

Lukewarm: The Church at Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

MPS Jesus is the Source for life refreshment and restoration when we engage personal communion with Him.

OBJ Jesus calls every person to a personal communion with Him as life's the source by Four Responses.

READ Revelation 3:14-22

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.

*15“ ‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18I 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. 19Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. 20Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. 21The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’ ” **Revelation 3:14-22***

Laodicea was the most unique city of all seven because it was the wealthiest city in Phrygia during Roman times.¹ Further south from Philadelphia along the Lycus valley, Laodicea lay between Hierapolis and Colossae, two cities of great importance for its ability to sustain a population. The soil of the valley produced fertile ground for rich fields perfect grazing sheep. Laodicea became known for its strong sheep herds with rich, black wool. “By careful breeding a soft, glossy black wool had been produced that was much in demand and brought fame to the region.”² Laodicea also became a center for banking. The prosperity of the agricultural and commercial industries made Laodicea “one of the richest commercial centers in the world.”³ “The most striking indication of the city’s wealth is that following the devastating earthquake of A.D. 60 the city was rebuilt without financial aid from Rome.”⁴ And finally, Laodicea was also known for its medical school. The school “followed the teaching of Herophilos (330–250 B.C.) who, on the principle that compound diseases require compound medicines, began a strange system of heterogeneous mixtures.” The most famous of which was “an eye-salve made from “Phrygian powder” mixed with oil.”⁵

For all the prosperity and affluence that marked Laodicea, there was one glaring weakness. And it is this weakness that proves most distinctive for our time today. Laodicea has no natural water source. Water was sourced from springs about six miles to the south through a system of stone pipes three feet in diameter. This made the city vulnerable both from enemy attack, closing off the water flow and during the dry season. In describing the water situation in Laodicea, Commentator Robert Mounce states, “Six miles north across the Lycus was the city of Hierapolis, famous for its hot springs that, rising within the city, flowed across a wide plateau and spilled over a broad escarpment directly opposite Laodicea. The cliff was some 300 feet high and about a mile wide. Covered with a white encrustation of calcium carbonate, it formed a spectacular natural phenomenon. As the hot, mineral-laden water traveled across the plateau, it gradually became lukewarm before

¹ Robert H. Mounce, [The Book of Revelation](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 107. Mounce notes, “In Roman times Laodicea became the wealthiest city in Phrygia.”

² Robert H. Mounce, [The Book of Revelation](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 107.

³ Leon Morris, [Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 83.

⁴ Robert H. Mounce, [The Book of Revelation](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 107.

⁵ Robert H. Mounce, [The Book of Revelation](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 107.



cascading over the edge.”⁶ Commentator Leon Morris also helps by showing how Laodicea sat between two contrasts, missing the great benefit of both. He states, “The imagery may be derived from the water-supply of the city which appears to have been drawn from hot springs at some distance, so that it arrived at the city lukewarm. This forms a contrast with the hot springs at nearby Hierapolis and the cold, refreshing water at Colosse. ‘Hot water heals, cold water refreshes, but lukewarm water is useless for either purpose, and can serve only as an emetic.’”⁷ Such imagery tells us that though the water would have been beautiful, it would not have been refreshing. Hot springs to the north in Hierapolis and cold, refreshing water to the south in Colossae, Laodicea could buy all they needed for supply, but did not enjoy the real benefit of either because both arrived lukewarm.

ILLUS Isn't it true how even the “idea” of lukewarm is unappealing! You never hear someone say, “Let's get a lukewarm (hot) tub.”, or “I crave a tall glass of lukewarm water.” Both what should be cold and what should be hot are ruined by this word, such that there is simply no positive imagery of the word.

TRANS And this is the imagery with which Christ addresses His church. Jesus says,
¹⁵“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

Jesus issues his strongest warning to the church of Laodicea. He says they are lukewarm, and this makes him want to spit them out of his mouth. What they celebrated about themselves, being rich, prosperous, and in need of nothing, were the very qualities that deceived them, and made them spiritually destitute. And that's the very point Jesus made. In contrast to their claims of rich, prosperous, and needing nothing, Jesus said their true state was the opposite, “*wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.*” Commentator Craig Keener highlights this when he states, “Everything in which Laodicea could have confidence outwardly, its church, which reflected its culture, lacked spiritually.”⁸ Yes, the water was still wet when it arrived at Laodicea, but it was neither cold for refreshment nor hot for life-restoring. And this was the spiritual state of the church. Laodicea had everything money could provide, but it was only wasted on things that were neither truly refreshing nor restoring for real life. [The Laodiceans built such a life by affluence that they lived deceived about their true spiritual state.](#)

Jesus is the Source for life refreshment and restoration when we engage personal communion with Him.

The reality of lukewarm was the loss of communion with Jesus. All the affluence of life caused them to believe they had no need and deceived them to think they could live far from the source. A lukewarm life is produced by two main qualities; a false security due to personal resource, that fosters a failure to give thanks and praise because you've grown accustomed to a tepid life by living too far from the source. The longer you live far from God, wandering and drifting, farther and farther away, the more dependent on personal resource and accustomed to the tepid state it produces. But the more the soul cries out, “There must be more, something better.”

ILLUS Two Primary Symptoms best diagnose a lukewarm life. **The first symptom is when you get HOT about things in life in a disproportionate manner to their true value for life.** By “HOT”, I mean moved to a degree disproportionate to the true value for life, whether in angered, depressed, anxious, or excited and happy, you get disturbed by stirred passion. The needle of passion moves both directions. We tell ourselves, “I'm just passionate”, and that is true. But it's always disproportionate to the true value for life. Some people just can't handle it when their sports team doesn't win, or when they do. Life experiences, recreations, and activities stir passion such that you give little or no consideration to the resource of life you spend to ensure you have them. A friend once shared about a season when he ‘ran religiously’ and became addicted to the dopamine rush it produced. When hit by injury that prevented his running, he went through a season of deep depression, aka withdrawal. “But hey, what's the harm in running. It's good for you, right?” I've had people tell me, “I meet

⁶ Robert H. Mounce, [The Book of Revelation](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 109.

⁷ Leon Morris, [Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 84.

⁸ Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Re 3:17–18.



with God in nature.” “Sunday is ‘me-time’, or ‘family time’.” Christin and I had dinner with our children this last weekend. We were discussing life and priorities. I said, “You kids grew up in a home of strong opinion. I don’t apologize. But I wasn’t always right.” Lukewarm doesn’t mean you never get hot. It does mean you get hot about the wrong things, at the wrong time, or in the wrong way. [Passion takes any number of varied manifestations, but when it’s stirred to HOT, it’s always disproportionate to its true value for life by subverting God’s Word in some way.](#)

The second symptom is when you remain COLD toward things that DO or SHOULD matter. COLD signifies indifference, being unmoved or unaffected when you should be stirred. You may sit in church, but you are unmoved in heart / spirit, you feel very indifferent toward God, and maybe even confused over why you are even present. You feel little affection for your spouse, questioning, doubting them constantly, and arguing often. You remain unconcerned whether your kids show any interest in Jesus or church, whether they know how to handle their Bible, what it says or means for life. I often see in people a HOT-ness toward their kids because of a growing COLDness with their spouse.

The HOTter you get about the lesser issues in life, the COLDer you remain to the truly important things of life. [Symptoms of HOT and COLD always indicate a life of priorities mis-aligned with God’s Word.](#)

TRANS Jesus calls His people to repent. Spit out the lukewarm living, and drink in the refreshment of Jesus.

OBJ [Four Responses set Jesus as life’s source for personal communion.](#)

1. [Invest life resources for true spiritual refreshment and restoration.](#) .18

¹⁸*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.*

Money was not the problem for the church, but it was propagating the problem. Jesus calls the Christians to stop using their resources create a tepid life and invest it to build their lives in communion with Him. Jesus makes this clear. Money is not the problem, but love of it is. The only way to continually kill, or avoid, the love of money is to practice faithful stewardship that honors Christ as Lord over life. Every other money management strategy leads to lukewarm living. Jesus instructs them that life resources cannot produce true life, but they can be invested to cultivate the things of God. And, if not stewarded for this purpose, they will always produce lukewarmness. [Faithful stewardship invests all of life’s resources to build communion with Jesus Christ.](#)

What kind of life are your resources cultivating, in time, treasure, and talents? I offer one piece of counsel for parents. You are passionate about your kids. Great. But don’t settle for simply being passionate about your kids. When parents live ‘kid-centered’, they raise kids who become self-centered adults. Keep the passion for your children focused on investing in the kind of life you want to train them to live, sold out for Jesus Christ. Better to miss some things the world offers than avoid what only Jesus can provide and produce. [The daily life you live trains and shapes the kind of person they will become.](#)

Communion with Jesus, and growth and maturity in relationship with Him is of first importance for all of life. [Steward all life resource so that you invest for true spiritual refreshment and restoration by communion with Jesus.](#)

2. [Understand God’s discipline as His love for you, not the opposite against you.](#) .19

¹⁹*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.*

Jesus said the Laodiceans were living in a humiliated state, “*poor, blind, and naked*”, but He loves them too much to leave them there. Telling the truth always demands the risk of offense, because love is greater than even the risk of truth-telling. So many today avoid truth-telling because they want to avoid offending. Taking offense is the most self-centered response one could have, and especially toward God. It is the true indicator of a self-centered life. The more Christ-like you become, the less possible it is for someone to be able to offend you. The Christian welcomes God’s discipline because God has not blinds spots like we do. The way we listen to God, specifically in how we receive His Word, says more about us than it does about God, especially when we refuse or reject Him. And we usually respond to God because of the way it may makes us look before other people. Understanding God’s loving disciplines means we not only learn to accept it, but we seek the Lord



to invite the Spirit to search and try, to convict of anything in us that is not OF, FROM, nor FOR Him. [Humiliated living is only be corrected by humbling oneself, and that requires God's loving discipline and Holy Spirit regular conviction.](#)

3. [Welcome Jesus to the center as the source of your life.](#) .20

²⁰*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

Ironically, John presents Jesus as the one outside the church knocking to get back in! Jesus' invitation goes out to the whole church. But his invitation is to any individual who will respond to Him, to welcome Him back for deep communion. Jesus invites you to welcome Him into the most common, ordinary, yet intimate moments of everyday life. The easiest way to live distanced from Jesus is to relegate any of your attention to Him to only one day a week, only a particular place, or among a certain people. [Jesus sources a life of cold refreshment and hot restoration in all things when He is enthroned as the center of life.](#)

[Are you tired of tepid living, settling for lukewarmness? Do you long for deeper communion with the Lord Jesus in your life, more refreshment from long days, weeks, and seasons of surviving on little satisfaction, whether in your own life, your marriage or home? Do you need more of Jesus' healing and restoring power in your own heart, marriage, or family?](#)

ILLUS "Knock, Knock." "Whos' there?" "Jesus, with a cold glass of spiritual refreshment, and a warm salve of healing." [Repent, turn to Jesus and draw close to Him for the deep, soul communion that only He provides as the true source for life!](#)

4. [Walk with Jesus daily to sit enthroned with Him in Eternity.](#) .21

²¹*The one who conquers,*

I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Jesus promises a reward unmatched; Christians will sit enthroned with Him in eternity. The one who conquers will only be because we walked with Jesus daily. And this daily walk now will lead us to sit with Him in eternity. Jesus, the only source that refreshes and restores not, is the only One who provides an eternal promise. [Walking daily with Jesus now leads us into eternity where we will be seated with Him.](#)

A lukewarm life is one of intentional lesser glory. It is not without beauty, power, strength, and even wisdom. But all of these are lesser because they are worldly in origin, and not God-originated. And with all of these, they will fade, spoil, and deceive the user. The one who sources life from Jesus and His Word invests all of life in eternity, for a glory that only grows.

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