



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

February 19, 2017

Jump Start # 1746

Revelation 3:16 "So because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot; I will spit you out of My mouth."

The image that our verse gives us isn't very pleasant. Most of us have tasted things that didn't taste well. Maybe it was sour milk. Maybe it was something too spicy for you. I don't like mushy bananas. Especially the kind that has black parts on it. UGH! Food that is supposed to be hot, ought to be hot. It's kind of odd what we say about things. We can leave a piece of pizza on the counter overnight with a glass of coke. In the morning, we'd say that the pizza was cold and the coke was warm, even though they are the same temperature. Some things ought to be hot. Some things are supposed to be cold. The Lord is using the illustration of food or drink in our mouths to describe the temperature of a congregation. Things ought to be a certain way. That's true with food and it's also true with a church.

This week we are looking at the various ways that Satan tempts a church. He has more than one idea. He attacks a church in obvious ways but also in ways that are not so obvious. Sharp eyes, steady hands, and a faith that is rock solid, will not only recognize Satan's tricks, but it will chart a course clear of the dangers that Satan presents.

Laodicea, the church talked about in our verse today, was blindsided with the spirit of apathy. Lukewarmness kills a church. It happens so gradually that most don't even recognize it until it's too late. Indifferent, lukewarm, an atmosphere of "who cares," will allow Satan to walk right in the front doors. Some who still have enough faith to see things as they are, will excuse themselves by saying, "It's not my problem." Problems are ignored in a lukewarm church. Folks fall through the cracks in a lukewarm church. Things ought to be done, but no one wants to do it. The lukewarm church is hopelessly stuck doing the same things over and over. What they need is a good swift kick to get them back to where they ought to be. The problem is, no one is around to do that kicking.

In lukewarm churches people settle for substandard service. The singing could be better, but that takes effort and no one really wants to do anything about it. It's easier to complain and remain miserable. In Malachi's days, the people were offering God diseased sacrifices. They were weary of worship. They were indifferent to what God said. Just put in the time and then go do the fun things that we want to do. Their attitude toward the Lord was shameful and disrespectful.

All through life, we have seen heroes who rise above the call of duty. These are the ones who go out of their way. They help a neighbor, even when he didn't ask. They stay late at work to finish a project, when everyone else has gone home. They go the extra mile to help a new student, a new co-worker, a new church member to feel welcome. They are patient to explain things and answer questions. Heroes who do what they didn't have to do. They see what needs to be done and they jump in.

(OVER)

Heroes in battle. Heroes in the police and fire departments. Heroes in school. Heroes in the neighborhood. Heroes in the church. Without these few heroes, most would follow the example of the indifferent. "I don't know," and "I don't care," are the ugly twins that opens the door to allow Satan to march right in.

Every congregation started by the hard work of a few. Some donated land. Some donated a lot of time and energy to get a church off the ground. They poured hours and dollars into getting a foothold started. Many of these congregations started in someone's living room. Others, started in rented hotel rooms or store fronts. People carried in song books every week. They put out chairs. First to come, then these same people, gathered up the song books and chairs at the end of services. They were the last to leave. They did this for a long time. Today, those congregations have grown up and moved into church buildings. They got men to move to be preachers. They appointed men to lead them as shepherds. They spread the word in that community and the church grew and grew. In time, that little group became large and powerful. People have moved in. It's easy to see how smoothly everything runs. It's easy to sit back and enjoy the ride. It's easy to allow lukewarmness to take over. "Why, they don't need me to do anything," becomes a ready answer for our lukewarmness. The example of those early folks who started the congregation has become lost to a new generation.

Lukewarm-no one intends to be that way. It just happens. Without careful attention, we get so busy doing things in this world that we lose sight. We take things for granted. We forget the most important things. Lukewarm can describe marriages. You don't find lukewarm as a young couple is saying their wedding vows. But put a dozen years into that marriage. Add some kids, a mountain of bills, stressful jobs, and the fire of romance has sizzled out. Falling asleep watching ESPN each night becomes the norm. The couple have not fallen out of love, they simply lost touch with each other. What happens in a marriage, can happen in our relationship with the Lord. No one intends to be lukewarm in their faith. Things just happen. Then it happens. Before long, a person is going to church out of habit and not out of love. Talk to the same people. Do the same things. Little change. Little challenge. Our hearts drift. We have become lukewarm. We still attend but the passion has leaked out of us.

It won't take much to push a lukewarm faith down. The death of a parent, the loss of a job, a rebellious teen-and before long, the lukewarm person has just quit all together. There wasn't much flame burning, and now it seems to have burned out. The lukewarm finds it so easy to just stop. They usually do.

Get a church full of lukewarm and Satan has won the battle there. His banner flies proudly from the roof top. No one is going to do anything special, unique or challenging. No one is going to turn the tide, at least no one in their lukewarm state. Preachers come and go and little changes. Another year passes, and all remains about the same. Once in a while a baby is born. The young move away and most no longer worship the Lord. One by one, the elderly pass on. It's sad to see this, but we ought to be used to it. These pitiful situations are the state of so many congregations today. Every state, every where, they are found. These folks are convinced that Satan isn't among them because they have studied all the "isms" in Bible classes. They have talked about premillennialism, Calvinism, materialism, humanism-if there is an "ism" to it, they have talked about it. No error is taking place. Not there. But, what they have failed to recognize is that the spirit of indifference has conquered them. Do nothing is the course that they are following. No plans. No vision. No life.

The lukewarm church does little evangelism. The lukewarm church makes little impact in people's lives. The lukewarm church looks like a fish tank that desperately needs it's water changed. Dark. Murky. Not very healthy. And to be honest, it smells.

What can be done? How does one change the spirit of lukewarmness? It takes leadership. It takes energy. It takes a plan. It can be done. Get folks involved. Give folks a job to do. Don't be satisfied with the way things are. Give God your best. That begins with your attitude. Then it trickles into worship. Give God your best. Each person doing the best that they can do. The song leader, leading the best that he can. The preacher preaching the best that he can. Pick it up. Raise the bar. Get into each other's homes. Invite others. Clean the place up. Make it bright and attractive. Never settle. Always strive to do better. Always.

Lukewarm doesn't stand a chance when giving God our best is our spirit.

Roger Shouse