

Revelation

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[0 : 00] And he says, I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot.

I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I'm going to vomit you out of my mouth. And I've got to tell you, when the subject of vomit comes up, I cannot get past the memory of our family going home to Weewar after holidays in Yamba.

We were inland, we had to travel over the Great Dividing Range to get home and that meant five children in the car, winding roads and gentle heat. And one of our kids didn't handle warm days and winding roads very well and neither did I when I was a kid.

A lot of experiences won't even tell you about me. You can ask my mum and I won't let her tell you. But Kerry was prepared for the journey ahead. She gave the child an ice cream bucket.

She gave them some chewing gum to keep them occupied and away we went. And halfway up the mountain, the inevitable happened, the pale and clammy expression, the sudden noise and vomit all through the back of the car.

[1 : 26] When I was at high school, we called that a technicolour yawn. Why didn't you use the bucket? Well, they did.

They took the chewing gum out of their mouth and put it in the bucket for safekeeping and vomited into the car. Policeman pulled us over a few hours later.

One of the lights on the trailer wasn't on. He stuck his head through the window. He pulled his nose back and he said, go. Now, despite the humour, there is nothing funny about how the Lord Jesus describes his church at Laodicea.

You make me want to vomit. You make me sick. And it's pretty hard to understand at first because Laodicea in those days was a very modern city.

Deb Gould's been there, she told us, the other day. And she said that up the top of the hill and the city above Laodicea, there's another city called Hierapolis.

[2 : 41] And up there, there's hot Turkish steam baths fed by the natural spring water that comes up out of the ground. And down at the bottom of the mountain, down below Laodicea, there's a beautiful, fresh water river with the water running from the snow melt in mountains far away.

Beautiful water for drinking. And the Laodiceans lived between the two, halfway up the hill. And they were very clever.

And they built a series of pipes and pumps to carry the colder water up the hill to meet the hotter water that was coming down the hill. And so they gave themselves a diluted water supply, a mix of the two, lukewarm water to provide water for their town, their city.

And people who were very clever, good at taking care of their comfort and looking after themselves. But in mixing that water, the Laodiceans had a reputation for water which tasted disgusting.

Lots of minerals, terrible taste, terrible smell, lukewarm. Now Westfield warms their water. You go to Westfield, you want to refill your water bottle. Lukewarm water tastes disgusting, except it hasn't got the taste of minerals.

[4 : 01] So when John writes that the Lord Jesus would want to spit them out of his mouth, they knew exactly what Laodicean water tasted like and they knew exactly why he had written it like this.

And he's no longer talking about water, he's changed from walking to talking about, talking, he's changed from water to talking about people who called themselves God's people in that place.

And so John is writing to a proud, self-sufficient church and he gives them this really frightening serve. This is the only church of the seven that he has absolutely nothing good to commend them for.

I know your works. Verse 15, you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot and because you're lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I'm going to vomit you out of my mouth.

Laodicea is a proud city. They are like a few of the others in Revelation. They are a city that was absolutely destroyed by a massive earthquake in AD 60. But they were different from the other cities because the other cities accepted the emperor's help to rebuild their city.

[5 : 13] Money from him, you know the disaster relief fund that rebuilt their city. Well the Laodiceans said, thanks but no thanks. We're rich, they're skilled, they're self-starters, they're initiators, they're independent people who achieve much by their own effort, self-made men and women who did not need handouts even when confronted by natural disaster.

And so they would be getting award after award in Australia for their can-do attitude in facing such a disaster and incredibly difficult times. But the huge problem in this passage, and this is the crux, was their self-assessment was different from God's evaluation of them.

So verse 17, you say, I'm rich, I have become wealthy, I need nothing. And you don't know that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

They filled out a survey, they've given themselves nine out of ten, and God fills out his survey and he gives them two. And this church is described as incredibly needy and desperate for charity.

My first four years out of Mill College, I was serving in a church in the Campbelltown Valley and it was probably one of the neediest suburbs in Sydney at the time and to some extent still is.

[6 : 48] And we were very dependent on Anglicare's support for ministry positions at church, for food, for gas and electricity bills for some of the people in the congregation, for counselling support.

In that parish, people's neediness was incredibly obvious, everybody could see it, and it was something that had to be dealt with. We as a parish, we as people, we knew we were needy and we were hungry for help.

But I've also been in wealthy churches where need was hidden, where people have problems in their families and their homes. Sometimes we have the wealth to hide them, they're not obvious and not easy to see.

Gambling addictions, destroying family finances. Drug and alcohol abuse to cope with unsustainable lives. Uncontrolled temper, somebody loses their temper in the family and somebody else lives with dreadful fear of them going off again.

Hidden addiction to pornography that many of us have grappled with where we pursue deep inner need in empty and harmful ways. We hide it, we get trapped in secrets, and we all have very deep need and brokenness and even for myself I go back a few years I needed two years of fairly significant support in counselling for some of the things that were going on in my life.

[8 : 19] We are broken and we are needy. Now privately we know that we're in desperate trouble but publicly we're too scared to admit it.

and so we fake it. Surely those things couldn't be a problem amongst the people of God. We don't feel like we can reveal those things when we come into a group of people like this.

We put on a face, we don't cry out needy for help. We try to present as though we're holding it together in a self-sufficient way. And Jesus speaks to his church and he says, you say I'm rich. I've become wealthy. I need nothing. But you don't know that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

And the incredible gospel truth here is that Jesus does not condemn them for being wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. He's merely pointing it out.

[9 : 38] This is a universal condition. The gospel's starting point is that all people are fallen. All people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3.23 The same gospel is wonderfully expressed in Ephesians 2.

As for you, talking to us, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to walk. And then further down, because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our trespasses and sin.

I think some of the saddest and most difficult people I meet in ministry are self-made men and women, often rich, people that perhaps we put up on pedestals because of their wealth.

I think of a man I loved and respected, a man who was kind to me, who was more moral than some of the Christians that he dealt with in business and some of the moral issues that were even going on in our church family.

He was rich. It was a principle of his never to borrow money. He paid in cash and he was a man who bought some really big stuff.

[10:57] He was the biggest giver to a new church building in the parish that I was in. And he died earlier this year as far as I know he died without Christ.

But brothers and sisters, he had a way of life that we would sell ourselves for. Outwardly, really connected to church but he didn't know Jesus and he built walls around himself that stopped anyone really knowing him and getting near what was deep inside.

I loved him. Jesus loved him even more but my friend did not know Jesus. See, we fear being laid bare. We fear rejection.

If other people really knew what was going on inside us, do they really know how anxious I am about these exams coming up? Do they know how difficult it is for me not to have the boyfriend or the girlfriend that I've really been hoping for or the struggle which is going on in my family? And we hide although some of us have places that we can share. The Bible is consistently scathing of our efforts to present ourselves as something to God, faking it with him.

[12:15] Isaiah chapter 64 verse 6 says, all of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. God wants our hearts and throughout the Bible he calls us to humble ourselves before him.

So in Isaiah 66 it says this is the one I esteem he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. And you come into the pages of the Bible and you see that the way of the cross is a journey from independence and self-sufficiency to dependence and complete reliance on Christ. Jesus speaks to this proud church with an incredible invitation. He says in verse 18 I advise you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you might be rich and white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see this is a rich trading city and these people are the Chinese of Chatswood and I'm not using it in a derogatory way they know about money they know how to do a good deal and they have gold supplies and they're famous for their black woolen rugs they're sold all around the world and their ear and their eye treatments everybody knows about them and Jesus offers them something that they already feel self sufficient in what do you do when somebody offers you something which you already think you have enough of you don't want anymore you say something like what do I need that for I've already got it and it's almost an expression of pride of self sufficiency of saying I'm okay thanks

I don't need it and Jesus looks deeper than they are capable of looking he knows their need and he says he says to them he says that you are wretched you are pitiful you are poor you are blind you are naked come to me and receive real wealth true cleansing removal of shame he can help them to see what they are completely blind to it's the gospel it's the cleansing power of the cross it's the work of the Holy Spirit which takes the eye scales away and helps us to see can you see the dynamic Jesus has absolutely nothing good to say about this church and yet he stands there and he offers them the most magnificent and generous invitation verse 8 19 as many as I love I rebuke and discipline so be committed and repent listen I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into him and have dinner with him and he with me Jesus is speaking to a church he's speaking to church people you and me people who call themselves Christians who hang around churches who are proud of their standing in the church community speaks as a father to a wayward son or daughter that he is still in relationship with he has not given up on relationship yet those I love I rebuke and I discipline wake up he speaks a word to insiders not to outsiders and he says let me in last week when I preached on the letter to the church in Philadelphia Jesus was portrayed as the faithful steward of God's house he has the swipe card to every room in heaven and he opens and he closes doors of opportunity to ministry and ultimately to heaven itself if he opens it you can't close and if he closes it you can't open it awesome power but the door here in Laodicea is different this door is a door that we have the ability to open and that we are ultimately held responsible for if we don't open it and

[16:15] Jesus says to us to his church be committed and repent it's a call to commitment to stand in Christ to move from lukewarm fence sitting and half-heartedness to a life which is devoted to Christ to repentance to a turning back to what we already know a turning back to the gospel giving up the faking it and allowing Jesus to do his cleansing work in us it's a call to humble dependence and repentance and it's a completely undeserved invitation into a renewed and refreshed relationship with Jesus I will come into him or her and I will have dinner with him or her and they with me it's the intimacy of knowing Jesus the closeness of having a meal together real relationship with him being able to pour your heart out to him and knowing him personally and knowing that he

cares for you it's not about doing and performing it's about abiding and resting and refreshing in joyful obedience of our saviour

Jesus Christ I thank God for the man who taught me when I was first a believer to relate to God in a real and intimate way every day in coming to his word and speaking with him in prayer and also sharing the faith with my friends and I grew and I was refreshed in my relationship with Jesus and I felt alive and I felt dependent on him and it was just a deep thrill being his person and after a few years and some of them in theological college and it's not college's fault but it became a chore and a task and a duty and more about getting over my guilt than enjoying Jesus and I was very half-hearted and lukewarm in coming to the scriptures and I used the language of commitment but was trading on the past not on the present and it's a really lonely place to be and Jesus invites us into something which is rich and intimate and relational with him and so I thank God for the woman and not Kerry another woman I thank God for Kerry let me tell you but this other woman who 25 years later helped me back into joyous times with

Jesus in his word and in prayer and in understanding that I was his son and who helped me to experiencing the intimacy and the grace and the exceeding joy of dining with him and living for him of being able to come safely into his presence despite being a person who was wretched pitiful poor blind and naked it's the greatest thing in life to know that we are loved by Jesus it's an enormous privilege to treasure him together there's incredible encouragement from coming together as the people of God who just love him and Jesus stands here with this church that he has nothing to commend to or to commend them for and he offers them extraordinary grace and mercy and kindness

I think it's incredibly similar to the sort of teaching which is going on in Luke's gospel from round about Luke chapter 18 you know the rich young man who comes up to Jesus and he says to Jesus what's the what's the good thing what's the one good thing that I must do to inherit eternal life and he says Jesus says we know the commandments he said I've kept all the relational commandments look I've never committed adultery I've never murdered anybody I've never lied I don't steal and I really honour my mum and dad and the whole community listening on they would have looked at the bloke they would have known his history and they would have said yeah he is like that that's the sort of bloke he is but Jesus drew out his heart and he said you still lack just one thing sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and then come and follow me and he walked away from Jesus very sad because he had great wealth he would not let go of one treasure to lay hold of a better treasure the Laodiceans are being called to let go of something which was a treasure to them but which made the Lord

Jesus want to vomit and in his great grace he wasn't just calling them to leave something precious or what was precious to them he was calling them to something precious something far more precious he wanted them to have something so much better he wanted these wealthy self-satisfied people to have him as their greatest treasure to repent to see that they needed to let go of the false treasure and lay hold of him and Jesus was very sad when that man walked away from him a great gift was being offered and he didn't take it because he thought he had something better no thanks I don't need it really is what he's saying even though he didn't say it like that and Jesus said how hard it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into heaven and the people who were listening and the people were looking on they were astonished at what Jesus said they were shocked and the disciples who can be saved and the question gets an astonishing answer with the encounter with the chief tax collector

[22 : 43] Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19 wealthy greedy rip off merchant trader he's all those things a great story for a current affair you know do one of those ambush interviews with Zacchaeus coming out the corner in Jericho up the tree gotcha Zacchaeus as he gets out of his filthy looking Mercedes Benz or whatever it is to climb the tree what's it like to live the high life on what you've stolen from other people in Jericho you dog that's how you do it isn't it he's a true Laodicean wretched pitiful poor blind and naked and he encounters Jesus and he is transformed isn't that incredible Lord I give back half of my possessions to the poor and if I've ripped off anybody in the year I have I will pay back four times what I've stolen from them so he does he exchanges one treasure for another he is received and accepted and loved by Jesus shame is removed his eyes are open he's loved by Jesus who declares the impossible

Jesus says today salvation has come to this house this guy gets it church in Laodicea is called to exchange one treasure for another they're called to overcome you see the starting point the starting point for all of us here is one of our value statement humble authenticity seeing ourselves as Christ sees us and the way that Christ sees us is all we've begun at this point wretched pitiful poor blind naked incredibly needy somebody asked me a question the other day about how I would cope as a minister if I was leading a church with a number of attenders who live an openly gay lifestyle and it threw me for a bit and I spent quite a bit of time reflecting on the question I'm going to continue to do so but part of the answers in this passage to see myself as Jesus assesses me to see me before I see them to see me as wretched pitiful poor blind naked very needy of the grace of Christ starting point for us all because it puts us in a place where we won't be too quick to exalt ourselves over others and it reminds us of the grace that we all need that's not a complete answer to that question but it is a starting point and I think going with that I hope that our church and I think that our church is a safe place for people from all sorts of places and struggles to consider the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ a church where we understand that we are all a work in progress that we haven't arrived and that we're at the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ and he is the one who has lifted us up from where we were where the Lord Jesus looked on us and saw us as wretched pitiful poor blind naked deeply broken before him I've only got to go to the Sermon on the Mount to expose my heart and reveal me to be

I read the Sermon on the Mount and I see straight away that I'm in God's eyes a thief a murderer an adulterer an immoral man and I don't glory in that but it drives us to be like the tax collector in the temple in Luke 18 whose starting point in relationship with Christ is to beat his breast and to cry out Lord have mercy on me the sinner Revelation 3 finishes with the words of Jesus to this church to the one who overcomes verse 21 to the one who overcomes I will give the right to sit with me on my throne just as I also won the victory and sat down with the father on his throne now it's pretty clear through this passage that the the overcomer is not the self-made man or woman they are the person who takes up Jesus invitation and buys from him gold refined in the fire so that they may be rich and white clothes so that they may be dressed and their shameful nakedness hidden and ointment to spread on their eyes that they might see so the overcomer that we are called to be is the one who turns to Jesus who comes to Jesus who receives from Jesus who depends on Jesus and we can do that because he is the great overcomer he is the one who has overcome for us and he says I also won the victory and sat down with my father on his throne he overcame God in the flesh allowed his creation to reject him in the most wicked and final way that they could at the cross he overcame he is the resurrected Christ the first to overcome sin and death he overcame right now he sits with his father on the throne of heaven ruling over the universe we overcome when we give way to him when we see ourselves as God sees us as wretched as pitiful as poor as blind and as naked we overcome when we turn from self-sufficiency to independence to turn from self-sufficient independence and we overcome when we humbly receive the grace that God wants to shower us with we overcome when we treasure Jesus

[29 : 09] Amen Amen wam Mapsmasteros