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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes

## INTRODUCTION

Laodicea is the seventh and final church of the seven churches. These seven churches represent all of the churches of all the ages; they represent me and you here today. Then, in chapter 4 the church is raptured and it begins to show us what will happen in heaven, then what's going to happen on earth during a time of terrible Tribulation, climaxing with the Battle of Armageddon when Jesus comes back.

When the Lord Jesus writes letters to these seven churches, he always speaks the truth. He never pulls punches. I heard about a man who walked out of a shopping center to his automobile and noticed someone had run into his car and crushed his left front fender but nobody was around. There was a note underneath his windshield wiper that said, "Hello. I ran into your car. There were at least 20 witnesses who saw me do it. They think I am writing down my name and address and insurance number. Have a good day!" There are some people you just can't trust. When Jesus wrote these letters to these churches, he spoke the truth. Let's see what he had to say to the church at Laodicea.

"To the angel of the church at Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, 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 spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and I 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 you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so 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 him, and he with me.

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Most of you are going to hear what I have to say, but not everybody is going to hear what God has to say, because Jesus says your ears must be spiritually attuned to what he is trying to communicate to us. I want to talk to you about is the tragedy of a lukewarm faith. What is your spiritual condition? If you could stick a spiritual thermometer into your heart, what would it read "cold," "boiling hot for Jesus," or would it be somewhere in between? There is a difference between being a normal Christian and being an average Christian. To be an average Christian you pretty much have to be like everybody else—you are in the middle. Some may be better than you, some may be worse than you. The Bible talks about a "normal kind of Christianity" few people experience today and it's not average.

I like the way Vance Havner put it. He said, "In the twentieth century most of us have become so subnormal in our Christian life that when someone comes along and begins to act normal, we

label them as abnormal.” He is saying that most of us have collectively backslidden to the point that if a normal Christian comes along and starts acting like a normal New Testament Christian, we point our finger at him and we say, “He’s crazy! She is crazy!” and probably the reason is most of us are so lukewarm that when a boiling Christian walks up we are very intimidated. Have you ever noticed most of us feel uncomfortable around somebody we perceive loves Jesus more than we do? We get a little uncomfortable around them because they want to talk about Jesus all the time. Most of us have gotten so lukewarm, that a boiling Christian scares us to death.

I know before God that I am far from perfect, but I testify to you for the first years of my Christian life, I was an A-number-one hypocrite—cold much of the time—at best lukewarm. But in the summer of 1970 when God called me to preach he got my attention. If I know anything it is that from that moment on my heart has been on fire for Jesus and there has been a difference in my life. How about you tonight? Are you a lukewarm Christian? Jesus said, “I’d rather you’d be cold or hot but not lukewarm.”

## I. THE CONDITION OF LUKEWARM CHRISTIANITY

### 1. Neutral: neither hot nor cold

Let’s talk about it. First of all I want to talk about the condition of a lukewarm Christian. What’s he talking about when he says, “lukewarm Christianity?” Two words describe it. Number one is the word *neutrality*. A lukewarm Christian is *neutral* spiritually. They don’t get upset about much of anything. They refuse to take a stand on moral issues. “I know that may be wrong for some people and it may be right for some other people I’m just not going to say what I think is right and wrong.” They are neutral on moral affairs and they are neutral on doctrinal affairs. Sometimes they say, “It doesn’t matter if you believe this or it you believe that whatever you want to believe that’s okay. Neutrality is a description of a lukewarm Christian.

It’s like the Civil War soldier from Kentucky who wanted to remain neutral so he put on grey pants and a navy blue coat—so both sides shot at him. It’s like a typical politician who says when asked about a certain pressing issue for a national interest, “Some of my friends are for it. Some of my friends are against it. I agree with my friends.” Isn’t that the kind of sidestep politicians are known for? Jesus is not talking about that kind of neutrality. He’s talking about a Christian who refuses to be neutral on issues that really matter and who’s not afraid to stand up and say, “Right is right and wrong is wrong!” One of the greatest sins of Christians today is the sin of silence.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was arrested by Adolph Hitler in World War II, saw it coming. He said, “When they came for the Federalists, I didn’t speak up.” He said, “When they came for the Jews, I didn’t speak up.” He said, “When the Nazis came for the Catholics, I didn’t speak up. When they came for me, there was no one to speak up for me.” That’s the sin of neutrality, lukewarm Christianity.

### 2. Nauseating: *emeo* means, “to vomit”

Another word to describe it is the word *nauseating*, because if you have the idea of Jesus spitting lukewarm Christians out of his mouth, you miss the whole point. He says, "Because you are neither hot or cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth!" Let's do a little word study here in the Greek language. When he says, "spew or spit you out of my mouth," it is the Greek word *emeo*. Those of you in the medical profession or pharmacology know if somebody tells you they need an *emetic* which comes from the word *emeo*, they need something that causes them to vomit, throw up, regurgitate. Jesus isn't talking about something that is just so distasteful that he spits out of his mouth. He is actually saying, "Lukewarm Christians make me sick to my stomach! They make me throw up!" He is saying I am nauseated by lukewarm Christianity.

A deep theological question I have been asked is, "Was Jesus ever sick?" Some say because he was God in the flesh he never got sick; others say he never had the sniffles or He never had a headache or a cold. Did Jesus ever get sick? I don't know if he got sick during the thirty-three years he was here on earth. I'm not going to answer that question, but he does tell us there is one thing that makes him sick: Lukewarm Christians—compromising, side-stepping, lukewarm Christians.

## II. THE CAUSE OF LUKEWARM CHRISTIANITY

### 1. Sickening compromise

What causes a Christian to be lukewarm? What causes a church to be lukewarm? Number one is what I call "sickening compromise." Jesus says in verse 16, "Because you are lukewarm, you are neither cold nor hot. I am going to spit you out of my mouth!" This is a picture of a person who is trying to straddle the fence between the world and the kingdom of God, the kind of person who goes to church on Sundays and sings the songs of Zion they have a Sunday vocabulary they use when they are around other Christians but then on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and maybe even Saturday they have another vocabulary they use with the boys with the girls with their friends—and they are compromising. They have one foot in the world and one foot in the church. Jesus said, "I wish you were cold—gone to get into the world—or I wish you were boiling hot but not lukewarm."

I like hot coffee. There are even some people who like iced coffee, but room temperature coffee makes me sick. I like hot tea and I love iced tea but room temperature tea makes me sick. Doesn't that describe a lot of people's lives? "I'm not too bad and I'm not too good I'm just sort of halfway in between." That's like the little girl who one night before she went to bed, "Dear God, make me good! But not too good, just good enough so I don't get a whipping!" Isn't that like a lot of Christians? They just want to be just good enough to scratch their way into heaven and have all the fun they want to down here on earth. That's a lukewarm, compromising Christian.

I remember I preached a message one time at a church when I was in seminary out in Kentucky somewhere. I'm still sort of a "fireball" preacher now, but believe me, I've toned down through the years. My preaching style in years past used to be where I would clear off a spot and pitch a holy fit. I used to start out loud, get louder and then got LOUDEST! I really let her fly! At one church I preached how they needed to repent and get right with God. After the service a man

came up to me who was angry at me for saying those things about his church. He said, "We're not all that good, but we're not all that bad either!" I'll never forget that not all that good but not all that bad either. That's exactly what Jesus is talking about here a Christian who is trying to compromise with the world.

I'm not a prophet nor the son of a prophet but let me tell you what I believe is going to happen in the years to come before Jesus comes back. There is going to be a dual revival among God's people. In the last days God is going to pour out his Spirit upon all flesh; young men will prophesy, dream dreams. There is going to be a tremendous spiritual awakening that's going to sweep through our churches. It is going to be fantastic! But parallel to that revival of righteousness there is going to be an upsurge of unrighteousness and decadence in our world because the Bible says, "There will be a falling away. Men will be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." The Bible predicts this parallel revival. That middle ground where some people try to stand seems to be wide enough for you to stand on but the time is going to come when you are going to have to choose. That middle ground of neutrality is going to get narrower and narrower and you're going to have to decide: Get in or get out! If you are a nauseating, lukewarm Christian, I pray to God that you will step out of that middle ground and go all the way to Jesus.

## **2. Sickening complacency**

Another cause of lukewarm Christianity is sickening complacency. It is the attitude in verse 17 that says, "I don't really need anything." This is what the church at Laodicea said, "I'm rich! I've acquired wealth! I don't need a thing!" If you could have gone to this congregation in Laodicea, you would have found without a doubt the wealthiest congregation of these seven churches. Laodicea was a center of financial affairs, money exchange. They made eye salve that went all over the world. It was a center of medical practice. They produced beautiful linen sent all around the world. It was a great gold exchange where gold was the standard. These were wealthy people in the congregation. If you could have gone into a typical Sunday worship there at the First Baptist Church at Laodicea, you would have seen folks sitting out there with Rolex sundials on their wrists. They would have chariots parked out in the parking lot some of them two horse power some of them four horse power. Half the folks in the church had a second home up on the lake where they had the inboard-outboard slaves. They had it all made! They had everything they needed in terms of wealth, possessions and material. But that kept them from being totally dependent on the Lord.

Face it, some of you have all the money you need—not all you want—but all you need. Can you remember a time in your life when you were scratching financially? When you didn't know how you were going to pay your bills at the end of the month? Do you remember how dependent you were on the Lord? How you had to pray over just about every check you wrote? How you almost had to pray over every bill you paid? Do you remember how dependent you were on the Lord? It's not that way anymore for some of you, is it? Some of you are saying, "I am rich. I'm increased with goods. Thanks God but I don't really need anything." It is a terrible position to be in to say, "God, I don't need anything from you." If we broke up right now into groups of three people in this congregation and I told you to turn to two other people and tell them right now what is the greatest need in your life, some of you might have to really search! Some of you

might even have to come up with something because you say, "Really, I'm pretty satisfied. I'm pretty complacent." That was the problem with these lukewarm Christians. Jesus was trying to do something in their lives and all they were doing was handing him twenty dollar bills. Jesus was trying to convict them and all they were doing was just giving him their money. The Bible says, "To obey is better than sacrifice."

### **III. THE CURE FOR LUKEWARM CHRISTIANITY**

#### **1. A restoration of spiritual values**

Number three, I want you to see the cure the cure for lukewarm Christianity, because Jesus tells us very clearly what to do when we find ourselves in a spiritually lukewarm condition. First, there must be a restoration of spiritual values. He says, "I want you to change your value system. I don't want you to think of your cars your houses your stock portfolio I don't want you to think of your net worth as being the most valuable thing in your life. There are other more valuable things." In verse 18 Jesus says, "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in my fire." They had plenty of gold—the kind that you use for money—but he says, "I want you to get my kind of gold. Change your value system." Second, he says, "I want you to put on my white clothes or you're going to be naked." In fact that's what he says about them. "You think you are rich, increased with goods and let me tell you what you really are you are wretched you are pitiful you are poor you are blind and you are naked." Can you imagine going to a wealthy, sophisticated First Baptist Church of Laodicea and saying, "You folks are wretched. You are blind. You are miserable. You are naked." "Huh! How dare you say that about us." but that's what Jesus said.

Jesus is using a totally different value system. Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist of the abundance of things." People are living under one of two kingdoms Some are living under the "thingdom" of gold. Some are living under the kingdom of God. Those people who live under the "thingdom" of gold they say these things are valuable but those who live in the kingdom of God say, "This is most valuable." A person's soul is the most valuable thing is in the kingdom of God, because Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul." The most valuable thing you possess is your soul in relationship with God. The most valuable entity in Tyler, Texas is the soul of each person out there. That's what is most valuable. That's why we ought to be concerned about the souls of people. He says, "You have to change your whole value system!" He says, "Take my gold. Put on my white robe of righteousness," because Laodicea was the gold exchange. This is where they manufactured linen. He says, "You get my gold. You put on my white raiment" and then he says, "You get my eye salve and anoint your eyes." This is where they produced the stuff.

#### **2. A restoration of spiritual vision**

That leads to the second cure, a restoration of spiritual vision. He says, "I want you to see things differently." Look at verse 18. He says, "Put on my eye salve so that you can see. I want you to change your value system and I want you to see things differently. I want you to see things the way that I see things." The Bible says right now we are walking by sight, and not by faith but we have the spiritual ability even in this world to see things by faith instead of by human sight. Would you agree with me that right now Jesus sees things differently than most of us do? I'm

talking about even in this room. I'm talking about as it regards Tyler, Texas. He sees things differently. What do you think would happen to you if for 30 seconds God imparted to you the ability to see things as He sees things? What do you think would happen? Number one it would scare most of us to death! Because I think what you would see is the invisible spiritual warfare that is going on around us between demons and angels. It would scare you literally to death. But then as you look at other people you would be able to look as the Lord looks not as man looks. The Bible says man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Don't you wish for 30 seconds you could really see people as they really are on the inside? Never again would you have to doubt their character. Never again would you have to wonder if you could trust them or you couldn't trust them. You'd know as God knows. The Bible says the closer you get to Jesus and the more like Jesus you get, the more you can see things the way he sees them. That's why he says, "You put my eye salve on your eyes and you see things the way I see things."

I love that old Amy Grant song that says "My Father's eyes, I want to have my Father's eyes, eyes full of compassion seeing all the pain knowing what you are going through and feeling it the same." Jesus says, "You have to have a different value system you have to start looking at things differently."

### **3. A restoration of spiritual vitality**

He says, "You just need life!" Look at verse 19, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline." This is a tough letter to lukewarm Christians but this is what he says, "Do you know the reason I am fussing at you? It's because I love you. Do you know the reason I am disciplining you I'm punishing you? It's because I love you." He says, "I only do that to those I love!"

Hebrews 12 tells us God disciplines his own children. He makes it very clear if somebody is rebellious against God and the discipline of God is not on that person, they are an illegitimate child. They are not really Christians, but he says, "One of the ways you can know you are a Christian is that when you get lukewarm and when you get rebellious and disobedient, I'm going to rebuke you and I am going to chasten you." There are two stages to that. First of all he rebukes then he chastens. Parents we can all learn from that. Don't just jump in and spank your child. Do it the way Jesus does it. Rebuke them first. Speak to them verbally first and then if they still don't respond, then you ought to discipline them. Jesus said, "I only do that to those that I love." Can you look back at a time in your Christian life when you believed the punishment of God was on your life? I know I can. Do you know the reason Jesus did that for me? Because he loves me. The reason he rebukes you and chastens you is because he loves you. So here's the rebuke: "Be earnest."

He uses a word which means "to be boiling." He says, "You're not cold; you're not hot; you're lukewarm. This is what I want you to do. I want you to be boiling for me!" I'm not talking about freezing in formalism and I am not talking about frying in fanaticism. I'm talking about being boiling hot in your zeal for Jesus Christ. That's what Paul said to young Timothy. He said, "Stir up the gift that is in you." That's a picture of going to a bunch of coals at a campfire that have settled down and become cold and dark and taking a stick and stirring it up until the fire begins to flame once again. That's what God wants to do to your life. Maybe there was a time when you

were white hot for Jesus Christ, but through the years, for one reason or another, you have become cold and dark. He wants you to get stirred up! He wants you to be boiling for him!

In verse 19 every word is important, "Get fired up! Be earnest and repent! Ladies and gentlemen, the last word Jesus gave to the church was not the great commission. The last word Jesus gave to the church is *repent*, which means change your mind, change your behavior, change your attitudes—get right! And when real revivals are going to break out in your life and in this church? When there is some good old fashioned repentance! I have been preaching for 23 years now and I don't suppose I can count on both hands the number of people who have come to me and simply said, "Pastor, I want to repent. I need to repent." I don't suppose I can remember ten people who have ever done that. Although the Bible uses the command, "Repent" over seven hundred times throughout my ministry, I have probably had a couple of thousand people who have come and used a word you never even find in the Bible. They say, "I want to rededicate." I know they mean well, but you never find that word anywhere in the Bible. A lot of people who have come and said, "I want to rededicate my life," what they really ought to be saying is "I need to come and repent." Rededicate sounds so nice and repent sounds so negative. Jesus did not say, "Be boiling and rededicate." He said, "Be boiling and repent." Then he said, "There's still hope. Here I am. I am standing at the door and I am knocking."

You've heard that verse before haven't you? Some of you came to Christ probably because that Revelation 3:20 was shared with you. He is talking to a church here? I believe the application can mean a person who needs to invite Jesus into their heart but the primary application he is talking about is to a lukewarm church who has shut Jesus out. He says, "Listen, church. (knock, knock, knock) Let me back into your church. I'm knocking and if any of you will hear my voice, I'll come in." This verse is interesting. It starts out speaking in the plural. He says, "I'm standing in the door knocking and if anyone" (plural) "hears my voice and opens the door" Then it becomes singular, personal, He says, "I will come in to him and will eat with him and he with me." Jesus says, "You repent and you open up your heart's door and let me come into your church let me come into your life let me take full control of your life."

## CONCLUSION

Holman Hunt painted that beautiful picture called, "Jesus, The Light of the World" many of you have seen. It's a picture of Jesus standing outside the door with a lantern in his hand, knocking at a closed door. Of course, you have heard the story that when the picture was first displayed in London, an art critic was quick to point out that Holman Hunt made a terrible mistake. When he painted the picture, he had neglected to paint a doorknob on the outside of the door. When confronted with that criticism, Holman Hunt smiled and said, "That's not a mistake at all. It is by design because the doorknob is on the inside and it can only be opened from within. Jesus will not barge into a person's life. He will not force his way into a lukewarm Christian's heart. He says, "I'm knocking. If you hear my voice, open the door. I'll come in and we will have intimate fellowship!"

## OUTLINE

### I. THE CONDITION OF LUKEWARM CHRISTIANITY

1. Neutral: neither hot nor cold (v. 15)
2. Nauseating: *emeo* means, "to vomit" (v. 16)

### II. THE CAUSE OF LUKEWARM CHRISTIANITY

1. Sickening compromise (v. 16)
2. Sickening complacency (v. 17)

### III. THE CURE FOR LUKEWARM CHRISTIANITY

A restoration of spiritual

1. Values (v. 18)
2. Vision (v. 18)
3. Vitality (v. 19-20)