare a lukewarm faith to a warm faith and a refreshing faith, which are both positive.
  - A warm faith is a faith characterised by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).
  - A refreshing faith might be characterised by knowledge and wisdom of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7).
    - It is obvious that these two characterisations are examples.
- ❖ The danger of wealth: 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing' (Rev. 3:18; Prov. 30:7-9) is a real danger for Christians. Jesus often warned against gathering treasures (Matt. 6:19-24).
  - Spiritual poverty might become visible when Christians have only superficial knowledge of the Scriptures. At the same time they don't feel the necessity to grow in knowledge and love (Eph. 4:15), because: "I need nothing."
  - They are blind to their spiritual needs, and as Peter says, they have forgotten the impact of the forgiveness of sins (2 Pet. 1:9).
  - And finally, they can't show their good works, because there is nothing (James 2:14-20).
- ❖ The reproach of the cosmic Christ is sharp and full of contempt, but at the same time loving.
- ❖ When the pastor of a congregation reads these words in front of a congregation, he is at the same time the voice of the Christ and of the Spirit. He is not reading from a book, but being an angel, a messenger of the heavenly Jesus.
  - Therefore, when the pastor is applying these words to the actual situation of any congregation, he should know the spiritual needs of the individual members and the congregation as a whole.
  - And the congregation should be aware of the fact that the cosmic Christ is in their midst when they gather in his name (Rev. 3:19-20; Matt. 20:18).

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