



REASON TOGETHER
— CHURCH —

LUKEWARM CHRISTIANS

Revelation 3:14–22

Sermon & Pastor's Commentary

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Pastor & Teacher

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

LUKEWARM CHRISTIANS

Revelation 3:14-22

"Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Revelation 3:16

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Aloha everyone and welcome. Thank you for being here today.

Why don't you grab a cup of coffee, walk with us to the Pastor's Study and find a comfortable seat and as we settle in, let's open our Bibles and prepare our hearts so that we can Reason Together the Word of God.

Good morning, everyone.

It's really good to see you again.

If this is your first time with us, a very special welcome. Whether you're joining us from here in Waikiki, somewhere else in Hawaii, on the mainland or from another part of the world, thank you for spending time here today. I never take that for granted.

You know...

One of the things I enjoy most about these mornings is that we don't come together pretending we already have every answer.

We come together because we believe God has spoken through His Word, and we want to understand it a little better than we did last week.

That's a very different goal.

Before we do anything else, let's ask the Author of Scripture to help us understand what He has written.

Let's pray.

Father,

Thank You for giving us Your Word.

Thank You that You are patient with us even when we misunderstand it.

Lord, we all come to passages like this carrying things we've heard over the years. Some of those things are absolutely true. Others may need to be refined. Give us the humility to know the difference.

Help us not to defend our opinions more than we desire to discover Your truth.

Teach us today.

Shape us today.

And may everything we do bring honor to Your Son.

We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Well...

I have to admit something.

When I first started preparing for today's study, I thought I knew exactly where it was going.

After all, I've heard sermons about lukewarm Christians for years.

I've even taught on it myself.

So I expected this to be one of those studies where I simply organized my notes, added a few thoughts and shared them with you.

That isn't what happened.

Instead, this passage started asking *me* questions.

Questions I wasn't expecting.

Questions that honestly made me slow down and rethink a few things.

Now don't misunderstand me.

I'm not here today to tell you that everything you've ever heard about this passage is wrong.

Sometimes what we've always believed turns out to be exactly right.

Sometimes it's mostly right but incomplete.

And every once in a while we discover that we've been answering a question Jesus wasn't actually asking.

That's why I'm excited about today's conversation.

Not because I think I have some brand-new interpretation.

I don't.

I'm excited because I think we're going to do something that's becoming part of who we are here at Reason Together.

We're going to slow down.

We're going to ask good questions.

We're going to let Scripture speak before we rush to conclusions.

If you've been in church for very long, you've almost certainly heard the expression 'lukewarm Christian.'

In fact, if I asked ten Christians to define it, I'd probably get several very similar answers.

Some would say it's someone who comes to church but doesn't really live for Christ during the week.

Others would describe someone who has lost their passion for God.

Still others might say it's someone trying to live with one foot in the church and one foot in the world.

You've probably heard those explanations.

I certainly have.

But here's the question I'd like us to carry throughout today's study.

What did Jesus actually mean when He called the church at Laodicea 'lukewarm'?

Notice I didn't ask,

"Is that a good sermon?"

There are many good sermons built around this passage.

I asked something different.

Is that what Jesus intended His original readers to understand?

Those aren't always the same question.

And I think learning to recognize the difference makes us better students of God's Word.

One of the things I love about Scripture is that it never asks us to be afraid of honest questions.

Think about that.

The disciples asked questions.

The prophets asked questions.

Job asked questions.

Even after the resurrection, the disciples were still asking questions.

Questions are not the enemy of faith.

Very often, they're the doorway to a deeper faith.

So can I ask you to do something with me today?

For the next half hour or so...

Let's take everything we've ever heard about this passage and place it on a shelf.

Not throw it away.

Not reject it.

Just...set it aside for a little while.

Then let's read Revelation chapter 3 as though we're hearing it for the very first time.

If our previous understanding is confirmed, wonderful.

If God gently adjusts our thinking, that's wonderful too.

Because our goal isn't to prove that we've always been right.

Our goal is to understand God's Word a little more faithfully today than we did yesterday.

So if you have your Bible, let's turn together to Revelation chapter 3.

We're going to begin in verse 14.

But before anyone reads...

I'd like to ask you one question.

Don't answer it.

Just tuck it away in the back of your mind.

When you hear the expression 'lukewarm Christian'...what picture immediately comes into your mind?

Whatever your answer is...

Hold onto it.

Because before we finish today, we're going to come back to that very question.

So...

Please follow along as I read our passage for today.

Let's begin with Revelation chapter 3, verses 14 through 22.

Take your time.

There's no rush.

Remember, we're not reading this because we have to get through it.

We're reading it because these are the very words God has preserved for us.

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Now...

Can I ask you not to do something?

Don't try to explain it yet.

I know that's hard.

It is for me too.

The moment we finish reading a passage, our minds immediately begin searching for answers.

Today, I'd like us to resist that temptation for just a few minutes.

Instead of becoming interpreters...

let's become observers.

Those are two different jobs.

Imagine someone handed you this passage with no chapter heading.

No study Bible.

No footnotes.

No commentary.

No pastor standing beside you.

Just these verses.

What would you notice?

Not what they mean.

Just...

what do you see?

For example...

The very first thing that catches my attention is that before Jesus says anything about the church, He says something about Himself.

I think that's interesting.

Why begin there?

I don't know yet.

I'm just noticing it.

Then He says,

"I know your works."

That tells me something immediately.

Jesus isn't making assumptions.

He isn't relying on rumors.

He isn't listening to what somebody else told Him about this church.

He knows them perfectly.

Now my eyes move down a little farther.

Three words suddenly seem to dominate the passage.

Hot.

Cold.

Lukewarm.

It's almost impossible to miss them.

Then comes the sentence that's probably caused more discussion than any other part of this letter.

"I would thou wert cold or hot."

Now...

I'll be honest.

The first time I really slowed down and looked at those words, they surprised me.

Maybe they surprise you too.

Why would Jesus say that?

Notice the question I'm asking.

Not...

"What does cold represent?"

Not yet.

I'm asking something even simpler.

Why would Jesus say those words?

Sometimes the first question isn't the most important question.

Sometimes there's an earlier one waiting to be asked.

And I've discovered that if I rush to answer the second question before I've wrestled with the first one...

I usually miss something.

Let's keep reading.

Here's something else I noticed.

Jesus doesn't continue talking about temperature very long.

In fact, after only a few verses, the conversation begins to move in another direction.

Suddenly He's talking about wealth.

Blindness.

Clothing.

Gold.

Eye salve.

Repentance.

Love.

An open door.

Fellowship.

Did you notice that?

If someone had covered up verses 15 and 16...

would you still think this letter was primarily about temperature?

That's an interesting question.

Because it raises another one.

Is Jesus changing the subject?

Or...

is everything that follows explaining what He meant in the opening illustration?

I don't know yet.

But I wrote that question in the margin of my Bible.

And it stayed there for quite a while.

You know...

I've become rather fond of writing questions in the margins of my Bible.

Not answers.

Questions.

Answers have a way of making me think I've finished studying.

Questions remind me that I'm still learning.

Some of those questions have remained in my Bible for years.

Others were answered a few days later.

And every once in a while...

I discover that the answer was much better than anything I would have written the day I first asked the question.

Maybe that's one of the reasons Proverbs tells us that if we seek wisdom like hidden treasure, we'll find it.

Treasure usually isn't lying on the surface.

It takes a little digging.

So...

Before we interpret anything...

let's ask ourselves one more question.

What have we actually learned...

just by observing?

Here's my list.

Maybe yours is different.

Jesus knows this church completely.

The church sees itself differently than Jesus sees it.

Jesus is deeply concerned about something He calls "lukewarm."

Even in His correction, He offers counsel instead of giving up on them.

He calls them to repentance.

He reminds them that He loves them.

And by the time we reach the end of the letter...

we discover something beautiful.

Hope.

This letter doesn't end with rejection.

It ends with invitation.

That really caught my attention.

Because if I'm honest...

I think many of us hear the word *rebuke* and immediately think *rejection*.

Jesus doesn't.

He rebukes because He loves.

That's a very different picture.

Now...

Before we try to answer what "lukewarm" means...

I think we owe something to the people who first heard these words.

Here's what I mean.

Jesus wasn't writing first to people living in Honolulu.

Or Orlando.

Or Manila.

He was writing to believers living in one particular city almost two thousand years ago.

So maybe...

just maybe...

before we ask,

"What does this mean to me?"

we should first ask,

"What would they have heard?"

Would you take a little trip with me?

Let's leave the Pastor's Study for a few minutes...

and visit an ancient city called Laodicea.

Because I have a feeling that understanding the city will help us hear the letter with fresh ears.

So...

Let's take a little trip.

Not for the sake of history alone.

History is fascinating, but that's not why we're going.

We're going because we want to hear this letter the way the Christians in Laodicea may have heard it.

Whenever I study the Bible, I try to remind myself of something.

The people in Scripture weren't characters in a story.

They were real people.

They lived in real cities.

They walked real streets.

They had jobs.

Families.

Bills to pay.

Children to raise.

They worried about tomorrow just like we do.

Sometimes I think remembering that changes the way I read the Bible.

So...

What kind of city was Laodicea?

Well, one thing historians generally agree on is that it was a prosperous place.

Business flourished there.

Trade passed through the city.

People didn't look at Laodicea and think,

"There's a struggling little town."

They thought,

"That's a successful city."

Now...

There's nothing sinful about success.

Scripture never teaches that prosperity is automatically wrong.

But success has a subtle danger.

It can slowly convince us that because things are going well...

everything must be well.

Have you ever noticed that?

Sometimes it's during the difficult seasons of life that we pray the most.

It's during the comfortable seasons that we can quietly begin depending on ourselves.

I don't know if that's where Jesus is going yet...

but it's already making me think.

Now...

There's something else about Laodicea that's especially interesting.

Actually...

it requires us to correct a familiar story.

Their water and their baths.

For many years, a very specific explanation became popular.

Hot water was said to have traveled from Hierapolis.

Cold water was said to have traveled from Colossae.

And by the time both reached Laodicea...

the water had supposedly become lukewarm.

That's a memorable explanation.

But newer excavation has shown that the city's water system did not work that way.

Laodicea received spring water through a system running from sources south of the city.

It was not being supplied by hot water from Hierapolis and cold water from Colossae.

So I don't think we should continue presenting that story as established history.

Correcting it does not weaken the Bible.

It simply keeps us from asking history to say more than the evidence allows.

But that correction led researchers to notice something else.

Hot and cold water were still very familiar in this region.

Hierapolis was famous for its hot springs and natural baths.

The Lycus Valley could also become cold enough for water systems to freeze.

And Laodicea itself contained several Roman bath complexes.

At least one of them likely operated during the first century.

A Roman bath deliberately offered different temperatures.

There was a heated room and hot bathing water.

There was a cold room with an invigorating pool that could refresh the body.

And there was a temperate room used mainly while moving between the two.

Now...

does that prove Jesus was describing a bathhouse?

No.

The text never uses the word bathhouse.

But it does help us understand why the original listeners could hear both hot and cold as desirable.

Hot water had a purpose.

Cold water had a purpose.

Lukewarm water was neither one.

That's historically credible, but Scripture still has to tell us what the picture means spiritually.

Now...

Can I use a very simple illustration?

Suppose you've spent a hot afternoon walking in the sun.

Then you step into a cool pool or into the ocean.

That cold water feels wonderful.

Now imagine that your muscles are sore after a long day.

You settle into a warm spring or a properly heated bath.

That hot water feels wonderful too.

Neither experience is second best.

Both temperatures accomplish something valuable.

One refreshes and invigorates.

The other cleanses, soothes and warms.

Now imagine water that is no longer refreshingly cold...

but is not hot enough to provide the benefit of a hot bath.

It has lost the quality that made either temperature desirable.

That's one reason this illustration catches my attention.

Jesus does not say,

'I wish you were hot instead of cold.'

He says,

'I would thou wert cold or hot.'

Both hot and cold are desirable and purposeful.

Lukewarmness is the condition that accomplishes neither purpose well.

Now...

Before anybody says,

"Well, there it is. We've solved the whole passage."

Let's slow down.

We haven't.

We've only learned something about the illustration.

The illustration still has to fit the rest of the letter.

And that's where I think many Bible studies accidentally move too fast.

An interesting historical fact is not the same thing as a Biblical conclusion.

One may support the other.

It should never replace the other.

There's another detail about Laodicea that caught my attention.

The city had a reputation for wealth.

In fact, after a devastating earthquake, historical records indicate that the city rebuilt itself without accepting financial assistance from Rome.

That's remarkable.

Can you imagine the civic pride that might produce?

"We're doing just fine."

"We don't need anyone's help."

Now...

I'm not saying Jesus had that event specifically in mind.

The text doesn't tell us that.

But I do think it's interesting that only a few verses later He says,

"You say, 'I am rich...I have become wealthy...I need nothing.'"

At the very least...

those ideas seem to belong in the same conversation.

Whether they're directly connected or not is something we'll continue thinking about.

And I think that's exactly where we should be.

Not rushing.

Not forcing conclusions.

Simply gathering evidence.

Because here's something I've learned over the years.

The strongest conclusions usually belong to the people who were patient enough to wait for all the evidence before they reached them.

I wish I had learned that lesson much earlier in life.

Now...

We've listened carefully to the passage.

We've learned a little about the city.

I think we're finally ready to ask the question we've been carrying with us from the very beginning.

What did Jesus actually mean?

And as we're about to discover...

faithful Christians have answered that question in more than one way.

So instead of choosing our favorite too quickly...

let's sit around the table together and listen to each one.

Well...

We've arrived at the question we've been carrying with us since the beginning.

What did Jesus mean?

Now...

Wouldn't it be nice if every passage in the Bible came with an inspired footnote that simply said,

"Here's exactly what I meant."

It would certainly make teaching easier.

But God often invites us to do something different.

He invites us to study.

To compare Scripture with Scripture.

To think carefully.

To pray.

To reason together.

And I think that's exactly what we're going to do now.

If you've been a Christian for very long, you've probably discovered that not every faithful Bible teacher explains this passage the same way.

Years ago that used to bother me.

I thought,

"How can good Bible teachers disagree?"

Then I realized something.

Sometimes they disagree because they're asking different questions.

Or because they're emphasizing different pieces of evidence.

That doesn't automatically make one person careless and another faithful.

It simply means we need to slow down enough to understand *why* they reached their conclusions.

So...

Instead of asking,

"Which interpretation do I like best?"

I'd rather ask,

"Which interpretation best explains what we're reading?"

I think that's a healthier question.

Let's begin with the interpretation many of us probably heard first.

According to this view...

hot describes a believer who is passionately following Christ.

Cold describes someone who has rejected Him.

Lukewarm describes someone trying to live somewhere in between.

I imagine many of us grew up hearing something very close to that.

And before we evaluate it...

let's recognize what this interpretation does well.

It reminds us that following Christ is meant to be wholehearted.

It challenges us not to settle for casual discipleship.

It warns us about hypocrisy.

Those are Biblical concerns.

Very Biblical concerns.

But a true warning is not necessarily the meaning of this particular illustration.

We still have to ask whether the explanation fits Jesus' words.

And this is where I encounter a serious problem.

If cold represents unbelief...

why would Jesus say,

'I would thou wert cold or hot'?

That is not a small difficulty.

Jesus is addressing His church.

He says that He loves these people, rebukes them and calls them to repentance.

I cannot conclude that He would prefer open rejection to the imperfect condition of His own children.

The text never defines cold as unbelief.

So while the familiar sermon may contain an important warning...

I do not believe it explains what Jesus meant here.

And I think we should say that plainly while respecting those who have taught it sincerely.

You know...

One of the easiest things in the world is to criticize a position after you've made it sound weaker than it really is.

I don't ever want us to do that here.

If we're going to examine another person's understanding of Scripture, then we owe them the courtesy of presenting it as strongly and as accurately as we can.

Only then should we begin asking questions.

I think that's part of loving our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now...

Let's consider the interpretation that both hot and cold are desirable.

This view does not treat the picture as a scale of spiritual passion.

Instead...

it focuses upon usefulness and purpose.

Cold water refreshes, invigorates and can serve swimming or bathing.

Hot water cleanses, soothes and can serve therapeutic bathing.

Both accomplish something valuable.

Lukewarm water...

does neither especially well.

This is where Laodicea's Roman baths may help us understand the picture.

A cold pool offered an invigorating experience.

A hot room and bath offered heat, cleansing and comfort.

The temperate room was mainly a place of transition.

So Jesus' words,

'I would thou wert cold or hot,'

make immediate sense.

Both are desirable.

But one more question remains.

What made this church's works spiritually ineffective?

Remember how Jesus introduces the illustration.

He says, 'I know thy works.'

Then He speaks of hot, cold and lukewarm.

And immediately afterward He exposes their claim to be rich and in need of nothing.

So the image of useful temperatures explains the contrast.

But the remainder of the letter explains the church's condition.

Its prosperity had produced spiritual self-sufficiency.

Its confidence had become blindness.

Its works no longer reflected conscious dependence upon Christ.

That is where the entire passage begins to fit together.

The historical picture illuminates the temperatures.

The text itself identifies the subject as their works.

And the complete letter identifies the spiritual root of the problem.

We need all three pieces.

Now the third interpretation becomes much clearer.

Verses 15 and 16 introduce the diagnosis...

while the verses that follow explain it.

In other words...

the real issue is not temperature by itself.

It is a church whose works have become ineffective because it has stopped recognizing its need for Christ.

The congregation has become satisfied with its own condition.

And the contrast between its evaluation and Christ's evaluation is unmistakable.

Not because the language is dramatic.

But because the rest of the letter is focused on self-deception.

'Thou sayest...'

'And knowest not...'

That's a powerful contrast.

The church thinks it needs nothing.

Jesus says it needs everything He alone can provide.

That is the interpretive key.

And it also answers the question raised by the temperature picture.

Hot and cold both accomplish a recognizable purpose.

Lukewarm describes works that have become spiritually ineffective.

Those works are ineffective because self-sufficiency has replaced conscious dependence upon Christ.

Do you see how the pieces fit together?

The historical setting helps us understand the picture.

The wording directs our attention to works.

The rest of the letter reveals the spiritual cause.

And Christ's loving counsel reveals the remedy.

That is not uncertainty.

It is a conclusion that gives each kind of evidence its proper place.

And it keeps Scripture, not historical reconstruction, as our final authority.

It also keeps me humble.

Because my responsibility isn't to defend my favorite interpretation.

My responsibility is to follow the evidence wherever God's Word leads.

And in this passage, I believe the evidence leads to a clear answer.

Now...

Can I tell you the conclusion I reached while preparing this study?

I no longer believe these are three equally likely explanations.

The cold-equals-unbelief interpretation fails to explain why Christ prefers cold to lukewarm.

The familiar aqueduct story does not survive current archaeological investigation.

But useful hot and cold temperatures remain historically credible, especially within Roman bathing culture.

And the complete letter tells us what made the church lukewarm.

Jesus chose an illustration His listeners could readily understand...

and used it to expose the ineffectiveness of their works.

Their problem was not merely low emotion.

It was self-satisfied blindness to their need for Him.

That is the conclusion that best explains all of the evidence.

And I think we can state it clearly.

So what did Jesus actually mean?

He was not saying that these believers were halfway between salvation and unbelief.

He was not merely complaining that they lacked excitement.

He was describing a church whose works had become spiritually ineffective.

Material prosperity had produced self-sufficiency.

Self-sufficiency had produced blindness.

They believed they needed nothing.

Christ showed them that they desperately needed Him.

That is lukewarmness in this passage.

Self-satisfied spiritual ineffectiveness.

The more time I spent with the passage...

the more I realized that this conclusion does not make Christ's invitation less important.

It makes the invitation even more beautiful.

Because Jesus does not merely diagnose their condition.

He offers everything their self-sufficiency had taught them to neglect.

He offers true riches, spiritual sight, cleansing, correction and fellowship.

He is not writing to win an argument.

He is calling His people back to conscious dependence upon Himself.

I don't want us to lose sight of that.

The explanation must never become more important than the invitation.

Sometimes we become so interested in solving the puzzle that we forget why the puzzle was given.

Now...

Let me ask you something.

Suppose Jesus had wanted simply to tell this church,

"You're spiritually lazy."

Couldn't He have said that?

Of course He could have.

If He had wanted to say,

"You're no longer passionate about Me,"

He certainly had the words.

Instead...

He painted a picture.

I've noticed something about Jesus.

He loved pictures.

He talked about seeds instead of theology textbooks.

Fishing nets instead of outlines.

Ordinary water instead of a theological lecture.

Why?

Because pictures stay with us.

You may forget a definition.

You'll probably remember a picture.

That's exactly what Jesus was doing.

Now...

Here's something that really captured my attention.

Notice what Jesus talks about after the illustration.

Not before.

After.

He doesn't continue discussing water.

Instead...

He says,

"You say, 'I am rich...I have become wealthy...I need nothing.'"

Then immediately...

"But you do not know..."

I stopped there for quite a while.

Those four words...

"You do not know..."

They're heartbreaking.

Because the church wasn't pretending.

They weren't trying to deceive Jesus.

They were deceiving themselves.

And that may be one of the most dangerous conditions any believer, or any church, can experience.

Not open rebellion.

Self-deception.

Because if I know I'm struggling...

I'll probably seek help.

But if I sincerely believe everything is fine...

why would I?

That's what makes this passage so personal.

You know...

As I was preparing for today, I asked myself a question that made me a little uncomfortable.

What if someone had asked the Christians in Laodicea how they were doing spiritually?

What do you suppose they would have said?

I suspect many of them would have answered,

"We're doing great."

And they probably would have believed it.

That's sobering.

Because it reminds me that my opinion of my own spiritual condition isn't the final authority.

Neither is yours.

Christ's is.

That realization has a way of humbling us.

And honestly...

I think humility is one of the greatest gifts a Bible study can produce.

Not uncertainty.

Humility.

Humility says,

"Lord, if I'm missing something...please show me."

That's a dangerous prayer.

Dangerous in the best possible way.

Because I believe God delights in answering prayers like that.

There's something else I noticed.

Jesus never says,

"I don't love you anymore."

Actually...

He says exactly the opposite.

"Those whom I love..."

I have to tell you...

those words changed the way I read this entire letter.

Because once I remembered that everything Jesus says is spoken from love...

the tone of the passage changed.

It no longer sounded like a judge looking for reasons to condemn.

It sounded like a Shepherd refusing to abandon His sheep.

What a difference that makes.

Correction feels different when you know the person correcting you loves you.

As a parent...

you understand that.

As a teacher...

you understand that.

There were times in my own life when someone cared enough about me to tell me something I needed to hear.

At the time...

it wasn't always comfortable.

Looking back...

I'm grateful.

Sometimes the greatest act of love is telling someone the truth with gentleness.

And isn't that exactly what Jesus is doing here?

He's telling the truth.

Not to shame them.

To restore them.

That's why I find it so interesting that after every word of correction...

there seems to be another invitation.

"Repent."

"Hear My voice."

"Open the door."

"I will come in."

"I will dine with you."

"To the one who overcomes..."

Do you hear that rhythm?

Correction...

Invitation.

Correction...

Invitation.

Correction...

Invitation.

That doesn't sound like someone trying to push people away.

It sounds like Someone who refuses to stop calling His people home.

I love that.

And I hope we never lose sight of it.

Because if all we remember from Revelation 3 is the word lukewarm...

but we never understand why their works had become ineffective...

I think we've missed the central warning.

Prosperity had taught them to believe they needed nothing.

Christ called them to recognize their need for Him again.

Repent.

Depend upon Me.

Open the door.

Come and fellowship with Me again.

That is the heartbeat of this entire passage.

Can I be candid with you for a minute?

This passage has been quietly following me around all week.

Not because I was trying to prepare a lesson.

But because it kept asking *me* questions.

I think that's one of the things I love most about Scripture.

Sometimes you think you're studying the Bible...

and then you realize...

the Bible is studying you.

Has that ever happened to you?

You read a passage you've read dozens of times.

Nothing about the words has changed.

But somehow...

you have.

And suddenly a verse you've almost memorized begins speaking to you in a completely different way.

That's what happened to me this week.

You see...

it's very easy to read Revelation chapter 3 and start thinking about somebody else.

Maybe another church.

Maybe another denomination.

Maybe another Christian we know.

If we're not careful, we can spend the entire study diagnosing everyone except ourselves.

I don't think that's why Jesus preserved this letter.

I think He preserved it so that every generation of believers would quietly ask,

"Lord...what do You want me to see?"

Not,

"What do You want my neighbor to see?"

Me.

Can I ask you something?

When was the last time you sincerely prayed,

"Lord...if there's something in my life that I'm not seeing...would You show me?"

That's not an easy prayer.

Because if God answers it...

something may need to change.

But I also can't think of a healthier prayer for someone who wants to follow Christ.

One of the things that keeps capturing my attention is that Jesus says,

"You do not know..."

Think about that for a moment.

They didn't know.

They weren't pretending.

They weren't lying.

They genuinely believed their spiritual condition was much healthier than it actually was.

That thought humbles me.

Because if it happened to them...

could it happen to me?

I think every honest Christian has to answer,

"Yes...it could."

And maybe admitting that isn't a sign of weak faith.

Maybe it's a sign of mature faith.

Because mature faith never stops inviting Christ to search the heart.

David prayed,

"Search me, O God, and know my heart."

I've always admired that prayer.

Not because it sounds poetic.

Because it takes courage.

It takes courage to invite God to point out what we'd rather not see.

But here's the encouraging part.

When Jesus points something out...

He never does it to embarrass us.

He does it because He loves us.

That changes everything.

Have you ever had someone correct you who genuinely loved you?

You could tell the difference, couldn't you?

They weren't trying to win an argument.

They weren't trying to make themselves look smarter.

They simply cared too much to remain silent.

That's how I hear Jesus in this passage.

Not raising His voice.

Not shaming His people.

Calling them back.

You know...

I've also been thinking about something else.

Churches can become busy.

Very busy with.

Programs.

Committees.

Bible studies.

Outreach events.

Budgets.

Buildings.

None of those things are bad.

In fact, many of them are quite good.

But I wonder...

Is it possible to become so busy doing the work of Christ that we slowly neglect spending time with Christ?

That question stayed with me.

Because ministry activity and intimacy with Christ are not always the same thing.

One does not automatically guarantee the other.

Maybe that's one reason I appreciate the image of Jesus standing at the door.

He isn't asking for another committee meeting.

He's asking for fellowship.

He isn't saying,

"Work harder."

He's saying,

"Please Open the door."

Those are two very different invitations.

And perhaps that's where this passage speaks most personally to me.

There have been seasons in my own life when my schedule was full...

my responsibilities were many...

and yet I realized I had begun spending more time working *for* Christ than simply enjoying time *with* Christ.

Maybe you've experienced that too.

If you have...

you're certainly not alone.

The wonderful news is that Jesus doesn't say,

"You've missed your opportunity."

He says,

"I'm still here."

"I'm still knocking."

"I'm still inviting."

That's grace.

Real grace.

And maybe that's exactly what someone listening today needed to hear.

Not another burden.

Not another list.

Simply an invitation to come back to the One who has never stopped loving them.

Before we move toward the close of today's study...

I'd like to ask you to do something.

Not because I can see your heart.

I can't.

Only Christ can.

But sometime this week...

find a quiet place.

Open your Bible to Revelation chapter 3 again.

Read it slowly.

Then simply pray,

"Lord Jesus...if there's anything in my life that needs to change, I ask and trust You enough to show me."

Then...

listen.

That may become one of the most important prayers you pray this year.

There's one more part of this letter I'd like us to spend a few minutes with before we finish.

In fact...

it's probably the most familiar verse in the entire passage.

Most of us have heard it many times.

Some of us may have memorized it years ago.

Jesus says,

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock..."

I have to smile a little when I read that.

Not because the verse isn't beautiful.

It is.

But because it's one of those verses that almost has a life of its own.

You've probably heard it in sermons.

You've seen it on greeting cards.

You've seen paintings of Jesus standing outside a door with a lantern in His hand.

It's a wonderful picture.

But let me ask you something.

Who is Jesus talking to?

Now...

don't answer too quickly.

Let's just look at the context.

He's writing to a church.

That doesn't mean this verse can never be used when talking with someone who doesn't yet know Christ.

Many people have done that, and God has certainly used it.

But in its original setting...

Jesus is speaking to people who are part of a church.

That observation really changed the way I read this verse.

Instead of seeing Jesus knocking on the door of someone's heart for the very first time...

I began seeing Him lovingly calling His own people back into close fellowship.

Do you see the difference?

One isn't necessarily denying the other.

We're simply trying to hear the verse the way the first readers would have heard it.

And I think that's always a healthy place to begin.

Now...

Let's follow that invitation one step farther.

Jesus does not merely say, 'Open the door.'

He tells them what will happen when the door opens.

'I will come in to him...'

'and will sup with him, and he with Me.'

Do you see the movement?

The invitation moves from a closed door...

to Christ entering...

to a shared meal.

So the meal is not a new subject.

It is the picture Jesus uses to describe restored fellowship.

And that raises an important question.

Why a meal?

Throughout Scripture...

sharing a meal is often much more than eating food.

It's fellowship.

Conversation.

Acceptance.

Friendship.

Time together.

Some of the most meaningful conversations in the Bible happened around a table.

When I think about that...

this invitation becomes even more beautiful.

Jesus isn't merely saying,

'I'll forgive you.'

He's saying,

'I want to spend time with you.'

This is not forgiveness from a distance.

It is restored fellowship at Christ's table.

Now...

I'd like to go back to the question we asked near the very beginning of today's study.

Do you remember it?

I asked you,

'What did Jesus actually mean when He called the church at Laodicea lukewarm?'

I wonder...

has your answer changed?

Mine has become clearer.

Jesus was not expressing a preference for unbelief over imperfect discipleship.

He was describing works made ineffective by self-sufficiency and spiritual blindness.

And He was lovingly calling His church to repent and depend upon Him again.

The purpose of today's study was not to pressure anyone into repeating my conclusion.

It was to show why I believe that conclusion best explains the text.

We observed carefully.

We tested the familiar interpretations.

We corrected a historical claim that the evidence no longer supports.

And we allowed the complete letter to explain the opening illustration.

That is what it means to Reason Together through God's Word.

You know...

One of my favorite things about the Christian life is that we're all still learning.

I certainly am.

Every year I discover things in God's Word that I somehow missed before.

Not because the Bible changed.

But because I did.

I hope I never lose that sense of wonder.

I hope I never become so confident that I stop being teachable.

And I hope that's true for all of us.

Because the moment we stop learning...

we stop growing.

As I look back over this entire letter...

the question is not merely,

'Do I appear active?'

Or...

'Do other people think I am doing well?'

The question reaches much deeper.

'Have I become so satisfied with my own resources that I no longer recognize my need for Christ?'

And...

'Are my works accomplishing what He desires?'

That is what this church was being invited to consider.

To hear His voice.

To recognize His loving correction.

To open the door.

To enjoy fellowship with Him once again.

And isn't that still His invitation today?

Not merely to know more *about* Him.

But to know Him more deeply.

I don't know about you...

but that's the invitation I want to accept.

Every single day.

A Few Final Thoughts

Before we pray together...

I'd like to leave you with one story.

Not because it explains the passage.

But because I think it illustrates something we've been talking about all morning.

A number of years ago, I watched an elderly gentleman walk into a small restaurant.

He wasn't in a hurry.

He wasn't looking around to see who noticed him.

He quietly took a seat by himself.

A waitress came over with a smile that seemed completely genuine.

She knew his name.

She asked how he was doing.

She already knew what he usually ordered.

As she walked away, it occurred to me that she hadn't simply learned how to do her job well.

Over time, she had learned *him*.

A little while later, another customer came in.

This one was frustrated.

You could tell before he even sat down.

The food took too long.

The coffee wasn't prepared the way he wanted.

The service wasn't fast enough.

Nothing seemed right.

The same waitress listened patiently.

She apologized.

She replaced the coffee.

She continued serving with kindness.

When he left...

she quietly walked over to another table and smiled just as warmly as she had before.

As I watched all of that, I found myself thinking...

There are people who simply leave every room a little better than they found it.

Not because they're trying to impress anyone.

Not because they're pretending life is easy.

But because something inside them quietly overflows onto everyone around them.

I drove home that day wondering...

Would people say that about me?

Not,

"Did he win every theological argument?"

Not,

"Did he always have the perfect answer?"

But...

"When he left...

did people see Jesus a little more clearly?"

You know...

I think that's a question worth carrying into the week.

Not because it earns God's love.

We already have that in Christ.

But because people who spend time with Jesus eventually begin reflecting Jesus.

Maybe that's why this letter doesn't end with condemnation.

It ends with fellowship.

Not with distance.

But with an open invitation to come near.

And I can't think of a better place to end our study than there.

If you've never placed your faith in Jesus Christ, today's invitation is also for you.

The same Savior who lovingly called the church at Laodicea to Himself is the Savior who calls each of us.

The Gospel is wonderfully simple.

We have all sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard.

We cannot save ourselves.

But God, in His great love, sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to live the life we could never live, to die on the cross for our sins, and to rise again in victory over death.

Salvation is not earned.

It is received by grace through faith.

If today you recognize your need for Christ, don't ignore that invitation.

Turn to Him.

Trust Him.

He has promised that the one who comes to Him He will never cast out.

Let's pray.

Father,

Thank You for this time together.

Thank You for Your Word.

Thank You that You love us enough to correct us, to pursue us, and to invite us into deeper fellowship with You.

Keep us humble.

Keep us teachable.

Help us never become satisfied with simply knowing about You when You are inviting us to truly know You.

May we leave this room with open Bibles, open hearts, and open doors.

We ask these things in the precious name of Jesus.

Amen.

Well...

Our coffee cups are about empty.

Thank you for spending this time with me in the Pastor's Study.

Before we leave, let me offer a few final invitations.

If today's study raised a question, don't be afraid of it.

Take it back to Scripture.

Pray over it.

Talk with another believer about it.

If this conversation encouraged you, share it with a friend, your pastor or your Bible study group so the conversation can continue.

And if you discovered something in the passage that we didn't discuss today...

I'd genuinely love to hear about it.

You might teach me something.

And I mean that.

This next part is really for those who consider Reason Together Church their church home.

Giving is a voluntary act of worship and stewardship for members whom God has led to support this ministry.

An offering box is available at the back of the sanctuary as you leave.

If you are visiting with us today, please do not feel any obligation whatsoever to give.

Your presence is truly your gift to us today, and you honor us by being here.

If you would be willing, we would love for you to complete a guest card.

We ask only for your first name and email address so that I can send a brief note thanking you for joining us.

No additional personal information is needed, and there is never any pressure.

If this is your first time with us, please stop by the Reason Together Cafe before you leave.

We have a Reason Together Church mug waiting for you and a complimentary cup of locally grown Hawaiian coffee.

Think of it as one more invitation to continue the conversation.

And whether you are here on Oahu or joining us from somewhere else, I hope you will be with us again next week.

We will open God's Word, bring our questions and continue reasoning together.

Until next week...

may the Lord bless you, keep you close to Himself and give you a wonderful week walking with Him.

To our church ohana, Aloha.

And to our honored guests, Aloha Nui Loa.

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY
LUKEWARM CHRISTIANS

Revelation 3:14-22

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

Revelation 3:19

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION Jesus called the church at Laodicea lukewarm because its works had become spiritually ineffective. The church's material prosperity had produced self-sufficiency and blindness to its need for Christ. Hot and cold are both desirable and purposeful. Lukewarmness is the self-satisfied condition that accomplishes neither purpose well.

Revelation 3:14-22 is often explained as though Jesus arranged three spiritual conditions on a scale. Hot is said to mean a committed Christian, lukewarm an inactive Christian and cold an unbeliever. That interpretation creates a serious theological difficulty because Jesus explicitly says that He would prefer either cold or hot. It would make Him prefer unbelief to the imperfect condition of one of His own children.

The passage itself points in another direction. Jesus begins, 'I know thy works.' He is evaluating what the church is producing. Both cold and hot can describe water that serves a useful purpose. Lukewarm water possesses the full purpose of neither. The verses that follow explain why the church's works had become ineffective: it believed itself rich and in need of nothing while Christ saw poverty, blindness and nakedness.

This commentary expands the reasoning behind the sermon. It follows the movement of the complete letter, examines the temperature language, considers the historical setting, corrects a popular water-system story and traces Christ's loving purpose from rebuke to repentance, from the closed door to His entrance and from His entrance to a shared meal.

1. Reading the Whole Letter

A Complete Message to a Real Church

The letter to Laodicea is the seventh message in Revelation 2 and 3. Like the other letters, it addresses an actual congregation while ending with a command for all the churches to hear. The local setting matters, but the message reaches beyond one city because every congregation can become confident in its own strength and unaware of its need for Christ.

The movement of the letter is orderly. Jesus identifies Himself as the faithful and true witness. He evaluates the church's works. He exposes the difference between its self-assessment and His assessment. He counsels the church to receive what only He can provide. He explains that His rebuke comes from love. He commands repentance, offers renewed fellowship and promises victory to the one who overcomes.

The Letter Interprets the Metaphor

The temperature image appears in verses 15 and 16, but its meaning is not limited to those verses. Verse 17 identifies self-sufficiency and self-deception. Verse 18 identifies dependence upon Christ as the answer. Verse 19 identifies loving discipline and repentance. Verse 20 identifies restored fellowship. The whole letter explains what lukewarmness looks like, where it comes from and how Christ corrects it.

CONTROLLING OBSERVATION The words 'I know thy works' identify what Jesus is evaluating. The following verses identify why those works have become ineffective.

2. The Faithful Witness and the Church's Diagnosis

The Amen

Jesus calls Himself 'the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.' Amen expresses certainty and reliability. He is not offering one opinion among several. His testimony concerning the church is faithful and true even when it contradicts everything the congregation believes about itself.

The phrase 'the beginning of the creation of God' does not present Christ as the first created being. In the language of Revelation, beginning can identify source, ruler and origin. The One who speaks is the

sovereign Lord through whom creation holds its order and purpose. He therefore has both the authority and wisdom to judge whether the church's works fulfill His purpose.

Two Assessments

Laodicea says, 'I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.' Jesus says that the church does not know that it is wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. The problem is not merely a difference in emphasis. The church's visible evidence has led it to a completely false spiritual conclusion. Prosperity can become a dangerous interpreter. A full room can be mistaken for spiritual fruit. A healthy budget can be treated as proof of divine approval. A respected reputation can hide inward weakness. Material blessings are not themselves condemned, but they become spiritually dangerous when they persuade Christ's people that they no longer need to depend upon Him.

3. What the Temperatures Do Not Mean

Not a Scale from Unbelief to Passionate Faith

The familiar three-level interpretation assigns hot to devoted faith, lukewarm to partial commitment and cold to unbelief. The first difficulty is the text. Jesus says, 'I would thou wert cold or hot.' Cold therefore cannot be a condition He rejects more strongly than lukewarmness. It is one of two conditions He positively prefers.

The second difficulty is theological. Jesus is speaking to a church. He says that those He loves He rebukes and chastens. Nothing in the letter suggests that He would rather one of His children become an unbeliever than remain spiritually ineffective. His purpose is not to push the church out of relationship. His purpose is to bring it to repentance and renewed fellowship.

The third difficulty is interpretive. The hot-faith and cold-unbelief scheme is imported into the metaphor before the rest of the letter is heard. The passage never defines cold as unbelief. It does identify works, self-sufficiency, blindness, loving correction, repentance and fellowship. A faithful interpretation must give priority to what the text actually supplies.

NECESSARY CORRECTION Jesus does not prefer unbelief to incomplete Christian activity. He prefers either of two desirable and purposeful conditions to a condition that serves neither purpose well.

4. Hot, Cold and Lukewarm

Two Useful Conditions

Hot and cold are not naturally opposite moral categories. They are temperatures that can serve different purposes. Hot water can cleanse, soothe and warm. Cold water can refresh, invigorate and serve bathing or swimming. The value of each condition lies not in emotional intensity but in its fitness for a purpose.

Lukewarm water can be unpleasant precisely because it lacks the desired quality of either condition. It does not offer the warmth expected from hot water or the refreshment expected from cold. The image therefore communicates ineffectiveness with unusual force. Something is present, but it is not accomplishing what it ought to accomplish.

The Connection to Works

Jesus does not say, 'I know thy feelings.' He says, 'I know thy works.' The metaphor describes the spiritual effect of what the church is producing. Laodicea may have possessed activity, resources and religious appearance. Yet Christ found that its works lacked the usefulness that dependence upon Him should produce.

This does not reduce Christian faithfulness to visible productivity. The Lord of the church defines usefulness. Prayer, worship, generosity, endurance, truth, mercy and faithful witness may not look impressive to the surrounding culture. The issue is whether the life and work of the church arise from Christ and serve His purpose.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. **Revelation 3:15**

5. Laodicea and the Water Image

The Popular Aqueduct Explanation

A widely repeated explanation says that hot water traveled from Hierapolis and cold water traveled from Colossae, with both arriving lukewarm at Laodicea. It is memorable and appears to connect all three Lycus Valley cities. The difficulty is that the excavated hydraulic system at Laodicea does not support this reconstruction.

Archaeological work beginning in 2003 identified spring sources south of Laodicea and traced parts of the city's water system. Mineral deposits survive inside portions of the pipes and demonstrate hard water and maintenance problems. They do not establish that water from Hierapolis or Colossae reached Laodicea, and they do not prove the temperature at which the water arrived.

HISTORICAL DISCIPLINE The traditional three-city aqueduct story should not be repeated as established history. The interpretation does not need it.

Familiar Hot and Cold Water

Correcting the aqueduct story does not make the temperature contrast mysterious. Strabo described the celebrated hot springs and natural baths at Hierapolis. The region's winter conditions could fall below freezing. Cold spring water, winter ice, pools, bathing and swimming offered familiar experiences of cold water. Hot water offered warmth, cleansing and relief.

Jesus does not say that all of these kinds of water were common within Laodicea itself. He does not need to. A metaphor can draw upon experiences familiar to hearers without naming a municipal supply. The contrast only requires that hot, cold and lukewarm conditions carried recognizable differences in desirability and purpose.

Roman Bathing Culture

Roman bathing culture supplies a particularly credible setting. Four bath complexes have been identified at Laodicea, and at least one likely functioned in the first century. A Roman bathing sequence deliberately used rooms and pools of different temperatures. The caldarium provided heat and hot bathing. The frigidarium provided a cold and invigorating pool. The tepidarium commonly served as a temperate transition between them.

This background makes the approved interpretation historically realistic. Hot and cold each had desirable functions. Temperate conditions could be transitional rather than the desired goal. The proposal should still be held with appropriate humility because Revelation does not name a particular bathhouse or explain the metaphor through architectural terms.

6. Rich, Increased with Goods and in Need of Nothing

The City's Independent Spirit

Laodicea was a prosperous commercial city. Ancient reports associate it with banking, textiles and medical activity. After the earthquake of A.D. 60, the city reportedly rebuilt without accepting Roman financial assistance. That history illustrates civic confidence and independence, though it should not be turned into a claim that every member of the church personally shared the same wealth.

The church's own confession is enough: 'I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.' The most dangerous words are not 'I am rich.' They are 'have need of nothing.' The problem is not possession but independence. Blessing has become a substitute for the Giver, and visible sufficiency has concealed spiritual need.

Blindness to Need

Self-sufficiency produces self-deception because it changes the evidence a person trusts. The church reads its bank account, reputation and resources. Christ reads its spiritual condition. The congregation sees abundance. Christ sees poverty. It sees respectability. Christ sees nakedness. It believes that it sees clearly. Christ says that it is blind.

This diagnosis explains the lukewarm works. Dependence upon Christ is not one spiritual practice among many. It is the source of Christian life. Jesus had already taught that a branch cannot bear fruit by itself. When a church carries on in its own strength, activity may continue while spiritual usefulness disappears.

THE HEART OF LUKEWARMNESS Lukewarmness is self-satisfied spiritual ineffectiveness. It is the condition of a church that continues to work while no longer recognizing its need for Christ.

7. Christ's Counsel

Receive What Only Christ Can Provide

Jesus counsels the church to receive from Him gold tried in the fire, white raiment and eye salve. The three images answer the condition He has exposed. True riches answer poverty. White garments answer nakedness. Sight answers blindness. Every remedy comes from Christ rather than from the resources in which the church has trusted.

The language may resonate with Laodicea's reputation for banking, dark wool and medicine. Those local connections are suggestive, but they should remain secondary. The theological meaning does not depend upon proving that each phrase names one civic industry. The controlling point is clear within the verse: Christ supplies what self-sufficiency cannot purchase.

The Grace of Honest Diagnosis

Christ's words are severe because love refuses to confirm a dangerous illusion. A physician who hides a diagnosis does not show kindness. Jesus tells the truth about poverty, blindness and nakedness so the church can receive riches, sight and covering. Exposure is not the final purpose. Restoration is.

The counsel also prevents despair. Laodicea's condition is serious, but it is not beyond Christ's remedy. The church does not need to manufacture excitement, improve its image or prove its worth. It needs to abandon the claim of independence and receive from Him again.

8. Love, Rebuke and Repentance

Revelation 3:19 interprets the tone of the entire letter: 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.' The strong warning of verse 16 must be heard beside this declaration. Christ is not speaking with indifference toward the church. His correction is the action of One who loves His people too much to leave them satisfied with spiritual ineffectiveness.

Rebuke exposes what is wrong. Chastening trains and corrects. Both belong to the Lord's faithful care for His children. Hebrews 12 similarly teaches that divine discipline is evidence of sonship and love. The painful recognition of lukewarmness can therefore become grace when it brings the church back to dependence upon Christ.

Jesus commands, 'be zealous therefore, and repent.' The zeal required here is not manufactured volume, emotion or religious activity. The command calls for earnest response to Christ's verdict. Repentance means that the church must stop defending its self-evaluation, agree with His diagnosis and turn again toward Him.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. **Revelation 3:19**

9. The Door and the Shared Meal

Christ Outside the Door

Revelation 3:20 is frequently used in evangelism, and its language can help an unbeliever understand the personal nature of Christ's invitation. In its original setting, however, Jesus is addressing His church. The tragedy is not that the world has kept Him outside. A self-sufficient congregation has continued its religious life while leaving the Lord of the church outside the door.

The verse is personal as well as corporate: 'if any man hear my voice, and open the door.' A congregation must hear, but individuals cannot hide behind the congregation. Each person must receive Christ's correction and respond to His voice.

From Opening to Entrance to Fellowship

The sequence should be allowed to unfold. First, Christ stands at the door and knocks. Then someone hears His voice and opens the door. Christ enters through the opened door. When He enters, the scene moves to a shared meal: 'I will sup with him, and he with me.' The meal is not a sudden change of subject. It is the purpose toward which the opened door leads.

In the ancient world, eating together communicated welcome, relationship and fellowship. The One excluded by self-sufficiency offers to come in and share the table. Christ's goal is therefore more than improved church performance. He desires restored fellowship with His people, and renewed usefulness grows from that fellowship.

THE GRACIOUS INVITATION Hear His voice. Open the door. Welcome Christ's entrance. Return to the fellowship that self-sufficiency had displaced.

10. Overcoming and Hearing

Jesus promises the one who overcomes a place with Him in His throne, even as He overcame and sat down with His Father. The promise lifts the church's eyes above its temporary prosperity. Laodicea may possess civic status and material comfort, but Christ offers participation in His enduring victory and kingdom.

Overcoming does not mean that a believer earns salvation through greater activity. Revelation consistently connects overcoming with faithful allegiance to Christ. For Laodicea, faithfulness requires hearing His verdict, repenting of self-sufficiency and returning to dependence and fellowship.

The closing command extends the letter to every church: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.' The warning must not become a label used against another congregation. It is first an invitation to listen. The proper response begins with examination of our own hearts, works and dependence upon Christ.

11. Pastoral Meaning for the Church Today

For the Individual Believer

A believer can remain busy while depending increasingly upon experience, routine, personality or resources. The test is not whether life appears active. The question is whether the work arises from fellowship with Christ and accomplishes His purpose. Psalm 139 offers the proper posture: ask God to search the heart and expose what the believer cannot see alone.

For Pastors and Teachers

Leaders should not use 'lukewarm' as an easy accusation against people whose personality, worship style or emotional expression differs from their own. Christ's diagnosis is concerned with spiritual usefulness and dependence upon Him. Pastoral application should therefore emphasize honest examination, loving correction and renewed fellowship rather than shame or artificial excitement.

For the Prosperous or Self-Reliant

Material provision should be received with gratitude rather than treated as proof that nothing is lacking. Churches with buildings, budgets, technology and respected reputations must remain as dependent upon Christ as a congregation meeting with few visible resources. Stewardship uses gifts faithfully while remembering that spiritual life cannot be purchased or produced.

For the Unbeliever

The letter addresses a church, but its Gospel invitation remains clear. Every person is spiritually needy and cannot save himself. Jesus Christ died for sinners, rose again and offers all who come to Him repentance and faith. Salvation is by grace through faith, not by religious activity or material success.

PASTORAL IMPLICATION Do not measure spiritual health by visible prosperity, emotional temperature or religious activity. Ask whether Christ is welcomed, His voice is heard and the work of life flows from dependence upon Him.

12. The Gospel at the Center

Laodicea's need finally points beyond a better program to the Gospel itself. Human beings are not merely underperforming. They are sinners who need the righteousness, covering and sight that only Christ provides. The cross exposes the poverty of self-salvation while displaying the riches of grace.

Jesus is the faithful and true witness who tells the truth about our condition. He is also the loving Lord who bears judgment, conquers death and calls sinners into fellowship. His rebuke is trustworthy because His love is proven at the cross. His invitation is powerful because the risen Christ can enter, restore and sustain those who depend upon Him.

The Christian life begins by grace and continues by grace. A church does not graduate from dependence upon Christ. The same Lord who saves His people remains the source of their fruit, sight, covering and fellowship. Repentance is therefore not a return to spiritual self-improvement. It is a return to Christ.

Conclusion: Useful Because We Depend upon Christ

Jesus did not use hot, cold and lukewarm to describe a scale from unbelief through incomplete faith to passionate Christianity. He addressed His church, examined its works and expressed a genuine preference for either cold or hot. Both temperatures could serve useful and desirable purposes. Lukewarmness described the condition that accomplished neither purpose well.

The reason for the church's ineffectiveness was self-sufficiency. Laodicea trusted visible prosperity and concluded that it needed nothing. Christ exposed spiritual poverty, blindness and nakedness. The remedy was not louder activity. It was to receive from Him, accept His loving correction and repent.

The door reveals the heart of the letter. Christ knocks because He loves His church. The opened door leads to His entrance, and His entrance leads to a shared meal. He does not merely want improved works from a distance. He restores fellowship, and useful works grow from dependence upon Him.

The enduring call is personal and corporate. Hear His voice. Receive His correction. Repent of self-sufficiency. Open the door. Depend upon Christ again. Let every work flow from fellowship with the One who alone can make His people fruitful.

THE FAITHFUL RESPONSE Reject self-sufficiency. Receive Christ's counsel. Welcome His fellowship. Become useful for His purpose through renewed dependence upon Him.

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