

Lukewarm Good Friday?
Rev. 3:15-22

What we have here is the last of seven brief messages or exhortations given to the seven churches of Asia Minor. There are seven specific messages given to seven churches with difficulties and problems as they lived in this fallen world. And as we come on Good Friday to remember the death of Jesus Christ for sinners like us, and the necessity of that death this might seem like a strange text. Maybe one of the crucifixion texts might line up more with this day and might be more appropriate. But I hope as we go through this text it will become more apparent why I chose this text for this Good Friday service.

And one of the main points of concern that Jesus says to this church is in verses 15-16, and we must remember that Jesus himself is communicating this message to John to give to these specific churches. And look what he says, **“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”** Jesus being God knows their works. And he doesn't criticize the works in and of themselves, but how they are done. He says that they are neither hot or cold. The meaning here is if you asked the Laodicean believers why they do what they do they would be able to tell you - give you a biblical reason. This is why we come out to church, this is why the preacher preaches, this is why we sing and pray. This is why we do our devotions or try to live moral lives. Jesus is not criticizing their works in and of themselves but the attitude or zeal behind those actions.

And Jesus says they are neither hot or cold. If they were hot they would be passionate. If they were cold they would be against about Christ and even opposed to him. You look at people who are cold to the gospel and they make no bones about it. You look at individuals that are hot, and we want to describe that believer as on fire for the Lord as if their passion is above the normal Christian experience. And I do not think that is the meaning, but it is the opposite of cold. The normal experience of believers is that they are to be hot. They love God, and are passionately following Jesus Christ. But of this church they are lukewarm. They claim to be Christ's. They want his salvation but the things of God are boring. Church is boring. The real exciting things are in the world, the things that captivate the heart and are worth living for are the things around us. That kind of faith is repulsive to Christ. He wants nothing to do with it. He will spit that kind of faith out of his heaven. It is absolutely distasteful.

And that is why I am preaching on this text today on Good Friday. It is because you cannot listen to the truths of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ and be lukewarm. You cannot listen to these truths and be unmoved. You will either listen to the message of Good Friday and either be really cold or really hot, but you cannot be indifferent. You cannot be lukewarm. And yet you look at so many individuals who classify themselves as believers they would even say that they are lukewarm. It is epidemic throughout Christian circles today. So the question that I want us to grapple with tonight is: what is the remedy of lukewarmness? How do we overcome the lack of enthusiasm for Jesus, and serving and savouring all that he is for us? And the remedy is the message of Good Friday. It is understanding and growing in our comprehension of what Good Friday means. And let me ask you: are you enthralled and transfixed and

in awe and overwhelmed by the message of the cross of Christ? And I really want you to be overwhelmed with all that God has done on this Good Friday as we remember that awful day and that glorious day when Jesus gave his life for wretched people like us. We do not like to use that kind of language about ourselves, but that is what we are. I want us to see a couple points I hope will enliven our minds and hearts to the meaning of Good Friday. You cannot be lukewarm in light of the message of the cross.

1. First, we need to recognize who we are. V.17

The problem is that we do not realize who we are. We do not realize that we are needy and that we are under the just wrath of God that we deserve for all of eternity. If I was to ask you if you are saved, how would you answer that question? You might say, yes, but what are you saved from? And you might say from sin, and that answer is not totally right. We are saved from the penalty of sin which is God's eternal and unending wrath that I deserve forever and ever in a place of conscious torment. And when you look at pictures of that judgment, we many times feel embarrassed by those descriptions in Scripture. The images of God's judgment are outer darkness, the fire that is never quenched, the grinding of teeth, the worm that never dies, and this judgment is eternal. And because God is righteous it speaks of what you and I deserve before God. We don't like talking about wrath, so we will say things like: do you want to go to heaven? Then trust Jesus for salvation. But again, why do I need to trust Jesus in order to go to heaven? It is because I am under the just fury, anger, and wrath of an all righteous God. The problem is that I do not see or realize how needy I truly am. We think we are so much more better than we are, and therefore Jesus is just not that needful or great. Sure I might have a few things wrong, but I am not all that bad. It is like a popular song says, All I need is a little bit of Jesus.

But realizing how needy and bad we are, and how comprehensively needy I am is the key to being hot before God or passionate about his grace, and that can only come by seeing who God is and who I am before Him. William Farley writes, **"we can trace most apathy about Christ and Christianity back to a failure to teach on the wrath of God. The doctrine of God's wrath makes us needy, and needy people are red-hot for Christ and his kingdom."** And let me ask you: do you realize who you are? Do you realize what your sins deserve and how great a sinner you truly are? Do you realize your sin is so extensive that there is nothing you can do, in other words, you are exhaustively needy? It is why we need a Good Friday!

Most people are not convinced they are that bad, look at verse 17, these people are not convinced, **"For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."** Remember, this is a testimony of a church that says they have trusted in Christ and need him. And, many times we have an official theology and an unofficial theology. The official theology is: I am "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked," before a holy God, absolutely needy before him. That is what we profess on Sunday. But the rest of the week we live with our unofficial theology, and this what we really believe, "For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.'" Notice the first words there, "For you say." This is a person's interpretation of self before God. It does not make it right just because I think it. I might think I have a lot of hair on my head but that does not make that

statement true just because I believe it. I can believe something and be totally wrong, and I can even deny the truth even though the evidence is so overwhelming that it is right. The meaning of "I am rich" is basically that I have no needs. In fact I have abundant resources for everything. And as a spiritual analogy it means that I need nothing before God. "I have prospered" means that I have actually gotten better rather than worse, and therefore when it comes to needing favour from God that I do not deserve, look at the response, "I need nothing."

And the amazing thing about this response is that this is religious people that are saying this. These are people who profess some kind of allegiance to Jesus Christ. And it is also the very reason that there is not a great love for Christ. I need nothing! Jesus says to Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7:44-47 these words; Simon believes that he is alright. God would accept him into his kingdom because of his own works, and here Jesus comes into his very presence, **"Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven-for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.'"**

And let me asks you: do you have an apathy toward God and Christ because this is the conclusion you have come to that you need nothing or you need very little? Because, look at what Jesus says to these self-righteous individuals in Laodicea in verse 17, **"not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked."** Now all of these words are giving a comprehensive message, and that is I am needy in not just one area of my life but in every area before God. It indicates how awful sin is and how comprehensive my sin. Notice the words, "Not realizing." You might not realize this, but this is the reality. In fact those who suffer from physical realities of being poor, blind and naked know that they are in that condition. The great error is that spiritually we do not naturally know that we are in this condition. And it amazing that we think so highly of ourselves. We think we are smarter than most. We think we are better worker than most. Think of it because in your work place you would say that you are an above average worker. You would say that you are an above average spouse. You are a better parent than most. And almost everyone thinks that, but everyone cannot be above average just because they think that.

But the one area that this is most devastating is in our view before an almighty God. We think we are better than most before God and my good has outweighed my sin, and I am rich and acceptable before God. We think we are all right, and we desperately and comprehensively laden in sin, under God's eternal wrath and most people don't even know it. The question should be in the midst of our arrogance and pride and thick heads, how can we ever understand how needy we are so that we will call out for the mercy of God?

2. And the way is Good Friday. Vv. 18.

The message of Good Friday is the most shocking and horrifying, and in many ways the most offensive message that has been ever heard. We have tried to clean it

up, and make it more appealing to our modern sensibilities, but it is an awful and grotesque message. But if you accept what Jesus has said about who we are this is the greatest message and the most stunning news so much so that the glory of God's love will change you forevermore. It will make us hot for Christ. In fact, the only way that Good Friday makes any sense is if verse 17 is true about you and me. This is what causes us to love God so passionately.

Now as we look at verse 18 it is evident that he is speaking metaphorically. There is a spiritual message. Let's read through verse 18 and see if we can discern the message that Jesus is giving, **"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."** Remember what people naturally think and that is they are rich, fully clothed and able to see. But notice the words, "I counsel you to buy from me." The "me" there is crucial. Poor and naked people have nothing to buy anything, so what does he mean buy from me that you might be able to be rich, and clothed and be able to see? He means to come to him by faith - to trust what he can give. He is commanding them where to find true riches and where to be clothed in white garments which speaks of absolute sinlessness and righteousness. And it can be only be found in Jesus Christ. That is the message. And how is Jesus able to give what we do not have? How is he able to give people who are wretched in God's sight absolute righteousness? And that is where we come to the cross. The big idea or meaning of the cross in two words is penal substitution. Penal meaning penalty. There is a penalty for our sin. We deserve God's wrath and eternal anger for the way we have treated him of most value. We read that the wages of our sin is death. That is the penalty and it is none other than an eternal and a very personal penalty. People hate hearing that because they believe the first part of verse 17. But whether we like it or not, admit it or not there is a penalty.

But the other key term is not only "penal" but "substitution." Jesus Christ substituted his life for ours. He came and the perfect one with no sin, and therefore since he is not under the penalty he is able to substitute his life for ours. And we learn something about what it is like to be abandoned in hell for all of eternity by seeing Jesus bear the sin of all those who would trust him. All those who realize their utter need of a sin bearer. It is infinite suffering that only an infinite Being could endure.

Again, listen to William Farley's description of the cross, **"There is almost no way to exaggerate crucifixion's brutality. Even the cruel, ruthless Roman government crucified only the lowest social classes—slaves and commoners. A Roman citizen could be beheaded for capital crime but never crucified. It was too demeaning. Because Paul was a Roman citizen he was probably beheaded, but Peter, a commoner, was crucified (upside down, according to legend). The cross was so distasteful that Cicero said it should never be mentioned in polite company. To the Jews it was a sign of God's cursing. It was a breathtakingly humiliating death, which usually took place near garbage dumps or similarly degraded locations. The victim was nailed or tied to a cross that was then impaled into the ground. The condemned was left to die a slow death from thirst and exposure. It was lingering, agonizing, torture, and because the loss of blood**

was minimal, death usually took several days. The fastest recorded deaths were after thirty-six hours. In some cases, the executioners broke the victims' legs, crushed their ribs, or scourged them to hasten death. They showed Jesus this mercy. Convulsions usually set in, and each movement tore the victim's hands and feet against the raw wounds. The pain was excruciating. Because the offender cried out for death, soldiers were stationed around the cross to prevent friends from killing the convicted or freeing him by force." If you want to see what wrath looks like, what you and I deserve. If you want to see the horror of your wretchedness from God's word then realize the Son of God was crushed for sinners. That is what I deserved for all of eternity.

And it is right here that we not only see God's justice, wrath, anger that is very personal, but it is here that we see the immeasurable love of God. God loves his enemies with a love that is deeper than the highest heaven and that is eternal. And he loved people that are not only not worthy, but could be rightly described as his enemies - those who deserve his wrath. Think of it, God sent Jesus Christ to die for you when he was angry with you. He died for you despite your complete and comprehensive lack of love for him and defiance in sin.

So here is the question: how do we overcome lukewarmness? How do I have a passion for Jesus? How do I not find spiritual things that should enthral my mind not boring or unnecessary in my life? And the answer is Good Friday. The answer is that in Good Friday we see both the bad news and the good news. God has to convince us of the bad news of what sin deserves, that God is just in judging my sin in the most just way. And how he convinces us is through the horror of the payment of my sin of his love for me. I see what my sin deserves as the eternal Son is bears my sin, and the sins of all those who would ever trust in Christ are laid on him, and he is crush. Sin is paid, justice satisfied and we are eternally loved. It is an amazing and startling message that should change each of us. It is a humbling message to any and all who claim to be rich and needing nothing. It is a message that in the midst of humbling takes our gaze off our goodness, and puts it on the amazing grace of God, and causes us to love deeply and passionately Jesus Christ.

And let me challenge us today that the message of Good Friday is not meant for one day out of the year, but it is meant for all of our lives. So preach it daily in your lives. I guarantee you that the fruit of that message will not only be eternal salvation but joy unspeakable full of glory. It will cause you to be hot for Christ.