

To Laodicea

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- [0 : 00] Well, please do take a seat. Today we're finishing off our series. We've got mail, we've been looking at it through the summer.
- This is our eighth sermon of eight. Really just almost opening other people's mail and reading what the risen Lord Jesus says to various churches dotted around Asia Minor, modern day Turkey.
- They've been a real mixed bag. There's been some small churches that have been really faithful amidst great opposition. There's been some big churches that have lost focus and gotten lost.
- And there's been some churches that have been quite a mixed bag themselves who have got some faithful people but have also got some false teaching and some things going wrong.
- They're real churches but they're also representative churches. And though Jesus writes these letters to them, they're written for us. That every letter finishes, those who have ears to hear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- [1 : 14] The churches. The churches then but the churches now. The churches like Bruntsfield Evangelical Church. And today we come to probably the most famous of the churches.
- The one that we know as Paul was hinting in his leading. This word lukewarm will forever be associated with Laodicea purely because of this letter.
- It is the most infamous of the churches. It's probably the least attractive. Although I think Sardis probably runs it very close.
- And so let me read. And I'd invite you to turn with me to Revelation chapter 3 and verse 14. To the angel of the church in Laodicea write.
- These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds.
- [2 : 25] That you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other. So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth.
- You say, I am rich, I have acquired wealth, and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.
- I counsel you to buy from me gold, refined in the fire, so that you can become rich, and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness, and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see.
- Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline, so be earnest, and repent. Here I am. I stand at the door and knock.
- If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in, and eat with that person, and they with me. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious, and sat down with my father on his throne.
- [3 : 39] Whoever has ears, let them hear what the spirit says to the churches. Let's pray, and then we'll get stuck into this. Father God, we thank you for all the truths that we've sung.

Father, thank you that they've provoked in us our real need of you. And so, Lord, would you teach us from your word. And Lord, would we not leave lukewarm, but on fire for your son, the Lord Jesus, who was victorious for us.

Bless us, and help us, in his glorious name. Amen. We actually have the word Laodicean in the English language.

We use it as an adjective, an adjective to describe someone who is unenthusiastic, perfunctory, and half-hearted. If somebody says you're Laodicean, that is not a good thing.

It means you're a bit tokenistic, and you're just keeping up appearances. This idea of being tepid, of being lukewarm, and it comes straight from this passage.

[4 : 47] This passage is so famous, that we've imported the word Laodicean into our language. And so, to this lukewarm Laodicean church, the risen Lord Jesus writes this letter.

And look how he describes himself in verse 14. He describes himself as the Amen. He describes himself as the strong and final words.

He says, I am the Amen. He says, I am the faithful and true witness. I am telling the truth. I'm not making it up. This is not a dossier that's been manipulated.

This letter I'm sending to you is laser-guided pinpoint truth. And I am the ruler of God's creation. I am the one whom the entire universe revolves around.

To this church with serious problems, Jesus slaps out some serious credentials. I am the strong and final word. I am the truth teller. And I am the ruler of God's creation.

[5 : 51] And therefore, what I say to you is truthful, authoritative, powerful, and needs to provoke a response in you. And we see from what follows the very dire situation that Laodicea is in.

And this risen Lord Jesus, he says five things. The first thing he says is, I know. Look at it in verse 15.

I know your deeds. He said that before, and that's been quite an encouraging thing. He says to one church like Thyatira, I know your faithfulness, your love, your service.

It's a good thing for Jesus to know those things. He said to Pergamum, I know where you live. I understand. But here he says, I know your deeds.

And his analysis of their deeds is that they're not good. You are neither hot nor cold. You're neither on fire or frosted over. You are utterly ambivalent.

[6 : 58] I used to work in Plains, just next to Airdrie in North Lanarkshire. And everyone just used to say that everything was fine.

It's just fine. Which provoked in me this kind of idea that everything was just kind of, I'm a bit ambivalent towards absolutely everything. Then I discovered that for Glaswegians, fine means that was the best thing I've ever heard.

Jesus though says, you're utterly ambivalent. You're neither devoted in your love for me, or provoked in your hatred of me.

You're just middling. Tokenistic. Going through the motions. And look at what the reaction it provokes in the Lord Jesus, verse 16. Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth.

This would be horrendous for the Laodiceans to read. The Laodiceans are a very proud city. They see themselves as just a cut above the rest of modern day Turkey.

[8 : 07] It is like the Los Angeles of the ancient world, where everyone lives in big mansions surrounded by palm trees. It is a boom town. It overlooks a fertile valley that produces so much crop, supports so many cattle, that the city really is expanding faster than you can imagine.

It is like London house prices in Laodicea. So affluent were they that in 60 AD, an earthquake, and haven't we seen this week just how destructive an earthquake can be, completely flattens the whole city.

The emperor sends a chest full of money to help them rebuild, and the Laodiceans say, no, you can just turn around and go back to Rome. We've got it covered. Laodicea is incredibly affluent.

It is the only city in the ancient world that had two massive amphitheaters. The only place. If you go to Laodicea, the place where Laodicea was today, the artifacts, you don't even need to dig for them.

They are so plentiful that they just sit on the ground. Oil lamps, ornamental pottery. You can't steal them. The customs will get you every time. But it is a place of opulent wealth.

[9 : 25] And so for them to hear that you're just lukewarm, you're provoking me to vomit you out of my mouth, would be a real affront to the pride of the Laodiceans. And this idea of being lukewarm is a particular embarrassment if you're from Laodicea, because Laodicea, despite all its wealth, all its prowess, its great reputation, has one major problem.

And its major problem is that it has no water supply in the city. All its water gets pumped in, and it has two neighboring cities, it's Hierapolis in the north and Colossae in the south.

Hierapolis is famous for its hot springs. It's a place where everyone goes to have a bath, kind of like Iceland today in their volcanic pools. Colossae is famous for its fresh spring water.

And so Laodicea pipes in water down from Hierapolis and up and along from Colossae. Now what's the problem? If you pump hot water eight kilometers south, by the time it gets there, it's lukewarm.

If you pump freezing cold water eight kilometers up and along, by the time it gets there, it's lukewarm. There is nothing more revolting than lukewarm water, is there?

[10 : 49] I remember we have a roundabout outside our house growing up, and we used to cycle around for hours and hours and hours until we were so dehydrated and you'd run in, and my mum would be doing the washing up, and you'd interrupt her washing up, and you'd put the cold tap on, and you'd drink it down, and about three gulps later, you'd realize that the tap hadn't run cold.

It was lukewarm, and it was absolutely disgusting. There is nothing more revolting than lukewarm water. Even worse than that is this hot water being done brought south.

As it cooled down, all the minerals and deposits came out of suspension. So the water in Laodicea became like this thick brown sludge.

Horrible. And so Jesus says, your attitude to me provokes the reaction that your water does to you. One sip and you want to spit it out.

Nothing to quench your thirst. This sludge. Jesus says, your attitude is sickening to me like your water is to you.

[11 : 58] You're utterly lukewarm. You're ambivalence. You're affluence and prosperity and pride and reputation has meant that you've reduced your faith to tokenism, perfunction, self-sufficiency.

It is very much the public school religion that I grew up with at school. That religion, Christianity was honoured almost nostalgically, as long as you weren't that into it.

You know, you could go to chapel every day and sing Jerusalem, but try and start a Christian union and everyone wanted to talk to you.

Why do you want to do that? That is Laodicea, a perfunctory, functional religion, a respect for church, but no real heartfelt spirituality going on at all.

A kind of empty hollowness. Respectable, but not foundational. They become fat heads. Jesus says, I know your deeds.

[13 : 07] I see through your sham respectability. I see what's really going on on the inside and it provokes me to vomit you out. Terrifying. You make me sick, Jesus says.

Yes. But he doesn't just leave them describing his nausea. He tells them that he wants them to change. And he digs a little bit deeper. And the second thing he says is, I counsel.

Look at how deluded they are, verse 17. You say, I am rich, I have acquired wealth, and do not need a thing. Isn't that the attitude of our age? I don't need a thing.

Everything I want is everything I can supply. I am an island. In fact, I am the Ibiza of violence. I am completely self-sufficient.

I don't need a thing. That is the Laodicean attitude. They're utterly self-deceived because Jesus says, you need everything because you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

[14 : 15] Those five adjectives are all describing, are all used to describe unbelievers in the New Testament. You're behaving like unbelievers. You're behaving like unbelievers. And so he says, how are you going to put this right?

How are you going to address this self-deception? He says, you need to come to me. He says, I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire.

That is very embarrassing for Laodicea because just north of Laodicea is the biggest gold mine of the ancient world, where they pull out the finest gold by the truckload.

And Jesus says, it's utterly worthless. That's embarrassing. You need to come to me and buy gold so that you can become rich.

Because in the light of eternity, you're just digging up worthless metal. And then he says to them, you need to buy white clothes to wear from me.

[15 : 23] If you're Laodicean, you're famous for black wool. There is a Laodicean sheep. And from it you get the finest black texture, which is kind of the Armani of the ancient world.

All the red carpet dues in Laodicea, everyone's strutting around in Laodicean wool. It's like Kashmir times infinity. It is expensive.

And how embarrassing that Jesus says, that won't do in my kingdom. You need to buy from me white clothes to wear.

Because your black Armani doesn't cover your nakedness and shame. Nakedness and shame has been a problem in the Bible ever since Genesis chapter 3. Their eyes were open.

They saw they were naked. They tried to make clothing themselves. It didn't work. The only thing that would cover their nakedness and shame was the garments that God himself produced for them.

[16 : 23] Jesus says, the only clothes that will cover your nakedness and shame are the clothes that I'm able to give. The righteousness that I'm able to provide.

If you'll come to me. And then lastly, and self to put on your eyes so that you can see. Laodicea is the center of medicine.

So much stuff going on. And particularly famous in Laodicea is the eye pavilion. Where they have this substance called Phrygian powder. Which you mix with water and it produces the most helpful eye cell you can imagine.

People from all over the world will travel to Laodicea to get their eyes sorted out. And what does Jesus say? It's useless. It's useless. You need to come to me to put self on your eyes so that you can see properly.

Laodicea has so much confidence in its own ability. Confidence in its wealth. Confidence in its clothing. Confidence in its ability to heal. And Jesus says it's all utterly worthless.

[17 : 33] You need to come to me for gold. Me to cook for clothes. And me for healing. You're so full of yourself you'd become empty of faith. And that I've been, Jesus says, pushed to the outside.

And yet it's important that we don't just look on Laodicea with condemnation. Because we can all be so Laodicean ourselves. What can I do?

What skills do I have? How can we make this work? That we become prayerless and arrogant. That we're so full of our own confidence we become overconfident.

And we start to think that we can do what only God can do. That is where Laodicea is. And that is where we can so often find ourselves. They've turned their back on Jesus and walked away.

He says, I counsel you to buy gold and get clothes and find myself. But then Jesus says the most remarkable thing. Look at it in verse 19.

[18 : 39] Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Isn't that amazing? That this church that has squeezed Jesus out, pushed him to the periphery, are so full of themselves.

Though they've stopped loving Jesus, Jesus has not stopped loving them. Those whom I love I pursue. Those whom I love I'm prepared to say the hard word to so they might be healed.

And I'm prepared to discipline them so it might bring about change in their lives. Those whom I love I discipline. This is where Jesus is not like us at all.

People turn their back on us. Our reaction, we turn our back on them. Jesus' reaction, well I will pursue them. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.

Be earnest. Be zealous. Be myopic. Be singularly focused. And repent. Come home. Those whom I love, Jesus says.

[19 : 53] Jesus loves this church. He's not writing just to shame them. He's writing to heal them. But we find ourselves being Leodicean.

What's the key? To turn back to Jesus. Say, I've got nothing. And I need you. Isn't it weird that as proficiency grows in our lives, we start to become independent.

So think about an apprenticeship. You're an apprentice mechanic. First day of an apprenticeship, you do everything you're told. Month in, you can be left to do a little bit by yourself.

By the end of your apprenticeship, you're a mechanic par excellence. That competence builds independence. It's completely the other way around in the Christian faith. That as we mature, we don't become independent of Jesus.

As we discover just how dependent we are upon him. How much we need him. And that's what Laodicea has forgotten. That as they grow, as they develop.

[20 : 57] It's not about moving away from Jesus. It's about pushing closer in to Jesus. And the beautiful thing is, Jesus says, I'll accept you because I love you.

The beautiful thing about the Christian faith is, no one has to remain the same. There's always a second chance. There's always hope.

Because there's always Jesus. Who never turns his back. Who always pursues and is always ready to welcome and restore. He elaborates a little bit further in verse 20.

Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. What a terrible indictment of the church. That Jesus finds himself on the outside. The prayer meeting is going on.

And Jesus is looking in through the window. So self-sufficient have they become. One commentator describes Laodicea as the self-sufficient, Christless church of the affluent society.

[21 : 58] How scary that we could do church. And Jesus could be on the outside. That's where Laodicea is. They've become so smug and arrogant.

The beautiful thing is though, Jesus says, I'm standing here and I'm knocking. And if you open the door, I'll come in. In the Middle East, the blessing is always to the host.

So in our culture, if you go to somebody's for dinner, you as the goer is the blessed one. In the Middle East, it is the host who is blessed.

And so to have Jesus eat with you in your house is a wonderful blessing. And he says, I'll do it. If you hear my voice and open the door, I'll come in and this most intimate picture of fellowship will be ours.

I will come in. And isn't that exactly what turning to Jesus looks like? It's opening the door of the house of our lives and saying, Jesus, come in.

[23 : 09] Jesus, come in and be Lord. Jesus, come in and I want to have fellowship with you. Last week I was on holiday. And over the weekend we stayed in a B&B.;

And on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday we stayed in a... No, on the weekend we stayed in an Airbnb. And on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday we stayed in a B&B.; And it was very different.

In the Airbnb down in the south of England, we had the whole house. Ted met us at the door and said, Here's the key. Here's the house.

Do whatever you want. Play with my kids' toys, he said. The B&B; on Aaron was very different. The woman, Caroline, met us at the door.

And she said, this is your room. This is where you can go. Don't go in any of these doors. Restricted access. And Jesus is saying, I don't want restricted access.

[24 : 09] Throw open the doors. Let me in. That's what he's saying to each of us this morning. I don't just want a bedroom or the utility room. I don't just want the wine cellar.

I want the whole building. I want in. Stand at the door and knock. Fling wide the doors. And let Jesus in.

Why? Because he is the only one who can make us rich in eternity, who can cover our nakedness and shame caused by our sin, and who can enable us to see what is really happening in the world and our absolute need of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus says, I stand. Stand at the door and knock. If you open it, I'll come in and eat with you. And you with me. Perhaps that's where some of us are this morning.

That we're conscious that as we've sung, our love has grown cold. That we're conscious as we've read about Laodicea. Laodicea, you think, oh yeah, Jesus, I've kind of pushed you to the periphery.

[25 : 13] Kind of compartmentalized you. There's rooms in the house of my life that I've put no entry signs private on. And so I think this letter from the Lord Jesus to Laodicea, but also for us, is challenging us to say, will you fling wide the door and let me in so that you can be rich and clothed and able to see.

And it all comes beautifully into land with the promise of verses 21 and 22. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.

The promise that extends into eternity. That the throne that the Lord Jesus has as the ruler of God's creation will be seen in eternity as he is the ruler of God's new creation.

He says, if you open the door to me, if you trust me, if you don't push me out, but welcome me in, you can share eternity with me. And the beautiful thing is, the reason we can share eternity, be victors with Jesus, is because he was victorious for us.

Just as I was victorious. Jesus, who went to battle against sin and Satan and death and suffering and shame and he absolutely won and he was victorious for us and if we will trust him, we will be victorious with him forever.

[26 : 43] Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. And so we finish our letter to lukewarm Laodicea with a real challenge.

If there was a spiritual thermometer, such a thing as a spiritual thermometer and we put it under your tongue this morning, how far would the mercury go up?

It would be blazing hot, moderately warm bath temperature, lukewarm, tepid, chilly, freezing.

The challenge of this is, will we let Jesus in? Will we let him be the centre of our lives in order that mercury will keep on rising and we'll pay an eternal dividend in the life to come?

None of the churches that Jesus writes to have particularly much going for them. Some have got lost, some have got compromised, some are so small and facing such hostility that you don't think it'll work.

[27 : 46] And yet there's great hope because Jesus loves them and is concerned about them. And if you thought the future of Christianity laid on these seven churches, you wouldn't give it a hope, it wasn't going to make it.

And yet because of the Lord Jesus, from these churches, the gospel spread to the entire world. It even got to Scotland. It even made it into Edinburgh and it even made it into our lives.

And so there's great hope, not in our ability, but in the Lord Jesus who says, I love, I love church, I love individuals, and I stand and I knock, open the door.

Let's eat together. Let's pray. Father God, we repent of our arrogance, we repent of our self-sufficiency, we repent of all the times that we try to go it alone.

Father, Father, where we think, we're respectable in your sight. And Lord, we come again and we invite you to take your rightful place in our lives.

[28 : 57] That Jesus might be Lord and King, he might be the center of our lives, he might be the Lord of our lives, he might be the King of our lives. That everything we are might be about him, everything we have, we might be grateful for because of him.

Lord, that we might know the intimate fellowship that he promises. With us, having all of our lives submitted to him. Father, where we're cold, warm us up.

Where we're arrogant, Father, humble us. Where we need it, would you rebuke and discipline in order that the Lord Jesus might be glorified and enthroned in each of our lives.

Amen.