

A Defining Moment

INTRO: For this week and next, we are going to take a pause before we enter our series on Ephesians. There have been some things on my heart that I believe that God is leading me to address and talk about for us as a church, and they affect our whole church body.

Of the two weeks, this will not be an easy sermon to preach. However, I keep reminding myself that my role is like that of a parent or a boss. When I can see where the standards are not being met, it is my job to call that out so that steps can be taken to correct.

I have to thank Francis Chan for parts of this message. I was struggling with how to preach this, and after listening to a sermon of his, God used it to show me a way to go about the preaching of the sermon.

- I. The weirdness of the American mindset
 - A. As Americans we often have this mindset that it is weird that people in other places live in a particular way
 1. That is part of our American centricism
 2. We do see things as different and think they are weird
 - B. The reality is that we are the weird ones
 1. Whenever something is the exception and not the rule, that is weird
 2. And America is the exception, not the rule
 - C. Allow me to give you an example
 1. 53 out of 100 on planet earth live on \$2 per day
 2. The average American lives on about \$200 per day or \$4000 per month
 3. So if the average tips in favor of the rest of the world, that would make us the weird ones
 4. But that is not the only thing that makes us weird
 - D. In America we complain we have no money
 1. Think about this from the perspective of those making \$2 per day
 - a) We make 10 times what they do
 - b) And here we complain as if we are poor
 2. Imagine someone that makes 10 times what you make
 - a) As of Dec. 2013 the average salary in America was about \$49k
 - b) How would you feel if you listened to someone that makes 10 times that salary or your salary, so \$490k complaining that they are broke, or poor
 - (1) Would you have much compassion?
 - (2) Would you feel sorry for them
 - (3) Of course not
 - c) And yet, we are the weird ones in this illustration because that is what happens with us

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- (1) We make ten times what the majority of people on planet earth make, and we complain often times that we are poor, or broke
- E. Some of you may be thinking: “Oh boy! Here comes the money speech. I knew sooner or later he’d be talking about money. Typical preacher just wants more money”
 1. Sorry to disappoint, but the sermon is not actually about money
 2. We will talk about that, but that is far from the main point
- F. “So what is your point Pastor Keith?”
 1. The point is simple, you are rich
 2. You may not call yourself rich, in fact you may even hate to think of yourself in that manner, but you are rich
 3. And because we are rich, that puts us at a huge disadvantage spiritually - ever think about that?
 4. Jesus told us that it is hard for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven
 - a) Why? We have safety in our wealthy
 - b) We have security - let’s face it, we live in a small town, and while I wouldn’t say we should leave our doors unlocked, we probably could
 - (1) We don’t have lots of criminal activity round these parts
 - c) These things make us comfortable and that puts us at a disadvantage
 5. Grab you Bible and go to Luke 18:18-30
- II. The story of the rich young ruler - Luke 18:18-27
 - A. The ruler - v. 18
 1. What we have here is a rich man that wants to get to heaven
 2. That would be all of us here - rich folks who want to get to heaven
 - B. Jesus tells the man to sell all he has and give to the poor
 1. The man cringed at the idea because he was wealthy
 2. He couldn’t give up what he felt was his
 3. And Jesus says, “It is so hard to get the rich into the kingdom”
 - a) It’s a sad thing because too often, we think our riches are worth something
 - b) We don’t want to give them up
 4. And Jesus says it would be easier to cram a camel through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven
 - a) And many people have picked this passage apart to understand just what Jesus was saying
 - b) They look at each word to understand, and try to figure out what Jesus meant by “it’s hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. So I will tell you what it means: It’s hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven

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5. Later in the passage Jesus says it is impossible for a rich man to enter heaven - impossible by human standards, but possible by God
 - C. Peter gets a bad wrap for his response in verse 28, but it is a logical question following what Jesus just said - We left it all to follow you
 1. In other words if a rich man is almost impossible to get into heaven, and we left our stuff, which he was not going to do, what about us
 2. Read 29-30
 - D. What is interesting to me, and I never really noticed this before is that Zacchaeus is just a few verses away from this story
 1. Luke 19:1-2 - He was wealthy
 2. We know the story that Zac. came down out of the tree and had dinner with Jesus
 3. By the end of dinner Zac. said he would give away 1/2 to the poor and 4 times whatever he cheated others out of
 4. And Jesus says that salvation has come to the house
 5. God does the impossible
 6. Zac. is just like the parable of the man that finds the treasure in the field, sells all he has to buy the field because he recognizes the value of the kingdom of God
 - E. Let me take you to one more spot - Revelation 3:14ff
- III. In Revelation, Jesus is writing letters to seven different churches - but what is eerie is this church we are about to look at describes the church in America to a 'T' - Rev. 3:14-22
- A. You are neither hot or cold - v. 14-16
 1. We are not going deep into some of this, but the point is very clear, the church at Laodicea was lukewarm and Jesus was about to spit them out of His mouth
 - a) They are not a nice hot cup of coffee
 - b) Nor are they a iced mocha latte
 - c) They are that cup of coffee that has been sitting on the counter half the day or more - just room temperature - it's just nasty
 2. Jesus is saying I know you and your deeds (keep that word in mind) and you make me want to gag
 - a) I know your church, and this is what I think about you
 - b) You are not fired up about me, you are not even cold, you are this sick lukewarm, and it makes me want to throw up
 - B. Much of where this comes from is they thought they are rich - they are well off - v.17-18
 1. They have what they need and they don't feel they need Christ

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- a) C.S. Lewis said this, “How hard it is to turn to God when everything is going well. “We have all we want” is a terrible saying when “all” does not include God.”
2. But Jesus shares the reality, you are really wretched, pitiful, blind, poor, and naked
3. Some people wonder if you can be lukewarm and be a Christian
 - a) Does wretched, pitiful and blind sound like a description of believers that you know
 - b) “I once was blind, but now I’m blind!”
- C. The reason that Jesus is being so harsh with the people of this church is in verses 19 to the end
 1. He loves them!
 2. He disciplines those that he loves and so He is getting on their case about their deeds
- IV. There is a reason I have preached these things, and they may seem harsh, but I have to go here because I love this church, and I love you
 - A. There are some here that may very well fall into the category of being lukewarm, and you will even admit that you are - and that should terrify us
 - B. But what is more terrifying, some of you will admit that you are, and you will walk out of here and do nothing about it
 - C. Worse still, some of you plan to be lukewarm - you want to get away with as little as you can
 1. You want just a little Jesus
 2. But not too much, that might make me look weird
 - a) That might make me have to do things I never really wanted to do
 - b) That might make me give up things that I don’t want to give up
 - D. Probably the worse situation of all is being lukewarm, and thinking that you are not
 1. Because if you are in that boat, you have deluded yourself
 2. If you are in that boat, you are like the ones in Matthew 7 that say, “Lord, we did all these things in Your name” and Jesus replies, “Depart from Me, I never knew you.”
 - E. Whether you are genuinely lukewarm in your heart, or you have been lulled into lukewarm behavior, let me tell you how this infection of lukewarmness affects the church
- V. The affects of being lukewarm in church
 - A. One of the first issues of a lukewarm heart is lack of commitment to Christ’s bride - the church
 1. Please note how I said that, lack of commitment to Christ’s bride
 2. That is your local church family

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3. And this is where I will take our church to task
 - a) I think it is a cultural thing in MI that during summers people are traveling, and gone on weekends
 - b) However, we have used summer, and nice weekends too much as an excuse to not be in God's house
 - (1) Which really comes down to a lack of commitment to Him
 - (2) And to our brothers and sisters in Christ
 4. We have the opportunity to worship the King of the universe who chose to reach out for us and save us
 - a) Rather than doing so, we too often make excuses that God is not taking attendance
 - b) That the church, being Jesus' bride mind you, is not really for us
 - (1) Which means you say you love Jesus but can't stand His bride
 5. This is one of these ways that we have to ask ourselves the honest question of whether we are lukewarm
 - a) When work around the house, sleeping in 'cuz it's Sunday, working on the car, etc all become more important than being with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and worshipping our Creator, something is wrong
 - b) The excuse that frustrates me the most is using family for the reason you can't come to church
 - (1) Seriously?
 - (2) So instead of coming to church and as a family working on your relationship with God, you stay at home, and your kids grow up to have lukewarm hearts at best toward God
- B. This lukewarmness works its way out in another way, and that is being involved in Bible study beyond just Sunday morning
1. Somewhere along the way Bible study in our church has taken a huge hit
 2. It's almost as if we think it is good for the children, and for the youth to be in Bible study, but us adults have "greater priorities"
 - a) What is a greater priority than your spiritual life with Christ
 - b) I am not downplaying your time in "Our Daily Bread" at home, but you need more than just that
 - c) You need your brothers and sisters in Christ
 - d) Bible study is not just good for the kids, it is for all of us
 - e) When we as adults fail to engage in Bible study
 - (1) Through Life groups, or discipleship
 - (2) We are setting an example for our kids
 - (a) They hear it loud and clear
 - (b) "Bible study is good for you, but not for us"

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- f) The other problem, the Bible is very clear that we are to grow in our walk in Christ so that we can teach the generations behind us
- g) When our secretary, Debbie, was running the children's ministry on sundays at her church, they set up a competition at her church between the kids and the adults about the stories in the Bible
 - (1) At her church the kids blew away the adults
 - (2) Kind of a frightening thought that the kids knew more than the adults
- 3. When lukewarmness sets in, it obliterates our drive for studying God's Word, and only feeds all the more into being in that lukewarm state
- C. Being lukewarm affects the church in a third way: in the budget
 - 1. When our hearts are not captured by Christ, it shows in our giving
 - 2. It is no secret that the budget in this church has taken a hit this year
 - a) I am happy to announce that had mis-read the reports so it is not as bad as I initially thought - explain numbers
 - b) We have been keeping up with expenses
 - (1) But that just means that we have not been spending money on the ministries like we could
 - (2) Which means we are not ministering in all the ways we can
 - c) In fact, each year we publish the potential budget for the coming year
 - (1) Everyone can see it
 - (2) The members get together and vote the budget into place
 - (a) The reality is we have not been meeting that budget as a church
 - (b) In large measure because we have not been here
 - i) I understand that some folks go away and make up their offerings - and we are grateful that they do so
 - ii) But something is off when we vote in a budget and then fail to support it
- D. Having a lukewarm heart can also affect our view of membership
 - 1. We went over membership earlier this year
 - 2. Let me tell you who should be a member of this church
 - a) Those who support it's mission with their finances, and their participation
 - b) Those who are already doing those things - it should not be like this:
 - (1) I become a member so then I chose whether I support the church
 - (2) You are already in support of the church, it's ministries, it's mission, it's desire to reach others for Christ, and then you choose to make the full commitment
 - 3. Membership is much like getting married

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- a) You do not chose a church based on the externals of liking the music, and the preacher is good (and good looking), and the people are nice so let's join
- b) You court the church much like you would a person you are going to marry
 - (1) You get to know who they are in a deep, meaningful and intimate way
 - (2) And when you are already fully committed just as with a marriage relationship
 - (a) You are serving that person
 - (b) You have their best interest at the forefront of your heart and mind
 - (c) You are actively seeking to advance them by letting the world know that you are in love with them
 - (3) That is a member
- 4. And sad to say, we still have many people that call themselves members that are not doing any of those things
 - a) A lukewarm heart has overtaken them
 - b) They are not on fire for Christ or His mission expressed to the world through the local church
- E. Having a lukewarm heart also affects how we minister
 - 1. This can run in many ways, but allow me to point out two
 - 2. First, the lukewarm heart cares not to serve but to be served
 - a) It is consumer Christianity
 - (1) Too many are customers at the counter rather than fighters on the front lines; or keepers of the aquarium instead of fishers of men
 - b) I'm here for you to entertain me, but not to serve at all
 - c) So I have no ministry at all - which means you are betraying your heart that you feel life is all about you
 - 3. Second, the lukewarm heart can show up in putting in half heart measures for the ministries we have
 - a) Now having a lukewarm heart is not the only cause of this, but it certainly can be one
 - b) The affect it has on the church should be obvious - that ministries suffer because we are giving God less than our best
- F. One last affect of having a lukewarm heart - and this one hopefully puts a personal face on it - your pastor is tired, discouraged and struggling
 - 1. The budget numbers a few weeks ago made me rather depressed - that has since passed since I noticed the error in reading the numbers
 - a) But it pointed out other things

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- b) I felt like this is my fault - I am not preaching well enough, I am not working hard enough - something, but this is on me
 - c) I felt so incredibly alone, almost like Elijah “Whoa is me God. I am the only one who cares, and I am the only one left.”
 - (1) And I know that is not true - there are others who care
 - d) I look at the number of people engaged in ministry, or more accurately, the number of people NOT engaged in ministry and get more depressed at all we could be doing for God’s glory
 - e) I look at the budget number and wonder when I will ever get a second staff member to give me some relief since I have been pulling double duty for 6 years
 - f) And it is hard not to take that personally, feeling like I have been pouring myself out for the congregation, defending the congregation a few times over the years, and feeling as if the congregation isn’t thinking about the toll ministry has on me, especially when many are not engaging in the ministry alongside of me
2. I only share this with you to help you see the personal face of having a lukewarm heart

VI. Concluding thoughts

- A. Some of you may be thinking, “Is Pastor really saying that we are lukewarm? Isn’t that being judgmental?”
 - 1. First, let me remind you that there is a difference between being judgmental and being discerning - and God asked us to be discerning
 - 2. Second, while I do believe that we have a problem with being lukewarm, I’m not accusing anyone or pointing fingers at anyone in particular.
 - a) What I am asking you to look at the evidence that I just presented and tell me if this church, and let’s keep it personal, if you personally are lukewarm
- B. What’s going to happen if we continue down the path we are currently on?
 - 1. Eventually you will burn your pastor out - it make take more time, but it will happen
 - a) And if you have the mindset, “Well suck it ya whiner, this is what you were hired for.” please let me know that, because it makes a huge difference in how I understand my job
 - b) Because I understand my job from Scripture - that I am to help equip you for ministry - NOT do all ministry myself
 - 2. Second thing that will happen if our church does not change from it’s present course, the church will die
 - a) It may take five years, ten years, or fifty years

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- b) But when a lukewarm spirit marks a church, send for the mourners because it is only a matter of time
- 3. Third, if what I said is correct, and I think the case for it is solid, that being lukewarm is equal to not being saved, we are talking about your salvation
 - a) We are talking about where people spend eternity
 - b) That is a huge gamble folks
- C. The solution for a lukewarm heart is get on your face before God until He sets your heart on fire for HIM, and for His mission expressed in your church
- D. I said before that this situation we are in made me feel like it was all my fault
 - 1. And while I know that is not true, this is a shared problem, and we as a church family need to admit to the problem and then address the problem, this situation has forced me to look at some things and realize I need to do some things to help correct our direction
 - 2. The biggest of these is setting the vision for the church
 - a) I need to help you see what areas of ministry we need to focus on
 - b) What areas of ministry are possible
 - c) How we as a church can be reaching out to a community that needs the gospel desperately
 - (1) If we need the gospel desperately (and that is a subjective statement in that we all need the gospel, the subjective part is desperately - do we recognize our DESPERATE need for the gospel) - so if we need it desperately, a world that does not understand the gospel needs it just as desperately, or more so
 - 3. Setting the vision of the church will be next week's message
 - a) Hope I don't scare you all away
 - b) But Christ's call is extreme - "deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow me"