

Friday, August 28, 2020

SERIES: REWRITING JESUS

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TITLE: Are You Lukewarm? Pt. 1

There is something that brings great joy in my life, and it's that moment of coming home and knocking on the door and hearing my kids yell, "It's Dad! Yay!" There's excitement to have me home from work or a trip. But I've noticed that as the kids have gotten older, I can knock and it's silent. I knock again, and sometimes I can hear a "Hey, it's your turn to get the door!" Finally, I bang again. "Will someone get the door and let me in?" Over time, the excitement to see Dad – the joy of being together again - has changed. It's not the same. My children have grown indifferent.

I wonder, is this kind of what Jesus experiences with His church today? Is the presence of God with us old news? Is indifference what Christ experiences with you and me – His children? What difference does our posture towards Christ make? That's what we want to talk about today.

Well, here we are wrapping up our series called "Rewriting Jesus". It's been a month of walking with Jesus. We've desired to see Jesus clearly - to hear Him without a filter. We as people committed to God's Word, *do not* want to rewrite Jesus in our image or in a way that fits us. We want to know Jesus for *who He really is*. And today, we're listening to Jesus in Revelation 3, and we'll begin in verse 14.

Here in Revelation 3, Jesus is communicating through John to seven churches spread through Asia. Each church was a real, physical church that needed counsel from its head and founder: Jesus. Even though these letters were written to historical churches, the message is relevant to all churches throughout history. We all need to pause and ask two questions: What kind of church are we? And what kind of church are we supposed to be? The answer to the question of "what kind of church are we supposed to be?" is to be answered by Jesus. He is our founder and the one who is over us today.

How so? How do we know? Well, it says so in the Bible. Consider Colossians 1:15-20 (ESV). Listen to what Paul writes about Christ: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

Jesus Christ who is the creator of all things and sustainer of all things is the head of the body, the church. If it wasn't for Jesus, the church wouldn't exist *today*. Christ wasn't just a man. He's not a pope of the church, nor is He a created angel over the church. No, Christ is God in the flesh - He is the beginning, and the first-born of the dead.

Paul in Ephesians 1:22-23 really punches this. Paul writes, “[And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,](#) ²³ [which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.](#)”

God the Father has set Jesus over the church. He's not like the president of your association or denomination. What He has said is *final*, and *not open for debate or negotiations*. That's why we find Jesus' words to the seven churches in Revelation so important. Jesus Christ is Lord. He is our Master. He is head of the Church. Knowing this, let's get to the Jesus' words in Revelation 3: 14:

¹⁴ “[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.](#)”

Jesus is writing through John – addressing the angel of each church. This isn't a heavenly being kind of angel; it's simply the lead pastor or leader of the addressed church. This letter is addressed to the church of Laodicea. Laodicea was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus. It was about 40 miles from Philadelphia. It was located ten miles east of Colossae and 6 miles north of Hierapolis. The city was nearly impregnable. It was built several hundred feet high on a plateau, but it had one major weakness: it depended upon water from Colossae and Hierapolis.

You see, in Colossae they had refreshing cold clear water. The Romans built aqueducts to transfer water. That cold, clear water would be transported through these aqueducts to Laodicea. The problem was, by the time the water traveled 10 miles in the aqueducts, it was dirty, lukewarm, and useless. Likewise, the water in Hierapolis was from hot springs. It was hot, refreshing, and medicinal for the body. Again, the same thing would happen. This hot, refreshing water was transported 6 miles in the aqueducts. So, you can imagine that at the end of the line, this water came out dirty, lukewarm, and useless.

Laodicea was a bustling city of commerce. It was a major trade route that had a highway running east to west and one running north to south. It was famous for its black wool. This wool was soft and beautiful. It was used in both clothing and carpets and it was a major source of revenue. Laodicea was also famous for its medicine. It was known to produce an eye salve that healed a variety of eye conditions. All of these resources and bustling commerce meant that Laodicea was independently wealthy. In fact, in A.D. 60, it was devastated by an earthquake. When Rome offered to help rebuild, Laodiceans said, “No, thanks. We've got this. We have enough resources.”

Again, we want to keep all this in mind, because Jesus will reference these unique characteristics of the city. Now, John describes the messenger of this letter as, “[The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.](#)”

In each letter, Jesus identifies himself in unique ways. In this letter he says, He is the “Amen.” Jesus isn’t confused, and saying it out of turn, like at the end of a prayer. He isn’t agreeing with something someone had said, like we as preachers like to hear when we preach. “Amen! Preach it brother!” *Amen* means that Jesus is the truth. Jesus is the truth and He will always be the truth. He is the source of truth. We can trust Him in all He says, and in all He says He will do. He is truth.

Think about that claim. That is an audacious claim, but that is exactly what Jesus said in John 14:6. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” He is not *His* truth. He is not *your* truth. No, truth is what corresponds to reality. Jesus *is* truth.

Theologian D.A. Carson says, “Jesus is the truth, because he embodies the supreme revelation of God – he himself ‘narrates’ God, says and does exclusively what the Father gives him to say and do, indeed he is properly called ‘God.’”

Let there be no confusion. Jesus is God. John declared this in John 1:14-18, saying, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. **15** (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) **16** For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. **17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

This is why we can be sure that Jesus is truth, because God is truth and Jesus is God. And because of this, God’s Word is truth. Jesus said in John 17:17, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

So when Jesus speaks, we listen and obey.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let’s go to Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole and talk a bit more about this magnificent city of Laodicea. Cara, what about this city compares to a lot of the areas people live in today in our country, and how might that be a danger to your spiritual life?

C: Jesus said that He would spit them out, as they spit out that lukewarm water that was coming out of those aqueducts. I think they’re a lot like this country, because we’re rich in material things, but spiritually, the Laodiceans and us are pretty wretched. We think we’re very self-sufficient. And I think that doesn’t allow us the fact to see how pitiful we actually are, and how much we actually need a Savior.

N: So what do we do to get through to people about that wretchedness? I mean, Arnie made a good point that we talked about earlier - the fact that like, this is really offensive to Jesus. I mean, He is the solution for the problem, and yet, they’re saying, “We’re good, Jesus”. And that’s exactly what’s going on today in America, and I would say across the globe in certain areas. So what’s the solution?

C: The solution is the Gospel. I have witnessed to so many people that say, “I can't consider that until I clean up my life”; or “I'm not done having fun yet”; or... ... but you don't need to do anything. You just need to receive the Word of God, get into the Word of God, and accept Jesus and let Him do the work. I mean, you know, you see people with all kinds of different things going on - lifestyles and poor decisions - and Jesus comes into their life, and He slowly just starts cleaning up the mess. So, the answer's the Gospel and that's it. [Right].

A: I would add to that, maybe going from our friend, David Platt, talking to pastors, he said, maybe the problem we're having - and I will add in America today - is we fed people Kool-Aid all these years that you need to believe, but there's really nothing required of you, and this Kool-Aid is leading people down this road: “Oh, we're glad you just show up to the youth group”. All of that. Now we're in deep trouble in the U.S., and lo and behold, lots of people are walking away from their, in quotes, *faith*, but it was a Kool-Aid based faith, totally lukewarm - as we're seeing, not effective at all.

C: I worked for a radio station years ago, and we didn't have much of a budget, so we hired Molly Hatchet. And I don't want to rip on Molly Hatchet, because most of the original members aren't even there. And we really knew what we had, and so what we decided to do was make it so you couldn't buy tickets. You couldn't get tickets, unless we gave them to you through these special raffles and giveaways. And you know, it was the most sought after ticket in Las Vegas - was this ridiculous Molly Hatchet concert - because people couldn't buy it. They couldn't do anything to get it. So in countries where they can't get a Bible, or they have to hide underground, they're hungry for it. I don't think we're hungry for it in this country, because we go in, we grab a latte, we sit down. We're just not hungry for it. It's not withheld from us. When something is withheld from you, you want it more than anything.

N: That's a lot of good perspective there. And I think I couldn't have said it any better, than Arnie did a little bit ago about the Kool-Aid. And I think what you're describing there, as well is the culture we've created, where we have trained up people in the churches to accept a watered down version of the Gospel, and a second rate or second class Christianity, all the while in a world that has been prepared to not be hungry for something, because it's been so prevalent. So their palate has not developed for what they really need. And so, because of that, Arnie, I want to know from you - you know, Jesus said, *I am the way the truth and the life* - I mean, that's so exclusive that there are no other options, but I think it's been substituted in the world today. Would you agree? And if you've seen this, what does it look like?

A: So still in America, it's feeble, but you know, we're at like 60%, I think, that say they believe in Jesus, but the problem is it's not about belief. I mean, Satan believes in Jesus. It's about commitment, and yes, Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. But He also says He wants your all; He wants you to be committed, and He's called you to serve Him. And it's not a cruise ship - it's a battleship, and we're called to the battlefield. And when things have gotten really tough with COVID-19, and then the different issues that are out there, that people are freaking out, and the election, all of that stuff, and people are wondering, “Well, where's God in all of this?” And

what I keep saying is, “Where are the warriors? Who are the people who are going to stand and bring this thing forward, to get people back to the Bible?” And I don't mean back to the ministry, Back to the Bible, but to get people back to the fundamentals of what it's all about of being a true Christ follower.

N: Right. Matthew Bates wrote a book called *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*. What he's trying to convey is that the word *pistis*, which we translate *faith* or *belief*, really isn't the full range of meaning, but there's also *allegiance*. In the time of that writing of the Bible, the New Testament, that would have been really understood - that when you were declaring your faith or belief in Jesus Christ, it was more than intellectual, or a verbal agreement, but it was saying, “No, I am pledging my allegiance to this person and I will follow Him.” Now whether or not he's right on that range of meaning, we could get into a debate, but I think that what is correct, is when we do believe, as you're saying, the outflow of it will be our following Him and our allegiance.

In Revelation 3:14, Jesus identifies himself as **the true and faithful witness**. This is just a continuation of the notion of truth we've been talking about. He is the one you can trust. He'll never let you down. He's here. He's here to stay. He is on the throne and He will come back again. Don't worry about it. He's faithful.

Then, He says something that comes out a bit confusing in the English. We read in the ESV that He is the “**beginning of God's creation.**” This is a passage people point to, to say that Jesus had a beginning. Well, that's not what it means at all. Beginning is the Greek word “*arche*” and it is where we get the term architect. He is the source of creation – the architect of creation. This is reminiscent of Paul's letter to the Colossian church.

Remember what we just read in Colossians 1:15-17. Paul wrote, “**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.**”

Jesus is the **firstborn of all creation**. This is the Greek word “*prototokos*”. It doesn't mean first created, but over and above all creation: Pre-eminent - in a class of His own. Paul could have used another word that means first created, but he doesn't. He uses *prototokos* - First ranked above all creation - because he is the architect of it.

Now Jesus is about to begin a rebuke of the Laodicean church. Verses 15-16:

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.

This Laodicean church was neither hot nor cold, but instead it's lukewarm. Traditionally, it's been taught that hot is metaphorical for Christians who were on fire for God. Cold was metaphorical to represent cold Christians or even non-believers. So, Jesus would prefer they were either clearly in or out.

I don't think that makes much sense when you consider the original context of the church and the people receiving the letter. Remember, the people of Laodicea wanted that hot water. It was therapeutic. It was refreshing for the body. It was relaxing. It was medicinal. They also wanted the cold, clean water from Colossae. It was good to drink. It was refreshing - thirst quenching.

Both hot and cold were good and desired things. That's why to equate hot with on fire Christians and cold with rebellious Christians, or even non-believers, wouldn't make sense to the original readers. However, Jesus describes the church in Laodicea as lukewarm. It was just like the water in Laodicea. It's not drinkable. It's dirty. It's contaminated. It's useless. If you took a swig of it, you'd immediately spit it out. Jesus is saying, you're no good to me. In fact, you make me sick.

The word we translate *to spit* is really a much stronger word. It's really *vomit*. It's the taste of this church is so vile, you puke it out of your mouth. It's disgusting! Jesus is saying, church of Laodicea, you're disgusting. So I will vomit you out of my mouth. Well, what is so disgusting about this church? What deeds make them so vile? Verse 17:

¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Remember what we said about Laodicea at the beginning of our time? It was a very wealthy city. They were self-sufficient. They had it all and a bag of chips. Not only that, they had incredible wool which made incredible clothes. Their homes were decked out in that Magnolia Market wool accessories by the original Joanna and Chip Gaines. Not only did they have great clothes, they also had great medicine. Get some sand in the eye, put some salve on it. If you knocked on the door of a Laodicean, no matter what you'd offered them, they'd say, "Nah. I'm good. I'm covered."

This is the problem with the church: It was a church maybe by architecture. It was a church by origin, but no longer is it a church by reputation; no longer is it a church by reality. It was a nominal, indifferent church, void of true believers and the living Christ. It was dead. It was useless. It was indifferent.

N: Now, let's turn to Arnie and Cara for a little perspective. Cara, what was the biggest problem in Laodicea? Was it prosperity or was it priority?

C: I think prosperity. You know, if we lived a trouble-free existence, I'm not sure any of us would recognize that need for rest or redemption. I mean, when you deal with the hardest things in life, Nat - your son's cancer; Arnie, your cancer - you really identify with a need for just rest. I mean, just even in this COVID-19 thing - you're going, "Okay, how long, how long?" I think prosperity can become a substitute for that real goal of pursuing God and His righteousness. So, and it's an idol.

N: Right. Okay, so how do we who live here in America - or those of us with some influence, or, you know, just have resources available to us - how do we prevent that from becoming a problem? Because we know that priority for the believer has got to be Christ, whether you have a lot or a little - so how do we do that?

C: Well, I know amongst the COVID-19 situation, that I was actually trying to orchestrate things, so I wouldn't lose any of my comforts. And so, that's not right. And I identified that, and I didn't like it. So I'm trying to change that. So I would say, looking for ways to serve people, instead of ways to serve yourself and making yourself more comfortable, is a great place to start, that's for sure.

N: Yeah. Agreed, agreed. Now let's shift focus a little bit in our discussion. I want to talk to Arnie, because Arnie, you know, you're an entrepreneur. And I think you're very forward thinking, you're creative, and you're not afraid to stand on your ideas. So with qualities like that, how do you keep from becoming self-sufficient? How do you keep your priorities right?

A: It really came from a belief system, before I became a Christ follower actually, that it's all an illusion. It can be here today and absolutely gone tomorrow. No matter how wealthy you are, no matter how poor you are, it's all a perception. So carrying that in, made it very easy to be an entrepreneur, and it made it very easy not to rely on success. I remember as a nonbeliever, I would pray all the time for money. I would pray for blessings. I would pray to win this deal, or get this facility open. And I wasn't even a believer. So self-sufficiency is, there are a lot of people who believe in themselves for the solution, but if you've been around long enough, the reason you can be a successful entrepreneur, is because you succeeded one more time than you failed. And most true entrepreneurs know that there's a fine line between failure and success, and just like genius in stupidity.

N: Great answer. Let's close by talking about this idea of lukewarm. I mean, I remember when I was a kid hearing this teaching, and I was taught, you know, again - hot are the Christian elites. The cold are the people who have kind of wandered from their faith. And so again, with some study, brought a little more perspective into what Jesus was actually getting at. So now when we talk about lukewarm, what comes to mind?

C: Well, God vomits. [Laughter]. And it is so strong.

A: Yeah. And one thing that I've learned as an entrepreneur, and as a Christ follower, both - the minute you get comfortable, is the day you start in a decline. I just see it all the time. And you know, I have all my lab here, where we monitor people's spiritual condition. And being stuck spiritually oftentimes means I'm stuck in my comfort zone. I'm not moving anywhere. I'm feeling sorry for myself. And the minute you stop and feel comfortable with your misery - or with your success - it doesn't matter. When you stop, you're in big, big trouble.

N: Right. No one coasts to growth. And especially with our spiritual walk with Christ - the minute you take your foot off the gas, be prepared. Because you're not going to go forward. You can only go backwards.