

You're a Fixer-Upper: I'm Through with Settling!

A sermon based on Revelation 3:14-22 – ***“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.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It would almost be comical if it weren't true (and I don't think Kevin would mind me sharing this story with you – many of you already know it). They were selling their home, planning on moving, and they had interested buyers...this actually happened twice. With each buyer, they disclosed, “The corner of the garage is settling.” And they said, “That's fine, we're still interested”...until the inspection came back with the report, “the corner of the garage is settling.” All of a sudden, it was an issue, and both interested parties walked away. I know, settling is an issue, but still, rather odd.

Today, we're going to talk about that very issue, settling...not with homes, not with buildings, but settling in families...settling especially in this family, our Light of the World family. Is that as big of an issue here as it can be when it happens with a house? Is that an issue with you? Is that an issue to God? All great questions. All great questions for us to really think about today.

But before we take a look at you and a look at us, let's look at another family, the congregation in Laodicea. Now, despite our verses coming from Revelation, a book of the Bible filled with figurative language, these words today are real words really spoken by Jesus to real people in that church, so hear them again, ***“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other...you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold.”***

So, what do we know about this congregation? It seemed to be rather well-off financially, and that was the problem. You see, the people had become so content in their physical wealth, they were neglecting their spiritual health to the point where Jesus said, ***“You don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”***

They were spiritually poor. They weren't hot...certainly not on fire for the gospel, filled with zeal, interest, and concern for the things of the Spirit. They weren't cold...people who were actively opposed to the gospel.

In other words, they had settled, or, the word our verses use, they were "lukewarm." And, by settle, I don't mean like, "Hey, I couldn't do any better than you, so I guess we're together." No, I mean, they were built as believers on this awesome foundation of Christ, but then they grew complacent in their faith lives, apathetic, indifferent, disinterested, lukewarm. By and large, they didn't care about or do what God, in his Word, had called for them to do. They were settling.

And we'll get to what Jesus thinks about that in a little bit, but first, does that sound like you? Neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm in your faith and in your faith life?

Well, what does that look like? What does a lukewarm Christian look like? To me, it sounds like someone who isn't necessarily delinquent, that is, someone who's become almost completely inactive and withdrawn from the congregation life...but it's also someone who's not eager, excited to find ways and opportunities to be in God's Word...someone who's not chomping at the bit or always happy to get involved at church, who's not actively looking for ways to serve.

It's someone who's set on cruise control, coasting...someone who's just going through the motion, and again, is largely complacent, apathetic, indifferent, disinterested. To me, it's like the legislator who merely votes "present" – they're there, but they're not doing anything. That's how I would describe lukewarm.

Does that describe you?

Well, maybe asking a few pointed questions could serve as a good litmus test, if you're not sure.

What's your church attendance look like? And please don't start thinking, "Well, compared to this person who only comes this often..." That's the wrong comparison. No, hold yourself up to God's Word, which says, ***"Let us not give up meeting together (and the verb form there in the original language indicates ongoing, continuous action), as some are in the habit of doing" (Hebrews 10:25).***

Or, how important is being in God's Word and reading your Bible to you? Do you have a Bible reading plan? Do you have a daily devotional book? Are you sticking to it? Or, is your thinking along the lines of, "I get God's Word at church. Why would I need it during the week?"

Or, let's jump over to your church life...because it was in the church of Laodicea where Jesus noticed lukewarm Christians. So, in this congregation, this church family, how would you rate your volunteering? And by volunteering, I mean, you sought out that opportunity, not a couple people almost had to corner you, or you felt guilty into doing it, or you only did it after you made sure you couldn't fit anything else into that part of your schedule. Is this the kind of family where you would drop almost anything to pray for them, visit them, care for them, use your offerings to support them, show love for them? Or is it more often where you're giving off the impression, "I can't be bothered"?

You know, Becky and I have this running joke with each other, where sometimes, one of us will say to the other, "Back when we used to love each other..." You would offer to give me a massage without me having to ask for it. You would ask my opinion before you bought that piece of clothing. You'd be finding excuses to spend time with me instead of hanging out with your other friends. Now, it's our

joke, but it underscores how sometimes in marriage, you sort of start to settle, don't you. You can get into this rut, where you aren't maybe as caring and considerate as you once were. You don't try as hard. You take the relationship for granted...and it becomes the norm.

You know, what's so wrong with being like that in our relationship with God...being a lukewarm Christian?

What it comes down to is this...God gave his all for you. God has withheld nothing from you...to save you, to make you part of his family...to provide for all your needs. And now, what he asks for in return...when it comes to your worship, your growing closer to God through his Word, your caring for and caring about your church family and the work they're doing - it's not nearly as much as he gave up for you.- but when he asks for that in return, too often what he gets back is this lukewarm attitude. Sometimes - maybe a lot of times - we're just going through the motions, phoning it in, doing the bare minimum - call it whatever you will - we're settling.

At the class I went to in Seattle last month, one day the professor got off on a tangent of giving offerings, how in the Old Testament, God's people were commanded to give 10%, so they did. New Testament believers (namely believers today) are not commanded an amount to give to God; we're simply shown the unmatched sacrifice God made to save us and then given the encouragement to give joyfully and generously...and our typical response is "How little can I get away with giving? How can we cut corners to do this second-rate?"

And what he said after that really stuck with me, "When did we become ok with this?"

When did we become ok with settling? When did we become ok with not caring about what God wants us to do?

When did we become ok with looking at the Creator of the world, the Redeemer of our souls, and saying, "You're not worth my time. You're not worth giving my best. You're not that important"?

I mean, you might like it that way. Does God? What does he say? **"Because you are lukewarm...I am going to spit you out of my mouth."** You know what that's like. You go to the restaurant, what you order comes out as is not cold but definitely not warm. You take a bite. You spit it out. It doesn't taste good.

The lukewarm Christian to God? They're nasty, distasteful. The word for lukewarm here conveys an unpleasant taste which causes vomiting. That's what the condition of a soul fluctuating between spiritual lethargy and enthusiasm of love does to God.

It's so bad God ever says, **"I wish you were cold."** I wish you were actively opposed to the gospel. What? Why would that be preferable to lukewarmness? Because those who actively oppose the gospel at least still demonstrate some interest in spiritual things. And lukewarm? Well, it doesn't mean halfway between hot and cold. It means faith declining from what it first was. It's sinking down...closer to cold.

Someone finding out a house is settling, sinking, what do they do? In Kevin's case, they walked away. For lukewarm Christians who have settled and are sinking, God should walk away.

He really should.

He doesn't.

Listen to what Jesus says, ***"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock."*** Where God could have rightly walked away and allowed us to sink into spiritual coldness – unbelief – he instead jumped both feet in and bought into us.

To those in Laodicea who had settled in with their own physical wealth while being tightfisted and ungenerous to God's people and, ultimately, to God, God bought into them. The price? Jesus. Same cost as for us who sometimes find ourselves in the same lukewarm position as them.

Right? True wealth is found only in Christ and in the salvation he procured for us in the fire of affliction he endured through his suffering and death on the cross. Only his blood could cover the costs our sinfulness incurred. Only the blood of the Lamb could wash us clean and make us white. Only Jesus' perfect and unending love could cover over the shamefulness of our poor attitudes. Only our Savior – through his life, death, and resurrection – could forgive our sins.

And he did. Jesus has given us the spiritual healing we need...the "eye salve," he calls it, so we, who may have at times have even been blind to our real condition, can now see him and see his love for us.

By the grace of God, we see the victory Jesus won for us on the cross. And as victors, Jesus tells us, ***"I will give [you] the right to sit with me on my throne."*** In other words, we are going to reign with Christ. Let that sink in. We will reign with Christ.

Does that not deserve our very greatest...hearts that are on fire for Jesus...lives that are eager to listen to God and serve God in everything?

It does.

Which is why Jesus tells us, ***"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline."*** "Those who have settled, who are stuck in lukewarmness, I rebuke and discipline."

Now, many of you know I enjoy board games. A lot. Well, I was once watching a guy reviewing a game, and he was being a bit nitpicky and critical of it. But then he explained himself, how when he had been in high school, his English teacher would give him an A- on a report and just fill the entire essay with red ink, while his friend would get a C or D with no comments. So he asked her, "If I'm doing so well in your class, why aren't you hitting him so hard?" And she said, "It's because you're close, so close to perfection." This reviewer was being hard on the game because he felt it was so close to perfection.

I'm not going to tell you you're so close to perfection. But if you feel like there are times where it seems Jesus, in his Word, being unduly rough and critical of your spirituality, it's because we're so close...to the perfection of heaven. And settling or remaining lukewarm in our Christianity isn't going to cut it. We can do better. And so, Jesus rebukes and disciplines...out of love.

So, how can we...how will we do better? How can we stop settling?

Solution #1 – Care.

The book of Philippians says, ***"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4).*** We're part of God's family, where we see just how much Jesus

cares about us. We're also part of a family here, which means we have a vested interest in what goes on at Light of the World and what we're doing at Light of the World.

And what happens when I care? I give effort...my all, in thanks to Jesus. I stop settling for less than my very best, which take effort, but in the end, when I'm reigning with Jesus, it'll have been worth it.

Solution #2 – Show up.

You know the saying, "Perception is reality"? I think it would be fair to say when only a few people are showing up...to worship, to a Bible study...to a congregational meeting...to a work day...the perception is only those people care because they're there. Prove that perception wrong. Make church and your church family's life an important, necessary part of your life.

Do it because Jesus showed up for you...on the cross...every day to graciously provide for you.

Finally, solution #3 – Be accountable. Cain asked God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" For every one of us, yes. Yes, we are. We are here to be each other's accountability partners, to care enough about them to encourage them – maybe even a bit strongly – when we see them settling. I will tell you I'm going to work at holding you accountable...to promises you've made to God. I want to you do the same with me. I want you to do that with your other family members at Light of the World...in love.

You know, a house that's been settling and sinking doesn't have to be a complete loss. All it takes are the right people, enough money and that house can set straight. The same is true for you and me. If we have been or are settling – lukewarm in our faith lives, we should be a wreck. But we have the right person – Jesus – who paid something better than money – his own life on the cross – to get us set straight with God.

That's it. That's enough for us to be done with the settling...because of Christ...for the sake of Christ. Amen.

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