

Getting Our Self Awareness Right

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[0 : 00] We're continuing in Revelation chapter 3 verses 14 to 21.

If you can turn there in your Bibles or in your devices, that's our passage. Let me just pray for us before we turn to God's Word.

Heavenly Father, as we've been thinking about, as we've been praying, pray that you would give us hearts now to understand that all of the worries of the news, all of the things that might distract our minds and take us away from sitting before your Word and listening, and we pray that you'd help us to learn, be edified, be filled this morning, so that we're better able to live as your people, to go out with joy, to live for your glory.

Amen. So our final letter in Revelation, the church in Leia de Sia. So from Revelation chapter 3 verse 14 I'll read.

And to the angel of the church in Leia de Sia, write, The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness at the beginning of God's creation. I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot.

[1 : 29] Would that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. If you say I am rich, I've prospered and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments that you may clothe yourself, and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. I will be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me.

The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Well, as we've been saying this morning, we're looking at the final letter in this series to the churches in Revelation. And as you'll remember, there were seven churches located throughout Asia Minor in modern-day Turkey, and all these letters addressed the big issues that the churches in that time faced, big issues that continue to be the things that churches today face.

[2 : 49] And this morning we come to Laodicea. Laodicea was located in the Lysus River Valley. And that location we find you read in history, and you can even see now, is a beautiful fertile valley.

And it brought lots of wealth to the city. So it was a... one person describes it as the Wall Street of Asia Minor, because it was both the crossroads for trade and had all of this natural wealth coming into the city.

It was so prosperous, in fact, that when there was a major earthquake there, just a few years before John was writing, the citizens didn't accept help from the Roman government to rebuild.

They said, we're going to do it all ourselves. And actually, if you were to go to that place, you'd be able to see inscriptions on some of the ruins of the old buildings, the names of citizens who had paid out their own pocket to have this city of Laodicea rebuilt.

Now, that might sound like a world away from the Isle of Lewis and a world away from Carlyway, but that self-sufficient attitude of Laodicea, the best of it, reminded me of the best of what I've seen here.

[3 : 58] I guess maybe it's part of just being in a rural location, but you have to be quite self-reliant. And I'm envious of how everyone seems to be able to just build their own homes and fix things when they go wrong.

And I don't have the first idea of where to start. Being self-sufficient in that way is really useful. But it's also important that we know our limitations when it comes to fixing something or whatever.

Because otherwise, you hear these stories about someone who, I don't know, maybe tries to fix a boiler and ends up melting it or exploding or someone trying to rewire their own house from a YouTube video and something going in disastrously wrong.

It's good to be self-sufficient, but it's right that we know our limitations to know how much we can do. Because otherwise, well, it's dangerous if you don't, because that's just...

Well, you might just say it's blind self-sufficiency, thinking that you can do absolutely everything. And it would be dangerous with wiring a house, for example, but it's disastrous when it comes to our spiritual lives.

[5 : 06] But that's the problem with Laodicea. It's blind self-sufficiency. Thinking that they were completely self-reliant. They could do everything. And however much... And as we see more of that played out, however much or however little we might be like them, we need to make sure we don't make the same mistakes, that we know where our limitations are, that we're not blindly self-sufficient.

We need to get our self-awareness right. That's the theme of our final letter here in Revelation. So our aim for this morning, our prayer really then, is that God would open our eyes to see us as He does.

We were talking to the children, Thomas was talking to the children and the children's talk about, you know, what matters. Is it how our friends see us or is it how God sees us? Well, we need to pray that God will help us to see ourselves as He does, and turn away from self-reliance to reliance on Him.

And that's our aim for this morning, and we're going to look at that under two headings. The danger of blind self-sufficiency and the all-sufficient Saviour. And maybe I have a habit of this, but the first point is about twice as long as the second. Just got more in it.

So first of all, the danger of blind self-sufficiency. As we've seen, the problem later see it was just that they thought they could do everything. They were completely self-reliant. Let's just look first of all at their blindness to this, because they didn't realise they had a completely false perception of themselves.

[6 : 40] And you'll notice that because Jesus draws it out in verse 17. Let me just read that again for us. He says, for you say, I am rich, I've prospered and I need nothing, not realising that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

They don't realise what they truly are like. They're completely deluded. They don't have a clue. And it'd be fair to ask, how could the church get that so wrong? How could the reality be so different to what they see themselves as?

And I think it comes back to how they measured themselves. As people, we like to measure. We like to measure our surroundings. I mean, it's fun to use a tape measure.

Just find out how big stuff it is. We measure the time. We measure heat, weight, all kinds of things. Kids learn at school and we continue to use throughout our lives. But arguably, I think our favourite object, subject to measure, is ourselves.

We find it interesting. We want to find out how we're doing. And so we measure ourselves. If we want to check we're healthy, we might go to the doctor or we'll also weigh ourselves, maybe measure our height, find out our BMI online.

[7 : 58] Maybe look at our clothing size, poke our prod ourselves in the shower, look in the mirror. We measure ourselves to try to think, try to work out how we're doing. It's not just health though, is it? We do an education, social life, family life, career.

We like to measure how we're doing. What's the main way we do that though? I think it's in comparing ourselves to others. You know, if someone's worried about their weight, they don't just, you know, measure it online.

You look at other people, compare yourself to them. If you're worried, if you're thinking of a teenage girl or boys, worrying are they beautiful or handsome, they'll compare themselves to probably an airbrushed picture of a celebrity online on a good day.

And that's how they'll measure how they're doing in that way. I don't know if there's, there aren't any kids today, but you know, how do kids measure how they're doing at school? How do the parents work out? Are their kids doing well?

It's often through exams and that kind of thing, for better or for worse. And parents and grandparents, you might look around when your kids are playing with other people.

[9 : 05] And you try to work out, man, is everyone's kids as badly behaved as mine? I gave my parents that constant worry, I think. They're trying to work out, are we just the only ones doing something wrong?

And you know that social media has just accelerated that comparison game. You just have to look at people's Instagram or Facebook and carefully chosen photos are meant to give a complete summation of someone's job and wealth and social life and romantic life.

And most of the time, when we compare ourselves to others, it's just depressing. Because people show the best of what they are, especially on social media, or just a false portrayal. And everyone looks like they're having a better life than you.

So measuring ourselves is unwise, potentially dangerous. But the thing is, we also measure ourselves in the Christian life, don't we?

Let me ask you, how are you doing in your Christian life? That's a really good question to ask. It's good to take a step back sometimes and assess how we're doing in our life following Jesus.

[10 : 13] But the problem is, I suspect that, like me, when you hear that question, the first thing you'll do, or if you think about it later in the afternoon, is start comparing yourself to others.

Maybe the people sitting next to you on the pewter family, who knows. And most of us will take the difficult family members, the neighbors, or maybe put pewter in the category and we'll think, well, I'm better than them.

And then we'll take people we look up to and respect and admire and we'll think, well, okay, I'm not doing as well as them and we'll give ourselves, maybe a comfortable 7 out of 10, something like that, maybe depending on our temperament.

But we can, it's what sociologists call the above average effect. Everyone thinks they're above average, which you'll know is impossible. But Laodicea, we see that big time.

They think they're a 10 out of 10. They look at other people as a city. They just reflect the attitude of the city. They look around at the world and we think, we're doing really well.

[11 : 14] And we might not be as skewed as Laodicea, but we can still have a skewed vision of ourselves. You know, if someone thinks that they're, and having a skewed vision can be dangerous.

So for example, if I think I'm a really strong swimmer and I go out to one of the beaches and start swimming out to sea, and I'm not, I could be in real trouble. We're potentially dangerous to see ourselves wrong.

But the big danger of comparing ourselves in the Christian life is that when we start to think that we're pretty good, we'll start to actually think that we're getting approaching God's level.

Now that might sound too extreme, but let me just expand on that. We may not say, I'm like God, but we'll start subtly acting like it. But by comparing ourselves rather than thinking that we're a bit better, we'll think that actually the privileges and attributes and prerogatives of God can sort of be ours.

So let me give some examples. When we start thinking that we know better than people, well secretly we can start being less willing to learn. And actually we're starting to say, I'm all-knowing, I'm omniscient, if there's the theological term.

[12 : 34] As we measure ourselves to others, we start taking that, elevating ourselves, closest to God. As we stand over others and condemn them, we're actually acting that we're the righteous judge, not God.

If we try to be everywhere and stretch ourselves thin, if we try to do everything, actually what we're saying is that we're the ones who are omnipresent, we're the ones who are omnipotent.

Those are just words to describe God's power and be limitless in His presence. So seeing ourselves wrongly can make ourselves elevate ourselves and to start thinking other people are less and actually that we're closer to God.

And you'll already see how dangerous that is, but that's just the start. You see, that's just repeating what happened in the fall. The devil saying to Adam and Eve, you can take the fruit, don't you want to be like God, knowing good and evil?

Don't you want to know like God, have knowledge like Him? We can very easily grasp at that as we start comparing ourselves, as we start measuring ourselves and thinking that we're great.

[13 : 44] And Laodicea had taken that to its natural conclusion in some ways, to the extreme conclusion and thought that they were self-sufficient, as they thought that they were better and better at doing life.

They thought, we've got this. So let me just go to verse 17 again. They say, Jesus says, if you say, I am rich, I have prospered, I need nothing.

That's quite a statement, isn't it? I need nothing. But actually the church is just acting as like the people around them. I mentioned that the city of Laodicea, the way they acted was just to be self-sufficient.

We don't need the provincial government. We can do it. We can completely rebuild. We're fine. Laodicea was a church in an affluent society, you might say, much like our own.

And it's really easy, especially when there is money, to start being an acting self-sufficient. To start actually letting the attitude of society, rather than the gospel, shape us.

[14 : 51] And think, I can look after myself. You know, I'm pretty smart and I'm a pretty good person and I'm actually quite efficient at doing life. I've got the money and resources to do this. I've got this.

I can do this. I can look after myself. Thank you. And in some ways it's a whole other sermon to talk about the way that money can actually slowly eat away and kind of creep in and give us that attitude of self-sufficiency.

You'll know how easy it is with money to feel like we're secure, to feel like we're independent or self-efficient. But you know from maybe Jesus' words on the sermon of the Mount that money can't protect us.

Jesus reminds us that moth and rust destroy, thieves break in and steal. We could add that stock markets crash, insurance doesn't pay out. And ultimately we all die.

We're not self-sufficient, however much we might want to be. More than that though, for human beings like you and me to claim and to act, like we can do everything ourselves.

[16 : 03] I mean it's just utter rubbish and it's just a complete affront to God. God is the only one who's self-sufficient. We know that but we can start acting otherwise.

Jesus reminds Laodicea just because they've forgotten. He says when he describes himself as the beginning of God's creation, he isn't saying he's created. He's reminding them that he's the ruler.

He's the judge in the words of Colossians that we read. He's the firstborn of creation. He owns everything. Everything is made by him and through him. Everything has its being through him.

You know our possessions, our money, our cars, all those things. You know we're just caretakers of God's possessions. No part of us is self-sufficient.

But even more importantly, any kind of attitude of self-reliance like we see here in Laodicea, maybe there's an inkling in our hearts, it denies the truth of the Gospel, doesn't it?

[17 : 01] The Gospel reminds us that we can do nothing to save ourselves from sin. We're completely dependent on Christ for our salvation. So when Jesus says to the blind self-sufficient Laodiceans, when he reminds them of this, actually it's natural that his reaction in verse 16 is to say, I want to spit you out. You make me want to vomit.

That kind of attitude makes Christ want to vomit. And you'll see he uses the language of lukewarmness to explain that, to just explain how abhorrent it is for people to act like we can do this.

Now when he uses the language of lukewarmness, and you'll see in verse 15 and 16, he isn't speaking about spiritually being lukewarm here. I think often this verse can be misunderstood, because otherwise in verse 15 he'd be saying, actually I'd rather you're spiritually cold or spiritually hot.

Do you see that there? He says, you're neither cold nor hot, would that you are either cold or hot? He's not saying I'd rather you be spiritually cold or spiritually hot. Rather he's just using imagery the church would understand.

So Laodicea, we know from archaeology historical records, they had just dirty rivers go through their cities, so they had to rely on water pumped from uphill, and that came from actually quite hot springs.

[18 : 23] And so by the time the water arrived, it was just tepid, lukewarm, pretty well barely drinkable, you might say. And nearby Colossae might have had nice fresh water, and Heropilus had hot water for baths.

But Laodicea just had lukewarm nauseating water to drink. And she says this point, it's just that you're nauseating like that water. You just make me want to be sick.

When I see you, when I see you acting like you can do everything, that when you're saying, when he sees them saying, you know, I've prospered, I need nothing.

She says self complacent and self sufficient church just makes me want to be sick, just makes me want to vomit and spit you out.

And we don't have to have that rampant arrogance of Laodicea for those same seeds of self-sufficiency, I think, to start growing in our hearts. I was reading something by the theologian Don Carson that gave some really searching questions.

[19 : 27] Let me just read two of them to you. He wrote, Am I so satisfied with my spiritual state that I feel no need to wait on my Heavenly Father in self abasing prayer?

Are we too self-reliant to pray? Does my self-assessment before the glare of God's word incite me to study the Scriptures more diligently, witness more faithfully, praise more devoutly, obey more wholeheartedly than ever before?

Or do I think I'm actually a remarkably spiritual chap and a cut or two above my peers? We could add to that. Do I think that I can thrive as a Christian without the fellowship of God's people?

Does my sense of peace come from my financial security rather than peace with God? Am I actually unconcerned with death because I'm in good health right now and I forget that one day I will have to stand before the judge of all the world?

It's so easy in every part of life to start thinking that we can do it ourselves, that we don't need God. You know, Laodicea wasn't just a church that suddenly got out on the wrong side of the bed.

[20 : 37] This decay can easily creep in even when life is going well, especially you might say, when life is going well. They want a church suffering loads of persecution, that's not mentioned. They might have, but it seems like life was going well and they started to think we're fine on our own.

Maybe the decay has even started in some of us. I don't know. I felt convicted by simply asking myself, why do I go to the Sunday service?

Do I go because I think I need God? Do I go just because that's my job? That's what Christians do.

What about you? Do you need God? As the apostle Peter puts it, is his word as essential to you as milk for a newborn baby?

Or is it just an optional extra when we get time or when things aren't going well? You know, we might not be as bad as Laodicea, but I think it's remarkably searching, just asking those questions.

[21 : 55] The good thing though, is that even though Jesus sees the blind self-sufficiency of Laodicea, that doesn't mean he's finished with them.

The results of their health check might be sickening, but Jesus doesn't just leave them to rot, does he? Rather with that same compassion that when he was on earth, he reached out to the leper and touched him.

He reaches out to the Laodiceans in their weakness, in their wretched state. Let's come and look at our second point, the all-sufficient Saviour.

You see, Jesus is exactly the doctor, you might say, that Laodicea and all of us need. He introduces himself, as in all the letters, reminding how he perfectly meets their needs.

Let's just look at it again. Laodicea were deluded, they thought they were great. We've already just said that we can so easily compare ourselves to others, and we just see ourselves wrong most of the time.

[22 : 58] We're like the blind leading the blind. But how does Jesus describe himself? He says he's the faithful and true witness. Jesus is, you might say, the eye doctor who has 20-20 vision, better than 20-20 vision.

He's the one who can perfectly assess our condition. And more than that, Laodiceans thought they were self-sufficient. They thought they can look after themselves. So we might go days, weeks, thinking that we don't, essentially acting like God doesn't exist, like we don't need him.

But look again, Jesus in verse 14 says, he says he's the Amen, the beginning of God's creation. Jesus is the Word that spoke all creation into existence.

Now you and I, we can create something, but we have to use stuff to make it. You know, whether that's using Lego bricks to make a Lego castle, or plates of metal to make an oil rig. We have to use stuff to make stuff. But Jesus is the self-sufficient God.

He made all things from, he didn't use matter that existed for eternity. He made all things from nothing. He created the building blocks that make everything.

[24 : 07] And he's not simply the doctor who can meet our needs, but the one who wants to meet our needs. Don't you love verse 19? Let me read that again. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. It's in love that he provides for our needs. He doesn't reluctantly jab us with a syringe and, you know, squeeze it and give us the vaccination we need.

It's in love he provides for our need. We see that depth of love because he's just said, you make me want a lot. And yet now he's saying, I want to provide for your need, even in that state.

It reminds us of the Gospel, doesn't it? How Christ set his face to Jerusalem to go and die, even though he knew that Peter was going to deny him. Now the disciples were going to run away. The crowds that had once that shouted Hosanna in Jerusalem were going to be shouting, crucify him.

Jesus comes to us knowing our utter wretchedness and provides, even though we don't deserve it. And so Jesus is the God that laid us here need.

[25 : 15] He's the God that we need. And it's from his complete sufficiency he provides the perfect remedy. Let's read again from verse 18. He says, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire that you may be rich and white garments so that you may clothe yourselves and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

There are two parts to the remedy. There's all the buying from Christ bit in verse 18 and then being zealous and repenting in verse 19. I don't know what you think when you hear the word repent, but often, but it's more than just saying sorry.

We need to realize that true repentance involves turning around. And there's numerous times Helen will tell you that I start driving the wrong way. And when I do, I did just admit I've gone the wrong way and take a U-turn when there's no traffic and go back the way I was meant to go.

That's what repentance is. It's a complete 180 away from sin and back towards God. And so for the laodiceans and probably us, that will look like turning away from self-reliance.

Turning away from areas in which recognizing, examining our hearts, turning away from areas in which we act like we can just do life on our own. And coming humbly on our knees and asking for Christ to provide.

[26 : 37] And I think the words buy from me just emphasize even more that need for reliance on Christ. Because how could the laodiceans buy? How could we buy? Jesus just said that they're bankrupt.

He said that you think you're rich, but you're poor. We're bankrupt naturally in our self-reliance. You might seem cruel that Jesus is writing a prescription and handing it to them when they can't even afford the medicine.

But that takes us back to the heart of the Gospel. You see, Jesus is there. He's prescribing the treasures of heaven, you might say. But the point is that's already been purchased at great cost.

On the cross, that great exchange took place, didn't it? On the cross, Christ took for himself the sins of people, like the laodiceans, like me or you if we've trusted in Him.

And there he suffered the full wrath of God in our place. And what did he give us in return? He gave us his perfect righteousness. In exchange, he placed in us the hands of the treasures of heaven.

[27 : 42] The point is that the price has been paid. The buying has been done. Jesus isn't prescribing anything new. He's saying to the laodiceans, go back to the Gospel.

Go back to the Gospel that you first believed. Humbly repent and receive God's grace like you did the first day when you trusted. The same is true for us if we're a Christian who strayed even a little bit in our thoughts, into self-reliance.

Or just completely in whole attitudes in life, in whole patterns of life. We need to go back to the cross. We need to go back to the Gospel.

Because that's where we're reminded of our insufficiency and God's complete sufficiency. It reminded me of those wonderful words in that hymn, Rock of Ages.

Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Naked come to thee for dress, helpless look to thee for grace. Vile I to the fountain fly, wash me, Saviour, or I die.

[28 : 49] Now there'll probably be here also a person or even listening online. Who's never trusted in Jesus? This might be your first time hearing the Gospel.

This might be, you might have heard it many times in life. And you might, but I think the wonderful reminder here is that the price has been paid.

You might have heard the Gospel again and again and know that you need to trust in Jesus, but struggle to take that final step. Jesus doesn't just show us all our faults and then leave us with an astronomical medical bill that we can't afford.

He shows us our wretched condition, but then he hands us the prescription with the words written at the bottom, paid in full.

Jesus has done everything. All we need to do, whether it's trusting in Jesus for the first time or coming back to him again in repentance, is say I'm sorry. Turning around, trusting in Jesus' death, taking that prescription to the Father as it were and say Christ has paid for my sins.

[30 : 03] I would like to be your son. I would like to be your daughter. Please give me a new life in him. And if we pray, if we have trusted in Jesus, then we'll be given the riches of heaven. Just look at how much he meets Laodicea's needs.

Just look out completely how perfectly he meets their needs. Just very quickly, reverse all this, salve for the eyes. Jesus opens our eyes so that we can not only see ourselves perfectly, like they were deluded, they couldn't see themselves perfectly.

He opens our eyes so that we can see ourselves perfectly and see our need for him, so that we can see who he is. So like Peter, we can cry, you are the Christ, the Son of God.

He gives us white garments and instead of having been dressed in our rags of our sin, he dresses us in righteousness so that we can approach God's throne and our fate.

He gives gold refined by fire to the poor Laodicea and he said, look, the riches of the world can't give you everything. Let me give you something that lasts for eternity. What lasts for eternity?

[31 : 09] What's a life that has been transformed by God's grace, that has been refined by fire? It's the Christian who's been changed more and more into Christlikeness. That's what he's promising.

He's promising the full sweep of salvation from taking us from nothing and clothing us and making and remaking us, scraping away that sin and polishing us until we shine like Christ.

And whether you're a follower of Jesus who's bonded or you've never trusted in him, this is the restoration that Jesus offers. And it just gets better, doesn't it? I'm really running out of time, but verses 20 and 21, he's saying, I stand at the door and knock, whether it opens, I will come into him and eat with him.

That eating is a sign of restored fellowship, isn't it amazing? It just shows the power of the gospel that a church that Jesus says you make me want to vomit. He's saying now I'll eat with you. The gospel can make that change. It can make people who are wretched and vomitous in God's sight into people he wants to eat with.

And he also promises that to the one who conquers, I'll grant him to sit with me on his throne. Isn't that amazing? Our natural sin is seeking to grab the crown, is seeking to sit on God's throne in our own right, and Jesus says, trust in me and I'll pick you up and place you by my side as a son or daughter of the king and you'll reign with me for eternity.

[32 : 48] That's the promise. The gospel does all of that. Brothers and sisters, we've seen this morning how blind we can be, how easy it can be to fall into self-sufficiency and thought and deed and action.

We've seen how that spits on the gospel, how that is an affront to God. But we've also seen what a great savior we have, our all-sufficient God who in love sent his son to die for us, who gave everything so that we can come back to him, who gave everything to provide for our needs, not to just save us to be sitting on the floor as a slave, but saving us and clothing us to be sons and daughters.

What a great God we have. What a great gospel we have. Let's pray it. Heavenly Father, we rejoice that while we are still sinners, Christ died for us.

Lord, thank you that there is no one too wretched, no one too pitiable, poor, blind and naked. That Christ doesn't offer to clothe them, to cleanse them, to restore them back to you. Lord, we pray for anyone here who has wondered that they'll come back, knowing that Christ can provide for all of their lack.

Lord, we pray for anyone who is never trusted in you, that today, in the near future, that they'll see the urgency that before Christ returns, or before they pass away, Lord, that they will put their trust in him, knowing that he provides everything for their need.

[34 : 39] Lord, give us great joy, give us assurance in knowing that Christ has paid it all in full, that he is sufficient, even when we lack.

We thank you for this. In Jesus' name, amen.