

7 CHURCHES OF REVELATION

Seven Churches // Sermon 8

Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church // Revelation 3:14-16

Mark Twain once said: *The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.*

Everyone lives for something.

- Some live for family, some for career, others for sports, relationships, or success.

But the question is – **is that the real purpose of your life?**

Proverbs 11:28: “A life devoted to things is a dead life, a stump; a God-shaped life is a flourishing tree.” **(Msg)**

In other words, when life revolves around *things*, it withers.

- But when life revolves around God, it thrives.

Rick Warren said it perfectly:

“The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment... You were born by His purpose and for His purpose.”¹

That’s the heartbeat of every child of God – to live for God’s purposes.

But what happens when a church – and the people in it – lose sight of that purpose?

What happens when comfort replaces commitment, when self-sufficiency replaces surrender, when passion for Christ fades into apathy?

That’s what happened to Laodicea.

¹ *The Purpose Driven Life*, by Rick Warren.

Laodicea was the wealthiest of the seven churches.

- It was a banking center, known for its luxury, fine wool, and famous medical school.
- From the world's standards, they had everything they needed to be successful.

But Jesus saw something deeper.

- He saw a church that was prosperous but powerless.
- They were affluent, but apathetic.

So, Jesus wrote this letter to save them from their complacency.

- He wrote to wake them up from their spiritual slumber.

Big Idea: *Jesus confronts our complacency so He can restore our devotion to Him.*

Laodicea looked alive on the outside, but Jesus saw their true condition – they were spiritually dying.

- What does Jesus do?
- In love, He calls them back to Himself.

This leads to the first things I want us to see in this text:

1. *Jesus exposes our condition.*

Before Jesus addresses the problem, He reminds them who He is:

*[14] "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen (OT title for God), **the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.***

*He says, "I am the **faithful and true one.** Therefore, you can trust what I am saying to you..."*

- **I am perfectly diagnosing your condition.**

And here's the diagnosis:

*[15] "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! [16] So, because **you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.** (Powerful language from Jesus) [16] So, because **you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.***

To fully understand this passage, there are a few things we need to know about Laodicea:²

Laodicea was strategically located in the **Lycus River Valley** between two other cities – **Colossae** and **Hierapolis**.

- **Colossae:** It sat at the foot of the mountain (southeast), where it received cold, refreshing mountain water.

² <https://www.preceptaustin.org/revelation-3-commentary>

- **Purpose = Refreshing to drink.**
- **Hierapolis:** It was located in a more northern region and was known for its hot springs, which emitted mineral-rich waters.
 - **Purpose = Great for healing and therapy (rich in minerals).**
- **Laodicea:** It was centered in the Lycus River Valley.
- They constructed underground aqueducts to transport water into the city from the surrounding mountains.
- The water had to travel 6+ miles before arriving in Laodicea.
- By the time it arrived, it was *lukewarm and gritty – full of calcium carbonate and other minerals.*
- **Purpose =** Gritty, lukewarm water that was suited for the textile industry (or flushing the city’s plumbing system), but if you consumed it, it functioned as an emetic, causing you to vomit.

And Jesus says, “That’s what you’ve become spiritually.”

[15] “... You are neither cold nor hot... [16] So... I will spit you out of my mouth.

The word “spit” literally means “vomit.”

- He’s saying, “Your spiritual condition makes Me sick.”³

Think about this:

- These men and women weren’t atheists.
- They weren’t openly hostile toward Jesus.

They were just comfortable. Casual. Complacent.

- They had enough of Jesus to be respectable, but not enough to be transformed.

It’s like a pot of coffee.

- **We love it hot. We love it over ice.**
- **But nobody wants it lukewarm (room temp.).**

A lukewarm latte left out overnight is nauseating.

Jesus is saying, “That’s how your faith tastes to Me – room temperature, stale, lifeless.”

Jesus continues...

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

They thought they were strong – Jesus says they’re weak.

³ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 100.

- They thought they were rich – Jesus says they’re poor.
- They thought they could see – Jesus says they’re blind.
- They thought they were clothed – Jesus says they’re naked.

Their *self-sufficiency blinded them to their spiritual bankruptcy.*

We must understand this truth: ***Self-sufficiency is the enemy of spiritual vitality.***

- When we rely solely on our own abilities, we cut ourselves off from the power of God.

Jesus says: [15] “*I know your works...*

- Our deeds reveal our devotion.
- Our behavior exposes our belief.

Romans 2:6-8 reminds us that God “*will render to each one according to his works.*”

- And James echoes the same truth – *faith without works is dead.*

So, Jesus looks at them and says, “You are lukewarm – there is no evidence of passion, no purpose, and no power in your life.”

How do we know if we are lukewarm?

- We begin to prioritize *comfort* over *commitment*.
- We settle for *attendance* over *obedience*.
- We know about Jesus, but don’t walk with Him.
- We no longer weep over sin or feel urgency for the lost.

That’s lukewarm faith – not cold enough to refresh, not hot enough to heal: Just room temperature religion.

And the tragedy is – it feels safe.

- Lukewarm faith doesn’t cause waves.
- It doesn’t draw criticism.

It fits in comfortably with the culture. **But it’s the very thing that makes Jesus sick.**

Jesus exposes our condition.

2. Jesus calls us to repent.

[18] 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.

After exposing their spiritual poverty, blindness, and nakedness, Jesus now counsels them.

- The word *counsel* means ***to advise with compassion.***

He's not condemning them from a distance – He's inviting them to come near.

Notice how Jesus offers a threefold remedy that perfectly counters Laodicea's pride:

A. "Buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich."

Laodicea was a banking center – they were familiar with money. But Jesus says, "You're investing in the wrong economy."

- Their wealth was material, but Jesus offers spiritual riches – faith refined through testing (1 Peter 1:7).

B. "White garments so that you may clothe yourself..."

Laodicea was famous for its black wool, which made them rich and well-dressed.

**They had swag.*

- But Jesus says, "You look fine on the outside, but you're naked before Me."
- "White garments" symbolize *purity and righteousness* (Rev. 19:8).
- Only Jesus can clothe us in the righteousness that covers our shame.

C. "Salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see."

The city's medical school produced an eye ointment that treated physical blindness.

- Jesus is saying, "You've healed many people's eyes, but you can't even see your own condition."
- Only Jesus can open blind eyes (John 9:39).

Jesus is speaking their language – He is using their own industries to expose their apathy and invite them to repentance.

- He's saying, "Everything you're proud of – your money, your clothes, your medicine – can't fix what's broken inside you. Only I can."

He continues in verse 19:

[19] Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

This is crucial – Jesus' rebuke is motivated by love, not anger.

- He disciplines because He cares.

Hebrews 12:6 says: **"The Lord disciplines those He loves."**

- Jesus isn't standing over Laodicea with a hammer – He's standing beside them with an invitation.

Notice the two commands:

- **Be zealous:** *Literally means "Get on fire again!"*
- **Repent:** Change your direction and come back to Me.

Repentance isn't a one-time act; it's a daily attitude.

- It's the way we keep our hearts soft before God.

Jesus concludes with this invitation:

[20] Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

This verse is often taken out of context – but in context, Jesus isn't talking to unbelievers; He's talking to His church.⁴

Imagine this – Jesus is outside His own church, knocking on the door to get inside.

- He's saying, "You've become so self-sufficient that you've shut Me out.... But I still want back in!

He doesn't force the door open.

- He knocks. He calls.
- He waits for someone – anyone – to hear His voice and respond.

He says: If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

In the ancient world, to dine with someone was a sign of intimacy, friendship, and acceptance.

- Jesus is offering *renewed fellowship, not just forgiveness.*

This is one of the most tender pictures in all of Scripture: *The Savior, standing outside a self-satisfied church, still knocking, still waiting, still loving.*⁵

Listen, Jesus' words to Laodicea are His words to us today:

- **Stop trusting in what you have and start trusting in who He is.**
- The wealth of this world can't buy peace for your soul.

The Laodiceans had lost their love for Jesus.

- **But Jesus was ready to restore it – the moment they repented.**

Jesus calls us to repent.

3. Jesus promises a reward.

[21] 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. [22] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Jesus closes this letter with a promise.

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 581.

⁵ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

- He confronted their complacency, called them to repentance, and ended with hope.

He says: [21] **The one who conquers...** - to the believer who overcomes spiritual apathy through faith and repentance - **I will grant him to sit with me on my throne,**

That's a staggering promise.

To "sit with Jesus on the throne" symbolizes intimacy, authority, and victory.

- It means sharing in His reign – not because we're worthy, but because He conquered for us.

He adds: **...as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.**

Jesus is reminding the church that He didn't call them to do anything He hasn't already done.

- He conquered the cross.
- He endured suffering, rejection, and death – and now He reigns!

So, he says to the lukewarm church:

If you will repent and return, you can share in My victory. You don't have to stay stuck in apathy – you can walk victoriously!

Jesus' promise is both an encouragement and a challenge:

- **Encouragement:** Your past apathy doesn't disqualify you from future victory. When you return to Jesus, He restores you fully.
- **Challenge:** Apathy is a choice – but so is passion and zeal.

The reward belongs to those who conquer complacency through faithfulness.

Romans 8:37 says: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us."

- You conquer by remaining close to Christ.
- You overcome by walking in daily surrender to Him.

And when you do, Jesus promises: *You will reign with Me forever.*

The Profile of a Lukewarm "Christian": *Modified from "Crazy Love" by Francis Chan*

1. **Lukewarm people are regular in church but rarely experience genuine repentance.**
2. **Lukewarm People are comfortable givers.**
3. **Lukewarm people love God as long as He is convenient.**
4. **Lukewarm people think more about earth than heaven.**

5. **Lukewarm people gauge their 'goodness' by comparison.**
6. **Lukewarm people play it safe – never taking risks for God.**

The Lord gave us life to be lived with a purpose – His glory. He stands at the door of an apathetic church and knocks...waiting for them to repent.

Conclusion:

1. **Ask God to reveal the areas of your life where you've grown lukewarm.**
2. **Ask Him to give you strength where you are weak.**
3. **Ask Him to do whatever it takes to set your heart on fire for Him.**

BULLPEN:

Jesus does not offer any commendation to this church.

“You are providing neither healing for the spiritually sick nor refreshment for the spiritually thirsty. You are spiritually lukewarm, and I will not tolerate you. If you do not repent (v. 19), I will spew you out, vomit you out of My mouth. You are sickly and insipid. I will not tolerate your condition any longer. You are flat and unsavory. You badly misrepresent the life-changing power of the gospel and the refreshment and healing it brings.”⁶

⁶ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Revelation*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 103–104.