Hi,

I think there were a few problems with Realm’s distribution of yesterday’s email. If you didn’t get it, [click here to read about hope and the king’s food taster, Nehemiah](https://www.dropbox.com/s/8v3vcx3zgrtxgat/Hope-in-Christ-email-%2370-Jun%2015.docx?dl=0).

Today’s updates:

* My 12:00 noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet today [on my personal Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* I’ve been told that my YouTube page/channel can be hard to find. A simple solution would be to [go to the link (here)](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChtwqaUcpZbwyTWnkp6INwQ?view_as=subscriber) and then bookmark the page or subscribe to my channel.

We are going to be in the Old Testament a good bit in the coming days. Why? Because these stories are all, in the end, about hope because they are stories about God, the God will not relent in his determination to rescue us from ourselves.

**Jeremiah 29:10-14 (NRSV)**

**For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon’s seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.**

**Revelation 3:14-22 (NRSV)**

**“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation:**

**“I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”**

Today’s passage from Revelation hits my heart hard every time I read it. You see, I know that I spent much of my adult life as a Laodicean Christian. I went to church much of the time, sang in choir a lot, even taught Sunday School now and then, but I was lukewarm. I would have told someone that I believed in Jesus and even been able to spout some smart-sounding theology, but I was really indifferent to the whole thing. I could take care of my own needs quite well . . . or so I thought. Sadly, I didn’t realize all this at the time. It is only by looking back from my new life in Christ that I can see my tepid faith for what it was.

So . . . when I read that Jesus wants to spit these wealthy lukewarm Laodiceans out of his mouth, I take a big gulp and thank God that he grabbed me rather than tossed me.

*Which is it?*

It is no surprise to us that Jesus would prefer the Laodiceans be hot for God, on fire and totally committed, trusting God in all things, and working to build for his kingdom. Surely, the creator of all things, the God of love, ought to be the focus of such passion and desire.

But preferring the Laodiceans be cold? Why would Jesus prefer people not know him at all, or even hate him, to simple indifference? In John’s gospel, when it comes to the question of Jesus there is no middle-ground, no “we’ll see,” no fence straddling . . . no room for indifference. One believes or one does not. One path leads to the light, the other remains in the darkness. One way leads to life, the other to death. And it is Jesus, who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

In John’s gospel and in this message to the Laodiceans, the term “lukewarm Christian,” is an oxymoron, it makes no sense. How could someone have genuinely been born from above (John 3), have given their life over to Jesus Christ, and yet be indifferent about the whole thing. At least Jesus knows where he stands with a person who is either hot or cold.

I know that many who come to church are like I once was – present but apathetic, not allowing God into any part of their life beside Sunday morning. A little worship here and there suits them just fine. But Jesus stands at the door, knocking, waiting for us to open it, not just peek though the crack.

*God never gives up – neither should we*

I don’t know whether you’d call the Jews exiled to Babylonia hot, cold, or lukewarm. Shattered and lost would probably be more accurate. They had been moved over a thousand miles with no prospects of returning to Jerusalem. They believed that they were being punished for their abandonment of God. In essence, they were headed to prison to serve out a life sentence.

Yet, this letter from Jeremiah bears a message from God that even though the generation sent into exile will not return, their children will come back to Jerusalem. This passage is grounded upon a faithful God who never gives up on promises made. And God promises the people a “future with hope” (v.11).

Now, we might think that God would simply reach out and accomplish all this. God shouldn’t need help – “I know the plans I have for you” (v. 11). Yet, these very plans will be shaped and affected by the people. When they call upon God and pray to him . . . *then* God will hear them (v. 12). The people will find God, and God will find them, but they are to seek God with their heart (v. 13).

There is deep mystery here that speaks to the profound love that God has for us. You and I, weak and confused though we may be, influence the plans and the actions of God. It is true that our faith is a gift from God so that no one can boast about it (Ephesians 2:8-9), yet we are to search for God. We are to pray. We are to open the door. As Anthony Saldarini puts it in his commentary on Jeremiah, “None of that may be quite logical, but it is that peculiar biblical claim about human freedom and divine initiative, or, if you will, divine freedom and human will. . . . God’s will and freedom do not run rampant over human words and deeds – good or bad – nor does human intentionality so control what happens that God is unable to effect the divine purposes. What ‘happens’ occurs within that tension. So we count on God to be God and we pray to God in order to bring that about.”

*Pray and do*

When I was in my late 40’s, I was lost. So lost that I did something I think I had never done before. I got on my knees and prayed. I prayed that God would pull me close, would give me direction and purpose. In a word, rescue me.

And God did. Over a period of a few months, God began to move me out of my lukewarmness and brought Patti to me. By the grace of God, I abandoned my indifference toward God and embraced the life-fulfilling passion that comes from an ever-growing relationship with our Lord.

People sometimes come to me to talk about that time in my life, for they themselves are lukewarm and lost. My advice to them is always the same: pray and do. Pray and then do the things you would do if you felt the passion you want to feel. Attend worship each week. Join a Sunday School or a Bible study. Find a place to serve on a regular basis. There is infinite variety in how this plays out in our lives, but the basics are now and have always been the same. . . . pray and do.

*A bit more on Jeremiah’s letter*

As the unrelenting pressure of the Babylonian empire fell ever harder on Jerusalem and the Jews nearly 600 years before Jesus, Nebuchadnezzar began to send increasing number of Jews into exile. A large wave left for Babylonia in 597BC, ten years before the final destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Today’s passage from the book of Jeremiah is part of a letter from Jeremiah (who is still in Jerusalem at the time of its writing) to Jews who had already been exiled.

The message from God that Jeremiah delivers in the letter is grounded in future hope, though not immediate. The Jews have been exiled to a distant land. They are to go ahead and build homes and raise their families. They are even to pray that Babylon prospers, for then they will prosper as well. It will be decades before God brings them home.

However, the message also carries a warning. The people are not to trust lying “prophets and diviners” amongst them. Their visions and dreams are not to be trusted. We aren’t told the specifics, but there were false prophets in Israel and there are false prophets even in exile in Babylon. Based on the conflicts between Jeremiah and some of the false prophets, it seems most likely that the deceivers were promising a quick end to the exile.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott