

Revelation 3:14-22

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- [0 : 00] sing now, and we're going to sing words that we find in Isaiah chapter 43. So we're going to be singing from that chapter in Isaiah, and we'll be singing verses 1 to 7, and the first verse that we'll be singing is there on the screen. This is what the Lord our God says, He who formed you Israel, He who formed the line of Jacob, He who knows and loves you well. Let's stand and sing from God's Word.
- Let's sing.
- Let's sing. Let's sing.
- Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing.
- When you cross paths, go in rivers, they will not see you away.
- [2 : 23] When you pass through fiery trials, in the fire don't be afraid.
- For the faith will not consume you, and be there to make you wait.
- I am the Lord your Lord and Savior, Holy One of Israel.
- I give people for your ransom, it shows that dear life as well.
- For you are my precious treasure, and on you I serve my love.
- [3 : 44] I have given you great honor, from my holy place above.
- To the fear of I am with you, I will bring your children home.
- Gather them from all directions. Nevermore to stay alone.
- Bring to me my sons and daughters, Every one who bears my ear, Who my days were my own glory, And created for my day.
- You make me want to vomit.
- [5 : 19] If one of my kids had said that when they were growing up, or even now, they would have been in trouble. It's just not acceptable language.
- You want to make me vomit. So why do I get a free pass to use it as my opening salvo this morning? You don't come to church to hear the minister verbally abuse you in such vulgar terms.
- You make me want to vomit. But here's the thing. This is what Jesus said to the church in Laodicea. The language in the translation that we use as the church Bible, the NIV translation, is somewhat sanitized.
- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For some, the language of the King James Version will be familiar. I will spew you out of my mouth.
- Or, simply, you make me want to vomit. Now, I want to spend a little time considering this letter or message to Laodicea, and with what I hope to say revolving around this nauseating expression or repugnant reality.
- [6 : 42] What's going on? And why does Jesus use such unacceptable language? Or maybe today it would be called hate speech. Why does Jesus use this kind of language?

You make me want to vomit. The three questions that we're going to pose and think about and try and answer in the light of the message that we've read, the three questions are these.

Who uses this revolting language? Now, you know the answer already, but we want to just explore a little bit more the answer to that question. Who uses the revolting language?

But then we want to ask, who is he revolted by and why? And maybe really that's the heart of the matter. Why is this language employed? And then thirdly, we want to consider what the revolting, repugnant believers need to do.

Because they're given clear instructions of what they need to do to change their condition. To make them less nauseating or not nauseating at all.

[7 : 47] So, let's think about these three questions and try and answer them in the light of God's Word. So, the first question is this. Who uses the revolting language? Well, notice with me the words of verse 14.

So, we're in Revelation chapter 3. We're at verse 14 and we read there, following the introduction, or we'll just read that as well, to the angel of the church in Laodicea write, these are the words of, so the author identifies himself.

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. Now, we know that's Jesus.

But how does Jesus identify or describe himself? Well, he does so, curiously, in language that is not drawn from the vision in chapter 1. Those of you who have been following through this series will perhaps remember that, almost invariably, in the introduction to each message, Jesus employs language that we find in the vision in chapter 1.

The vision of the resurrected Jesus. And he draws from that language to introduce himself and identify himself. But in this occasion, he chooses not to. He uses another way or makes use of other titles.

[9 : 03] These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. And there are really two titles that Jesus assigns to himself.

And we want to think about each of them just in passing. First of all, we read there that he identifies himself as the Amen. These are the words of the Amen. And it would seem that Jesus here is deliberately applying to himself a title for God that we find in the prophet Isaiah.

In Isaiah, in Isaiah chapter 65 and in verse 16, we'll read. And when we read the verses, I'm going to, you won't immediately identify the connection, but I'll explain what it is in a moment.

So, in Isaiah 65 and verse 16, we read, Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the one true God. And the verse continues and uses that title again, the one true God.

In other versions, it speaks of simply the true God. Now, the Hebrew word translated true there in Isaiah is the word Amen. And really, if we were to transliterate the title, what is being said there in Isaiah is simply the God of Amen.

[10 : 17] The God of Amen. And Jesus is looking or drawing that title and saying, that's me. I am the God of Amen. These are the words of the Amen.

Jesus is the God who is faithful. He is the God who is true. He is the God who is truth and who speaks truth always.

And of course, that's very important in the light of what he's going to go on to say. The language that he goes on to use and to direct to the church at Laodicea may be revolting.

It may be offensive, but it's true. It's true. Because he is the Amen. He is the true God. He is the faithful and true witness. Everything he says is true and trustworthy.

We may not like it. We may be appalled by it. We may be offended by it. But one thing we can be sure of is that it's true. And when he says to the Christians in Laodicea, you make me want to vomit, it's because that is true.

[11 : 19] These are the words of the Amen. The use of the title also echoes the language of Paul in 2 Corinthians.

In his second letter to the church in Corinth and in chapter 1. Let me just read those verses to remind us of how Paul expresses himself on that occasion. In 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verses 19 and 20.

We read as follows. 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 19 and 20. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, by me, Silas, and Timothy, was not yes and no.

But in him he has always been yes. For no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ. And so through him the Amen is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Jesus here describes himself as God. We can't just pass over that just fleetingly. That in itself is a remarkable thing. Jesus is saying, I am God. The titles that apply to God apply to me.

[12 : 27] But then very particularly this title. The God of Amen. Jesus is God's Amen. The Message Bible, more a paraphrase than a translation, vividly and helpfully renders this title as God's Yes.

Jesus is God's Yes. Can you be forgiven? In Jesus, yes. Can you be welcomed into God's family? In Jesus, yes.

Yes. Can you live a God-pleasing life in Jesus? And by His power, yes. Jesus is God's Yes. But Jesus also applies to himself another title there in verse 14.

He says that He is the ruler of God's creation. The word translated ruler can mean or can also be translated beginning. Some versions opt for that translation. The idea is that Jesus is the Alpha of God's creation.

Really echoing language that we see in the first chapter of Revelation. The Alpha of God's creation. The ruler of God's creation. The preeminent one over God's creation.

[13 : 34] There's possibly here a deliberate allusion to the language that we find in Colossians 1 and verse 15, where Jesus is described as the firstborn over all creation.

Not as part of creation, but preeminent over creation. These titles of the one who is speaking.

And to make that link or to suggest that connection with Colossians isn't a random shot in the dark, but it's something to recognize that we know that the church in Laodicea, who are being addressed, was familiar with Paul's letter to the Colossians.

At the very end of Colossians in chapter 4 and verse 16, you may recall that part of that parting conclusion to the letter. He says to the Christians in Colossae, pass on this letter to the church in Laodicea and get them to pass their letter on to you.

So, Paul is acknowledging they were very close geographically, these towns in Asia Minor. And so, very explicitly we're told that the church in Laodicea had received and had read and were familiar with Paul's letter to the Colossians.

[14 : 49] And so, given that, it's perhaps not surprising that we would find, it would seem, allusions to that letter. And perhaps we have one here in this title that Jesus adopts for himself.

So, this is the one who is speaking. This is the one who says, you make me want to vomit. The Amen. The faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

But let's move on to the second question. Who is Jesus revolted by and why? Well, the first part of the question is relatively easy. He is revolted or disgusted by the believers in Laodicea.

He says to them, you make me want to vomit. But let's not forget how Jesus ends each of these messages. There in verse 22, whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

So, it's very clear that though this letter is addressed principally or in the first instance to Laodicea, it is intended to have a much wider audience that includes us here this morning.

[15 : 53] So, we too are part of the intended audience to whom Jesus directs these words. But why such a rebuke?

And here is where we want to focus our attention a little bit more carefully. Why such a rebuke? The answer to the why question is provided in verses 15 through 17. And what is said in these three verses provides one clear answer.

But the one answer is provided in overlapping and connected parts. Two parts really. Verses 15 and 16 and verse 17. So, it's one answer to the question, why does Jesus feel this way?

But one answer in two parts. And so, let's look at each part in turn. First of all, verses 15 and 16. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot.

I wish you either one or the other. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit or spew you out of my mouth. So, Jesus clearly says, this is the reason why I feel this way.

[16 : 55] Because you are lukewarm. But what does Jesus mean by the language of hot and cold and lukewarm? What do you think it means, this language that he uses, when he speaks of believers as being either hot or cold or lukewarm?

What does that mean? Why is it better to be hot or cold rather than lukewarm? I think this language, this picture really is usually understood in the following way.

Hot is good. To be hot is to be on fire for Jesus. To be spiritually alive and vibrant. So, we can get that. It's good to be hot.

Cold is bad. To be cold is to be spiritually dead. But at least, even though that's so, at least you're honest about it with no pretensions to piety.

And so, it's better than lukewarm. And lukewarm is really bad. To be lukewarm is to claim to be alive or even to be alive, but to live as though you are dead.

[18 : 03] With little or no evidence of love for Jesus or others. I think that's how the language is often understood. Certainly, it's how I have generally understood the picture that Jesus employs.

But is this what Jesus actually means? Jesus presents hot and cold as good. He says, I wish you were hot or cold.

It seems clear that Jesus understands either of these possibilities as being good possibilities. Hot or cold. Why so?

Well, everything seems to point to the fact that Jesus is using the town's water supply, not just of Laodicea but of two neighboring communities, as an analogy for their spiritual condition.

So, let me just explain how that works. Well, in the neighboring town of Hierapolis, there were medicinal hot springs that served the community. This hot water was good and useful.

[19 : 03] It healed the sick and energized the weary. And in another neighboring town, the town of Colossae that we've already made reference to, their water was supplied by a cold mountain stream.

This cold water was good and useful. It satisfied and refreshed the tired and the thirsty. But in Laodicea, their water came also from hot springs, but they were a few miles away.

And by the time the water arrived through the pipes that had been installed, it was no longer hot. It was lukewarm. Possibly even somewhat contaminated by the pipes through which it traveled.

And this lukewarm water was not good or useful, certainly not in the condition in which it arrived. It was repugnant. It was revolting. When you drank it, your first gut reaction literally was to spew it out.

So, I think that's what Jesus is saying. That's the analogy that he is using, the picture that he is painting. But notice this detail, which I think is important.

[20 : 08] Jesus begins verse 15 with the words, I know your deeds. Their deeds were lukewarm. Now, no doubt their hearts were also lukewarm, but the focus of Jesus is on their deeds.

Their deeds were lukewarm or useless or non-existent. Their deeds were not hot. They didn't heal anybody. Their deeds were not cold.

They didn't refresh anybody. And that's why Jesus says to them, You make me want to vomit.

But what about us? What about you? Do your deeds of service in the name of Jesus heal and refresh? Or are they lukewarm, useless, non-existent?

Are you too busy serving yourself to serve others? What does Jesus say to you? But then we have verse 17 as the second part of the answer to the question, why?

[21 : 12] Why is Jesus revolted by these Christians? And here we'll just need to note very fleetingly what he says in verse 17 to complete the answer that he himself gives.

In verse 17, Jesus contrasts the Laodiceans' proud self-deception with his own brutal but true diagnosis.

Those two things are placed alongside each other. You see their proud self-deception there in verse 17. You say, I am rich.

I have acquired wealth and have need of nothing. Do not need a thing. This was their proud self-deception. They imagined they were fine.

No doubt they were materially wealthy. They were successful. They were well thought of. They had established themselves. They had security. They had a good reputation perhaps. Who knows?

[22 : 11] We don't know. They were well with their soul. All was well with their service of God. No doubt they were generous in their giving to the church.

They had plenty money to give. Who knows? We don't know. We're not given that level of detail. But the point is they're proud and they're self-deceiving in their estimate of themselves.

But then that is contrasted with Jesus' brutal but true diagnosis. What does he say? But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

That's the reality. And that's why they make Jesus want to vomit. Well, let's move on to the third question.

The third question is this. What are the revolting or lukewarm believers to do? Clearly, the place they're in is not a good place to be.

[23 : 12] In the measure that they take on board what Jesus is saying, they must say, Well, this is a bad place to be. We need to get away from this place. So, what can they do?

Well, Jesus gives them counsel as to what they need to do. And we find that really in the verses that follow from verse 18, really through almost to the end of the message.

And let's just think a little bit about what Jesus counsels them and indeed counsels us if we, in some measure, can identify with their condition. Let's start by noting what Jesus is recorded as saying in verse 19.

We'll come back to verse 18, but let's start in verse 19. Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. What the believers in Laodicea need to do is they need to listen to the one who loves them.

And I want you to just pause. Just pause, take a moment, and reflect on this seeming incongruity. Listen, Jesus loves, deeply loves the very people that he wants to vomit from his mouth.

[24 : 22] That's what he's saying. He's saying, you're the people I want to vomit you from my mouth. I want to spew you from my mouth because you're lukewarm. You revolt me. You disgust me. But I love you.

I love you deeply. And so I'm going to counsel you so that you can change, so that you don't remain in that appalling place that you are now.

I don't want you to be there. I want to delight in you. I want to find you fragrant and beautiful. I don't now, but that's what I want for you because I love you.

And because I love you, I'm going to warn you. And I'm going to counsel you. And I'm going to discipline you. What they need to do is listen to the one who loves them. That's a good lesson in life.

Listen to the people who love you. They're the people to listen to. They're the people who will give you good counsel. And how much more of God. He loves you.

[25 : 18] Jesus loves you. Listen to him. That's what they need to do. They need to listen to the one who loves them. And because he loves them, he rebukes them and disciplines them and instructs them so they can change and become hot and cold.

Healing and refreshing. Pleasing to God and useful to others. And what does the one who loves them tell them to do?

Well, they need to be earnest and repent. We see that there in verse 19 as well. So be earnest and repent. Be earnest, I think, is really saying face up to your reality. Be honest with yourselves.

You know, what I've told you is true. Take it on board. Own your condition. Recognize your sin. Be earnest. Be honest. Don't kid yourselves anymore that all is well when all is not well.

Be earnest and, of course, repent. But what does this repentance evolve or look like? Well, Jesus urges them to do two things. And I think these two things are the way in which the believers will give expression to or evidence their repentance.

[26 : 27] And the two things can be summarized in two verbs. They are, first of all, to buy. There's something they need to buy. And secondly, there's something they need to open. And let's just notice these two things.

In verse 18, they are counseled to buy something. Let's just read the verse. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you can become rich, and white clothes to wear so that you can cover your shameful nakedness, and solved to put in your eyes so that you can see.

In the very verse, Jesus very explicitly identifies this beautiful symmetry between their wretched condition and Jesus' provision. They're poor.

Well, Jesus can make them rich. They're naked. Well, Jesus can clothe them. They're blind. Well, Jesus can help them see. He will provide the resources they need to deal with this condition that they are suffering from.

Of course, that just reminds us of a truth that I'm sure we're very familiar with, that Jesus is the only and sufficient Savior. Jesus can and does supply our every need.

[27 : 39] Whatever your need is, Jesus is able and willing to supply that need if you would come and receive from Him.

In the pictures that are used here, there's another allusion to the city of Laodicea. Laodicea was famous for its wealth. And so, there's a play on that when Jesus identifies them as poor and recognizes the only true wealth that they can enjoy is from Him.

Laodicea was famous for its textile industry, in particular, black wool. And He says, well, I can provide you with white wool to cover your nakedness.

Laodicea was famous, so we are told, for its medical expertise and perhaps especially in the field of ophthalmology, though that is disputed by some. But if it's true, then clearly again, we see a connection that Jesus is drawing to make His counsel all the more vivid as He offers them salve to put on their eyes so that they can see.

But leaving aside these intriguing and helpful allusions to Laodicea, let's go to the heart of the matter. How are these Christians to buy if they are poor?

[28 : 56] And what do the gold and the white clothes and the salve represent? Well, the language of buying. Surely, as an echo, be it deliberate or otherwise, of the same kind of language that we find in Isaiah, chapter 55, a passage that I imagine many of us are very familiar with.

And let me just remind you of what the prophet says there as he invites the people of Israel to come to God to have their spiritual thirst satisfied.

Isaiah 55, Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters. And you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and you will delight in the richest affair. Give ear and come to me.

Listen, that you may live. And there clearly no money was required to buy what was being offered. And equally here too, when Jesus says to the believers in Laodicea, I counsel you to buy from me.

[30 : 05] The price is faith. Trusting in Jesus. Because that is how we receive that which Jesus offers.

But I wonder if more than resources, the picture that Jesus paints here is pointing to a person. And the two things are not entirely separate or distinct.

And I just suggest this for you to maybe give thought to and ponder on and you can come to your own conclusions. But remember the vision of the risen Jesus in chapter one. It was a few weeks ago that we looked at it.

But if you cast your mind back to that vision and you can have a look at it even now in chapter one, you have that vision of the resurrected Jesus. But just let's remind ourselves of some of the characteristics of the resurrected Jesus.

Well, for one thing, we're told that he was dressed with a golden sash. We're also told that his hair was white like wool. We're told that his eyes were like blazing fire.

[31 : 05] Now we're told many other things, but these three elements form part of that vision. And I wonder if there isn't a connection there with what Jesus here says to the Laodiceans when he speaks of gold and of clothing and of sight.

Jesus isn't just saying, I can provide you with these things. He's saying, come to me. Come to me. That's what you need to do. You need to come to me.

What they preeminently need is not what Jesus can provide, but who Jesus is. Though, as I say, these two things are inextricably linked together.

Jesus is calling them, come to me. In me, you are rich. In me, you are clothed. In me, you can see. And this is what we need to do always. We need to come to Jesus and trust in Jesus and rest in Jesus and find our sufficiency in Jesus.

And then, in the instructions that are given, we have not only the verb to buy, but we also have the verb to open.

[32 : 20] In verse 20, we read, 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.

Now, this verse, as I'm sure many of you know and perhaps have experienced, is often applied evangelistically to describe Jesus calling unbelievers to repentance and faith.

And the picture is painted of Jesus knocking on the heart of the unbeliever and waiting for the unbeliever to open his heart that Jesus would come in. Now, let me be clear, I don't doubt for a moment that God can and has used such an application to draw folks to faith in Jesus.

But the original intent is clearly different. The invitation is addressed to believers. It's addressed to lukewarm believers. It's addressed to believers who have chosen to push Jesus away.

And Jesus is saying, I want back in. I want to be with you. I want to be near you. Jesus is calling and knocking. It's not that Jesus needs permission to come in, but that he chooses to remain outside while we foolishly glory in our self-sufficiency.

[33 : 35] With the Laodiceans claiming or imagining or thinking we do not need a thing. But he wants to come in. He wants you to enjoy renewed fellowship and friendship with him.

He wants to eat with you and counsel you and encourage you and embolden you and equip you to be hot and cold, to be healing and refreshing.

He wants to come in. Do you hear his voice? Will you open the door? The message ends with a striking promise for those who overcome, for those who are victorious, to use the language that we find there in verse 21.

For those who repent and buy and open the door. We find this striking promise there in what follows, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.

Now this is a quite spectacular promise from the God of Amen.

[34 : 49] And time does not allow us to explore all that this picture or promise is intended to convey. But I do want to just pinpoint a vivid contrast between the picture painted in verse 16 and the promise given in verse 21.

And with that we'll draw things to a close. The picture painted in verse 16 is the language with which we began. Jesus saying to the believers in Laodicea, you make me want to vomit.

So you have that on the one hand. This repugnant picture of Jesus expressing himself in this way, directing these words to the believers in Laodicea. And yet here in contrast in verse 21, the same Jesus promises to his people a place next to him on his throne.

What's it going to be for you? Spewed out by Jesus or sitting next to Jesus? This is the challenge that Jesus brings to us today.

Let's pray.