

Riches and Poverty in the Eyes of God

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Preacher: Kevin Murphy

[0 : 0 0] Well, will you join me? Let's pray together and come before our Father. Sovereign God, glorious Christ, wonderful, comforting Holy Spirit, we come before you this morning, God, very aware of our need for you.

God, we come in all sorts of weakness. We come not having it all together, God. God, we're so grateful that in the gospel you don't just invite those that have got it together.

You invite us as we are and you say that you will clothe us in your righteousness, God. You give us the riches of your gospel. You, God, come and heal us, Lord. And so we come to you, God, with open hands on our knees and just admit our need for you, God.

We need you because we are worried and anxious about what's going on in our times. We need you, God, because we face all sorts of challenges and difficulties.

But, God, supremely we need you because apart from you, God, we carry our record of sin. And we cannot atone for ourselves. God, we need your grace and your mercy.

[1 : 1 3] But, Lord, also we need you to come and strengthen us and to revive us and to revitalize our hearts. Father, as the men and women of old prayed, we ask, God, not necessarily that our lots in life will be enrolled amongst the earthly great or the rich.

God, more than that, we want to be numbered with the spiritually blessed. God, we pray that won't you help us, God, to make it our persevering concern in life, to obtain blessings which may not be esteemed in our culture or our city, but, God, which are esteemed by you, God, which are eternal in their nature, which are eternally satisfying.

God, I pray, Lord, help us to be the kinds of people, God, that are agents of salt and light in our city because we've been transformed by you, God.

God, won't you remind us that this city, which so many of us call home, is not our ultimate home, but that, God, we are sojourners on this earth and we await the day when you come and you take us to our true home in glory, God.

We look forward to that day. God, we worship you and adore you this morning. God, as we come to your word now, we do pray that you will speak to us, Lord.

[2 : 3 7] God, won't you take just my simple words and that which is of you, God. I pray that you will anoint her with power, God. I pray that your word from your gospel will speak life to our hearts and souls, God.

God, we haven't come to listen to just the opinions of man. We've come to listen to the eternal words of the one who is faithful and true. And so, Christ, come and speak to us from your word, we pray, God.

God, we want to pray for our city. And especially today, we want to pray for teachers and educators, those at the universities. God, we know many in our midst are in teaching and are at universities and schools.

God, we pray that as our city goes back to school and back to university in these coming weeks, Lord, we pray, God, that you will give Christian teachers and educators profound wisdom, God.

God, I pray that you will be with them in the classroom, God. I pray as there's tension and as people are working out what it means to be students in this age, God, I pray that you will use those that are followers of Jesus to be salt and light in the classroom, in the university halls, God, in campus.

[3 : 46] We pray for the ICF ministry. We pray for the leaders there, God. We pray that you will give them amazing conversations to point to the hope of Jesus in our city at this time, God. Thank you so much for the university ministry and ICF.

God, we pray for your Holy Spirit to rest upon them this week and the weeks to come, God. God, we pray that all of us will be salt and light in our city. God, use us, God, we pray.

We pray that we really will be a voice of hope in such a time as this. In Christ, this morning we pray finally for our leaders in the city.

We pray for our political leaders. We pray for the police. God, we pray for law enforcement and the courts. We pray for our protesters, God. We pray that peace will prevail.

We pray, God, for healing. Father, we pray that all of us will acknowledge and admit where we have been wrong, God. We will humble ourselves and confess our contribution and we'll seek your peace.

[4 : 47] Christ, come and heal our land, we pray. Come and have your way. We pray these things in your wonderful name. Amen. Amen.

Great. Let's listen to... Christina is going to read God's word to us this morning. The scripture reading comes from Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

Please follow along in your bulletins or on the screen. And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, the words of the first and the last who died and came to life.

I know your tribulation and the last who died and came to life. I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation.

[5 : 51] Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. With that you are either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are rigid, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so 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 soft to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

[7 : 06] Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to 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.

This is the word of God. Great. Thank you, Christina. Okay, so if you are new to Watermark, we are working our way through the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

And last week, well, today we get to chapter 2 and 3. And last week, we looked at how the book of Revelation is really this one letter that's written primarily to seven churches in what's modern-day Turkey, the ancient Roman province of Asia Minor.

And Jesus gives these words to John and asks John to write this letter to these seven churches. But rather than John writing an individual letter to each one, you know, here's the letter to Ephesus and pulling another letter out like a postman, he writes one letter, which is the book of Revelation, and it goes to church, to church, to church, to church.

[8 : 33] And so Ephesus gets this long letter, and they read Jesus' words to them as a church. And to each church, Jesus has some words of commendation, of affirmation, saying this is what you've done well.

And to most churches, he also corrects them and says, yeah, but these are some things I think you need to be aware of, and this is what I have against you. And so Ephesus reads this letter, and then they read all the other letters and the whole book, and then they pass it on to the next church, etc., etc.

And the reason why Jesus does this is because Jesus isn't just giving them a performance review. He's not just saying, listen, Ephesus, you know, four out of ten in this regard, eight out of ten here.

He actually wants them to get a glimpse of his glory and his majesty. And so he says, I want you to see not just my little letter to you, but the entire picture of who Christ is and what he's done.

And so he gives them the full book. And then last week, we looked particularly at Jesus' words to the church in Ephesus, and how Jesus says to them, he says, this is what I want to commend you for.

[9 : 40] You're a church that loves God's word. People come and they teach you things, and you don't just take it at face value. You check God's word, you see that what the preacher says is in the Bible, and those things that are true, you listen to them and obey them.

Those things that are false, you reject them. You love my word and theology and the Bible, and so well done for doing that. But this is what I have against you, that your theology is in your head, and it hasn't dropped to your heart.

It's still mechanical. You understand all these things, but that hasn't transformed the way that you love and worship me. And so Jesus says, come back to your first love.

And so that's what we looked at last week, and he calls them to repent. Now today, we're going to look at two other sections, Jesus' words to the church in Smyrna and his words to the church in Laodicea.

And we're going to start with the second one first, Laodicea. And so in your bulletins, look at the second section with me. We're going to look at Revelation 3, verse 14 to 22.

[10 : 43] Okay, so let's dive in. It says this. These are the words of the Amen to the church in Laodicea. The words of the Amen, the faithful and the true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

Okay, now just a few words in here. The word Amen doesn't just mean I finished my prayer, and now it's your turn to pray. Okay, sometimes we use it like that.

But actually, the word Amen is a confirmation. It's an affirmation. So when someone prays and you say Amen, it's like you're saying, Yes, I agree with what Gary just prayed.

I confirm that. I'm in agreement with that. So the word Amen is a confirmation, an affirmation, that something is valid or true. And so when it says here, these are the words of Jesus, the Amen, it says these are the words of the one in whom everything is true, in whom everything conforms to perfect reality.

Everything finds its Amen in Him. What Jesus says is valid and true. And then He says, He is the faithful and the true witness. You know, if you watch law series or court drama series, what happens, right?

[12 : 00] Either the defendant or the prosecutor, they've got their witness, and they prep them beforehand. They say, Listen, if someone asks you this question, don't answer it like this, right?

They prep their witness to convey a certain side of the story, and both sides try and do this, right? Jesus here has a witness who is absolutely faithful and true. What He says is 100% true.

He doesn't have a bias. He's not trying to paint a particular kind of picture. Jesus, these are the words of the one who is Amen, valid and true, the faithful and true witness. And that means you can bank your life on Him.

He is faithful. And then it says, These are the words of the one who is the first of all creation, or the beginning of creation. And that doesn't mean that Jesus was the first one that was made.

It means, in the Greek writing, the word first means the preeminent one, the one that is the ruler over everything. So in the ancient world, the emperor called himself the princeps, in other words, the preeminent one of Rome.

[13 : 00] He was Rome's first citizen. Well, Jesus here is the princeps, the first citizen of all creation. He is the one who rules over everything. So these are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the first of all creation, the ruler of all creation.

And then he's going to write these words to this church in Laodicea. Now, the city of Laodicea in the ancient world was a very established and important and well-respected city.

And it was famous for three things. Actually, four, but three. Let's just go three for now. The first thing it was famous for, it was a very wealthy and financially successful city.

It was actually a banking center for the province of Asia Minor. And so what actually happened in the year 60 AD, there's this massive earthquake and it destroys the city of Laodicea.

The buildings just are absolute ruins. And Rome says, listen, you guys are such an important city. We will rebuild Laodicea for you. And the people of Laodicea say, no, thank you.

[14 : 05] We don't need your money. We'll do it ourselves. Thank you very much. One historian, Tacitus, said it like this. Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources and with no help from us, from the Romans.

So it was a very financially wealthy and prosperous city. The second thing it was famous for is it had a medical school just outside of the city and a medical training college.

And actually, there were two very famous physicians and teachers from that training college that lived in Laodicea. And so if anyone in that province wanted to learn medicine and go into the practice of medicine, they would generally come to Laodicea and learn from these two teachers.

And then in addition to that, Laodicea had developed two kind of famous ointments. One was for ear infections and the other one was for irritable eyes. And they developed this cell for your eyes that actually got exported all over the Roman Empire.

Okay? And so it was a place of healing and wellness and restoration. And the third thing Laodicea was famous for is somehow, I don't know how, they were famous for this black wool, which the farmers had managed to somehow develop.

[15 : 19] Right? I don't know how they did it, but black wool was grown on the sheep of Laodicea. And they made these very famous tunics called a tremata, which Laodicea was famous for, the Laodicea and tremata.

Okay? And so all that to say, Laodicea was a famous, it was a wealthy, economically successful city. It was also a leader of industry, medicine and agriculture and clothing, etc., etc.

Now, as we get further into the book of Revelation, we're going to see that Satan or the devil or the accuser, one of the things Revelation is going to show us is how he is bent on destroying the church and destroying Christians.

Okay? Particularly chapter 11 to 20, we're going to see this. And he generally has three strategies. His one strategy is through false teaching and deception.

So we actually see this in chapter 11. The beast rises up. One of the imagery of the devil is he's a beast. And he rises up and it says in chapter 11, he looks like a lamb. Well, in the book of Revelation, Jesus is pictured as the lamb.

[16 : 27] And so Satan is, for a time, he's pictured like Jesus and he deceives people by pulling them away from the truth of the gospel by bringing false teachers into the church.

Okay? The second way he tries to destroy the church is through persecution and oppression. Okay? So his goal is through fear to incite fear in Christians and through persecution and oppression to get Christians to fall away from following Jesus and to just kind of shrink back into a comfortable life and not put themselves on the edge.

And the third way that he is going to destroy the church is through not false teaching and deception, not through intimidation and oppression, but actually through prosperity and abundance and pleasure.

And primarily through financial abundance and through sexual pleasure. And so Satan is going to come and he's going to constantly tempt the church with these two things to lure followers of Jesus away from Jesus through financial abundance and prosperity and through sexual pleasure.

And these two are the most sinister because there's nothing inherently wrong with having money or sexual desire. These are gifts that God gives us, but they have an amazing ability to get into our heart and to become a kind of God for us that we hope and trust in to satisfy us rather than Jesus.

[17 : 49] Okay? Now, that being said, out of these three things, what do you think is going to challenge the church in Laodicea the most? Any ideas?

The third one, right? Prosperity. Yeah. They are a wealthy, prosperous city. That's exactly what Satan is going to do. He's going to try and, through their abundance of wealth, try and undermine their love for Jesus so that they fall away from following God.

Okay, now here's a little bit more challenging. What do you think the church in Hong Kong is going to be challenged with? Probably the same one, right? Prosperity and wealth and abundance.

As we've lived in Hong Kong almost two years, every city is going to have some churches that are teaching interesting things, right? But by and large, Hong Kong, actually, I think the churches here are fairly strong.

The churches love God's word and really want to honor God's word. In Hong Kong, generally, we're not going to face a whole lot of persecution. Anyone here have been thrown to the lions yet? Or been thrown in jail for following Jesus?

[18 : 56] Actually, Hong Kong is one of the safest cities in the world for following Jesus. Now, that's not true for all of Asia, right? Our brothers and sisters all over Asia are being thrown in jail. Churches being closed down.

People being arrested. People not seeing their family and loved ones for months on end. Not knowing where they've gone. And even in the Western world, you face persecution for following Jesus, right? If you're in the east coast of the U.S.

Or you're in the leading cities of Europe or Australia, you go for a job interview, and they find out you're a follower of Jesus, maybe just that job is suddenly closed, right? Because nobody wants to hire people that they perceive to be bigoted or oppressive or homophobic or something.

And so even in the Western world, you're going to face it. But in Hong Kong, actually, this is one of the safest cities. But what is going to be our challenge? Our abundance and prosperity, right?

That's where Satan's going to tempt us to fall away from Jesus. Now, we're going to come back to that. Let's look at our passage today. Look at what Jesus says to the Church of Laodicea in verse 15.

[20 : 01] He says, I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. But because you're lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I'm going to spit you out of my mouth.

Now, when we first hear that, what we may think is that Jesus is saying, listen, either love me or hate me, but don't sit somewhere in the middle.

Don't just tolerate me. Don't sit on the fence. I'd rather that you dislike me or really love me, but don't be somewhere in the middle. But that's not actually what Jesus is saying here.

Well, you see, what's happening here is Jesus is saying to them, your resourcefulness, your wealth as a city, has made you ineffective and mediocre and bland.

You've kind of just blended in with your culture. There's nothing distinctive or standoutish about you. You see, Laodicea, as we said, they've got a lot going for it, right?

[20 : 57] Financially well, there's a medical center, trade and commerce, agriculture going on. But the one thing that Laodicea was also famous for, the fourth thing it was well known for, was its terrible water.

And the reason was because it's one of the only cities in the ancient world that wasn't built on any kind of water supply or water source. You know, most cities are built on a river or on the coast or something like that.

But Laodicea was built where it was because it was at the juncture of two really important trade routes in the ancient world. And so they built the city there as kind of the gateway to the province of Phrygia.

But the problem is there's no water nearby. The closest water supply, there's two water supplies. One is about 10 miles to the northwest, okay?

And there were some mountain ranges there, and there's some fresh, cool, flowing water that was fresh and revitalizing. And so the water would come down the mountains in the streams, but it was about 10 miles from the city.

[21 : 58] And so the city built these aqueducts to pipe the water into Laodicea. But the problem is after 10 miles of sitting in the sun, this water was no longer cool and refreshing.

It was lukewarm and pretty ordinary. The other water source was about six miles to the northeast. I'm trying to do this in reverse, the northeast. There's a city there called Hierapolis.

And Hierapolis was famous because it had all these hot springs. And the hot springs were famous for medicinal and healing purposes. If you had aches and stomach cramps and stuff, people would say, go to the hot springs of Hierapolis, and it would heal you and restore you and soothe your aches and pains.

And so the hot springs would overflow. But again, by the time the water came near to Laodicea, it had cooled down, and also it was full of lime sediments.

It tasted disgusting. And so there's some historians that write about people coming across the water from Hierapolis and taking a drink and like, just spitting it out because it tasted gross.

[23 : 01] Now, what do you think Jesus is saying? You see, if you go to the original sources of these two water sources, you're going to find water that would either be cool and refreshing and revitalizing or water that was soothing and relaxing and healing.

But by the time they got to Laodicea, both of these water sources were ineffective. They were bland. They were ordinary. They were mediocre. Jesus says, I know your works.

You're neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one of them. But because you're just lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I'm going to spit you out of my mouth. Jesus is saying, he's picking up on what they knew, and he's saying, you're just like your water supply.

You're neither refreshing for the spiritually weary. People come to your midst, and they're looking for life and revitalization. And as they encounter you, it's just bland.

There's nothing standoutish about you. But you're neither healing and restorative and revitalizing for those that are spiritually sick. You've just become lukewarm later this year. You've become bland and ineffective.

[24 : 06] There's nothing noticeable, nothing distinctive about you. You're no longer, in the words of Jesus, salt and light. You're no longer any benefit to your city because you've become just like your city.

And one of the reasons why this is so important is because history tells us, as the church goes, so goes the city. In other words, when churches are salt and light and are revitalizing and are healing and go against the culture and bring life, the city actually flourishes.

And this makes sense because as the gospel multiplies in our hearts, so philanthropy multiplies, social justice multiplies, concern for widows and orphans and families get healed, all that multiplies.

But also, history actually tells us this. You know, out of the seven churches that Jesus addresses in the book of Revelation, the two cities where the churches look the most alive and in the exterior, they look like they're doing the best.

But Jesus says, you're dying. Those two cities were the first cities to be overthrown at the end of the Roman Emperor. Laodicea was one of the first cities to get overrun and no longer exist.

[25 : 19] And yet the two cities where Jesus commends the churches and says, I know you don't look very impressive. I know you don't have all the bells and whistles, but well done. You are faithful to my cause.

Those two cities were still standing hundreds of years later. In fact, one of them, Smyrna, what we read about, is still around today. It's the city of Izmir in Turkey. So as the church goes, so goes the city.

Which is why when Jesus says to Laodicea, you guys are just lukewarm. You've become bland. You're just like your culture. Well, a couple of hundred years later, as the church becomes dimmer and dimmer as a light in its city, as the flame of the church diminishes, actually the witness of Christ diminishes, and the city struggles.

Okay, does that make sense? Now, why is it that Laodicea had become lukewarm? What's the reason for it? Why is it that this church, which is called to be set apart, to be salt and light, to stand out and give a reason for the hope for Christ, to be ambassadors for Jesus, why did they become mediocre and ineffective?

Well, look at verse 17. Look at what Jesus says. He says, You say, I am rich. I have prospered. I need nothing. Remember AD 60? Here, latest year, can we help you out?

[26 : 36] No, thank you. We need nothing. We are fine. We are self-sufficient. You say, I'm rich. I have prospered. I need nothing. Not realizing that, in fact, you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

So what's happening here? The blessings and the abundance that they find themselves in has actually become a stumbling block to them. Not only because, as their wealth and success made them feel safe and secure, it's blinded them from seeing just how much they actually need God.

See, look at how he says, You say you're rich. You say I'm poor. You say I've prospered. I need nothing. Well, that's not a good thing. It's maybe slightly arrogant. But that's not the main problem. The main problem comes when he says, You don't even realize just how much you do need.

That's the problem. You think you're secure and you're safe, but you don't realize actually how vulnerable you are. Friends, the problem, when we think of ourselves as well-resourced, often we become blind to our own poverty.

And as we saw earlier, on the surface, the things that Jesus challenges them on is the very things that, as a city, they would have thought they're doing well in. Jesus says, Can't you see you're poor?

[27 : 56] They would have said, What are you talking about? We're latest here. We're the banking center of Asia. What are you talking about? Jesus says, Can't you see that you're naked? What do you mean?

Everybody knows we've got the finest clothes in Asia Minor. If there's one church that is not naked, listen, those guys down the road, Ephesus, okay, sure, they need some help. Let's take up a clothing drive for Ephesus.

Shame. Their clothes aren't looking that good, right? But we're latest here. We're fine. Jesus says, Can't you see that you're naked? Jesus says, Can't you see that you're blind? You're blind? What are you talking about?

We've got medical school right here. Sure, those guys, Smyrna, okay, their eyes are a bit funny, you know. Let's send some doctors there to go and help them out. Jesus says, Can't you see that your abundance has actually blinded you to what's really going on?

Friends, could it be that the wealthier the church, the more spiritually bankrupt we might possibly be without even knowing it? And so let's look at the other church, the church in Smyrna.

[28 : 58] Look at chapter 2, verse 8 with me. Christina read this to us earlier. Jesus says, To the church in Smyrna, these are the words of the first and the last, the one who died and came to life.

Just interesting on that, I was reading Judges this week, and whenever God's people in the Old Testament and judges, they get into trouble, they cry out to God, and God sends them a deliverer, a judge, and He saves them and He rescues them, and Israel flourishes for how long?

Until the judge dies and passes away. Israel does well, as well as Othniel's with them, and then Othniel dies and things go downhill. Ehu rises up as a judge, and Israel flourishes until he dies.

Gideon does well until he dies. But friends, in Jesus, we have a judge, we have a king who died, and he came alive, and he's never going to die. Here is a faithful king, the words of the one who died and came to life.

That was just on the side. Look at what he says here. He says, I know your tribulation and your poverty. Okay, so the church in Laodicea is wealthy, and here is a church that's poor, right?

[30 : 09] Maybe they meet under the tree in the park because they can't afford to rent a building. Maybe they don't have any staff because all the leaders, they work in other jobs as well.

Maybe everything is secondhand, or their sound equipment is secondhand, that they are poor. When they have community lunch afterwards, it's pretty mediocre, it's pretty average food.

He says, I know that you are poor, but in fact, you are rich. Hang on, what's going on here? Jesus said to Laodiceans, I know that you are wealthy, but in fact, you're poor.

And now he says to this church that looks pretty mediocre, actually, I can see that you're rich. Something's going on here. It tells us that Jesus doesn't see wealth or poverty the same way that we tend to see it, but it also means that Jesus doesn't evaluate his church in the same ways that we tend to evaluate a church.

Remember how we said the book of Revelation is called the Revelation because Jesus is pulling back the curtain, right? We see things on one level, but he wants to pull back the curtain and show us what's happening behind the scenes.

[31 : 16] Well, Jesus is pulling back the curtains here, and he's saying, these are the words of the amen, the faithful and true witness. These are the words, the one who knows what's going on. And what I'm telling you is, on the surface, it looks like one thing, but there's something else going underneath.

Even though, Smyrna, you look poor, and it looks like your church isn't very impressive, and everything's kind of average, actually, you are rich, and you're healthy, and you're well, and I'm so pleased with you.

It's kind of like when a magician, I don't know if you've ever seen a magician, what does a magician do? How does he get to do his tricks on you? He gets you to focus on one thing, so he pulls a coin out, and he says, okay, you see this coin?

Now, you see it. Now, don't take your eyes off the coin. Now, I'm not doing anything. It's just an ordinary coin, right? You're watching this coin, and while he's got your eyes on this coin, what's his other hand doing? There's some sleight of hand going on.

There's something else going on, and he's drawing your attention here so that you don't see, you know, putting a coin behind your ear or whatever it is, right? And Jesus is wanting to say, I want to show you the book of Revelation.

[32 : 18] Don't get distracted by what the devil's doing. Don't get distracted by this. I want to show you what's actually going on here. Yeah, yeah, yeah, you look like you're rich, but actually, there's a poverty in your church here.

Well, actually, Smyrna, I know everyone thinks that you're pretty poor and you're not that impressive. I want you to know that though the devil is telling you, you guys don't have anything going for you, I want you to know I see what's going on behind the scenes.

Friends, maybe it's think about it. Maybe you move to Hong Kong and you're looking for a new church to attend and you hear from someone that there's this church down the road called Smyrna Community Church.

And so you think, I'm going to try it out. And you go there and you look around and they're meeting in a park under a tree and there's someone on a guitar and the guitar's kind of strapped together because it's a little bit, you know, forthhand.

And then they pass around, they have a lunch afterwards, but the lunch is pretty average. But there's something rich there. There's something beautiful.

[33 : 23] The way that people welcome you, the way that people serve you, there's a passion to their worship as people just pour out their hearts to Christ. And it seems the Holy Spirit is there. Or maybe you hear the next week that there's this other church right next door called Laodicea Community Church.

And so you go there and as you go there, you get to the front door and there's a bellman who just says, just pass me your keys and I'll park your car for you. And you walk in the door and just on the app, you press what kind of coffee you like.

And as you get to the top of the lift, there's a bellman waiting with your, you know, macchiato, whatever, whatever it is, perfectly temperature. And you walk in and the chairs are like theater chairs, right?

It's beautiful. And the band, they're all just such good looking people and the music is amazing. And then as you leave, you know, you press another button in your app and someone brings your car right to the front door.

Friends, which church would we be tempted to join? Laodicea. Laodicea. Okay, thank you, Anastasia. You didn't need to answer, but thank you, yeah. Friends, I sometimes have this nightmare, this fear, that one day when we get to glory, one day when Jesus returns and the Bible says he's gonna hold us accountable for the way that we live and he's gonna give us rewards.

[34 : 44] The Bible says he gives us crowns. And I picture in my mind's eye that there's this long queue, right? Jesus and all his glory at the front. And you know who I think is gonna be, you know the celebrity pastors and the elders and the leaders and the people, the books that we read and the podcasts we listen to and even the guys on stage, I think we might be way, way back there.

And you know who I think is gonna be right at the front and receiving the greatest commendation from Jesus? I think it's gonna be some old granny in some little village in the middle of China or in the middle of Timbuktu that nobody has ever heard of and has never been honored in their lifetime.

And Jesus is gonna come and say, well done, good and faithful servant. Come and receive and enjoy your reward. The economy of Christ is so different to the economy of our world.

And so the question is then, does wealth or material success, does it disqualify us from receiving the grace of God? Or see it another way, is God biased against the wealthy?

And I think the answer is no. God is not against wealth and he's not against success and he's not against wealthy people per se. It's not wrong or unspiritual or ungodly to be wealthy.

[36 : 04] So what is God warning us against here? He's warning us against the danger of confusing the economies of our world with the economies of the kingdom of heaven. He's warning us against putting our confidence in anything other than God and who he is.

Tim Keller says it like this, the irony of the gospel is that the only way to be worthy of it is to admit that you are unworthy. You see friends, the kingdom of God is only open to those that admit that they abandon all self-sufficiency and realize their only hope is in Christ.

That's why Jesus says the way into the kingdom of heaven is hard, it's narrow, it's difficult. Remember how Jesus says at one point how hard it is for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom of God, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

Now Jesus is not against wealthy people at all, he's not against wealth, Jesus is not saying this because he doesn't like wealthy people, he's saying that the only way to God, the only way to salvation, the only way to know God and experience his grace and his mercy is the realization that our only hope is in Christ.

That as we said a few weeks ago, there is not a single drop of salvation outside of Christ, there's not a single drop of true wealth and true riches and true gold outside of Christ.

[37 : 26] That reconciliation and mercy come from him and him alone and not even our best works on our very best day with the very best intentions can in a single way credit us before the mercy and the salvation of God.

Friends, this is what the entire Bible is about, this is what the gospel is about, this is why Jesus came. Jesus didn't come to show us how to save ourselves, he came to show us that we could not save ourselves unless we come to him, unless we abandon all self-sufficiency, unless we come and admit, God, my only hope is in you.

Jesus is not a financial advisor to help us save ourselves, he's a savior to come and save us. Sinclair Ferguson said it like this, it's not that the gospel is hard to understand, it's not hard to understand, it's pretty straightforward.

The gospel says that all of us, every one of us in this room are sinners in need of a savior. The gospel says that every one of us are more sinful than we think or we like to admit.

The gospel says that every one of us on our own we have a deep, deep, deep problem. But the gospel says that Jesus Christ loves us more than you would ever imagine, more than all eternity of trying to figure out how much he loves us, you still won't get to the bottom of his love for you.

[38 : 52] And because of his profound love for you, he went to the cross to save you. The gospel is not hard to understand, but oh, it is so hard to receive. Why?

Because it requires that we humble ourselves and admit that we need him and we cannot do it on our own. And so does wealth or prosperity or success disqualify us in God's eyes?

Only if we trust it or if it leads us to self-sufficiency. Now, just by the way, you can be very poor and still be self-sufficient and still be proud and still be self-righteous.

Just because you're not wealthy or not successful doesn't mean you're immune from the cancer of pride, right? But there is something about wealth that has a way of making us feel more secure in ourselves.

Now, that might all sound like bad news, but Jesus does give us some good news. Look at verse 18. In fact, he gives us three bits of good news. Look at verse 18 with me.

[39 : 57] Just by the way, let me just think about how to say this. I think the reality is probably all of us in this room on a world scale are fairly wealthy.

And so when we think of wealth, it's easy to think of super tycoons or other people out there. But I think most of us, self-included, are just as susceptible to this.

And so this isn't in any way like condemnation or looking down or this is just for all of us, right? This is all of us. Compared to the world scale, most of us would fall into this category.

Let's look at what Jesus says here in verse 18. Jesus gives us three bits of good news. He says, I counsel you to come and buy gold for me. Jesus says, come and buy real gold.

Gold that has been tested in the fire. Not fool's gold that is worthless. Come and buy gold for me that has been tested and refined, that has stood the test of time, that has withstood tribulation, the trials that are coming your way.

[41 : 07] Come and buy gold for me that you may be rich. Jesus says, come and buy white garments from me that you may clothe your nakedness. Come and cover your shame. What does nakedness mean?

It means you carry your shame about you. Jesus says, come to me, I want to cover your shame. I want to cover your vulnerability. It means I want to clothe you in my righteousness.

Friends, in Jesus is the one place where you can come with all your flaws and failures because he accepts you as you are. Everyone in this room is broken and sinful. You can come here with all your sins and flaws and failures.

But he doesn't leave you like that. He says, I will cover you in my gospel. I will clothe you with my righteousness. He says, come to me and buy white garments that you may clothe your shame.

Friends, if you're here this morning and you feel shame for any reason, come to Jesus. He wants to cover your shame. He wants to clothe you. Come to him. He says, come and buy from me self that your eyes may see.

[42 : 08] Friends, our city is looking for freedom. It's looking for hope. It's looking for opportunities. It's looking for justice. Many in our city are looking to be heard, looking to be understood, where they'll be taken seriously.

Jesus says, come to me. All these things are found in me. Don't come to religion. That won't do it. Come to Jesus. Now, why does Jesus say, come and buy it?

I thought the good news of the gospel was free. Why do you need to buy the gold? He says, come and buy from me gold that's been refined in the fire. I thought it was free. Do you have to pay your way into heaven?

Why do you have to buy it? Remember what Jesus says in Isaiah 55. He says, all you that are thirsty, come to the waters. You that have no money, come and buy and eat.

Come buy wine and milk without money, without price. How do you buy living waters without money? How do you do that? How do you buy living water without price that is free?

[43 : 10] You see, friends, on the one hand, the gospel costs you nothing. It doesn't matter if you have not a single dollar to your name. If you've got nothing, nothing, nothing, the gospel isn't just for the privileged or the elite or the wealthy, you are welcome to come and receive it.

It's for everyone. Come, those of you that have got nothing, come and receive. But at the same time, it does cost you something. What does it cost you? It costs us our pride.

It costs us our self-sufficiency. It costs us our sense that we can do it. Jesus says, you have to come and admit that you need me. The irony of the gospel is that the only way to be worthy of it is to admit that you are unworthy.

Jesus says, come and buy gold that has been refined in the fire. Second thing Jesus says is this. Look at verse 19. Those that I love, I reprove and I discipline. So be zealous and repent.

Friends, sometimes Jesus can really get in our face. Do you ever feel like that? Jesus can really, Jesus, why do you have to be so challenging? Why do you have to be so confrontational?

[44 : 15] Can't you just tell us to love our neighbor and just be kind and nice citizens? Why do you have to get in our face so much? Look at what he says. I do this because I love you.

Friends, Jesus doesn't want us to be seduced by fool's gold. You know what fool's gold is? It's that mineral that looks like gold but it's actually worthless. It's like a rock that has a gold tinge to it but there's no value to it.

Friends, think about this. Imagine your son or your daughter or maybe your mother comes to you one day and says, I've invested my entire life savings in this company. They're going to do so well.

I'm going to make millions of dollars and you know that that company is a pyramid scheme. It's an absolute fraud. They're going to lose everything. What are you going to do? Out of love for them, you're going to say, don't do it.

Please, I'm begging you, don't invest. It's fool's gold. It's going to come to nothing. Jesus says, because I love you, I'm challenging you. I reprove you. I love those that I discipline.

[45 : 19] Friends, I want you to know Jesus is not angry with you. In calling you and I to repent, it's because he's not angry. It's because he loves us. Repentance feels like death but it always leads to life.

And then look at the third and final things. We come to a close. Jesus says this, verse 20. 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.

In biblical culture, to eat a meal with someone was a sign of relationship. It was a sign of welcoming and accepting someone. And if there's tension or relational difficulty, to invite someone to have a meal with you was a way of reconciling the relationship.

Remember in the story of the prodigal son, the son comes home and he says, I'm not worthy to be your son. I'll be a servant. I'll be a slave in your house. And the father says, kill the fattened calf.

Tonight we're going to have a feast. My son was lost but now he's home. What's the father doing? He's saying, all is forgiven. He's saying, you are my son reconciled.

[46 : 24] To have a meal with someone is to say, the past is behind us. You and I are on good terms again. What does Jesus say? He says, I stand at the door and knock. I want to come in.

I want to sit at the table with you. I want to have a meal with you. I want to be reconciled to you. There's an old Puritan who wrote a prayer like this and I want to read it to us.

He says, God, convince me that I cannot be my own God and I cannot make myself happy. Convince me that I cannot be my own Christ to save myself or restore my own joy.

Show me that I cannot be my own spirit teaching, guiding, and ruling me. Take away my ever-searching eye, my curious ear, my greedy appetite, and my lustful heart.

Oh God, show me that none of these things can heal a wounded conscience, can support my aged body, can uphold a departing spirit in the day of my death. Then, Lord, I pray, take me to the cross and leave me there.

[47 : 27] Friends, Jesus is not calling any of us to be paupers. Jesus is not wanting us to be miserable or unable to enjoy the pleasures of life. He's inviting us to exchange fool's gold for real treasure that's been refined in the fire.

In the year 155 AD, so 60 years after the book of Revelation is written, there's an old man called Polycop, and he is the bishop of the church in Smyrna.

Remember, Smyrna is the church where Jesus said, I know you're poor, but actually you're rich. Jesus says to the church in Smyrna, you're going to go through a whole bunch of persecution, you're going to be killed for your faith, but don't worry, I'm with you.

The bishop of Smyrna, this man Polycop, he's in his late 80s, early 90s, and he gets arrested because he won't honor the emperor and bow down to the emperor. They take him to the town square, and there's a big stake in the town square, and they put some hay and some straw around it, and they light the torches, and they tie him up around the stake, and they're getting ready to light the torches and to set him on light.

And they say, Polycop, this is your last chance. Do you want to recant what you have to say? Do you want to honor the emperor? All will be forgiven. And Polycop says this, he says, for 86 years, I have served Christ my king, and he has done me no wrong.

[48 : 56] How can I then blaspheme my king and my savior this day? Friends, here is a man who had found that Jesus is the one whose words are faithful and true.

Here is a man who had discovered that hope and faith are not found in the golden treasures of Laodicea or the bank accounts of the world. He found a golden treasure that had been tested through the fire and had been found to carry him through.

He had found a grace because God had opened his eyes to see that he could not be his own God. He could not be his own Christ. He could not be his own savior, but that there was one who was faithful and true to the end.

Friends, I want to ask us, in this city, have we found him? Have you found him? Have you found this Christ? Have you discovered the one who is more precious than all the gold in the world?

Have you discovered the one who will cover all your shame? Have you discovered the one who will bring healing to the depths of the hurt in your heart? Have you discovered the one who will open your eyes to see the world as it is?

[50 : 04] Today, this day, this very day, Christ is standing at our door and he's knocking and he's saying, come, come and eat with me. Come and receive, come and be with me.

I want to come in and I want to dine with you. Let's come to him now. Let's come and pray. Amen. Amen. Jesus Christ, oh God, we need you, God.

Father, I pray, won't you open our eyes to see how much we need you, God? God, we are very privileged to live in this great city that we've come to love.

But Father, I pray, don't let the pleasures and the prosperity and the blessings of the city delude us. Don't let it, God, take what is meant to be hot and make it lukewarm, God.

God, I pray for us, God, may we stand out in our city, God. Oh God, I pray that we as a church will be fresh and revitalizing, God, for the spiritually weary.

[51 : 34] I pray, God, that we will be healing and soothing to those that are aching. Christ, we want to hear your words and heed your words and we want to repent, God.

Christ, have your way in our life, God. Have your way, Lord Jesus. God, we're so sorry where other things have gripped our hearts, Lord, where other things have become first.

Jesus, we need you, God. Lord, I pray for those of us here that are hurting, God. Won't you, the great physician, come and heal us, God, where our hearts are sore, God, where we are gripped by insecurity and fear, God, where we long to be loved.

Christ, won't you pour your love into our hearts, I pray, God. God, where we long to be accepted, I pray that you will come and clothe us and cover our shame, God.

Show us how you cover us in your righteousness. God, I pray for those of us that have either been told it or have felt that we are just not good enough.

[53 : 10] we are not worthy. Christ, won't you come and remove those lies from our hearts and speak your truth into our lives and arrest us, God, and open our eyes to see you and call us home, I pray, God.

God, I pray that we will be a rich church, a rich and pure gold refined in the fire, Lord. God, God, we may not be ever impressive in the world's eyes, we may not get all the accolades and the crowns, but God, I pray that in that day, in glory, God, when you commend us, I pray, Father, that for some reason, God, we will be found to have been faithful to you.

Oh, God, come and help us, we pray. Come and help us, Lord.

Lord Jesus, thank you so much that while you challenge us even more than that, you love us. Thank you, God, that you say you challenge us because you love us.

God, help us to feel your love. Help us to know that our identity is in you, God.

[54 : 42] Come and have your way, we pray.