

Sermon – Revelation 3:14-22. Laodicea – the Lukewarm church

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“Success” and “Failure” (words on A2 sheets either side of stage):

PPT – III – Video clip – success university

What the world says about success and failure is very different to what God says about success and failure.

Today I want to ask you two questions:

1. Are you a success or a failure? **(PPT)**
2. Does GOD think you're a success, or a failure? **(PPT)**

Revelation 3:14-22 and the letter of Jesus to the church of Laodicea.

Was this church a success or a failure? Well, let's have a look at the city:

Laodicea

Laodicea was an incredible city.

- **PPT pic** – It was a rich city – a banking city. It was the home of millionaires and wealthy bankers.
- **PPT pic** – It was a major manufacturing city, manufacturing high quality clothing from local black wool.
- **PPT pic** – It was the home of a famous medical school that developed successful eye ointments.

This was such a wealthy city that in 60AD, after a huge earthquake severely damaged the city, they refused the city of Rome's help to rebuild. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote: *“Laodicea rose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us.”*

Can you imagine today a city like New Orleans, after hurricane Katrina, telling the government they don't want any help to rebuild?!

Laodicea was self-sufficient. They had everything. And the Christian church in Laodicea was very much a part of this wealthy community. In fact, you could barely tell the difference between the **CITY** of Laodicea and the **CHURCH** of Laodicea.

Jesus is called, in verse 14, the “faithful and true witness”. Jesus *knows* Laodicea. He knows the truth about them. He knows that in their hearts this church says – in verse 17:

PPT – *“I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing”.*

He says to them in verse 15:

PPT – *“I know your deeds – you are neither hot nor cold”*

What does that mean? To be neither hot nor cold? This is a symbolic statement. You see, Laodicea was in the Lycos valley, between the cities of Hierapolis and Colossae:

PPT – Hierapolis was 10 kilometres north and was famous for its hot healing springs. In fact they still attract a lot of people today!

16 kilometres South East was Colossae – a city famous for its cold pure spring waters.

Geographically, Laodicea was in between. And spiritually, Laodicea was in between. Not hot. Not cold.

The spiritual problem of Laodicea was that their faith was lukewarm. They saw themselves as rich. They didn't need anything. They had huge wealth. Beautiful clothing. Incredible medicine.

But Jesus calls them *“wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”* And he says to them: *“YOU MAKE ME SICK!”* And I am about to spew you out of my mouth!”

You think you're rich, but you're spiritually poor.

You think you're clothed, but you're spiritually naked.

You think you can see with your medicines, but you're spiritually blind.

You see yourselves as successful, but **you have failed.**

Being lukewarm is when we say: "I'm fine! I don't need anything! I've got the riches of the world, AND I've got God in my pocket. I get to church most Sundays, crack open the Bible a few times a week, even say a prayer before meals. Lukewarm is when we feel fine about all that **we're doing** in our faith. Most days of the week we look like the rest of the city around us. But occasionally, we stand out. The problem is when we're happy with that. When we're happy with standing out one day a week. We become self sufficient and complacent with what **we do**. Rather than what GOD has done for us.

Because of their lukewarm faith, Laodicea is ABOUT to be spat out of the mouth of Jesus. But Jesus has a solution for this lukewarm church:

Verse 18: *"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."*

Jesus says, get these spiritual things from me! We cover ourselves, like Laodicea, with the riches, the clothing and the healing of the world. But we need to receive these things spiritually from Jesus. We need HIS gold – a genuine faith. Laodicea have a faith in the riches of the world. How hard is it for **us** to forget about worldly riches? But that's what Jesus wants! Forget about them. Don't worry about them. Don't worry if you have them, don't worry if you don't have them. Be concerned about genuine faith! Success is being able to **put aside** the riches and attitudes of the world.

And we need to get our clothing from Jesus. **Pure white clothes that are washed in the blood of the lamb.** We cover ourselves in the clothing of the world. The riches of the world. Our clothes, homes, education, possessions, cars, our jobs. Prosperity in the world's terms is not success in God's eyes. Laodicea were rich in clothes. But they were spiritually naked failures! **Success is wearing the white robes of Jesus. Success is having your sin paid for by the blood of Jesus.**

And we need to get our healing from Jesus. Spiritual blindness means we need a spiritual healing. Are we spiritually blind to our failure before God? It's so easy for us to look for vision and direction from the world. But we need vision that has been restored by Jesus. We need to see **spiritually**.

III – Have a look at this video... (Moon-walking bear)

Did you see the moon-walking bear? He was there the whole time. We just don't always see what's right in front of us, because we get distracted by other things. Laodicea is spiritually blind. They need to listen to Jesus and not be distracted by the world. Verse 19. Jesus says:

PPT – *"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent."*

We often hate discipline and rebuke. We don't like being told we're wrong, or that we drive too fast or too slow, or that we eat the wrong things. We don't like it because it's hard to admit when we're wrong. But how can we not listen to correction from Jesus? He's perfect, he's always right, and he loves us and wants what's best for us. He wants us to succeed. Not in worldly ways. But spiritually. He wants us to be spiritually rich. Spiritually clothed. And spiritually healed. Can we listen and respond to the rebuke and discipline of Jesus?

In Revelation 1:17, John falls down at the feet of an almighty and all powerful Lord Jesus. And Jesus reaches down, puts his hand on him and says, "Don't be afraid".

And now, Jesus reaches down and puts his hand on us. In verse 20, Jesus says to us:

PPT – *"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 him, and he with me."*

If we HEAR Jesus, if we OPEN the door and let him in, he says, in verse 21:

PPT – “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

That is success. Opening the door to Jesus, overcoming the world, and sitting down with Jesus.

PPT – III – If you were to knock on my door at 6:30 in the morning and get me out of bed, you would get a bit of a shock. It’s not a pretty picture. Hair everywhere, unshaven, half dressed, cracked lips, morning breath. To be honest, in the morning, I’m a wreck.

That’s the spiritual picture Jesus sees of us every day. He sees the real us. Naked, pitiful, poor, wretched and blind. He sees us without our worldly wealth. Without our clothes, he sees us as we are. He is the **True Witness** of our lives.

PPT – As you stand naked before God, are you a success or a failure?

Success is: not being lukewarm.

Success is: being able to put aside the worldly things.

Success is: seeing true riches in the forgiveness of your sins.

So **take off** the world. Never be complacent or comfortable with the way you’re carrying the riches and desires and cravings of the world. Jesus wants us to have spiritual success – faith, forgiveness and healing. But to have that, we need to forget about the world’s idea of success. And we have to do that **now**. That’s the key word here. **Now**. Jesus stands at the door **now**.

Let me put it like this: Before God, you look good naked! You’re a **success** naked. Without the wealth and the accessories of the world, you are a **beautiful** and **successful** and **forgiven** person. Don’t be lukewarm. Don’t say “I’m fine. I pray. I go to church. I’ve read the Bible. I give.” That’s lukewarm. Self-dependant on what **WE** do.

Be who Jesus wants you to be.

Spiritually rich in faith, ***spiritually*** clothed in forgiveness, and ***spiritually*** healed.

Let’s pray.