

## What Is Your Temperature?

Sterling UMC  
November 8, 2009  
Revelation 3:14-22

This morning as we begin our series entitled "Rekindling the Flame", I want to ask you a question. What is your temperature?

When we become sick, one of the first things we do is pull out the thermometer and take our temperature. If I were to give you a spiritual thermometer and ask you to apply it to your life what would it say? Are you hot? Are you cold? Are you lukewarm?

As you begin to ponder that question in your own heart, let me direct your attention to the last of seven letters written by Jesus Christ to particular churches in the book of Revelation. It was the church of Laodicea. The church of Laodicea had an inside problem.

Outwardly, this church is in great shape. Laodicea was the wealthiest of the seven cities, known for its banking industry, its manufacture of black wool, and a medical school that produced eye ointment. It was great place to live. A comfortable place. But this is where the problem begins.

Perhaps slowly, and perhaps imperceptibly, the culture of the city became the culture of the church. The comfort and affluence of the city caused the church in Laodicea to become comfortable and complacent.

The church in Laodicea was not a dynamic church but it was not a dead church either. It was not a thriving church, but it was not a dying church. It was not a risk taking church, but it was not a comatose church. It was well with in the range of evangelical respectability, you might say. It was kind of normal. It was just a safe, comfortable place to attend and have a membership. Just a benign group of believers content to cocoon together with other believers for an hour a week. They're not zealots, but neither are they antagonistic. They're not hot, but neither are they cold. Call them tepid, call them lukewarm, and then call them disgusting in the eyes of Christ.

Shockingly, in verse 16, Jesus says to the church in Laodicea, "You make me sick." Verse 16 literally says, "I am about to vomit you out of my mouth." The Jesus that we think of as being meek and mild says, "What's going on at your church makes me ill to my stomach."

Christ spoke these words to the people of the church in Laodica, but I wonder this morning if he could not also speak them to us and to our church.

Ladies and gentlemen the time has come for us to quit trying to fool ourselves. It is time we stop playing games and take a good hard look at ourselves and come face to face with where we stand spiritually.

We say we want revival. We say we need revival. But do we really know what that means. Are you really ready to do what it takes to see revival sweep into your life and through this church?

Most people think of "revival" as series of church meetings designed to whip up interest in the church. You come to hear some good singing. You come to hear a good sermon. You come for the fellowship. But if your here for any of those reasons this morning, you're here for the wrong reason. Revival is serious business.

A man once came to Gipsy Smith, the celebrated English evangelist of an earlier

era, and asked him how to have revival. Gipsy asked the man, "Do you have a place where you can pray?"

"Oh, yes," the man replied.

"Then I tell you what you do. You go to that place, and take a piece of chalk along. Kneel down there, and with the chalk draw a complete circle all around you - and pray for God to send revival on everything inside that circle. Stay there until he answers - and then you will have revival."

My friends this is where revival begins. Revival begins when we as God's people get on our knees before him and take an honest appraisal of our lives and see where we stand in our relationship with the Lord. We have to open ourselves up completely to the Spirit and allow him to flood our life with his light.

We must let light illuminate every dark corner of our souls. We must face our sin, we must face our shortcomings, and to ask ourselves some tough questions. We must look in the mirror and to come face to face with our spiritual condition.

When the Spirit of Christ confronted the Laodicean church we learn of two factors that make Jesus sick about the church; two things that Jesus can't stand in any church - then or today.

And the first one is found in verses 15 and 16

FIRST, JESUS IS DISGUSTED WITH CHURCHES THAT ARE INDIFFERENT

"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

What Jesus is saying here is, you're all the wrong temperature. You're passionless and indifferent. You don't take a stand for anything. You're not doing anything for Christ. The Laodicean church had become independent, self-satisfied, and secure.

If you could compile a hymnal that would be appropriate to use in the Laodicean church, it would include such songs as "I surrender some," "Take my life and let me be," "Sit up, sit up for Jesus," "My hope is built on nothing much," and "Be Thou My Hobby."

But before we laugh too much, let me ask you, what about you today? How many of us even here this morning are wealthy, and live fairly easy lives, and are confident, satisfied, complacent, and indifferent?

I don't know about you, but I didn't sign up for that. Ask yourself - didn't your passion used to burn for Christ and for the church?

I grew up believing that the church was God's hope for society, that the Gospel has the power to do what government can't do, what science can't do. I believed that Jesus Christ was mankind's only hope. And I believed it so much that I sensed God calling me into full-time pastoral ministry.

Then I became a pastor of a church and I began to see the problem.

I was sent to a church that was full of nice people. Our budget was being met. We were seeing some growth. And the slow but subtle trend was for me to forget that the church has a mission. It was almost enough to open the doors for the same people week after week, to enjoy our fellowship, and have almost no passion for the lost, or even a passion for God.

Isn't that how it happens to us? What about you today? I'm afraid that there may be some of you here that the face you see as you look in the mirror is the face of a

lukewarm Christian. Like the church of Laodicea, you have lost the passion for your Savior. There is no spark. No joy. No burning desire to serve the Lord who died for you.

It doesn't happen overnight. One thing I remember from my engineering courses in college is the second law of thermodynamics. This law requires that a "closed system eventually moderates so that no more energy is being produced." Unless something is added from the outside, the system decays and dies. Without added fuel, the hot water in the boiler becomes cool; without electricity, the refrigerant in the freezer becomes warm. The same principle applies in spiritual terms. When we take our eyes off of Jesus Christ, when he is not at the very center of our lives, when we neglect our relationship with him, we very soon begin to cool off.

I'm here to tell you today that Jesus Christ does not tolerate a lukewarm Christian. With Jesus Christ there is no middle ground. We can no longer straddle the fence and think that everything is okay. It is not. Jesus says that if we are going to call ourselves Christians there can be no compromise, no concessions, no hesitation, no reservation, no second thoughts, and no doubts. A Christian cannot be lukewarm. The two words do not even make sense together. You have to make a definite and decisive choice, either to be cold, indifferent, or apathetic toward the claims of Christ, or burning hot in our adherence and loyalty to them. Those who seek to compromise, to cut spiritual corners, to follow a middle course, are detestable and nauseating. He says, "I wish you were either hot or cold, but you are lukewarm and I am about to spew you out of my mouth."

Those are pretty strong words. You can't get much more graphic than that. There's no doubt about it. The issue is crystal clear. It is cut and dried. And it is absolutely critical that we look it square in the eye.

But Jesus goes on. In verse 17 he says:

"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."

**SECOND, JESUS IS DISGUSTED WITH Christians and CHURCHES THAT ARE SELF-DECEIVED**

You see, the deeper problem of the church in Laodicea was not simply their indifference, but it was ignorance of their true condition. They thought of themselves as being rich and sufficient. They thought they had all they needed. They were a lot like the Pharisees, whom Jesus also confronted. But Jesus evaluates them and says, "You're really spiritually wretched and pitiful. You're poor, blind, and naked"

In an excellent book *The Heart of a Great Pastor*, H.B. London and Neil Wiseman write:

To acknowledge frailties in the Church and failures in the ministry is giant step toward renewal...I heard a recognized clergy leader tell ministerial students...that the "Church is doing a better job of fulfilling her mission now than at any time in church history." A student asked a friend seated next to him, "I wonder if the speaker really believes that? If everything is right, why are so many giving up on the church?"

Let's admit that the Church is not what it should be. We are not what we should be. Deep in our hearts, we all know that the Church needs to be renewed and refocused. We need to experience renewal and revival. Something has to be done about it.

So as we deal with these issues, Jesus offers three words of advice:

## FIRST, COME TO ME FOR EVERYTHING YOU NEED

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. (Revelation 3:18)

In a city that had plenty of gold as a source of its wealth, Jesus says, "It's not enough. You need gold from me." In a city that was known for its manufacture of black wool, Jesus says, "You need to get clothes from me." And in a city renowned for its manufacture of eye salve, Jesus says, "Come to me for divine eye salve.

And to us he says, "Come to me realizing that you have no resources of your own. You need my salvation, and my power to be what you need to be."

Jesus Christ accepts nothing less than absolute commitment, unconditional surrender. Like an army laying down its weapons and submitting themselves to their captures.

But you say, "I'm a good person. I don't bother anyone. I don't do any real bad things. I go to church. I attend Sunday School. I sing in the choir." None of that matters one single bit unless Jesus Christ is truly alive in your heart. "I am the way and the truth and the life."

## SECOND, JESUS SAYS, REPENT AND BE Earnest

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. (Revelation 3:19)

Turn around. Turn away. Leave those things behind. Rekindle your love and loyalty for Christ. Humble yourselves before the sight of the Lord. It's not too late to replace complacency with zeal.

## Finally, RESPOND TO CHRIST'S INVITATION

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20)

'The Light of the World' is the title of a famous picture by Holman Hunt, the artist. It portrays the Lord Jesus Christ, thorn-crowned, and carrying a lantern in his left hand, knocking at a closed door.

It is said that the artist after completing the picture, showed it to some friends who praised the beauty and meaning of the painting. One of them pointed out what he considered to be an omission on the part of the artist. 'You forgot to put a handle on the door,' he said to Mr. Hunt. The artist replied, 'No, you forgot -the handle is on the inside.'

By rights, lukewarm Christians should be standing at Christ's door, begging for forgiveness for their half-heartedness and their apathy. But look at the picture that is painted here. No other love is like Christ's love!

The nail-scarred hands of Jesus are knocking on the door of a callused Christian, whose heart should be warm with worship night and day, but it's not. So the disappointed but long-suffering Jesus patiently knocks on the door of a tepid Christian, saying, "I'm seeking you out."

"True, I, Jesus am the offended and the wronged party." "But I am extending myself to you. I'm knocking at your door. I'm taking the initiative." and he says, "Open the door."

Friends that's what you call amazing grace.

I want to close this morning with Jesus' challenge that he have to each of the seven churches in Revelation. We hear it again in Revelation 3:22:

"He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

So lukewarm Christian, you know who you are. This is a call for you to leave the ranks of the half-hearted and become fully devoted. The Christ you claim to love is standing at your heart's door today. And he's patiently knocking. He's patiently offering you the hope of forgiveness, renewal, and growth. Open the door! Don't delay, don't put him off. Welcome him to a position of lordship in your life. Resolve to get back into good spiritual shape again by rigorous disciplines. Resolve to meet with him every day so you never grow distant from him. Increase your spiritual intake. Meet regularly with other Christians to sharpen each other. Make Sunday's a priority in your life.

The challenge is that we will hear the Spirit's voice and respond? Will you open the door as you hear Jesus knocking, and allow him to enter, and eat with him, and he with you? Will you cast off indifference and self-deception, and leave the ranks of the half-hearted?

I'm going to ask you to pray silently for a minute, responding to what the Spirit has said to you: