

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark, and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church; I'm glad you're here. Over the last 8 weeks we've been preaching through the Book of Revelation, and this morning's sermon will address the message Jesus spoke to a church located in the city of Laodicea.

In keeping with one of the central themes in our text this morning, I've created a three question pop quiz designed to reveal your response to door knocking. Are you ready?

1. *When you hear someone knocking on your door, what is your internal response?* **(a) You're hesitant**; it could be a friend, but it could also be a door-to-door sale person; **(b) You groan**; you don't care who it is—you don't want to answer the door; or **(c) You're excited**; you can't wait to see who's there.

2. *What's your physical response to the door knocking?* **(a) You call out—There's someone at the door**—and hope that your roommate, spouse, kids, or cat will answer the door for you; **(b) You turn out all the lights**, remain stay as quiet as possible, until the person goes away; or **(c) You answer the door** yourself.

3. *When someone drops by for an unexpected visit, you are most likely to:* **(a) Talk to them briefly but tell them you have other plans**; **(b) Tell them you have plans but welcome them to join you**; or **(c) Welcome them in and change your plans**.

At my house, our front door contains glass which allow us to see who's knocking. When our kids were small, we offered the following instruction: *if you don't know who is knocking at the door, come and get either Mom or Dad; never open the door to a stranger*. More

often than not, the identity of the knocker determines our response. I wonder, **how would you respond if Jesus was the one knocking at your door?**

On the screen behind me you can see a painting by the English artist, Holman Hunt; he entitled this painting *The Light of the World*, finishing it some time between 1851 and 1853. The inspiration for this painting came from the Biblical text we will be looking at this morning; in Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, "*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.*"

Hunt's painting is filled with imagery, metaphor, and meaning. In keeping with vs. 20, the Christian's heart is pictured as a home, but notice that Jesus stands outside, not inside. Notice that there is no handle on the outside of the door—Jesus is knocking because He must be invited in. Notice that the door is overrun with ivy, and the hinges are rusted—everything about it screams "neglect"—this door has been closed for a very, very, long time.

Holman's painting asks a pointed question: *is your heart Christ's home, or, does He stand outside knocking?* Friends, Before I conclude my sermon this morning, I trust you will be able to give a clear, honest, answer.

At this time, I want to invite you to open your Bibles with me to Revelation 3:14-22.

The city of Laodicea lay at a crossroads, with important trade routes running both east and west. Laodicea was wealthy because they were the Swiss bankers of the ancient world. They also raised a breed of

sheep that produced very fine, luxurious, black wool that was in high demand throughout the Empire. In addition to wealth and fine clothing, Laodicea also boasted an advanced medical centre; their physicians had developed an ointment that had healing properties for weak and ailing eyesight.<sup>1</sup>

Laodicea was a city that had it all—wealth, fashion, and cutting edge healthcare. History tells us that when a great earthquake devastated Laodicea and many other nearby cities, Rome offered financial aid but Laodicea refused—*we don't need your charity!* The citizens of Laodicea prided themselves on being self-reliant.

To this proud city, Jesus spoke the following word:

*“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.*

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Fee, *Revelation*, 57.

<sup>2</sup> John 14:9.

*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.”*

The message to Laodicea follows the same pattern as the messages to the other churches; it begins with a description of Jesus. But unlike the previous six descriptions, this one is not drawn from Revelation 1:13-16. Here **Jesus is described as God's Amen**, which is another way of saying that **He is God's Trustworthy Word, His Final Word, the clearest revelation of who God is**. Jesus once said, *“If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.”*<sup>2</sup>

Jesus is then described as the **faithful and true witness**; this is a continuation of the same thought. If we're honest, most of us do the best we can to determine the right path and make good decisions, but there is so much we don't know and cannot see. How can we be confident in our own limited perspective, or the limited perspective of others?

**Jesus is God's faithful and true witness**. He sees everything from heaven's perspective and can speak truthfully and authoritatively

about what is, and, what is to come. *Is anyone more trustworthy than Jesus? Is it wise to trust your perspective over His?*

Jesus is also described as the “**ruler of God’s creation**”. He is not the ruler of some of God’s creation, some of the time, but of **all of it, all of the time**. The pages of history are littered with those who set themselves up as God’s rivals, those who use wealth, power, and privilege to take what they want. In the first century, Rome was the world’s great oppressor; everyone bowed to her in one way or the other.

But never forget—Empires rise and fall. Does Rome still rule the world? Kings and Queens, no matter how powerful, all have a shelf-life. At the moment in Western culture, bowing before Jesus is depicted as foolishness—there are more current, and relevant, options. But as a student of history, I say, give it time and we’ll see who made the foolish choice. *Hitching your hopes to the power of the day is woefully short-sighted; **Jesus is the only Ruler who will stand firm forever***. What good is it to gain the world today, but tomorrow lose your soul?

At this time, let me encourage you to look at vs. 15-16. The Christians in Laodicea are described as being lukewarm—neither hot nor cold. Jesus said, *“I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm...I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”*

These are strong words, so strong in fact, that we might be tempted

to soften them. We much prefer a meek and mild Jesus, someone empathetic and comforting. Jesus **is** empathetic and comforting, but there is more to Him than that. As we shall soon see, Jesus does love, but the love we want from Him isn’t always the love we get; sometimes we need “tough” love—more on than in a moment.

There are some geographical details that are not included in the text but would have been well-known to the first readers of *Revelation*; these details help to explain what Jesus is saying. Laodiceans may have boasted that their city had it all, but in actual fact, their city had an inadequate water source. Their water came from a spring, located 10 kilometres to the South, and had to be transported through a system of stone pipes. By the time it got to Laodicea, it was drinkable, but just barely.<sup>3</sup>

Laodicea had two sister cities—Hierapolis to the North and Colossae to the South. Hierapolis was famous for hot springs that were said to have healing properties, but by the time this water flowed south to Laodicea, it was no longer hot—it was lukewarm. By contrast, Laodicea’s other sister city—Colossae—enjoyed cold, spring water. Laodicea had neither.

It’s possible that the term “lukewarm” describes these Christians’ spiritual temperature, but it’s unlikely. Jesus says that He would rather that they be cold than lukewarm; if He were talking about spiritual temperature, isn’t lukewarm better than stone cold? It’s more likely that Jesus is making a statement about the church’s

<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book Of Revelation*, 107.

failure to refresh the spiritually weary (like the cold springs in Colossae), and their failure to heal the spiritually sick (like the hot springs in Hierapolis).<sup>4</sup>

**illus:** When it comes to coffee, people like it hot—and cold—but almost no one likes it lukewarm. If barista serves an unsuspecting customer a lukewarm coffee, it's likely to be spit back into the cup. When it comes to a drink, “lukewarm” means neither hot nor cold, but when it comes to a person, it means indecisive or uncommitted.

The story is told of Mickey Cohen, a gangster from Los Angeles, in the 1940's, who made a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ. However, as time passed, Mickey's new Christian friends began to express their concerns. Though Micky insisted that he was a Christian, he refused to leave his gangster lifestyle behind.

“When they confronted him...he protested, ‘You never told me I had to give up my career. You never told me I had to give up my friends. There are Christian movie stars, Christian athletes, Christian businessmen. So what's the matter with being a Christian gangster? If I have to give up all that—if that's Christianity—count me out.’”<sup>5</sup>

Lukewarm means indecisive or uncommitted. If you think you can follow Jesus **and** keep your options open, then you've already made your decision and shown Jesus to the door. If you're not in, you're out; if you're not following Jesus, you're walking away. Nobody likes lukewarm, not even Jesus.

While His language is stark, “I am **about to** spit you out of my mouth,” notice that the deed has not yet been done—there is still time to return.

**vs. 17-18:** “*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. 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.*”

Here's Jesus offers both a diagnosis and a cure. The church was confident and self-assured but Jesus described their state as wretched and pitiful. Laodicea was known for its many banks, but in Jesus' eyes this church was spiritually bankrupt. Laodicea was a purveyor of fine woollen clothes, but spiritually speaking, these Christians were naked and ashamed, no longer covered by the righteousness of Christ. Laodicea was known all over the Empire—they had a cure for failing eyesight—and yet these Christians were blind to their own spiritual condition.

Listen again to their own self-assessment: “*I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.*” Self-reliance is an idol in our culture every bit as much as it was in Laodicea. The danger in wealth and prosperity is coming to believe that we can make life work without God. I'm not talking about embracing an atheist philosophy, I'm talking about having a belief in God that barely

<sup>4</sup> Rudwick and Green, as quoted by Mounce, 109.

<sup>5</sup> Chuck Colson, *Loving God*, 81-92, as quoted by Craig S. Keener, *NIV Application Commentary: The Book of Revelation*, 148.

penetrates the surface of our lives. Many Christians live as practical atheists.

For nearly every problem, **we** can come up with a solution. When we're sick we go to hospital; we have schools to educate us; seminars help us get ahead in our industries; financial advisors help us attain our desired level of financial security. And besides all of that, we have Google—*who needs God when we have Google?* Google can give you millions of answers to your question in less than a second.

Let me ask you, *is your life practically prayerless?* **Prayerlessness is the clearest indicator that we are walking the path of self-reliance;** our prosperity has blinded us.

There is a perspective from below that seems right to us, but *Revelation* connects us to a perspective from above. Jesus is God's Amen, the Final Word, the Faithful and True Witness, who sees everything and everyone clearly—**He can speak authoritatively to our condition because He sees what is, and what will be.**

The Laodiceans are like us in so many ways—resource-rich but spiritually bankrupt. And so, Jesus counsels them, and us, to buy what we need from Him.

- Jesus can transform our wretchedness into blessedness;
- He can transform spiritual poverty into true riches (gold refined in the fire);
- Jesus can heal our blindness so that we can see Him as He is, and see ourselves as we are;
- Jesus can meet us in the place of our shame and dress us in clothes fit for royalty.

In vs. 19, Jesus says something that goes against the grain of our culture: "*Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.*"

In today's Western therapeutic world, we don't want to be corrected or directed, we want to be affirmed and celebrated; the idea of a God who corrects and directs has fallen out of fashion. Today's definition of love is primarily spoken about in terms of permissiveness: *if you love me, you will let me do what I want, you will approve of, and celebrate, all my choices.* We're told that love lets people be and do what they want, without expectation or restriction. **Love says "yes;"** to say "no" is considered unloving, judgemental, and manipulative. So goes the current rhetoric.

It's ridiculous of course, and spite of all the fuss people make, no one really believes that love works this way. When a close friend tells you that he or she intends to gamble their life savings on a horse race, does love say "Great idea! Go for it!"? When a child says to a parent, "if you love me, you will buy me an iPhone 8—or a laptop, or a car, or a 6 month vacation in Southeast Asia," are they tapping in to love's true nature? What would a loving parent say?

Love without boundaries isn't love—it's indecisive, uncommitted, and unreliable. Jesus says, "*Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.*" Once again, **Jesus is God's Amen, God's Final Word; He is the Faithful and True Witness.** Because He sees everything from heaven's perspective, He can speak about right and wrong, healthy and unhealthy—He loves us too much to simply tell us what we want to hear. "*Repent,*" Jesus says, "*unless you return, you will remain poor, blind, and naked.*"

**Vs. 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.*”

As we return to this verse, let us return to the metaphor it paints—**our heart is Christ’s home**. This verse has been famously used, by Billy Graham and others, as a call for unbelievers: *Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart; will you let Him in?* In the context of the message to Laodicea this is a call to Christians, who through self-reliance, have shown Jesus to the door and pushed Him out into the cold.

But in an unbelievable act of humility and self-restraint, Jesus doesn’t kick the door down, or, stomp off and leave us to die in our blindness. Patiently, graciously, mercifully, He knocks on the door of your heart. *Will you let Him in?* In the ancient world, sitting down to share a meal was a sign of friendship, closeness, togetherness; it still is today.

Perhaps you started off well enough; you put your faith in Jesus years ago and followed Him closely. But maybe as the years have raced by, you have drifted from Jesus; perhaps you’ve pushed Him from the centre in order to make more room for yourself. You might think you’re doing rather well—*God has blessed me, and I don’t need Him like once did*. Perhaps without knowing it, you’ve become poor, blind, and naked.

We notice in Holman’s painting that the door has no handle on the

outside—it can only be opened from within. We have a choice to make today, and every day. Following Jesus is not a one time decision, it’s an every day, every moment decision. Richard Neuhaus once said, “It is our determination to be...in control that makes us unavailable to God.”<sup>6</sup>

*Is your heart His home, or have you retained the ownership?*

Maybe you heard Jesus knocking and opened the door to Him—*come on in Jesus, make yourself at home!* But maybe you’ve been careful to keep Jesus contained: the kitchen, living room, and the den are ok, but the bedroom, basement, and garage are off limits. *It’s my home after all; He can’t do as He pleases, He’s **my** guest.*

Perhaps you’ve been coming to church for some time; perhaps you’ve been exploring Christianity seeking to understand who God is and what’s He’s like. Jesus stands at the door of your heart and He knocks. He loves you. He left the perfection of heaven, took on our flesh and blood, and died for you and for me on the cross.

The cross addresses the broken relationship between God and humanity; through Jesus we have been reconciled to God. Jesus died on the cross, bearing the wrong things we have said and done. At the cross, Jesus broke the power of sin—if you feel bound or captive in some area of your life, Jesus can lead you to freedom. At the cross, Jesus broke the power of death; though we will die one day, through Christ we can be raised to a life that never ends.

*Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart; will you let Him in?*

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Neuhaus, as quoted by Stephen Seamands, *Ministry In Th Image Of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service*, 28-29.

**Vs. 21** concludes, *“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.”*

It struck me last night as I was thinking things through that those who invite Jesus in to sit at their table will in turn be invited to sit with Jesus on His throne.

There are many forces at work in our world, claiming power and authority. “But,” as Richard Bauckham writes, “heaven is the sphere of ultimate reality; what is true in heaven must become true on earth.” Jesus is seated on the throne; He is the Beginning, the End, and the measure of all things. He is High King of Heaven and the High King over all the earth—*will He be the High King of your heart?*

**Pray**