

Revelation 3:14-22 Suffocating Your Soul

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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We're going through the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, and we're looking at seven letters sent to seven churches back in the first century by Jesus. They were performance evaluations or report cards, if you will. We've noticed that they all follow a typical pattern. They open by telling the recipient something about Jesus, then they move on to a commendation for what the church is doing well, a critique of where and how they need to improve, and then they end with a promise regarding what's in store for those who overcome and remain faithful.

This morning we're looking at the seventh, and final, letter – to the Church at Laodicea. Now, unfortunately, the letters end on a bit of a sour note. Two weeks ago we looked at the church at Philadelphia – the church Jesus had nothing bad to say about. Laodicea is the opposite – Jesus had nothing good to say to them.

You might remember, a few weeks ago we looked at the sad church at Sardis, and things weren't going too well there either: they had a name, a good reputation, but it was all a façade, they were dying from the inside out - but Jesus said there were at least some there who had not dirtied their garments, and they would walk with Him, for they were worthy. The bulk of the church had drifted, but Jesus recognized a faithful few. Laodicea doesn't even appear to have a faithful few. Read with me:

Revelation 3:14 “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 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 dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame 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.””

You see what I mean? Nothing good. No exceptions, unless you repent and overcome, this is a wholesale rebuke. There's nothing praiseworthy in Laodicea, just a pathetic complacency, a spiritual indifference and lethargy. And yet, my friends, I have to tell you,

this is one of the churches I feel we can learn from the most. So please, consider what you hear as the Spirit speaks to our church today.

We start each of our studies by noticing what the letter says about Jesus, so let's ask: What do we learn about Jesus here? Well, if He's willing to say, "I'll vomit you out of my mouth" I think one thing is pretty clear: Jesus isn't afraid to be judgmental. He knows what's really going on in our lives and He loves us enough to call things like they are. He doesn't sugar coat it, doesn't butter us up, doesn't try to smooth things over – there's a problem, and He speaks to the church forcefully and directly about it. He says to the church, "I know your works" and I'm not impressed.

Friends, honestly, this terrifies me. You see, I want to be told, "It's alright." I want Jesus to say, "Ah, I know you're tired, you've got a lot going on, it's going to be OK," and turn a blind eye to the fact that I'm really just lazy and selfish and spiritually disinterested at times. Can you identify with that? Aren't there times when you feel like cutting corners spiritually, times when you feel like skipping the details, times when you just want to get the job done and move on to the next thing? Aren't there times when we all ask, what needs to get done here so I can move along? Not, "How can I excel?" Not, "How can I make this better?" But, "What's the minimum that needs to happen and how can I slide by doing that?"

Friends, we are all prone to grow lukewarm and lackadaisical. We know we should do better, but we write it off and give ourselves an excuse for cutting a corner this time. And then, Jesus shows up. And He takes a look at the condition of our lives and we're hoping He won't notice the messes we've shoved into the closets and the dust we've missed in the corners, we're hoping He won't notice the little details we skipped. We're hoping that either we can pull one over on God and He won't notice, or that He'll be polite and understanding and cut us some slack.

But He won't. Because He can't. How could He? How could God be holy and perfect and still tolerate us cutting corners? How could there be a heavenly version of 'good enough for government work?' What would that look like? (Someone needs to draw a cartoon of what Heaven might look like if it was run with that attitude.) No, God looks into your life, He looks into my life, He looks into the church at Laodicea, and calls a spade a spade. But look, it's not because He's mean. It's not because He's indifferent to the difficulties and struggles in our lives, it's because He knows what is best and He wants that for us. So when we don't hit the mark, He tells us. Not to mock us, not to make us feel bad, but because there's no way things are going to change unless He does.

Proverbs 27:6 (ASV) **"Faithful are the wounds of a friend; But the kisses of an enemy are profuse."**

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Hopefully you know the value of having someone in your life who will call you out on things – the friend who will say, "you didn't reach full depth on that squat" or, "you need to tighten this report up before you present it," or, "you shouldn't go out with her." Someone who will ask hard questions and give honest

feedback. Gratuitous feedback is just a waste of time, isn't it? And Jesus doesn't waste time. When it comes to your soul, He's shooting you straight, even if it hurts.

But look, we need a God who tells us the truth. We need a God who calls things like they are. We need a God who is Holy and demands more because on our own, most of us are prone to shift into neutral and coast, to go with the flow. But if you take a glass of water and put it in the middle of the room, cold water will warm up and hot water will cool down. We all trend toward being lukewarm if we aren't near some sort of influence. And when we start to lose our flame, lose our heat, if we listen, we can always hear God calling us out.

So, the first thing we see this morning is that Jesus is judgmental, but His judgments are for our good. What else do we see? Well, we see that's He's boxing us in – He's making an airtight case – He says He's the Amen, the Faithful and True and witness, and the Beginning of all Creation – He's stacking authority on top of authority so that we will understand, He knows what He's talking about.

Let's take them one by one. First, He says He is the Amen. Now what does that mean? We say amen at the end of our prayers don't we? But what does it mean? It's a word that doesn't get translated in most languages, you can pray with people from all around the world and you'll know when they're done because they'll say, 'amen.' It's quite possibly the most widely recognized word in all of human speech and it comes from ancient Hebrew – it means, 'so be it' or 'verily' or 'certainly' it's an expression that should convey the notion: this is all true, and I agree with it.

So, when Jesus says He is the Amen, it means, He is The True One. The One who can be trusted, relied on, the one whose Yes is Yes and whose no is no. The one you don't have to follow up with or send a reminder to. The one you don't have to worry about, you just know He'll be there, and He's good to go. John, the one who is writing all this down, also wrote the Gospel of John – one of four gospels in your Bible – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and John frequently quotes Jesus saying 'verily, verily,' or 'truly, truly I say unto you' - in Greek the actual word is 'amen.'

But not only does Jesus speak truth, He is truth.

2 Cor 2:20 - For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.

When Jesus speaks to you – He's speaking the truth – so don't try to wiggle your way out, don't try to soften or minimize it. Whether He has a critique for you, or a commendation, or a promise, receive it as truth and thank Him. He's sure about it. He means it. He's the 'Faithful and True Witness.'

He's also '[the beginning of God's creation.](#)' What does that mean? It's the idea that everything else springs forth from Him – He is the singularity at the beginning of it all. He is the bracketing frame of the universe and everything in it – He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.

And now, the point of it all – Jesus as the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the beginning of everything, is to reinforce His authority in the judgment He’s making about Laodicea, a judgment that might apply, in principle to any of today as well. He says:

15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

Now, notice this: the real problem in Laodicea was one of spiritual indifference. They weren’t these terrible godless pagans, but they had drifted to the place where they were just going through the motions spiritually. They had no enthusiasm, no zeal, no real commitment in their lives.

It’s a condition you run into all too often in bureaucracies – how many times have you come across someone who was milking a paycheck? How many times have you been frustrated by someone who you needed something from, some approval, or some signature, and either you couldn’t ever reach them, or they were practically unhelpful – they wouldn’t go out of their way to help you at all. They can’t be fired because they haven’t done anything criminal or wrong, but they’re not trying to excel either, there’s no desire to improve, it’s just a job for them, a space to fill while they pull a paycheck.

You know the frustration that you feel in dealing with that kind of person? Well, that’s what the church in Laodicea was like spiritually. And again, if we’re honest, there’s a little bit of the behavior in all of us too. So Jesus says, in a frustration we can all understand, ‘You make me want to vomit.’

Friend, let me ask – do you make Jesus want to vomit right now? Is this talking about you? Only you know for sure, but do you hear anything in your soul when we read this passage?

Because, as your pastor, I have great concern for us. This city does not esteem Jesus. Few things and few people here are going to fan your spiritual flames. Going to church on Sunday is not a societal norm. You’re not going to just slowly rise in spiritual temperature just by being here. I hope you will in the church, I hope you’ll absorb some heat from the brothers and sisters around you in here, or in your home groups, I hope you’ll find some fellowship with someone at work, but over all, the collective spiritual temperature of the greater DC area is tepid as best.

Now, note I said tepid, not frigid. This isn’t Vegas. People like to have a little ‘fun’ as they call it, but sin here in the city is somewhat restrained, isn’t it? We stay, for the most part, just this side of depravity. Too many people need to guard their reputation, their clearance, their position. Which, actually, makes it easier for you to join in things you wouldn’t otherwise do. After all, these are respectable people and you know things aren’t going to get too far out of control. But do you find yourself taking part in things that are chilling your soul? Not freezing it, but definitely cooling down whatever heat you picked up from

God. Please, please, ask yourself that question. I'm begging you – ask yourself – am I lukewarm spiritually? What is the temperature of my soul?

Would you please ask God to give you an honest assessment of your spiritual vital signs? The thing about being lukewarm is, there's nothing that stands out about it. You react to things that are cold and things that are hot, but things that are lukewarm don't register at all. And that's why I'm asking you to take a look. I'm praying that God would speak in a way you can understand, and if you're trending toward complacency, that He would wake you up and fire you up – for His sake, for your sake, and for the sake of all those around you whose lives you could be influencing for eternity.

God loves you enough to speak the truth, He is the Amen, the Faithful and True witness, so listen as He speaks – if you have an ear, hear what the Spirit says to the church.

Listen to what He says to the Laodiceans and I think you'll find echoes of truth that apply directly to us and our city today. They were saying,

17 ... 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and [they did not] know [they were] wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked

Let me give you a little background data that will make this stand out even more.

Laodicea was a wealthy city with thriving banks, a medical school, and textile industry. They were so rich that when an earthquake devastated the city in the year AD 61 they rebuilt without any financial assistance from Rome. That would have been right around the time of this letter and the fact would have been fresh in everyone's mind. They felt like they had things under control financially, but Jesus says they're wretched, miserable, and poor.

Laodicea also had a famous medical school that made an eye salve that was exported all across the empire – they were famous for the stuff. But Jesus tells them, you're blind.

One of Laodicea's other famous exports was clothing made from a particular breed of sheep that were raised in the surrounding area – these sheep had a very glossy, deep black, wool that was considered a luxury textile. And yet, Jesus says they're naked.

In other words, Jesus says, all the things you think are strengths, are really weaknesses. All the things you're taking comfort in and enjoying, are killing your soul.

Friends, do you hear the warning bells, do you see flashing lights? Do you see how easily all of this might apply to us? This is a city of achievement. On paper, some of us make good money and have stable jobs. There are an awful lot of things for us to take comfort in. But are those things, which could be very good things, having a chilling effect on your soul?

I know for a fact that for some people the answer is yes. I've seen it. Not once or twice, but so many times that it is one of my greatest concerns for us as we live here. I've seen people

come to DC on fire for the Lord, I've seen people who were alive spiritually when they arrived, and watched as they were slowly suffocated and smothered by this city.

So, when I tell you to be careful, to be on the lookout, to guard your soul – will you please listen to me? Will you please take it to God in prayer? Will you please take a look at the thermometer of your soul and see what direction it's trending? Are you enjoying your paycheck and your position and this city too much at the expense of your relationship with God?

Do you need to hear the words of Christ this morning,

18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

If so, how do you do that? How do you buy gold from God when He says you're poor, blind and naked? The answer is: you give yourself to Him. It's a transaction, just like our normal lives – you give someone your hours, your days and in exchange every couple of weeks, or twice a month, they give you dollars. The money you receive, and the money you spend is just a way of monetizing your life – putting you into a liquid form that can be passed around.

God wants you to make the same kind of transaction with Him. He wants you to moonlight. Only, He doesn't want to be your second job – He wants to own you entirely. He doesn't want 40, 60, or even 80 hours a week, He wants everything and then He'll subcontract you out to other projects, and He'll even let you double-dip when it comes time for payroll because He's paying with a different form of currency.

Listen to what He says through the words of Isaiah the prophet:

Isaiah 55: 1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.
2 Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread,
And your wages for *what* does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is* good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
3 Incline your ear, and come to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—
The sure mercies of David.

We give God our lives and He gives us the bread of life, living water, eternal crowns, and white robes. All the things we can get so worried about on earth He promises to give us for eternity, if we will only surrender our lives to Him. He takes good care of the citizens of Heaven! So,

2 Why do you spend money for *what is not bread*,
And your wages for *what does not satisfy*?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is good*,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.

If you're caught up with the things of this world, they might not be bad things; they're just not good enough. Jesus told the woman at the well, "*whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but who ever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst.*"

And He tells the Laodiceans

18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed*; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

Do you need to respond to that? Do you need to be zealous and repent this morning?

Consider who is calling you to do it:

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 dine with him, and he with Me.

Now, would you please, for a moment, consider that with me? Ponder the outrageous humility of this – that He who rightfully owns all that is and was and shall be, stands politely outside and knocks, offering to come in. Friends, I don't even really know how to put this in words – our Lord, our risen savior, is coming to you, standing outside and exercising gentle manners while we're busy inside doing our own thing. Who does that? Who else but Jesus responds in this way?

But this is our Christ, this is our savior, who comes to us in the midst of our sin, in the midst of our selfishness and rebellion, and He initiates reconciliation. He initiates!!!

At the time this was written, they typically had three meals a day, like us. Breakfast was light, maybe just a piece of dried bread dipped in wine, lunch was packed and eaten on the go or while you were traveling or walking – not a big affair, but dinner, dinner was to lingered over. The family gathered, perhaps friends came over, and they lingered at the table. No one had anything else to rush away and do at that point – it was night and they didn't have phones, televisions, or computers, they had each other.

So here's what Jesus is offering – even though you've been drifting away from Him, even though you've been making your walk less of a priority lately, He's come by to check on you. He's at the door knocking, and He wants to come in and eat with you, to linger at the table and hangout. He's offering you gold, white linen, physical healing and spiritual insight. He's offering to give you back everything you're wandering away from. Once again, who does this? Who is this merciful, who is this kind? I think I could understand if there was a knocking at the door and it was someone coming to repossess what Christ had given me earlier, I could understand if there was someone coming to serve me court documents, I could understand if there was some breaking in the door to serve me a warrant.

But Jesus doesn't do that. And, He doesn't send someone else to knock; He comes Himself. He raps His own knuckles. And if you open the door, He comes in immediately because He's standing right there! This isn't just an invitation being delivered; this isn't someone offering to set up an appointment for you to do dinner together some other time. There's an intimacy and a sense of immediacy about it all. Friend, everything can change between you and Jesus, starting right now.

And if it does, He's got even more for you.

21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame 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." "

He who has an ear – this means you, this means me – it's a personalized letter, not just to the ancient church. Don't apply this to everyone else, don't write it off, don't move on to the next thing you've got to do today to get ready for next week – think about this, apply it, let it transform you. God is speaking to you today, how will you respond?

It's rude to walk away while someone is talking, or to turn and walk away without acknowledging what has been said. How will you acknowledge God this morning? How will you respond to what He's been whispering to your soul? How will you respond to the knocking inside? I'm going to pray for us all right now and then give you a moment to figure that out as we prepare to receive communion.