

Standing and Knocking

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon 'Standing and Knocking' addresses the spiritual condition of the Laodicean church, emphasizing the need for genuine repentance and awareness of one's true state before God.

Duration: 33:42

Scripture: Revelation 2:1-3, Revelation 3:15-20

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the danger of becoming lukewarm in one's faith. He warns that even ministers can backslide and lose their fervor for God. The speaker criticizes the materialistic culture and televangelists who mix the gospel with promises of financial gain. He urges the church to repent and turn back to God, offering the opportunity to receive true riches, spiritual clothing, and spiritual sight from Jesus.

Transcript

I want to talk to you about a difficult subject today. I want to preach it better than I've ever preached it in the past. Before I put the passage up, it comes from the book of Revelation, and it's one of the letters that Jesus wrote to seven.

Everyone say seven. Seven churches. Now, John, who gets the vision in Revelation and encounters Christ, he kind of delivers the message that Jesus is giving to these seven churches.

They were all Christian churches, and the message is different to each one. And that's why when someone says, what is God saying to the church? That's really a silly thing to say, because God is saying 70,000 things to the church. It just depends what church you're in.

The letters are different because every church, and may I go further, every Christian has a different spiritual condition. These are all Christian churches. Now, the commentators and the experts have tried to make sense of seven churches.

Why seven? That they were literal churches, all found in what we would know today as Turkey, then known as Asia. That's for sure. They were seven churches, and they needed these letters, and Jesus knew what was going on in them, and that's for sure.

Others have said, no, they're also symbolic of seven different church conditions, seven different situations that will appear over time again and again. So Jesus is addressing this because his eye is not on the UN or the White House or the elections on Tuesday. His eye is always on the church because we are his body.

The only thing that's going to extend the kingdom on this planet is the church of Jesus Christ. How many say aloud, amen? Amen. We are his body.

He is the head. We carry out, if we're healthy, we carry out his wishes and desires. Others have said, no, it's also symbolic of seven church ages, starting with the first letter to the church at Ephesus.

It represents that after the apostolic era, that that was a church age. How long did it last? Nobody knows, but they say it was for a period of time, hundreds of years maybe. And then the second church is the second church age, all the way up to the seventh church, which would be the last church age before Jesus returns.

Be that as it may, I just want to focus on that this is a letter to a church addressed to the angel of the church, probably the leader of the church, the messenger of the church, who is kind of held responsible for the state of the church, which is why I read this very carefully, because like priests, like people, a lot about the condition of a church has to be laid at the feet, good or bad, of the leadership. No church hardly can get above the leadership. If the leadership of a church is carnal, worldly-minded, money-minded, show-offy, full of themselves, then the church is going to be a lot like that by the nature of things.

Let's now, with all of that background, read the seventh letter to the seventh church. To the angel of the church in Laodicea write, these are the words of the Amen, Jesus calls himself here the Amen, the faithful and the true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot.

I wish you were either one or the other. That's strange. So because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth.

You say, I am rich. I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

That's very strange language by the loving Savior to a Christian church. But here it is, which opens up all kinds of possibilities in our minds. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich, and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness, and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Those who I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Turn around.

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.

And that's interesting because there's a famous picture, I forget who the painter is, of Christ knocking on the door. You've heard that used evangelistically when you present the gospel. Anybody here doesn't know Jesus.

He's standing at the door and knocking to come in. But this is not to be used that way. That is a false application of that verse.

Although it's true too. The application here is Jesus is outside his own church. He can't get in his own church.

So he's standing at the door and he's knocking. What kind of pastor was that? What kind of leadership was that? He's standing outside his own church knocking and he says, I will come in and eat with that person and they with me. To the one who's victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my father on his throne.

So let's just apply this to the church back then. Let's just go through what it meant to them and what Jesus is saying. And then as you always should do when you read the Bible, remember that letter was not written to you.

It was written to them. We read it. We study it.

And then we step back and say, how might that apply to anybody here or to a church in America or a church in Bangladesh or a church anywhere? What can we learn from it? So we find out here that Jesus is saying something strange to them. I know your deeds. I know where you're at.

And the emphasis is I know because they don't know and have a clue about anything. They're a Christian church that's totally deceived. Remember what we read? You say I'm rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing.

But you don't even know that you're blind. You're naked. You're a mess.

But now he's using I know. You don't know. I know.

So that gives us a word here, cautionary word, that you can't judge where you're at spiritually. We have to get in communion with the Lord and find out what he thinks. You might like this sermon, might not like this sermon, but in the end I have to go back and be with the Lord alone and he will review the sermon.

Why I preached it, with what spirit I preached it, am I just doing it to make a living, am I trying to sell books here or something? The Lord has the final say and it's good to find that out early because in the end we're all going to stand before him. How many say amen? Okay. So he says I know, you don't know, but I know.

I know your works. I know where you're really at. And that's hard for us because the concept we have of Jesus and love now is a very weird one.

That any corrective word, any rebuke which he gives them, anything like that means that can't be Jesus, that can't be you love me, because if you correct me that means you don't love me. Listen, you deal with that all the time in the ministry and with yourself. Like any corrective word means what's up with that? I thought you were on my side.

But Jesus said no, this is how I prove that I love you. I correct you. What doctor sees a patient and says what do you want me to tell you? No, the doctor says I got to tell you where it's at.

What parent says to the child who's misbehaving? No, you just go ahead and play with those matches, burn down the house. We can always build another one. So you just go and have a good time.

No, they're going to do pow-pow if need be. But our concept is no, no, no, no, no. You can't say it.

Jesus never would say anything. What? You're naked? You're blind? You don't even know what's going on? You're totally deceived? No, that can't be Jesus. He's the one who said come on to me.

All you that labor and are heavy laden. That's the growing spiritual effeminacy of the church. That instead of dealing with reality, we like to just do surface puff kind of things.

So Jesus said you're neither hot nor cold. I know about you. I would that you were either hot nor cold, but because you're in between, lukewarm, I'm going to vomit you out of my mouth.

It's a very strong word in the Greek language. I'm going to thrust you, vomit you. I can't take the temperature of who you are.

That's Jesus talking to a Christian church. So pastor Simbala, beware any pastor visiting here. We're responsible for things like this.

Forget what peers think. If you wrote a book, you won book of the year. If your choirs won some Grammys.

If you have a lot of people coming on Sunday, numbers don't mean anything to God. He's looking at spiritual temperature. He's looking about where are the folks really at? How much do they love me? What's their spiritual temperature? Over the centuries, there's been an interpretation of that passage, neither hot nor cold, because it sounds wrong.

How would the Lord rather have us hot? Yes, I got that. But I'd rather you even be cold. How does that make sense? So it's been, you know what, if you were hot and fervent and on fire, I want that.

Even if you were cold and hardly knew me, didn't know much about me, but that doesn't fit so well because it is a Christian church. But over the last hundred years or so, as studies have been made about that period of time and where Laodicea was, it was six miles to the north of Laodicea was a city that was known for its hot springs, its hot water. People would travel there to do physical therapy, and that hot water, like a spa, could be helpful to them.

Laying 10 miles to the east was a city that was known for its cold springs, their water fresh, clean, very cold and refreshing, life-giving. In fact, Laodicea, where this church was, had no water supply of its own. It was tepid, it was lukewarm, and it was filled with minerals, which made it very hard to drink.

So is Jesus using that to say, you're not cold and refreshing, but you're not hot and therapeutic and being able to be a blessing? No, you're in between. You just have enough heat to be lukewarm, and I can't take that. Laodicea, the city, unlike most of the others that Jesus wrote letters to, was a prosperous city, a wealthy city, known for a glossy black wool that was produced there.

It was a banking center, it was a trade center. So this was a well-to-do city, and it seemed like that well-to-do-ness had prosperity, had an effect on the church, as we're going to see. So Jesus said, I know about you.

Don't go by what you think. In fact, the next sentence he says is, you say I am rich and increased with goods, and I don't need a thing. Listen, you say I am rich and increased with goods, and I have need of nothing, which was speaking materially.

But notice that he's looking spiritual condition, and they're talking about how well they're doing, and what new phone they have, and what clothes they're wearing, and how much money they have stashed away in an IRA. That's what they're thinking of. Jesus is not looking that at all, because his people are sometimes poor, his people are sometimes billionaires, but what he looks at is not your bank account, it's your spiritual account.

In other words, you can have an Armani suit on, or a Dior dress, and be naked, according to Jesus. You can have the best, and you don't even know it. That's the sad part about this church.

They didn't have a clue. Notice also here, this whole idea of confession creating reality. By confessing certain things, they become real.

That is false, obviously. What's real is real. By you saying something doesn't change reality.

The bug is on the rug, or the bug is not on the rug. You can say whatever you want. Today is Monday.

Let's all say it, today is Monday. Say it louder like you believe it. Today is Monday.

How many know what today is? Yeah, exactly. You can't change reality. Is there a place in scripture for confessing God's word? Yes, there is, but notice here the warning.

This church was bamboozling themselves. You know, when someone plays you, how about this? You play yourself. This church was being played by itself.

I am rich and increased with goods. Just enough religion to be respectable, but I'm not gonna go all out. I don't like when the people lift your hand.

Some of you were crying, and getting all into these songs. What are you doing that for? Just sing it. Be relaxed.

Let's not go over the edge here. Just keep it respectable. Notice, not no religion, not denial of Christ, not don't go to church.

Just enough to be lukewarm. Not fervent, not all out, not on fire, no on en fuego. Just enough.

This was that church. Not talking about you or us yet. That was this church.

You say you're rich and increased with goods, and don't you know that you're miserable and you're wretched. I mean, what kind of Savior, what kind of loving Jesus talks like that? Don't you know that you're wretched, and you're a mess, and you're naked. You're showing off your threads, but you're really naked.

You're poor. You're pointing to your money. You're totally self-sufficient.

You don't need anything, and yet you don't even know you're busted. You have nothing. You're poor, and on top of that, you're so clever, you know everything, and you're blind.

You can't even see what's happening around you. This is a spiritual condition of that church, which means, i.e., this could happen throughout history. A church, a pastor, a choir, a congregation can be totally out in left field and not even know it.

Oh no, I'm one of God's, I am a friend of God. I am a friend of God. I am positionally seated with Christ.

All these things are true. I'm just telling you Jesus's words, not Paul, not John. This is Jesus's words to one of his own churches.

I really feel bad for you, because you're not only a mess, you don't know you're a mess. You know, before you go out in the morning, most people look at a mirror. Why? They want to know how they look, right? Because you're not going to go out, and there's still shave cream on your face, or you got an eyelash that's flipping off over here somewhere, or whatever you ladies do.

You want to see that before you go out, am I correct? But here, there was no mirror they looked in. They had no idea. They had no idea.

They're doing praise and worship songs they didn't even know. Didn't even know. I don't know about you.

That makes my heart beat. That makes me want to draw near to God and say, God, please help me. Don't let me be totally deceived.

Jesus said, the word actually in the Greek means, not a command. He's saying, I suggest this is my advice to you. You want my advice? To that church, he says, I advise for you to get real wealth.

I got gold for you, but it won't be like this money that you're running after here in the world, because that you can't take a dime with you. I'll give you real wealth. I love you.

I want you to be rich, spiritually rich. You can be on public assistance and be very wealthy with God, and you could be a billionaire and be busted. Nothing, nada.

You'll find, we'll find it out soon when we see him, because this happened to that church. He said, I'll give you real clothes. Put away all that stuff.

You got it's a knockoff anyway of the real price. I'll give you real clothes. I'll give you white garments of righteousness.

And you know what it costs? Zero. Just trust me. I'll give it to you.

I'll give you real wealth. I'll give you gold that doesn't perish, and you don't need any money to buy the gold. I give it.

I only do frees. I only give away free things. God never pays anybody anything.

He gives by grace. I'll give you the real gold. I'll give you real clothes.

There was a eye salve that was famous in that city that actually looked kind of like a cake, a small cake, and people would take it and rub it on their eyes for so-called medicinal purposes. And now he picks up on that, and he says, let me anoint your eyes so you can really see. You think you're so clever.

You think you've got everything figured out, and you don't even know you're blind. You're running into walls that you don't even know about. But I'll help you because I love you.

I'll give you real gold. Oh, how many would want some real gold today? Anybody here with me? The gold that doesn't pass away. You know the old joke about the rich man who died.

Someone said, how much did he leave? And they said, everything. Everybody leaves everything. Naked you came into the world.

Naked you're gonna leave. And it's pretty sad that the carnality of our culture here, especially American materialism, this country, the televangelists, the clever unscrupulous ones have picked up on it. And now they're mixing the gospel with payday for you.

You give me this seed gift, and then you'll get so much money and money. Because they know that's where your heart is at. You want money.

You don't want the real gold that Jesus gives. You want dinero. You want money.

So they've woven this into it very cleverly, unscrupulous. They'll have their day of judgment when they see Christ. So here Jesus is offering, I got free gold, free clothes.

The garments I have, they never wear out. You know how women are. Once they wear a dress, once or twice, I better be careful right now where I'm going.

Well, am I right? A little right? No? Worse, they get a new dress, and they're so happy. And then their friend wears the same dress that same day. I mean, that's like Harry Caray time.

Jesus, I'll give you real clothes. I'll give you real clothes. Oh, what a cheapening of Christianity we're living through.

Just think if this is true, and it's true, Jesus is speaking. Think what really matters and what most folks are worried about. I deal with Christians now all the time.

I see it everywhere. I travel on both sides. I'm apolitical.

I see people, they're more Republicans and white conservative than they are Christian. I meet people who are black liberals, and are more enthused about liberal politics than they are about Jesus Christ. They justify every kind of horrible thing like abortion, and every same-sex marriage, and every other kind of thing.

Why? Because their tribe backs that. And they're not, they identified so much, not with Jesus. They identify with their group here on earth.

Right wing, left wing, I'm no use for any of it. I want to follow Jesus with all my heart, with all my life. So this is so sad, people getting more enthused about politics than about the Lord Jesus Christ.

He died on the cross for all of us, but you don't want to talk about him and serve him. You want to talk about Trump, or Hillary, or the Republicans, or Democrats. What in the world? Open your eyes, please.

Would you open your eyes and read the Bible for a second? All of that will pass away. You think any of those people are the answer? How many are with me? Only Jesus is the answer for every problem in this earth. Justifying vulgarity, justifying horrible speech.

Why? Because, oh, I got to look the other way. That's my team. That's my side.

Shame on us. Shame on us. So then Jesus ends with this.

Remember now, everyone I love, I correct. If you're not corrected by your friends, that's not a real friend. If friends only tell you what you want to hear because they're so afraid of your ego or my ego, that's not a good friend.

I want people around me, ministers and friends, who will tell me the truth. If they're wrong about me, I'll try to explain. But if they're right about me, I want to take it.

Because God can use anybody to help you. He used a donkey in the Old Testament to speak to a prophet. He can use anybody today.

Can he to help us? Whoever I love, I rebuke and I correct. I'm preaching this so that God can correct me and help me. So what does it matter what you think of me or my peers? Does it matter what awards or whatever notoriety this church might have of any kind? What good is that when I see Jesus? What do you think he's going to ask? How'd you all do down there? How many were you running? What was your budget? You think he's going to ask me any of those things? ¿Dónde está su corazón? Where's your heart? Jesus said this.

Remember, don't get shaken. Whenever I correct you and break you, it's a sign I love you. If I never correct you, the Bible says, a child that's never corrected or loved is a bastard.

That's a child that doesn't belong really to anyone. Because if you love your children, you correct them. That's how I am with you.

I love you and I correct you. Now listen, I stand at the door and it's in the present tense. Right now while I'm talking to you, Jesus says to this church, I'm knocking at the door.

¿What door? Obviously the door of their heart. You would think, I would think, what? A church like that? After all Jesus has done, they're naked and poor and blind. They're lukewarm and not hot and cold.

You can't be fervent about Jesus after all he's done. I would be out of town. I'd be out of town, Jesus.

I'd be, I'm not going to bother with any of you. You're not worth it. You're lukewarm after all I've done for you.

No, Jesus said, I love you so much. I'm not leaving you no matter how you are. I'm right outside the door.

Unfortunately, you pushed me out. You broke fellowship with me. You don't have intimacy with me anymore.

You're all caught up with the material and the political world. That's where you're at. You know, I grew up around relatives pulling me to church.

Come on Jimmy, you got to come to church. I'm like six years old. I don't want to go to church.

I want to play punchball. I want to play stickball. No, you got to go to church, Jimmy.

Come on, you got to go. Jimmy, put up your hands and praise God. That's what I was around.

Prayer meeting night. Come on, what's more important than prayer meeting? To call upon God? He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek him? No, I'm going to be in church. Come on, Jimmy, you got to go to church.

Then, years go on, I go away to college, play basketball all over the place. Come back, now I'm meeting them. Prayer meeting, they're not even going to church on Sunday.

Now all they're talking about, they had nothing. Eastern European didn't have two sticks to rub together. Hard workers like my mom and dad.

My late father and my mother who's going to be in two weeks. Can you believe this? My mom's going to be 104 in two weeks. We're going to bring her here.

My goodness. So, no, no, fervent, fervent. Come on, we're going to work for Jesus.

Talk about Jesus. Pray to Jesus. That's the only thing that matters.

We don't have much money. The wedding reception is going to be in the church basement. Just some little golumpki or stuffed cabbage or whatever they could pull together.

But no, no, it's all about Jesus. And then, I'm out of college. I didn't go in the ministry.

Now people are, their children are calling me. Talk to my mom. Talk to my dad.

They don't even go to church anymore. Don't read the Bible. Don't tell me this can't happen to everyone.

You can get lukewarm real quick. Once that fire stops coming in your life, you can get lukewarm real quick as a minister. Ministers backslide while they're preaching.

Yes, they can. You just get sermons. You go with all the help they have now and all the software.

Three points and a conclusion. The meeting of a few words. And you get a sermon.

You try to dazzle the people. But your heart is far from God. Heart's not close to God.

Hey, trust me, I've done it. I don't want to be that way. I don't want to be lukewarm.

Anybody here with me say amen? I don't want to be lukewarm. I want to be fervent for Jesus. Don't live off of how it used to be.

Last word. We don't need war stories of how it was back in Trinidad or when you were 14 or when you were whatever back in Puerto Rico or how it was back 15 years ago in the choir. We don't need any of that.

Jesus doesn't say I know how you used to be. He says I know how you are. The only thing Jesus is interested in is que pasa.

Not que paso. Not what happened. What's going on now.

So this is a searching word. A lot of people go to church and might think I didn't come to church to hear that kind of thing. Well what do you want me to do? It's in the Bible.

What do you want me to do? Read the Quran to you? I got to read the Bible here to you. I don't want to be lukewarm. I don't think you want to be lukewarm, do you? But notice you can get totally deceived and some of you might now while I'm talking God was convicting you behind me and in front of me.

I felt it. Felt the witness of the Spirit. God's because he loves us.

You don't think he's ever searched me? I've preached sermons 25-30 years ago. While I was preaching the Spirit spoke to me and said you're a mess. Stop talking.

End as quickly as possible. How can you help anybody when you're lukewarm? So let's do this for Jesus. Amen? He loves us so much he's standing at the door and knock.

And notice I'll close. What changes everything? Just open the door. What's that mean? I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I'll come in and have a meal with them. That's spoken that day of fellowship. Just let me in and fellowship with me and everything will change.

Don't make promises. Don't make vows. Don't try to get heated up and use a Bunsen burner or some kind of match to get yourself lit again.

No, no. Just let me in because when I come I bring fire. I bring love.

I bring fervency. I bring the flesh down. I bring the world down.

I bring spirituality up. You start looking and why was that lady unnamed? Why was that lady here at five o'clock this morning and we pay her nothing? Why? Because she was looking for something more than comfort. She was doing it for Jesus.

Like that lady, what was her name? Passed away to gone be with the Lord. I hope I live in her neighborhood. The one who did all the brass.

Viola. She was doing all the brass in this church. That's right.

Hands and knees. Elderly. I would walk in.

I had sometimes I want to look away. She'd be up on the staircase there shining the brass, right? I go in the elevator and she'd be high past the symbol shining all the brass. That was her ministry to the Lord.

Never sang in a choir. Never got any announcements made. Was in the prayer band.

God bless her. Shining brass for Jesus. I hope I live near her.

She's gonna be in a good neighborhood. No public housing where she is. She's gonna be up where mansions are there.

Let's close our eyes. Jesus, we would just want to say help us. Help me.

Don't help other pastors. Don't help other people. But start me.

Me, Lord. It's me standing in the need of prayer. Don't let me become lukewarm.

Don't let me be just living off of how it once was and war stories about how you once used me. No, no, no. Now, Lord.

Don't let me be lukewarm. Send your fire. Ignite my heart to love you, serve you, be crazy for you.

Did you not go to the cross and die for me? Can't I live everything for you? Or am I gonna be have reservations and keep a distance from your perfect will? Am I gonna do American church rather than New Testament Christianity? Save me. Save the precious people that you love so much in the congregation here. You do stand at the door and knock and we hear you.

Just this message has been a knocking for some of us. And we hear your voice. And Lord, we see how you respect our free will.

You don't say, I'm gonna push the door down. You say, no, if anyone hears and opens the door, I will come in. If you don't open the door, I'm not coming in.

Oh, Lord, help us to open the door. Like that song, Lord, that they drug me to prayer meeting. And I heard into my heart, into my heart, into my heart, Lord Jesus, come in today, come in to stay into my heart, Lord Jesus.

We're Christians. We know you live in us, but Lord, we see the potential for lukewarmness here. And all scripture is inspired by God and it's profitable.

So help us help the pastors. None of us be lukewarm, Lord. No choir members, lukewarm.

Whatever we're going to do, let's do it. And then we're going to get out of here and be with you, but help us to go full bore for you, Jesus. Anoint our eyes so we can see what really matters.

Give us the real clothes. Give us the real possessions that matter, not phones, not all the gadgets that everyone lives for, but help us to get from you gold tried in the fire and garments, spotless white garments, Lord. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you love us.

If I were you, I would have thrown me away a long time ago. And you know that sincere Lord, but you're not like that. You keep loving, keep knocking.

Oh, are you faithful? Oh, are you faithful? Not just to supply, but to keep coming after us. Because you know that when we stray from you, we get in trouble. We lose our peace and our joy.

And that's why you're so adamant about stay close to me, have fellowship with me. Open the door. Let me have fellowship with you.

You don't have to have any food. I bring the food with me. Thank you, Jesus.

Lord, there's no altar big enough for all of us, so there'll be no altar call. We're all at the altar, all of us. Thank you for speaking to our hearts today.

Thank you for your word. Now, Lord, we open our hearts to you starting this moment by your grace. We're going to talk to you more, listen to you more, heed your word more, be in more fellowship with believers, because that brings in the fire of the Holy Spirit.

We do not want to be lukewarm. Please, Lord, never let that be written over the Brooklyn Tabernacle name. Not that our name matters, but don't let it be written over this church, neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm.

No, Lord, please do what you have to do in me and everyone else. And we will give you all the praise. We will give you all the honor.

And you deserve everything, Lord. You've been so good to us. Make us on fire for you just by the simplicity of letting you in, not trying to climb a mountain and not trying to ignite ourselves, but just fellowship with you.

We thank you for this truth. We thank you for your word. We thank you for the church of Jesus Christ.

We thank you for all our brothers and sisters. Bless us and make us a blessing, I pray in Jesus' name. And everyone said, everybody stand and give someone a handshake or a hug.

God bless you.

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