

Lukewarm Leftovers

By: Jerome Applegate

Many people will not read the book of Revelation. They don't even want to talk about it. Revelation scares them. The book of Revelation is my favorite book in the Bible because it is Grand Central Station for the whole rest of the Bible. The book is not about the antichrist. It's not about the battle of Armageddon. It's about Jesus. Rev 3:15-18 says, "I know your deeds, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

This is Jesus speaking. He is not just talking to some church we don't know anything about in Laodicea. He is speaking to us. When you put something in your mouth to commit to eating or drinking it, you want it to either be cold or hot, not lukewarm. If it is, you will probably spit it out.

In the U.S. we are impressed by numbers. We gauge the success of an event by how many people attend it. Jesus questions the validity of this kind of record keeping. According to the account in Luke 8:10, when a crowd began following him, he began speaking in parables, "so that" those who were not genuinely listening wouldn't get it. He just wasn't interested in those who fake it.

In the parable of the sower, the seed is the word of God. When the seed is thrown on the path, it is heard but quickly stolen away. On the rocks, it has not roots, has the appearance of depth and growth, but only on the surface. Among the thorns it is received, but suffocated by life's worries, riches, and pleasures. In good soil it grows, takes root, and produces fruit. My warning to you is this: Do not assume you are good soil.

I will say it again. Do not assume that you are good soil. Has your relationship with God actually changed the way you live? If you have ever been honest with yourself in your whole life, now is the time. Are you satisfied with being "godly enough" to get into heaven, or to look good in comparison to others? Or can you say with Paul that you "want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death (Phil 3:10)?"

For far too long this verse just had too much Jesus for me. I thought the verse should have ended at the word resurrection. I have heard people say that So-in-so was "so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good." That is one of the stupidest, most worldly statements I've ever heard.

I do not want to be in the church of Laodicea. I do not want to be lukewarm. There is no such thing as being so heavenly minded that you are no good, just like there is no such thing as a lukewarm Christian. This is an oxymoron. To put it plainly, church folks who are lukewarm are not Christians. We will not see them in the Kingdom.

Christians do not serve leftovers to a holy God. Yet so many of us pay our tithes as long as we can do it without putting ourselves in a bind. A man once told me, "It's all fine and good to talk about tithing, but the electric company will still cut off the power if you don't pay the bill. The

mortgage company will still foreclose on you and the bank will still repo your car if you don't pay."

My answer to the man was, "If they repo my truck because I paid my tithes, God will give me a new one, that is, of course, if it was because I paid my tithes and not because I took my wife to Red Lobster." I was actually put to the test on that one because they did repo my truck because I kept on paying my tithes, and sure enough, God did give me another one, and this one was paid for, no truck payments. Look at me. Aren't I wonderful? Not! I am right there with the rest, constantly reminding myself of where I am lacking.

Christians do not serve leftovers to a holy God. Yet so many of us pray, spend time with the one who placed us here so he could hang out with us, in our "spare time." The fact is that, according to some surveys, most "Christians" pray more in church than at any other time. Most spend far more time in front of the television than praying.

What happens when people "ask Christ into their lives?" They go up to the altar, say a prayer, and that's it. It's done. Right? Unfortunately, that is exactly the way we treat it. They said the prayer and now they go to church. It is better to be in church than not to be in church, but this is so very far from what God wants from us. Our lives have not actually changed hardly at all.

Let's face it. If we are willing to make changes in our lives at all, it is only if we think it affects our salvation. This is why I hear so many questions like, Can I divorce my wife and still go to heaven? Do I have to be baptized to be saved? Am I a Christian even though I am in a homosexual relationship? If I am ashamed to talk about Jesus, is he really going to deny knowing me? If I have sex with someone I'm dating can I still get into heaven? If I commit suicide will I still go to heaven?

To me the real tragedy of these questions is that they show the real state of our heart. They show that we are more concerned about going to heaven than actually loving the King. We are in the mindset of "What's in it for me?" If it were all about us, we would be in even more serious trouble. It is not about us. It is about God. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." When we consider this, our question quickly becomes the unthinkable: Can I go to heaven without truly and faithfully loving Jesus?

I have never seen anything in the scripture that leads me to believe that the answer to that question could be yes. I John 2:3-4 says, "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Maybe I'm warped, but I just kind of think that what John was trying to say was that the person who claims to know God but does not obey his commands is a liar and the truth really is not in him.

In Mat 16:24-25, Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."

If I think more of my comfortable life than what the Lord wants me to do, what he wants me to be, then I will lose my life. What we are talking about here is the dzoe' life, the kind of life God has, the spirit life, the kind of life that does not constantly have to be recharged with food, with water, and with air. The kind of life we are familiar with is the bios life, the temporary life, the life that will ultimately end for all of us. Jesus promises those that belong to him the kind of life he has, the zoe' life.

Some people claim that we can be Christians without necessarily becoming disciples. This makes me wonder, then, why the last thing Jesus told us was to go into the world, making disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that he commanded. Notice that he did not add, "But hey, if that's too much to ask, tell them to just become Christians, you know, the people who get to heaven without having to commit to anything."

When we are in the mindset of What's-in-it- for me, we think about such things as how we can "get into" heaven and what rewards we will receive. If we continue to serve and pursue Christ for Christ himself, at some point we will realize that we have forgotten all about those things and just want his work to be done, his kingdom to be realized. We will realize that the rewards are chicken feed compared to being with him.

I don't want to be lukewarm. Lukewarm people attend church because that's what "good Christians" do. Isa 29:13 says, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."

I don't want to be lukewarm. Lukewarm people give money as long as it doesn't impinge on their standard of living. If they have a little extra, they give a little. "I tell you the truth," Jesus said when he saw the rich bringing their gifts and the poor widow putting in two small coins, "This poor widow has put in more than all the others."

I don't want to be lukewarm. Lukewarm people tend to choose what is popular over what is right when they are in conflict. They care more about what people think of what they do (like going to church and giving) than what God thinks of their hearts and lives. Jesus said in Luke 6:26, "Woe to you when men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets." He said in Revelation 3:1, "I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."

I don't want to be lukewarm. Lukewarm people don't really want to be cleansed of their sin; they only want to be saved from the penalty of their sin. They don't genuinely hate sin and aren't truly sorry for it. They're just sorry because God is going to punish them.

I don't want to be lukewarm. Lukewarm people hardly ever share their faith with their neighbors or friends. They don't want anyone to feel uncomfortable by talking about private issues like religion. They don't want to make people angry. A young woman I witnessed to once told me in a very angry voice, "I'm not a Christian. I'm a Baptist." The truth is she might not have known anything about Jesus, but she knew she was not where she needed to be with Christ and that she did not know him at all (Baptists usually are Christians) and it scared the daylights out of her.

We all tend to manifest fear through anger. James 1:22 tells us "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourself. Do what it says."

I don't want to be lukewarm. Lukewarm people do not live by faith; their lives are structured so that they don't have to. They don't have to trust God if something unexpected happens, they have their bank account. The truth is, their lives wouldn't look much different if they stopped believing in God. "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (Luke 12:20) I don't want to be lukewarm. Lukewarm people may drink and swear less than average, but besides that, they aren't really any different from your typical unbeliever. They equate their partially sanitized lives with holiness, but they couldn't be more wrong.

We attempt to serve leftovers to a holy God, leftover money, leftover time, leftover love. My concern in writing this is that it may only evoke fear and guilt. Personal experience has taught me that actions driven by fear and guilt are not an antidote to lukewarm, selfish, comfortable living. I hope that you realize instead that the answer is love.

I don't want to be lukewarm. I have said this, but unfortunately I find myself falling into just that on too many occasions. I don't want to fall into lukewarmness ever. But, you see it is not just our actions that God looks at; it is also our heart.

Paul said beginning in Romans 7:14, "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do... Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." You see, we all sin. We all fail God, fall short of his glory, but I truly hope you can see the difference. The grace of God is there for those who belong to him. God's grace is sufficient for this. God's grace covers us if we belong to him. But, what if we do not belong to him? What if we are concerned only about whether we are going to get into heaven with the least amount of effort instead of whether we love the king? What if we are more concerned about the rewards we think we will receive than whether the things we can accomplish for the kingdom will come to pass?

I don't want real believers to doubt their salvation. In the midst of our failed attempts to please the God we love, his grace covers us. To call someone a Christian simply because he does some Christian-like things is giving false comfort to the unsaved. But to declare someone who sins "unsaved" is to deny the reality and truth of God's grace.

Grace does not help, however, what is wrong with our hearts. Grace does not cover lukewarm, complacency. If we have as much of God as we want for right now, a reasonable portion of God among all the other things in our lives, this is not covered by the grace. Those that should be the most afraid are those that are lukewarm, and know it, and don't care.

The thing is, when you're in love, you will do whatever you have to for the one you are in love with, even things you didn't know you could do. Please, read this until it sinks in. It is vital and

there is absolutely nothing more important. Here goes: Are you willing to say to God that he can have whatever he wants? Do you believe that wholehearted commitment to him is more important than any other thing or person in your life? Do you know that nothing you ever do in this life will ever matter, unless it is about loving God and loving the people he has made? If the answer to those questions is yes, then put your actions where your mouth is. True faith means holding nothing back; it bets everything on the hope of eternity.