

The Lukewarm Church

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[0 : 00] Well now we turn to Revelation chapter 3. Revelation 3 as we read the vision to the seventh of these seven churches of which John was given visions of.

This is to the church in Laodicea. As you know, the lukewarm church. We're going to read that section. And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

I know your works. You're neither cold nor hot. Would that you are either cold or hot. So because you're lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. Not realizing that you're wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich. And white garments, so that you may clothe yourself. And the shame of your nakedness may not be seen.

[1 : 18] And salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and be with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne.

As I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne. He who has an ear can hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Amen.

And may God bless that reading from his holy word this week. Let's see in the theme of the lukewarm church, the church in Laodicea. Four things to highlight this evening.

The strong rebuke that Jesus gives to the church in relation to it being that lukewarm church. And then secondly, the self-centred boast that the church in Laodicea were making about themselves.

[2 : 24] A very false picture that they gave themselves of what they thought was a correct way of being, but in fact wasn't. And then the Saviour's advice, as we read there in verse 18, about Jesus counselling them, advising them to buy of him for their own well-being, their own spiritual well-being.

And we'll look at the details of that advice in a moment. And then the promise, the great promise. I'm sure you've heard many times, but we're here again. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him. And he will listen to you. We'll again look at that promise in more detail. The lukewarm church.

You know, if you were to ask yourself, what are the greatest dangers, the greatest dangers to any church, to any church, the life of any church, even in this present day?

I'm sure you could come up with a number of things. You could, I suppose, come up with the opposition of so many around, the active opposition of those who have no shame in condemning the church for its absolutes, for its holding to the word of God.

[3 : 42] I suppose you could speak of the so-called intellectuals of the day who, again, have made no bones about standing against the Lord Jesus and the gospel of grace.

I suppose you could talk about what's been seen, even in these last few years, the woke ideology that seems to threaten so much of the church's teaching and so many things.

But if we were truly to abide by Scripture as to what really are the, where the greatest dangers to the church today lie, we have to say it's within.

The greatest dangers to the church today are within the church itself. As we've been even looking at these past, these past few weeks, the different churches that John wrote about, the complacency, for example, so often the indifference to being on fire for the Lord, the self-centred righteousness that we can so easily fall into when we think we're doing fine, we're doing all right.

We don't believe that anything can threaten us. Nothing's going to topple us as a church. That we don't need to go out and witness. We don't need to pray.

[4 : 59] We don't need to have fellowship with one another. We don't need to get our hands dirty and going out with the gospel. Thinking, oh, we're doing all right.

You're saying, well, we go to church on a Sunday. Well, we can defend the faith when it's the right time to do it. And we take every doctrine that we've been taught since we were young.

A middle ground, though. A middle ground that's neither on fire for the gospel. But not altogether frozen. Not altogether frozen and doing absolutely nothing for the sake of the gospel.

Just like the church in Laodicea. That church that Jesus condemned for its complacency. Jesus condemned for its half-heartedness. Its self-pride, as we read there in that section.

And if this is a letter to the church in Laodicea, it's a letter to the church in any day and age. And in many ways, what we read there is unpleasant, difficult reading.

[6 : 03] It might even feel uneasy when you hear again these words. But let's seek to apply these words. If we're truly to be those who seek first the kingdom of God.

To hear what the Spirit sing to the churches. And in hearing, to act upon what you're hearing from the very mouth of God. Now, as we've done in all the previous six churches, context is crucial.

You can't understand this part of the vision unless you know a little bit about the place itself that was being referred to. And Laodicea is no exception.

It's another inland city. This time, if you're to see on a map, it's southeast of Philadelphia. The city we're looking at this morning. And it's a very prosperous place.

Very wealthy city. And like other places in that region, it suffered from earthquakes. But the difference was that that city was so wealthy, it didn't even want support from other places.

[7 : 08] It felt it could go along by itself. It could rebuild everything out of its own resources. It was a very proud city. A very wealthy city.

It's situated in the intersection of different roads. So trade was very much centred in that place. It was a main banking centre. I suppose you could say it was the Geneva of Asia Minor.

Very proud city. Proud of its money. Proud of its banking. Proud of the expensive clothes that were worn. Proud of all that was made from the very expensive sheep that were reared there.

The black-willed sheep. And also, it had a medical school there. A medical school that produced medicines. Particularly ointment for the eyes.

It made an eye salve from the rocks. It pulverised the rocks of that area. But despite all the wealth from the technology even in that city, it had a very unpleasant water supply.

[8 : 14] There was a nearby town called Herapolis. Herapolis was a town that was renowned for its healing. Its hot springs. Colossae. The letter to the Colossians.

Colossae was actually noted for its cold springs. The cold springs. And even refreshing drinking water. But Laodicea didn't have these hot springs.

It didn't have the cold, refreshing springs. Laodicea, for its water. It got its water from a very long viaduct. And the viaduct wasn't exactly the purest of things.

The tepid water that arrived in Laodicea was sometimes very foul. And people were sick from drinking that water. So, bring all this together.

There's a wealthy city. It's got very expensive goods. But it's got a hopeless water supply. But at the same time, it produces this eye salve.

[9 : 13] Not just eye salve, other medicines as well, for the benefit of the citizens. So, in one sense, there's a mixture of healing. Yes, there's the medicine school there. But there's sickness in the city as well.

A very proud city. But it's prone to all these sicknesses as a result of that water supply. All this is going to impact what Jesus says to the church in Laodicea.

Well, how does Jesus refer himself before we look at the actual details of his words? Well, he calls himself the Amen. The words of the Amen. The faithful and true witness.

The beginning of God's creation. I mean, he's serious as he's giving these words. He's the Amen. In other words, as the words means in the original language, they're a Hebrew language.

You know, he's the faithful and true witness. Everything's confirmed in him. In other words, he has the final authority. So, what he's going to say to the Laodiceans is absolutely trustworthy.

[10 : 14] Absolutely true. What he's going to say to them is, it can't be contradicted. It's absolutely accurate. And that's the one, as he says of himself there, is the beginning of God's creation.

And again, you know, speaking of his authority as creator. The one through whom creation came into being. He's the Lord. He's the Amen. He's the, as it were, the head of God's creation.

And as such, he's to be listened to for his word of truth. Word that no one's going to dismiss. So, what is that word that Jesus gives to the church and allowed to say?

Well, as we see in the headings there, first of all, it's a strong rebuke. As in every other of the letters, he knows that church. I know your works. You're neither cold nor hot.

Would that you are either cold or hot. So, because you're lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I'll spit you out of my mouth. To put it colloquially, this church makes Jesus sick.

[11 : 21] I mean, the attitude in that church is so awful that Jesus simply tells him, I want to spit you out of my mouth. I mean, it's not a dead church, as the church in Sardis was deemed to be.

There's no evidence that there was the kind of Jezebel person that was in Thyatira. But it's a church that is clinging to particular attitudes about itself that so makes repugnant, not just repugnant reading, but it's so repugnant to Jesus.

He wants to spit that church out of his mouth because the church is in a desperate condition. And bring all this to what we've said already about Laodicea, the water supply.

You know, when you realize the context, you see what Jesus is saying. The church in Laodicea was not like the hot springs of its neighbor in Hierapolis because the hot springs brought healing.

And the church in Laodicea weren't bringing that healing to others. They weren't bringing the comfort and joy of the Word of God to others. And they weren't like the cool, refreshing waters in Colossae.

[12 : 37] They weren't refreshing others with the Word of God, with the Word of the Gospel. Jesus says to that church, I wish you were either hot or cold.

And you see what Jesus is saying here, these different kinds of ministries that the church should be involved in. I wish you were either hot, you know, that sense of providing the warmth of healing, the warmth of fellowship, the warmth of the message of the Gospel that changes hearts, that heals, that restores.

And it wasn't being, as it were, cold, cold in the sense of refreshing the hearts and souls of others. It wasn't doing, as Jesus said, when he spoke of giving that cup of cold water in Jesus' name.

That church obviously wasn't doing that. It wasn't showing works of mercy or works of kindness or compassion. Instead, the lukewarm church was just that.

Just like the lukewarm water that people had been drinking and having to literally throw up all over. That water that was only good for making people sick.

[13 : 52] So Jesus is saying to that church, you're neither hot, you're not proclaiming the warmth of the Gospel that heals, and you're not refreshing, you're not showing the Gospel in its practical effects.

Because the loudest saints, as we're told here, were so self-centered. They were so self-sufficient, so they thought. They didn't see the need to refresh others with the Gospel of good news.

They didn't think that they should go out with the Gospel that heals. That's what Jesus was making. Jesus said to the church there, that he wants to spit them out of his mouth.

And of course, there's a message, not just for the loudest saints 2,000 years ago, but a message for the church today. Because unless we're hot or cold in the way that it's written here, unless the church acts to heal broken hearts and broken souls, unless the church goes out to heal and to refresh, refresh through the preaching of God's Word.

Jesus says he doesn't want anything to do with a church that isn't active, or a church that's so self-centered, looking in and itself. Because as Jesus said, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth.

[15 : 14] Well, that word hasn't changed. Unless the church changes, unless the church is asked. Jesus called the loudest saints to be hot or cold.

And Jesus says, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth. And, you know, you have to ask each one of us, ask ourselves, am I pleasing the Lord Jesus?

Am I wanting others to drink from the fountain of life? Am I wanting others to take that water of life that truly refreshes, that truly heals?

Do I want to reach out to the gospel of good news? Do I want to let others know the great physician who truly can heal him? And break men with broken hearts.

And heal souls that are sick and sin. Do you not want others to know the Lord Jesus, the Saviour and Lord?

[16:17] Well, not only was there a strong rebuke to that church, it was a strong rebuke because the church itself had a self-centered voice. You see, says Jesus, I'm rich, I've prospered, and I need nothing.

Not realizing that you're wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. In other words, the church in Laodicea was a mirror image of the city in which they lived.

And that city was a very proud city, very self-sufficient. And they had what they thought everything they needed. But Jesus said, you think you're likely to the city, but no, you're not.

You're wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. Yes, in many ways, I'm sure the church was wealthy. In many ways, they would have lacked nothing of the world's goods.

But the riches and the wealth that the Laodiceans were boasting about was the riches and wealth of pride, spiritual pride. They thought they were doing fine.

[17:23] They thought they didn't need to bring the good news to others. They hadn't even come to Jesus poor in spirit. They consider themselves spiritually self-sufficient.

In Germany, in World War II, certainly from 1940 to 1945, the government there, in Nazi Germany, had a policy called autarchy.

If you know the word, it means self-sufficiency. The government thought they could provide everything for themselves. They couldn't get the oil from Iran or elsewhere, so they would manufacture their own oil.

And they would manufacture their own resources, their own food, their own coffee, whatever. And of course, that failed. Human pride in its own self-sufficiency was doomed to failure.

Well, here in Laodicea, exactly the same mindset. That church that was so blinded by its autarchy, by its self-sufficiency, was so sure of itself.

[18:27] It wasn't even aware that it was wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. Because in spite of their material wealth, they were actually spiritually wretched.

They were actually more to be pitied than to be admired. And despite, you know, living in a place where they had all these ointments for their physical eyes, they were spiritually blind.

They couldn't, they didn't have that sight to see where truly their service lay and should lie. All around, there was this evidence, abundant evidence of all the, the, the, the rule, the cloth, that so gave the city its wealth, clothed the, the people.

And yet, in Laodicea, they were spiritually naked. They didn't have the protective garments of, of truth and humility and love and righteousness.

Again, there's a lesson for, for the church today in all this that, you know, to be on our guard against thinking that everything's fine. That, you know, we can be so self-sufficient in ourselves that, you know, we don't need to come to Jesus and fall at his knees and, and even to confess that we are poor and pitiable creatures who need his love, who need his forgiveness.

[19:46] Because we were thinking earlier of what's so destructive in a church. Well, spiritual pride is so destructive because wherever there's spiritual pride in a church, it tells us there's a lack of humility.

And there's, even within ourselves, there's that, even that vestige of spiritual pride. Whether it's pride in a congregation or pride in our denomination or pride in the fact that we're Christians.

Be humble. Be humble. And fall on your knees in confession. Confess that spiritual pride. And come to the one who's, who's gentle and humble in heart and seek forgiveness.

But then, you know, we see here, even in this church that was so self-centered, we see this, this wonderful word of Jesus. Jesus, in his grace and in his mercy, he's calling on, on the church.

He's, he's not fully condemning them because he's calling on them, well, as we read in verse 18, to buy from them what they lack. And then Jesus, in his great love for the church, tells the church, you've got to change.

[21:03] And he shows them the way to change. He shows them how they're to repent. And we see there that the Savior's advice, I counsel you, I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich.

A white garment so that you may clothe yourself. And the shame of your nakedness may not be seen. And salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Like Jesus is, he's comparing himself to one of the, the many business people in the, in the city, one of the shopkeepers.

And he's calling on the passers-by to buy from them. But it's not material things he's asking them to buy. It's spiritual things. Remember what we, we heard just a few moments ago.

It was a wealthy city. But all the money in Laodicea couldn't buy the, the wealth that Jesus was offering. And all the fine garments in Laodicea couldn't cover the spiritual nakedness of the, the church there.

And all the, the medical eye salve in the place couldn't, couldn't remove the blindness of the church there. Only from Jesus could the church be rescued from, from being spat out of Jesus' mouth.

[22 : 19] So Jesus here, he's giving that church their counsel. Giving them advice. The best, the advice of all, of course, because that advice is given to, to deliver that church from itself, centreness, itself, righteousness.

And so they're advised, buy seven of these things. Go, white clothes, and eye salve. Again, see all this in the, in the context of, of the, the place.

How could the people buy? I mean, after all, they're called wretched and pitiable and poor. Poor, how can they buy from Jesus?

I mean, what, what could they give to Jesus for, for what they needed? What can you do? Well, you read in Isaiah 55, these words, come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

So how do you buy without money? Well, the answer, of course, is in the Lord Jesus. Not a cost to you, but it's all of Jesus.

[23 : 30] Because Jesus paid the cost. Jesus bought for you what you need eternally. He bought for you by paying the penalty for sin.

He bought for you eternally by giving of himself. Because when you come to him in faith, the cost's already been paid. So, Jesus tells the church to buy, to buy from him.

Yes, he knows that you're poor. He knows that none of us can pay the price for our salvation. But Jesus paid that price in full. And so, Jesus is telling that Laodiceans here to buy from him gold, gold refined in the fire.

Remember, the city of Laodicea was famed for its great wealth. The Bible talks about gold in so many ways in relation to power and authority and even royalty.

Gold was given to Jesus. Remember, from the major here's Jesus saying to the church, realize what truly is valuable, what's truly precious.

[24 : 38] Jesus is it's not your wealth, your physical wealth, it's not your self-satisfaction which counts for nothing. It's for you to have that complete turnaround in your mind and in your heart and to see where true wealth truly lies.

Because true wealth, true riches are found in the Lord Jesus. Jesus speaks of that wealth that's refined in the fire. You're thinking this morning in the children's address about being tried, being tested and the true faith of a believer will be tried and tested and come out, come forth, this gold, pure gold and yes, you'll be tested and tried even in your faith but come forth, even as Job said, I'll come forth as gold when I'm tried, when I'm tested and in that life of testing, that life of being tried, you know that there is that heavenly prospect awaiting you.

The same book, the book of Revelation at the end speaks of the new Jerusalem as the city of gold, the city of gold where sin will be no more, death no more, pain no more and tears no more as the former things will have passed.

That's true wealth, that's the fullness of wealth in the glory of heaven, in the glory of the new heaven and new earth. So Jesus advises, advises you, buy from him all that's required to live that upright and honouring life that glorifies God.

But there's more advice, not just the gold, not just, as we saw there earlier, the clothing, but I count you to buy from me white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen.

[26 : 33] You know, you think back to the church in Sardis earlier in chapter 3 and Jesus commended a few in that church because they hadn't soiled their clothes and he said to them that they'd walk with them dressed in white because they're worthy.

Well, this is the same word picture we've got here in Laodicea. The white garments that speak of the purity, purity of those who are clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

So Jesus is saying, he's saying to that church they're allowed to see and he's saying you thought you're in need of nothing that God sees and God knows.

That church there thought it was so well clothed needing nothing but it was a bit like the emperor's new clothes. The emperor was deluded in thinking that his tailor had clothed him with the finest of

clothes but in fact they've done nothing of the sort.

And so the church they're allowed to see him. They've been so deceiving themselves they went around thinking they were all so right and self-sufficient and yet they needed the righteousness of Christ the pure white robes of Christ's righteousness to cover them.

[27 : 47] That's what they lack. Don't go around thinking even that you're somehow snug and secure in the clothes of your own self-righteousness.

Because only Christ's righteousness can cover you so that God doesn't see your sin and condemn you. And Jesus finally says I counsel you to buy from me salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

We mentioned before the church there was spiritually blind even though it lived in that city where the eye salve was given to help people's eyes.

But the church there was blind to its own poverty. Blind to its own self-centredness. They couldn't see what truly was the case in their own situation.

Jesus says to them come to me and I'll restore your sight. The eye salve and loud to see apparently helped many eye problems. Jesus is saying well you come to me and I'll help you see.

[28 : 51] I'll help you truly see. I'll open your eyes and you'll see. Many of Jesus' miracles of course were the healing of blind people. You open their eyes and they saw Jesus pointing to the miracle of conversion when Jesus opens your eyes.

And you see him as you never saw him before. You see him as Lord. You see him as saviour. And I thank God the many even here this evening who have seen the Lord Jesus whose eyes have been opened by the saviour.

I once was blind but now I see you can testify. The thanks that yes you see you see the Lord Jesus. And you know this is Jesus speaking to this church in Laodicea who'd fallen so far as it were back in their true witness.

And yet you know Jesus is offering that church healing. It's a backslidden church but he's healing them. He's loving them. and in his love as he says verse 19 and certainly still his will come to his promise.

He said those whom I love I reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent. Jesus loves this church. They've gone so far back as it were in their true witness forum.

[30 : 15] He still loves them and he's given them time to repent. This is amazing grace. The amazing grace of the Lord Jesus loving his people and he's making even a promise in love and a promise of love.

Behold I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I'll come into him and eat with him and he with me. You're thinking of the door opening this morning the door of opportunity to witness to the Savior.

Well here Jesus is saying he's standing at the door of your heart. If anyone hears his voice opens that door he'll come in and sup with him.

If any of you are outside of the Lord Jesus he's standing at the door of your heart. He's knocking on that door and in his grace and love he's offering you that forgiveness of sin.

He's offering you his mercy. He's offering you a saving grace. just as Jesus had every right to condemn the lukewarm church. He's every right to condemn any lukewarm church.

[31 : 27] But he's speaking with these words of love and speaking with words you might say of reconciliation. And you who've opened that door by faith, you who by his power have opened that door and let Jesus into your life.

Listen to the promise that he gives to you. He says you will reign with him forever in glory. The one who conquers, I'll grant him to sit with me on my throne as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne.

The more that you realise that you're a sinner before God, the more you realise the amazing grace of God in saving you. And the more you realise the sin within your heart, the more yes you'll see your sin and the more you realise how much grace the Lord Jesus has shown to you.

Forgiving you, giving you new life and he's giving you this promise of reigning with Christ forever.

So we take heed to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

and meditate on these words. When you go back home, read this passage again and seek by God's grace to come before him and pray that God will make you that hot and cold witness for the Saviour.

[32 : 55] And yes, at the same time, seek forgiveness as I have to seek forgiveness for so much foolishness, so much spiritual self-centreness, so much spiritual self-righteousness and seek forgiveness.

By that gold that never perishes, by the clothes that will never wear out, by that eye salve that makes you see, that makes you see the Lord Jesus, makes you see the one whose grace is sufficient for you, both now and forevermore.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord and God, our Heavenly Father, you who give these sure promises, these sure promises in your grace and in your mercy.

Lord, may we appropriate these promises to live by them and to live in the light of your word. And so teach us, Lord, the more to come to you, to come to you and to seek that which honours and glorifies your name in our lives.

We are poor, we are wretched, we are pitiable, we are unclothed, so often in our spiritual making.

Lord, we pray that you will come and comfort, bring comfort, bring assurance, we pray, of your love.

[34 : 19] Hear us as we cry out unto you for that mercy. Hear us as we commit even our very lives to you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.