

To the Laodicean in All of Us

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Date: 27 November 2022

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[0 : 00] This is the word of God. And maybe as you hear those words in verses 15 through 16, those words that say, I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot.

I wish you were either one or the other. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth. Maybe as you hear those words, they're confusing.

I've always found those words to be confusing when I read them. Would Jesus really rather that I be an all-out atheist? Would he rather I be an atheist than just a casual church attender?

Is that really what he wants? Some people who read this passage seem to think so. Some commentators say, one for instance says that if you aren't essentially on fire for Jesus, you had far better have nothing at all to do with Christ.

That's what one says. Another says this, that any condition is better than being lukewarm. But I'm not sure that's actually what Jesus means here. I'm not sure if he's saying to you, it'd be better for you if you were an atheist than just someone who casually attended church.

[1 : 08] I think what Jesus is doing is he's drawing us a picture here like he often does. And it's a picture that we all know here this morning. It's that when it's cold, you want something hot to drink.

And when it's hot, you want something cold to drink. And lukewarm never satisfies the need that you feel really. And I think what Jesus is trying to get us to see is not that it's better to be an atheist than a casual Christian.

But like I said to the children, that Jesus actually has very sensitive taste buds, I think. And then he comes to a church like Laodicea and he tastes their Sunday mornings.

He tastes the worship. And he tastes the fellowship. And he tastes the preaching. And he tastes the singing. And he tastes the people's private lives who are there.

Their friendships and their attitudes and their meals together. And the things they talk about. The things they think about. And he's looking for something. He wants to be satisfied. In some ways he's almost tasting for something.

[2 : 08] And Jesus comes to Laodicea and he says, What I'm tasting here, this isn't it. And it's not just that this isn't it. It's that what I find here is actually repulsive to me. And the word Jesus uses to describe what he finds as he comes and tastes what's going on in Laodicea is he says, this is lukewarm to me.

And so as we think about that, that should lead us here this morning to come to the reality that Jesus is here this morning. And he's here with his acute sense of taste.

And he's tasting. And it makes me think, is he satisfied? Is he pleased with our worship here this morning? Is he pleased with our fellowship?

Is he pleased with the singing? Is he pleased with the preaching this morning? Is he pleased with the posture of my heart and your heart that we bring here this morning? And the scary thing about lukewarmness, one of the scariest things, is if you look in verse 17, it says, but you don't even realize it.

It's that the Laodiceans didn't even know that they were that way. Sometimes you sin and you know I sinned. They didn't even know it. And that's the terrifying reality of when we read this passage, is that your spiritual condition can be repulsive to the Lord, and you might not even know it.

[3 : 34] So what I want to talk about this morning is what it actually means to be lukewarm. What does that mean? Because I truly want Jesus to be satisfied with the worship this morning.

I would want, if he were here, and it's not if, because he is here, I want him to say, this is satisfying to me. I want him to be pleased and refreshed with our hearts as we come here and as we leave here and say the beautiful reality that Jesus could say, you're so pleasing to me.

And to do this, I want, the outline will be very simple for this sermon. I want to first look at the condition of this passage, the condition of the Laodiceans.

And second, the counsel that he gives them. Then third, the invitation. So just condition, counsel, and to avoid annoying alliteration, the invitation at the end. So first, the condition.

So the question is, the question of this sermon is, what does it really mean to be lukewarm? What was Jesus tasting in this Laodicean church that was so repulsive to him? And maybe if to bring it home a little bit further, what would that actually have looked like if you would have attended the free church of Laodicea?

[4 : 44] What would that have looked like on a Sunday morning? And to understand that, we have to understand a little bit more about Laodicea. You see, the city of Laodicea was really strategically positioned at the crossroads of main roads.

It had booming industries and banking, and it produced this famous eye salve. It had a school of ophthalmology. It had a large textile trade. So in other words, it had money, it had fashion, and it had academic prestige.

That was the city of Laodicea. You see, the city was so well off and so industrious that when an earthquake hit the area, they said, we don't even need help from the government. Like everyone else, all the other cities received help to help rebuild their cities.

And they said, we'll cover it ourselves. We have enough finances. We can do this. That's power. They said, we don't need anything.

And so it was any surprise when we look at verse 17 and we hear what these Laodiceans are saying, and they say, what do they say? They say, I'm rich. I've acquired wealth and do not need a thing.

[5 : 52] In other words, I'm rich. I got those riches myself. Thank you very much. Without the help of anybody. And I don't need anything. And I think maybe it'd be good for us just for a moment to ask the question, did they actually say those words out loud?

Were those things that you would have heard them saying to each other? The Dutch biblical theologian J.H. Bovink thinks probably they didn't say those things out loud. He says, he writes, did they really say it that way in Laodicea?

Were they sunk that deeply in their pride that expressed this so openly? I guess not. They most likely bravely sang of God's saving grace.

Nevertheless, in the deep crevices of their hearts, so softly that they themselves could not hear it, that's exactly what they said. The church still speaks of grace alone, but in the deepest sense, she begins to reason differently.

You see, this section, this letter, and all of Jesus' letters, if you were to look at each one of them, it begins with the two simple words, I know.

[7 : 03] In other words, I know you. I know what's going on underneath. I know that your hearts are whispering. Even beneath your sung and preached orthodoxy, I know what your hearts are saying.

My guess is that the church in Laodicea knew better than to say those words out loud. They were orthodox enough to know those weren't the right answers to the questions. They probably said, so what did they say?

They probably said things like, look how much the Lord has blessed us with as a congregation. How relevant we are to our booming city. How our members are working in every little corner of this city. How nice it is that we've been blessed with so much that we don't have to be a burden to other congregations. We can care for ourselves. We are a self-sufficient church, maybe they said. Meeting our own needs and blessed with so many resources.

Maybe that's what they said. You see, but Jesus knew. He knew what underneath those things, he knew what their hearts were really saying. Their hearts said, day after day, we've done this.

[8 : 13] We've built this thing. We're proud. We don't need to depend on anyone. See, but you can be wealthy and you can still, you can be successful and you can still love Jesus.

That's not where this sermon is going. Wealth itself is not the enemy. It can be a dangerous friend sometimes, but it's not the outright enemy. It's a blessing. But when your wealth leads your heart to say, even to think, even though you don't realize it, that I don't need anything.

I don't need anyone. That is what Jesus tastes. That's the lukewarmness. And he wants to spit that attitude out of his mouth. And he says that, that right there, that posture of heart is what I call lukewarm.

You see, their success had blinded them to how bankrupt their souls were, how needy they truly were for Jesus. You see, but we don't have to be wealthy or we don't have to live in Laodicea for the temperature of our hearts to begin to settle to that same spot.

For our hearts to say, maybe without even realizing it, I'm pretty sufficient. I don't, maybe beneath that sufficiency, I don't need Jesus. Our hearts can all become lukewarm and complacent.

[9 : 32] But what does that actually look like? What does that actually, what does it look like for a heart to become lukewarm? It can look like a lot of things, but let me just give you one maybe practical example. Every day that you don't come to the Lord in prayer and dependence upon his word, your heart is saying something.

It's saying, I don't actually need Jesus today. I'm so busy that I can handle this on my own.

And the converse is also true. When you do come to the Lord in prayer and you come to his word, your heart is also saying, I know my soul needs Jesus today.

I know that I need him. I need him to uphold me. You're testifying to your heart and to Jesus, how much you need him, even for the most mundane of days.

And Jesus tastes that heart. He tastes that dependent heart and he says, that satisfies me. That pleases me. I rejoice in that. So the next question we have to ask is, how does your heart actually get to the point where it says, I don't need Jesus?

[10 : 44] How does your heart get there? Because I don't think any of the Laodiceans wanted their hearts to get there. And I don't think anyone in this room wants their heart to get there. So how does it actually get there? And for each person, it's different. But if you look again at verse 17 with me, you can kind of see how it got there.

It says, I have acquired wealth. In other words, I have made myself rich. I got this myself.

There's a helpful, I think, paradigm for thinking about the Christian process of sanctification. Maybe some of you have heard of it before, but it's like weeding an old neglected garden if you've done that before.

When you begin, what do you begin with? You begin getting the big things out. You're pulling out huge rocks, and you're pulling out tires, and you're pulling out cans. You're not even really weeding yet. And that's where the Christian life begins, I think.

Christ says, don't commit adultery. Don't murder. Stop cheating. See, those are big and actually relatively simple sins to see because it's just as obvious as a tire being in a garden.

[11 : 51] It doesn't belong there. It doesn't mean it's easy always to fix the problem, but it's easy to see the problem. You see, but as you progress in sanctification, the problems get, they get trickier.

You start to actually have to deal with weeds, and you have to decide what is a plant and what is a weed. I remember pulling out plants at some point, the wrong ones. It's no longer just don't murder your brother, but now don't hate your brother, or now don't speak poorly of your brother behind his back.

And now it's not as simple because you have to decide what does it actually mean within me not to hate my brother? What does it mean to, what's a kind word and what's not a kind word? And is this gossip? It's no longer just don't commit adultery, but now be careful what you look at.

And as you progress, the weeding gets finer and finer, more subtle and more nuanced. And the questions really get harder as you move along. It's no longer just why did you say that unkind word to your brother?

It's now, what is your heart like when someone praises you? What is your heart? How does your heart respond to that? Or why do you serve in the ministry that you do?

[13 : 01] What's the heart behind that? You see, as you progress, God, it's almost like he's lifting up the rocks of the good things that you do and asking, why do you do those things? The questions get much harder.

And at first, as I thought about Laodicea and I was preparing for this, I thought, there it is. That's the answer to Laodicea. You see, Laodicea was at a very advanced stage of sanctification, I thought. Jesus was uncovering the subtle motivations of their hearts and saying, you're doing all these good things, but you're missing the point. But that's not what's happening here at all, actually, the more I thought about it.

You see, it isn't that Laodicea is so advanced in the Christian life that God is now asking them hard questions. That they are just weeding out the most complicated of sins. That they're at the most advanced level of sanctification.

Instead, Jesus looks at Laodicea and the letter he writes to them and he says, you've got the whole thing wrong. Why did they get the whole thing wrong? Because they didn't start right.

[14:06] You see, they started off with their own efforts. How do we know they started off with their own efforts? Because look at what they said at the end. They said, I've made myself rich. I got here myself.

And we can tell how they started because they built their whole way there. I have acquired wealth. I got this all myself. See, you can do that whole process of sanctification, of weeding, of pulling out tires and cans all the way to the finest weeds.

And you can do it all by yourself and for yourself. You can create a beautiful garden that Jesus comes to you and he says, that's your garden. That's yours.

I never did that. I wasn't a part of that. That's your garden. And everything you will have created will mean nothing to him.

And that is what Jesus says to them. He says, you think you've created something beautiful, Laodiceans. You're so proud of yourself. You boast in your self-sufficiency and how much you're doing as a church.

[15:10] But actually, you're wretched and you're pitiable and you're poor and you're blind and you're naked and you don't even realize it. So I would just ask you very simply here this morning, I think we should all ask ourselves, is there something in our hearts that says, I'm sufficient?

That maybe I don't truly need Jesus. I appreciate him as a nice add-on to my life, but I don't need him for the things I do. I wonder if that belief has crept in anywhere into our hearts and maybe we don't even realize it.

Have you weeded your own spiritual garden to this beautiful creation and Jesus was never at the start of that? Have you hoped that Jesus would look at your creation and say, I accept you, beautiful, instead of letting him, the true gardener, create something beautiful himself?

Is there something in you that comes to Sunday morning services and to say in your heart, I don't actually get that much out of the preaching, but it really isn't for me anyway.

It's for, I see new believers, I see maybe unbelievers, I see visitors. I know how to manage my life, but I really hope they heard that sermon. That would have been good for them to hear. I need to send that link to this person.

[16:23] They would really benefit from that. Do you come and you say, I don't stick around much after church actually to spend time with people. The people here are really kind, I really like them, but I have plenty of other friends.

Christian friends are so important for new believers to have, but I have other friends. That's the heart that comes and says in some subtle way, I don't need what happens here.

I'm actually okay. And that's not the heart that Jesus is looking for. The heart that Jesus loves is the one that says, I need Sunday morning worship.

My soul needs to sing with the people of God, the truths of God. My soul needs to sit under the word and have the spirit work in me because I know that there are things in my heart that maybe I don't even see deep down that I don't even know about and I need Jesus to unmask my own sins and show me them.

I need him to breathe new life into my heart. Is that the way you come to a Sunday morning? And you might be asking this morning, is this me? Has my heart slowly become lukewarm in some way?

[17:33] Have I started to quietly believe in subtle ways that I don't actually need Jesus? Maybe you're asking that question. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson in a sermon on this passage gives us a test on how to know if that's us or not us.

He said, here's how you know. Here's how you know if that's you this morning. If you read what Jesus says to the Laodiceans, if you read the hymn say to them, you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked, and you say, wow, they must have been really bad.

Then, from the bottom of my heart, I think, you have to ask yourself, maybe I'm lukewarm. But if you sit here and you say, and you hear those words and you say, oh, how true those words are of my own spiritual condition, and your heart is just broken in two over them, then your heart is anything but lukewarm.

Your heart is broken for the Lord. And Christ says to you this morning, he says, come, dine with me. Christ says, the posture of your soul is so delightful and precious to me.

Whichever of the two you are this morning, Jesus has counsel for you, which is our next main point, the counsel. Christ says to you, verse 18, he says, here's what I counsel you to do.

[18:56] Which, as a side note, is amazing, that Jesus, the ruler of the earth, would say, not that here's what I command you to do, although he could say that. He says, friend, let me give you and your soul some advice.

I want to talk to you about your soul. And here's what he counsels them to do. If you look at verse 18, he says, buy from me. Buy from me. He says, Laodiceans, you live in a market economy. You're used to industry. You're used to trade. You're used to exchange. You're used to all this language. Well, you traders, come buy from me now. Come do business with me. Stop trading with your old suppliers and enter my markets now.

I want to talk to you about trade. Jesus says, I have something you need. Come now and do business with me. from me. Those are the words that the Laodiceans truly needed to learn. They needed to learn that they needed what Christ had to offer. That they had needs. That they had to go to Jesus and no other market to find and meet. And look what he tells them they need.

[20:00] What he tells them to buy from him. He says to them, Buy from me gold so that you may be rich. Clothes so that you may clothe yourself and eye salve so that you may see.

And the connection is so obvious. If you look at verse 17, they were poor and naked and blind more than they could ever imagine. And so Jesus says to them, You who are poor, come get gold from me.

You who are naked, come get clothes from me. You who are blind, come get eye salve from me. Do you remember how Jesus was first presented in the first chapter of Revelation?

Do you remember how he's presented there? If you just turn over maybe one or two pages to Revelation chapter 1. And you look at verse 13. Chapter 1, verse 13.

It says, Among the lampstands was someone like a son of man dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.

[21:10] His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp, double-edged sword.

His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. Do you see the gold? Do you see the white wool? Do you see the eyes blazing with fire? And what does Jesus tell the Laodicean church to do? Come buy gold refined by fire from me. Come get white garments from me. Come get salve to anoint your eyes from me. In other words, he's telling them, come, take of me.

So what this means is this. Jesus is saying, come and buy from me. Period. Invest all you have in me. You are made to look like I am, so stop spending all your money trying to look like the Laodiceans, and being conformed into their image, and thinking their thoughts. Spend all your time, and all your resources, buying of me, of what I have. Or as another New Testament author would put it, put on Christ.

[22:22] Clothe yourself in Christ. And isn't this nothing more than a vivid picture of faith? Faith is a heart that says, I have need of everything.

I am bankrupt. I am blind. I can't see. I am in poverty. Please, give me yourself, Christ. Give me your riches. Give me your purity. Give me your eyes.

But most of all, would you give me you? And it's here that we begin to see the answer to the question of how do we fix this? How do we fix this lukewarm heart that's within us?

And the answer is simple. It's, we must take of Christ. We must be so united to him, have such rich communion with him that we realize how much we need this person.

And isn't that true? Isn't it true that the more that you spend time with someone, the more you realize how deeply you truly need that person in your life? until the point where you find yourself saying or thinking, whatever did I do before I had this person with me?

[23:26] I need them in every little corner of my life. The same is true with Christ. The more you spend time with him, the more you realize how much you need this person in your life.

And you begin to rely on him every moment of the day. You draw from his resources over and over and over again and he just keeps saying to you moment after moment, day after day, take of me, child, take of me, take of me.

And at the same time, the more you spend time with this, with anyone, the less you want to grieve that person. The last thing you'd ever want to do is grieve a dear friend with your life.

So we begin to see what it is to be hot with passion for Christ. It's not to be an emotional fanatic. It's not necessarily how loud you sing or if you lift up your hands.

It's not to be charismatic. When Jesus says be hot or cold, he's saying ask everything of Christ. It is for Christ to be everything to you in your life.

[24 : 31] Jesus says to them, buy from me. Buy. And if we're talking about exchange, I think we have to ask, what does this cost them? What do these things cost us here this morning?

And in one sense, I think we all know the answer to that question. It costs you nothing. You cannot buy salvation. It's a free gift. Christ offers himself to all of you freely this morning.

But in another sense, it costs you everything. One author put it this way, we can only buy these things when we sell all we have.

All our secret self-satisfactions, all our pseudo-importance and pomposity, all our intelligence and brain power. And maybe you're here this morning and something of this resounds in your heart. Maybe you feel as though a mirror has been held up to you this morning and it's no longer you just reading this passage, but it's beginning to read you. But maybe you still say quietly in your heart, I don't know.

[25 : 38] You see that it will cost you everything. And something in you wants to say yes to Jesus this morning, but something in you also wants to sin tomorrow. And you say with Augustine, oh Lord, make me chaste, but please not yet.

But have you noticed that you aren't the only one in this passage? Jesus is also in this passage. If you look with me at verse 14, Jesus says, these are the words of the amen.

In other words, I am the amen. That's not something we normally use, really think of Jesus as the amen. That's something we say at the end of a prayer. So what does it mean for Jesus to be the amen?

Well, that's exactly what you say at the end of a prayer. Truly, truly, let it be so. It's agreement. It's the opposite of any indecision, any wavering, doubting, any insecurity, or fear.

And Jesus says, I am that one. The opposite of all those things. I am the assured one. I am the resolute one. Everything I set out to do, I accomplish. There's not a glimmer of uncertainty in the person of Christ.

[26 : 56] So when you come to him and your faith is feeble and doubting, when you're faithless, he remains faithful. When you come to him and say, I don't know. I don't know if I have that resolve in me.

Jesus says, take that of me. I have enough for you. So if you're wavering this morning by assuredness from Jesus, he says, I have enough. Buy from me.

Come, take from my markets that which you lack. And isn't that the beauty of the gospel? That faith is nothing but clinging on to him and his righteousness and saying, Lord, I believe.

Help my unbelief. I need your belief. Or maybe you're here this morning and you say, but what will this cost me actually? Will it cost me my reputation in this environment?

Or what will people think of me? And look again at verse 14. Jesus says to you, I am the faithful and true, it says witness there, but maybe it should be translated more literally, I'm the faithful and true martyr.

[27 : 54] That's the word. In other words, Jesus is saying, I followed the will of my father even when it led me to a cross. There's nothing that you could suffer that I haven't suffered in your place.

It will not cost you anything that it hasn't cost me. Or maybe you're here this morning and you say, but what will I lose? What will I have to give up? And Jesus says to you again, looking at verse 14, he says, I am the ruler of God's creation.

In other words, I rule over everything you could ever want because I created all of it. What could you possibly lose by serving the one who created the stars and the sea?

See, in your fear, uncertainty, worry, and doubt, Jesus is saying, whatever you lack, come, buy from me. I will supply that for you. Clothe yourself with the certainty, peace, and faithfulness of Jesus.

And in verse 19, Jesus says, even though these things are hard to hear, these are hard things to say, I'm saying them because I love you.

[29 : 05] Buy from me all that you have. Be zealous. Leave your old markets behind. Turn from your old ways. Be zealous in coming after me.

So you might have heard this passage this morning as a, and maybe other sermons on this, and when you think about what it means to be lukewarm, you think it's a call to be more zealous, to be more wholehearted, and you think, okay, God is calling me to do more.

I should really begin to volunteer more for church. There's this area that I've been putting off. I think it's time that I sign up for that, or I have this neighbor that I've really been wanting to talk to, and maybe it's time to stop being lukewarm.

I need to actually talk to that person. But if you actually get the logic of this passage, Jesus isn't calling you to do more. He's calling you to be more.

Be more zealous in your neediness for Jesus. Be zealous in your putting on of Christ, realizing your inadequacy and saying, I'm coming to Jesus for this area. Be closer to Jesus as you rely on him as a friend.

[30 : 11] And if you will do that, then Jesus says, if you will do that, I have an invitation for you. And he has an invitation for all of us here this morning, and that's the last point.

It's in closing. This letter ends with an invitation. It ends with that picture, Jesus paints for us another picture. It's of him standing outside a door and knocking and calling out.

He says, here I am. And the question is, this morning, will you hear him? Will you hear him as a church calling out to all of you, saying, I have taste buds for what happens in this church?

Will you actually conform your lives to what I long for? Will you hear him calling out to you individually? And will you respond?

And the scary reality that we even see in this passage is how easy it is not to hear his voice, or to hear his voice on Sunday and then to tune it out the rest of the week. Jesus says, if, if you hear my voice this morning, how easy it is to fill our lives with the noise of TV and busyness and music and good things and friendships and events, that we don't hear the consistent knocking of Jesus calling out to us day after day after day after day.

[31 : 39] And if you think about that, how scary of a reality it is that one day that knocking will stop and it will be quiet. the last knock will have sounded and Jesus will have left the door.

And I ask you, as a church, what will become of you when this kind, loving Savior leaves the door and stops knocking, stops calling out and saying, here I am, buy from me, take from me.

When the last knock sounds and his last call out is given and you don't come to the door, what will become of your soul then? Oh, but if you do, if you run to that door and say, Jesus, I need you, I realize the depth of my own neediness for you.

Look what he says, he says, I'll come in and I'll eat with you. And he didn't even need to put it, he says, and you with me, just to make sure we have this picture of this intimate fellowship between us and Christ.

In other words, I'm eating with you, you're eating with me, there's fellowship here. And he says, you'll sit with me on my throne and you will be with me and maybe you're wondering, what does that actually mean?

[32 : 47] But the important thing is with me. In other words, you'll be with Jesus. And the question is, what do you have to do in order for this to happen? What do you actually have to do? If you look at verse 21, it says, it's the one who conquers.

And every letter to each of these churches in Revelation says, to the one who conquers. And you might think, okay, I need to conquer. It's time to wake up early tomorrow morning and conquer. But it doesn't mean just pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and making more of yourself, of going back to work on your own garden.

It means realizing how much you need Jesus. That's what it means to conquer. It's to conquer the own voices in your head that say, I am sufficient and saying, no, those are lies.

I'm desperate and needy for this person. It means, to conquer means to be with him and to take of him every day as he offers himself to you each moment saying, take of me, dear friend.

And if you do, if you will live like that, if you will conquer the own voices of sufficiency that are ringing out in each of our heads, you who once were wretched and pitiable and poor and blind and naked, you'll be someone who eats with Jesus.

[34 : 04] You'll be someone who sits on a throne with Jesus. You who were a pauper will be a prince in that day. Let me close this in prayer.

jimEN