

# UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH

*Then and Now*  
in 30 Minutes



## Episode 51 - Wholehearted

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## THE SETTING



We've arrived at Laodicea in Turkey, the site of the seventh of the seven churches of Revelation, 45 miles (72 km) southeast of Philadelphia. This was the wealthiest city in the region in Roman times- so wealthy that when it was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60, it declined the Emperor's help and rebuilt from its own resources. The city was magnificent, with fountains, pools, theatres, agoras, colonnaded shops and temples. The main temple was to Zeus, but there were also temples to Apollo, Asclepius (god of healing), Hades, Hera, Athena, Serapis, and Dionysus. It was also famous for three industries - banking, textiles and medicine (all of which are picked up in Jesus' words). However, the city had a major weakness: it lacked a good water supply. Nearby Hierapolis (6 miles/9.5 km north) was famous for its hot springs that were used as a spa treatment for many medical conditions. By contrast, Colossae (10 miles/16 km east) was known for its cold, pure drinking water. But Laodicea's water was neither hot nor cold - just lukewarm; because the hot water piped from Hierapolis had cooled down and was full of sediment by the time it reached Laodicea; and the cold water from Colosse had warmed up. It was therefore neither one thing nor the other - just like the church had become.

The church was probably founded by Epaphras ([Col 4:12-13](#)), along with Colossae and Hierapolis. Paul wrote a letter to this church that the Holy Spirit did not preserve for us ([Col 4:16](#)).



Set on a ridge overlooking the valley below, Laodicea's water from nearby hot springs has poured over the edge, leaving calcium carbonate deposits behind.

The modern name for the site is Pamukkale which means 'Cotton Castle'



Pools form on top, filled with warm, slimy water and emitting a sulphurous smell.

This site is normally packed with visitors



## BIBLE READING

[Revelation 3:14-22](#)

## KEY IDEAS



### ***The lukewarm church***

There is no commendation for the church in Laodicea, only rebuke: a rebuke that they have become as lukewarm and unpleasant as the city's water supply. They are neither one thing nor the other—neither cold water that refreshes (like Colossae's) nor hot water that cleanses and heals (like Hierapolis'). Jesus therefore says that he will "spit you out of my mouth" (v 16) - and that word 'spit' really means vomit! What a thought - that lukewarm Christian makes Jesus want to puke!

How had they drifted into this? How had they become so self-deceived, self-sufficient and complacent? How could they think (like the city itself did) that they were rich and had everything, when in reality they were "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (v17)?

### ***Christ's challenge***

Yet it is not too late! Jesus calls them to buy from him three things that Laodicea prided itself in - gold, linen and salve; for while the city had these things in abundance, materially-speaking, the church had none of them, spiritually-speaking. So he calls on them to get their gold, clothes and salve from him, not from the world around (v 18). Yet his clear and urgent rebuke doesn't come out of anger, but out of love: "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (v 19). So he calls them to repent - though exactly what they needed to repent of is quite shocking: Jesus accuses them of having shut him out of his own church (v 20). Although this picture of Jesus standing at the door knocking is often used evangelistically, it is really not addressed to unbelievers at all. It is addressed to the church! It is the church that

needs to let him back in! It is the church that needs to become wholehearted once again! For Christ had got squeezed out and they hadn't even noticed.

### ***Christ's promise***

Jesus promises that, to those who 'overcome' (a call in each of the seven letters), he will give the right to sit with him on his throne (that is, share in God's rule) - a powerful reminder that while, at the moment, it might look as if Rome was in charge, this is not the ultimate truth. God alone reigns!

Despite its terribly careless, backslidden state, it seems this church did indeed repent. For history shows that it grew, and multiple church sites have been found in the city dating from the first to the fourth centuries, in one case, covering an entire block. It would also be the home for the regional Council of Laodicea in AD 364. Jesus is indeed faithful - but we do need to respond to him.



1. How do churches end up drifting into being lukewarm?
2. The church in Laodicea had so drunk in the spirit of the city around it that there was little difference between the church and society. Do you recognise any signs of that in our own day?
3. How could a renewed resolve to be wholehearted help the Church become unstoppable once again?



For a behind-the-scenes glimpse into what was involved to create this podcast series listen to Mike and David recounting their experiences!

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