

Hot or Cold?

Revelation 3:14-22

Notes for preachers

Intro.

I would probably tell the first part of this story in my own words. Perhaps you might consider reading the dates and the quote of what Judson wrote to his sisters.

Adoniram Judson was born into a pastor's home on August 9, 1788. As a child then, he learned the principles of the Bible, but as he entered his teen years, he rejected the faith of his parents. When he graduated as the valedictorian from Brown University in 1807, he was a full-fledged agnostic. He denied the veracity of the Bible and told his parents that he believed that Jesus was nothing more than a man. His father tried to reason with him, but he was no match for his brilliant son. Back at Brown, Judson and his best friend Jacob Eames had become convinced that there is no afterlife and there is little meaning or purpose to this life. That conviction however, led Judson the next year to moods of melancholy as he tried to find some meaning in a world that had no purpose. Toward the end of the year, he spent the night in an inn in New England. There was a man in the room adjacent to his who moaned all night keeping Judson awake. The next morning, he learned that that young man died in the middle of the night and the inn keeper mentioned that his name was Jacob Eames. Judson froze as he heard the name of his best friend. Suddenly, his theology became very personal. He thought "what if I am wrong? If so, then my best friend entered a Christ-less eternity last night in the room right next to mine." Judson couldn't shake that thought. Over the next several days, his struggle intensified until finally as CS Lewis has put it, he came kicking and screaming into the kingdom of God and was marvelously saved.

Four years later, he felt called by God to become a missionary and was convinced that Jesus was leading him to go to India. So, in 1812, certain of God's plan, he set sail with his bride to their new home. When they arrived in India, however, the officials would not let him enter, so he was exiled to Burma before his ministry even started.

The next 17 years were in many ways an exercise in futility:

- 1812 Arrived in India and exiled to Burma; began ministry.
- 1815 Roger Wm. Judson born in Rangoon (Sept)
- 1816 Roger died (May, at 8 months)
- 1818 The first convert (Maung Nau)
- 1819 Struggle with fellow missionary (Eliza Wheelock)
- 1824 Arrested as a spy (June 8)
- 1825 Maria born (Jan. 26)
- 1825 Released from prison (Dec. 31)
- 1826 wife dies (Oct. 26 at 36 years old)
- 1827 Maria Elizabeth Butterworth Judson died (April 24 at 2 yrs, 3 mos.)

Finally, at age 41 - after 17 years as a missionary on October 24, 1829, he wrote to his wife's sisters Abigail and Mary Hasseltine:

“Have either of you learned the art of real communion with God, and can you teach me the first principles? God is to me the great Unknown. I believe in him, but I find him not.”

In those words of frustration, you can hear Judson saying this is not what I signed up for. The plan was for me to be a missionary in India. I gave that up to come to Burma but here I am 17 years later with one convert to show for all my efforts. Now I am all alone with three graves that mock my conviction that there is a God in heaven who led me here with the assurance that he would be with me in my work. So, what do you think? Has Judson lost his faith? Is he on the verge of losing his faith? Has he become the “lukewarm” believer that Jesus condemns in his message to the church at Laodicea?

We will find the answer to that question as we examine the details of the message that Jesus gives to the “lukewarm” church at Laodicea in Revelation 3: 14-22.

Use picture from film



“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 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. 18 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.

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 20 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 that person, and they with me.

21 To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

In the ancient world there were at least six cities called Laodicea and this one was called Laodicea on the Lycus to distinguish it from the others. It was founded about 250 B.C. by Antiochus of Syria and was named after his wife Laodice.

Its importance was due entirely to its position. The road from Ephesus to the east and to Syria was the most important in Asia. It began on the coast at Ephesus, and it had to find a way to climb up to the central plateau 8,500 feet up. It set out along the valley of the River Maeander until it reached what were known as the Gates of Phrygia. Beyond this point lay a broad valley where Lydia, Phrygia and Caria met. The Maeander entered that valley by a narrow, precipitous gorge through which no road could pass. The road, therefore, detoured through the Lycus valley. In that valley Laodicea stood.

It was literally astride the great road to the east which went straight through Laodicea, entering by the Ephesian Gate and leaving by the Syrian Gate. That alone would have been enough to make Laodicea one of the great commercial and strategic canters of the ancient world. Originally Laodicea had been a fortress; but it had the serious handicap that all its water supply had to come by underground aqueduct from springs no less than six miles away, a perilous situation for a town besieged. Two other roads passed through the gates of Laodicea, that from Pergamum and the Hermus Valley to Pisidia and Pamphylia and the coast at Perga and that from eastern Caria to central and west Phrygia.

As Sir William Ramsay says: "It only needed peace to make Laodicea a great commercial and financial center." That peace came with the dominion of Rome. When the Roman peace gave it its opportunity it became, as Pliny called it, "a most distinguished city."

Laodicea has the grim distinction of being the only Church of which the Risen Christ has nothing good to say. Christ's negative assessment of this church can be summed in one phrase "you are lukewarm!"

Thus, if being "lukewarm" is one the worst descriptions Jesus could make about us, it behooves to find out **why any believer might be called "lukewarm."** Furthermore, and maybe more importantly, we need to know how to stay "hot!"

The subject of this message is "why do believers become lukewarm?" there are two "reasons" why: 1. We don't see our need for God. 2. We don't know how to get hot.

I. We Become Lukewarm When We Don't See Our Need For God

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 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. 18 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.

He is the "Amen." This is a strange title and may go back to Isaiah 65:16 where we read, God is called the "God of truth;" but in the Hebrew he is called the "God of Amen." "Amen" is the word which is often put at the end of a solemn statement in order to guarantee its truth. If God is the "God of Amen," he is utterly to be relied upon. This would mean that Jesus Christ is the One whose promises are true beyond all doubt.

Adoniram Judson thought he put his faith in the God we call "Amen." After all, he traveled halfway around the world at what he thought was the call of God. Then he spent the first seventeen years of his ministry dedicated to serve God with little to show for it except one convert and three graves that mocked his conviction that there is a God in heaven who led him to India. Not surprisingly, at this crisis of faith he wrote to his sisters,

"Have either of you learned the art of real communion with God, and can you teach me the first principles? God is to me the great Unknown. I believe in him, but I find him not."

Have you ever felt like Judson did when he wrote these words? Were you ever so sure that you knew God's will for your life but when you did what you were sure God wanted you to do it just seemed God was nowhere to be found? Did God abandon you like he appeared to have abandoned Judson?

As you mull that over, consider this. In April 1850, just before his death, Judson now 62 wrote;

"I never prayed sincerely and earnestly for anything, but somehow, in some shape---probably the last I should have devised---it came. And yet I have always

had so little faith! May God forgive me and while he condescends to use me as his instrument, wipe out the sin of unbelief from my heart.”

Obviously, something happened in Judson’s mind and heart between the time of his letter to his wife’s sister’s when he was 41 and this amazing statement of faith some 21 years later. What happened? I suspect that he learned that when God calls us to follow him, he never promises that we will have the easy life. In fact, he told his first disciples that following him meant they would need to pick up a cross. He advised true disciples might lose relationships with family, friends, and countrymen. If that is the deal then, why would anyone want to follow him? The reason is that Jesus is the “Amen” of God who grants his followers power and influence in His name that is infectious and lasts for eternity! If we stay the course, we will experience that power as we pray and we will see it in the lives of the people Jesus calls us to serve. Do you believe that? Clearly the statement that Judson dictated before his death shows that he did.

What is the rest of the story? Today there are 4000 churches that can be attributed to Judson’s work and 1,000,000 believers in Burma. All praise to the “Amen” of God!

A. We don’t see a need for God because we tolerate lukewarm deeds vv. 15, 16

Jesus offers this convicting assessment of the church of Laodicea in vv. 15, 16. *because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

On the surface we may think this means we must be blazing hot in our commitment to Jesus all the time. The meaning of the key words seems to confirm this conclusion. “Cold” is “psuchros;” and it can mean cold to the point of freezing. Ecclesiasticus (Sir_43:20) speaks of the cold north wind which makes the ice congeal upon the waters. “Hot” is “zestos;” and it means hot to boiling point. “Tepid” is “chliaros.” Things which are tepid often have a nauseating effect. Hot food and cold food can both be appetizing, but tepid food will often make the stomach turn. Directly opposite Laodicea, on the other bank of the Lycus, and in full view, stood Hierapolis, famous for its hot mineral springs. Often hot mineral springs are nauseating in their taste and make the person who drinks them want to be physically sick. That is the way in which the Church at Laodicea affected the Risen Christ. But is the primary application of Jesus’s statement about whether we are hot or cold?

How hot is lukewarm? Lukewarm is a relative phrase. Am I lukewarm if I am not as passionate as Billy Graham? Or am I hot if I am slightly more passionate about my faith than Judas who betrayed Jesus? What do we use as our thermometer? If I am like everyone else around me, am I ok? If so, everyone in Laodicea would be ok. Actually, asking if I am lukewarm may be the wrong question. Perhaps the question should be “how anxious am I to grow?” How much do I want to be like Jesus?

Could the one attitude which the Risen Christ unsparingly condemns be indifference? It has been said that an author can write a good biography if he loves his subject or hates him but not if he is coldly indifferent. Of all things indifference is the hardest to combat. The problem for the modern Church is not hostility to Christianity; it would be better if it were so. The problem is that to so many Christians have ceased to have any relevance and men regard them with complete indifference. This indifference

can be broken down only by the actual demonstration that Christianity is a power to make life strong and a grace to make life beautiful.

What then, does Jesus mean by the term “lukewarm?” None of us are where we could be in our walk with God. Depending on the day or week we may need to restore our spiritual passion. That is the subject of Gordan McDonald’s excellent book, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*. McDonald reminds us in his book that leaders like David, Elijah, Daniel, Paul, Peter, General Booth, Billy Graham all experienced times when they needed to restore their spiritual passion.

So, if restoring spiritual passion is not the main point of this passage, what is? I think the point becomes clear when we consider the difference between David and Saul in the Old Testament. David is one of the biblical heroes who needed to restore his spiritual passion on several occasions. What’s more the Bible informs us that he was an adulterer, a murderer, and a liar! (Check it out! He lied three times to the high priest in 1 Samuel 21:2, 8).

Because of his obvious sins, some Old Testament scholars have wondered if Saul got a raw deal. We know Saul rushed a prayer meeting when he felt he couldn’t wait for Samuel to offer a sacrifice according to 1 Samuel 13:8-10. We also, know he became jealous of David according to 1 Samuel 18. But any accounting of David and Saul’s sins, David’s sins were worse. How then did David become the man after God’s heart and Saul was rejected. The difference is that David knew he was a sinner, and he confesses his sin in 2 Samuel 12:13-24, Psalm 32, 51.

Saul, on the other hand, admits to Samuel that he sinned by violating the Lord’s command and instructions, but he blames his men for his failure. He claimed he was afraid of the men and gave in to them. 1 Samuel 15:24-26. Later according to 1 Samuel 26:21, Saul confesses, “I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely, I have acted like a fool and have been terribly wrong.”

This may seem like a genuine confession of sins until we see Saul clearly did not mean what he said because until the day he died he continue to pursue David to take his life.

What is the difference between David and Saul? David’s confession led to a changed life that produced a man after God’s heart. Saul’s confessions change nothing. The pattern of his life continued to be very self-serving. He was angry, jealous, and disturbed but none of that led him to pursue a deeper relationship with God. Instead, driven by his rage, he continued to pursue David.

This leads me to ask “what or whom do you seek? Do you desire to grow? If you know you need to restore your spiritual passion, does it bother you enough that you want to change your course of actions?” The problem with the church of Laodicea is that they did not feel the need to change anything, so Jesus says I am about to vomit you out of my mouth! What has made Jesus so sick? He observes, “*You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’*” Obviously, in saying that, Jesus is acknowledging that he knows that they have no felt need to pursue a deeper relationship with him.

B. We don't see a need for God because we don't know why we need him vv. 17, 18

Laodicea had certain characteristics which have left their mark on the letter written to it.

1. It was a great banking and financial center. When Cicero was travelling in Asia Minor it was at Laodicea that he cashed his letters of credit. It was one of the wealthiest cities in the world. In A.D. 61 it was devastated by an earthquake; but so rich and independent were its citizens that they refused any help from the Roman government and out of their own resources rebuilt their city. Tacitus writes: "One of the most famous cities of Asia, Laodicea, was in that same year overthrown by an earthquake and without any relief from us recovered itself by its own resources" (Tacitus: Annals 14: 27). No wonder that Laodicea could boast that it was rich and had amassed wealth and had need of nothing. It was so wealthy that it did not even need God.
2. It was a great center of clothing manufacture. The sheep which grazed round Laodicea were famous for their soft, violet-black, glossy wool. It mass-produced cheap outer garments. It was specially connected with a tunic called the trimita, so much so, indeed, that it was sometimes called Trimitaria. Laodicea was so proud of the garments it produced that it never realized it was naked in the sight of God.
3. It was a very considerable medical center. Thirteen miles to the west, between Laodicea and the Gate of Phrygia, stood the temple of the Carian god Men. At one time that temple was the social, administrative, and commercial center of the whole area. Until less than a hundred years ago great markets were regularly held on its site. In particular the temple was the center of a medical school which was transferred to Laodicea itself. So famous were its doctors that the names of some appear on the coins of Laodicea. Two of them were called Zeuxis and Alexander Philaethes.

This medical school was famous for two things throughout the world, ointment for the ear and ointment for the eyes. The King James and Revised Standard Versions speak of eye-salve. The word for salve is "kollourion" which literally means a little roll of bread. The reason for the word is that this famous tephra Phrygia, Phrygian powder, was exported all over the world in solidified tablet form in the shape of little rolls. Laodicea was so conscious of its medical skill in the care of the eyes that it never realized that it was spiritually blind.

So, what did the people at this church fail to see? **They failed to see that they were wretched, poor, blind, and naked.**

In 1985 People Magazine published an article entitled "Sin." In that piece the author noted that they surveyed 1000 Americans. Those surveyed indicated they commit about 4.64 sins per month, although churchgoers felt they commit a lot more (6.80) than non-churchgoers. Seventy percent of readers said they are more tolerant of sin than their parents were, but 40 percent also believe they commit more sins than their parents did at the same age. Most said they were significantly more tolerant of homosexuality,

abortion, mercy killing, revenge, pornography, and premarital sex than they were 15 years ago.

There have been many “sin” surveys since this one but none of the ones I found asked how many sins the reader thinks they commit in a month. Several of the more modern surveys include the perspective on sin of those who identify their religious affiliation as, “none.” Some say that group may represent 50% of all Americans by 2030. In any case 33% of “Nones” currently deny the existence of sin. Those who think sin exist downplay its affect on human nature. All that tells me that most Americans today would struggle admitting that they are **wretched, poor, blind, and naked**. Could that be why violence, emotional abuse, road rage, suicides, teenage cutting, depression, and hate crimes are on the increase? If we don’t think we are sinners, we have no need to change. **Add a transition statement here. “We have seen that the first reason why believers become lukewarm is we don’t see our need for God. As we examine the last section of Jesus message to this church, we see believers can also become lukewarm because we don’t know how to get hot.”**

II. We Become Lukewarm When Don’t Know How To Get Hot Vv. 19-22

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 20 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 that person, and they with me.

21 To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

A. If we want to become hot for God, we must be “zealous.”

What do we do then if we know we are not “hot” for Jesus, but we want to be? Gordan McDonald in his book *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion* suggests that we all have 5 kinds of people in our lives.

1) **Very Resourceful People** are the people who stimulate and challenge us in our ministry—our mentors.

(2) **Very Important People** are those who share with us in our ministry, often our associates.

(3) **Very Trainable People** are those people who have potential for ministry, whom we can profitably train.

(4) **Very Nice People** are just that but add little to our ministry and do very little ministry themselves.

(5) **Very Draining People** are those who could easily consume most of our time and energy in ministry. These are the takers, who seldom become producers or givers. These are the very needy folk, who drain us of our strength and time.

As you examine this list it should be easy to see that only the first three categories of people will help us restore our passion. “Very nice people” will often turn on us when we are in crisis. In their strained efforts to remain “neutral” often they gossip about our problems which adds to our anguish. “Very draining people” suck the energy out of us.

What should we do then. Purposely look for opportunities to spend time with anyone from the first three categories. This probably will take a conscious decision to set up an appointment with them when we may not feel like doing it. But if there is any hope of getting hot, we must do it. Just ask yourself, “When I am around people whose love for Jesus is contagious, do I feel better?” Or “when I am with peers who still have the passion I used to have, does that help.” Or “when I pick myself up out my depressed stupor and go and help someone who needs my help do I feel better?” You know the answer to those questions! Stop feeling sorry for yourself then and make the decision to spend time with the people who will help you restore your spiritual passion!

B. If we want to become hot for God, we must “repent.”

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 20 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 that person, and they with me.

After underscoring the dangers of being lukewarm, Jesus challenges the church of Laodicea to repent! He then promises if they do open the door to him, he will come in and eat with them!

Susie Larson is a bestselling author, national speaker, and host of the popular radio show Susie Larson Live. A two-time finalist for the prestigious John C. Maxwell Transformational Leadership Award, Susie is the author of over 20 books and devotionals, and her Daily Blessings reach over half a million people each week on social media.

I know Susie! She is one of the “very resourceful people” that Gordan McDonald describes in his book. There is a reason why around the world her podcast has more than 3.5 million downloads.

She gave the devotional not long ago for the Trustee Board at the University of Northwestern at St. Paul. This highly esteemed influencer and godliest of women took her thoughts from the last verse of Psalm 23. “Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” She shared how comforting it was to her that God’s “goodness and mercy” like a sheep dog were chasing her to Jesus! She created the image of those two dogs nipping at her heels and barking anytime she started heading in the wrong direction. She then said “I need that because I have thoughts that come into my head that are not Godly. Also, there are times when I know I am not doing what Jesus would have me do. But Jesus loves me so much that before I get too far down the wrong path, I hear the barking and the thought of God’s goodness and mercy fill my heart with joy!” That is an attitude of repentance! Susie does not need to be convinced that she is **wretched, poor, blind, and naked**. God’s goodness and mercy remind her of that truth daily which only makes her more grateful and inspiring to people like you and me!

Conc.

Jesus concludes his message to this lukewarm church saying,

21 To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

If you are lukewarm Jesus says think about heaven. Ask yourself can I picture the day when I will sit on my throne next to Jesus?

As you contemplate that thought consider this.

Jeff Moskowitz in an article for “The Christian Science Monitor,” February 12, 2014 wrote,

Since this is a quote, I would read it word for word.

Many Jerusalem residents believe not only that the Messiah will return, but that his arrival is imminent – so imminent they have taken legal precautions to ensure they can return to Jerusalem immediately upon his return.

In apartment contracts around the city, there are clauses stipulating what will happen to the apartment if or when the Jewish Messiah, or mashiach, comes. The owners, generally religious Jews living abroad, are concerned that he will arrive, build a third temple, and turn Israel into paradise – and they will be stuck waiting for their apartment tenants' contracts to run out before they can move back.

It is prophesied in the Jewish scriptures that there will be no more war, murder, or theft, the Jerusalem Temple will be rebuilt (all that remains today is the Western Wall), and all the Jews will return to the land of Israel upon his arrival. This period is known as Olam Haba, or the World to Come.

*Because rental contracts are handled privately, rather than by the municipality, there is no exact count of how many leases in Jerusalem contain such a clause. But although not standard, **the Messiah clause** is requested enough that every Jerusalem property manager and real estate lawyer contacted by The Christian Science Monitor had heard of it, and all except one had dealt with it firsthand.*

Joshua Portman, a Jerusalem-based lawyer, wrote it into a contract for one of his clients, though he says it's not part of his standard lease. Sarah Eiferman, a real estate agent and owner of Eiferman Properties, has had three clients in her career make this unique request. These clauses were relatively lax, giving tenants two to three months to vacate the property, so potential renters voiced no opposition in any of the cases.

But some contracts are less relaxed. Tikvah Blaukopf Schein was told she and her husband would have to vacate their apartment in a week if the Messiah arrived when they moved in last August. A difficult negotiation ensued when she decided to take the clause seriously and wasn't about to let them get evicted.

"I said, 'That's not nice behavior,'" Ms. Schein says. "Where would we go? What would we do?"

Eventually the owner and the renters reached an agreement: If the Messiah showed up, the Scheins would move into one of the two rooms in the apartment for the remainder of the lease, while the owner and his family would get the other one.

But what if the apartment owner says the Messiah has arrived and the renter doesn't agree? This particular disagreement has come up before in Jerusalem's history, although it was about 2,000 years ago.

Opinion among the property managers and real estate lawyers was unanimous that their clients would know the Messiah when they saw him. "When he comes, we'll know. It's in the Old Testament," says Mrs. Eiferman.

A "Messiah clause!" Did you know these contracts existed? What a thought! How would it change your life if you had a "Messiah clause?" Jesus is coming soon! Can you picture it! Will your throne be made of gold, silver, jewels? More importantly when you sit on your throne next to Jesus what will you say? What will you do? What will Jesus say to you? I am hoping he will say to me, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" Matthew 25:23