# Wealth, Faith, and the Mirror of Laodicea

A Summary of Our Class Discussion

## The Pastor's Paradox

Our session kicked off with a provocative topic: What happens when spiritual leadership and significant personal wealth collide? We explored the complex theological questions this raises, jotting down our initial thoughts and concerns.

This led to a candid discussion about the potential dangers of wealth and power for the church. Some of the questions we wrestled with included:

- What dangers do wealth and power present for the church?
- Does a spiritual leader who gains wealth through book deals and merchandise change from a pastor to an entrepreneur?
- How much is "too much"? Is being an entrepreneur a conflict of interest for a person of God?
- When do blessings become traps for leaders?

We also touched on real-world examples, such as Rick Warren, who reportedly earned his wealth through publishing his book *The Purpose Driven Life* rather than from a salary from his church.

## The Mirror of Laodicea

This discussion was the perfect bridge to our main text: the letter to the church in Laodicea from Revelation 3:14-22. We read the passage in two different versions, noting the stark and discomforting language used—especially the phrase "You make me want to vomit" from *The Message* translation.

To understand the message, we began to unpack its rich symbolism by looking at the historical context of the city. We learned that Laodicea was a city famous for three key things:

- **Banking:** It was a wealthy financial center, so much so that its citizens refused Roman aid after an earthquake, proclaiming they were "self-sufficient."
- **Wool Industry:** The city was known for producing fine, black wool garments.
- **Medicine:** It was home to a famous medical school that produced a well-known eye salve.

This context makes Jesus's message to them incredibly ironic and powerful. He calls this "rich" and "self-sufficient" church "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." He then offers them true riches: "gold refined by fire," "white garments," and "salve to anoint your eyes."

## 🔍 From Audit to Action

So, what's the antidote to this spiritual "lukewarmness" and self-deception? We discussed the theological takeaway: true wealth isn't material self-sufficiency, but "gold from God"—a richness found in faithfulness and serving others.

We connected this to 1 Timothy 6:6-10, which warns that the *love* of money, not money itself, is a root of all kinds of evil. The focus is on our motivation and priorities, not just the simple fact of possession.

The session concluded by turning the mirror on ourselves. The message to the "angel of the church" represents the collective ethos of a congregation. We were challenged to consider how our own church might exhibit "Laodicean" tendencies, such as focusing too much on internal programs at the expense of outward mission.

As a practical exercise, we were given two assignments:

- **The Church Audit:** To review our church's announcements and find examples that highlight success and comfort versus those that show vulnerability and dependence on God.
- **The Neighborhood Economy Drive:** A homework assignment to observe the economic disparities in the community immediately surrounding our church.

The final goal was to reflect on these observations and pray about how we can more faithfully be "rich in Christ's gold" for our neighbors.

## Discussion Questions

Here are a few questions to continue our reflection on the session:

- How do you personally draw the line between a leader being "blessed" and being "trapped" by wealth?
- If our church is the "angel" of our congregation, what collective "ethos" do you think we project to our community?
- After reflecting on the "neighborhood economy drive," what one new way could our church serve the needs right outside our doors?