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SERIES: REWRITING JESUS

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TITLE: Are You Lukewarm Pt. 2

The church in Laodicea was sick and indifferent. Does this describe your church? Does this describe you? The church in Laodicea was unhealthy and indifferent - this is why Jesus says, the church made Him sick. It *once* knew Christ. It once believed in Christ. It lived Christ. But then over time, it began living for itself. It no longer needed Christ. It just needed itself.

This church is a scary representation of many churches today. And whether you're in America, Jamaica, South America, Europe, wherever, this may be happening in your church today. I love the U.S. I love the freedom we still have in America. But if we're not careful, we could become a lukewarm church as well. We will be useless - indifferent.

Anglican author and priest, John Stott, said this, "Perhaps none of the seven letters is more appropriate to the twentieth century church than this. It describes vividly the respectable, sentimental, nominal, skin-deep religiosity which is so widespread among us today. Our Christianity is flabby and anemic. We appear to have taken a lukewarm bath of religion."

If we are not careful, we will settle. We will be a people - we will be a church - by architecture, but not in reputation. We will Christians by tradition, but indifferent in lifestyle.

It's easy for us to be so consumed with our lives. We have jobs. We have homes. We have cars. We have yards, boats, spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, kids, grandkids, great grandkids. We have Xboxes. We have Netflix. We have alcohol. We have Ibuprofen for the alcohol effects. We have social media. We have vacations. We have fake vacations. Did you know there are websites that digitally Photoshop you in *fake* vacations? We have virtually *everything* a person could ask for at the tip of our fingers, including Jesus Christ – right in our midst. But do we live like it? Do we live like Christ is the priority of our lives? If not, something's wrong.

Jesus is Lord and King and He deserves *first place* in our lives. How does he rank in your life today? 1st? 5th? 10th? If King Jesus isn't in 1st place, be careful, because you're becoming indifferent. We don't want to become the Laodicean church, full of wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked people. So how do we avoid this same rebuke from Jesus? Let's see beginning in Revelation 3, verse 18 (ESV):

¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

Jesus is saying, don't buy the lies. Your money doesn't define you and it sure doesn't save you. Don't think your wool is so sacred. It's just cloth. It's easily destroyed. Quit thinking your medicine will keep you alive and healthy forever. It won't. He is saying, you're finding your value – your identity – your salvation in things that won't save you, and will ultimately disappoint you. Don't believe the lie. Jesus is saying to them, “You're sick. You're sickening. So repent! Turn from your deceit. Turn from your lies. Turn from your false sense of security and salvation. You need me. Turn to me and I will save you.”

This church was not a church of believers. It was full of spiritually dead people. If they weren't, Jesus wouldn't tell them to put on the white garments. That imagery is for those who are righteous because of Christ, and is manifested in their deeds of obedience. They are still in their old garments, stained with sin; marked by sickening deeds.

This is why Francis Chan says there are no lukewarm Christians. He says in his book *Crazy Love*: “I don't know how you can read that passage and call that person a Christian. Because a Christian is not going to be spit out of the mouth of God.” What was true in John's time is true for us today in America and around the globe. Chan said, “It's always been that way.” And Jesus explains it's going to be the wheat and the tares. And at the time of harvest He's going to show who's for real. There are millions and millions of people gathering these days online, or maybe you're even back in a church building – either way, we're gathered as “the church”. But not *all* who gather as “the church” are actual followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus says you look at their lifestyles and you can tell that. This is frightening, but He's right.

Jesus warned of this in Matthew 7:21-23. It's probably one of the most frightening passages in all of Scripture. Jesus said, “‘Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Think about that: There are people who will listen to a church service online, or go to church, serve on a service team. They identify as “Christian” on Facebook, but on Judgement Day, Jesus will declare, “I never knew you.” But you might say to Jesus, “That's not fair”, right? Afterall, they belonged to a church – they “did” church. They served. They believed in God. But remember what James said, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” You see, demons understand and know who Jesus is. *But that doesn't save them!* People, *many people*, know who Jesus is. They believe that God exists, and yet they've never turned from their sin and turned to Christ.

Jesus says, you need Me. You need My salvation. Remember, *I am the truth, the way and the life! No one gets to the father but through me.*” (John 14:6) So be zealous, and immediately turn from your sin and turn to Me. Is Jesus that concerned about indifferent and dead churches? Revelation 3, Verse 20:

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

Jesus is very concerned with the Church – big C; apostate churches – those who once lived for Christ, but no longer follow Him; and the world as a whole. Jesus says, He *stands at the door and knocks*. Is this in reference to an individual or the church? Jesus is talking to the Laodicean church. In other words, He’s knocking at a dead, indifferent church. And He is waiting for just one person to welcome Him back into the church - to breathe life into His Bride.

It often starts with just one person, but we know Christ is calling many to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9 says, The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Christ wanted to be welcomed back into the church 2000 years ago, and He desires the same thing today. There are dead, indifferent churches today around the globe, in your country, here in the U.S., here in Nebraska, in your state, even in your town! He desires that just one person would open the door and let Him back in. Hopefully this isn’t your church. But if we aren’t careful, we can push Jesus out of our lives and out of the church today.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let’s talk a little more about this with Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Cara, describe the difference between a live, growing church and a dead, indifferent church.

C: Well, a live church is growing. And I mean, they're growing, because they're in the Word of God, so not growing and trying to mold what the world is, how the world is growing; but they're growing in the Word of God. That's important. I think the people in the church aren't divided - they're sharpening each other. They're reaching out to the lost; they're serving others. I would say then the indifferent church is the opposite of that. I mean, I think you could go two ways. You could be super religious, or you could make Jesus out to be a mask-wearing, social justice warrior, keeping the Gospel to themselves, showing very little grace, having very little mercy, or just not biblical - not following the Word of God. All good news without the bad news - you know, that you're a sinner in need of a Savior. So, I mean, it's a train wreck; the indifferent church is a train wreck. Get out.

N: Yeah. And we're seeing more and more of them everywhere you go. And it's not just a U.S. problem. It's a problem across the globe.

A: So pastor Nat, I’ve got a question for you. [Uh-oh]. So what do you do if you find yourself attending a dead church? Not as the pastor, but as a congregant. And maybe it's a twofold question. What if you're a pastor? Okay. But as a congregant, what do you do? Maybe you've gone there for 15 years, and it used to be on fire, and now it's just Deadsville. What do you do?

N: That is such a hard question. And it's complicated, because there are so many factors, that it's really a case by case situation. Generally speaking - and I've actually heard some other prominent Bible teachers talk about this as well - and the general consensus would be this: there is a time for you to stay and try to influence – influence up, influence the people around you, be active, and involved, and be willing to speak up, and be persecuted for it - even inside the church. I think though, at some point, you have to realize that maybe your influence has ended.

They are not responding to it. They don't care. They don't want any part of it. And I think in those instances, it's okay to leave. But I think how you leave is almost as important as how you're dealing with it, while you're on the inside. So is it appropriate to leave? Absolutely. When? I don't know, but I think it starts with you being willing to step up, to speak up, to point back to the Bible. And when you feel like God is saying, okay, they are not listening, they are not responding, then I think you have full permission to go. But I understand also, when it comes to church, it's family. I think a lot of people stay in churches because of the community that they experience. It's been my church - like you said - my whole life; my best friend brought me into this church. And they don't see a problem with it: "So why, you know, I mean, should I stick around for them?" And I think that's admirable. But again, at some point, if they are teaching a false Gospel, they are teaching heresy, and they are an indifferent, dead church, do what you can do. But then when the time is right, leave.

How have you become indifferent towards Jesus? How have you let other things take priority in your life? Jesus is knocking. He wants to fellowship with you. He wants to eat with you. He wants to be with you. The idea of eating here, is that at night people would gather, eat, and connect. They'd linger and fellowship. Jesus eagerly desires this for His children. He desires and deserves to be number one in your life. He desires and deserves to be in intimate relationship with you: In all you do, not just Sunday mornings; not just in your 1-minute devotional; not just in your dinner prayers. In all, and everything, He wants to linger with you. He loves you. Won't you show Him that you love Him too?

So it doesn't matter if Jesus is knocking at a dead, indifferent church, or if He's knocking at the heart of a believer who's become indifferent, or if He's knocking at the life of a non-believer - the point is that He wants in, and He wants to be with His Bride, the Church. He wants to be with His children. He wants life restored and fellowship experienced. For your church, He wants to be intimately involved in everything that you do - in every ministry and every decision we make. He wants to be in the midst of it and consulted in it. For us as individual followers, He wants to daily eat with us, to linger with us and be in intimate relationship with us.

Think about it: The one, true God. The architect of all Creation. The sustainer and ruler over all desires. He wants a rich, deep, and meaningful relationship with you today - right now. Don't push Him out. Do not ignore Him. And what is the reward for those of us who have let Him in? What is the reward for the follower of Christ? Verse 21:

²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

In each of the seven letters, there is a reward for the overcomer, for the conqueror. The overcomers are those who are truly saved. This is made evident by their deeds. One such deed is their willingness to live for Christ, no matter what trial, no matter what abundance we experience. For the follower of Christ, we will rule with King Jesus forever! We will sit on the throne with Him, ruling forever.

2 Timothy 2:12 says, “if we endure, (it’s that same idea of being a conqueror) we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us.”

The follower of Christ is marked by a life of obedience and living for their King. The result of our identity in Christ is reigning with Him forever. But those who are separated from Christ – those who deny Him in faith and action - He will deny them.

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

Friend, have you heard your King? He is asking you, and He is asking me, to stop living for ourselves and begin living for Him. Again, He is first asking you, will you eat with Me? Will you linger with Me? So we need to ask the question: What do we truly value? Look at your time. Look at your online bank transactions. Look at your GPS. You’ll find your answer. Jesus is knocking. Will you spend quality time with Him, or will you just get your check in the box through a one-minute devotional, and an evening prayer? Can you imagine – If I checked in with my wife, once a day, for one minute, I’d have a poor marriage. If I talked with my wife for 30 seconds at dinner, and then stopped, I’d have an offensive relationship with my spouse. If I stopped into the house once every two weeks to see my wife and my kids, I’d be negligent of my duties as a husband and father. But we do this with the bride of Christ – the church. If it doesn’t work at home, why would it work with the Bride of Christ, and why would it work with God?

Jesus is knocking at the door. He is asking us to make a difference where we are, with who is around us. This is true as a church, and it is true as individuals. What are you doing to follow Christ? What are you doing to make Him first place in your life? What are you doing to love Him more? What are you doing to obey His Great Commission to make disciples? We can always do more than what we’re doing today.

Each one of us is a minister of the Gospel. Each one of us is part of the priesthood of believers. He has called each one of you to go out into the world, and make disciples, who make disciples. Each one of us. It’s not just my job. It’s not your pastor’s job. It’s not just ministry’s job to make disciples. It is all of our jobs - and frankly, you can do this in everyday ways, by asking the server, “How are you really doing?”, through asking the barista, “What’s your story?”

To avoid being the indifferent church – to avoid being indifferent followers - we must daily, out of love, walk with Jesus, and introduce people to Him; develop them into fully devoted followers; and equip them, and send them to impact your city. That’s the kind of church we are called to be.

N: All right, let’s get some perspective on this from Arnie and Cara. So Arnie, how do we keep our churches alive as we walk through this COVID-19 crisis?

A: Man, that’s a great question Nat. We’ve certainly done a lot of research on this very thing, because you’ve got all kinds of different issues: meeting as a body of believers, you know, whether you wear a mask or no mask; giving is usually challenging during this time. It really takes a strategy that is focused on the individual congregants, to really figure out a way to get them through this situation as your body of believers.

N: Yeah, I think what's been really neat to see, is how involved Back to the Bible has been in helping the churches deal with the COVID-19 crisis, and engaging their congregation while at a distance. And I've seen that in the U.S., but we're seeing it globally - how active Back to the Bible has been in helping the churches stay connected. It's just a great testimony of God's faithfulness, and also the innovation that you bring to Back to the Bible. Cara, can you jump in here with some practical ways for us to reach out, even though COVID-19 may have people somewhat shut in?

C: Well, I stay in contact with people, and I'm kind of a sermon junkie. So I have my own church that I attend, but then I have some pastors out there that are my favorites. And so, you know, there's this podcast I could share. There are sermons that I can pass along to people, you know, especially the ones right now that are on anxiety, hope - I think a lot of people are needing to hear that. And so, yeah, that's what I've been doing anyway.

N: Yeah. And I also know you're a big proponent of using and sharing the goTandem app. [I sure am]. And I tell you, this weekend, I was out of town, and met a gentleman, and he was talking about, you know, just the world of COVID-19, and how it's just really been disruptive - and how one moment it was normal, and now it's like, everything is chaos, and there's anxiety. And so I just asked the question, "Hey, you know, are you spiritual, or what's that like?", and he goes, "Well, you know, yeah. I think that there's more to it than just what I see around me". And I go, "Well, if you would be interested in experiencing some peace, you may consider downloading this goTandem app. It's free, and they'll give you a spiritual assessment, and basically give you exactly what you need, to encourage you and to move closer to Jesus". And he goes, "I think I would really enjoy that." And so that's another great tool that we can use to reach the lost, even in the world of COVID-19. I would like to hear from each of you, do you think that COVID-19 actually brings opportunities to thrive spiritually?

C: Well, what do you mean by that? Because I've actually - I've grown in ways that are positive through this.

N: Does the world around us, does the situation we're facing - in this particular case COVID-19 - does it hinder us, or does it actually provide an opportunity to grow spiritually?

C: Well, I think it provides a great opportunity for us to grow ourselves, because I think for me, it's revealed a lot of things that I don't like about myself that I need to change. I'm more selfish than I realized. And I knew I was selfish before, but nah, it's bad. And too, people are not in control, so, "Hey, you know what? You're not in control. This is crazy. Here's goTandem", you know?

A: Yup. So I think it does provide a tremendous opportunity to thrive spiritually. And it's funny. I just - matter of fact - I have an hour to write this response to this other couple of research firms - have found that during COVID-19, mature believers actually engage the Bible less. We've lost more ground in the area of Bible engagement during COVID-19 than we ever have in any period of time before. And so I think there is a tremendous opportunity to thrive, if

you like step to the plate, but now you have to be - it's not convenient - you have to be much more intentional. And what we see is a solid group is heading towards this being spiritually stuck, discouraged, giving up, and instead of thriving spiritually for Jesus, they're thriving for the wrong side.

C: Do you think it's because people's routines have been upended?

A: Oh, you bet. It's going to have a tremendous impact, just church attendance alone. And that was one of the things, one of the researchers said, "Well, of course they're not reading the Bible, because they go to a Bible-reading church, and they're not going anymore. So they're not hearing the Bible."

C: Well, they're not seeing their encouraging buddies, and they're not - you know, it's sort of like when you go on vacation - that's the least amount of time you spend with God, because you fill your day with things, and then He gets the leftovers. [Yeah.] You know? And so we're out of our routines. It's hard, but there are ways to thrive spiritually.

A: Oh yeah. I mean, it goes back to that old thing: Are you on a cruise ship or a battleship? You know, do you expect the catered lunches and the big lines like you would on a cruise ship? Or if it's a battleship and there's people fallen by the wayside, are you in the battle? Are you in the game? It really comes to perspective, I think, but it's a tremendous opportunity.

N: I would agree. I think it is a huge opportunity. And I think what this is doing – COVID-19 is doing - is simply revealing what we really value at the end of the day. When pastoring a church, I mean, we'd be lucky to see a person, maybe two weeks out of the month. The rest of the time, I mean there were legitimate reasons, they're doing other things, but when, you know, if they were going golfing, or whatever it is - an opportunity, like COVID-19, though it is a wrench in our plans, it's basically provided an opportunity for them to continue to live for themselves, in whatever fashion that looks like.

And so I think it's simply indicative of really what was a priority before, and now they just don't have to have that weekly infusion, which is sad. So like any trial, it creates great opportunity, but the opportunity can be wasted, or it can be capitalized on. And that's why we're doing what we do here at Back to the Bible. That's why you're doing what you're doing as well, with the Center for Bible Engagement, to get people back into the Bible, to be engaged, and to move closer to Jesus today than they were yesterday. The situation really doesn't matter. It's what are you going to do with it?