

Revelation. Laodicea- a Lukewarm Church
Revelation 3 v 14-22

If we're not sinning scandalously does that make us ok with God? If we haven't backslidden completely into heresy and debauchery but are attending worship most Sundays and living respectably, would that be enough to please the Lord?

Not according to Jesus' message to the congregation in Laodicea. In one of His most strongly worded messages yet He says, "Your lukewarm, nominal kind of religion makes me sick! Your proud self-sufficiency makes me feel like throwing up! Yet, even now, if you hear my voice and my knocking at the door to be readmitted, if you repent and welcome me again, I will return and there can be fresh communion between us."

Have you ever made a cup of tea or coffee and just sat down when the phone rings and by the time you finish the conversation – well – it's not quite cold but it's no longer hot – it's lukewarm, tepid, really quite disgusting and you want to spit it out?

Close to the 1st century city of Laodicea were hot springs and the people thought it a good idea to have the water piped to the town. But by the time it reached there it had cooled – not enough to be actually cold and possibly refreshing, but lukewarm, insipid and really quite useless.

A bit like the Christians in the church there, according to Jesus, Who is here described by contrast as the Amen, the Faithful and true Witness and Ruler over God's creation. In other words He is the very epitome of reliability whereas they have become anything but! All they can be relied upon for is insipid, half-hearted worship and uninspiring witness.

The Lord would rather have them 'hot' – enthusiastic, even if they needed some guidance in doctrine, or more obviously 'cold' – clearly

backslidden and knowing it so they might be prepared to listen to His challenging ‘wake up call’.

The problem with Laodicea was that *they* thought they were ok. It was a wealthy city, the Christians there had what they needed materially. They were respectable and respected as citizens – no threat of persecution mentioned here. So they were content to just go with the flow and not cause trouble for themselves.

-Let’s not offend anyone or do anything controversial. Let’s just enjoy a comfortable life, being ‘lukewarm’.

Had they forgotten Jesus said His disciples would have to take up our ‘crosses’ to follow Him? Were they ignoring the Gospel accounts of Jesus causing social and religious controversy during His ministry? Had they in fact developed a style of church which had effectively shut the ‘real Jesus’ out? Just nice hymns and familiar, psychologically comforting rituals. But no Jesus. No challenge. No discipleship.

In His assessment, this congregation in Laodicea was in fact spiritually “wretched, pitiful, poor, naked and blind”. He urges them and perhaps many of us today too, to repent of such stubborn self-reliance and return to a full dependence on Him. For only in Him are found true riches, true righteousness and true enlightenment. It is Jesus Christ, Son of God, our Saviour Who truly enriches our souls, clothes us in His perfect righteousness and opens the eyes of our minds and hearts to understand the truth and purpose of Almighty God.

Now at first this letter to the lukewarm church in Laodicea may seem discouraging. What a disappointing, pathetic bunch they sound! Or maybe, in honesty, they remind us a bit of ourselves and we feel like failures and want to give up. But hold on! That’s not why Jesus gives us these messages. That’s not why the Lord speaks to us still today, by the Holy Spirit, even when His words challenge and unsettle us. Listen again!

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline”, He says, “So be earnest and repent”.

Our Master really loves us and desires us to grow in His grace. So His rebuke is designed to correct us and draw us back, not strike us down and out! Along with His rebuke come words of invitation and promise. “Here I am! I’m standing at your door, knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me”.

We may have let ourselves become disgustingly lukewarm in our faith but Jesus wants to rekindle His fellowship and friendship with us. Would we offer Him the hospitality of our homes, our hearts, our lives today? Because listen – He continues, “To Him who overcomes I will give the right to sit with me on my throne ...”

Here’s the deal – if we are prepared to open our hearts to Him here on earth, He is willing to open His Father’s house to us in Heaven.

We sometimes joke that if you find a stranger sitting in your favourite pew, instead of scowling at them you should smile, introduce yourself and make them welcome.

But this is no joke. The Lord is serious. Some hearing this may believe about God but have never properly become Christian, and today Jesus invites you to really open your heart and life to Him for the first time. Others may feel that in various ways we have settled for a nominal, respectable kind of lifestyle, but in fact by loving other things more, we have frozen Jesus out of our lives, out of our fellowship. To some of us He may be saying, Look, how pathetic you have become!

But even now He graciously says, Welcome me back with your whole heart and you will find yourselves welcomed into Heaven. You can share my seat and be loved as a child of God!

Such amazing grace. None of us could deserve it. But the worst thing we can do is not accept it and continue on in our own proud but inadequate attempts at righteousness!

Come to Christ, or back to Him, 'home' to Him and let us allow His redeeming love to work in us all that is truly pleasing to God.

The seven 1st century churches in Revelation 2 & 3 all speak to us today. Sometimes by their strengths, sometimes by their weaknesses they tell us what the Lord wants His Church in every place and in every age to be. Ephesus reminds us to keep our first love for Him, Smyrna to be willing to suffer patiently for Him, Pergamum to hold true, Biblical doctrine for Him, Thyatira to practice holiness for Him, Sardis to be sincere for Him, Philadelphia to be enthusiastic in mission for Him and Laodicea to be absolutely and always wholehearted for Him Who loves us and gave Himself for us.

Those who have open ears and willing hearts - let them hear what God's Spirit says to His Church worldwide!

Amen