

## *When God Is on the Throne: Discovering the Mysteries of Revelation*

### **Study Guide on Revelation 3—Week 3 (Sunday, Sept. 20)**

**Background:** Last week we looked at the first of the seven letters (the letter to Ephesus), and this week we look at the last, the letter to the Laodiceans. Those who wish to understand the message of Revelation should spend at least the time to read the other five letters between these two, just to get a feel for the historical situation in which John writes his vision.

The previous five letters have spoken of Christians in the province of Asia being slandered and put in prison, one even put to death. The letters have also castigated Christians for failing to keep their distance from the things of idolatry and their corrupting influence. Some Christians have been told that even though they consider themselves alive and well, they are actually dead. And all have been promised eternal reward if they will overcome the temptation to follow their culture or to give up their faith.

John obviously knows the town of Laodicea. This wealthy city was famous for its banks, its linen and wool industry, and its medical school, which was known for a special eye ointment. It is also helpful to know that there were both cold springs and hot springs nearby. All of these are important in the letter.

**Text:** The letter to the Laodiceans is probably the best-known of the seven letters, the one that speaks of the church as neither hot nor cold but rather lukewarm. However, there is even more to the letter than many have noticed. The letter begins as usual with a description of Jesus in the loftiest of terms. But Jesus has no positive words for these Christians. They are not only “neither hot nor cold;” they also think that they are “rich” (probably a reference to their supposed spiritual health, although they were probably materially wealthy, too). In reality, though, they are poor, blind, and naked. They are encouraged to buy from Jesus refined gold to alleviate their poverty, white clothes to cover themselves, and salve to heal their blind eyes. Jesus reminds them that these tough words are discipline, a sign of his love for them. But they must repent in order to receive his blessings.

In another well-known metaphor from this letter, Jesus says that he stands at the door and knocks, ready to eat with anyone who will open the door. This may be a reference to the coming messianic banquet (see Matt. 8:11), or to Jesus’ desire for a close relationship with them, or perhaps to both. He ends the letter as he does the earlier ones, promising a share in his future reign to those who overcome.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Both hot water and cold water are beneficial at times, but there is little use for lukewarm water. What might Jesus mean when he says that he wishes they were one or the other? (There are a couple of possibilities. Coldness may, but does not necessarily, suggest faithlessness.)

2. The Lord has nothing good to say about the Christians at Laodicea. Yet they see themselves as spiritually mature. How can Christians be so blind to the truth?
  
3. How is our culture like theirs? In a wealthy culture such as ours, should we be concerned about what Jesus said to Laodicea?
  
4. Who or what might help us see ourselves as God sees us? That is, how can we best overcome our natural human tendency toward pride and self-sufficiency? This may be a long list.
  
5. No one really likes to be rebuked and disciplined. Yet this passage and many others in the Bible tell us how it is good for us. What is the secret to being able to hear and respond to discipline?
  
6. What might the image of Jesus “standing at the door and knocking” say about God’s role and our role in our relationship with Him?
  
7. Jesus says that Christians who overcome will sit with Him on His throne, just as He overcame and sat down with the Father. How did Jesus overcome, and what might this say about the nature of discipleship?