

Revelation 3:14-22

Introduction:

Picture yourself in the ballroom of the Titanic. The surroundings are elegant. The people are elegant. The entertainment, the music, the food – all elegant. Some of the richest people in the world are on board, including members of the British aristocracy and the social elite of America and several other countries. Among those in the first class parlor suites, the richest is Lt. Col. John Jacob Astor IV, who is worth about \$100 million at the time. In today's money he would be a billionaire.

Nobody in that ballroom knew the end of the story as we do today. On its maiden voyage in April of 1912, the ship hit an iceberg. Within hours the ship was underwater and most of its passengers died. Wealth, power and prominence all proved meaningless as the ship sank. There wasn't even enough room in the lifeboats.

The church in Laodicea was a lot like this crowd on the Titanic. They were well off and self-sufficient. They were satisfied with the place they found themselves in life. But Jesus sees them differently and says they are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked." They are totally unaware of their urgent spiritual need. This church receives the most severe rebuke of any of the seven that receive these letters.

A Look at the Passage:

3:14 Laodiceans – most manuscripts read "the church in Laodicea." The name of the city means "the rule of the people," which would be something like "democracy."

The city was very well off. Years earlier there had been an earthquake that destroyed many of the cities in the area. Rome stepped in with what we might call federal disaster relief to help with rebuilding. Laodicea didn't need any help. They rebuilt without Romans assistance and some of its citizens even contributed to the rebuilding of other cities. The city's wealth came from three main sources.

1. **Commerce:** It was a commercial or financial hub in the ancient world.
2. **Manufacturing:** It was known for the manufacture of cloth and clothing. There was a soft black wool that the city was known for, which was sold for export as well as locally.
3. **Medicine:** It had a famous a medical school and was known especially for the production of a substance call Phrygian powder that was used as a salve to soothe eyes and cure eye diseases.

The Amen, the Faithful and True Witness All of these imply that Jesus has the last word. He sees things as the really are and calls them as he sees them.

The Beginning of the creation of God This title can be misunderstood, as some groups insist that this means Jesus is the first of all created beings. It would be better to think of him as the origin of the creation of God.

John 1:1-3 ¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

3:15-16 neither cold nor hot Laodicea was wealthy, but the one thing it lacked was a good water supply, so their water was brought by aqueduct from quite far away. The nearby city of Heirapolis had hot springs which were prized for their medicinal value. Another neighboring city, Colossae, was supplied by cold, refreshing streams. Laodicea had neither. Christ is speaking to them in terms they can readily understand.

I wish you were cold or hot If we put it in spiritual terms, Christ says that coldness, even to the point of open hostility, would be preferable to the state they are in. Prior to his conversion the Apostle Paul was a vigorous opponent of Christ. At least he took Jesus seriously. Christ was able to confront the hatred of Saul of Tarsus head on. Robert L. Thomas puts it like this,

To prefer outright rejection over a half-way response is startling, to say the least, but to profess Christianity while remain untouched by its fire is a disaster. There is more hope for the openly antagonistic than for the coolly indifferent.

I will vomit you out of my mouth When the people of Israel came into the land of Canaan, the Lord gave them the following severe warning. After a list of prohibitions, the Lord says,

Leviticus 18:24-29 ²⁴Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. ²⁵For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. ²⁶You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you ²⁷(for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), ²⁸lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

Jesus is giving a similar warning to this church. Their current state of affairs is making him sick and he is not going to put up with it indefinitely. He now describes the problem in more detail.

3:17 I am rich, have become wealthy and have need of nothing We mentioned that Laodicea was a very self-sufficient place. The second phrase “have become wealthy” carries the meaning of, “my wealth is due to my own exertions” (Thomas, citing Swete, Alford, Beckwith).

Here in the Midwest, we respect enterprising people who work hard to make something of themselves. That pioneer spirit is what made America great – but it has a downside. Unfortunately it is this very quality that can make us something like the church in Laodicea.

We're diligent, independent people – not a bad thing in itself, but this is the very thing that can blind us to our spiritual need. This church was very content with its own condition, but like passengers on the Titanic, they were completely blind to their horrible need. Christ's assessment of them is completely at odds with their assessment of themselves.

The Danger of Self-Sufficiency:

There is a poem from 1875 by the English poet William Ernest Henley entitled *Invictus*, meaning "unconquerable." The last two lines state,

I am the master of my fate:

I am the captain of my soul.

You may remember the movie by the same name. Morgan Freeman play Nelson Mandela. Matt Damon plays a South African rugby star. Clint Eastwood is the director and movie is one of my favorites.

In the context of the movie, we admire Nelson Mandela for not giving in to the corrupt apartheid government, even though it meant years in prison, much of it on Robben Island off the coast of Cape Town. His determination eventually leads to his election as president.

Then, in an environment of the worst imaginable racial tension, Morgan and Matt work together to bring unity to a divided nation. They don't give in to the lower elements, either white or black, that would drag the nation into an endless cycle of revenge, violence and further strife. It's totally inspiring.

But here is a problem: The same poem, *Invictus*, and the same words were also given as a handwritten last statement by Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh just before he was executed at the federal prison in Terre Haute back in June of 2001. In that context, the title "Unconquerable," and the words, "*I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul,*" just seem defiant and actually evil. What do you do to someone who kills 149 adults and 19 children in one violent act and is then wholly unrepentant – the resolute, unbending master of his fate?

Step one in the Christian life is to recognize our own need.

3:18 **gold ... white garments ... eye salve** It's remarkable how Jesus hits on the three things that this city would have been most proud of. You can almost taste the irony as Jesus goes down the list of their shortcomings and offers the solutions.

Gold refined in the fire that you may be rich This church was just too comfortable. In the area of spiritual riches they were complete paupers, but their earthly affluence made them oblivious to their great need.

White garments that you may be clothed Laodicea was known for its black wool, but white garments in the Bible are associated with true righteousness.

Revelation 19:7-8 ⁷Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” ⁸And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see This Christ says to a city known for its eye salve. Do you think they would feel the force of that rebuke. In the Gospel of John, the apostle tells of Christ healing a blind man. Afterward there is a big discussion that ends like this,

John 9:39-41 ³⁹And Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.” ⁴⁰Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, “Are we blind also?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.

Too many of the people in the Laodicean church were still lost in their sins and didn’t know it.

I counsel you to buy from Me This is one of the hardest things for some of us to grasp. When Jesus says, “Buy from Me,” he is using it somewhat ironically. Spiritual riches cannot be obtained in the same way as material wealth. If they could, the rich would have a shortcut into the new heavens and the new earth. These things can’t be bought except by giving up ourselves.

The only way to obtain the things Jesus offers is to acknowledge our complete poverty before him. This is extremely hard for self-sufficient, self-satisfied people to do.

Many would say, “Give me some religious standards to keep and I’ll show you I’m a good person.” Others, not happy with any religion on the market, decide for themselves what a righteous life ought to look like. They are good, by their own standards anyway. They don’t hurt anybody. They pay their bills. They may think, “At least I’m not as bad as this guy or that guy or that religious hypocrite down the street.”

Jesus asks us to drop our guard and stand before Him helpless.

Isaiah 55:1-3 ¹“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. ²Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. ³Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you— The sure mercies of David.

And just a bit later,

Isaiah 55:6-7 ⁶ Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

But too many of us might not want to be pardoned. We want God to give us a pass on our own terms. The problem with that is that we don't see ourselves as clearly as he sees us. So Jesus shows the church in Laodicea that their condition is exactly the opposite of that which they think it is.

3:19 Look at Christ's motive. It is love. This may be a very harsh letter, but Jesus is not finished with this church just yet. He is trying to warn them of their sorry state before it is too late.

3:20 Jesus stands at the door knocking. He is outside the church in Laodicea at the present time.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door The whole church doesn't have to respond. Jesus will come in for anyone. Jesus is speaking to the whole church but he is looking for individuals who will respond. The more, the better.

Illustration: Jesus is not like Big Bad Wolf. You know the fairy tale right?

"Little pig, little pig, let me come in."

"No, no, not by the hair on my chinny chin chin."

"Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in."

Only you can let him in so that the two of you can enjoy the fellowship that he describes. If you don't respond, he stays on the outside. That is not where he belongs at all.

I will come in to him and dine with him and he with me. The wording Jesus uses pertains to main or evening meal. He is not talking about grabbing a quick lunch in the middle of a busy day. He wants to spend some time and hang out with you. But again only you can let him in.

Notice how the dining is reciprocal: **I with him and he with me.** Wherever Jesus is invited as the guest he soon becomes the host. When he went to a wedding, he eventually supplied the wine. After his resurrection, when he met his disciples on the beach, he was grilling up some fish and offered them some food. When he was walking on the road to Emmaus, two of his disciples invited him to spend the night with them. He was the one who broke the bread and offered the blessing and they immediately realized who he was.

We may think you are inviting Jesus in as a guest, but what we have to realize is that we are the guests in his house. He owns it all and it's our privilege to enjoy fellowship with him.

3:21 And it goes farther than that. He invites us to sit on His throne.

2 Timothy 2:12 *If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. ...*

Later in the book of Revelation, we read of the New Jerusalem, and it says,

Revelation 22:3-5 ³And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. ⁴They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. ⁵There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. **And they shall reign forever and ever.**

So Jesus is speaking to us, but he is also speaking about us. And he is speaking of a glorious future that will never ever end. You were created to be heavenly royalty, but what Jesus is asking you to do is to respond to that call.

3:22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Conclusions:

- 1. God has a right to rebuke us.** When he does so, he does so out of love. The problem is that in our present cultural climate, we may not be comfortable with a God who ever rebukes anybody at all.
- 2. There is danger of confusing material riches with spiritual riches.** In a culture like ours that admires the rich and famous, we may mistakenly think that those people have it made. Not so. They may be passengers on a spiritual Titanic and the iceberg may be just ahead.
- 3. There is a danger in being blind to our true condition.** We can all have terrible blind spots in our lives. Therefore it is essential that we let Scripture be the measure of our condition. By that standard we all fall short and need to let Jesus examine us thoroughly.

Psalms 139:23-24 ²³Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; ²⁴And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

- 4. There is a danger in self-sufficiency.** The Christian is one who is willingly conquered by the love of Christ. The Christian refuses to be master of his or her own fate, or captain of his or her own soul, and willingly gives Jesus those titles.

- 5. If we are going to enjoy fellowship with Jesus, the door only opens from the inside.**

Illustration: In the back of our building, in the middle, there is white door. It has no keyhole and no handle of any kind. On the outside it's just a flat, white surface. It can only be opened from the inside.

That's the kind of door Jesus is standing at and he is not going to break it down. He's knocking right now and inviting you to respond.