

Sermon for Sunday, September 13, 1981 by Andrew A. Jumper D.D., Pastor
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"CHRISTIANS WHO MAKE GOD SPIT"

Revelation 3:14-22

Text: "I know you well--you are neither hot nor cold: I wish you were one or the other! But since you are merely lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth!" (The Living Bible) Revelations 15 and 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 steaming cup of piping 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, "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." A lukewarm Christian makes God spit!

Our scripture for this morning gives us some reason 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 one 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 I." 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 Christians. Once he discovers whose house is on fire, he ceases to be lukewarm. Would you believe me if I told you your house was on fire? 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 Christian in Laodicea he said to them, "I counsel you to buy white garments to clothe you and to keep 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, "gets 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, has 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? Could 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. Imagine a line called the glory line. If you fall below the glory line you are going to hell. The only way you get to heaven is to fall above the glory line. If that is the glory line and you fall below it, even if you are a one, you are still lost, if you are below the line your lost. Do you know what the Bible says? "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." 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 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 made God spit! 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."

Our Scripture for this morning has in it one of the best known passages in the Bible. In verse 20 we read, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." But the thing you may not realize about that passage is this: it is spoken to lukewarm Christians! It is spoken to church people like us! It is spoken to people who have forgotten they are sinners, who have forgotten that the penalty of sin is death, and who have forgotten what a great Saviour they really need.

Is that true for you this morning? I suspect it is true of most of us. There are times in our lives when we need to be reminded of how serious our spiritual condition is. There are times when we need to be reminded that we do shut Jesus out of our lives. And there are times when we need to be reminded that he stands there, knocking, wanting to enter our hearts in a fresh, new way and be Lord of our lives again. I don't know about you, but every now and then I need a time of rededication and recommitment. I need a time when I invite Jesus to take control of my life again in a conscious and deliberate way. That's because I do grow lukewarm. Do you have that need, too?

This morning Jesus says he stands at the door knocking--if anyone will open the door, he will come in. I'm going to lead us in a prayer. As I pray, I'm going to open the door of my heart again and I invite you to do the same.