

Don't do Life without Christ

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Well, please keep your Bibles opened at that second reading. And there's also an outline you might find helpful in the bulletin. Well, I wonder what you would say to finish this sentence.

I cannot do life without... You? Me? For most children, the answer would be screens, isn't it?

I cannot do life without screens. For teenage children, it's a particular screen. I cannot do life without my phone. They're always on it. For me, I cannot do life without coffee.

I don't know if you're similar or perhaps it's tea. For many people in the world, they cannot do life without caffeine, whether it's a cup of tea or a cup of coffee. And so there are all these things about it online, like this one, where it says, me without coffee.

Not very happy. And then, me with coffee. And so the point is, when you don't do life with these things, it messes your life about.

[1 : 11] And as we come to the church in Laodicea today, the last of the seven churches, they've tried to do life not without coffee or without screens, but without Christ.

You can see it down there in verse 17, where they say, I am rich and wealthy. I do not need a thing, including Jesus Christ.

But life without him leads the Laodiceans to being lukewarm before him, which is point one, verse 14. And I'll put the verses online as well on the screen.

So Jesus writes, he says, To the angel of the church in Laodicea write, These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

Now, before we get to the lukewarm bit, Jesus introduces himself in a rather odd way. I mean, it's odd to say, hi, I'm Amen. That's not normally how people introduce themselves, is it?

[2 : 13] But as you know, the word Amen means I agree. And so when people lead in prayer, we say Amen at the end to say, I agree with that prayer to God.

And so Jesus seems to be saying that he is God's Amen, the one who agrees with what God says. And we can know that because of how he describes himself next, as the faithful and true witness to God.

In other words, Jesus is the one who always agrees with God. And what Jesus says is always what God says. And so to try and do life without Jesus is really doing life without God, which is foolish.

What's more, we're told that Jesus is the ruler of God's creation. The church down the road from Laodicea was the church at Colossae. And Paul wrote to the Colossians and told them to share his letter that we have in the Bible, Colossians, with the church at Laodicea.

And so the church in Laodicea would have heard Paul tell the Colossians things like this about Jesus. And that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the exact representation, if you like.

- [3 : 24] And in fact, God created all things through Jesus and for Jesus. He is before all things. And in Jesus, all things hold together.
- And so if you want to know the best way to live, you go to the guy who created it, don't you? Jesus. And in fact, all of life holds together in him. He's the one who makes sense of everything.
- And so again, to do life without Jesus is just plain dumb because you're doing life without the instruction manual, if you like, of the creator.
- You're doing life without the one in whom all things hold together. That makes sense. But that's what this church decided to do.
- I will see how in a moment, but first Jesus warns them how serious this is. For it means they've become lukewarm before him and about to be spat out by them, by him rather.
- [4 : 21] So verse 15, Jesus says, 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, neither cold nor hot, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth.
- Now, I used to think in this passage, lukewarm meant they were half-hearted. And so it was kind of like a ranking system. You know, if you're hot, you're on fire for Jesus.
- If you're lukewarm, you're half-hearted. And if you're cold, then you're really cold towards Jesus. You don't want anything to do with him. But that doesn't actually fit what Jesus says here about wishing they were either cold or hot.
- Jesus doesn't wish anyone would be cold towards him. He wants everyone to believe in him. And so what he's really saying is that hot is good and all for Jesus.
- Cold is good and all for Jesus. Lukewarm, though, is gross and not at all for Jesus. And to help us think about tea and coffee, which I started with.
- [5 : 29] Because a soothing hot cup of tea or invigorating cup of coffee is good. Or a cold, refreshing iced tea or iced coffee is good.
- But if you've ever had a tepid tea or lukewarm coffee, it's bad, isn't it? In fact, you know, sometimes you let your cup of tea go cold, lukewarm. Here's my lukewarm thing.
- And then you taste it. That's exactly the point. You just went, oh, gross. That's exactly the point, isn't it? Lukewarm is gross.
- I don't know if I remember to change that water from the first service. Oh, dear. And history, I think, backs this up.
- You see, as I said before, Laodicea was situated. That dotted line is a road. And it's situated near the Lycus River. But I've actually bouldered the river more than it was.
- [6 : 28] It wasn't that full. And in fact, the river near Laodicea had minimal flow and would often dry up. And so it wasn't a great source for water. And so what Laodicea did was they actually built pipes all the way down to near Colossae, where there was a good source of cold, mountain-fresh water.
- And they'd pipe it back to the city. So here are some pipes, rows of pipes that you can still see today that would run all the way, almost eight miles or so, to bring in the cold spring water.
- It wasn't Mount Franklin. It was Mount something else to drink. Here's a closer look of the pipes that, again, you can see today. But Laodicea was also known for its medical center.
- So it would also pipe in hot water from the hot healing springs of Hierapolis. And that's the pipeline that ran from the city of Hierapolis all the way down to Laodicea.
- And here's a picture of the hot springs. There was a fair bit of calcium in these springs, which is why the cliffs had gone white. There was even a thermal pool known as the Pool of Cleopatra that people, tourists, can swim in still today.

[7 : 41] It's still warm. It's still nice and hot. Of course, the problem with piping the healing hot water from Hierapolis or the refreshing cold water from Colossae is that by the time it reached Laodicea, what happened?

The hot water cooled down, the cool water warmed up, and it became lukewarm. And in fact, not just lukewarm, but dirty from the pipes.

Laodicea was known for having gross lukewarm water, only good for spitting out. And that's what this church had become. Gross, about to be spat out or rejected by Jesus.

How do they become like this then? It sounds pretty serious, and it is. Well, it's because they now were doing life without Christ. Point to verse 17.

Jesus said to them, you say, Laodicea, I am rich. I have acquired wealth, and I do not need a thing. This verse actually starts with the word because, you know, they are lukewarm, about to be spat out, because they say they are rich and wealthy and do not need a thing.

[8 : 53] In other words, they are now trusting in their own prosperity, which leads to self-sufficiency, you know, relying on themselves. Notice the repetition of the word I.

I am rich. I am wealthy. And the NIV misses one of the I's. I do not need a thing. And, of course, by saying that, they also include that they don't need Christ.

It's why wealth is so dangerous. Money is good, but it is dangerous at the same time, because it can lead us into thinking we can do it all ourselves.

You know, we've got enough money. We don't need to worry about or pray about things. We can do it all ourselves. And it led Laodicea to thinking they didn't need Christ anymore. And it's easy to imagine how this happened, because the church of Laodicea lived in a very wealthy city.

Laodicea was very rich. In fact, it was the wealthiest city in Western Turkey. Their wealth came from things like their textile industry. Their grazing land meant the sheep produced a rich, glossy black wool that was wanted all over the Roman Empire.

[10 : 04] They also had a tunic called a trimeter, which became famous. It was the must-have tunic for the Roman celebrities. It looked something like this, without the sunnies.

I don't think they had sunglasses back then. And, ladies, if you still want one, you can buy one today from a store called Trimeter. And Laodicea also had famous medical school, as I mentioned, that produced two famous medicines, an ointment for the ears and a salve or a cream for the eyes.

Which Jesus will refer to later. All this trade, all these things made it incredibly wealthy. They even had a banking system that traded in gold. In fact, it was so wealthy, when the city was destroyed by an earthquake in 60 AD, Rome offered financial aid, and it said, we don't need your money.

In fact, the Roman historian Tacitus writes, Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us in Rome.

Can you imagine? Your house has got all cracks in it. We've had a couple of earthquakes here in Melbourne, not bad ones, but, you know, maybe there's some cracks in your house. The government says, I will give you a million dollars to completely rebuild your house.

[11 : 17] And you go, keep your money. I don't need it. Imagine how rich you'd have to be to say that. That's what Laodicea was like. And, of course, prosperity leads into self-sufficiency, thinking you don't need a thing from anyone else.

And this attitude of the city crept into the church. And so now it thinks it doesn't need even Christ. And, hey, they may not need anything physically, but they sure do spiritually.

Because look at how Jesus describes their real poverty in the rest of verse 17. He says, but you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

How's that for a wake-up call? But, you see, this is their true spiritual condition without Christ. You try and do life without Christ, trusting your own prosperity or self-sufficiency, and that's how you'll end up.

You see, we're not meant to start trusting in Jesus and then stop and swap to our own prosperity or self-sufficiency. No, no, we're to keep trusting in Christ for help through this life.

[12 : 36] And so Jesus counsels them to come back to him and to buy from him and discover true prosperity that lasts for eternity.

Verse 18. He says, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you can become rich and white clothes to wear so you can cover your shameful nakedness and salve to put on your eyes so that you can see.

In our first reading, God counseled Israel to come to him and buy without money. And so here, Christ counsels this church to come to him and to buy from him without money.

That is for free. Jesus will give it to them for free. And he names three things that would have resonated with them. You know, to buy gold, not from their banks, but from Christ.

By trusting in Jesus that they might become spiritually rich now and physically rich later in the world to come. And to come to Jesus and follow him, that they might store up treasure for themselves in heaven, as Jesus said.

[13 : 50] For there, thieves cannot break in, stock markets cannot crash, and death cannot take. One of my Bible study groups last week, one of the guys was sharing how he has sadly lost two non-Christian friends in the last two weeks.

And he was reflecting on the fact that they had everything in life. They were quite wealthy people. And this is what he said. He said, it hit me again that you just can't take it with you. Isn't that true?

But if you buy gold from Jesus, you can take it with you, so to speak. Here is real prosperity. And second, they say, Jesus says, buy from him a white garment rather than a trimeter to cover their shameful nakedness.

As we saw with Sardis a couple of weeks ago, these white robes are the dress code that you need in order to enter heaven. And as I showed you then, they are made white, not being by washed in Omo or coal power, but by being washed in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus.

Later scenes are, in other words, trust in Jesus' death to bring them forgiveness, to cover their shame. No amount of money can ever buy the white robes that we need to enter heaven.

[15 : 13] Only Jesus can give them when we trust in his death for us. And third, they are to buy a salve or a cream, not from their medical center or school, but again from Jesus.

So they can truly see in life. That is, they are to trust in Christ and his word, like the Philadelphians did last week, do you remember? So they can truly see how to live well in this world.

So they can see what's truly important in this life. So they can see as Christ sees, have the mind of Christ our Savior, as we'll sing later. Now, I don't think our church has become lukewarm and gross before Jesus, but we do live in a pretty prosperous city, don't we, compared to the rest of the world.

And this sort of attitude tends to creep in slowly and often unconsciously, doesn't it? And so it's worth asking ourselves, you know, are we trying to do life without Christ?

You know, do we trust in our own prosperity or self-sufficiency rather than Jesus and his resources? For example, what do we trust in for peace in life?

[16 : 25] Is it knowing that we have a healthy bank balance? Okay, so I've got some peace, I've got that money in the bank, that's all good. Or is it knowing that Jesus is Lord, so everything will be good, fine.

Which brings us more peace? And whom do we rely on to solve problems in life, ourselves or Christ? I'm not suggesting we don't do anything ourselves or use the resources we have.

If we have a health problem, then we go and see a doctor. If we have a job problem, we go and see a recruiter. If our grandkids or kids have a school problem, we go and see the teacher.

They're all good gifts from God. But how long is it before we pray about the problem? Now, do we pray as a first thing or a last resort when nothing else works?

In fact, I wonder the time it takes us to pray about our problem is indicative of how often we try and solve it ourselves. When things go wrong, whom do we rely on more, ourselves or Christ?

[17 : 33] And who do we look to to keep us on track in the Christian life? Our own resources or Christ and his resources? I like his word, his spirit, his church.

I know some people who used to be quite regular at our church pre-COVID, but then COVID came and life got busier as things opened up again.

The kids, there were issues with the kids and life just became a bit more difficult. And so they just stopped coming to church. And one of them said to me, they thought they'd still be okay.

After all, they can read the Bible and pray at home. And that's true, isn't it? But do you think stopping coming to church to meet with one another to be encouraged will help them read the Bible and pray more at home or less?

Which do you think? I know without the weekly reminders, they're not going to pray more at home. They're going to pray less. And that's what's happened.

[18 : 34] You see, they look to their own self-sufficiency to make it to glory rather than to Christ and his family. And now I'm not exactly sure where they're at. Abraham Lincoln once wrote this.

He said, Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of going to God for his redeeming or preserving grace.

Too proud to pray to the God who made us. But we need his grace to help us, don't we? In fact, we're not meant to do life without Christ, are we?

And so if you've found yourself starting to do that, starting to drift away from him and rely on yourself, then we're to repent and be zealous for Christ.

Point three, verse 19. Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent, he says.

[19 : 39] Jesus says here that he rebukes those he loves. And he has rebuked this church pretty harshly, hasn't he? You know, they're richard, pitiful, poor, blind, naked, and so on.

He didn't pull any punches, did he? But he does that because he loves them. And he disciplines those he loves. It's hard to know how he has disciplined this church here.

It could just be this stern warning or it could involve some sort of suffering. I remember a lady from an old church was in hospital and she told me how she got talking to the person next to her.

And she mentioned that she was a Christian and the person next to her said, well, why would God allow my suffering? And she said, perhaps cheekily, or perhaps he's trying to get your attention.

In fact, I was talking about this very thing yesterday with someone from our church who was sharing how they'd been through some very difficult times in their life, but looking back could see how God had used it to draw him closer to God, to depend on God's grace more in prayer and so on.

[20 : 48] God disciplines those he loves. And isn't that what we do too? Don't parents and grandparents rebuke and discipline their kids because they love them? Hey, grandparents, you've got to be really careful about that one, don't you?

You don't want to step on the kid's toes. But parents do it because they love them, don't they? They want what's best for them. And what's best for Laodicea and what's best for us here at HTD is to do life with Christ, to be zealous for Christ.

In fact, the word earnest there is the word zealous, literally. But we don't like that word, do we? You know, it kind of sounds a bit too extreme, like an unloving activist or perhaps a religious terrorist.

Now, of course, we're not to be any of those things, but we are to be lovingly different. And that may mean we look a bit extreme to the world around us.

You know, they find out. Oh, you go to church every Sunday? That's a bit extreme, isn't it? Oh, you follow the Bible on that topic? Oh, that's a bit over the top, isn't it? You pray every day?

[21 : 57] Oh, that's a bit fanatical, isn't it? We are to be zealous for Christ and to do all of life with him. And that may mean we look a bit extreme in this world, but not to God.

It's actually what's best for us, to help us because he loves us. And if we've been trying to do some of life without Christ, then we're to repent, to stop and turn back to him because he's waiting at the door for us.

You see verse 20? He goes on to say, 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, with that person, and they with me.

This is a reasonably well-known verse and it's often used when speaking to non-Christians. And so if you're not a Christian here today or online, then Jesus is standing at the door, knocking, waiting for you to open it.

That is to believe in him and to welcome him in your life as your saviour who died for your sins and as your Lord who guides you for your good.

[23 : 08] But while this verse is good for non-Christians to hear, it was originally written to Christians. This is a church. To help us repent. To know that while we may have done life without Christ from time to time and while the Laodiceans seems as though they've kicked Christ out of their house, he's still there on the outside at the front door, knocking, waiting to come back in as soon as they repent.

How kind and gracious is our Lord? You know, when people cut us off, we really want to cut them off. You know, off the Christmas card list.

You know, we're going to buy some cards, but not for that person. Off the Facebook page or whatever. But when we do life without Christ, ignore him, he's still there waiting, wanting to come back in and restore fellowship with us.

That's how gracious Jesus is. And not only that, he'll give us the right to rule with him later. The last two verses. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my father on his throne.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. For us who trust in Christ, rather than our earthly prosperity or self-sufficiency, Jesus will give us the right to rule with him.

[24 : 30] Which means ruling over everything. In the world to come. It means we'll have everything in the world to come. That's more prosperity than you can poke a stick at, isn't it?

And so, we're not going to miss out by doing life with Christ. We're going to gain the world. I don't know what it is you can't do life without, whether it's screens or phones, or for me, my morning coffee.

Okay, I lie. My morning two coffees. But more than all that, we're not meant to do life without Christ. So, let's pray. We wouldn't.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for our Lord Jesus. We thank you for his grace and goodness to us.

That he's always ready and waiting to come back into fellowship with us the moment we turn back to him. Help, please forgive us for the times where we've sought to do life without him.

[25 : 33] And please help us to keep doing life with him. We ask it in his name. Amen.