

Sermon for Sunday, April 6, 1975 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

CHRISTIANS THE LORD CAN'T STAND
Revelation 3:14-22

Text: "So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth."
Revelation 3:16

At our house we drink a lot of tea. On a hot, sweaty summer's day when you've been working in the yard, it is pretty hard to beat a big glass of tea, filled with ice and frosty cold. On the other hand, when the ground is frozen and the cold north wind is moaning through the trees and the temperature is dropping, it is hard to beat a piping, steaming cup of hot tea when you come in out of the cold. Yet, at no time of the year and no matter what the weather conditions, nobody at our house ever drinks lukewarm, tepid tea.

Have you ever come home from work in the hot summer time - your clothes sticking to your back, perspiration running down your elbows, and headed for the refrigerator - you take out the water bottle, pour yourself a glass of ice cold water, and take a big drink only to discover that someone has just filled the water bottle? Somehow that tepid water didn't fill the bill, did it? Most of us like food and drinks in the extreme. Either we want them good and hot or else we like them nice and cold. Rarely do we like anything that is just tepid - lukewarm. Instead, we say something like this, "Hey, how about a little more ice in this?" Or, we say, "How about heating this up a bit?" How does the old nursery rhyme go? "Some like it hot, some like it cold.." And while some even like it in the pot nine days old, nobody much seems to like it lukewarm!

In our scripture for this morning the Bible tells us that God feels the same way about Christians. The Bible says, "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth." God can't stand a lukewarm Christian.

Our scripture for this morning gives us some of the reasons why God can't stand a lukewarm Christian. One of the reasons is that he has a wrong view of self. The Bible says, "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing..." And if it is true that we think we are doing pretty well, if we think we don't have need of much, doesn't it mean that we think pretty highly of ourselves? How do you see yourself this morning? How do you judge yourself? One of the preacher jokes I've heard concerns the minister who had a lady in his church who was notorious for gossiping. For years he tried to get through to her that gossip was a sin, but somehow it never connected. She had a view of self that was very high. Finally, one Sunday night she arrived at church for the evening service a little early and then a great rain storm came up. When time for the services came, she was the only person present. The preacher was delighted and proceeded to preach a sermon to his listener on the evils of gossip. After the service was over she greeted him at the door and said, "well, pastor, if they had a' been here, you sure would have told them."

The fact is, there is a psychological device in all of us whereby we tend to judge ourselves in an unrealistic way. We rationalize our mistakes and justify our behavior until they become almost virtues. As a friend of mine once told me, "I had read the Bible many times, but I was never converted until I finally realized that the sinner it was talking about was me." And isn't that true for most of us? Until we see it is our lives that Jesus is talking about, until we see it is our lives that the laws of God are talking about, the Bible doesn't get very urgent. It's like the man who is walking down the street and he sees the fire truck go by.

"Well," he thinks with some indifference, "there must be a fire somewhere." He walks down the street a little further and he sees a column of smoke ahead. "Well," he comments, showing some lukewarm interest, "it looks like the fire is in my neighborhood." He continues to walk along and then suddenly breaks into a frantic run, shouting in dismay, "Good heavens, it is my house!" Now, the same is true for the Christian. Once he discovers whose house is on fire, he ceases to be lukewarm. The Bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That means that your house is on fire this morning. The Bible is talking about you and me. We are the ones standing in need of redemption. We are the ones who need to be saved. Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and fell down before him? "What must I do to be saved," he cried. His house was on fire and he knew it.

So, one of the problems with the lukewarm Christian is that he has a wrong view of self. He sees himself more righteous than he is; he sees himself in a better light than he deserves. And as long as he does that, he cannot understand the urgency of his own need and his own spiritual problems. As our scripture says, "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

The second problem of the lukewarm Christian is not only a mistaken view of self, but a mistaken view of sin. As the Lord spoke to the Christians in Laodicea he said to them, "I counsel you to buy white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see." That is, these people did not realize the seriousness of their condition. They were naked and didn't know it, blind and unaware of it. You see, sin is usually something the other fellow does. Too many of us are like the woman who, as the phrase puts it, "got religion" at a revival meeting. "I'm saved," she cried, "I'm saved from tobacco, saved from liquor, saved from cards." The fact of the matter was, she had never smoked in her life, had never tasted liquor, and didn't even know how to play cards. She had been saved from something she had never done in the first place. What are you saved from this morning? What are the sins in your life that separate you from God?

Actually, if each of us were asked to rate himself on a scale from one to ten as to how sinful he was, where would you put yourself? If one is very good and ten is very bad, where would you fall on such a scale? Would you be a two which is almost perfect? Or would you be a nine, which is next to the worst? Isn't it a matter of fact that most of us would put ourselves somewhere about number five? We aren't the best people in the world, but on the other hand, we aren't all that bad either!

But the fact that we would even take such a rating system seriously means we don't understand the nature of sin correctly. Your sin is such this morning that it is deserving of eternal death. The sin in the lives of each one of us is such that apart from some act of grace on the part of God each of us is doomed to eternal separation from God. Look at St. Paul, for example. He had given up everything to follow Jesus. He had suffered shipwreck, he had gone to jail, he had been flogged in public, he had suffered all kinds of indignities for the sake of Jesus. He certainly didn't worship false idols, had not committed murder nor been guilty of adultery, nor coveted anything that was his neighbors. Yet, this same man cried out, "I am the chief of sinners." You see, he had a proper view of sin. He recognized that sin separated him from God and that such separation was eternal death.

You see, as long as you think you are doing fairly well, as long as you - like the Laodiceans - say, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing" you cannot realize how desperate your situation really is. St. Paul writes, "There is none righteous, no not one..." And that means that sin is so serious in the lives of

of each of us that all of us stand condemned.

Now, all of this is leading up to the third thing I want to say this morning which is this: if you have an erroneous view of self, if you have a wrong view of sin; it means that you have a poor view of the Saviour. If you see yourself in a very good light, someone who, after all, isn't so bad; and if you see sin as something not so very serious in your life, what kind of a Saviour do you need? Well, not much of one, do you.

See how it works. Suppose you are walking down some steps with a friend and you trip. Your friend reaches out and grabs your arm as you stumble and keeps you from falling. You are mildly appreciative. "Oh," you say, "Thank you so much. I almost fell." But change that scene around. Suppose you are out swimming with this same friend and suddenly you get a cramp. You begin to flounder in the water and suddenly you realize that you are drowning. You begin to go under, your breath is gone and water begins to fill your lungs. Fear strikes your heart and you know you stand on the brink of eternity for you are dying. Then your friend dives in for you, catches you and with strong, sure strokes, carries you to safety. What is the difference between that saving act of your friend and the time he caught your arm when you stumbled?

Well, the difference is, the second time my friend is my saviour. He has snatched me from the jaws of death. Do you see? How you view sin and its impact in your life, how you view sin and what it means to you determines how you view Jesus. Is your sin such that you are not so bad after all? Then you do not need much of a saviour. But if your sin is such that you are standing on the brink of eternal death; if sin is such that you are cut off and separated from God; if sin is such that you are weighed in the balance and found wanting; if sin is such that you are helpless and unable to help yourself, then you need a great saviour, you need a mighty saviour.

The church at Laodicea was filled with Christians the Lord couldn't stand. They had a wrong view of self, for they thought more highly of themselves than was justified. They had a poor understanding of sin, because they thought they were not so bad after all. As a consequence, they didn't need much of a saviour so they were not excited about their religion. But God said to them, "You are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth." Yes, they thought they were spiritually rich and had need of nothing, but God said to them, "you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

Now I don't know what you think of yourself or your spiritual condition but you need a great saviour and if you don't know that you are poor and blind and naked. How do you see yourself this morning. What kind of a saviour do you need?

Back during the days of Jesus when a man came to pay for his sins he brought a little sacrificial lamb that was pure without spot or blemish and he went to the sacrificial altar and there he laid his hand on the little animal and prayed to God that his sins might be transferred to the animal and then the little animal was slain. The animal who didn't deserve it. But he was slain for the sins of that man. We call that substitution. When you realize that you deserve to die, you know you need a great saviour and you can never be lukewarm about Jesus, when you know your sins were laid on him and he was your substitute in death.

One of the best known passages, I suppose, in the whole Bible is the 20th verse of the third chapter of Revelation that we read this morning. "Behold, I stand at

the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him." Did you ever realize that that scripture was said to people the Lord couldn't stand--to lukewarm Christians. That's our scripture for today in the church for people who have lost their enthusiasm and zeal who need to learn again that a separation from God is eternal death and that Christ is the only saviour who can heal the brokenness. "Behold," he says to us, "I stand at the door and knock. If any one will hear my voice and open the door I will come in to him."