

Don't Be Lukewarm toward the Lord!

Rev. 3:14-22

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St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

"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, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were 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 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." (Rev. 3:14-22, NIV84)

In the name of the One who is the Truth, the Ruler of God's creation, the Lord Jesus, dear friends:

If you're a coffee drinker, you prefer to have your coffee served hot. Maybe not scalding hot like the infamous McDonalds' incident years ago, when a customer scalded herself with hot coffee, sued McDonalds and won a million dollars; still, most like coffee reasonably hot. But some also like it cold; on a hot summer day, an iced coffee may be more refreshing.

But a coffee served at room temperature—lukewarm coffee? Blah. It just doesn't appeal. (By the way, I'm not a coffee drinker.)

Our Lord Jesus was dictating to John to write letters to congregations in Asia Minor, southwestern Turkey today. Jesus had a letter written to the church in Laodicea, calling himself the "Amen," a word that means "the Truth"; he is the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. Jesus had a warning for this congregation: "I am about to spit you out of my mouth." Why? Because they were lukewarm. Let us today learn from Jesus' letter to Laodicea: **Don't Be Lukewarm toward the Lord!**

Jesus described the Laodiceans' attitude: "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.'" It was a "feel-good" church. "Don't rock the boat," they were saying. "Things are going well here, we have no needs. So don't bother us with all this talk about sin; spiritual matters don't really concern us."

Jesus told them, "You're neither hot nor cold. I wish you were either one or the other!" Obviously, a "hot" faith was preferable to their lukewarm state—God would like to see them "on fire" for the Lord. But "cold"? At least those who were cold, hostile to the gospel, had some interest in spiritual matters, even if they "coldly" rejected Christ. But the Laodiceans? They just yawned, uninterested in the message of sin and grace.

The Lord wrote his diagnosis: The church thought it was rich, well-clothed, seeing. "But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." They were spiritually impoverished in their sinfulness, needing a Savior; they were spiritually blind to the ways of God,

and didn't know that they were uncovered in shame due to unrepentant sin. Being lukewarm was a danger to them, because their easy-going ways blinded them to their sins that were leading them to eternal death and hell.

Let the Lord's diagnosis of lukewarmness serve as a wake-up call for us all. There's a temptation to view church as merely a place to feel comfortable, a social place to see our friends, while the message of law and gospel doesn't penetrate our hearts. Like the Laodiceans we could say, "I am rich and don't need anything." Outwardly maybe it seems that way. As much as we complain about high prices and the cost of things, we have an abundance of possessions and we're in no danger of starving. So we get complacent and don't even see the need to come to church much, just once in a while to "pay our respects," enough so the pastor won't pester us about getting to church.

The Lord loves us too much to leave us in our lukewarm state. In love he rebukes and disciplines us. He calls out to us: "Be earnest, and repent! Have a change of heart!" He knocks at our door: "This is your wake-up call! Shake off your lukewarm ways and hear the Word: God's laws says you're going to die in your sinfulness!" That ought to stir us up!

And when we realize that we really are spiritually "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked," our Lord has a prescription to heal us. "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich." True wealth, finer than pure gold, is the gospel of Jesus, a priceless treasure indeed. How can we buy it? The same way the Lord called out in Isaiah: "Come...you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" (Isa. 55:1). We have nothing to offer God but our sins; Jesus offers us his salvation, free of charge. We "buy" it by faith in Christ.

The Lord also counsels us to buy "white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness." Isaiah again identifies those clothes: "He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10). Christ's salvation, his righteousness and holiness, became ours when Jesus exchanged his righteousness for our sins on the cross. We receive them by faith in Christ.

The gospel, the good news of Jesus is also "salve to put on [our spiritually blind] eyes, so [we] can see." The Holy Spirit works with the gospel of Christ to enlighten us, to make us see Jesus as our Savior from sin. That's the prescription, the antidote to blind lukewarmness.

Now hear the Lord knock again at your door. Listen to his voice. It is the voice of your Savior that we hear in the gospel, the Word of God. Open the door—not as though it's by our "decision," but by faith moved by the Holy Spirit—and let Jesus in, with his great promises.

Jesus promises: "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." Jesus himself will make his home with us, just like he promised the disciples, "My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn. 14:23). Just think of that—God the Father and his Son, permanent guests in our home!

An even more amazing promise: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne." "Overcomes"—that word reminds us that our Christian faith is not life on "easy street," but a struggle against sin in us and the devil around us. But the Lord promises that we can and will overcome, because Jesus has overcome the devil for us and rose from the dead. And when he comes again, he'll usher us to heaven, where we'll sit on thrones alongside Jesus! Amazing!

How can we be lukewarm toward the Lord after hearing these terrific promises? Let's daily repent, and keep believing the good news, and rejoice now in the Lord's true wealth! Amen.