

"Self Sufficiency"

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all. I hope you all had a good holiday break. You know, it's one of the rites of passages as a parent, when your kid looks at you and says, I do it myself. It always happens at some point, and though, yes, it's an appropriate developmental step for them, and it's not the worst thing in the world, there is a reality that often, no, always, the first time they say that, they can't do it themselves, even though they're trying. They say, I do it myself, and they try to tie their shoes, and 10 minutes later, the laces are still not tied.

The fun thing is, when they do it, when they get into their car seat, no, Daddy, I do it myself, and you think, no, I can't let you not buckle your seatbelt. That's illegal. So you have to negotiate these things. They are unable to do the things, but they want to do them on their own, and this is a reality of the human heart and the human soul that we tend towards self-confidence and self-sufficiency even to our detriment. Now, we live in New England, which is the place where self-made, independent American person was made iconic in its culture, and we live in a world today where dependence is often seen as weakness, scorned by others, where self-reliance is valued above all. Friends, I wonder this morning how often we allow this attitude to sink into our spiritual lives as well. How often do we look at God and say, no, God, I do it myself.

How often do we feel that dependence is weakness?

How often do we come into church on Sunday morning feeling like we have to project? I've got it all together. It's my strength, and I'm able to do this. Even when we don't.

[2 : 38] What would Jesus say to a church? A church of, I do it myself. Well, that's what we're going to look at this morning. Advent, just so you know, starts next week.

So this week, we're finishing up on the first part of our series in the book of Revelation. We're going to be on Revelation chapter 3. If you're using the Pew Bibles, it's page 967.

And if you remember, we're looking at the letters to seven churches. Letters to seven churches that are part of the vision that Jesus gave to the Apostle John to the church at large.

And these letters introduce themes that we will then see throughout the rest of the book of Revelation. The challenges that the churches face. The call to endure in the face of hardship and persecution.

And most importantly, the surpassing excellency and the victory and the glory of Jesus Christ in the end. And there are seven letters which suggest not that there are only seven churches that Jesus really cared about, but that the seven was a symbol of completeness or comprehensiveness.

[3 : 52] And so the idea is that these letters were given not just to the real churches that maybe they were read to initially, but given to the whole church, not only in that time, but in all times for us to listen and to think, Jesus, what do you have to say to us through this letter to the church?

How are we like this church today, the church in Laodicea? So let's look at Revelation chapter 3, starting in verse 14. Let's look at this together.

Please read with me. 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 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.

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

[5 : 03] 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. 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 he 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, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at this word together. Lord Jesus, we thank you for this word.

[6 : 02] We thank you that you speak, Lord, through these writings that were given in a specific time and place. And yet you intended us, Lord, for the rest of history to read and understand and receive your revelation and your words to us.

Lord, I pray this morning that you would help us, Lord, that our minds would be alert to understand. That our hearts would be soft to receive, Lord.

And that we would be, Lord, willing to follow your counsel. And in the midst of that, Lord, to bring glory and honor to you.

I pray for your help this morning that I might speak as I ought. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So as we look at this passage this morning, we will see that God calls us to turn from our self-sufficiency into trust in an all-sufficient Christ.

So we're going to look at this in two parts for those of you who are taking notes. The first part is the problem of spiritual lukewarmness. This will be verses 14 through 17. And then the second is the solution of a sufficient Christ in verses 18 through 21.

[7 : 24] So first, the problem. The problem of spiritual lukewarmness. Now, it starts with this image, right? After the introduction, verse 5, he says, You have a problem.

You are lukewarm. And I don't know about you, but I grew up in a Christian culture where what lukewarmness meant was these are people who are half in, half out Christians, whose spiritual fervor is inconsistent at best.

And look, here's the reality. That is real. People can be like that. And that's a problem that needs to be addressed in the Christian life. But that's not what Jesus is actually talking about here.

We need to stop calling them lukewarm based on this text. Because look at it. What does Jesus say? He says, I wish you were hot or cold.

Is Jesus really saying, I wish you were spiritually cold in your fervor for me? No, of course not. He's saying something else. So let's just be clear on that as we move in.

[8 : 29] What is he saying? Well, here's the thing. To the first century readers who lived in the region of Asia Minor, which is now modern-day Turkey, and particularly around the city of Laodicea, it's in a valley called, or a region called Phrygia.

And in this, there were two other cities. One was Hierapolis, and one was Colossae. And Hierapolis had these wonderful hot springs that were known for their medicinal and healing power.

You'd go and soak in the hot waters, and they were good for your soul and for your body. And Colossae had these wonderful springs that produced cool, clear, crisp drinking water.

And so you'd go to Colossae, and you'd drink the Colossian water, and think, ah, that's a good, refreshing cup of water. Laodicea? Laodicea was a wealthy town, put where it was because it was at the crossroads of trade routes, but it was not near a good water source.

The water was actually piped in from miles away. And when it arrived, it was lukewarm and full of minerals.

[9 : 42] Such that they would take the water, and they would put it into jars and let it sit for a couple of days to cool and for the minerals to settle at least a little bit.

Because if you tried to drink it right out of the aqueduct, it would be like drinking salt water. And you would spit it out. Which is exactly what Jesus says he was doing in response to the lukewarmness of the church in Laodicea.

So that's the image. Here's my updated version. Jesus is saying, I wish you were either a Philly cheesesteak or a Maryland crab cake, but instead you're a 7-Eleven hot dog.

That's useless. It's inedible. It's not good for you. There is nothing there. That's a stretch. I know.

I get it. It's the best I could do. So, but maybe you'll remember it. The commentator on Revelation, Grant Osborne, writes this.

[10 : 50] The church should not have matched its water supply. The Laodiceans should have known, should have been known for their spiritual healing like Hierapolis or their refreshing life-giving ministry like Colossae.

Instead, as Jesus' next statement reads, they were lukewarm. So now we understand what the image is. What does it refer to? Well, I think that verse 17 explains that.

Jesus goes on and he says, this is what your lukewarmness looks like. You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. But you don't realize that in reality, you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

And you don't even know it. If I were going to wrap this up in one word, Jesus looks at him and says, you think you have all that you need to spiritually prosper.

And your self-sufficiency is going to kill you. Because you are not that. You are in desperate need. Of something outside of yourself.

[12:08] So this spiritual pride and self-sufficiency, this is what Jesus is getting at this morning in the church in Laodicea. And maybe in our hearts as well.

What might this look like? I think this could go in a ton of different directions. But the text itself points us in a few directions. What are some of the ways that we fall into self-sufficiency?

First is, I think, material prosperity. When we have material wealth, we often can fall into spiritual self-sufficiency.

Why is that? Well, because when we don't lack for our necessities, when we have an abundance of things, of food, of clothing, of shelter, of the things that we need, we become spiritually lazy.

Because we don't trust in God for the things that we need. We're not aware of our need for God to be providing. And we become complacent in light of that.

[13:07] And rather than looking to God daily and saying, oh God, be merciful to me and be my help, provide for me, we think, I've got all I need.

And God fades into the distance. Either that, or we get all this stuff and we think, oh, this stuff is great. I want more.

And we start to take responsibility for it. And we start to be consumed by it so that we care more about managing the gifts of God than knowing God himself. Reminds me of the parable that Jesus told about the man with the barns of grain.

He said, take care. In Luke 12, he said, take care and be on your guard against all covetousness. For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. And he told them a parable saying, the land of a rich man produced plentifully.

And he said to himself, and he thought to himself, what shall I do? For I have nowhere to store my crops. And he said, I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones. And there I will store all my grains and my goods.

[14:17] And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, and be merry. But God said, fool, this night your soul is required of you.

And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

So material wealth can consume us and become the thing that we run after and the thing that we spend our time working for and then enjoying.

And in the midst of this, God gets pushed to the margins of our life. Now our prosperity may be physical, like a good bank account or physical belongings.

It also may be things like physical comfort. It may be non-tangible things like job security or financial success. It may even be things like relational security where we think of our family or our extended family as the places of our richness.

[15:28] And here's some questions for you, for me. Do our belongings consume more of our hearts than depending on God? Are we tempted to hoard rather than be generous with what God has given us?

How do we respond when we lose something of value? Do we get angry and bitter towards God? Do we pray more or less because of what we have?

So one of the ways that self-sufficiency can capture our hearts is through riches, physical, material blessings that we have.

The second thing I think is there can be a self-sufficiency that has to do with our spiritual lives.

When we think we are called to or able to be good enough to please God on our own, this is a very dangerous spiritual self-sufficiency.

Jesus says we are naked, pitiable, not prospering. And this nakedness, what is it talking about? It's not literally talking about nakedness.

[16:47] This is an image here. But you see it in a number of places throughout the Scriptures. And here's one from the Old Testament that may help us understand it. In Lamentations 1.8, writing about Jerusalem, Jeremiah writes, Jerusalem sinned grievously, therefore she became filthy.

All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness. She herself groans and turns her face away. Her uncleanness was in her skirts, and she took no thought of her future.

Therefore, her fall is terrible, and she has no comforter. This is in the context of Jerusalem, the Jewish people turning away from God and worshiping other gods through idolatry, trusting in themselves through their own military strategies, doing these things, turning away from God and trusting in themselves for their own spiritual flourishing.

And they would say, I have kept the law in these ways, so now God must, must give me prosperity and blessing.

And friends, we know this dynamic points to a deeper heart dynamic that we all have. We all have this heart from the very beginning when Adam and Eve fell in the garden, and God came and said, what are you doing?

[18:18] They were naked, and they were ashamed, and what did they do? They started making excuses for themselves to say, well, it wasn't my fault, what happened wrong? And so began the arc of humanity wanting to find our way back to God through our own religious good works.

We want to keep the law. We want to do what is right. We live in a world today where we think, why would God not like a good person like me and accept me? But the New Testament tells us something different.

The New Testament says that when, apart from Christ, we look honestly at ourselves, what do we see? We see this nakedness of sin. Our hearts are full of rebellion against God.

We want to do it ourselves, even in the spiritual realm. And God calls us to put that off and to put on something else, to put on by faith Jesus Christ.

That's what Galatians 3.27 says. To put on Christ so that we might know God. But when we trust in our own good works, when we trust in our own religious activities, when we trust in our mercy, when we trust in our acts of justice, when we trust in our lives, when we trust in our acts of justice.

[19:49] Whether it's Die Mansion, we think these things are what allow us to have a relationship with God. We've fallen into a self-sufficient, self-oriented salvation plan that sidelines Jesus and the cross.

so material wealth can do it religious activity can can be a a forum for our self-sufficiency and finally spiritual blindness it's very clear that jesus means this he says that we are blind and naked and as you look ahead in verse 18 he's going to talk about you need some new salve for your eyes i had to look that up and listen to it a number of salve solve anyway salve i'll try to get it right um what is salve it's it's ointment okay so that's what it is um and what what what we won't don't know in the 21st century is that in the first century there was a medical school in the valley in the uh in the license valley where laodicea was where and they this medical school produced something called phrygian powder that was in that was famous in the whole area for curing eye diseases and so there was so this was a great point of pride we have through our research and technology and knowledge been able to heal eyes and jesus says you think you can see but in fact you are blind blindness here is not a physical thing but a spiritual thing jesus called the pharisees blind guides because they were religiously zealous but without faith or true knowledge of god and their spiritual pride blinded them to seeing who jesus really was paul reminds us in second corinthians 4 when he writes in their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of christ who is the image of god maybe you know this feeling i remember it i remember before i knew christ hearing about christ and having no understanding i had eyes but i could not see who jesus really was and friends we can do this even after knowing christ we can develop a spiritual blindness where we fail to see jesus because of our pride and self-sufficiency so jesus comes to laodicean church and in these ways he says you are in danger of being consumed by these patterns of self-sufficiency but he doesn't leave them there verses 19 and 20 it reminds us of his heart jesus comes and he says i come to you as ones whom i love and i discipline and i reprove you because i care about you because you can turn from this and this is what i call you to i call you to turn away turn away from trusting in yourself turn from this and turn to the all-sufficient christ so this is my second point this is what uh the letter here calls us to and reminds us to that there is an all-sufficient christ you remember the words that jin he read uh read earlier from isaiah 55 come everyone who thirsts come to the water he who has no money come

buy and eat come buy wine and milk without money and without price why do you spend your money for that which does for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food

incline your ear and come to me hear that your soul may live way back in isaiah god was inviting his people our people us to come to him and to receive from him things that we could not have on our own we could spend our money in self-sufficient building of our lives or we could turn to god and without having any money that would be any worth to him we could come humbly and receive from him and this is what jesus says in verse 18 i counsel you to come to me and buy and he uses this economic trend transaction language but when you look at it there's no money transaction he means by buying he says come to me and receive come to me and get from me that which you do not have in and of yourself come and buy not with money but receive by faith all that you long for and look at how he then portrays what it is come to me for riches not the riches of this world but the riches that are in christ remember the words that peter wrote to the church in rome that according to god's great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of jesus christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you who by god's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time in this you rejoice though now for a little while if necessary you've been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of jesus christ jesus says do you want gold this is the gold you really want a tested faith that comes from me and that i will keep you and that i will ensure that you have this inheritance in my kingdom that is imperishable undefiled and unfading and that it will come one day with glory and praise and honor to jesus and he says come don't look at the riches of the world look at look at these riches that will be eternally glorious he goes on and he says not only come to me for gold but come to me for white garments we'll see some of the implications of these white garments as we go further on in the book of revelation in chapter 7 there's a vision of the throne room of god and there are these people from every tribe and tongue gathered around this throne and in verse 13 it says then one of the elders addressed me saying who are these clothed in white robes and where have they come from where have they come and i said to him sir you know and he said to me these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb therefore they are before the throne of god and serve him day and night in his temple and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence they shall hunger no more neither thirst anymore the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat for the lamb in their midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living water and god will wipe away every tear

from their eyes friends the robes were washed in the blood of jesus and jesus says don't come to me and pretend that you could be good enough for me to embrace you on the basis of your filthy rags even the best goodness that we can produce falls so far short of the glory of god but we know that christ through his life and death and resurrection has achieved for us a salvation and we can receive from him these new clothes when we put on christ we put on his righteousness and these righteous clothes are white in their purity and in their glory and when we stand before the judgment throne christ god the father sees the righteousness of christ and he accepts us and he welcomes us and he allows us to sit with him and friends think about how glorious it would be for these believers in the first century facing persecution and trial where following christ would be so costly to know that's the end i don't need armor to get through this i can even die but if i have these white clothes of christ if i am clothed in his righteousness then i have a good shepherd who will watch over me and i have a future with him that will be forever then finally jesus says come come for a new eye salve come for some new medicine that is going to open your eyes so that you can see the glory of god paul goes on in second corinthians 4 having talked about the blindness of unbelievers he says in verse 6 god who said let light shine out of darkness has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of god in the face of christ jesus came to bartimaeus the beggar sitting by the road who was blind and he said bartimaeus do you want to see he said yes and bartimaeus his eyes were opened and he saw jesus and he saw him and he knew this is the son of david this is the messiah this is the hope of israel this is everything we've been waiting for and his eyes were finally opened and friends this is not something we can do we cannot see jesus simply by trying harder but if we go and confess our need for him god will come and meet with us and he will open our eyes and he will help us see christ in all of his glory another commentator on revelation greg

beal says this referring to this last to this first section he's referring back to chapter one notice how in the initial vision christ was attired with a golden girdle his hair was white like wool his eyes were like flaming fire which corresponds strikingly to the three products mentioned in verse 19 the gold the white garments and the eye salve all point to one thing christ only in christ our true riches clothing and insight and friends this is our great hope for our savior and our shepherd king jesus is our greatest treasure in his incarnation we wonder that in love he would come to earth to rescue us at the cross we glory for there he laid down his life to win our salvation by dying for us in the empty tomb we rejoice for he is one of victory over sin and death and all the enemies against god's kingdom and he lives forever and in his ascension we exalt for he is one and we will sit with him forever remember the words of philippians 2 jesus is the one who left all this glory all this greatness all this victory and he humbled himself and he made himself a servant and he took on flesh and he went even to the cross being obedient to the father and submitting himself to him so that he might be then in his resurrection highly exalted having the name that is above every name so that at the name of jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that jesus is lord friends if we have this savior why in the world would we spend our time trusting in ourselves to try to do anything in our lives why would we spend our time and our money trying to prove ourselves when we can go and sit at the feet of jesus and receive from him by faith and live out the callings that he's called us to even when it's costly and even when it's going to include suffering and even when it may include death as it did for the first century believers because we know that in him the all-sufficient christ we have surpassing sufficiency for all of our needs and friends with this then the first part of the vision of revelation ends but it's a great setup because in chapter four he's going to take us to the throne room of god and we're going to see the glory of the lamb who is a lion who is the one who is worthy and in the meantime we're going to celebrate through uh the the season of advent the coming of jesus and the wonder and glory that he came for us let's pray together lord jesus we thank you for this word and lord we pray we pray we confess how often our hearts fall into self-sufficiency and we think that we can do it ourselves how often we are we fall into its complacency its pride lord help us anew this morning to turn from that self-sufficiency and independence and in weakness look to you the all-sufficient christ we pray this in jesus name amen was a worship bent up