

That The World May Know: The Early Church – Session 5: Hot or Cold

Conquering the Gates of Hell

In the Word of God, imagery of water is used frequently to convey a spiritual message. The message of Revelation 3 hinges on the imagery of the refreshing, ice-cold water of Colossae; the warm, healing water of Hierapolis; and the foul-tasting lukewarm water of Laodicea. In the following passages, keep in mind the invigorating free-flowing streams of Colossae; the warm, healing water of Hierapolis; and the foul-tasting, lukewarm water of Laodicea. For people in ancient times, “living water” was fresh and free-flowing, like water from a spring or stream. It was not water that had been drawn from a well or cistern, nor was it water that had been put into a container and carried from its source. The invigorating, free-flowing streams of Colossae are an appropriate image of the “living water” of God, a gift that followers of Jesus are called to offer to others.

1. David’s psalms are known for their vivid descriptions of our human longing for God. Note the ways in which David expressed his desire for God. How would you describe your need for God?
Psalms 42:1 – 2
Psalms 63:1 – 8
2. What amazing promise does God make to spiritually thirsty people who search for him?
Isaiah 41:17 – 20

Why does God do these things?
3. How did the Samaritan woman respond when Jesus told her about the living water he could provide?
John 4:10 – 15

What do you think she was hoping for and what did she find?
John 4:25 – 30

4. What did Jesus promise to people in Jerusalem? What did John say “living water” symbolized?
John 7:37 – 39
5. What are some images used to describe people who stand for righteousness and justice—those who drink the living water of God?

The Church in Colossae

Colossae, at the foot of Mount Cadmus, was a city in decline at the time the gospel message came to Asia Minor. Although the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis had grown more prominent and prosperous than Colossae, the reputation of its cold, fresh, rushing water was still widely known. It seems that the city was also known for its vibrant, loving Christian community.

1. How had the people in Colossae learned about the kingdom of God?
Acts 19:8 – 10
Colossians 1:3 – 8
2. How well did Paul know the Colossian believers? How much did he care for them?
Colossians 2:1 – 5
3. What had Paul heard about Philemon, a leader of the church in Colossae?
Philemon 4 – 7

In what way were Philemon and other believers being “cold” water in their world?

What impact did their faithful service to Christ have on Paul?

4. What did Paul specifically ask Philemon to do?

Philemon 10 – 22

What did Paul expect the outcome of his request to be?

5. What challenges was the Colossian church facing?
Colossians 2:8 – 23

A Light Shining in the Darkness

Light and darkness held great meaning for people in the ancient world, and gods of light were honored greatly. One reason the apostle John used the concept of “light” more than thirty times when writing to the church in Asia Minor because the god Apollo was considered to be the god of light. Notice how God communicated his message of light and life to the people of Asia Minor.

1. Describing the God of Israel as a light that dispels darkness was not a new concept for those who spread the news of God’s kingdom in Asia Minor. What images of light are used to describe God and his gift of salvation?
2 Samuel 22:29
Psalm 27:1
Psalm 89:15

What imagery did Isaiah use when he predicted the coming of the Messiah?
Isaiah 9:2
2. What did Paul urge the Christians of Colossae to do because of what God had done for them?
Colossians 1:10 – 14
3. Which images did Paul use to help the Ephesian Christians understand their new identity as children of God?
Ephesians 5:8 – 14

4. Apollo was considered the god of light. How would his followers have responded to what Jesus said about himself?
John 8:12
5. What did it mean to the disciples when Jesus told them that they were “the light of the world”?
Matthew 5:14 - 16

Being a Totally Committed Witness of Jesus Christ

As *talmidim*, the disciples of Jesus were passionately committed to living life as he did—to walk as He walked and, by doing so, to show people what the kingdom of God was like. God used these men and other believers like them to change their world. Christians today have no less of an opportunity to live a Jesus’ faithful *talmidim* and bring his message of salvation to a lost and hurting world.

1. What was Philip’s commitment to being a *talmid* of Jesus?
Mark 3:13 – 19
John 1:43 – 49
John 12:20 – 22
2. In what ways would have Philip’s vision been expanded by these two situations? How would he have been prepared for his ministry in a Gentile world?
John 6:1 – 14
John 14:6 – 14
3. What was Epaphras’ faithful, tireless work on behalf of the gospel?
Colossians 1:1 – 8
Colossians 4:12 – 13
Philemon 23

Church history records that the church in Laodicea remained dynamic after most churches in Asia Minor disappeared. One of

its bishops was martyred for his faith in AD 161, long after John wrote his warning to the city in the book of Revelation. In AD 363, Laodicea was the location chosen for a significant church council. So, it appears that the church in Laodicea learned its lesson, and God continued to bless the Christian community there for some time.

Challenged to Be Hot or Cold

God’s inspired Word speaks to all people. Although we can understand the Bible without knowing the cultural settings in which particular books were written, we can learn even more by learning the common images and symbols used by the biblical writers. What images did the apostle John use to describe God’s kingdom. Revelation 3:14 – 19

You are neither cold

nor hot.

Because you are lukewarm

I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing”

But you do not realize you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire.

Buy from me what clothes to wear.

Buy from me salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

References

Genesis 2	Genesis 3
2 Samuel 22	Psalms 27
Psalms 42	Psalms 63
Psalms 89	Psalms 107
Isaiah 9	Isaiah 32
Isaiah 41	Matthew 5
Matthew 25	Mark 3
John 1	John 4
John 7	John 8
John 12	John 14
Acts 19	Ephesians 5
1 Corinthians 12	2 Corinthians 1
2 Corinthians 4	Colossians 1
Colossians 2	Colossians 3
Colossians 4	Philemon 4
Philemon 10	Philemon 23
James 5	1 Peter 2
1 John 1	1 John 2
Revelation 3	

Asia Minor

