

Series: REVELATION

Sermon: I Stand at the Door and Knock

Revelation 3:14-22

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 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. 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.

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 20 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.

21 To the one who is 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. 22 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Sermon

I know fall is here, but I was reflecting on summer church camp. I remember one year I got to play cupid - not for the kids at camp, but for the counselors. The first day of camp, we did a skit that involved the participants getting married. I had the two college-age counselors, who did not know the script ahead of time, and somewhere in the drama that got to hold hands and get hitched. It made sense in the story. The kids loved it, Ohhh! The counselors were red in the face but smiling. Ahhh. It was such a hit we made it a reoccurring theme every day. Somewhere, in our devotions or chapels, we acted out another skit, and even if the script did not have a wedding, we threw one in there so they could get married all over again. Towards the end of the week, the guy pulled me aside and asked, “Why did you pick us two?” Just coincidence, I guess, was all I could say. At the beginning of the week, this was just play acting. But the fourth day of camp, He kissed her on the cheek - and not during a church led drama. This guy said that all week long the feelings for her were growing fonder. And he didn’t know if he could take another pretend marriage to her without falling in love. This pretending about love was starting to get a real emotion growing within his heart. And he was asking me if I thought that she might also feel that kind of attraction. What was in her heart? He was asking. She was from the same city as he, and this was her last week of camp counseling. They were going to have a four hour ride home together where he would chit-chat, but would be thinking deeper thoughts. All I could advise was to do the thing that would avoid later regret. If you don’t say anything and would want to smack yourself later, you made the wrong choice. To make matters worse, she had a quasi-type boyfriend back home. To encourage him, I told him Steph had a boyfriend back home when I asked her out. Did they get together? I don’t know - they went back to their lives and I haven’t seen them since, although I could probably stalk them on Facebook to find out. But his question, “How do you tell what is in the heart” made me think of how God looks at our hearts.

“What does it mean to have a pure heart?” How does God know what is within our Spirit? I’d think that someone pure of heart would be rather dull. Does someone have a pure heart if they think of only soft bunnies and daffodil covered meadows? Is a pure heart one that has never been tempted or never had a negative thought? The answer to at least those two possibilities would be to look at the person of Jesus. Jesus was the quintessential example of a pure heart, yet he was tempted and he thought of other things than bunnies and

daffodils. Jesus thought about the suffering of humanity; that's the reason he came. Jesus could carry on conversations with prostitutes and burly fishermen; surely they had more to talk about than recipes and tunic designs. He was angry at the religious leaders and went as far as to call them a "brood of vipers;" not such a positive image to communicate. If he had a pure heart, how could he call them names? As far as being tempted goes, the first three Gospels tell the story of Jesus being tempted by the devil and that after the devil left Jesus in the desert, the devil returned again at a more "opportune time". Regarding the concept of temptation, keep in mind that there is a distinct difference between being tempted and falling into sin. As someone once said, "You can't keep a bird from flying over your head, but you can keep it from nesting in your hair." Pure hearts often do have times where they wrestle with impure thoughts that the enemy places in our minds. The pure heart keeps the impure thoughts from resting in its hair and putting down roots in its soil. The word Jesus used for pure, "kaqaroi", is best understood as clean or undiluted. A youth director friend of mine illustrated this well when he was trying to communicate sinlessness to a group of junior high guys. He set before them two pans of freshly made brownies. He said one pan contained nothing but pure brownies. Everything that was supposed to be in those brownies was in the brownies. The other pan, however, contained brownies that were close, but not completely pure. They looked very similar. In fact, it was impossible to tell the difference between the two. Yet they were far from being the same. One pan, perfect. The other pan, had all the same stuff, cooked exactly the same, but with one little tiny addition - it contained a table spoon of doggy-poop (and I think he actually referred to it as "doggy poop"). He solicited a volunteer to choose between the two and eat the one he chose. Needless to say - even among junior high guys - he was not able to get a volunteer. They wanted brownies that were clean, pure. You can't tell the difference! All of the germs were baked out of it! Jesus was alluding to the same thing (though I doubt he would have used that illustration). The pure in heart is not diluted. It does not comprise a mixture of things clean and unclean. It is wholly clean.

However, the purity Jesus was talking about was not something that would be discerned solely from the outside. Like the brownies, for a time, it's easy to fake purity. For a time, almost anyone can appear pious and righteous. Jesus wasn't referring to a purity that was only skin deep. He was talking about a purity of the heart. It's what Moses was trying to say to the Hebrew people when he cautioned them not to get lost in their religiousness but allow God to "circumcise their hearts". The purity the Kingdom life offers is a purity of the heart, a purity that is without sin and that is without mixed motivation. A little later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus elaborates on the mixed motivation aspect of this when he encourages those listening to "seek first the Kingdom of God". He was saying that Kingdom folk should have one over-riding purpose and passion in life, pleasing God. Everything else confuses the issues and dilutes life.

Before we examine how much we truly want to have a pure heart, let's take a look at what a pure heart might cost us. When I pose that question to my honest self, I think back to a time before I was a pastor. I was thinking about this because of a girl who was also at that same summer camp who came because of a friend. The friend was a church going kid, but this girl was not. And her parents thought it good that she go. Go to church camp, it'll be good for you - even though they never went to church. You guys talk a lot about God! And she dreaded the thought of "church camp". To her, church camp was going to be boring. And I remember having those same thoughts once upon a time. Though I had grown up in the church, loved my Christian parents, but being around church people smacked of boring. Christians sang boring songs. They didn't like really funny jokes. Of course, "really funny jokes" to a fifteen year old was almost anything off-color or that would make a sailor blush. Christians seemed passionless about life. I know that was an unfair picture, but it's the one I had - maybe you had it as well. If Christianity has such a bad rap, then surely "pure Christians" have to be considered the bottom feeders who live at the lower echelons of the boredom spectrum. What fun is purity? How many girls want to date the "pure" guy? They want someone who is a little exciting, who has an edge to him. A date with "pure" means a night watching a Disney movie and eating low-fat popcorn. Possibly a perceived cost of having a pure heart is that we may lose our edge, or at the very least, be perceived as extremely boring.

Maybe, if we were honest, we don't want a pure heart because we have to admit we enjoy some of the things that

make life impure. Hey, if sin wasn't fun, nobody would be doing it. If sin didn't offer at least a temporary emotional high, it wouldn't be as much of a temptation to indulge. If sin was boring, it would be rather easy to avoid. But the pure of heart, knowing the temptations, can avoid putting their foot in the snare by not giving time nor trouble to allow the sin to roost. Rather, think about the cost of not seeking a pure heart, of the destruction inherent in continuing to allow garbage to overflow in our lives. A pastor friend was talking about TV programming. This is a guy who doesn't watch hardly any tv. I don't know how he survives. But a while back, he had the opportunity to watch for a while. He shared that after watching a week of TV, he felt like someone had backed a garbage truck up to his living room window and dumped the community's trash into his house. He felt dirty, corrupted, distracted, and borderline depressed. Then he said this: "Our bodies were never intended to eat garbage. Neither did God design our hearts to live off of sin. The first kills the body, the second kills the soul." Good point.

This brings me to what the writer of Revelations advises to the church in Laodicia. John opens up the letter with a word for the seven churches in Asia. It is kind of a report card for each church. There's the church in Ephesus, Smyrna, pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and the last one, Laodicia. I could have chosen what John said to any of these churches for this morning, but his message to Laodicia seemed to hit our situation today. John could have been writing to the church of Suberbia with his words this morning. "So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent."

The primary problem with the church at Laodicea was they were playing the game of comparative Christianity. They were comfortable. They had not killed anyone recently. They were wealthy and of high moral standing. Yet Jesus refers to them as lukewarm and about to be spewed out of his mouth. Why? For one reason, they were diluted. Their righteousness may have had a smattering of godly righteousness in it, but it had a significant helping of self-righteousness as well. It was at the end of this letter that Jesus said, I stand at the door and knock. Obviously, their impure hearts had kept them from not only seeing their need for God but hearing the call of God as well. They needed to "repent." The letters to the churches are simple. They follow a formula - praise, correction and promise. Just like any good teacher, the letters praise churches for what they are doing well, chastise them for what they are doing wrong, and promise a word of hope if the corrections are made - if they repent from their error. Repentance is the reoccurring theme in the letters to the churches of Revelation. The impurities are varied, but the solution is the same, repent; turn around. Stop heading in the direction you're going and head back to God. Repent, sometimes easier said than done. How do we repent? The first step is to acknowledge we're heading in the wrong direction; to name that thing in our lives that is clogging up the flow of the Spirit. Write it out in a journal. Confess it to a mature brother or sister in the faith.

I once read a book that had a chapter called, "Brownies in the refrigerator." It's a different brownie story. The Reader's Digest version of that is of a young lady who was walking in the mall and passed the bakery. She was on a diet and knew she shouldn't buy the brownies, but she bought them anyway. She wanted to test her resolve. As she was driving home, the warm, aromatic brownies were calling to her from the passenger seat. When she reached home, she grabbed the bag, ran into the house, threw the brownies in the refrigerator, and then collapsed on the floor, pleading with God to help her fight the temptation to eat the brownies. The author then posed the question, "How likely is it that God is going to be able to help her?" The answer was, "very unlikely." Why; because she put the brownies in the refrigerator. People put things in the refrigerator that they want to keep until later. If she really wanted to have a fighting chance of not eating those brownies, she should have thrown them out the car window. Like the "brownie addict," our ability to allow the Spirit to purify our hearts would be much more likely if we were to limit our exposure to things, places, and people that tempt us to sin.

Jesus is standing at the door and knocking. I would bet that most of you know this picture: (Jesus standing at the door and knocking). We have it hanging down by the Heritage Room. It's called the Light of the World. This is one version of it. It was painted by William Hunt in 1850ish - the door is covered in overgrown weeds

and hasn't been opened in quite some time. It became immensely famous and was donated to the local college. In time, the college began charging for people to come see it, and Hunt decided to paint a second version - one that would be free to look at. Much larger and brighter. That one hangs at St. Paul's in London. But notice the door handle. There isn't one. Notice the hinges. They're on the wrong side - only someone on the inside can open the door. Jesus can't open it alone.

He stands and knocks, the Light of the world, looking to make the world pure once again. If anyone answers the door, they will dine with the savior of the world. It might cost to see a painting of the savior - but his company is free - if we but open the door. And the people of God said, AMEN.