



---

## LUKEWARM IN LAODICEA: COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE BEFORE CHRIST

---

### Part 9 of The Seven

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Rev. 3:14–22 | June 17, 2012

Revelation 3:14–22

<sup>14</sup> “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.

<sup>15</sup> “‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

### THE CITY OF LAODICEA

I’m going to go ahead and pray, and here’s where we will be, Revelation 3:14–22 is where we find ourselves for this teaching.

Father God, thank you so much for this wonderful privilege that it is to not only read the words of Scripture, but go to the places that are spoken of. And God, as we are here in the ruins of the ancient city of Laodicea we’re mindful of the words the Lord Jesus had for them. And God we ask as we open the Word that you would open our hearts and minds so that the Word that was sent to the church in this place would also be applicable for us, and our families, and our churches. And God, I pray for those of us who may be lukewarm, or love and know people who are, that this could be a word of stirring, and motivation, and expectation, so that Lord God, as we sit here in the heat of the day, our hope is that our souls and our spirits, our minds and our wills, would be passionately heated to be obedient to you, to love you, to pursue you, and to enjoy you. So we ask for the Holy Spirit to lead our time, and to guide my words, and to open our ears. In Jesus’ good name, amen.

Well, welcome to Laodicea. Here we are in modern-day Turkey. Let me give you a bit of information and history on what is a massive archaeological site. And there is a lot of work that is happening here. When we were here just a few short years ago, much of this was not yet excavated, and so much work is underway.

Just in front of me is essentially the ancient main street. And so this would have been beautiful polished marble with high pillar columns. Other streets are adjacent and connected to it. There’s an ancient Christian baptistery that they’re excavating at the end of the road. Behind me would have been an ancient pagan temple. Around the corner from that was a church, a Christian church where God’s people did, in fact, gather together.

And what is interesting about Laodicea, at least topographically, as you can tell, unlike many of the cities we’ve been at, this is actually in a very high, elevated plain. And this was a very important trade route in its day, as commerce would pass through this town, so that made this a very affluent city. And that’s very key to understanding Laodicea.

Additionally, along the main street here would have been a lot of shops, and businesses, and merchants. Homes were behind that. And as you begin to investigate and as you go around, you’ll see that many of the homes were, in fact, quite large. They were very large for their day.

When we were in Nazareth some years ago, the homes that we visited in and around where Jesus grew up, in the area particularly of Nazareth, were very small. They’re hundreds of square feet. You’re looking at homes that are about the size of a modern-day parking stall for one of our vehicles. And a portion of that home in that day would have been used to house the animals.

Well, then we come to Laodicea, and some of the homes that are excavated and in the process of excavation, they are a few thousand square feet. So you’re looking at very large homes for their day. And also you’re looking at a centralized water system, whereby you have pipes, ancient pipes, that would have brought water to the homes. You’re looking at indoor plumbing. You’re looking at indoor access to water. So this is a highly developed, was rather, a highly developed city.

C. S. Lewis says that sometimes we can have something called chronological snobbery, where we think, “Well, in the olden days people weren’t as smart as we are. We’re very advanced and we’re very developed.” But as we’re visiting these sites, we realize that the engineering, the architecture, was quite complicated.

And one of the issues is, how do you then get water to this place? I mean, as we’re here today it’s probably 100 degrees, we’re in a high plain, there is not fresh water from this general location, so it had to be piped in. But all of that is very complicated engineering that took a lot of money. And so this was a very rich, very affluent city.

It was also a city that was, at least on two occasions, essentially destroyed by tremendous earthquakes. And so earthquakes are pretty notorious throughout this particular region. And on the two occasions that this city did in fact fall, rather than accepting money from the government, they were a very proud people, a very rich people, they instead rebuilt their own city with their own money.

So you’re looking at incredible wealth, incredible affluence; this is like the Beverly Hills, or the Manhattan, or the Irvine of its day. It’s a place where business is transacted, where commerce is common, where rich people live, and where they are placed strategically on a trade route to ensure their affluence.

This is indicated as well by two major theaters that are just behind us. One seats perhaps twelve thousand, another seats perhaps eight thousand. These are large entertainment venues that have been excavated. And if you could imagine, we’ve been to a few cities like Pergamum, where they have a major theater that seated about ten thousand. In Ephesus there’s one theater that seats about twenty to twenty-five thousand. Here they had two theaters. This just shows you how rich and affluent they were. To not only have a city with one centralized entertainment center, but to, rather, have two. And they’re both quite gorgeous, as you’ll see. They actually sit overlooking the valley, with majestic views.

So just, you get the idea of opulence, of great wealth, highly educated, influential, important, significant people. And that is basically what was happening in the days of the New Testament. Now, the result was these people had become very haughty; they’d become very proud. As we even sit here on a high plain, really we’re just looking down on the rest of the region, and that sort of typifies the attitude of the people who lived in Laodicea. They kind of looked down on everyone.

I mean, here we are, basically, with a penthouse view. You’re high above the plains. You’re looking down on everyone. And you were the rich, prosperous, powerful city. You have all the best food, all the best drink, all the best entertainment. You’re living in the largest homes. Wherever you live, think of the nicest neighborhood, the gated community, the most affluent lifestyle. That’s Laodicea. That’s exactly where we find ourselves.

Spiritually this was also a very complicated place. Multiple gods and goddesses were worshiped here. There were multiple temples that were built. Zeus was, as far as my research indicates, the primary patron deity of the city. Also there were temples for Apollos and Aesculapius, the god of healing, who we also learned about outside of Pergamum. The gods and goddess Hades, Hera, Athena, Serapis, Dionysus the god of wine, and other deities were worshiped here.

So it was a very polytheistic culture. And also there was worship of the emperor here, which was political in nature. There were also a number of Jews here as well. So you’re looking at a very diverse people group. Spiritually, you’re looking at travelers and pilgrims passing through, conducting commerce.

So this is a very important, strategic place for a church to be. And one thing we learn as we study the New Testament is that oftentimes, churches were planted in important, vital, urban centers. It’s not that rural areas don’t matter, but it’s that cities are strategic because people are passing through them, and if they meet Jesus, they take the news of the gospel with them. And Laodicea was one of those very significant, important cities. It is essentially like the Wall Street of its day. And if the church was healthy there, it had the resources financially, and it had the opportunity governmentally, and it had the infrastructure practically, to send the news of Jesus out to the whole region. So it’s a very important place.

## **JESUS’ WORDS TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA**

That leads us from the context of the first century, to the text of Scripture. And we got to get our mind around this, I mean, it took us hours to drive here today. Imagine how long it would take on foot to get here. But, away from here there was a body of water, a few-hour boat ride from there was a little island called Patmos.

It was the place where John, the youngest and beloved disciple of Jesus, was exiled after being boiled alive. All the other apostles, in so far as we can tell, had died a martyr’s death. They tried to kill John but he didn’t die. And so they exiled him to Patmos. History, tradition tells us that there in a cave the Lord Jesus appeared to him. And we read of this in Revelation 1.

John is at this point an older man, and this is nearing the end of the first century, and Jesus speaks to him. Jesus ultimately gives him letters to the seven churches of Revelation. Included in them is a letter to the church at Laodicea. And so then John faithfully records the words of Jesus.

We’ll now read what Jesus has to say to the church at Laodicea. Jesus is here communicating from heaven. He has died for our sin. At this point in history, he’s risen for our salvation. He is ascended as our sovereign Lord and King. And he has all knowledge of everything that is going on on the earth, including what is happening here at the church at Laodicea. And so he has a particular word for these people in 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. 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

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 salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” A very famous verse there. “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, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” And then he says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

There’s a familiar pattern here in Jesus’ communication, through John, to the seven churches in Revelation. And the first is usually an encouragement. Whenever there is something encouraging for the Lord Jesus to say to a church, he communicates that. Here, what is the encouragement? Nothing. There’s no encouragement at all.

The big idea here is this: that some professing churches are not practicing Christian faithfulness. And there are certain denominations that have gone apostate, and they’re rebelling against the God of the Bible. There are certain churches and leaders, certain individual Christians that, truth be told, there is nothing good to say about them.

This may seem, for some of you who are more compassionate and encouraging by nature, difficult. Some of you have the gift of encouragement. You’re always looking for something nice to say, and we don’t discourage that. But sometimes when there’s nothing nice to say, the most loving thing to say is the truth. And that is, “This is unacceptable behavior. This is a lifestyle that does not glorify God and he is displeased with that. And I’m telling you because I love you. And I can’t encourage your lifestyle, but I can encourage you to come to Jesus and change your lifestyle.” So that’s how we encourage.

## **LUKEWARM**

So there is no encouragement. This church is not apparently doing much, if anything, well. And then he has a number of rebukes for them and consequences if they disbelieve and disobey. The first is, he says they are lukewarm.

This is a very important thing to understand topographically. Again, as we’re on this high plain, the question is, “Well, where does the water come from?” Well, it has to be piped in. And because of the mountain range, and occasionally ice and snow, there is the possibility of acquiring cold water, potentially from springs in the area as well. It’s possible as well, because of the temperature and the heat, to get what would be considered fairly hot water.

But no matter what the source—and there’s actually an ancient water source that still exists just over the hill from us, called, I believe it’s Pamukkale, ancient springs where there is mineral water that they would use for health spas and healing. There’s still to this day a very popular health spa and hotel built right over the mineral springs. So the water source here was good in the valley, but there was nothing up here on the plain.

So the question is, “Well, how do you transport that water?” Well, they built a very complicated aqueduct system so that that water would be brought here, but by the time it reached here, the hot water was just warm, and the cold water was just warm. And one of the constant complaints, in so far as we can ascertain, here in Laodicea was, it’s really difficult to enjoy the water.

How many of you are coffee drinkers or tea drinkers? Right. Cold is good, right. Iced coffee, you think about it right now, you say, “That sounds good.” Iced tea, really good. Hot coffee, hot tea. Lukewarm water, lukewarm tea, lukewarm coffee. That’s never good. And the point is, hot and cold is what they would have preferred, but lukewarm is what they always had. And so what they would complain about was the lukewarm nature of their water source.

Here Jesus is functioning missiologically. Jesus here is looking at the context of the culture, and he is trying to find a way to communicate to the people in a way that will be gripping to them and understood by them. And what he says basically, is this, “You know every morning when you get up and you don’t have hot water, and you can’t really make your coffee, you can’t really make your tea,” or whatever it was in that day that they enjoyed, “and you put it in your mouth, and you’re complaining, and you’re frustrated because it’s unpleasant,” Jesus says, “Your church is like that to me. It’s just lukewarm. It’s not hot.” And the heat here is in reference to passion, to enthusiasm, to excitement, to devotion, to sacrifice, to mission, to commitment.

Jesus is saying, “Just lukewarm, that’s all you are.” And he says, “It’s displeasing to me, and as you will spit lukewarm drink out of your mouth,” Jesus says, “If you don’t repent, I’ll spit you out of my mouth.” And so he’s here trying to capture their understanding of what it is like to be their God.

Additionally, this could refer to a normal, unregenerate person. A person who is not hot for God, is not passionate for the truth and things of God, but is just sort of lukewarm and indifferent. And you can’t tell this until someone is receiving instruction or correction. If they are hot for God, they’ll respond. If they’re not hot for God, there’ll be no response at all, or it will be short lived. There’s no real ongoing, sustained passion.

## **POOR**

Jesus’ second rebuke is that they are wretched, pitiable, and poor. And again, this would have been quite shocking because they didn’t see themselves as poor. Again, they were very affluent and rich. When they gathered together in their church and this letter was read perhaps by their pastor, you were looking at wealthy, affluent citizens. They not only had large homes, but vacation homes. And they didn’t do a lot of work because they had a lot of servants. And the businesses in town were theirs. And Jesus shows up and says, “Though you are materially rich, you are spiritually poor.” He says, “In my eyes, from the insights into your soul, you’re poor. There’s not growth. There’s not life. There’s not health in your soul. Your pockets are full, but your heart is empty.”

## **NAKED**

Additionally, he goes on and he says that they are naked. In that day this would have been an ultimate humiliation. Only those who had undergone tragedy, or were exceedingly poor, would have been seen with any degree of unclothedness. And so these people would have dressed very nicely. And in this town what helped to cause them to become so prosperous was for a good long while, this area was noteworthy for black wool. And they had black wool that was cultivated here from the sheep, and as a result it was spun into fine clothing. Particularly outer garments, cloaks, coats if you will.

So people from all over the region, and perhaps all over the nation, they would have purchased their coats from here. This was like getting your designer label. All right. This is your G-Star RAW, or your Armani, or whatever your brand is, the one that you wish you could afford, this is where that was created. And so this is a fashion center. This is a clothing and textile center.

Jesus says, "Though you are physically clothed, I see you as spiritually naked." And it just goes to show, that just like Jesus says elsewhere, that man looks at the outward, and God looks at the heart. That you can look rich, and powerful, and successful, and educated, and affluent, and be spiritually impoverished, and blind, naked, and poor, not growing, not loving God, lukewarm towards the things of God.

## **BLIND**

He goes on as well to say that they are blind. Again, this would have been quite shocking because one of the things that this city was known for was an ancient eye salve. When people had visual problems, or they had blindness, they would come here for a special salve that was created in this area, and it was connected to their very advanced, sort of naturopathic medical care. And then this eye salve would be applied and blindness would be cured. And so people would come here from miles away in an effort to be cured of their physical blindness.

Jesus says, "Isn't it ironic that in an area where there is constant healing for visual blindness, there is still spiritual blindness that is self-selected." The people have essentially closed their eyes to Jesus. They've closed their eyes to the fact that they are sinners and that they need a savior.

## **WORSHIPING COMFORT INSTEAD OF CHRIST**

For them, their functional saviors are saviors that cannot save. They are saviors of success, saviors of comfort, saviors of pleasure, saviors of provision. And so the real issue here is one where they are worshiping comfort instead of Christ. Christ is calling them to do that which is, for them, uncomfortable, and they would rather have comfort than Christ.

We can look at them, and we can judge them, and we could say, "Yes, that's how the haughty, proud, rich people of the world are." And let me just say this, for those of us who are Americans or live in the Western world, we tend to be the haughty, pride-filled, rich people. We live in affluence and a lifestyle that is really unparalleled in the history of the world.

Their homes were gigantic. Most of our homes are similarly sized. Their homes had indoor plumbing, which was innovative, and we take it for granted. That for us, we're really not worried, most of us, about whether or not we'll have clothes to wear tomorrow, water to drink, or food to eat. Instead we just assume that our affluence will continue.

And it can lead us into a place of lethargy, where heaven doesn't feel like home, that this is a good enough paradise for us. Where Christ is not whom we live for, but comfort is what we live for. And Jesus comes, and he says, "Though everything is going well physically and materially, I'm very concerned for you spiritually because you've chosen comfort over Christ."

## **HOW ARE WE PRONE TO BE JUST LIKE THEM?**

And so then he goes on. But first I'd ask you just a few questions, so that we don't just hear about the Laodiceans and then arrogantly stand back and judge them, but instead we humbly learn from them, knowing that in many ways we're prone to be just like them. If we don't do that, we end up just reading the Bible like religious people who judge others, rather than worshipers who allow the Scriptures to judge ourselves.

So number one, would you say in your relationship with Jesus, is it cold, you really don't care? Is it lukewarm, you don't care very much? Or is it hot, you really do love Jesus, you really are motivated to get to know him better, you really do want to walk with him and by grace become more like him? Would you say you were cold, lukewarm, or hot? And sadly, what sometimes happens is in Christianity, lukewarmness is accommodated and we just compare ourselves to those who are icy cold. And we think, "Well, I'm not as bad as they are." No, but we're not where we should be.

Number two, would you say that the church you're in is cold, lukewarm, or hot? Sadly, I think that Jesus' word to the church that it's lukewarm, could be a word that is appropriate for many churches. Just lukewarm, not a real passion, not a real zeal, people aren't giving, praying, serving, caring, trying, risking, innovating. It doesn't bother them that people aren't becoming Christians. It doesn't bother them that lives aren't being transformed in large numbers. It doesn't bother them that everything is sort of just settled into a comfortable routine. You can kind of imagine it here: very affluent people going to church, and then going out to lunch, and then going on with their lives, not applying anything that the Scriptures had really commanded them to believe, and ways to behave.

Number three, what things keep you passionate, hot for God, to use the language here of Revelation? And do you carve that time out, and do you safeguard that time? Some of you say it's reading the Bible, it's time in prayer, it's time in fellowship with God's people, it's sitting under the preaching of God's Word. Some of you would say it's silence and solitude, and just hiking, and getting time to clear my thoughts, and to talk to the Lord. Some of you would say it is journaling and prayerfully considering, with pen in hand or laptop in front, where I'm at, and what God is teaching me, and what

I'm struggling with. And I would say that each of us has different ways by which our relationship with Jesus is cultivated and stays hot. And whatever that is for you, how's it going? Are you safeguarding that? Are you protecting that? Or are you allowing yourself to become lukewarm?

Number four, what comforts keep you from being hot for God? Sometimes it is comfort over Christ. Say, "Well, I would read but I would rather do something else." And so sometimes it's surfing the Internet, and watching the television, and chasing our favorite shopping, and consuming our goods and services, and filling our belly, and taking our naps. And sometimes comfort does come before Christ.

What are the things that keep you from being hot for God? Are you single and in a dating relationship where you want to be hot for God but the person you're with is icy cold or lukewarm? You know what you need? An ex-relationship, right? You need to look at the people and things that, for you, keep you from being hot for God, and to, as much as you're able, proceed forward rather than retreating back into lukewarmness as a lifestyle.

And number five, what parts of your life lack any sense of urgency? And that was really, I think, what Jesus is getting at. He's saying, "There's just no sense of urgency, and that's how you become lukewarm." The lukewarmness often comes when there's no sense of urgency for repentance, for life, for faith, for growth, for others to meet Jesus, for the forward progress of the church.

## COMMANDS AND PROMISES

So Jesus gives some commands and promises. He says, "Accept loving discipline." See, some of us are in positions where nobody ever gets to discipline us. We're the parents, not the children. We're the bosses, not the employees. We're the ones who have organized our life outside of community, where nobody really ever has a right to put their finger in our chest and say, "You know, I love you, but I really need to talk to you about that because I think that's a problem." And so Jesus says, "If somebody really loves you, they're going to discipline you. They're going to correct you. They're going to point out flaws in your life, and they're going to do so in a way to invite you to change." And Jesus says, "I'm doing that for you."

Sometimes when we hear criticism from Scripture, at first our defense mechanism can be to bristle against that. Jesus says, "No, I really do love you, and I really am concerned for you, and I really am displeased with you, but I really want to help you. So accept correction from me." And sometimes that comes through God's people who love us enough to tell us the truth.

He goes on to say, "Be zealous." Now, the Holy Spirit wants you to be zealous. God can enable you to be zealous. And if you are willing, God can ignite passion and zeal, if that is something that you are availing yourself to. So if you're lacking zealousness, you simply say, "Okay, Lord Jesus, you want me to be hot? Teach me to be hot. I want to be hot. And Holy Spirit, ignite, continually reignite that passion for Jesus."

Number three, he says, "Repent." And that is: have a change of mind that leads to a change of direction and a change of life. Again, over and over and over, the Bible talks about repentance. Repentance is not something we just do to become Christians, but it's an ongoing, humble series of moments where we acknowledge that what we believe or how we behave is wrong. And so we have a change of mind that leads to a change of heart that leads to a change of direction, and a changed life.

When Martin Luther nailed the *Ninety-five Theses* to the Wittenberg door, which was the beginning, the sort of opening salvo of the Protestant Reformation, the opening line was essentially, "All of a Christian's life is one of repentance." If you stop repenting, you'll start growing lukewarm. That's the big idea. If you're always right, always defending yourself, always blaming others, always judging others without judging yourself, always excusing yourself, overlooking errors, follies, faults, flaws, failures in your life, that's how you become lukewarm. And the way we stay hot is repentance. And that's where we turn from sin, and we come back to Jesus.

He goes on to say, as well, that he wants to be in the church. And how many of you have heard this line, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If you open the door I'll come in and eat with you." And usually that verse is told as like the great evangelism verse. "Hey, Jesus is here today, he's knocking on the door of your heart."

The truth is the church had a door, and they locked Jesus out. Jesus couldn't go to their church. He was too, perhaps, controversial. He was too opinionated. He was too strong willed. He was too divisive. And so the church decided, "We'll get together, but we don't want Jesus to come." And Jesus says, "When you guys get together for church, I see you in your building, and you all walk in in your nice clothes, and yet I show up and you guys shut and lock the door."

So the image here is of the Lord Jesus outside banging on the door of the church that has the name Christian on the placard, right? And they open the peephole, "Who is it?" "It's me." And they're like, "No, we don't take your kind. You're going to tell us to repent. You're going to tell us we're wrong. You're going to tell us to give money, and time, and effort, and we have a very nice social club, and there are some very important people here. These guys have degrees, these guys have rims on their chariots, these guys have seven wives. None of them really like what you have to say. So we're deadbolting the door. We'll see you after church."

There are churches like that. There are denominations like that. I mean, it's tragic. I've actually been invited to preach at places, when I get up they'll say things like, "Now, you know, do you have to say the name of Jesus so much?" "Why?" "Well, you know, people, God they're okay with, but Jesus, that's a little divisive. We start talking about Jesus, some people are going to get offended. And not everyone here is a Christian. Some people have other religions. Does it have to be so strong on Jesus?" Yes or no? Well, yeah. As soon as they tell me that, it's like, "Well, now I'm going to say 'Jesus' way more than I was planning on." Right?

Because it's about Jesus. And the hope for people is Jesus. And the help for people is Jesus. The healing for people is Jesus. Christianity for us is not just a lifestyle, or a social club, or a way of living that is moral and upright that is good for the whole family. It really is meeting Jesus, having him take

our sin, give us his righteousness, fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we're hot for God, and by the grace of God, we grow to increasingly be like Jesus. That changes our life, our family's life, our community's life, by the grace of God, our church's life. But it all begins and ends with Jesus.

And my question to you is this: Is Jesus really welcome in your life? Is Jesus really welcome in your home? Is Jesus really welcome in your church? And is he welcome when he tells you something you don't want to hear? Some of you say, "He's welcome as long as he says things like, 'I love you.'" You're like, "I'm okay with that." But he says, "I rebuke you." "Well, I'm not okay with that." And it's an issue of lordship, and sovereignty, and submission. Who's in ultimate authority?

So then he says, number five, "Listen to the Holy Spirit. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The Holy Spirit is always talking to God's people. Primarily through Scriptures, which he inspired to be written through human servants and authors. He also speaks through circumstance, through other believers.

If we believe the Holy Spirit is speaking to us, and he always is, we need to check that by the Word of God, we need to check that by the people of God and the leaders that God has placed over us, like 1 John says, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether or not they're from God." Those are ways in which we test what God might be saying to us through the Holy Spirit. The question is always, "God, what are you trying to say to me?"

## THE THRONE

And he says, "If you listen to me, two things will happen, you'll eat with me and sit on a throne with me." Now, in that day, the greatest honor was to eat with a king. You didn't get to eat with a king. Jesus says, "I'm the King of kings, Lord of lords. I'll let you sit down and eat with me. And not only that, sit on a throne with me."

Now, in that day, the emperor was a man named Domitian. He was a horrendous man. He had a few military successes. But what would typically happen is when an emperor would die, when a political leader would die, then they would declare him a God because he went into the spirit world. With Domitian, he decided, "Before I die, in fact, at the beginning of my reign, I'm going to declare myself to be God." So, he had very high self-esteem, we'll just say that.

So, Domitian declared himself to be three things: lord, god, and savior. Well, obviously those words belong exclusively to Jesus, so there is competition with Christianity. And to make sure that everybody knew he was god, in the cities he had temples built for him to be worshiped as a god.

They had Olympics-style games where the judges would wear headdresses. And typically, historically, it had the image of various gods and goddesses. He put his image there as well. He named two months of the year after himself, just so they would all know how important he was. He started reminting the coins and put his own face on it. With one he's holding a lightning bolt, saying he's basically Zeus. He's the leading god of the universe.

He was also a man who started systematically persecuting Christians. Some called him "The Beast" and he may be the beast of Revelation 13. He may be that beast. That may, in fact, be the Roman emperor, Domitian.

What's interesting about him as well, is that the military was very loyal to him, and he would enforce through a heavy-handed rule of law. He taxed people very unjustly, and then he paid soldiers very lavishly. So you wonder, "How did he get away with this?" Well, he just paid the soldiers to enforce his martial law.

What happened then is people grew very wary of him. Even his own wife plotted in his murder. Ultimately Domitian was killed, and this is outside of the Bible, but it is told that when they came to stab him, he opened his arms and he said, "Feel free to stab me. I will not die because I am a god." And they stabbed him, and he realized he wasn't a god, and he said something I can't repeat. But that's how the story goes.

Now, what happens then is when Domitian dies, everything with his face inscribed upon it is eradicated. He is banished, he is—and this is the worst thing that can happen to a ruler in Rome, and that is that they try to obliterate the memory of your existence. So the statues, the temples were taken down, his image was destroyed.

But during this time, who was seated on the throne? Domitian. And what Jesus is saying is, "I've got a throne above Domitian's. I'm a ruler that rules above him. But I'm not a ruler like Domitian. I'm a loving ruler. If you'll come to me, I'll forgive your sin. If you come to me, I will heal your life. If you come to me, I'll let you sit at my table and feast with me. If you come to me, I'll let you sit on the throne with me." Jesus is saying, "I'm completely different than Domitian." When you hear that Jesus is King, you think of loving, humble, gracious, generous, servant king. That's the kind of king that Jesus is.

And so what happens here is, I think it's in Revelation 3:21, it talks about the throne, and then it proceeds forward to talk about, at the end of chapter 3, that Jesus is high and exalted and seated on a throne. And this is the conclusion of the seven letters.

The big idea from this point forward is the throne. It appears forty-five times in Revelation. It appears in fourteen of the twenty-two chapters. Jesus is the one seated on the throne. This goes all the way back to Isaiah 6, where Isaiah says, six or seven hundred years before Jesus was even born on the earth, he says, "I saw heaven open, and I saw one seated on a throne. And he was high and exalted. And the angels worshiped him. And they cried, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Heaven and earth are full of his glory.'" The question is, who is that king seated on that throne? John 12:40-41, he says, "Isaiah saw Jesus and spoke of his glory."

So from this point forward in Revelation, it picks up this theme, this imagery, this typology of a throne on which sits a king, and he's the one who rules.

And we belong to him. If we submit to him, and if we follow him, and if we repent of sin to him, and we trust in him, this is a King who gave us his life. This is a King who died for us. This is a King who rose to create a kingdom in which we can have our sins forgiven, we can have our eternity altered, we can feast with him, and sit upon a throne with him, which means that Jesus is promising them even a more generous and lavish life than the one they were enjoying here in Laodicea.

So this is the image of Jesus. He agrees with the Father in all things, we read here. That's what "amen" means. It means, "I agree." It says that he is faithful, that he is truthful. That he was there at the beginning. And he is our Creator God. And he is our King.

And so the word to Laodicea was simply that. This is who Jesus is. And the church did continue here, and around AD 363 there was a Christian council that was held here. Eventually this area was completely abandoned, and there is not a church here today. Sadly, basically, the whole region has grown lukewarm toward Jesus as God, Savior, King, and Christ. There are a handful of believers scattered in this general area, but it is not a place that is well known for Christianity.

So we're going to close our time in prayer, and we're also going to examine our own hearts and ask, "How are we doing in our walk with Jesus?" Individually, as a family, and corporately as the church. Are we lukewarm, indifferent? Is the light of the gospel starting to dim? Or is it growing brighter, and brighter, and brighter as we repent of sin, and come to Jesus, and see him as exalted King seated on a throne, who's benevolent, gracious, and good, and the one in whom we trust?

## PRAYER

Father, we do thank you for this word that the Lord Jesus delivers through your servant John, to the people who lived here in Laodicea. God, it's amazing that just around the corner was actually that church building where these people met, and heard this word. And God, we thank you that you love us enough to tell us the truth. That you don't lie to us, and pretend with us. You're not a flatterer. You're not an enabler. That God, instead, you are a Savior and you are one who loves. You're one who loves us enough to be honest with us.

And we thank you that the image here of Jesus is big, and global, and cosmic. That he's a King seated on a throne, but he's not a king like Domitian. He's not heavy handed. He's not mean spirited. He is not greedy. He's generous. He doesn't want to crush us, he wants to invite us to turn from sin and trust in him.

And so God, we want to, on this day, pray for this region, and we want to pray for those handful of people who do know you here. That they would be hot for you and that the gospel would continue forward. And we want to pray for ourselves and our churches. Lord God, we know that we are prone towards lukewarmness, and some of us are lukewarm now. Even this word isn't stirring our hearts as it should. God, please give us a holy unsettledness, a disturbance in our soul, whereby lukewarm is not enough, and it's not acceptable, and it's not something that we are willing to accommodate in our life. Please help us to repent of sin, to remove whatever would keep us from being hot for you.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are such a good King. We thank you that not only did you know what was going on in the church of Laodicea, that you do know what is going on in our churches as well. And so, God, we love the whole church, so we pray for every church, and we pray for the leaders of the churches that we personally know, that they would be hot, that their people would be hot, that there would be a passion and fervor for Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*