

Hot or Cold. But not Lukewarm

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[0 : 00] 22 which addresses the church at Laodicea. As I said at the start we're coming to the end of the section where the churches, seven churches were being addressed by the Lord. Now you may be familiar with this section and heard sermons on all the different churches. If you go back to verse 1 of chapter 1 we see the reason for which John was given this revelation. What the Lord showed to him in the purpose followed, the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angels to his servant John who bore witness to the word of God and so on. So as you go back to the beginning of the book you realize the purpose for which God was giving this word. So much of revelation looks way into the future to the coming of the Lord as you see towards the end but it also instructs us about things that will take place before that time. And the first warning that we see in the book of Revelation is the warning to the churches. And as always as we see in our own world a variety of churches with variety of issues and varieties of works and all kinds of things. We see the variety that the revelation was being given to these seven churches. We see the kind of different things that were going on in the churches. Each church is addressed and it's characterized usually by one particular mark. The church at

Ephesus had begun to backslide. The church at Pergamon was compromised. It was holding to other teachings. The church at Thyatira was a church that it was saying it was on its last chance told to repent. The church at Sardis is described as a dead church. The churches we see here there's so many differences between them. But when you look at the last two that we read in Philadelphia had an open door of opportunity there for them. The door was open. But what's interesting then as you read into the church at Laodicea is the door is closed but the Lord Jesus is standing at the door and knocking.

And perhaps the church at Laodicea is one we may be often called to mind. When we hear these words that describe the church in verse 15 I know your works you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold I will spit you out of my mouth.

There's a real warning in these words. And yet when you look at the church you think to yourself well there's not really many major problems here. There's no real heresy in their midst. There's no persecution going on. There's no immorality mentioned. None of these things describe the great problem in the church at Laodicea. So what does mark it out? Mediocrity. They become complacent in all that they see around them and all that they have in their lives. They've lost their focus to the extent now that you see Christ on the outside standing at the door and knocking.

And there's always a strong warning to ourselves there. There's opportunity for them. As it says here he is standing at the door and knocking. But they need to open this door that the Lord will come in and refresh them. Laodicea is a church that has problems. The other churches have both positives and negatives mentioned. But what is said about the church in Laodicea this lukewarmness is a negative.

[4 : 17] And so the question is why? What kind of place was Laodicea? What kind of problems did they have? And is it a problem or problems that we are in danger of ourselves? The free church's vision at the moment is a healthy gospel church for every community. So if you think of that in the case here, the purpose of writing to these churches in Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamon, Thyatira and so on would be to refresh them, to renew them, to reinvigorate them, reinvigorate them, to be a healthy church in their place. And that's the same as what we would long to see in our own country and other nations of the world. Healthy gospel church, being strong witnesses in our communities. But in order for that to be the case, it doesn't matter what we do and how we're going about things. If the Lord is on the outside, it's no use.

So the answer to be refreshed and focused is with Jesus as our Lord. In the midst of everything that we do, that he would be with us, with us in our worship, with us in our homes, with us in our

outreach, and all that we seek to do for him, that he would be with us in the midst to bless. And so we're going to look at this church at Laodicea and see what it has to say to us. First of all, we're just going to think about the place, this place that is Laodicea. What kind of place was it? Well, it's a tough diagnosis that it's been given. John Stott in his commentary on this passage. He says, we shall need to brace ourselves to hear what Jesus thinks of the Laodicean church.

We need to brace ourselves. Can you imagine what it would have been like for them to hear this message? A church that maybe thinks all is well. Everything is going well for them. They're prospering in so many ways. And yet this word comes like an arrow. You are neither hot nor cold. Would that you are either hot or cold, but not lukewarm. Imagine what it would be like for them receiving this word. What would the Lord say to ourselves as a congregation, as a church? What words would he use to describe us? Would he describe us in our good works and all that we were doing? Or would he come with negatives and challenges to us? I'm sure there would be a mixture of all good works, but also areas we need to improve on, things we need to refocus on and maybe do better.

[7:18] Because you see, the danger here is maybe they think that there's nothing wrong. We're okay. But what's the danger there? What's the serious danger there is pride.

Pride. Because they think, well, we're doing all right. We're getting on well. And Psalm 75, we sang these words, boast not, I tell the proud. We're not to be proud. That's always the danger that the Lord would humble us. And that's what the Lord is doing to the church at Laodicea. He's humbling them.

And we see the authority of the word that comes to them. We see that in verse 14. It comes with all authority. 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. This is a word from the Lord. And as you see, towards the end of this section in verse 21, it says, It is the Lord's church. It is his church, his body, which he has fought and come victorious for.

He has conquered and sat down with his father on his throne. Where do we look back? We look back to the cross where Christ was victorious and he ascended to his father to sit at the right hand until he comes again. So this is the word with authority from the Lord himself, the one who is victorious. And when we think of all that the Lord has done for us, there's no way then we should be lukewarm for him. We should be on fire for him. The challenge here is to the church at Laodicea, what are you doing for my church? What are you doing for my people, my bride? The different ways he describes his church throughout scripture. What are you doing for my church? And that's the challenge for ourselves as well today? Who is he writing to? What kind of place is Laodicea? Well, you see, as you go through this, it is a rich place. They have plenty of wealth, plenty of prosperity. And in particular, there was three major factors that made them rich.

He describes here in verse 17 that they were rich, but I have prospered and I need nothing.

[10:08] This is their attitude. I have prospered and I need nothing. But there's a warning then in verse 18, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich. So there's this problem.

They thought they were wealthy and rich, but actually the Lord is saying you're poor. So they had all this commerce and banking going on. It was a place, Laodicea, that was the center, the hub of the banking world at the time. Trade came from north, south, east, and west through this great city. And much wealth came with it. It was also a place that was rich because of its textile industry. As we'll see as we go on, he speaks about clothes. He says, you've got all of this cloth, all of this clothes, and yet you're naked. So they had all of these things. They had great wealth.

They had the textile industry, and they also had a special ointment that they got in this place, an ointment that was produced there, that was put on people's eyes to cure blindness.

And this would have brought great wealth to them as well. There's these three positives in this place. A place of wealth, a place of commerce, a place of everything going well. And they come to the point, they say, I am rich. I have prospered. I need nothing. And it's such a dangerous place to be.

When we look around our own town here, we look at the past and present examples of what has brought wealth to this island. You see pictures and images of the herring girls and the industry that was booming for years here. In the past, you see Arnish that brought so much work, and at times still does.

[12:08] You see a new cruise terminal growing up. You see wave and wind energy being harnessed. You see food experts going out. There's so much going on in so many different ways. That's not to say that we're not in need. We know there are great needs around us too. But what happens in these booms and slumps, what we see here, the church becomes lukewarm. The Christian freshness, the Christian witness was dying. And that is always the danger that we have to guard against ourselves. There is a rebuke for them here. Something that we have to always consider for ourselves. And yet when we look at what we have here, our greatest richness, our greatest heritage is our Christian heritage. The Word of God, the Spirit of God that we need to come back to and harness for ourselves. Not to end up being like the church at Laodicea, pushing the Lord outside the door, but making sure that the Lord is in. So the place was a place that was booming. And this led to so many problems. So many problems in this city. But in the midst of all that was going on, their greatest problem is their water supply. For all that this was a booming place of commerce and industry. Their water supply was poor. And that's what the Lord uses to describe how they are as God's people. He says, I know your works. You're neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. But all that they had that was good, the water was lukewarm. Other places nearby were famous for hot springs. Other places were famous for cold springs. And in order to get a water supply to the city, to Laodicea, they would bring water from both these places. But the problem was, if they brought hot water, it would cool down before it reached and be lukewarm. The cool, refreshing water, it would warm up as it was coming to Laodicea and be lukewarm. So this was a great problem. And this is what he's using to describe their spiritual state. We maybe often think of hot as in on fire for the Lord and cold as in being away from the Lord. But that's not the point he's making here at all. He's saying, would that you were either cold or hot? Because the hot water brings refreshing and healing in the same way that cool water quenches a thirst and brings refreshing as well. So it's be one or the other, not lukewarm.

And this is what leads to the image of being spat out. I'm sure you've all picked up maybe a cup of tea thinking it's hot and put it to your mouth only to find that it's cooled down and you just spit it out. Or water that's gone warm and it's just not refreshing. You spit it out. And this is the way the Lord is describing the church here. And what's the problem? They've trusted their wealth.

They say, I am rich. I have prospered. I need nothing. So what a dangerous place to be. And may the Lord guard us against ever thinking that ourselves. That we become complacent and say we have nothing that we need of the Lord. Because apart from him, we can do nothing. So what is their condemnation? Well, he says, you think you are rich. You think all this wealth is going to help you and be there for you all the time. But he's actually saying you are poor. He says, you think you have great cure for eye problems, but you're blind. Look at verse 17. When you say, I am rich. I have prospered. I need nothing. Realizing that you're rich, pitiable, poor. You have this eye salve, but you're blind. You have this great textiles, but you're naked. You think you have everything, but you have nothing. So the very things that they had built their lives on and thought that they were secure was actually their downfall. They were, as it were, building their house upon the sand and not upon the rock. So the Lord comes with the warning. And that's when we turn and see the cure that is here. They say they need nothing. They have been accustomed with selling for a great profit, but now

Jesus comes to them like a merchant with an offer that could change everything for them. He says in verse 18, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich. So he's saying here, come and buy this gold, this precious gold I have to offer that you may be rich. Come and have these white garments, the white garments that you see throughout Revelation as those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Come, take these white garments so that you may clothe yourselves.

And he goes on then to say, the shame of your nakedness may not be seen and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Come and take what I have to offer you because what you have is going to do nothing for you. You need what I have to offer. And he is standing at the door and knocking.

[18:25] He wants to come in to them. There's a call here to repentance. This is where we see the cure. It's about turning to the Lord. But you also see the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ here. There's a note of tenderness in these words as well. He says in verse 19, those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.

And isn't it great that we have the Lord as our God in that way. Those who he loves, he reproveth. He challenges, he disciplines. So be zealous and repent, he says. Come to me. If anyone hears my voice, I will come in. I will come in to him. We see verse 20, behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me. That is the beauty of this fellowship with the Lord Jesus, that he longs to be in the midst of his people. Christ longs to be with his people. Without Christ in our midst, we have nothing.

And so it's always to remind ourselves that everything that we are doing for the Lord is with him in view. To keep our eyes on him. With Christ, the one who is welcomed in, we enjoy fellowship and blessing with him and through him. He offers the cure of what we really need. It's in him. The riches that he has to offer. The clean garments that he has to offer. The 2020 vision that he has to offer. He has all of these things. So that we would see him, the one who has conquered and sat down at the Father's throne. And so we are to look to him. That is the hope of the church at Laodicea and ourselves that he will come in and sit with us and we with him. When you look through the scriptures and you see dining so often with the Lord Jesus, it's a time of fellowship and blessing. And so often Jesus was seen with those who others would rebuke, the tax collectors and the sinners and women who had bad reputations, all these kinds of things. Jesus came and sat with them and ate with them and fellowshiped with them. And he is saying to the church here at Laodicea as to ourselves, remember, I stand at the door and knock. Open and I will come in to you and eat with you and fellowship with you. You will enjoy my blessing. A shared meal in ancient times was a symbol of loving fellowship.

[21 : 24] And it's still the promise that the Lord has to give to his people today, that he will be in the midst to bless. I'll leave you with a story of a pastor in America who went to visit a very wealthy man in Texas. He was invited to dinner in this man's home. The pastor was invited in. And after the meal, this businessman invited him to go outside with him. And he took him outside and he started showing him everything that was his. He pointed to the landscape in front of them where there were oil wells scattered.

And he said, all that is mine. 25 years ago, I had nothing, but all that is mine. Looking in the opposite direction, there were fields filled with grain. And he said, all that is mine too.

Turning east, he saw this huge herd of cattle. And he said, all that is mine. And then he pointed to the west and a beautiful forest. And he said, all that is mine too.

And the businessman paused for a moment, expecting the preacher to say a great word of compliment to him, how well he had done in his life. But the preacher instead put one hand on the man's shoulder and said to him, pointing heavenward. He said, how much do you have in that direction?

And the man's head bowed. And he said, I never thought of that. Sometimes we need a rebuke, just like the church at Laodicea. A church who said, we are rich.

[23 : 17] I need nothing. Just like that businessman who the pastor went to thought he was rich. He needed nothing. And yet he was missing out on everything because he had no thought of Christ.

Without Christ, we have nothing. But as it says, he stands at the door and knocks. Let's keep the door open. That the Lord Jesus would be in the midst of us and everything that we do, that he would be in the midst to bless. May God bless his word to us.

We're going to conclude by singing.