



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

### WHY REVIVAL TARRIES -- "Because few feel the need for revival"



The first of a series of five sermons preached in Ballymagerney Free Presbyterian Church, by Rev. Ivan Foster

*Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see, Revelation 3:18.*

This epistle was written to a church about 40 years old. It is likely that the Laodicean church was founded around about the same time as the church at Ephesus, that is, during Paul's third missionary journey. That would have been about the year 57 AD. It is believed that the book of the Revelation was written by the apostle John around about the year 96 AD. Laodicea was about 40-50 miles east of Ephesus. If the spiritual atmosphere in Laodicea was anything like that which prevailed in Ephesus at its commencement, then it would have seen a great revival. Events in Ephesus during Paul's ministry there indicate that a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks, Acts 19:10. This information will give us the setting for this epistle.

What the Saviour has to say to the church at Laodicea indicates that it was a sadly back-slidden church. It also reminds us of the changes that can come about within a church during a generation, irrespective of what that church's history may have been.

Are not the Bible records filled with the sad decline that often followed in the demise of a godly generation? It certainly was the case when Joshua's generation passed on. *And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel*, Judges 2:10.

Fathers, be aware of your duty to teach your children diligently of the wonderful works of God which you have experienced. *We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old*, Psalm 44:1. Let every father read Psalm 78 for further instruction in this duty.

If our children are as the generation that followed Joshua, it is our fault for not instructing them as we should.

Three forces were at work to reduce the church at Laodicea to the level to which it had sunk.

**1. The corrupting influence of the old nature.** The greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon a people does not deliver that people from the presence and potential danger posed by their old nature and its evil desires. It is ever there seeking opportunity to break forth and overcome us and drag us down into disobedience and backsliding. Paul registers



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the agony of his ongoing struggle against it in Romans 7:21-24. *I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* The Laodiceans had been overcome by their base nature.

**2. The corrupting influence of an evil society.** Laodicea was a pagan city. Its Christians had to contend with much sin and the immoral influences a heathen environment presented. That is a danger very much underrated today. The Saviour spoke of the consequences for many when confronted by rampant immorality. *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*, Matthew 24:12. This is the reason why Lot declined as he did when living in the evil surroundings of Sodom. Laodicea presents a strong and timely warning to us all today.

**3. The corrupting influence of wealth.** Laodicea was a wealthy city. Wealth and holiness do not sit easily together. It militates against holiness. It breeds greed and covetousness, a love for itself. *For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*, 1 Timothy 6:10. The impact of these evil influences may be seen in the sad state of the church at Laodicea.

### I. CHRIST HAD BEEN DRIVEN OUT OF THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA

Here is a church in need of revival.

**1. He was driven out inadvertently.** By that I mean, a congregation meeting did not take place in which a decision was taken to overthrow the rule of Christ amongst them. Rather, a creeping worldliness invaded, and little by little Christ was removed from their midst.

**2. He was outside the door**. Verse 20. That would seem to indicate that it was not a fatal or final breach. He had not turned His back upon them and departed. But a breach it was nevertheless.

**3. His presence and power were no longer central in the church.** The services and activities of God's people were not centred upon the Saviour. Both the church and the homes of its members would have been affected.

One of the questions put to our ministers, whenever a Presbytery examination of a congregation takes place, is whether or not family worship is maintained throughout the congregation. I often wonder just how accurate is the minister's estimation of the extent of such worship. I fear that the number of families which gather around the Word of God, at least once each day, has sadly declined in recent times. It is an evidence that Christ is no longer in His rightful place in the church or in the home.

### II. SADLY, NO ONE HAD MISSED HIM



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None appeared to have noticed His absence. How dull have the hearts and minds of people become when they do not notice the absence of the Lord from the meetings! The attitude in Laodicea contrasts sharply with the attitude found amongst the people of Capernaum in Luke 4:42. *And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them.* There was no such rush to retain the Saviour in Laodicea.

**1. They felt no want or emptiness .** *Because thou sayest, I . . . have need of nothing,* verse 17. How often have God's people been guilty of never missing the Saviour or noting His absence! Remember Joseph and Mary. *But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey,* Luke 2:44. Remember the words of the prophet Hosea to Israel. *Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not ,* Hosea 7:9. Remember poor Samson. *And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him,* Judges 16:20. Much of the activities to "brighten up" services and make them "attractive" are but unenlightened responses to an awareness that something is lacking in our meetings. It is not something but "Someone", Who is missing! It is the Lord in His power and grace. Not only did they fail to note His departure but . . .

**2. No one heard Him speaking or knocking to gain re-admittance.** The church was so taken up with other things that they failed to hear the Saviour's voice calling upon them to open the door to Him. It reminds us of the scene depicted in The Song of Solomon. *I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?* At least in this instance, the church hears the voice of Christ and finally does arise to open the door, though the delay causes His departure and necessitates a sad and humbling search on the part of the church. In the case of Laodicea, the Saviour's voice goes unanswered and His knocking unheard.

The Lord employs both His voice and His hand to gain the attention of His people. When they will not hear His voice He uses His hand. I believe that there are evidences of the hand of the Lord being lifted against His church in Ulster at this present time. We would do well to consider the words of the prophet Micah. *The LORD'S voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it ,* Micah 6:9. The rod of the Lord is raised in Ulster and is being laid upon His people. We would do well to heed it and hear it and return unto the Lord.

**3. The Lord sent a special message to warn His people.**

A letter was sent to the church from John the apostle informing them of their condition. The voice and the hand of the Lord had been ignored but the Lord in mercy spoke yet again. The events in our Province over the last 30 years and the personal tragedies to which we all can relate have been a powerful message from the Lord to His people. He is telling us that His place in our hearts and lives has been usurped by worldliness and back-sliding. We would be wise to heed and obey His commands lest a worse thing come upon us.



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### III. THERE WAS AN IGNORANCE OF HOW CLOSE THEY WERE TO JUDGMENT

They were in danger of being *spued out* of the Saviour's mouth, verse 16. That is a most powerful metaphor. The word *spue* means to *vomit*. The Lord Jesus was going to remove them from His body in the fashion in which that which is sickening is removed from our bodies! This is a parallel action to the cutting off He refers to in John 15:2. *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit*. As the unfruitful branch which makes no use of its privileges is cut off, so it will be with the church that turns its back upon the Saviour and stubbornly refuses to heed the call to repentance.

I believe that this epistle is very relevant to today's church. Christians must take it to heart or suffer the consequences of continued defiance of God.