

# Revival: Our Great Need



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Rev. 3:14–21, Heb. 12:7–11, Matt. 25:1–13, Zech. 3:1–5, Song of Sol. 5:2–5.*

**Memory Text:** “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me” (*Revelation 3:20, NKJV*).

**L**aodicea is the last church in Revelation's sequence of seven churches. The name means “a people judged.” It is also a fitting symbol for God's last-day people.

Laodicea was located in an open valley in southwestern Turkey. It was an important financial capital, a fashion mecca, and an educational and medical center. Its inhabitants were independent, self-confident, and rich.

The one vital natural resource that the city lacked, however, was water. The water was piped in via Roman aqueducts from a spring that was five miles south of the city. By the time the water reached Laodicea, it was lukewarm. Jesus uses that symbolism to represent the lukewarm condition of His last-day church, described as self-confident, complacent, apathetic, and spiritually indifferent. It is a church that has lost its passion. It is a church that needs a spiritual revival.

Nevertheless, the Laodicean message is filled with hope. Christ speaks to His people in love, offering to meet their heart needs and revive their deepest spiritual longings.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 6.*

## Hope for Lukewarm Laodiceans

Jesus addresses each of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 with a title of Himself that is appropriate for their spiritual condition. The titles He uses in His message to the church of Laodicea ring with the assurance of spiritual renewal for all those who will heed His call.

**Read** the following Bible passages (*Rev. 3:14, 15; 2 Cor. 1:20; John 3:10, 11; Col. 1:13–17*). **Why do you think that Jesus uses the titles “the Amen,” “the faithful and true witness,” and “the beginning of the creation of God” to address the Laodicean church?**

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In Revelation 3:14, the Greek word for “beginning” is *arche*. It can mean “beginning,” in the sense that the one to whom it refers is the beginner of the event or action. In this context, *arche* refers to Jesus as the Beginner, or the first cause of all creation. In other words, He is the Creator (*John 1:1–3; Eph. 3:8, 9*).

This is extremely significant. Jesus, the One who spoke and worlds came into being, the One who created the earth, the One who spoke life into existence—this same Jesus speaks hope to Laodicea. The all-powerful Creator can create new life. He can re-create new spiritual longings in our hearts. He can transform our spiritual lives.

**Read** 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:14, 15. **What do these texts mean to you?**

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**Why is the Laodicean message a message of hope? What is it about the introduction to this message of strong rebuke that encourages you? Which of the three titles of Jesus do you identify with the most, and why?**

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## A Loving Rebuke

**Read** Revelation 3:15, 16. Why does Jesus give the Laodicean church such a strong rebuke? What does it mean to be lukewarm? What other words might Jesus have used in place of “lukewarm”?

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Commenting on Revelation 3:15 and 16, Ellen G. White states: “The message to the Laodicean church applies most decidedly to those whose religious experience is insipid, who do not bear decided witness in favor of the truth.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 962. This is a fascinating statement. An insipid religious experience is one that is lifeless. It has the outer husk of Christianity but lacks the substance. It has the external form but lacks the living power. The Laodiceans are not heretics or fiery fanatics; they are, simply, spiritually indifferent. The Laodiceans appear to be good moral people. They have what Paul calls “a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5, NKJV). Jesus speaks of religious people in His day who “draw near to [Him] with their mouth and honor [Him] with their lips, but their heart is far from [Him]” (Matt. 15:8, NKJV).

**Read** Hebrews 12:7–11; Job 5:17–19; Psalm 94:12; and Proverbs 29:15, 17, and describe God’s purpose in His rebukes.

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Our Lord loves His people too much to let them go easily to perdition. He will do whatever it takes to rekindle a spiritual flame in their hearts. His strong rebuke is because of a stronger love. His chastisement is only because of His longing to heal us. The prophet Hosea echoes this sentiment with this call to repentance: “Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up” (Hos. 6:1, NKJV).

**Has God ever used painful, even embarrassing, experiences to humble you and draw you closer to Him? What did you learn from these experiences that, ideally, ensures you won’t have to go through them again?**

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## Perception and Reality

There is a gap between what Laodicea says and does. There is an even greater gap between the spiritual experience that Laodicea thinks she has and what she actually does have.

**Read Revelation 3:17.** What is Laodicea's evaluation of herself? What is our Lord's assessment of her? How do you think a people could be so blinded to their true spiritual condition? In what ways might we be blind regarding our own spiritual condition?

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One of Satan's fatal deceptions is to blind us to the reality of our spiritual needs. Some of the religious leaders of Jesus' day were blind to their own spiritual poverty. They were Bible-reading, Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying "church" members looking for the coming of the Messiah. Yet, many were in darkness regarding the type of spiritual kingdom that He would usher in. Jesus called them "blind guides" (*Matt. 23:24*). Paul writes to the church at Corinth about those "whose minds the god of this age has blinded" (*2 Cor. 4:4, NKJV*). This is why Jesus said that He came for the " 'recovery of sight to the blind' " (*Luke 4:18, NKJV*). Jesus will restore the spiritual eyesight that we have lost if we allow Him. Every time that Jesus opened blind eyes in the New Testament, He was revealing His desire to open the eyes of our minds in order to enable us to see Him clearly.

**Read Matthew 25:1–13.** What are the similarities between the foolish virgins and the members of the church at Laodicea?

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What ways have you found to keep spiritually alert? Why do you think it is so easy to become spiritually indifferent? What are some ways to counteract religious apathy?

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## The Divine Remedy

There is hope for Laodicea, just as there is hope for all who are afflicted with spiritual apathy and indifference. Our Lord has the divine remedy. The fact that the Lord speaks to this church shows that hope for the church exists if His people accept and follow His counsel.

**Reflect** on Jesus' counsel in Revelation 3:18, 19. What does Jesus mean when He talks about "gold refined in the fire," being clothed in "white garments," and our eyes being anointed with "eye salve"? See also 1 Pet. 1:7, Zech. 3:1–5, Rev. 19:7–9, Eph. 4:30.

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"Jesus is going from door to door, standing in front of every soul-temple, proclaiming, 'I stand at the door, and knock.' As a heavenly merchantman, he opens his treasures, and cries, 'Buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.' The gold he offers is without alloy, more precious than that of Ophir; for it is faith and love.

"The white raiment he invites the soul to wear is his own robes of righteousness, and the oil for anointing is the oil of his grace, which will give spiritual eyesight to the soul in blindness and darkness, that he may distinguish between the workings of the Spirit of God and the spirit of the enemy. Open your doors, says the great Merchantman, the possessor of spiritual riches, and transact your business with me. It is I, your Redeemer, who counsels you to buy of me."—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Aug. 7, 1894.

**Ellen G. White quotes Revelation 3:20, saying of Jesus, " 'I stand at the door, and knock.' " Jesus knocks; He doesn't break down the door and force His way in. What this means is that, in the end, regardless of what God is willing to do for us, we must make the choice to let Him in. Ask yourself, "How resistant am I to opening the door to Him?" If you are resistant, ask yourself, "Why?" What is holding you back? What sin, what indulgence, don't you want to let go of, or what is it that you find so hard to let go of?**

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## A Relentless Love

**Compare** Revelation 3:20 to Song of Solomon 5:2–5. What similarities do you find in both instances? What do these passages reveal about God’s love?

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The evening meal in the Middle East was and still is extremely important. When the work of the day was over and the men returned from the fields for the evening meal, the entire family gathered around the table. In most instances the extended family lived together. The number at the evening meal often would be quite large. Grandfather and grandmother, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces and cousins, adults and children might be present. In this grand reunion after a hard day’s work, stories were told, experiences shared, and counsel given. It was a time of fellowship. It was a time of warmth and family intimacy. Jesus longs to have fellowship like this with us, as well.

**How** does Christ’s promise in Revelation 3:21 reveal His heartfelt desire for each one of us?

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The book of Revelation mentions God’s throne more than forty times. This is more than in any other book of the Bible. At God’s throne, we join in with the heavenly chorus and joyously proclaim: “ ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing’ ” (*Rev. 5:12, NKJV*). He promises that we can participate in this grand festive scene of rejoicing once the long saga of sin ends.

Christ uses His greatest motivation for His indifferent end-time people. The greatest motivation to wake us from spiritual slumber is Jesus’ endless love, for He longs to spend all eternity with us. If that is not enough to shake us out of our spiritual apathy, what is? If that is not enough to bring us to our knees, seeking revival, what will? His love has provided eternity for us. We have royal blood running through our veins. We are sons and daughters of the King of the universe. We can reign with Him, seated upon His throne forever.

**Christ longs to be in fellowship with you. How much do you want to be in fellowship with Him? The answer is simple. How much time do you spend in prayer and fellowship with the Lord? What does your answer tell you about yourself and, perhaps, just how lukewarm you might be?**

**Further Study:** “A revival and a reformation must take place under the ministration of the Holy Spirit. Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from the spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices. Reformation will not bring forth the good fruit of righteousness unless it is connected with the revival of the Spirit. Revival and reformation are to do their appointed work, and in doing this work they must blend.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 25, 1902.

“The counsel of the True Witness is full of encouragement and comfort. The churches may yet obtain the gold of truth, faith, and love, and be rich in heavenly treasure. ‘Buy of me gold that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.’ The white raiment is the righteousness of Christ that may be wrought into the character. Purity of heart, purity of motive, will characterize every one who is washing his robe, and making it white in the blood of the Lamb.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 24, 1888.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is so dangerous about being lukewarm? Why can it lead us so easily to spiritual self-deception?
- ❷ Why do some Christians seem so radiant and others so indifferent? Is it a matter of different personality types, or is there something deeper? If so, what?
- ❸ Discuss with your class ways in which to avoid becoming spiritually indifferent. How can we keep our spiritual experience vibrant and growing? What are things that we can do as a church body, as a whole, to protect ourselves from becoming “lukewarm”?
- ❹ Why do you think God would rather have us be “cold” than “lukewarm”? Why isn’t being lukewarm better than being flat-out cold? Hint: what’s more comfortable, being lukewarm or being cold?

## Ibrahim's Question

Ibrahim, 9, lives in the country of Azerbaijan. Most people in Azerbaijan are religious, but they are not Christians. Ibrahim loves going with his mother to do missionary work. Often they take a minibus to a village near their home. Ibrahim likes to sit near the driver so they can talk. One day the driver asked Ibrahim some questions: "How many eyes do two birds have?"

"Four!" Ibrahim said. "Now I have a question for *you*. How many days did it take God to create the earth?" The driver didn't know. "It took six days," Ibrahim said. "If you want to know more about what God does, you should buy a book from my mom. It's called *Only Allah Gives Us Peace*."

Some people on the bus heard Ibrahim talking to the driver. One of them asked Ibrahim's mother about the book Ibrahim had mentioned. She told them that the book is about people who are faithful to Allah [God]. "How can we get the book?" a man asked. Ibrahim's mother usually sold the book to help pay their bus fare, but she let Ibrahim give a copy to each of the people on the bus for free.

Ibrahim walked down the aisle giving one to each person. The people smiled and said, "*Sahg-ohl!*" (thank you).

As Ibrahim and his mother got off the bus, he noticed several passengers reading the book he'd given them. *We've just arrived at the village, and already we've shared God's Word with many people*, he realized.

At school, every student takes part in a religion class. One day Ibrahim's teacher read the story of Noah. Then she quizzed the students about the story. "What did God tell Noah to do?" she asked.

Ibrahim raised his hand. "God told Noah to build a boat," he answered. "Yes," the teacher said. "And how long did it take to build the boat?"

"It took Noah 120 years to build the boat and warn the people about the flood.

Ibrahim answered confidently. "But no one chose to enter the boat except Noah and his family—eight people. So, God sent the animals into the boat and closed the door. Then the flood came."

"How do you know so much about this story?" the teacher asked Ibrahim.

"My mother and I read the sacred writings together," Ibrahim said. Ibrahim and his mother share God's message of love in a land where Jesus isn't worshiped as God. Our mission offerings help believers in difficult countries to share God's message of hope with people who've never heard. Thank you for giving so that others can hear God's message of love.