

I Stand at the Door and Knock

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[0 : 00] This is the PM service on March the 29th, 1998. The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled, I Stand at the Door and Knock, and is from Revelation, chapter 3, verses 14 to 22.

Which is worse, indifference or outright rejection? Is it worse to be apathetic to Jesus or antagonistic to him?

At first thoughts, we would probably say the latter. It is worse to be outrightly rejecting Jesus or antagonistic to him rather than to be apathetic or indifferent to him.

But in fact, it's the former. Jesus cannot stand indifference towards himself. He cannot stand those who just don't care less about him, one way or the other.

To be indifferent means that it makes no difference whether Jesus is yes or no, whether he's there or not. That's indifference. It doesn't matter. It doesn't care.

[1 : 31] At least, you see, those who reject Jesus outrightly recognize his importance, that somehow we need to decide about him.

But indifference is the height of rudeness to Jesus Christ. For many people in our day and age, the name of Jesus still evokes some strong reactions to them.

That's seen sometimes in the way people use his name as swear words. But for the majority of the people in our society, there is indifference. They don't care less.

They think Jesus might have been a good man or a good teacher, but it's pretty irrelevant to how we live our lives today. They're not bothered either way. If you want to go to church, well, that's fine. That's your business. But it doesn't bother me at all. That's indifference. And indifferent people can't understand the fuss that Christians make about Jesus.

[2 : 31] They can't understand why people would want to follow him or give their lives for him. They cannot comprehend his claims. They cannot comprehend his death or his purpose.

And the majority of our world insults Jesus by their indifference to him. And the reaction of Jesus to that?

It cannot be more disdainful. The church at Laodicea suffered from that sort of indifference that our world suffers from.

And Jesus' words to it are harsh and condemning. There are no words of praise about the church that is indifferent, the church at Laodicea.

And like the last shower in the morning at a camp or a cadet camp, they are lukewarm. The heat's gone. So if you get up late, you end up with a lukewarm shower.

[3 : 35] And hardly anybody likes a lukewarm shower. So Jesus' words to this church in verse 15 are, I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot.

You're lukewarm, in effect, is what Jesus is saying here. And anything is better than lukewarmness. He goes on to say, I wish that you were either cold or hot.

That is, I wish that you'd actually take a stand. That you'd be for me, or actually rejecting me, but the indifference I can't tolerate.

The people who think Jesus doesn't really matter at all. And this may be a striking way of thinking. We'd probably think that Jesus would be more disgusted with those who take an opposing view to him, on the far extreme of antagonism.

And yet not actually the case. And I think in Christian ministry, this bears itself out. It seems to me that the people who are most vulnerable to becoming Christians are often those who are the most antagonistic.

[4 : 41] The people who are indifferent are much further from Jesus than those who seem to be way out on the extreme of antagonism. So Jesus says to them, in verse 16, Literally, he's saying, you make me sick.

The word is actually quite a coarse word. It's almost vulgar. He's saying, I'm going to puke because of you. I'm going to vomit. I'm going to chuck up. I'm going to spew you out of my mouth.

Anyone reading this or hearing it for the first time would be shocked by the force behind Jesus' words here. It's not a gentle little dainty, but rather one of those uncontrollable vomits that goes, This is utter rejection of those who are lukewarm.

Indifference to Jesus makes him nauseous. Now the people of Laodicea, 2,000 years ago, or 1,900 years ago, would have understood the image that's used here in these words.

The town of Laodicea in John's day, that is the years after Jesus' resurrection, late in the first century AD, the town of Laodicea was an important place.

[6 : 04] It was built on the crossroads in the middle of eastern Turkey. We've got a map, actually, to show you that Roger's going to put up. Thank you. The last few weeks we've been travelling through some of these towns and now in the middle of western Turkey there is Laodicea.

And it's actually on a crossroads, a road from Ephesus straight through to Laodicea heading towards the east, and another road that's come down from Pergamum all the way through Philadelphia, Laodicea, and it's heading down towards the Mediterranean.

Important roads in the ancient world. Thanks, Roger. This was a strategic place. It was a trading place. And it was built for the road, because of the roads.

But there's one thing lacking. An adequate water supply. The little village that started there, that was okay. There was a little river running past. But once this town began to grow, then its water supply was too small.

Now, as it happened, just up the road, about 10 kilometres away, as the crow flies, was a place called Hierapolis. Magnificent ruins today. And there at Hierapolis were hot water springs.

[7 : 20] 36 degrees. Now, that's the ideal sort of shower, isn't it, in the morning when you're on a camp or a cadet camp. So you'd go to Hierapolis for your morning shower. It's a fantastic place and a major tourist place today in Turkey.

The day I was there, you swim around in this massive spa bath, in effect. Ancient columns, 2,000 years old, are sort of in the bottom of this swimming pool that's been made around it.

And there's waters gushing out here, there, and everywhere at 36 degrees. They were medicinal waters. I can understand why. The day I was there, I wasn't feeling very well.

But tell me, it was very soothing to be swimming in this sort of massive spa bath. Now, the trouble was that by the time the water was channeled down terracotta pipes all the way from Hierapolis down to Laodicea, 10 kilometers or more away, the water was lukewarm, no longer 36 degrees. Turn on your equivalent of an ancient tap. And the Hierapolis water that you now got at Laodicea was well and truly off the boil, lukewarm. And indeed, as you walk around Laodicea today, which isn't much apart from a field and lots of bits of rock lying around, you can still see bits of the terracotta pipes and the big stones that carried them 2,000 years ago.

[8 : 43] But the other thing about this water from Hierapolis is not just that it was lukewarm. It was mineral water. It was full of calcium. And in fact, Hierapolis is on the top of a hill, a 300-foot cliff in fact.

And these bubbling waters over the centuries have created a great white deposit of calcium carbonate on the top of a cliff. It looks sort of like a lunar landscape today. Try drinking that water. It's not all that pleasant because it's so full of minerals. Last year on holidays, I was up in outback Queensland staying with a friend who's a minister with Bush Church Aid and their water is from the bore.

It's hot. They don't have to actually heat any water. They have to cool it. And their water was full of sulfur. And the whole house stank of the smell of sulfur. Well, it's a bit like that in ancient Laodicea. Not only was the water unpleasant, but it made people vomit at times if they drank it in two bigger doses. And the water that came to Laodicea no longer had any medicinal purpose either.

[9 : 55] It was very useful up there in Hierapolis where it was nice and hot and bubbling and fresh. But by the time it got to Laodicea, it wasn't much good at all. And if you head down the other way to a place called Colossae, a little bit further than Hierapolis, the place to where the letter to the Colossians went, there was nice, cold, spring, fresh water.

Beautiful water to drink. Laodicea was in the middle. And its water made you puke. Where does the indifference of the Laodiceans come from?

John, in writing this, recording Jesus' very words about this place, has used their image of their background of the city, their water supply, to describe their spiritual state as well.

But why are they an indifferent church? Where does such indifference come from? There's no heresy here, you see. There's no persecution here, like some of the other churches we've seen in recent weeks.

But what we do see hidden here is the self-sufficiency, the wealth, the riches of the people in the church of Laodicea. And they're complacent because of that.

[11:05] Indeed, so wealthy was the town of Laodicea that in AD 60, not many years before this was written, there was a major earthquake in Laodicea. And the town had to be rebuilt.

Now usually when there was an earthquake, the government, the imperial government in Rome, would give money to rebuild, as it had done as we saw last week in Philadelphia and Sardis. But not in Laodicea, we will build it ourselves.

We've got enough money, and they did it. And what a boast for a town. We have enough wealth to rebuild our city, ourselves, without help, from Rome.

One wonders then if Jesus is quoting their sort of boast at the beginning of verse 17. He says, For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.

Their wealth came from banking, from the trade that passed through their city, and it came from the fine black wool of the sheep in that area. And the reason, you see, is that they're lukewarm is because of their wealth.

[12:14] So notice the very first word of verse 17. For, you say, that is because, this is saying, you are lukewarm because you say, I am rich.

Their wealth is the cause of their self-sufficiency, their indifference. But the tragic thing is that they fail to perceive their need.

Jesus says, For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. But then the second half of the verse is a damning indictment. You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Five things, one after the other, strung together to show just how desperate was their condition. But the tragedy of it is not that they're poor, but they fail to see they're poor. The tragedy is not that they're blind, but that they fail to see that they're blind.

And so on. Their self-perception was that they were rich, but that didn't match up to the reality. No wonder you see they're indifferent to Jesus because they think they've got everything they need.

[13:18] They think that Jesus hasn't got anything that they need, so why bother with him? He's there as a crutch for other people to lean on, but not us, thank you very much. We've got all that we need. Thank you.

Goodbye. Shut the door on your face. People who don't see their own need are indifferent about Jesus Christ. They don't care about him.

He's irrelevant to them. It's only when people appreciate the need for a saviour that they see the point of Jesus Christ and will be saved.

It seems to me that our suburb is full of people like the Laodicean Christians. It's full of people who might have started out in some sort of form of Christian faith, but now they've got everything they need.

They're grand palaces in the local side streets. They're nice cars. They're holiday homes. They're boats. They're children and they're grandchildren and all the trappings of life. Thank you very much.

[14:15] We're very comfortable. Yes, it's nice to know that you come from the church. Slam the door on your face. They're indifferent. They don't care. They think they've got everything they need. They can't comprehend why they would need Jesus or where he would fit into their already wealthy full life.

The tragedy is they don't see or perceive their own spiritual plight. They don't see that they're really pitiable, wretched, poor, blind, and naked.

Well, Jesus ironically, even sarcastically counsels these Laodiceans to spend money. Therefore, I counsel you to buy.

It's a sarcastic invitation because in effect he's saying to people, you think you can buy whatever you want. Well, now buy something from me.

Try these things. You rich bankers, you rich traders, buy these things. He's mocking their self-sufficiency. You see, he's saying in effect, your money can't do it.

[15:22] You can't buy these things that I have that you need. Not all the money in China or Turkey or wherever will buy all this. You see, you need me after all is the mocking tone of this verse.

Therefore, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich. But Jesus isn't talking about gold that you go along to some metallurgist and pick up a kilogram of gold or something for lunch.

He's talking about a metaphorical gold. He's talking about pure, refined faith. That is, faith that stood the test of time. Faith that stood trials and tribulations and persecutions.

Faith which endures and endures and endures. That's what he's talking about and he's saying to these people, you are really poor. Spiritual wealth comes from me and me alone.

And then he advises them not only to buy gold refined by fire but to buy white robes to clothe you. But he's not talking of course about literal clothes. They've got clothes to wear, they've probably got very fine clothes to wear.

[16:28] But rather he's saying in effect you're really naked but you need the clothes of righteousness and your money can't buy that but I can give it to you. So come to me. Maybe even mocking Laodicea's famous black wool.

Rather the white robes of righteousness are what you ought to wear. And the third thing he counsels them to buy is salve to anoint your eyes. Laodicea was a famous place for an ophthalmologist called Demosthenes apparently.

And it was a place where they manufactured eye ointment as well. And again Jesus is mocking the pride of Laodicea. You can't see.

You're really blind spiritually. But come to me and you'll have spiritual sight. And your money won't buy you that. But I'll give it to you.

If you come to me. The mocking tone of Jesus is quite marked here. He's saying in effect you cannot be self-sufficient in spiritual things.

[17:33] For persevering faith for righteousness and spiritual perception you cannot get it for yourself and money won't buy it for you. Doesn't matter how hard you work or how much money you have you cannot buy it attain it or achieve it.

You cannot be self-sufficient in it. But rather all three of these things are gifts of Jesus Christ. They're never our own achievement.

Jesus says come and buy them from me but that's sarcastic mocking their physical wealth. But rather the irony is that they're free gifts without cost for any who come to Jesus Christ.

self-sufficient. Oh yes that doesn't mean they're cheap they're expensive but Jesus has paid for them for our benefit. You see self-sufficiency is a dangerous pursuit.

That was the folly of the Laodiceans and it's the folly of much of our society today. It's the desire of teenagers to be self-sufficient. They're itching to get out of their parents' house. They're itching to have their own money to do what they want to be independent and self-sufficient.

[18:40] Self-sufficiency is not just the target of teenagers but it's the goal of workers and parents as well. To have a stable enough good enough job to have everything you need to secure your future forever whatever the prospects and circumstances turn out to be.

That's self-sufficiency and it drives 95% of our population of this country. But it doesn't stop their either because self-sufficiency is the frustration of the elderly who now are old and on a pension and relying on somebody else and they're frustrated as anything because they're no longer self-sufficient.

It's easy to be caught up in this goal of self-sufficiency in our world from teenagehood to elderly age but it's a folly if it spills over into our spiritual life.

Indeed it's a folly in physical life as well because we are always to be eternally dependent on Jesus Christ. Never self-sufficient spiritually but only ever dependent upon him.

And you see it does spill over to spiritual life because very often the wealthiest churches are those for whom great legacies have been left. Cash bequests, land, property, etc.

[19:57] etc. But sadly when you look around at such churches they're all too often the spiritually impoverished ones. the ones who've lost their ministry edge, the ones who've lost their commitment to the gospel, the ones who've lost their generosity and perseverance in Christian faith.

They're resting on their laurels because those in the past have left them so much that has been squandered in luxury. without Jesus the sentence is the same whether you're Laodicean or

Doncastrian.

Wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, naked. But here's the remarkable thing. Nauseous though the Laodiceans make him Jesus does not abandon the church of Laodicea.

I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest therefore and repent. The opportunity is given to respond.

He's about to spit them out of his mouth but here's a last chance to change, to repent, to rely upon him and buy what only he can give and that he gives free.

[21 : 18] So often today people have got Jesus' love wrong. They think because Jesus is all love that it means whatever we do Jesus accepts us.

But Jesus here says something different to that. He says something here about love that is far deeper from that sort of trivial love. This is love that disciplines and reproves. This is love that seeks out the very best eternally and spiritually for these people and us ourselves as well for Jesus' love to us is the same as it was to the Laodiceans.

So often you see in liberal churches they say well do what you want, live whatever sort of lifestyle you want to live because Jesus loves you and isn't that a great message? Hallelujah, do what you like.

But that's not love, that's indifference. Love reforms, love seeks reproof, love disciplines.

Any parent knows that. If you love your children you discipline them because you want the best for them. It's not open slather and it's the same for Jesus. His love for us is to reprove us and discipline us, to train us in righteousness rather than setting us free to go about whatever task or direction we want ahead.

[22 : 37] The invitation of Jesus stands for these Laodiceans. Listen, I'm standing at the door knocking. They can't hear him. They're too busy living it up. Listen, I stand at the door knocking.

Their spiritual ears are deaf. Listen, I stand at the door knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door I will come into you and eat with you and you with me.

when I walked across the site of Laodicea there's not a lot to see. Few stones and in one point an arch and there's a sign with this verse on it.

I stand at the door and knock. There's no door, it's just the doorway. The Turkish authorities don't know their Bible very well because they quote it as John 3 verse 20. I took my pen out and scribbled a John and put revelation.

This verse which is probably well known to most of us is not about becoming a Christian. It is written to a church that is Christian but is indifferent.

[23 : 58] It's lost its love, its edge, whatever. It is about repentance, about turning back to Jesus from whom they've drifted away. But it is an individual response because when Jesus says I stand at the door knocking, if you singular hear my voice and open the door I will come into you singular and eat with you and you with me.

It's not for the church to open wide the door though, glory if that is the case, but rather to each individual within the church, repent, open the door to Jesus, by these three things that he's offering here.

That's what it's on about. It's not about opening and knocking on the door of your heart, but rather it's about seeking and finding righteousness, persevering faith, and spiritual sight.

And that is an individual response. But isn't Jesus' grace here extraordinary? This is knocking at the door of a church that has in effect expelled him.

Kicked him out, ignored him, been indifferent to him, and therefore he's moved away. They've said, well, we don't really want you central in our church, sort of go off to the back.

[25 : 16] Now, if that ever happened to us, we'd be out of here in a flash. We'd be wiping the dust off our feet, we'd be throwing in our membership, we'd be writing stern letters to the archbishop, the bishop, and anybody else who might hear us, and we'd never have anything to do with the place again.

But not Jesus. He comes and he knocks, and he knocks, and he knocks. It's extraordinary, isn't it? How many times does he knock? Seventy times seven? Probably more. Listen. I'm standing at the door knocking.

As with each of the other six churches before this, the description and address to this church finishes with promises. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you and you with me.

But he's not just talking about having a nice afternoon tea in the vicarage, he's talking about the heavenly banquet. And what an invitation, what a promise that is. That if we repent and turn back to Jesus and find from him persevering faith, and find from him clothes of righteousness, and find from him spiritual sight, then the heavenly banquet is ours to participate in.

[26 : 34] What a promise that Jesus gives us, and he gives the Laodiceans as well. But that's not all. You think heaven's great, and it is, but know where we'll be in heaven.

Verse 21 tells us, to the one who conquers, I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my father on his throne.

Isn't that extraordinary? memory. You think, well, who's going to conquer? Anyone who places their faith in Jesus' death conquers. That's the view of revelation taken as a whole. So any Christian who is in heaven shares in the throne of God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ.

Isn't that amazing? We wonder who on earth are we ruling over? Well, that doesn't matter, probably. But that's what God created us for, way back in Genesis 1. He created man and woman and told them to have rule and have dominion over this world.

Of course, that fails. We don't exercise that rule and dominion as we ought. But now, once we're in heaven, all that creation purpose will be fulfilled forever. Extraordinary place, extraordinary privilege will be ours in heaven.

[27 : 51] Well, we've completed our grand tour. seven stops in four weeks. Hasn't cost us the thousands of dollars that it does for some of the other tourists that fly over to Turkey.

But I think we've seen things through more important eyes. Yes, we've seen a few glimpses of beauty and we've seen a bit of spectacular scenery in the background, but we've seen things through Jesus' eyes.

We've seen seven churches, the way he views them. We've seen they're good, they're bad, they're struggling, they're heresy, they're persecution. We've seen them struggling to stay alive and some that are dying, some that are improving, some that are losing their first love.

Each is in need of some rebuke and some encouragement. And each of those seven letters, the last of which we've looked at tonight, begins with a description of Jesus.

To the angel of the church of whatever place, these are the words of, and in place of the name Jesus, a description of him. He's the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven lampstands.

[29 : 00] He's the first, the last, he was dead and now he's alive. He holds a sharp two-edged sword. He's the son of God, the one with fiery eyes whose feet are like burnished bronze. He's the one who has the seven spirits, the holy and true one, the one with the key of David, the one who opens and it remains open and shuts and it remains shut.

And to the church of Laodicea, he is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation. You see, whatever church it is, good, bad, indifferent, Jesus is the answer.

Jesus is what they need to see and know. And those descriptions of him are important as we've seen in recent weeks. These days, you see, the pressure is on the church to become down to earth and relevant, to be out there in the marketplace, to be saying the things the world wants to hear, to scratch itching ears and so on.

But these letters remind us that real relevance lies in heaven, not on earth. These letters remind us that we are to be heavenly minded more than being earthly minded.

For it's only when we have a right view of Jesus Christ, a right vision and perception of who he is, that we will avoid heresy, that we'll be sustained and persevere through persecution.

[30 : 30] It's only by having a right view of Jesus that we will curb immorality, that we will sustain our first love. And it's only by having a right view of Jesus that we will prevent indifference to him.

there is nothing much left of Laodicea today. It's not a tourist site. It's a field. A few rocks here and there, a couple of signs that tell you what they think might have been there.

One arch and a few rocks that look like a bit of an amphitheatre. Hardly anybody visits. You can drive through, there's no gate and there are animals that wander across the place.

Certainly, there's no church there anymore. Jesus has spat it out of his mouth. Its indifference was its downfall.

But ultimately, what caused that indifference is its weak view of Jesus Christ. We cannot be indifferent to Jesus if we understand properly who he is and why he died.

[31 : 42] let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen.