

Msg #169 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

“Am I Lukewarm?”

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk about actually making the decision to follow Jesus Christ. Now, I'm not only talking about becoming a Christian. Actually, I'm talking about two things. On the one hand I'm talking about you becoming a Christian, you know, about finally making the decision to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And on the other hand, I talking about you becoming a real Christian. You see, there are lots of people out there who need to make Jesus Christ their Savior, but there are a lot of professing Christians out there who need to make Jesus Christ their Lord. Of course, making Jesus Christ Lord should be an automatic part of being saved. But then, like I said, there are many people out there who need to make Jesus Christ their Lord. You either need to get saved in the first place, or you need to really get saved instead of just playing around with Christianity.

You see, you're one of three things. First, you're a real Christian, tried and true, who demonstrates Jesus Christ daily as both your Lord and your Savior. Second, you might be one of those people who have been waiting a long time to make your decision to follow Jesus, but you just can't seem to get through to God. You can't hear anything from him. He's not speaking to you, or helping you, or, whatever. Anyway, the third type of person is one who has already made a decision to follow Christ, but has never really followed him, even though they attend church every week, or at least sometimes.

So, there's three types of people who may be listening to this, and you who are listening are either a truly for real Christian, or, you're not a Christian yet and don't claim to be one, or, you're straddling the fence of Christianity. The Bible describes this last type of person in Revelation 3, verses 15-16. Let me read it. It says, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot: I would rather you were cold or hot. 16 So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth."

And now here is what these verses mean. The Bible uses the term 'cold' to describe someone who has never had God's word burst into flames. They may have had a spark from God's word, but they have never allowed that spark to become flames of fire. This is someone who needs to make the initial decision to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The next word to look at is the word, 'hot'. Hot refers to those who have had the fire of God kindled within them and the word of God does burn within their hearts. They are Christians. They mean business with God. They have not only made the decision to make Jesus Christ their Savior, but they have made the decision to make Jesus Christ their Lord. They have made the decision to take up their cross and follow Jesus. They are on their way to Calvary to crucify the flesh and live in the spirit. They have truly been born again and everyone around them knows it.

But now, the other word I want to refer to in these verses is the word lukewarm. Lukewarm refers to Christians who have had the fire of God's word kindled in their hearts, but who have never let the fire burn very hot, or, they have been hot and have now cooled off. You see, lukewarm just means this. When you are lukewarm no one can tell if you are hot or cold. You don't fit into either category. What the Bible is saying is that people who are lukewarm call themselves Christians, but when God looks at them, he can't really decide if they are cold or hot because on the one hand they claim to be Christians but then on the other hand God can't really see any evidence that what they are claiming is real.

The actual concept of lukewarm means that if you stick your finger in water that is lukewarm, you can't really tell if it is on the cold side or if it is on the hot side. Lukewarm is right in the middle. And for Christians, lukewarm means that you are straddling the fence of Christianity. You have one foot in the world and one foot in heaven, but you can't seem to make up your mind which side of the fence you want to be on.

And you know, today's church seems to be full of fence sitters. People who are straddling the fence with one foot in heaven and one foot in hell. They have one foot in church and one foot in the world. God looks pretty good to them when they think about going to heaven, but he doesn't look all that good when they think about having to live life on the earth. Going to heaven sounds good to them, but they don't have much interest in living for God now. They would rather live their lives savoring the delicacies of earth right now, and later go to heaven. Sure, many people want to go to heaven where Jesus Christ will reign over them, but not a whole lot of people want Jesus Christ to reign over them now.

But then, maybe you're one of these people. I hope not. But then, if you are, maybe you're one of these people and you're lukewarm because you just can't seem to hear anything from God. Or you pray to God but don't get any confirmation that he hears you. So you just wait for God to do something but he never seems to do anything, so you just wait and wait and wait, thinking that sometime things will change and God will start moving and then you will gladly follow him.

Well, it doesn't necessarily work like that. You see, it isn't necessarily God that needs to do something about you. It is you that needs to do something about God.

You know, it's really difficult for people to realize that God wants them to do something instead of waiting for God to do something. When it comes to either becoming a Christian, or becoming a real Christian, God has already made the way for you by coming to earth as a man and dying. All that is needed now is for you to decide what you're going to do about serving him. And the word 'serve' is the key word. Following Jesus Christ means that you die out to yourself. This means, now get this, this means that you make the decision to stop living your life for yourself, and start living your life for the sake of others as much as possible. This is what Jesus meant when he said that we have to pick up OUR cross and follow him. He went to Calvary to have his flesh crucified. And this is what we must do also. We need to die to our fleshly desires in order to let God's spirit live and reign in us.

You see, being a Christian means that you not only accept Jesus Christ as Savior, but you also accept Jesus Christ as Lord. The word, Lord, means, master. But you have to make the decision to make Jesus Lord of your life instead of you being Lord of your life. In this world we're just passing through, and the problem with a lot of professing Christians, is that they attempt to be Christians without giving up their own lives. But Jesus did not live for himself. He gave himself for us, and was 100% obedient to the will of the Father instead of to his own will. That's what he asks us to do. No, you can't do it perfectly, but you must have the intent and the determination to do it. When you finally decide to die out to your own desires of this world, and decide that you will live your life for the sake of God, then, and only then, will you become born again. It is the absolute determination to live a life of obedience to God's will that seals our salvation, because when we do this, the Holy Spirit comes in and dwells in us. And it is the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit within us that gives us the ability to maintain the desire to live for others instead of living for the things of this world.

The flesh side of people is their self side. Humans, before they are born again in spirit are self seeking. They care more about themselves than they do about other people. This is the way of flesh and blood humans. And this is also why the Bible tells us that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Our flesh is selfish. Everything we do as humans has the tendency to do it for selfish reasons. But when we truly become Christians, we die out to self and begin to live for God and for other people.

You know, maybe I should tell you about my own experience of deciding to serve God. It may help some of you. Anyway, many years ago I was attending church. I wasn't serving God, but I was under conviction. I would go to church, but I wouldn't actually serve God. From time to

time I would respond to an altar call and would go down to the front of the church and get on my knees and start praying. But then, nothing would happen. God wouldn't speak to me and I couldn't get this wonderful feeling to wash over me that everyone always talked about. I would spend a little while on my knees waiting for God to do something or show himself, or whatever, and after a while I would just get up and go back to my seat. I wasn't getting anywhere. But then one night in church I finally got exasperated. I had been on my knees praying and hoping to get the confirmation from God that he had heard my prayers, but nothing was happening, again. And finally, I came to the end of my rope. I was tired of waiting for God to receive me, or for God to do something. So, what I finally did was to say something to God that sounded something like this. "God, I'm tired of coming down to this altar and never getting anywhere. I want to be a Christian but I can't feel anything. You're not talking to me or giving me that good feeling, or anything, so this is what I'm going to do. I've decided that I'm going to follow you, and I'm going to serve you with all my heart, with all my strength, and with all my mind. And God, whether you talk to me or not, or do anything or not, I'm going to serve you. And if we come to the end of the world and you throw me into hell, then you're just going to have to throw me into hell. I'm still going to serve you anyway because that's what I've decided to do."

Then I got up off my knees and went back to my seat. And when church was over I went back home and I began to do exactly what I had told God I was going to do. And you know what? Pretty soon I began to feel the spirit of God wash over me. Pretty soon I began to hear God talk to me and begin to direct me. And do you know what else happened? I found out that what I had done was exactly what God had wanted me to do all along.

There are many people who go through the process of reciting the sinner's prayer but who never have any real intent of serving God. God doesn't receive them because they aren't interested in serving him as Lord, they're only interested in receiving his promise of salvation. So after awhile they don't feel anything because they don't do anything, and then they just go back to what they were prior to reciting the sinner's prayer.

And on the other hand, there are many people who become Christians and burn hot at the beginning, but then begin to cool off, and after awhile they become lukewarm. They were hot at one time, but now they're lukewarm. No, they're not cold like they were before they got saved, but they're not hot either. And in the verses of Revelation, chapter three, God tells us that if we are found to be lukewarm when he comes back for us, he will spit us out of his mouth. God would rather you were still cold, and had never had the fire of his word kindled in your heart yet than to have been hot and cooled off to the point that no one can tell if you're a real Christian or not. If a person has not yet been saved, God can handle that a lot better than a person who has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord but then doesn't serve Jesus much at all. God doesn't like it when we have cooled off to the extent that we treat his word with so much contempt that we don't even get excited about it anymore. A non-Christian, in God's eyes, is better than a lukewarm Christian, because at least with a non-Christian they can get saved. But a lukewarm Christian has already been saved but then even though they have experienced the good word of God and have once loved it, they now treat God like he is old clothes and they don't want to wear that Christianity stuff any more than they have to.

It's like that article of clothing in your closet that used to be one of your favorites, but now it's getting a little bit old and it doesn't have the same flash that it did when it was new. And because it was one of your favorites, you don't want to get rid of it, but then you don't ever wear it where people can see you. It just hangs in your closet gathering dust.

You know, all through the Bible God talks about people serving him with all their strength. The prophets were men of God, and the prophetesses were women of God. Some people were really good, and some people were really bad. But the worst kind of people are those who are neither good nor bad. They just straddle the fence. They want to be included in the congregation, and they want to be able to go to heaven, but they don't really want to make Jesus Christ their Lord. They don't want Jesus to be their master, they just want Jesus to be their Savior. But Acts 2:36 tells us that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. Not just Christ our Savior, but God has also made him our Lord. Have you ever wondered why Jesus is often referred to as the Lord Jesus instead of just Jesus? It's because Jesus is not someone to just recognize as being God's son. Even the demons know that Jesus is God's Son. But Jesus is called the Lord Jesus because God has also made him to be the authority over us. And if you know anything at all about authority, you know that you obey those who have authority over you.

But you can't be lukewarm and still make Jesus your Lord. He won't like it any more than your supervisor at work would like it if you served him in a lukewarm manner. But you know, the biggest mistake you can make is to wait around for God to do something. Many Christians want to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, but they don't know how. They keep thinking that one day God will rise up and start to do wonderful things and then they will have a work to do. Or they pray and pray and pray for God to give them a ministry, and they wonder why God doesn't show them what to do. But the answer lies in being obedient to God's word, and not just when he gives you a ministry in the way the church looks at ministry, but according to ministry itself.

The word ministry means that you have begun to minister to the needs of other people. Anybody can minister to the needs of other people. The problem with finding our ministry is that we are always looking for ministry that we can put a label on. Even many pastors and other church leaders don't know much of anything about actually ministering to people. They think that the only thing that is ministry is when you have a recognized program and a title. But as far as God is concerned, you can forget about the title. Titles are man's invention to puff himself up. God is not looking for titles, he is looking for people who are willing to obey his word.

You know, there have been several times in my life when people have asked me to pray for them that they receive the ministry that God has for them. My answer to them is that they have already received that ministry, but that they don't really like the one they received from God. They don't like the idea of becoming a servant to other people, they like the idea of other people looking up to them, but they don't like the idea of other people using up their time. They like the idea of people serving them by being part of their Bible study, or part of their church congregation, but they don't like the idea of serving the people by helping them with physical needs.

Ministry is accomplished in the body of Christ in two ways. You can either minister to the physical needs of people, or you can minister to the spiritual needs of people. And sadly, most people who want to minister are looking for a way to minister to the people in a spiritual way, but they don't want to minister in a physical way. And the reason for this is that it is easier to sit back and talk to someone about the word of God, but it is much harder to get up off the couch and go out and help someone cut their grass or fix their shingles or clean their house.

If you're a real Christian, then you will want to minister to the physical needs of the body of Christ as well as the spiritual needs of the body. And if you ever want to be really used of God, then all you really have to do is roll up your sleeves and get busy. There's plenty to be done out there. And if God has not yet opened the door for you to minister to people with spiritual things, it may very well be that the reason God isn't giving you that teaching ministry you've been wanting is that you haven't yet learned how to apply to your own life the principles of God's word that you think you already know so much about.

One of the rules of thumb that I try to apply to my life is that I try to concentrate mostly on being what God wants me to be, and paying less attention to what God wants me to do. When you concentrate on being what God wants you to be, you will automatically end up applying the word of God to your life, and consequently you will automatically end up ministering to the needs of others. But if you concentrate more on doing the work of God, you will get caught up in just looking to establish a recognized ministry, and when you do this you will most likely end up with either a dead ministry or with no ministry at all. God isn't looking so much for people to do his work. He can do his own work, he only shares his work in order that we can be blessed by him. But what he is mostly looking for is for people who will try their best to be what he wants them to be. In fact, serving people is only half of the spectrum of Christianity. The other half is serving God. You can't teach God anything, and you can't be his pastor. You can't be the shepherd to God, and you can't invite God to come to your Bible study.

What you need to do is to set your mind to start applying God's word to your own life, and after that maybe God will call you to more ministry. But it is certain that if you do a poor job of the basics of Christianity in your own life, he isn't going to make you one of his leaders. Oh sure, you can be one of the church leaders who Satan uses, but you won't be a true minister of God's word unless you first learn how to serve people.