

What Jesus Wants for His Church

by Vance Havner

Jesus wants His church to be rich in Him, clothed in His righteousness, and seeing with spiritual eyes.

Duration: 26:42

Scripture: Proverbs 29:18, Isaiah 61:10, Matthew 6:33, Luke 15:20, 1 Timothy 6:17, 1 Peter 1:7, Revelation 3:18

Topics: "Lukewarmness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher addresses the current state of society, which is filled with scandal, filth, and a lack of moral values. He emphasizes the need for individuals to lift their sights and recognize their spiritual poverty, blindness, and nakedness. The preacher shares his personal experience of going through a difficult period in his life while also experiencing spiritual growth. He then references the city of Laodicea, known for its wealth, clothing market, and medical school, and relates it to the needs of the church. The preacher concludes by highlighting the importance of being rich in Jesus, understanding the true value of what we have in Him, and seeking spiritual wealth, clothing, and vision.

Transcript

I want you to think with me briefly about what Jesus wants for his church. It's surprising that what he wants is not always what we want for it. And he expressed this threefold desire to the church of Laodicea, and you're familiar with that letter to the lukewarm church.

I'm not going to read it all, concerned with only one verse in it. You remember that Laodicea was neither cold nor hot, just lukewarm. It might shock some comfortable Sunday morning Christians to remember that our Lord prefers a cold church to a warm church.

He said, I'd rather you be cold or hot, one of the two. Isn't it better to be a warm church than a cold church? No. He said, I'd rather you be cold or hot, one of the two, but I can't take this lukewarmness.

Cold water won't make you sick, hot water won't make you sick, but lukewarm water is nauseating. And a lukewarm church is nauseating to the Lord. He said so here, I'm about to spew you out of my mouth.

Now, there isn't any way to make that elegant. You know what he said, can't dress it up. I was in New York State many years ago in meetings, and I'd been persecuting the saints pretty heavily, I guess, and the dear brother who took me to the hotel each night thought he ought to say a good word for the town.

So he said, well, we're not so good, but we're not so bad. We try to behave ourselves, stay out of the penitentiary, and do the best we can. He said, we're not so good, but we're not so bad.

I said, did you ever stop to think that's the kind of people the Lord said made him sick? That's what it says here. You are so, so. A little too hot to be cold, a little too cold to be hot, a little too good to be bad, and a little too bad to be good.

And I just can't take it. The church today is swinging all the way from rigor mortis to St. Vitus. Half of the crowd is freezing and the other half is frying.

And both are mistaken. I think about that sea of glass mingled with fire in Revelation. I know this is not what it means, but I've been in some churches that were dignified enough, all glass.

Then I've been in some that had nothing but fire, and they were going to the other extreme. I think if you mix the glass and the fire, you might have the right combination. Laodicea did not know what a miserable condition it was in, because he said, Thou sayest and knowest not.

You say we're rich, we don't need anything, everything's in great shape, we don't need a revival. And you don't know that you're wretched, which means burdened, not with debt, but with money in this case. And you don't know that you're miserable, pitiable the word really means, and the last thing that crowd wanted was pity, as proud as they were.

And you don't know that you're poor, they were living in unconscious bankruptcy. You don't know that you're blind, short-sighted, no vision of God or your own need or the need of the world. You don't know that you're naked spiritually, although the best-dressed congregation in all pro-consular Asia, but stripped of everything, naked and open under the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Laodicea was a wealthy city, it was a banking center, it was a clothing market, where they specialized in the glossy dark wool that was woven into the finest of garments. And it had a medical school that was known for its famous eye powder, the tephra phrygia. And isn't it interesting that when our Lord told them of their needs, he used those very three characteristics.

Wealth, wardrobe, and wisdom, so far as what they needed, their wealth, their clothing, and their eyesight. And the verse that I want you to remember is the 18th verse of the third chapter of Revelation, and three times you have one phrase in it, repeated it, three times. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.

And white raineth, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear. And anoint thine eyes with thy salve, that thou mayest see. That thou mayest be rich, that thou mayest be clothed, and that thou mayest see.

That's what Jesus wants for his church, and that's why we're all in need today. We need to be rich, not get rich. God doesn't want any church to get rich.

That would ruin it. But he offers gold tried in the fire. We need to be rich, and we're not.

And for all our buildings and equipment and trained personnel and activity, our first problem is spiritual poverty. When it comes to gold tried in the fire, we're a generation of paupers. The church doesn't have any Fort Knox or gold reserves these days.

They said, I am rich. He said, that thou mayest be rich. The church at Smyrna was rich when it was poor, because he said, I know how poor you are.

And then in parenthesis, but thou art rich. Laodicea was the other way around about, poor when it was rich. One was a rich-poor church, and the other was a poor-rich church.

I've been in both kinds in sixty years of preaching, and we have them. Now what is this gold tried in the fire? Well, it's our Lord, who though rich for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. And that gold was tried in the fire of Calvary, and it means all that we have in Christ Jesus, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I heard of a man who eked out an existence on a poor little tract of land. When he died, his son took over and discovered all underneath and became a millionaire. Now it was there all the time.

Most Christians are living like that first man. We don't know what we have in Jesus Christ. And then it's our Christian faith, which Peter says is more precious than gold and pearls, though it be tried in the fire.

It has stood the test of dungeon and fire and sword and the persecution of the saints. It's very fashionable these days to have a spell every once in a while of reexamining our faith. I get awfully tired of it.

We make a fresh study of Genesis once in a while and the inspiration of the scriptures and the resurrection, just about everything else, trying to prove at this late date what our fathers never doubted to begin with. Why are we so busy about trying to establish it now? We've let the world, the flesh, and the devil trick us into rethinking what doesn't need rethinking, just needs reliving. And if we do too much of that, it's going to give the impression that we're not sure about it ourselves.

If we keep on examining the foundations of our faith, the world's going to say, well, they must be worried about it themselves. It's been through the fire. We have a symposium of experts every once in a while trying to figure out what's wrong with this and that.

They don't usually find out. I listened to a group the other day discussing alcoholism, and they were discussing the causes of alcoholism. And you know they never mention the liquor business any time during all the discussion.

And I said, well, I may not know much, but I always thought the cause of alcoholism was alcohol. I think that makes sense, doesn't it? But, of course, the liquor business is the sacred cow today, and so many folks are connected with it one way or another, making it, buying it, selling it, drinking it, including church members. If the church members would ever vote against it, you could put it out almost any time.

The reason why it doesn't go out today is because too many church members vote for it by the way they live, and actually sometimes when the referendum comes up. So we're always explaining in these symposiums. You know what a symposium is.

It's where we pool our ignorance. And we've got an awful lot of it today, and so when we decide to get together and have a symposium, we pool it. Well, it would all be ridiculous, and is, if it weren't so pitiful.

I read of an engineer who built a great dam out in the west, and the water gathered back of it in a mighty reservoir. One day the rumor got out that the dam was about to break, and the excited village dwellers ran everywhere all over the valley and said, get out, flee for your lives. Some of them ran to the house of the

engineer who had built a home right down below the dam.

Run for your life, the dam is about to break. He asked, what dam? They said, the one you built. He said, that dam won't break.

I know what's in that dam. And today this old frenzied world is about to go crazy, running all the direction and saying the dam is about to break, and I think it is, if you're talking about this world, and about society, and about civilization, and maybe about the United States of America. But you can run if you want to.

The dam that I'm counting on won't break. It won't break till the Ten Commandments break. It won't break till Calvary breaks.

It won't break till the Resurrection breaks. It won't break till John 3 breaks at the 16th verse. You get nervous if you want to.

I'm not running. I know what's in that dam. It's the rock of ages.

It won't break. Then it means personal Christian experience tested in the fires of discipline, and suffering, and persecution. We've got so much cheap Christianity.

Most of our church members are building with wood, hay, and stubble out instead of gold, silver, and precious stones. The time is coming when the fire is going to try it, and most of your living is going up in smoke. You remember that Solomon had such wealth that the imagination is staggered.

I read through Kings and Chronicles every once in a while in my devotions, and I never cease to marvel at the wealth that man had in that magnificent temple. We read that all the vessels were made of gold, no silver. It says they didn't even look at silver.

It was a thing not to be thought of. Imagine that. Then you get proud over a silver plate, a silver set.

They wouldn't even look at it. But one day when Rehoboam became king, old Shishak invaded Jerusalem and saw all those golden shields hanging up around the temple, and he made off with them, of course. And Rehoboam, the king, in his embarrassment, said, Well, we'll have to have something.

And though there was a time when the folks in Jerusalem would say to their company and their country kinfolks when they came to visit them, Look at all this. You never saw anything as wonderful as this. And then the gold shields disappeared.

Rehoboam hung up brass shields. Now that's a come down from gold. It'll shine, but it's not gold.

And I'm sure those Jerusalemites must have said to their company, I'm sorry. We used to have better days than this. We had golden shields all the way around.

And you notice what a tumble we've taken all the way down to brass. Now that's where the church is today. We started out with the real thing, and the devil has robbed us, and we won't admit it.

And instead of getting on our faces and saying, God, we've been robbed of the real thing. We want to get back on the gold standard. Instead of that, we're scrubbing brass all the time, trying to make it look like gold.

God knows the difference. Nobody's fooled but us. The world knows it.

The world goes by and says, What have you got in the church? What have you got we don't have? Most folks don't have much they don't have. We need to get on our faces and say, Lord, we're going to have the real thing or nothing. We're tired of putting up with the sins of the church.

God's running a refinery today, beloved, trying to make saints out of sinners. When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace all sufficient shall be thy supply. The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design thy gross to consume and thy golden to refine.

God's out refining us, if we don't let Him. He wants to refine His church today. Then Laodicea had another problem, spiritual nakedness.

This is a day when nakedness is top item on the list. We're living in a pagan world with an accent on nudity. One of the signs of the moral putridity of this Sodom and Gomorrah.

And ever since Adam and Eve wore fig leaves, this man has tried to cover his sin in shame. But God accepts only the robes of Christ's righteousness. No matter how we disguise ourselves, we'll be shown up one day as the guest was at the supper in our Lord's parable who didn't have on the right garment.

It may have been a nice garment. I don't know what he had on. It may have been something he paid a good price for.

And when he stood before the king, the Bible says he stood and the Greek says, muzzled. Couldn't say a word. He talked a lot, I imagine, in the past, but he couldn't talk that day.

And I hear a lot of fellows now who give their reasons, their excuses, not reasons. They only have excuses which are only the skins of reasons stuffed with lies. And he gives his excuses as to why he's not a Christian.

But one day you'll stand muzzled because if you're not clad in his righteousness alone, you will not be focused to stand before the throne. Check your wardrobe as a Christian. Are you wearing the rags of self-righteousness, the spotted clothes of worldliness, or the gray garb of compromise? God's Word has a lot to say about how we're clothed, both materially and spiritually.

It has a lot to say about the clothes we wear. And I look at the garb of a lot of church people, especially in the summertime. I'm aware of our need to get both kinds.

I'm always glad when fall comes and the saints get back in their clothes, if not in their right minds. The white stands for cleanliness, which is next to godliness. When the prodigal son came home from the far country, he was a sight to see.

But his father gathered him in forgiveness. The next thing that boy had to do was clean up. New robe, new rain, new shoes.

Now God will take you just like you are, just as I am without one creed. But the minute He takes you and you become a Christian, you're supposed to look like one, and act like one, and live like one. We're supposed to be a different people.

I know some folks say, well, the world is interested in your heart. That's what matters. It's the state of your heart, not your clothes.

My friend, the world can't see your heart. It sees you. It sees your clothes.

Some people say, well, you're just talking about the symptoms, not the disease. But you ask any doctor if symptoms aren't important. The doctor wants to know what the symptoms are.

It helps him to determine what the disease is. The Bible has a lot to say about our robes of holiness, too. God didn't save you to make you happy.

If you want to be a popular preacher today, preach happiness. But if you want to be an unpopular preacher, preach holiness. But the Bible preaches holiness.

You'll be happy, but it's another kind of happiness. We used to think of the Christian, and I remember that old song about the way one held a pilgrim in tattered garments, clad on his way to heaven. You get it in pilgrim's progress.

You get it through much of the great old-fashioned preaching of the past. We've got a new kind now. He's a sort of a Madison Avenue modern, quite up-to-date in this world.

He takes the Lord's Table on Sunday and cocktails at the Country Club on Monday. He's on good terms with Balaam and Jezebel. And he's out building new hole pens in the far country instead of getting the prodigal home to God.

If they'd had a social gospel in the days of the prodigal son, somebody would have given him a sandwich and some soup and he never would have got home. That's the kind of gospel that so many would advocate today. We need to get back to the garments of the righteousness of the Lord.

Then they had one other trouble. They were short-sighted. That thou mayest see.

We see men as trees walking today. We cannot discern the time. Do you know what time it is? I think of old Elisha.

There was a man that had a built-in CIA. He was a central intelligence agency. In one man.

Because every time the king of Syria planned some kind of a move, old Elisha had a hotline to help him and found out about it. And the king of Syria said, we've got to get him. I can't do a thing.

So they sent an army to get old Elisha. And Elisha's servant came out and looked around and there were soldiers to the right of him and soldiers to the left of him. Here a soldier, there a soldier, everywhere a soldier.

He ran back in, scared to death, and said, they've got us this time. And old Elisha came out and didn't even bother looking there. Looked up and there were angels to the right of him and angels to the left of him.

There an angel, here an angel, everywhere an angel, because the angel of the Lord was encamping round about them with fear to be delivered. And Elisha said, Lord, open his eyes so he could see. Now if you're going by the news reports and the news broadcasts and the news on TV, may the Lord have mercy on you, we've been fed on water again and all the scandal and slop and filth, not only of the news, but of altogether too many of the programs themselves, they say that they become so sorry these days that the kids have even gone back to their homework.

Well, I wouldn't be surprised. And in such a time, you'd better lift your sights. I'm looking higher.

I've set my sight on higher things. There's plenty down here to disturb you. It ought to bother us as Christians, but Elisha said there'd be more that be with us than they that be with them.

Well, I thank God even the statistics are on our side. You'd never think so, but they are. All the saints are on our side that are gone.

All the children that went to heaven are on our side. All the angels are on our side. Don't ever get the blues and say we're outnumbered.

I heard of a fellow who lived in New Hampshire in the town of up there, they call it Concord. He came down to Concord, North Carolina, came through on the train. It was right after the Civil War, and there was an old Confederate veteran standing out there who hadn't got over being licked yet in the war because there weren't too many of the others, and that's right.

This Yankee from Concord got off the train and walked up to this old Confederate in Concord, and he's just trying to make out was he in the right town. He looked at him and said, Concord? No, he said, just outnumbered. Well, I feel like saying, brother, we're not even outnumbered.

Give way to the idea that we are. But you've got to get your eyes open to see that. There's plenty that we could worry about if we wanted to.

The greatest period of my life in the last year and a half, and it's been the saddest year of my life. Now, you put that together if you can. You can, not in your own human reasoning, because when we see, God grants us to see that back of what we don't understand is what we will understand, and that behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own, then you will thank God for another set of eyes that seizes the Lord to seize.

Now, that's what the church needs this morning, beloved. It needs to be rich in Jesus. You don't know what you've got.

We don't know what we have in Jesus Christ. We live like paupers when we could live like princes. Then we need to be clothed in His righteousness, get off these old rags, and the garments of compromise, and then, Lord, help us, we need to see.

Well, this church of Laodicea would not repent. He told them, repent, but they wouldn't, and so they disappeared, like all the other five that wouldn't repent. Jesus said, I've got one more proposition.

If you're going your way, I'm standing at the door knocking. If anybody, I'll take anybody I can get in this church. Anybody.

Anyone. It doesn't say any man in the original, although it does in the King James. Anyone.

The assembly of the anyones. If I can get anybody who will hear my voice and open the door, I'll come in and sup with him and he with me and we'll start a new church. Dr. Campbell Morgan says he excommunicated the whole crowd and started over with one man.

I believe that's what God's doing right now in these days. I believe there's a movement underneath all our organized Christianity where people of all denominations who know and love Jesus Christ, everywhere I

go, meeting after meeting, and I'm out and out for seven in a row, week after week after week. I ought to have more saints, but I haven't.

Seven in a row. But everywhere I go, we have the faithful church members, and then we have visitors who love God. Last week I was in Moone.

People had rode from Statesville, they'd rode from 50 miles and more around to come into this. Couldn't even get across the street. Now that's the situation you're up against these days.

Now I believe in the local church. I've stood with it all my life with all its faults and its failures. But Jesus is saying here, I'll take whoever I can get and start my next move.

And so although we sometimes sing there's a stranger at the door, let him in, this isn't Jesus trying to get into a sinner's heart. He's standing at the door of the church. And there's another old song that's much more suitable.

O Jesus, Thou art standing outside the fast-closed door, in lowly patience waiting to cross the threshold o'er. Shame on us, Christian brothers, you and me. His name and sign who bear.

O shame thrice, shame on us. Keep Him standing there. Who's keeping Him standing there? Not the bums and the bootleggers and the sinners, but churchmen.

Because Jesus stands at the door. Are you keeping Him? Out of there. Out of your heart.

We had enough church members today who are willing to say, I want the will of God in my heart. My own.

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