

**Laodicea: “Neither Hot nor Cold”**

Today we come to the last church of the seven churches that the risen Christ addressed in the book of Revelation, the church in Laodicea. It is for this church that Jesus reserves his harshest and most well know words. He says to her, **“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other! So because you are lukewarm-neither cold nor hot- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”** It literally translates as “I will vomit you out of my mouth.”

The imagery is downright shocking, if not repugnant. What lies behind it is the city water supply in Laodicea. Unlike some cities her water supply was not pure and unlike some cities her water supply came from a hot mineral spring that was located five miles from the city so by the time the water reached Laodicea it was no longer hot, but lukewarm. And so what Jesus is saying to this church is that it would be better if you hated me (cold) than it would be if you were half-hearted in your commitment to me (lukewarm). The person who rejects Christ and things of God may be closer to Him than the person who says he is a Christian but is not really committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

How can this be? Because the person who has rejected him is honest and the person who is sitting on the fence, with one foot firmly planted in the world and the other foot dabbling in the things of God, is deceiving himself because he has no passion for Christ, yet he claims to follow the one who calls him forsake all no matter what the cost. So for the person who rejects Christ at least he is honest, but the person who claims to be a Christian but is not committed is kidding himself. And Jesus is saying to that kind of person, I wish you would make a decision either *for* me or *against* me. **“Choose this day whom you will serve.”** (Joshua) Will you serve me with all you got or will sit on the fence all your life and play games with God? You need to make up your mind one way or the other, be hot or cold, because if you don’t I am going to vomit you out of my mouth.

What I want to do right now is take a little tour and look at some of the hard sayings of Jesus from the four gospels that repudiate the notion that being lukewarm for Christ is an option for Christians.

- Matthew 19:16-30
- Mark 8:34-37
- Luke 9:57-62
- John 6:53-69

I think the greatest struggle we have as Christians is to actually believe that Jesus really means what he is saying in these teachings.

We who are American Christians living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are very much like the church in Laodicea. We, like the Laodiceans, say to ourselves, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.”

We are the Americans, we don’t take foreign aid; we give it out. And we are American Christians, we don’t need missionaries and evangelists to come to our land because we have a church on every

block. It we who send out missionaries to the world, not them. And we are not “wretched, poor, pitiful, blind, and naked.” But Jesus says to the church in Laodicea and to us today, yes you are.

You *are* “wretched, poor, pitiful, blind, and naked.” You may have great wealth in your city, and you may have been able to rebuild your city all on your own, without the help of the Romans after the earthquake, and your lives may be comfortable but you are in danger of losing your souls because the world has seduced you into believing that you can be a Christian in name only.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once spoke of being lukewarm in this way. He called it cheap grace. He said, “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness of sins without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” (The Cost of Discipleship)

I think this is our greatest temptation today. It may be the greatest temptation that ever has been and always will be before church. The temptation to domesticate Jesus and try and follow him half-way. The problem is that we can't follow him half-way. We could and many do but from the perspective of Jesus it is not an option. If we try to follow him half way we risk being spewed out of his mouth. We must follow him wholeheartedly.

Jesus wants us to be passionately in love with him. Christ calls us to follow him with everything we got. Jesus wants us to forsake all other lovers whom we love more than him so that we may love him above all things and all people. Christ has died and risen for our salvation so that he may be Lord in and over our lives. We need Jesus because we are “**dead in our trespasses and sins**” (Eph. 2) and “**he counsels us to buy from him his gold (the gospel) that has been refined in his fire so we can become rich (in the gospel and the things of God) and have our shameful nakedness (sinful nature) clothed in his white clothes (his righteousness) so that we our eyes maybe open by the healing power of his salve (to the light of God's redeeming love).**” (v.18)

Here in this text we find to the key to being a great church on 1026 Davie Avenue. A great church is one that burns hot for Christ. The Lord says these hard words to us because he loves us. The text tells us that “**those whom he loves he rebukes and disciplines.**”

So as hard as Jesus was on the church in Laodicea it was because he loved them. He had not abandoned her in her cozy, half-hearted, self-sufficient Christianity. Instead he was standing at the door of their hearts and knocking so that she would answer the door and let Jesus come into her life so they may eat together.

That is what Jesus wants to do with our church today. Christ wants to eat with us. He wants to sit down at our tables and be with us in an intimate way. Why? Because it is only through that fellowship with him, he with us and us with him, that we will fall in love with Christ and burn hot in our love and devotion to him.

He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Amen.