

Complacency as a Christian

So it looks like I did not do too badly the first time, so Pastor Spencer and Pastor Dan let me speak again today! Welcome, Fort George Baptist Church! To everyone listening online (which is all of you, of course, because of... well covid). I hope you are doing well. When this is being recorded, I am just finishing my final week of school for this semester, so that is a blessing; now all I have to do is write finals... my motto in high school was if it is due, you do it tomorrow. Unfortunately, I don't think I should be following my own advice. Anyway, let us get underway.

One of the issues that we see in Christianity within North America is that everyone is a Christian. We do not need to look far and wide to find people like this. Many people say, "I am a Christian because I believe in God," or some may say, I am a Christian, but I am not a serious Christian. I have heard people say,

yeah, I am a Christian because I was baptized as a church. Many people go to church and act one way, but the other six days of the week, they live a very different lifestyle. There are plenty of people like this in this church. They may say they are a Christian simply because they check off every moral Christian church list; they do not swear or sleep around or get drunk, etc. I am sure we all know people like this, and I will tell you guys right now that many of us are like this as well. One of the largest issues in the church today is that we are too comfortable in our faith, so we become stagnant in our faith. Let's try and look at what the Bible says about the danger of complacency and what we can do to get out of it.

So before we begin diving into scripture, I encourage you all to pray with me.

Dear God, I thank you that in this season, we can meet and come together and still worship you. No matter what situation the world is in, we can find comfort, knowing that you are still sovereign and present. I pray that over Christmas break, I pray that you can help us strive to be with the community while

still following health protocols and being intentional about our relationship with you. Help us to be willing to step out of complacency. I pray for eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart that is willing to learn, be open for correction, and for your movement. We pray this in your name, Amen.

If you all have your bibles with you, then I encourage you to turn with me to Revelation 3; our passage today will be verse 14-22.

The author of this letter is named John. Many people think that this is the same John that wrote the Gospel of John, ultimately we are not too sure. John is exiled on an Island called Patmos; as such, he is exiled away from all Christian communities around Rome. Revelation is his letter to seven specific churches in Asia Minor. One of this book's core messages is to teach Christians to continue holding their allegiance to Jesus Christ without compromising, to persevere in the faith of God alone, even amid persecution. With that in mind, let's look over to Scripture...

Scriptural Reading. Revelation 3:14-22 (Slide 1-2)

Now the core issue for lukewarmness in Laodicea was prosperity and wealth. Their thought process was, “because I am rich and prosperous, I do not need anything else. I am comfortable with where I currently am”. Compared to the other churches that John is writing to, Laodicea was one of the wealthiest. It was a trade center for clothing and textiles, one of the largest sources of the economy. It had a massive stadium and a theatre. There were also multiple pagan temples for false Gods such as Zeus and Dionysus. Laodicea was a wealthy city. Christians here have become comfortable, and they probably don’t realize they need for faith because they are so caught up in every other comfort the city is offering. Do you know what that sounds like? It sounds like the world we are currently living in today. I think in a city as wealthy as Canada. This passage speaks so much truth. There are so many things inside our lives that can pull us away from our faith and cause a half-hearted devotion to Jesus. In verse 17, he calls the congregation

naked; he always strips their social status and prosperity to show them that they are poor, blind, and led astray in reality. Verse 18 teaches that when we choose to give ourselves to Christ when we decide to say that nothing in this world is an idol and we will offer ourselves to Him, He will provide us with white clothes to wear to cover our shameful nakedness. Revelation is famous for all of its weird imagery of colors and symbols, and visions. The color white in Revelation is meant to symbolize purification from sin and faithfulness towards God. The Christians' goal in Laodicea and for us today is for Christians to move out of their state of comfort and into a place where they are in a strong, dedicated relationship with God that involves discipleship. One of the reasons we struggle with lukewarmness today is that in North America, what it means to be a Christian has lost its meaning and importance, especially in comparison to other areas of the world.

One of my favorite theologians, Eugene Peterson, states that “One of the reasons many of us do not ardently believe in the Gospel is that we

have never been given a rigorous testing” **(Slide 3)**. To share a bit of background to Revelation’s book, John is writing to seven specific churches in Asia Minor. During this time, the Roman Empire was at the highest authority of political, economic, and social power, and it was very unfriendly towards the Christian message. In this time, if you were a Christian, that means something, you are going against the political and social norms at the time, and you are saying that I do not hold allegiance to the Roman Empire because Caesar is not my God, God is my God. If you called yourself a Christian during this time period, it would have been very likely, that you would be killed by persecution. And that is what persecution does. It is a testing of your faith. Suppose you are serious about your Christian faith. In that case, that means that you would choose to continue faithfully witnessing to Jesus, even if it means you are being persecuted, even if it means you will

be abandoned and hurt by those around you, even if it means that you will face death. I want to ask you guys to question this, if these people were willing to go as far as die, to proclaim that Jesus is their King, that he alone is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), Let that sit with you, that these people were willing to die and face death boldly to hold onto their faith. That is something worth wrestling with.

Everyone here has told a lie, but eventually, we will tell the truth when the burden becomes too much. Imagine being in the face of death and severe persecution and still being willing to share your faith and proclaim that Jesus is king over your life. The witness and testimonies that these persecutors show that Jesus is not a lie! These people were willing to go as far as to be killed because they knew Jesus Himself is who He says He is.

After this letter was written, Christians were continually being persecuted in the Roman Empire, and in some cases, more brutally. Until around the start of 300 AD with a man named Constantine. Who was the first Roman Emperor to legalize Christianity resulting in being normalized. Now, that sounds great, doesn't it? You can argue that it helped Christianity become more widespread, which is true, and I know that what I will say may cause disagreements, but I think this was one of the worst things for the Christian churches to experience. Before Constantine, the church suffered persecution, and believers were dying left and right for our faith. Suppose you were to tell those believers that they would die for the faith. Do you know what they would say? "So What?" To live is for Christ. To die is to gain. When I am at my death, I get to witness those who watch my execution that Christ was something that you are willing to die for. When Constantine

came, that passion and that drive for our faith began to fall apart. That is what faith looks like in the world today in North America. In other countries, people are getting persecuted, but they are also willing to go as far as death for their faith. Why? Because they have found the treasure out in the field. They know that they are no longer citizens in this world; they are now a citizen of Christ. They are simply here on earth to be the hands and feet of Jesus, to be a vessel for His glory, and to show others that faith in Jesus Christ is worth dying for. When you hear persecution stories, you seldom hear them from North America. They are often in places where Christianity is illegal, like North Korea, Afghanistan, Libya, or China. Over there, while there may not be as many people who call themselves Christians as there are here, those who profess their faith over there, it means everything to them. We seem to struggle with the total opposite problem. While many people call

themselves Christian here, whether it is because they go to church, occasionally read their bible, and pray. We often become stagnant and lazy with our faith.

So with this in mind, how exactly do we overcome lukewarmness? One of the reasons we are complacent in our faith is because we are comfortable with where we are. So the first thing we need to do is to stop comparing ourselves to others. One of the ways we can be complacent is by comparing our righteousness to others. That is what the Pharisee did to the tax collector (Slide 4). Do you pray like a Pharisee yourself? Do you thank God for not being a moral disaster like that person or this person? When you do that, you will measure your faithfulness on human standards and deceive yourself into thinking you have everything all together, when in reality, you are likely very stagnant in your faith.

The second way we do this is to die each day. (Slide 5) Many teach the Christian faith in churches today is that if you want to be a disciple, you pray the prayer, and you are automatically accepted. I am sure many people here have that as part of their story, whether it is a youth conference, camp, a night after youth group, even young adults, or worship service. That is a step in the right direction, but often, we miss that the Christian life is not just a decision. It is about discipleship. It is a choice that you make, just like Paul. To Die to oneself and for Christ to work through you. That is how persecuted Christians live. They were willing to die for the Gospel.

Finally, be willing to act on the inspiration that the Word of God is giving you. Looking at verse 19 (Slide 6). If you feel challenged in your life, whether you feel a calling to alter something in your life, sacrifice something to let God work through you, spending more time dedicated to the word, or in

prayer, or helping out the community, encouraging those around you. Let that conviction hit you, and name those things. Realize what God is teaching you and, most importantly, act on it. If you are moved to focus more on the convictions and still choose not to do something, you are only going through the motions of what it means to be a faithful Christian; then you are struggling with Luke-warmness and need to be diligent with your faith. My youth pastor told me years ago that inspiration has an expiration date. If you choose to ignore the convictions God is giving you, if He tells you to do something, and you decide to be stubborn and ignorant of what He is showing you, eventually, you will begin to be ignorant to the Christian faith. Do not compromise God's message, God's teachings, encouragements, and challenges, but let it permeate in you and shape how you live your life.

If you are listening to this sermon and feel like a lot of what I am saying is resonating with you, I encourage you to let it seep with you. Do not make this one of those sermons where you choose to listen to but not act on. Do not let the church be a thing that you attend every Saturday or Sunday just so you can check it off of the moral checklist, but let what God has taught you through my message to change you. In this coming week, whatever God is convicting you to do, whether it is to spend more time in the word, making prayer a larger priority in your life, or even just saying to yourself each day. “I am going to live a life that is faithful to Christ and Christ alone.” Act on those convictions, and live a life as a faithful and holy disciple, clothed in white, as what Jesus has designed for you to be.