

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-31-13 PM NOTES  
"THE LUKEWARM CHURCH"  
REVELATION 3:14-22  
#9 in Series, "Verse-by-Verse Through Revelation"

**Revelation 1:19 (NKJV)** "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."

**Revelation 3:4 (NKJV)** "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

I. The Correspondent (v. 14)

- A. "The Amen"
- B. "The Faithful and True Witness"
- C. "The Beginning of the Creation of God"

**Revelation 3:14 (HCSB)** "...the Originator of God's creation."

**John 1:3 (NKJV)** "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."

"The Laodicean church was a comfortable church. You could attend there for years and probably find it very pleasurable. You would never be challenged, rebuked, or corrected. You would never even have your conscience pricked. You would only be encouraged, stroked and flattered, because this was a comfortable, compromising church."  
—Ray Steadman

II. The City (v. 14)

- A. Laodicea Was a Very Wealthy City
- B. Laodicea Was a Center for Fashion
- C. Laodicea Was a Center of Medicine
- D. Laodicea Had a Water Problem

III. The Concern (vv. 15-17)

- A. Their Compromise (vv. 15-16)
  - 1. Cold

2. Hot

**Luke 24:32 (NKJV)** “And they said to one another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’”

**Romans 12:11 (NASB)** “not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.”

3. Lukewarm

**Matthew 7:23b (NKJV)** “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”

“Lukewarmness is the worst form of blasphemy.”

—Dr. G. Campbell Morgan

B. Their Complacency (v. 17)

IV. Their Command (vv. 18-20)

A. Appeals From Christ (v. 18)

1. Gold Refined in the Fire

**1 Peter 1:7 (NIV)** “These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

2. White Garments

**Revelation 19:8 (NKJV)** “And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”

3. Eye Salve

B. Admonishment From Christ (v. 19)

**1 John 5:16 (NKJV)** “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.”

C. Access to Christ (v. 20)

V. Counsel (vv. 21-22)

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The book of Revelation is outlined in **Revelation 1:19 (NKJV)** “Write the things which you have seen [chapter 1], and the things which are [chapters 2-3 which this message completes], and the things which will take place after this [chapters 4-22].” The seven churches addressed in this “things which are” section are both historic and representative. They are historic in the sense that they were real churches filled with real members in real locations. They are also representative in that they have the same problems, strengths and weaknesses that all churches of the whole church age have. Every church today can see truth about themselves in these seven churches.

Does it make any difference that Jesus Christ, the founder, builder, and Lord of the church was resurrected from the dead and lives today? It certainly should! Because He is alive, there ought to be an element of the unexplainable in every church that is surrendered to His Lordship and is functioning in dependence on the Spirit of Christ. If everything that happens in a church can be explained by good leadership, hard work, a good business plan, good marketing, and a preacher that is a good communicator, then the church is no different than a business, a non-profit organization like the Red Cross, or civic club like the Rotary or the Lion’s Club. Because Jesus Christ is alive, His church should be unexplainable and different from every other organization. If Christ is truly alive, then those who know Him will have a white hot zeal for Him and His church that permeates their lives.

The church at Laodicea had nothing unexplainable about it. Jesus told this church that they made Him sick. He did not have even one good thing to say about them. It is likely that all seven letters that Jesus dictated to John were read to all the churches. Picture the church at Laodicea as they gathered to hear a word from the Lord Jesus Himself. The letter to the church at Ephesus is read. Next comes the letters to Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia. Even though there were some strong rebukes to some of these six churches, there was something positive said about each one. Even Sardis which was a mostly dead church, Jesus said in **Revelation 3:4 (NKJV)** “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.” As they prepare to listen to what the Lord Jesus says to them, they wonder if He will commend them for their giving, their intelligence, or their organization skills. What they heard must have put this self-sufficient, self-confident, self-deceived church in a state of shock. The Lord Jesus had no commendation, no praise for this church – only rebuke.

Let’s examine this final letter to the churches and see what the Lord has to say to us as individuals and as a church.

I. The Correspondent (V14)

As with each of the other six letters to the six churches, Jesus begins with a description of Himself that is tailored for the needs of each church.

A. “The Amen” (V14a)

When Jesus calls Himself “the Amen” He is saying that He is the embodiment of the truth. The word “amen” means “it is so” or “it is true”. Jesus is saying to this church that He is the personification of the truth. All other truth is measured by Him. His words are the truth standard. Jesus identifies Himself this way because what He is about to say is going to shock and jolt them.

B. “The Faithful and True Witness” (V14b)

As the faithful witness, He will not dilute the truth, and as the true witness He will not distort the truth. Jesus was about to tell them about their spiritual condition and what He says will be faithful and true. He will neither exaggerate nor suppress any of the truth. As a witness in court does, Jesus is affirming that He will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

### C. “The Beginning of the Creation of God” (V14c)

“Beginning” is not the best translation. Jesus is not saying that He was the first thing that God created. He is eternal and therefore uncreated. The word could better be translated “source” or “origin of the creation of God.” The HCSB translates it much better: **Revelation 3:14b (HCSB)** “...the Originator of God’s creation”. We see the same truth about Jesus Christ in **John 1:3 (NKJV)** “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” The word translated “beginning” (*arche*) also has the idea of the one in charge. As the creator and ruler of all that is, He possesses the right and prerogative of sovereign ownership.

Why did Jesus reveal Himself this way to this church? It is because Christ’s assessment of this church is going to be the opposite of their self-assessment. We see how they see themselves in **Revelation 3:17a (NKJV)** “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing!’” Jesus tells them how they really are in the last part of that verse: “and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”. This church needed to be reminded on the front end that the one who is speaking to them is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, and the originator and ruler of the creation of God. His assessment of us is the way things really are even if we feel differently about it.

Ray Steadman summarized the Laodicean Church: “The Laodicean church was a comfortable church. You could attend there for years and probably find it very pleasurable. You would never be challenged, rebuked, or corrected. You would never even have your conscience pricked. You would only be encouraged, stroked and flattered, because this was a comfortable, compromising church.” [Ray Steadman, *God’s Final Word*, Page 108].

## II. The City (V14)

As with the other six churches, we get some insight into the proper interpretation of the text by learning some things about the cities where the churches are located. This city was known for its self-sufficiency. About 60 or 61 AD, an earthquake leveled Laodicea. The city rebuilt, refusing help from the Roman government. The people of the city paid for the rebuilding. The people of the church at Laodicea said in **Revelation 3:17b (NKJV)** “[We] have need of nothing”. Let me tell you four things about the city of Laodicea that will help us better understand what Jesus said about them.

### A. Laodicea Was a Very Wealthy City

Laodicea was a banking center for this part of the world. Great sums of gold, silver, and Roman currency was kept on deposit at Laodicea. Businessmen from all around the area came to Laodicea to finance their ventures.

### B. Laodicea Was a Center for Fashion

The city was known for its black soft wool. A Laodicean garment was a prized possession in the Roman world.

### C. Laodicea Was a Center of Medicine

Laodicea had a prominent medical school. A well known eye salve that supposedly cured many eye diseases was made there.

All three of these industries (banking, fashion, and medical remedies for eye problems) comes into play as we hear what God says to this church.

### D. Laodicea Had a Water Problem

The only problem this city had was that there was no plentiful water supply in the town. Their water came from two sources. Some of their water came from Colossae. Colossae was about six or seven miles away and their water came from off a mountain and was very cold and very good. This water was transported to Laodicea by an underground aqueduct. Laodicea also got water from Hierapolis which was about five miles away. Hierapolis was known for its hot mineral springs. People would go sit in the water for medicinal purposes to soothe their aching bodies. Water came from those hot springs through an aqueduct to Laodicea. Why then was the water a problem? By the time the cold water from Colossae arrived, it was no longer cold. By the time the hot water arrived from Hierapolis, it was no longer hot. The water at Laodicea was known because it was lukewarm. Visitors to Laodicea who were unprepared for the

water in Laodicea would sometimes vomit after drinking the water. Jesus used this fact about the water to show them that there was more than water that was lukewarm at Laodicea.

### III. The Concern (V15-17)

Let me repeat that Jesus had nothing positive to say about this church. He brings up two areas of deep concern to this self-sufficient church.

#### A. Their Compromise (V15-16)

Like the undesirable water, even so the church members at the church of Laodicea were lukewarm and Jesus said that He will vomit them out of His mouth. In other words these lukewarm compromising church members made Him sick. I believe that by using water temperatures, we can differentiate between three spiritual states.

1. Cold – This refers to those who have cold hearts and care nothing for the things of Christ. Matt 24:12 speaks of those whose love has grown cold. A spiritually cold person generally does not do harm to the cause of Christ. They don't try to act like they care. They don't claim to love the Lord Jesus. They are just cold and unconcerned. The Gospel does not move them. They have no interest in God, His church, or His people. They are not hypocrites. They don't claim to be God's children.

2. Hot – The two on the road to Emmaus when they walked with the resurrected Christ said in **Luke 24:32 (NKJV)** "And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'" The hot are those who are spiritually alive, those to whom Jesus is precious, and those who love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and mind. When you are around a person like this, you don't have to wonder very long about where they stand on things. Jesus is central in their thoughts, conversation, and actions. These that are "hot" are passionate about Christ and His glory. They love worship. They are serious about obeying the Great Commission. The Bible describes these "hot" believers in **Romans 12:11 (NASB)** "not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord". I love these people! I am encouraged when I am around these people. Love for the Lord Jesus Christ just oozes out of their pores.

3. Lukewarm – This word described the whole church at Laodicea. I don't want to get too complicated, but I believe that there are two kinds of lukewarm church members. First, there are the phonies. These people are on the church roll and even attend church some. They give mental assent to the facts of the Gospel; they believe that Jesus was who He said He was and profess to be Christians, but their lives have never been transformed. They have no fire in their heart because they are spiritually dead. They go through the motions. They have been deceived by the enemy and are headed toward a Christless eternity thinking that they are all right. Oh how my heart aches for these deceived people. I grieve to think that they will one day hear the risen Lord Jesus say the words of **Matthew 7:23b (NKJV)** "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

The second group in this lukewarm category is those who have been born again, but the fire has almost gone out. These people can talk the talk, but they have compromised with the world. They know what it is to have their heart burn within them. Now, they have lost their passion. These lukewarm believers are the most miserable people in the world. They are way more miserable than the cold hearted. They are under the Lord's discipline. Their days are long and dreary. They can't be happy in the world because they belong to Christ and they aren't happy with fervent, passionate, hot people because it reminds them of how far they have backslidden and how much they have compromised. Dear brother, dear sister, how long are you going to fight against your heavenly Father who loves you and will not let you go. How long are you going to try to fill the void in your life with the world's remedies? You were made for Christ and there will be no joy as long as you keep trying to walk away from Him.

I believe that the vast majority of the lukewarm in the church are in the first category – they are phonies who have never been born again, never been made a new creation in Christ, and never made partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). They are not under God's discipline because they are not God's children. They are headed for a Christless eternity.

Why would the Lord say that He would rather that the lukewarm be cold than in their current state? It is the lukewarm that do the most harm to the cause of Christ. The great English preacher, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said, "Lukewarmness is the worst form of blasphemy". The lukewarm professing believer says, "I believe that Jesus Christ is alive, that His Spirit dwells in me, but all of that bores me and I find the risen Christ insufficient." When those who are cold see those who profess to know Christ and yet act just like the world, they decide there is nothing to what the "Christian" professes. One disillusioned lost person put it this way: "They're praising God on Sunday; they'll be alright on Monday; its just a little habit they have acquired". The Lord Jesus says to the lukewarm, "I love you, but your blasphemous lukewarm life makes me vomit."

#### B. Their Complacency (V17)

In verse 17, the Lord Jesus gives the cause for their Lukewarmness. They were plagued with worldliness, materialism, and a smug self-sufficiency. Their worldly success had caused them to believe that they could handle their lives on their own. In a town known for its wealth, they were poor; in a town known for its eye salve, they were blind; in a town known for their expensive clothing, they were naked. So often, our greatest need is to see our need. The end of Lukewarmness comes when we see that we are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. That is one of the things that happen when revival touches down on a church. The eyes of God's people are opened to see their compromises, their complacency, and their self-sufficiency.

### IV. Their Command (V18-20)

#### A. Appeals from Christ (V18)

In verse 18, the Lord is saying, "I am the source of your supply; stop looking everywhere else for what only I can give you." The key phrase is "buy from Me". What do they need to look to Christ for?

1. Gold Refined in the Fire – 1 Peter 1:7 speaks of gold refined in the fire as genuine faith that has been tested and purified in trials. When we turn from our compromise and our complacency, we will not have an easy life. There will be trials and tribulations but as we read in **1 Peter 1:7 (NIV)** "These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

2. White Garments – The white garments signify the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to us. We do not trust in our own righteousness but in the righteousness of Christ put to our account. The white robes also picture the practical fruits of righteousness that flow from the lives of those made righteous in Christ. **Revelation 19:8 (NKJV)** "And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

3. Eye Salve – Jesus is speaking of the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit to enable us to see, to understand God's truth. The Holy Spirit removes the scales from our eyes that we may see ourselves as God sees us.

#### B. Admonishment from Christ (V19)

This verse is directed at those lukewarm members who were truly saved. The Lord chastens or disciplines His children. Our chastening is evidence of His love for us. The Lord will not allow His children to continue in Lukewarmness. There will be increasing rebuke and chastening. The indication in the book of 1 John is that when a true child of God refuses to respond to the Lord's chastening, the Lord takes their life and takes them on to heaven. **1 John 5:16 (NKJV)** "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that."

Because of the chastening, Jesus commands the lukewarm at Laodicea to be zealous and repent. To be zealous is to be hot. To repent is to recognize that you have blasphemed God in your Lukewarmness and to purpose in your heart to turn from you compromise and complacency and lust for comfort and all that the world offers, to take up your cross and follow hard after Jesus wherever He leads.

### C. Access to Christ (V20)

Verse 20 is one of the most recognized verses in Revelation. This is one of the saddest pictures in the Scripture. Jesus, the founder and Lord of the church is on the outside knocking. I think that we sometimes push to symbolism of this verse too far and use it exclusively of lost people inviting Jesus into their life to be saved. I don't think that is a wrong application of this verse, but I think that it is a little more general. I think that Jesus is addressing all the lukewarm to dine with Him – have intimate fellowship with Him. That intimate fellowship is the flame that heats up the lukewarm heart to become fervent and hot for Him.

### V. Counsel (V21-22)

All Christians are overcomers. Even now we are told in Ephesians 2:5, 6 that we are seated with Him in heavenly places. However there is coming a time when those who are his will rule and reign with Him in His physical Kingdom (Revelation 20:4).

This section of Revelation closes with this counsel from Christ that He closed each of the letters with. If your ears have been opened by the Spirit of God, hear and heed what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church.

### CONCLUSION

Lukewarmness is a horrible sin and an affront to our glorious Lord. I cry out to you tonight to be zealous and repent. If you are a lost church member, receive the Lord Jesus into your life to make you a new person, a transformed person. It is when we deal with the Lukewarmness that we will find ourselves in the middle of a mighty move of God. (3249)