

Jesus' call to the church

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Preacher: Oscar Chow

[0:00] Good morning, church. Today we'll be reading from Revelation chapter 3, verse 14 to 22.! If you're reading from our church Bible, it's on page 967.

To the church in Laodicea, 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.

I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. With that, you are either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 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 soft to anoint your eyes so that you may see. To those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. 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. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, so as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Lydia. Good morning, everyone. Hi. If you don't know me, my name is Oscar.

[1:43] I am one of the... What am I? I am one of the non-staff elders here at Watermark. Please join me. Let's pray as we look into God's word.

Father God, Lord Jesus, gracious Holy Spirit, as we consider your word and come under your word today, please open up our hearts to receive what you want to tell us today. Help us to be sensitive to your word and to be open to what you want to tell us. Help me, God, as I share and speak. May my words be yours.

Help me to have the conviction and the gentleness and humility that you desire. We give this time to you. May you be praised, glorified, and honored now and always. In Jesus' name, amen.

So if you didn't know, at Watermark, usually we speak through...we preach through one book of the Bible, one passage at a time. We just finished 18 weeks, 10 chapters in the book of John, and today and next Sunday, we will have two stand-alone sermons. Maybe you're wondering, why are we preaching on Laodicea today?

Well, here's some background. It's been three or so months since we moved here to Viva, our new venue, and the resounding feedback from all of you and from the venue team has been positive. Everyone is very excited about this new venue. It's new. It's nicely renovated. Thank you, Colin Co., wherever you are.

[3:27] It has great classrooms. Finally, we have an MTR and parking. We have the mall that we can hang out at Viva. It's a great place. It's a great place. It's a great place. It's a great place.

It really has been such a wonderful gift, this venue here at Viva. Everything that we were hoping and praying for 18 months ago has come to pass. All praise to Jesus. And so as I was asking God for a message for today, this passage came to me because we are at this interesting and unique season here at Watermark. And looking ahead, I can envision two different paths for Watermark, specifically relating to this venue. The first is that we can use this venue for good, for us to go deeper in the gospel and to love Jesus more through meeting here, understanding his word, and praying with each other. Our children can love and trust Jesus and grow in their faith here in this venue. We can invite our friends who don't know Jesus yet to come, hear the gospel, and believe in Jesus and have life in his name. But there's also another path. We can think of this venue as convenient and comfortable, and we can sit back and be consumers. We can take it and enjoy this gift, but forget the creator and the giver of this gift. It's like when you give your child a toy for their birthday. When you open up that toy and start playing with it, you open up your arms to expect a big hug, but your child just ignores you because they're playing with that toy. We can accept gifts, but forget the creator and the giver of the gift.

And so it was with this in my mind and heart that I share from this passage today. Because as I hope you'll see in this passage, on the outside, this church in Laodicea, they were materially very successful. They were very blessed.

They loved their gifts, but they abandoned the giver, Jesus Christ. So as we dive into this passage, we'll examine it in two parts. The danger of lukewarmness and the antidote to lukewarmness.

Let's get in there. The danger of lukewarmness. Now in today's passage that lady just read, Jesus, he offers quite a stern rebuke to this church in Laodicea. In Revelation chapters two and three, Jesus writes seven letters to churches in Asia Minor. In the first six letters, Jesus offers words of encouragement alongside some rebukes. But in this last letter to Laodicea, Jesus does nothing good to say about them at all. In verse 15, Jesus starts off saying, I know your works. You're neither cold nor hot. Would that you are either cold or hot. Verse 16, so because you're lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth. Can I just say ouch? That is a punch in the gut on a Sunday morning. But Jesus is saying, because you're lukewarm, I'm going to reject you. Now what did Jesus mean with all these symbols, cold, hot, lukewarm? Well here, Jesus references the geology of the land.

[6 : 55] Laodicea was set between two cities. If you can see the map there, Heropolis was in the north, Colossae to the east. Heropolis was famous for its hot springs. Colossae's water was cold and pure.

But Laodicea did not have its own water supply. And so they had to pipe water in from many miles away through these stone pipes. But the problem was that water that started off pure and clean, by the time it got piped through those stone pipes many miles away, it picked up all these impurities.

And so when it got to Laodicea, the water was undrinkable. It was disgusting. If you drank it right from the source pipe, you'd be so sick, you'd vomit. And Jesus compares the impure, repulsive water with the Laodicean church. You make me want to vomit. You nauseate me. Your lukewarmness towards me makes me sick. Again, the language Jesus uses is very strong. And so now let's ask the question, why is Jesus calling this church lukewarm? When we hear the word lukewarm, what's the first thing we think about? We think about lukewarm water, which isn't that bad, actually. It's quite drinkable.

Or maybe we think that it's Christians who are maybe a bit apathetic or indifferent towards Jesus. Is it that we think that there are Christians or people over here who are hot for Jesus and passionate for Jesus? And then there are other people over here who don't know him at all and are cold. And then in the middle, we have these lukewarm Christians who maybe profess faith in Jesus, but are unaffected or apathetic towards him, which, you know, maybe isn't that bad.

Is that what we think lukewarm means? Well, actually, if we continue on in this passage, although apathy or indifference may be symptoms of lukewarmness, the root cause or disease is something much deeper and insidious. Let's consider Laodicea. This city was known for three things.

- [9:03] First, it was famous for its textiles. Native to Laodicea was black wool, which would be made into rugs and clothing. The city was also known for its medicine, particularly this eye salve or ointment, which was famous across the region. And third, they were a wealthy banking hub.

Laodicea was so wealthy that in AD 60, when the city was destroyed by an earthquake, when Rome offered to help rebuild the city, Laodiceans said, Ah, we don't need your help, Rome. We're good. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote this, Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of her own reserves, with no help from us.

The broader Laodicean people, and by extension, the church, were quite successful in a worldly sense. Do you see where I'm going with this, right? Do you see any similarities between Laodicea and Hong Kong today?

Perhaps as a city, we're not as textile savvy as we used to be, other than Henry, our resident fashion expert over there. But Hong Kong is still a solid banking and finance hub. We have fantastic medical institutions and many fantastic doctors here at Watermark. We also have top universities.

Many Watermarkers have come from abroad to study and to work in our great city. So how does a church that has so much material wealth and success engage with Jesus?

- [10:38] See, on the surface, the Laodicean church probably said and did all the right things. They probably went to church service. They probably lived in community. They probably gave money to the church.

But Jesus looks past the surface and knows the condition of their hearts. In verse 17, Jesus says this about the Laodicean church.

For you say, I am rich. I have prospered. I need nothing. I need nothing. I don't have a prayer request because I already have everything I need.

And Jesus says to them, because of all your wealth and success, you think you have everything you need. Money, resources, influence, good looks, comfort.

You're self-sufficient and self-reliant. You're too comfortable and you don't think you need me. But then, Jesus looks at all the resources, talents, and money, and he flips it upside down.

- [11:43] In the second half of verse 17, Jesus says, You say, I'm rich. I have prospered. I need nothing. Not realizing that you're wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

On the outside, you're a wealthy banking hub. But because you so highly value money, you're actually spiritually bankrupt. You may have experts in medicine, but because you think that your eye ointment is so supreme, you're actually spiritually blind.

You think you're so well-dressed because you wear these black wool garments. The reality is you're spiritually naked. Jesus is saying you lean on all your resources, talents, and money.

You think you're rich. You're actually spiritually bankrupt. And this is not just a theme in Revelation. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is constantly imploring us to flee from self-sufficiency and run to him.

Recall the story of the rich young ruler. A wealthy young man, he goes to Jesus and he asks him, What must I do to inherit eternal life?

- [12:50] And Jesus responds and says, Well, you know the law. You know the commandments. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not steal.

Do not steal. Do not steal. And the man's all excited. He says, Great, I have kept all of these. But the last words of Jesus hit him hard. Jesus says, You lack one thing.

Give away all your money to the poor. And then you'll have treasures in heaven. And then come follow me. but the young man couldn't do it for he had great possessions and he loved his stuff above Jesus well look at Matthew 5 Jesus said blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven to be poor in spirit is to acknowledge that without Jesus we have nothing if we're liars on in him if we're not abiding in him we have nothing to be poor in spirit to be dependent not on ourselves but fully in him and so for us if we examine our own lives to what extent do we also desire to be self-sufficient and self-reliant we Hong Kongers we're known to study hard to work hard to build up our careers and our bank accounts so that in the future if a rainy day happens we'll be okay we send our kids to tough schools and give them extra classes to set them up so that they're in control of their destiny but in the process how many of us actually don't need to exercise faith or trust in God we think we're already in control of everything maybe that's why our prayer life is so stagnant maybe it's why we feel God is so distant

Jesus' charge against the lay of the sea in church was that their lukewarmness was due to their self-sufficiency and yet they were still part of a church maybe they even served in church on Monday morning in the office when the topic of religion came up they probably said yeah I'm a Christian and this is the scary part for this letter was not written to people who rejected Jesus or don't know him at all Jesus pours out his heart in this letter to people who profess that they're Christians but Jesus says to them because of your lukewarmness I will reject you and then down in verse 20 Jesus says behold I stand at the door and knock think about this picture Jesus is saying you guys are gathering you're in community I'm not even present with you it's like a picture of a wedding where as the bride is giving her vows the groom is outside the chapel knocking on the door trying to come in the ladies see in lukewarm

Christians or actually not Christians at all and this is why I believe if we go back to verse 15 Jesus says this I know your works you're neither cold nor hot I'd rather that you were cold or hot I'd rather you be cold or hot this is quite a mysterious sentence let's think about it to be hot seems quite clear if you take a quick glance down to verse 19 in your Bibles Jesus says be zealous and repent being zealous means to have passion to adore to have an intense love for it's not simply raw emotion it means being wholeheartedly devoted to Jesus such that we respond to him in worship and surrender but then why would Jesus rather someone be cold towards him versus being lukewarm someone who is cold towards Jesus has explicitly rejected him at least if you're lukewarm and maybe you come to church a little bit maybe you know a little bit about the Bible but consider this comparison between two people the first is my friend my friend who has never been to church in his entire life according to this passage that he will be cold towards

[17:12] Jesus well we met up one day and when my friend asked me to explain the gospel I said to him that all of us all human beings have this secret and darkness in our hearts and we're all in need of a savior and I saw that something in him clicked and then he shared that he struggled with sin he didn't call it sin as he doesn't know what sin is but he knew of this darkness in his heart that needed fixing my friend is not yet a believer in Jesus but I really believe he's close but then think about person two a lukewarm Christian a lukewarm Christian has one foot in church and one foot out we think we're a lot better than we really are many years ago when I played college tennis we had three kinds of teammates the first kind of teammate came into school really talented and just was excellent did really well the second kind of player came into the school first year was kind of weak but knew they needed to improve listened to good coaching got better and added value to the team the third that was kind of like me actually the third kind of player came in weak but thought they were

Roger Federer the problem with that is that when the coach said hey your serve needs work or your forehand's a bit shaky the third kind of player would say no coach you're wrong I'm good put me in but then they never took good coaching they never improved they thought they were better than they really are and they never added value to the team if this is the danger of being a lukewarm Christian we think we're a lot better than we really are perhaps this is you maybe you're a cultural Christian through your family maybe you think you're a Christian because you come to church on Sunday but if you're really honest with yourself you don't really think you need Jesus at all or maybe you used to have zeal for Jesus but because of the busyness and the struggles of life Jesus is now somewhere on the back burner does the gospel bounce off your heart like the words of my old tennis coach and if this is you please know this no one here at Watermark can nor will judge you only God knows the true condition of your heart but if somehow

God is speaking to you today prompting you respond to him come back to him come back to Jesus surrender your life to him and for the rest of us do you wrestle with the tension between being self-sufficient on one hand and being desperate for Jesus on the other is it just me only me here in this room okay yeah four people over there on this side I admit all my life I've been privileged ever since I graduated university I've been financially independent I never admit it publicly but I've been dependent on my work ethic my education and my career for most of my adult life but I'm learning that self-sufficiency is a lie I'm not in control I'm in control of very little and the more I rely on my own abilities actually the heavier my burdens become and as God has stripped away stuff that I've been depending on

I've been realizing that trusting and relying on Jesus is so much better how about you we at Watermark I think for the most part are educated talented and fairly well off I don't think many people here are worried about our next meal how desperate are you for Jesus and now more recently we have this new venue which is wonderful even my children are more excited to come to church these days I feel it's a wonderful gift but we can also get complacent and comfortable thinking that church is great because we have a wonderful new building but across the world there are beautiful church buildings with no worshippers inside so as I was preparing this message this is what my heart longs for this is what I've been praying for that for myself that for Celeste my wife for our three children and for all of Watermark Community Church may we run away from self-sufficiency throw it out the window drop it and run to Jesus and to be dependent on him may we not just hear about Jesus may we know Jesus may we not just experience Christianity may we may we experience

Christ our Savior himself that's been my prayer for Jesus warns us against lukewarmness because he so desires to shower us with something which is infinitely superior to all this earthy stuff that we adore all this stuff that makes us so self-reliant we'll never ever feel the deep ache and longing in our hearts for purpose and meaning and acceptance but Jesus wants to offer us the antidote to lukewarmness and it's beautiful so what is the solution to this problem of lukewarmness maybe you think Jesus is calling you to put in a ton of effort and to experience a lot of stress to throw away your self-sufficiency well it's just the opposite in fact he's calling you to throw away self-sufficiency and to collapse into his arms to find all your sufficiency in him and look what

[23:14] Jesus offers in verses 18 to 21 of our passage Jesus urges the lady to see in church to repent and come back to him and Jesus offers to heal the lukewarmness in verse 18 Jesus says I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire that you may be rich white garments 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 what did Jesus offer when we repent and run back to him when we go back to Jesus in repentance he may allow us to go through some trials and difficult times so that our faith in him is like gold refined by fire we then come to a place of such strong faith and trust in Jesus such that whatever happens in life and life will go up and down but good bad and ugly we're still good the peace of Christ is in us this is true spiritual gold and infinitely better than physical gold money or bitcoin he offers us white garments this is a symbol many of us carry shame and guilt from our past these white garments are a symbol to tell us when we come to Jesus he covers us with his purity and his righteousness because that's who he is and he removes all of our shame ointment for our eyes

Laodicea was blinded by her own self-sufficiency and often times we're the same our Lord says come to me I'll open up the eyes of your heart to see your own sin and to see my beauty and Jesus gives all of these gifts to us out of love verse 19 those whom I love I'll reprove and discipline so be zealous and repent despite this church this Laodicean church being so self-sufficient and actually repulsive repulsive to Jesus Jesus loves them so much and the word love here is the translation is not the fatherly commanding kind of love it's the brotherly love I love you so much as my friend and brother that I'm urging you I'm begging you to repent and come back to me and look at verse 20 now

Jesus offers such a close and personal relationship with those who come to him he's saying to the church I'm outside the doors of your sanctuary I'm knocking will you let me in will you let me into your life and if you do I will dine with you and you with me in those days and in our day when you eat and dine with someone and commune with someone it's someone that you care about Jesus desires intimacy and relationship with us and finally Jesus offers honor I love this verse verse 21 to 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 when we throw off self-sufficiency and self-reliance we go from being wretched pitiable poor blind and naked to conquering alongside Jesus and how do we conquer?

do we do it ourselves? no because we can't but if you love and trust Jesus if we bank our lives on him we conquer because he conquered for you see Jesus on the cross he defeated that which we could never overcome sin and death by ourselves we can never rid ourselves of the deep darkness inside here and we can never prevent death from coming to our doorstep one day but Jesus conquered both and because of his death and resurrection he conquered the grave and deserves all glory and honor and praise and if we continue reading on Revelation we will see where he is today he is seated on the throne in heaven with his father and if we love and trust him we will sit with him one day on that same throne we conquer because he conquered so how can we respond to this today how can we respond to the call of Jesus today well here's three ways we can respond take stock of your own heart and life many of us do health checks to examine the inner workings of our physical bodies

I think some of us here many many of us here check our bank accounts or our stock and crypto portfolios to check the financial health of ourselves but how often do we actually stop and reflect on the health of our heart our control center our inner compass the source of all our desires what am I putting all my hope and trust in is it my work and career is it all my is it my grit and my hard work is it my health is it my relationships or my children's education and when I don't have them it causes so much stress and fear which indicates I'm putting way too much hope in them or if I do have them and I depend so much on them if I think about it actually I don't need God and I put God way over there into a box take stock of your own heart and life number two repent one of the first and crucial steps to throwing out self-sufficiency is to confess it to God and to own it see God isn't asking us to solve it but he is asking us to confess and repent of it and if something today has convicted you to go back to God to repent take that step perhaps approach one of our prayer team members afterwards and ask them to pray with you because you can't repent passively and you can't repent by osmosis maybe you think repentance is something shameful or embarrassing oh no just the opposite it is one of the most wonderful experiences of being a Christian and I know this from experience

[30:10] I'm a serial repenter I've always been and will be all my life see we can repent of our self-reliance we can throw it out and receive what Jesus offers such relief in knowing that we don't have to be perfect such assurance in knowing that he forgives and loves us we must repent and third and final live out gospel community many of us here are part of a community group we spend time and hang out with our church family that's wonderful but that may or may not be gospel community who knows the real you who knows what's going on inside of your heart living out gospel community means we're vulnerable we are open with someone in our church family actively confessing and repenting with each other of the stuff that makes us self-reliant and self-sufficient and then reminding each other of the riches of Christ and helping each other to run back to him live out gospel community now let me close with this quote from

Charles Spurgeon this is one of Kevin's favorite quotes I think I have a great need for Christ and I have a and I have a great Christ for my need it is in our nature to try to figure things out ourselves to rely on our own abilities on our own resources our own skills and talents but that's not freedom that's a life of heavy burden but when the penny drops when we realize that self-sufficiency is a lie we run back to Jesus bank our lives on him and become desperate for him that is a life of freedom unspeakable peace and joy in all seasons and this is what the apostle John meant we studied this for 18 weeks this is what the apostle John meant when he said when you believe in Jesus you have life in his name when we realize we have a great need for Christ and we realize we have a great

Christ for our need so may Watermark Church be a church that lays down our self-sufficiency and self-reliance runs back to Jesus to receive the riches of God let's pray together Father God Lord Jesus Holy Spirit you are you are great and greatly to be praised and honored we are humbled by your word God pray that as we digest and meditate and contemplate your word open up our hearts to respond to you right now Lord help us God to see the self-sufficient aspects of our lives whatever it is not just money but other aspects or hard work or work ethic what I've been putting too much hope into Lord help us to give it to you God lay at your feet and may we receive such wonderful assurance and goodness from you even now may we experience you now God be with us for the rest of our service as we continue to worship you for you are the only one worthy to be worshipped in Jesus name we pray

Amen