

Christians That Make Jesus Sick

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[0 : 00] There is a type of Christian that makes Jesus want to vomit. Those are not my words. That's how Jesus himself puts it.

In verse 16 of Revelation 3, the letter we're looking at this morning. Let me read it. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth.

Okay, Jesus doesn't mince his words. In your translation it might be spit, but that's a very lame translation of the actual word, which you can't really cover up.

It means to vomit, to hurl, to throw up your guts. That's what it means. And so what we're reading here is that there is a type of Christian that makes Jesus want to vomit.

And this Christian that makes Jesus want to vomit is a Christian who is called lukewarm. Now I don't want to be the type of Christian that makes Jesus want to vomit.

[1 : 12] Do you? I don't think any of us want to be the type of Christian who makes Jesus want to vomit. And so we've got one task this morning. And that is to find out from this letter what Jesus means, what makes a Christian lukewarm, and why he can't stand them, and how we can make sure that we are not those Christians.

And as we look at this letter, I encourage you to have it open in front of you because we're going to look at a number of verses in it. What we find out is the answer why Jesus can't stand this type of Christian is essentially because this type of Christian is pretty much useless to him.

And so let's look at what lukewarm actually means here. Notice in the passage, Jesus doesn't mind if you're hot or cold as long as you're not lukewarm. At the end of verse 15, I wish you were cold or hot.

Now immediately what that means is that coldness and hotness is not talking about your fervor or your enthusiasm. Lots of people will read it that way because that's how we talk about being lukewarm today.

We use the word, you know, he received a lukewarm reception. It means people weren't very enthusiastic. But this is not talking about enthusiasm. Jesus is not saying, I'd rather you be super enthusiastic or not enthusiastic at all about me.

[2 : 42] He's not saying that. That's not what hot or cold in this context or lukewarm means. Rather, it's actually talking about usefulness. That's what the illustration of water is used for because water is generally useful when it's either hot or cold, right?

Hot water is useful for making tea, for washing your dishes. It's much more useful than lukewarm water. Hot water for showering, getting clean.

Cold water is useful for refreshment. You know, I was in a wedding in France, I was like 37 degrees in the afternoon. I wouldn't want a glass of lukewarm water. A glass of cold water is what you want.

That's what refreshes you. Or you jump into, on a hot day, we're going to go camping in the new year. You jump into, we go by the river. And on a hot day camping, you want to jump into a river that's not lukewarm.

You want to jump into a cold river that's going to be refreshing. So that's the illustration that's being used here. That's what's on the mind of Jesus as he dictates this to John to write to the church in Laodicea.

[3 : 49] Usefulness. Hot or cold water is useful. Lukewarm water is neither useful for either of those things. That's what Jesus means here.

And that is a concept that the Laodiceans would have immediately understood. And that confirms that this is the right interpretation because the context that they live in.

Let me just teach you a little bit about the town of Laodicea. It was located in a valley. There's a map behind me. And as you can see on that map, Laodicea was in the middle of this broad valley.

Now, it was a very important town because it was in the middle of a trade route, a number of roads linked to it. And apparently, historians, archaeologists have uncovered that it had a very active banking system for the ancient world.

It had a very successful textile industry. And it also was a center of medicine and medical studies. People did this kind of stuff in the ancient world.

[4 : 50] And Laodicea had almost everything going for it. But there's one thing that archaeologists tell us Laodicea really struggled with, and that was to have a reliable water supply.

In fact, you can Google it. There are these pipes that they've uncovered, Roman-era pipes that are all around Laodicea who had to pipe in water from the surrounding towns of Heriopolis, which was in the north, and Colossae, which was to the east.

You can see on the map. Heriopolis is to the north, Colossae is to the east. And these are the two towns that supplied Laodicea with water. Now, what's interesting is Heriopolis had famous hot springs.

It was a Roman resort town. Roman generals used to go there and relax in the hot springs. In fact, today, you can see in the picture behind me, it is still a famous resort town. The ancient town of Heriopolis is still a place where people go from all over the world to go relax in these beautiful hot springs.

And what was interesting about Colossae, which was the town on the east, if you go back to the map, is that it received a whole lot of mountain flow from the nearby mountains which fed into the nearby river.

[6 : 08] And so Colossae had a lot of cold spring mountain water. And so you've got Laodicea in the middle of these two towns that are known for their hot water and their cold water, but by the time it was piped to Laodicea, it was neither hot nor cold.

It was lukewarm. And so you see the Laodiceans really would have understood exactly what Jesus was talking about when he talks about water that is useful versus water that is useless.

Because by the time it arrived in Laodicea, in these pipes, not only would it have been lukewarm, but often it would have had these sediments and the clay that was picked up from these Roman pipe systems.

And so they would have just spat it out. It was useless water. And so they really struggled, Laodicea, for centuries to have a useful water supply.

And so that's important context because it means that what Jesus is saying here, when he says, you are lukewarm, you are lukewarm, right?

[7 : 12] He's saying, you're not useful for anything in my kingdom. You're just useless. You're not doing anything for me.

That's what he means. And that is a really important reminder that we often forget in our 21st century consumer culture as Christians.

The reminder is that we were made and saved to be useful for God. Not the other way around. We are meant to be useful to God.

He doesn't exist to be useful for us. It's a very important concept that I think we just need to meditate on for a few minutes. And it's also why the letter starts with this image of Christ.

Remember, each of these letters starts with a different picture of who Christ is, highlighting a different attribute of Him, that these particular people need to see.

[8 : 12] And this is the one that we get given to the Laodiceans. It's in verse 14. Look at what it says. Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea, thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God's creation.

That's who Jesus is. Jesus is the originator of God's creation, or the ruler of God's creation, is the essence of the original word.

That is a very important thing to remember about Him, especially at Christmas time, in Advent. As we remember the birth of Jesus, and all that it means, and that's very important to do, we mustn't forget His pre-existence.

By that I mean the fact that before He was born, as a baby, He existed for eternity past, with the Father and the Spirit. Jesus existed way before He was born.

He was there at creation with His Father, creating with Him. In fact, in Genesis 1, we see hints of Jesus' presence, and in John 1, He makes it very explicit.

[9 : 26] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and all things were created through Him. And He's talking about Jesus, who later became flesh, as we remember at Christmas. But He was there way before Christmas happened.

And when they made us, they made us for their purpose, and for their plans. That's why they made this world, that's why they made humanity.

They didn't make us just to do whatever we want to do. Okay? We were not created to just do what we want, and to live how we want.

We were made for a purpose. And a lot of the Bible is there to teach us what that purpose is. But right at the beginning, what we realize is that we failed to live up to the purpose we were made as humans.

The fall that we read about in Genesis 3 is not just a story about how sin entered the world. It's not just a story of how curse and death entered the world.

[10 : 34] The fall is a story of how we lost our reason for living. when we, when we, when our relationship with God was severed, our connection with our purpose, our very reason we were created was severed, and we, we didn't only enter into a life of death and curse and frustration, but into a life of pointlessness.

And that is what most people are living at the moment today in this fallen world. Lives that really aren't doing anything. Lives that are pointless in the grand scheme of things, in the big picture. People are living just for a little bit of pleasure, a little bit of happiness, temporarily, in and amongst all the frustration and pain, that never lasts, and at the end of the day it's really pointless.

That's why so many people on their deathbeds just have so much existential angst about death because they look back on their lives and they realize it didn't mean anything.

See, that's the curse that we're under, having been separated from God, but that is also what Jesus was born into this world to redeem us from.

[11 : 57] Jesus wasn't only born to rescue us from sin and death, which he did, and it's amazing. Jesus came into this world to rescue us from pointless lives.

Jesus came into this world to rescue us from living lives that don't count for anything at the end of the day. He came to bring us back to the purpose for which God made us.

Jesus came to rescue us, to die for us, to bring us back into the kingdom, to bring us into him so that we can live lives that matter again. And we see this all over the Bible.

this fact that Jesus came to save us to do something, to be useful for him. Ephesians 2, verse 10, for example, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

Right? God has prepared his people who, ahead of time, before he saved us, he prepared what we were going to do for him once we were saved in this world.

[13 : 08] Titus 2, verse 14. He gave himself, Jesus, for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession who are eager to do good work.

Jesus saved us for a purpose, to do things for him in this world. We were made and saved to be useful to Jesus.

He is not there to be useful to us. And let me tell you, those are two completely different brands of Christianity. Christianity. And if you learn to discern, you will see, you will easily start to spot the difference between these two brands of Christianity.

Okay? Just listen to what the preachers are saying, listen to what they're saying and doing in their church. You've got the one brand of Christianity, which is very, very popular.

How Jesus is useful to me. Let me go to church and hear how Jesus is going to improve my life. Let me go to church and hear how I can tap into what Jesus has to help me achieve my goals.

[14 : 27] Then you've got the other brand of Christianity, which is, let me go to church to hear how I can be useful for Jesus. They're very different. And this type of Christianity, which is, let me see how Jesus can be useful for me, me, that's the type of Christianity that makes Jesus want to vomit.

Okay? I hope you can tell the difference. So many Christians treat Jesus as a way to get what they want to help them fulfill their own goals in their life.

And I think that's what's going on with these Laodiceans. You see, they're rich. They're comfortable. They're used to controlling their own lives. That's what riches does for you. That's why people want money.

So we can control, we can call the shots in our lives, which is really what we all deep down simply want to do. But it's to have some control, to be in command, because money allows us to do that. These Laodiceans had lots of money. They were rich, comfortable Christians. Christians. They were this type. They were the ones who Jesus was useful to.

[15 : 44] And it's not to say that they weren't enthusiastic. Lots of these Christians who Jesus is useful to are super enthusiastic about that. And they will worship, and they will praise, and they will speak in tongues, and they will be super, super on fire.

Right? These Laodiceans, they probably went to church and they were enthusiastic because Jesus was so useful to them. But it turns out that they were not useful to Him.

And so He issues this stark warning in this letter. If you're not going to be the people I saved you to be, I really don't need you. And I'm thinking of just throwing you up.

That's His warning to them, but I think it's the same warning to 21st century Christians today, because it is more easy in this generation for Christians to be comfortable and useless than ever before.

Make sure you're not one of those Christians. Make sure you're not a comfortable, useless Christian who does not get involved, who never invites people to Christmas, to services that the church lays out so that the word can go out, who's never praying, who's never involved in kingdom things.

[17 : 04] Don't be one of those comfortable, useless Christians because that's the kind of Christian that makes Jesus sick. Great thing is though, it's not hard to be useful for Jesus.

It actually isn't. You don't have to have fancy degrees, you don't have to have special training. Jesus allows, in fact we've been learning this last year, Jesus gives each of his believers gifts to use for him, for the common good.

Everybody that the Holy Spirit resides in, that's all you need, just God's Spirit in you. You know, skills and training and stuff comes afterwards. It's not actually hard to be useful for Jesus, but what we learn in this letter is there is one major thing, one major thing that prevents us from being useful to Jesus, and it's self-sufficiency.

Self-sufficiency. Lukewarm Christians, we learn in this letter, are self-sufficient Christians. That is what actually causes their uselessness to Jesus.

So look carefully in verse 17 at the reason these Laodiceans were so lukewarm and useless to Jesus. Verse 17, let me read it.

[18 : 27] For you say, I'm rich, I have become wealthy, and I need nothing. Jesus is like, oh really?

You need nothing, do you? Well, that's their attitude. You don't realize, Jesus replies, you are actually wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

You think you need nothing, you need everything. One of the biggest delusions a human can have is thinking that they're self-sufficient.

Right? Thinking, oh, I've got my life under control. I don't need anything from anyone. I can supply everything that I need. I've got a good job. You know, I'm strong.

I'm self-sufficient. I'm independent. Don't people love that? Being independent. They can take our lives, but they can't take our freedom.

[19 : 31] Freedom, independence, self-sufficiency. America has a whole holiday to celebrate independence, right? It's a very popular virtue in our society to be self-sufficient, to be independent.

independent. But that is one of the biggest delusions that we can have, to think that we are actually self-sufficient. And you know what? God, in His mercy, has given us daily reminders of how dependent we really are on Him.

I mean, think about it. God didn't need to give us lungs. Right? He could have, bear with me, He could have created us so that we didn't, every minute, need this invisible stuff that's around us and have to suck it into ourselves in order to stay alive.

He could have made us so we didn't have lungs, and there could have been another way that our blood supply could have worked without needing air. But He made us, and He could have even made us like, that we have to breathe, I don't know, like a whale.

When does a whale have to breathe? Once every, I don't know, long time. They can hold their breath for a long time. But He wanted specifically to remind humans, we are so dependent on what He gives us.

[20 : 46] Every second of every day, we need what God gives if we are going to stay alive. God has given us daily reminders of how dependent we really are.

But the biggest delusion is when we convince ourselves that we are independent, we are self-sufficient, we don't need anything outside of ourselves. Because the truth is, we were never made to be self-sufficient.

independent. As creatures, we were never made to be independent. That is just not what we were made for. We were never made to be these independent figures who strike our own path and live our own lives.

That is never what humans or any creature was made for. We were created to be dependent beings. We were created to only be able to be alive and useful and fulfilling our purpose when we are depending on our Creator.

We don't like that idea. It grates against our sense of independence that we love and we cling to and we cherish. But it is the truth. You were made to be dependent always.

[21 : 56] You know, when those health insurance forms come and say, how many dependents are in your household? I'll be like, all of us? We're all dependent. You were made, no matter how independent you think you are, you were made to be dependent and you never won't be dependent.

But we still really want to be dependent. We still really want to be, sorry, we want to be independent. We don't want to be dependent. We want to be self-sufficient. We strive to be self-sufficient.

We want to clear our debt so that we can be financially free and financially independent. And that's a good thing, by the way. But we mustn't think that when we do that, now we can call the shots in our lives that we are actually independent.

We're not. We're completely dependent on everything God gives us. Our skills to do our jobs, our money, our food, our air, our everything. We were created to be dependent, but we still, we've got this sense in us always that wants to break out and find self-sufficiency, find independence, because you know what?

That's the nature of original sin. That's exactly what Adam and Eve did in the garden. It is part of breaking relationship with our Creator, this desire to be independent of Him.

[23 : 12] And we want to be independent of God so that we can control our own lives. That is the sinful tendency we all have. We want to be independent of God so that we can break free of Him and control our own lives.

And go where we want. And do what we want. When we first got our dog, Finnan, he is a puppy, he's full of energy, still full of beans, even though he's older and more mature now.

You wouldn't think it. But when we first got him and we took him for walks, and he's this like teenage dog, right? Just older than a puppy. And we would let him off the lead in the park or on the beach or something.

And now immediately he's like, I'm free! I'm independent! I'm independent! And he goes running off and he totally forgets that he has humans that he has to come back to. And we have to go, once he attached himself to another family and they were going to take him home.

And we had to go and say, no, sorry, that's our dog. And he looked at us like, who are you again? He was just, you know, dogs are like that. You let them go and they're just off and they just want to be free and independent.

[24 : 19] He didn't last like that though because he soon realized that he needs to stick with us if he wants food. And water. And shelter. And so, even though he doesn't have a huge brain, it figured out that the only way he can get what he needs is that he's actually a dependent creature and he needs us.

And so now, he's matured. And we let him off as he sticks by us. He's always looking back. Where are my humans? Where are my humans? I actually need them. You see, and that's kind of, that's a picture of a Christian's maturity.

That we start thinking, oh, you know, we're not really, you know, God's, it's great and the gospel's great and stuff, but I'm still living my own life. But the more we grow as Christians, the more dependent we become on God.

The more we realize we need him for absolutely everything. That is actually the sign of Christian maturity. To become more and more dependent on God, not less.

But even then, even if we've been Christians for a long time, we still have that tendency in us not to be too dependent on God.

[25 : 29] Still, still to control and hold a little bit of independence myself. So I can still, most of the time, do what I want to do. And we have this tendency not to admit our absolute daily need of him and what he gives us.

And it's the tendency we all have. You know, if you, if you did realize your absolute daily need of him and what he gives you and his means of grace into your life, you would never skip church ever or growth group.

You would always make church the reason you skip everything else. But when you choose to, when you wake up on a Sunday morning and you go, I don't need to go to church today, what you're saying is, I don't really need what God has to give to me today.

I don't really need to be with his people sitting under his word today. It's nice, but it's not absolutely essential. But that is a self-sufficient spirit.

To think you don't need what God has to give you through his means of grace. To not cling to those things and realize that we are absolutely more in need of what God gives us through things like this than we are of water and air for our eternal life.

[26 : 55] We're far more needy for what God gives than we think we are. But we have the self-sufficient spirit and that's what the Laodiceans had. And we know actually from history that the Laodiceans were a people who took great pride in their self-sufficiency.

In AD 60, very close to when this letter was written, there was a major earthquake in that whole valley and the town of Laodicea was almost completely destroyed.

And the Roman Empire, it was so bad that the Roman Empire and the emperor himself said, listen, we can send you supplies to help you rebuild your town. And the Laodiceans, they said, no thanks, we've got this.

They literally turned down the Roman Empire's help so that they could build their own town themselves with their own resources. They were that self-sufficient. They took great pride in that.

And that is a commendable virtue in our age to be self-sufficient, not to need anyone's help.

We all have that, right? We all have that, don't we? When something's going wrong in our lives, oh, what's up? Can I help? No, no, no, I'm fine. I'm fine.

[28 : 04] No, I don't need anything. I'm independent. I'm self-sufficient. We're all a little bit Laodicean. But you see, the very thing the world commends, this self-sufficient independence, is something that leads to spiritual disaster.

Because a self-sufficient spirit causes us to rely on ourselves. And when we do that, we are not truly relying on Christ. And when we are not relying on Christ, we won't ever be useful to Him.

Because if we're going to be useful to Him, we need what He has to give us. That is exactly what He goes on to say in verse 18. That's what He's trying to convince these Laodiceans of.

Verse 18, let's read it. I advise you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich. White clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed.

And ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see. It's very interesting how this is a specific reference to everything the Laodiceans thought they had going for them.

[29 : 14] We know that they had a very active banking system. They were very rich. They had a textile industry. And they had a medical industry. And yet, the point Jesus is making here is the things you think you can do for yourself, money, clothes, medicine, I can do much better.

I can give you what you can never get yourself. True treasure that doesn't get destroyed by moth and rust.

Kingdom clothes, true clothes that are white clothes, righteousness. And the medicines to, the ointments to open your eyes so that you can see what is true in this world.

Only I can give you that. And He's saying the same to us this morning. He's saying whatever you're relying on yourself for today, I can give you far more if you rely on me, Jesus says.

And you need to realize that you desperately need what I can give far more than you know. And sadly, because of our natural self-sufficient spirit, sometimes Jesus has to send us really hard trials, really tough times, to remember our true state that we are actually, just like the Laodiceans, wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

[30 : 48] And sometimes it's only when we're going through those tough times that we realize that about ourselves. But when He does that, brother or sister, even in this letter that is so solid, and

there's no sort of commendation, this is one of the only letters that doesn't have a commendation.

And it's just this sobering wake-up call. Even then, Jesus has this reminder of His mercy. And He says, listen guys, Laodiceans, Christians, I'm going to have to wake you up to this fact that you are poor, wretched, pitiful, blind, and naked, and that's not going to be comfortable for you.

But, look what He says in verse 19, As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent.

Be zealous and repent. Realize that this hard time, this trial, is sent to you because Jesus loves you so much and He wants you to take what He can give you.

Because He knows that's the best thing for you. Rather than to rely on yourself. So be zealous and repent. In other words, hunger for what Jesus can give. Hunger for it.

[32 : 04] Hunger for what you can get when you come and sit with His people around His Word.

Hunger for it. Put everything else aside. You know, the image I had when I was thinking of this word, zeal, being zealous, is, you know when a country, typically in Africa somewhere, goes through famine, and they're in terrible famine.

It's happened quite a few times in the last decades. And the United Nations sends these food trucks. They send in these food trucks filled with bags of corn or maize or whatever, rice, to give to the people.

And they arrive. Have you seen those scenes? Have you seen what happens? Those videos. The crowds just run. These thin, bedraggled people who have no energy because they haven't had any food still sprint to this food truck.

And as these UN aid workers are offloading the food, they're just grabbing it. And they're scrambling over each other to get the food. And they're fighting each other to get it. That's what it means to be zealous.

And that should be our attitude to church, to the means of grace that Jesus wants to give us.

[33 : 16] To be zealous, to be hungry for what Jesus wants to give us. Are you zealous for the things that Jesus wants to give you? Are you willing to put everything else aside so that you can grab the means of grace Jesus wants to give you?

Or do you think you've already got what you need? Especially if you're well-off. That is a tendency well-off people will have to be independent. I've got what I need.

I can control my life. Well, that's what's going to keep you lukewarm, brother or sister. That's self-sufficient spirit. But if you realize your true need, if you repent of your self-sufficiency and you realize that these difficult times in life is Jesus teaching you to rely more on Him.

And if you learn to really do that, then not only will you start living a more useful life to God in this age, but also in the age to come as the letter ends, as all seven of these letters end, to the one who conquers, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on His throne.

Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. Let's pray. Lord, we want to listen to what you say to the churches.

[34 : 48] And Lord, we know that as we've studied these seven letters over the last seven weeks, you are not only speaking to Smyrna and Ephesus in Laodicea, you are speaking to Plumstead, you are speaking to St. Mark's, and we pray that you would help us to have ears to listen to what you're saying.

And help us, Lord, not just to let these words pass us by because we think we have what we need. Help us to realize that without you we are wretched and poor and pitiful and blind and naked.

And help us, Lord, to be zealous, to repent of our self-sufficiency, and to take hold of what you have so that we will be useful for you and your kingdom and that we will start living out the purpose for which you saved us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.