

## ISAIAH 30:8-11

### LAODICEAN PREACHING

“And now, go, write it before them on a tablet  
and inscribe it in a book,  
that it may be for the time to come  
as a witness forever.  
For they are a rebellious people,  
lying children,  
children unwilling to hear  
the instruction of the LORD;  
who say to the seers, ‘Do not see,’  
the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us what is right;  
speak to us smooth things,  
prophesy illusions,  
leave the way, turn aside from the path,  
let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.’”<sup>1</sup>

**T**he earnest Christian will not have been walking in The Way for many days before she hears of the Laodicean Era, a reference to the final period of this present Age of Grace. The reference speaks of a time when the true Faith will be nearly extirpated from the earth. That dreadful era will be marked by mass defections from the Faith once for all delivered to the saints. Though true faith will not be eliminated, proclamation of the Word will be truncated, attenuated, vitiated. What is not often understood is that matters won’t seem particularly dreadful to those occupying the pews during this Laodicean period. In fact, religious fervour will be vibrant throughout this period. At that time, the ecumenical dream that has been long held by many church leaders will have been realised beyond their wildest imaginations.

I’m not a prophet, though I do believe that all who occupy the sacred desk in this Church Age are appointed to preach prophetically. We who bear the honorific “Pastor” are responsible to preach in such a way that the will of God is made evident to all who listen, though we have no mandate to serve as seers. Nevertheless, I cannot help but wonder if the absence of the prophetic voice from the pulpit presages the dark days of the Tribulation—that dreadful time when though mankind will be religious, the most will be largely lost?

In fact, I wonder if Laodicean preaching is not even now dominating the modern pulpit. As churches focus on entertaining the masses, and as multiplied voices instruct the preacher how to make his message palatable to sinful listeners, the pressure mounts to temper the message, presenting just enough religion to sound Christian, but not so much as to be offensive. Modern belief has been defined as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”—a new religion that encourages confessing Christ as Lord without demanding submission to His reign over one’s life. Tragically, what is being presented is not simply a watered-down version of the Christian Faith; it is, in fact, not-Christianity. Thus, youth ministers are to be entertaining, youth activities must always be fun, Sunday School teachers must be enchanting and preaching must avoid offending. Especially must preachers avoid insisting upon adherence to biblical doctrine.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Laodicean preaching is not new—it simply is growing in popularity among a populace that is increasingly ignorant of the Word of God and of the will of God. Focused on fulfilling their own desires, contemporary worshippers flock to the latest spokesman for self-fulfilment and self-gratification. Pastoral web sites focus on instructing readers in the art of making people comfortable, discouraging addressing sinful behaviour or speaking of controversial issues. Tragically, Laodicean preaching does appear to be in the ascendancy in this day.

**LAODICEAN PREACHING IS DRIVEN BY THE PEOPLE AND NOT BY THE LORD.**

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and inscribe it in a book,  
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Dorothy Sayers, a well-known British author, possessed a knack for unmasking misperceptions concerning the Faith. In her day, many people professing concern for the state of the Faith, attempted to redefine Christian practise and teachings. Their efforts were fuelled by an apparent boredom with presentation of doctrine. Sayers countered this apathy and biblical ignorance of those who professed themselves Christian. Tragically, despite the passage of time, little has changed in the restless search for alternatives that will make Christianity palatable.

Consider some of the arguments Sayers presented during the period when the British were hard-pressed by Hitler’s armies. “Official Christianity, of late years, has been having what is known as a bad press. We are constantly assured that the churches are empty because preachers insist too much upon doctrine—dull dogma as people call it. The fact is the precise opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man—and the dogma is the drama.”<sup>2</sup>

“Now, we may call [Christian] doctrine exhilarating, or we may call it devastating; we may call it revelation, or we may call it rubbish; but if we call it dull, the words have no meaning at all. That God should play the tyranny over man is a dismal story of unrelieved oppression; that man should play the tyrant over man is the usual dreary record of human futility; but that man should play the tyrant over God and find Him a better Man than himself is an astonishing drama indeed. Any journalist, hearing of it for the first time, would recognize it as news; those who did hear it for the first time actually called it news, and good news at that; though we are likely to forget that the word Gospel ever meant anything so sensational.”<sup>3</sup>

“...[T]he cry today is: ‘Away with the tedious complexities of dogma—let us have the simple spirit of worship; just worship, no matter of what!’ The only drawback to this demand for a generalized and undirected worship is the practical difficulty of arousing any sort of enthusiasm for the worship of nothing in particular.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Sayers, “Letters to a Diminished Church: Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine,” (W Publishing Group, Nashville, TN 2004) 1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 6-7

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 15

“It would not perhaps be altogether surprising if, in this nominally Christian country, where the creeds are daily recited, that there were a number of people who knew all about Christian doctrine and disliked it. It is more startling to discover how many people there are who heartily dislike and despise Christianity without having the faintest notion of what it is. If you tell them, they cannot believe you. I do not mean that they cannot believe the doctrine; that would be understandable enough since it takes some believing. I mean that they simply cannot believe that anything so interesting, so exciting, and so dramatic can be the orthodox creed of the Church.”<sup>5</sup>

“Surely it is not the business of the Church to adapt Christ to men, but to adapt men to Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

“It is the dogma that is the drama—not beautiful phrases, nor comforting sentiments, nor vague aspirations to loving-kindness and uplift, nor the promise of something nice after death—but the terrifying assertion that the same God who made the world, lived in the world and passed through the grave and gate of death. Show that to the heathen, and they may not believe it; but at least they may realize that here is something that man might be glad to believe.”<sup>7</sup>

Reading her comments, one is struck by how prescient she was; her comments concerning the professed people of God in Great Britain could easily have been written today about professed Christians in Canada! It sometimes seems that the average Christians seeks just enough religion to inoculate against feeling compelled to take a stand. More energy is expended on evading commitment than is spent on making church members feel good about themselves.

Laodicean preaching asks the people, “What do you wish to hear? What would you have me say?” Having a job is more important than being true to Him who appoints to holy office for Laodicean preachers. Nor should any assume that this phenomenon is something new to the Faith; Laodicean preachers have infested the Faith since earliest days. One such Laodicean preacher was Moses’ grandson. The story, recorded in Judges, begins with a man named Micah.

Micah stole from his mother, but his conscience got the better of him and he confessed his theft. He had stolen silver that his mother had dedicated to make a carved image—a stunning violation of the commandment of God against such accoutrements to worship. Already, the Faith was degenerating into ruin and disrepair. So, Micah made himself a shrine, an ephod and household gods. All he lacked was a priest to preside over his new religion [see JUDGES 17:1-6].

A Levite from Bethlehem happened to be passing through, and Micah invited him to serve as his priest. His invitation to the Levite was, “Stay with me, and be to me a father and a priest, and I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living” [JUDGES 17:10]. The Levite consented. Understand that not just any Levite could be a priest; only one who descended from Aaron’s lineage could serve as a priest. In fact, we will learn later that this Levite was the grandson of Moses [see JUDGES 18:30]. Let that fact sink in! Moses’ grandson had become a hired preacher, saying what he was paid to say—preaching for a salary!

When one is paid to deliver a particular message, he will discover that it is quite easy to be hired away from the one who hired you in the first place. After all, it is the money that is important to the paid preacher—not fidelity to the Word. If you are hired to say something, you had better continue saying what you are paid to say. If someone else likes what you say and wants to hire you, undoubtedly you will sell yourself to the highest bidder. Tactfully, you will have become a religious whore, prostituting yourself and your message to the highest bidder.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 15-16

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 21

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

That is what happened to Jonathan, grandson of Moses. The account is given in the next chapter. In effect, he received a better offer. He would have a larger audience, more prestige, a better salary—and all he had to do was to say what he was paid to say. Keep the people happy, and he had job security.

“When [a band of Danite warriors] went into Micah’s house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, the priest said to them, ‘What are you doing?’ And they said to him, ‘Keep quiet; put your hand on your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be priest to the house of one man, or to be priest to a tribe and clan in Israel?’ And the priest’s heart was glad. He took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people.” [JUDGES 18:18-20].

Throughout Israel’s history, Laodicean preaching was a continuing problem. Here are a few examples of condemnation of Laodicean preachers delivered by the prophets of the LORD. Jeremiah wrote of the preachers of his day:

“From the least to the greatest of them,  
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;  
and from prophet to priest,  
everyone deals falsely.  
They have healed the wound of my people lightly,  
saying, ‘Peace, peace,’  
when there is no peace.  
Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?  
No, they were not at all ashamed;  
they did not know how to blush.  
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;  
at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,”  
says the LORD.”

[JEREMIAH 6:13-15]

The preachers said what they were paid to say and the people loved it! I fear that the divine condemnation could be made of many even in this day late in the Age of Grace.

Another example of such preaching is provided by Micah of Moresheth.

“Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets  
who lead my people astray,  
who cry ‘Peace’  
when they have something to eat,  
but declare war against him  
who puts nothing into their mouths.”

[MICAH 3:5]

That is pointed! The prophets cry “Peace” when they are paid, and they declare war when no one pays them. They are not speaking for the Lord, but for the highest bidder.

Later, in this same prophetic book, the prophet of God exposed as hirelings the priests and prophets of that day when he wrote:

“Its heads give judgment for a bribe;  
its priests teach for a price;  
its prophets practice divination for money;  
yet they lean on the LORD and say,  
Is not the LORD in the midst of us?  
No disaster shall come upon us.  
Therefore because of you  
Zion shall be plowed as a field;  
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,  
and the mountain of the house a wooded height.”

[MICAH 3:11, 12]

Look at one final incident recorded in the Word before we move on to the next point. Amos had an exchange with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. “Amaziah said to Amos, ‘O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.’

“Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah, ‘I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, “Go, prophesy to my people Israel”’” [AMOS 7:12-15].

Since Amaziah was paid to say what the king wanted to hear, he assumed that Amos also preached for what he could earn. I’ve repeatedly heard precisely such comments during my service to God. At one church, the former pastor took me aside and counselled, “Mike, if you’ll just do what the Chairman of the Church tells you to do, you’ll have a job for life.” I cut him off, coldly responding, “I wasn’t looking for a job when I was called to this pulpit. That is why you are not preaching any longer. You wanted a job rather than understanding that this is a calling.”

I had the leader of one of Canada’s larger evangelical denominations counsel me, “Mike, you could pastor any of our largest churches if you would just be quit preaching so hard against specific sins and say what makes people feel good about themselves.”

The disturbing bleat arising from many church bosses is that the preacher is paid to say what they command. They seek out a preacher that will say what they want to hear rather than seeking one who will speak the truth in love. There are enough churches pastored by those who say what they are paid to say rather than what they are appointed to say. Laodicean preaching is driven by the people rather than being driven by the Master who appoints to His service!

#### LAODICEAN PREACHING FOCUSES ON GRATIFYING THE FLESH.

“They are a rebellious people,  
lying children,  
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who say to the seers, ‘Do not see,’  
the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us what is right;  
speak to us smooth things,  
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leave the way, turn aside from the path,  
let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.’”

Since the Laodicean message is driven by a desire to please the people rather than the desire to be faithful to the Master who appoints to this service, it should not be surprising that gratifying the flesh ranks very high on the list of goals for all such preaching. On one occasion a couple left a former church. “You are just too fundamental,” the husband stated during an exit interview. These erstwhile parishioners for several years had taken pains each week to thank me for my strong message, frequently commenting that such bold preaching was seldom heard today. I guess I finally exposed some pet sin and they were no longer comfortable under my preaching. The husband named another congregation nearby that they intended to attend. “The pastor only speaks about fifteen minutes, and some days, he doesn’t even preach” he explained! I guess that such commended the Laodicean preacher in some way that still mystifies me.

I knew that the preacher was busy running his own business and that he seldom set aside time to prepare a message! He justified his dilatory preparation and biblical apathy by claiming to say whatever the Spirit gave him to say. As an aside, I’ve discovered that the Spirit works powerfully with a thoroughly prepared field, while little of value ever grows in a fallow field. The preacher in question had made a decision that having people like him was more important than speaking the truth! Consequently, he was noted for his friendly visits within the community.

As he began the prophetic word that constitutes this particular chapter, Isaiah wrote:

“‘Ah, stubborn children,’ declares the LORD,  
‘who carry out a plan, but not mine,  
and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit,  
that they may add sin to sin.’”

[ISAIAH 30:1]

God had warned against going back to Egypt or making an alliance with the pagans. However, the people were fearful of powerful nations about them, and chose to do what God warned them not to do. They depended, not merely on their own intuition, but appealed to pagan ideas as though religion would somehow satisfy the need for relationship. As a point of grave significance, I note that people who don’t know God or who fail to obey His precepts degenerate into ever deeper darkness. Is this not what we are taught when Paul warns against surrendering to our own desires while ignoring the will of the Creator? “Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools” [ROMANS 1:21, 22].

Consider the divine charge God through Isaiah levelled in the previous chapter.

“Because this people draw near with their mouth  
and honor me with their lips,  
while their hearts are far from me,  
and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,  
therefore, behold, I will again  
do wonderful things with this people,  
with wonder upon wonder;  
and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,  
and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.”

“Ah, you who hide deep from the LORD your counsel,  
whose deeds are in the dark,  
and who say, ‘Who sees us? Who knows us?’  
You turn things upside down!  
Shall the potter be regarded as the clay,  
that the thing made should say of its maker,  
He did not make me’;  
or the thing formed say of him who formed it,  
‘He has no understanding?’”

[ISAIAH 29:13-16]

Following the Babylonian conquest of the land and deportation of the leadership to Shinar, Jeremiah warned the remnant of people not to leave the land; and especially did he warn against fleeing to Egypt [see JEREMIAH 42:1-22]. The people had pleaded with Jeremiah to pray for them and to tell them what God expected of them. They had solemnly declared when they begged him to pray, “Whatever the LORD our God says declare to us and we will do it” [JEREMIAH 42:20]. Listen to that verse again, for it is echoed in the churches of this day: “Whatever the LORD our God says declare to us and we will do it.” Nevertheless, when they heard what God commanded, they whined, “That’s too hard! We can’t do that!” The women led a rebellion against God and against His prophet; they insisted that the word Jeremiah brought from God was too difficult for them. They would return to their previous idolatrous practises [see JEREMIAH 44:15-19].

I pause to note that neither in biblical history nor in contemporary church life has there ever been an instance recorded of women driving religion which resulted in strengthening worship or in honouring God. The people knew what God expected; but they did the opposite, concluding that obedience to the divine will was too demanding, too difficult.

Something similar happens all too frequently among the professed people of God in this day. I’ve had church leaders sit in my office and whine that it is too difficult to raise children. The church is at fault because their children are casual about the Faith, no longer wanting anything to do with church. It is too difficult to continue living with the wife of one’s youth—surely God wants them to be happy. As an aside, where is that famous verse that teaches God wants you to be happy even at the expense of righteousness? These leaders whined that it is too demanding to worship each week, too expensive to maintain their lifestyle and yet be generous toward their church, too hard to resist looking at sinful shows when their spouse wants to watch, too hard to avoid approving of wicked conduct. God doesn’t know how hard it is! Therefore, these paragons of religious effort will do what they think best, taking the easiest route.

When the preacher speaks against pandering to our own sinful desire by watching pornography in the form of a sitcom, he doesn’t know how exhausted I am from working hard all week. When the preacher warns that failure to instruct my children will ensure that they turn from serving Christ, he has no idea how hard it is to get kids to listen. When the preacher counsels generosity in giving, he doesn’t know how much it costs to maintain my lifestyle. When the preacher points out that the rebellious lifestyles that are accepted as normal today are an abomination before God, he has no idea how hard it is to resist the tide of evil today. In effect, what we hear is the deafening bleat of sheep that have determined for themselves what is good and right, but who refuse to do what is honourable and godly.

**LAODICEAN PREACHING INVITES DIVINE JUDGEMENT.**

“Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel,  
‘Because you despise this word  
and trust in oppression and perverseness  
and rely on them,  
therefore this iniquity shall be to you  
like a breach in a high wall, bulging out, and about to collapse,  
whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant;  
and its breaking is like that of a potter’s vessel  
that is smashed so ruthlessly  
that among its fragments not a shard is found  
with which to take fire from the hearth,  
or to dip up water out of the cistern.’”

[ISAIAH 30:12-14]

The message that is driven by the people and not by the will of God and the message that gratifies the flesh is not of God. Those who deliver such messages are not motivated by God’s Spirit. God, through Jeremiah complained about the multiplicity of prophets speaking in the Name of the LORD. “The LORD said to me: ‘The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name although I did not send them, and who say, ‘Sword and famine shall not come upon this land’: By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword, with none to bury them—they, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their evil upon them” [JEREMIAH 14:14-16].

Again, God exposes the hypocrisy of those who deliver a message He did not give.

“I did not send the prophets,  
yet they ran;  
I did not speak to them,  
yet they prophesied.  
But if they had stood in my council,  
then they would have proclaimed my words to my people,  
and they would have turned them from their evil way,  
and from the evil of their deeds.”

[JEREMIAH 23:21, 22]

Listen to one further instance of God’s exposure of lies from the pulpit. “Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who steal my words from one another. Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who use their tongues and declare, ‘declares the LORD.’ Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all, declares the LORD” [JEREMIAH 23:30-32].

How is it that the nature of God's people resists depending upon Him and His promise? We say that we have entrusted our eternal destiny to Him; but because we continue to live in this fallen world we somehow imagine that we must assume control over our own lives. So, we plot and scheme, we finagle and finesse, always looking for wiggle room as we attempt to walk a tightrope between obedience and self-exaltation. The people to whom Isaiah wrote attempted the same evasions. The manner in which the Lord addressed their wickedness is found in the verses following out text.

“Thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel,  
‘In returning and rest you shall be saved;  
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.’  
But you were unwilling, and you said,  
‘No! We will flee upon horses’;  
therefore you shall flee away;  
and, ‘We will ride upon swift steeds’;  
therefore your pursuers shall be swift.  
A thousand shall flee at the threat of one;  
at the threat of five you shall flee,  
till you are left  
like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain,  
like a signal on a hill.  
  
“Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you,  
and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.  
For the LORD is a God of justice;  
blessed are all those who wait for him.”

[ISAIAH 30:15-18]

Disobedience to the divine will, rebellion against the Master, never turns out well—especially for the child of God. Because we are His people, He will discipline us. We cannot disgrace His Name through disobedience without inviting His discipline. We read the prophecies, ignoring the warnings even as we seize upon the promise. Thus it is that the Laodicean preacher soothes the fears of parishioners, reminding them that God waits to be gracious and is ready to be compassionate, even while failing to warn that discipline and injury are in the immediate offing for those who rebel.

That preacher who is guilty of Laodicean preaching needs to hear the Word of the Lord.

“Woe to those who call evil good  
and good evil,  
who put darkness for light  
and light for darkness,  
who put bitter for sweet  
and sweet for bitter!”  
Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,  
and shrewd in their own sight!”

[ISAIAH 5:20, 21]

“Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees,  
and the writers who keep writing oppression.”

[ISAIAH 10:1]

“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,  
and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria,  
the notable men of the first of the nations,  
to whom the house of Israel comes!”

[AMOS 6:1]

When God says “Woe,” we should say “Whoa,” stepping back so that we may discover what offends Him so that we may do what honours Him.

We are warned repeatedly throughout the pages of the New Testament against such false workmen. In his parting words to the Elders of Ephesus, the Apostle Paul pointedly warned, “From among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” [ACTS 20:30]. Speaking in a similar vein to the Corinthian Christians, He spoke of such phony preachers as “false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 11:13]. In his final missive to be included in the canon of Scripture, he warned, “The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” [1 TIMOTHY 4:1]. Jude, the half-brother of our Master, wrote the churches of that ancient day, “Certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” [JUDE 4].

I caution all who listen, warning of this insidious danger precisely because the people of God are susceptible to error. More importantly, in light of the message I have just delivered, God’s professed people tolerate such error precisely because it is palatable, it is soothing and the people love to have it thus. Our present situation has been accurately described by Jeremiah.

“An appalling and horrible thing  
has happened in the land:  
the prophets prophesy falsely,  
and the priests rule at their direction;  
my people love to have it so,  
but what will you do when the end comes?”

[JEREMIAH 5:30, 31]

I encourage you to look to Christ. Ensure that you know Him—that you are twice-born. Then, as one who is born from above, I plead with you to demand of those who occupy the sacred desk to deliver only the message given by God’s Spirit. Insist that those who declare the Word invest time in His Word, hearing from Him and delivering the Word that He has spoken. To do other than this is to ensure that the Laodicean era shall descend shortly. Amen.