

OVERCOMING LUKEWARM CHRISTIANITY
Revelation 3:14-22

Sermon for Peace Church
October 14, 2007

PURPOSE - To renew believers in a life of zealous thanks to Jesus, their Lord and Savior.

MAIN IDEA - Lukewarm Christianity is the result of material and religious self-satisfaction and is only overcome by the joy and thanks in Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

I. INTRODUCTION

Let's open our Bibles to Rev. 3:14 ...

... to the last of 7 letters Jesus authors to His church through the apostle John.

1. Back in the 1980's, churches began to design their ministry, especially Sunday mornings, MORE INTENTIONALLY around who they wanted to ATTRACT.

- So arose a movement which produced seeker-sensitive services, seeker-friendly services, believer-oriented services.

(i) There was much good in this - churches became more intentional in ministry, the unchurched better welcomed.

A. The danger, however, in this line of thinking is that in a zeal to attract people, we forget to attract the ONE PERSON absolutely necessary for the well-being of the church - JESUS! Churches want Jesus to be at home in their midst ...

- ... cause when Jesus shows up in church, things happen! He always draws a crowd - read the gospels ... and He heals the sick and teaches the hungry and confronts the wicked. He finds the lost.

- a spiritually DYNAMIC church will be one that is intentional in welcoming the Spirit and Word of Jesus among us.

2. To that end, we've gone through these 7 letters in Revelation 2&3 to LISTEN ... and learn what He VALUES in a church. We want Him to be at home here!

- So these letters CALL us FORWARD.

- (i) IN them, Jesus calls us to “overcome” = “NIKE”, triumph, conquer:
- A. COLD HEARTS - busy, loveless Christianity
 - B. DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES - we grow through them
 - C. WORLDLY COMPROMISE - eating food sacrificed to idols
 - D. SEXUAL IMMORALITY - which stains so deeply
 - E. SLEEPY INDIFFERENCE - to the ways evil encroaches
 - F. HESITANCY IN UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY - let’s go for it with Him
- ... take the doors He opens.

3. Today’s is probably the best-known of the 7 letters - Jesus confronts lukewarmness in His church.

Read Rev. 3:14-22

II. THE CAUSE

1. There you have it, boys & girls, what does Jesus do with lukewarm Christians?
He’s inclined to SPITS THEM OUT!
- The Greek word actually means “VOMIT”!

(i) Lukewarm water is hard to swallow - and the city of Laodecia actually had that kind of water. Jesus uses something from this church’s everyday life to compare them to.

Archaeologists have discovered that its water came from a 6-mile aqueduct from the hot springs at Hierapolis, another city. But by the time that water travelled 6 miles, it had cooled down. So you check into the Holiday Inn at Laodecia, open the tap for cold water, and out would come LUKEWARM WATER.

Then just to the east, was the city of Colosse. It had snow-capped mountains and clear, cold streams of water coming from the snow melt-off.

But Laodecia’s water was neither hot nor cold. It was lukewarm ...

... like the Christians in its church! = repulsive!

(ii) Are we like that?

Each of us have to answer that question ourselves today.

- Am I becoming lukewarm?

I’m not sure that that word fits our church as a whole:

(i) When I look at how hard-working many of you are for God - boards, committees, schools, programs, youth groups, food ministry, social causes, studies - the word “lukewarm” honestly doesn’t seem to fit.

2. What I think, however, is the VALUE of this letter is to notice the CAUSE BEHIND Laodecia's lukewarmness, lest this spirit ever begin to set in our lives.

Verse 17 - The Laodiceans had become lukewarm because they said, "*I am rich. I have acquired wealth and DO NOT NEED A THING!*"

- They had become SELF-SATISFIED!
- Their life for God had become SPENT in the cause of satisfying their own standards and needs.

(i) Laodecia was a WEALTHY city - a center of banking & commerce in the ancient world.

This church too had obvious wealth.

- A. If you serve God for the sake of having a well-provided life
- 2 car garage, dog in the yard, mortgage under control, good clothes & food, safe neighborhood - and then all those things come to be - what happens?
- YOU'RE SELF-SATISFIED ... *I don't need a thing* ...
- ... and the flame of service for God LESSENS - invariably!

B. On occasion, especially when it's rough serving God, that thought tempts me: "Well, at least I'm getting paid for it! ... I have a nice lifestyle."

- I renounce & rebuke that thought - "What I get out of it" - It's Satanic and will lead to lukewarmness.

- I want to serve God when I retire MORE EFFECTIVELY, more passionately than I do today.

3. But self-satisfaction in our service for God can not only be discovered materially, it can also infect us RELIGIOUSLY.

(i) Back in 1989, Karen and I planted a church in Ontario. There were 9 other families that joined with us to begin. We were a phenomenally zealous group - reaching out, welcoming people, building relationships, praying ... = red hot!

And God blessed us - and in 3 years we grew to the point of being financially stable and formally organized by our denomination. The day that happened, it was like the air went out of the bubble.

= "Whew! We made it. We're a church now! ... *I don't need a thing!*
... and lukewarmness set in!

A. And I'm scratching my head thinking, "What's going on here? What was BEHIND that zeal?"

(ii) Do we serve God just to preserve a religious organization and culture?

- Is it just so that I can have friends and family together?

... to keep a lifestyle that has served me so well?

A. Those are important questions for us, as Peace Church stabilizes beyond white flight! Will stability bring the onset of lukewarmness?

4. The LAODICEANS HAD BECOME SELF-SATISFIED - *"I'm rich ... I don't need a thing"*

- But in Jesus' eyes, that self-satisfaction had made them "pitiful, poor, blind and naked."

(i) HE LOVES THIS CHURCH - v. 19 - *"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline"*

... and so, He prescribes a CURE for their lukewarmness.

III. THE CURE

Verse 18 - Because you're poor, blind and naked, *"I counsel you to buy from ME gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; white clothes to wear - so you can cover your nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."*

If treasuring self-satisfaction is the CAUSE of lukewarmness, its CURE is TREASURING JESUS CHRIST - His life, death and resurrection.

- That's what the gold, clothes & salve represent.

1. The gold is His obedience - refined in the FIRES - of the wilderness, Gethsemane, the Cross.

- through all that suffering & temptation, even to death by crucifixion, He remained the "faithful and true witness" (v. 14) - Hebrews 4 - He "learned" obedience.

- His obedience is refined gold. ... BUY IT! TREASURE IT!!!

(i) Christian, don't you get a BUZZ when the obedience of Jesus marks your life?!

I.e. - you're worshiping ... and a JOY comes in that worship, a RELEASE, a FREEDOM, a cleansing, a POWER - it's Jesus' worship in you.

- You're fighting temptation - ready blow your lid at someone who mistreated you at work, but you pray ... and then a spirit of peace, wisdom, even LOVE for that person marks your heart - and you act other than you'd normally do - what a joy!

- You're listening to someone's testimony - how she was saved by listening to a Christian song on the radio - and it turned her life around - and you find yourself weeping in praise, your heart aligned with the angels and Father above.

A. The great thing about being a Christian is that, by the power of the Spirit, Jesus' life - His obedience - lives in you. It's eternal life / heavenly life. It's pure gold! It's sacred. It's good. It's true life.

2. WHITE CLOTHES - are a reminder of His death - which makes full atonement for our sins - cleanses us in forgiveness - makes us pure before the Father.

Wearing them we know that GOD IS FOR US! We don't have to prove ourself to Him. Wearing them we gain freedom from performance orientation, approval addiction, shame & blame. God is for us.

(i) In his book, "The Search for Significance", Robert McGee lists 4 false beliefs that plague & defeat people:

- A. I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself.
- B. I must have the approval of certain others to feel good about myself.
- C. Those who fail, (including myself), are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished.
- D. I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.

(ii) The WHITE CLOTHES of Jesus FREE US from these lies.

- A. Wearing them, I am justified and pleasing to God. I don't fear failure.
- B. Wearing them, I am accepted by God. I don't have to fear rejection.
- C. Wearing them, I am loved by God. I don't have to fear punishment or punish others - shaming them for their failures.
- D. Wearing them, I am a new creation and no longer need be bound by the pain of shame. I am not hopeless. I can change.

When you taste this freedom, when you GROW in it, does it not ENTHRALL your heart?

- Rollercoasters are a riot - but compared to this freedom, they're boring!

3. SALVE - is healing ointment for the eyes.

The Laodecians were so blind in their self-satisfaction that they could no longer see the things in this world that God wanted them to see.

They had lost a vision that God had for their church.

They had lost a vision that God could see for their individual lives.

(i) Jesus heals the blind. He gives vision. He reveals the plans God has for our lives, the steps of our development.

- Risen & ascended, He sends His Spirit to help us see God's preferred future for our lives.

The CURE for lukewarm Christianity is in Jesus' life, death and resurrection - because in receiving these gifts from Christ, we are filled with thanks.

- In treasuring Christ over self-satisfaction, our zeal knows no end!

We do good because Christ, by His Spirit, is renewing us to be like himself. In our living we're expressing THANKS to God for all He has done - wanting HIM to be praised, not self to be satisfied. (Lord's Day # 32)

IV. CONCLUSION

But PRESCRIBED CURES mean nothing if those PRESCRIPTIONS aren't acted on.

- To avoid or heal lukewarmness, you need to BUY from Christ; & TAKE the medicine. HERE'S HOW:

(GO TO TABLE)

Verse 19-20 - *Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.*

HERE I AM. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

WE OVERCOME LUKEWARMNESS BY EARNEST REPENTANCE AND THEN EATING WITH JESUS!

1. But the meal described in this letter is UNIQUE.

- It's one that we open the door and invite Jesus to eat with us.

Typically when I stand here, I say Jesus invites you to eat with Him.

- And He does!

- This meal is His life / death / and resurrection

- His gold / white clothes / healing salve.

- But we can go through the motions of this meal and never really commune with Jesus.

2. Today, the Word calls us to invite Jesus to come in and MINISTER TO OUR

HEARTS by the power of the Spirit. That's communion.

(i) In the imagery of this passage, Jesus is at a distance from your heart.

- WHERE do you sense He is outside KNOCKING?

A. Does the power of His life - His obedience / strength ... that good feel distant to you?

B. Does the power of His death - its forgiveness & freedom - feel outside your heart?

C. Or the power of His resurrection vision - your plans / future / your service in His kingdom feel outside.

3. This bread & cup signify his life, death & resurrection.

- through faith, this meal SEALS to us the benefits of Christ.

- As it is being served, ask Jesus to come.

- He promises to eat with you and minister the truth of his life / death and resurrection.

4. Lukewarmness is overcome by eating of Christ and with Christ ... TODAY!

To him who overcomes lukewarmness, Jesus gives the right to sit with him on his eternal throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

AMEN!

1. Prayer
2. * Song - Table of Plenty
3. Institution
4. Invitation - *This table is prepared for all who love Jesus and trust in Him alone for their salvation. All who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who desire to live in obedience to him, are now invited to receive in gladness from the table of the Lord.*
5. Pass - both bread & cup - retain till all have been served
 Invite the Lord to come by His Spirit
 - Then we will eat & drink together.
6. Song - "More Precious"
7. Communion
8. * Philippians 3