

Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church **Revelation 3:14-22**

There is no one better suited to keep a pastor humble and in his place than a loving but honest pastor's wife. I heard about a pastor who thought preached one of his very best sermons. After the service was over parishioners lined up to tell their pastor what a wonderful message he had preached. Now, any pastor enjoys receiving kind words of encouragement from his church family. There's isn't thing wrong with that unless he begins to take those compliments to heart. Well, this pastor was feeling really good about himself after church and couldn't wait to tell his wife about all of the compliments he had received. When they sat down for lunch he continued to go on and on. He said "You know dear Mrs. Smith told me that my message this morning really warmed her heart. What do you think about that?" Finally, his wife had all she could stand. She got up from the table, walked into the library of their home, picked up a dictionary and turned to the definition of the word "warm." She set the dictionary down in front of her husband, pointed to the word "warm" and then read the definition for him. "Warm," meaning not so hot!

Several years ago a singer by the name of Mac Davis recorded a song entitled, "It's Hard to Be Humble." That could have been the theme song for the church in Laodicea.

Of all the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3, this one was perhaps in the worst spiritual condition. And yet, if you had visited this church you would have a group of believers puffed up with pride and self-righteousness, and blissfully unaware of their sad spiritual state. They did not realize the miserable condition they were in. The truth was they were a desperately poor church, but they thought they were wealthy. They were a seriously sick church, but they thought they were healthy. They thought everything was just all right, when in fact just about everything was wrong.

1. The Commendation

There are no words of commendation for the church at Laodicea.

2. The Condemnation

They were condemned for having lost their vigor.

Look at verse 15. Jesus said, *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth"* (Rev. 3:15, 16).

Laodicea was located near two other cities in the area; Colossae about ten miles to the east, and Hierapolis, about six miles to the north. The city of Colossae had a wonderful spring that poured out delicious, refreshing cold water. On the other hand Hierapolis was known for its healing hot springs. People would travel many, many miles to bathe in the hot springs of Hierapolis, kind of like Hot Springs, Arkansas. Colossae had cold water. Hierapolis had hot water. And Laodicea, well they didn't have any water. So they built an aqueduct to bring water down from the snow

laden mountains of Phrygia. When the water left the mountain it was clear, clean, and ice-cold, but by the time it travelled through those underground aqueducts all the way down to Laodicea it arrived foul, dirty, and lukewarm. It wasn't hot enough to relax and restore, like the hot springs of Hierapolis. Nor was it cold and refreshing, like the water at Colossae. It was lukewarm.

When you drink a glass of Coke or Pepsi what temperature do you want it? You want it ice cold, don't you? When you have a cup of coffee or tea in the morning what temperature do you want it? You want it piping hot, don't you? We want our cold drinks cold and our hot drinks hot, not lukewarm. Lukewarm is distasteful to us - and to the Lord.

Jesus said to the Laodicean church *"Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth"* (Rev. 3:16). The word translated "vomit" in verse 16 is **emeo** in the Greek and it means to reject with extreme disgust. Jesus was saying, "You make me sick at my stomach."

Jesus describes three different spiritual states in this verse. There are Christians with a spiritually *"hot"* heart. Believers with a *"hot"* heart are characterized by three things. One, they have a genuine passion for the things of God. They don't have to be begged or bribed to pray, read the Bible, worship, witness, or serve in the Lord's church. Two, they have a bold testimony of their faith in Christ. They are not ashamed of the Gospel. Three, their lives are a powerful witness to the saving, sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. They are consistently Christ-like.

And then, there are those who have rejected Christ who have a spiritually *"cold"* heart. They are cold toward the things of God. Most are simply unconcerned; the gospel doesn't move them in any way. They have no interest in Christ, His Word, or His church. Some are openly hostile, the gospel actually irritates them. They are lost and make no pretense to be Christian.

Jesus describes a third kind of spiritual condition; those with a *"lukewarm"* heart. Are they saved or lost? Since the Lord Jesus is addressing this letter to the church at Laodicea I believe He is speaking to those who have at least made a profession of faith in Christ. Some of them are genuine born again believers who have simply lost their spiritual passion. They were once hot for Christ, but they have grown lukewarm. They haven't lost their faith, they have lost their fire. Let me just say that this is not an uncommon experience for a Christian. It happens too many of us at one time or another, but it is a temporary state for those who have been born-again, not a permanent one.

However, within the church there are also those who profess Christ but don't really know Him. They are unsaved church members. They are lukewarm because they are lost. They have been touched by the gospel in some way; perhaps they were moved emotionally on occasion, or persuaded on a purely intellectual basis, but they have never been transformed spiritually, *"Having a form of godliness but denying it's power,"* (2 Tim 3:5).

To have a lukewarm heart is to be in a sad and dangerous state. The tragic truth is there is no one harder to reach for Christ than a false Christian. John Walvoord said, "There is no one further from the truth in Christ than the one who makes an idle profession without real faith." ¹

There is an inscription in a cathedral in Lubeck, Germany that powerfully expresses what the Lord Jesus might say to the professing Christian with a *“lukewarm”* heart. “Ye call Me Master and obey Me not, Ye call me Light and see Me not, Ye call Me Way and walk me not, Ye call Me Life and choose me not, Ye call Me Wise and follow Me not, Ye call Me Fair and love Me not, Ye call Me Rich and ask Me not, Ye call Me Eternal and seek Me not, Ye call Me Noble and serve Me not, Ye call Me Gracious and trust Me not, Ye call Me Might and honor Me not, Ye call Me Just and fear Me not, If I condemn you, blame Me not.”²

They were condemned for having lost their values.

Look at verse 17. Jesus said, *“Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of having, and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, (and) poor”* (Rev 3:17).

Their city of Laodicea was known as a great banking center. The members of the church in Laodicea were proud of their financial wealth. Materially speaking, there was probably not a more prosperous church in all Asia Minor. Spiritually speaking, there was not a more poverty stricken church. The Laodiceans boasted that they were rich and had need of nothing when in fact they were poor. Their whole value system had become twisted. They were measuring their wealth by human standards instead of spiritual values.³

They were condemned for having lost their vision.

Look at verse 17 again. Jesus said, *“You are wretched, miserable, poor, and blind.”* In what way were the Laodiceans blind? They were blind to the true nature of their spiritual condition. The Laodiceans were proud of the famous eye salve that was made there. They were in desperate need of a healthy dose of some spiritual eye-salve. In fact, Jesus said in verse 18 *“anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see,”* (Rev 3:18c).

Psalm 139:23-24 should be our prayer. *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

They were condemned for having lost their vesture.

Jesus said, *“You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”*

The Laodiceans were proud of their fine clothing made from the black wool of the sheep of that area. They thought they were splendidly clothed when in fact they were shamefully naked. What kind of garment did the Laodiceans need to put on to cover their nakedness? Look at verse 18. Jesus said, *“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.”* What does the white garment represent? It represents the righteousness of Christ.

How do we put on the white robe of Christ’s righteousness? By turning from our sins and trusting Jesus as our Lord and Savior. As William Barclay observed, “There is little point in a

man adorning his body, if he has nothing to adorn his soul.”⁴

3. The Command

They were commanded to renew their spiritual passion.

Look at verse 19. Jesus said, *“Therefore be zealous.”* The word *“zealous”* is from the Greek **zeloo** (dzay-lo'-o) meaning to be burning with passion. The Laodiceans needed to stir up that inner fire. How can we stir up the inner fire when our heart has grown cold? We can't stir up the fire, only the Lord can do that. However, there are some things we can do.

The cure for the lukewarm church or Christian is really the same as the cure for the lost love church or Christian. Do you remember what Jesus said to the church in Ephesus, the church that had lost their first love for the Lord? Jesus commanded them to *“Do the first works”* again. Do those things that you did when you first became a Christian. Do those things that you did when your heart was really on fire for the Lord.

What are those things? I believe Jesus meant those simple spiritual disciplines of prayer, bible study, and worship. If you will commit yourself to spend time with Jesus every day; if you will discipline yourself to pray, read your bible, and worship the Lord every day; if you will do those first works again and again and again, God will rekindle the fire in your heart and restore your spiritual passion.

They were commanded to repent of their sin.

Jesus said, *“Therefore be zealous and repent”* (Rev. 3:19). Have you noticed that every time one of these seven churches had a problem that Jesus commanded them to repent? He told the church in Ephesus to repent. He told the church in Pergamos to repent. He told the church in Thyatira to repent. He told the church in Sardis to repent. Here the Lord Jesus tells the church at Laodicea to repent. They needed to humble themselves before the Lord and repent of their complacency and pride.

Beloved, if you are guilty of the sin of being lukewarm then you need to repent. The Holy Spirit will not rekindle the fire in your soul until you first repent of your sin.

4. The Comfort

They were comforted with the promise of the Lord's loving correction.

Look again at verse 19. Jesus said, *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.”* The Lord still loved the lukewarm saints of Laodicea, and His stern rebuke was proof of His love. The bible tells us in Hebrews 12:6, *“For whom the LORD loves He chastens.”*

What a comfort to know that we have a heavenly father who loves us so much that he's not going to let us just go on and on and on in our spiritual indifference and sin. Because He loves us He must sometimes *“rebuke and chasten”* us. The Lord's discipline is sometimes painful, but always profitable.

Hebrews 12:11 says, *“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”*

When the Lord disciplines us, it's not something we should resent; it's something we should rejoice in because we know that His correction is proof positive of His love for us.

They were comforted with the promise of the Lord's patient call.

Look at verse 20. Jesus said, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock”* (Rev 3:20).

That's a sad picture when you think about it. This is Jesus talking. This is Jesus who voluntarily left His royal throne in heaven so He could come down to this sinful old world and die on a cross. This is Jesus who loved the church so much that He gave Himself for it. This is Jesus, the foundation and Chief Cornerstone of the church who said *“Upon this rock I will build my church.”* This is Jesus, now shut out from his own church.

Now notice the promise. Jesus said, *“If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me”* (Rev. 3:20).

The Greeks in that day had three main meals; breakfast, a light midday meal, and then the evening meal called supper. Supper was the main meal of the day. It was more than just a time of enjoying good food; it was a time of enjoying fellowship with one another. It was a time of intimacy. Jesus said, “If you will open the door and let me come in I will sup with you. I will share myself with you.” That is His promise to His church. That is His promise to you and me today.

Probably all of you have seen Holman Hunt's picture of the Lord Jesus, the Light of the World. He's standing there with the lamp, knocking on the door. When he first painted that picture and was showing it one of the first times, a man came up to him and said, "Mr. Hunt, you've made a mistake on your painting. You have Jesus knocking on the door, but there's no handle on the outside of the door." Mr. Hunt said, "No, there's been no mistake. The handle is on the inside of the door."

Jesus is knocking at your heart's door. The handle that opens the door to our hearts is on the inside. It's our responsibility to "open the door" and invite the Savior in. If you will open up your heart to Jesus, He'll open up heaven to you. If you will give Him your heart He will give you Himself.

Sing, "Somebody's Knocking at Your Door."

If you've never trusted Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, I want to invite you to "open the door" of your heart, to repent of your sin and, by simple, child-like faith, receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord right now. (Lead in sinner's prayer.)

Christian, have you grown lukewarm like the saints in Laodicea? Has your heart grown cold? Have you become complacent about the things of God? Have you lost your spiritual fire? I want to invite you to "open the door" of your heart and invite Jesus to come in again, to rule and reign in your life again, to restore your spiritual passion again.

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