

# The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 3:14-22

Topic

Jesus tells the Laodiceans He will vomit them out of His mouth unless they acquire from Him certain priceless spiritual resources

Title

*"The Hurl of Great Price"*

## Introduction

You may have heard the rumors that I like coffee. A few of you mistakenly think I am obsessed with coffee, and especially with gear for making it in a variety of unusual ways.

As the saying goes, *Haters gonna hate.*

What you probably don't know is that I've recently discovered the world of international bottled mineral waters.

Let's take a random country - say, Italy. Most people have heard of San Pelligrino; but have you heard of Ferrarelle? Or Fiuggi? Or Panna? Or San Benedetto? Or Sole? Those are also Italian bottled waters.

In fact, [finewaters.com](http://finewaters.com) lists about 600 brands of Italian domestic bottled water. I didn't misspeak; *I said 600.*

I know what you're wondering. You want to know how many bottled waters there are in Turkey. The same website says there are 288.

**There wasn't any bottled water in first century Turkey, when John wrote the Revelation to the seven churches located there. But water is important for our understanding of the letter Jesus dictated to him for the Laodiceans.**

You see, Laodicea had almost no water sources of its own. According to one document I read, "no other city in the Lycus Valley was as dependent on external water supplies as Laodicea."

Two neighboring cities sent water to Laodicea: Hierapolis and Colosse.

- Hierapolis, about six miles away, was known for its natural **hot spring water**. The baths of Hierapolis attracted citizens from all over the Roman Empire.
- Colosse was known for its **cold water**. Located about eleven miles from Laodicea, it was situated at the foot of Mount Cadmus, which peaked at 9000 feet. Ice-cold snow-and-rain-fed streams rushed down the mountain into Colosse.

One water was naturally hot at its source; one water was naturally cold at its source. By the time either arrived in Laodicea, it was lukewarm.

Isn't Jesus is going to tell the Laodiceans that they are neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm? As Mr. Spock might say, "Fascinating!"

Of course, it is so much more than "fascinating" for us, because God can use it to speak to us about our own spiritual temperature.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Takes Your Spiritual Temperature, and #2 You Can Tweak Your Spiritual Temperature.

## #1 Jesus Takes Your Spiritual Temperature

(v14-17)

This is the last of the letters to the seven churches. Too bad it wasn't a case of saving the best for last. Quite the contrary - Jesus had nothing good to say about this church.

Rev 3:14 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:

Right away you notice something odd about this greeting. Rather than describing them as the church *in* Laodicea, as with all the other churches, most Bibles translate the phrase the church *of the* Laodiceans. It sounds like they had taken ownership of the church away from the Lord.

The name 'Laodicea' lends itself to that interpretation. It is derived from two words which means *the rule and decision of the people*.

The Laodiceans ruled themselves. They were not submitted to the authority of Jesus Christ.

To this self-governing body Jesus described Himself as the "Amen." Amen translates to *so be it*. We use it in prayer as if it meant "the end," but it is really a statement of agreement. We should only say "*Amen*" when we agree with what someone said.

A prerequisite for walking with the Lord is that you always agree with Him. You read the Word, and whatever you find in it, you say, "so be it."

Jesus was and is the "Faithful and True Witness."

1. Faithful Witness means His Word can be received with confidence. He will keep His Word and has power to do so.
2. True Witness means that His Word is never speculation or guess work. It is rock-solid.

The "beginning of the creation of God" doesn't mean that Jesus was the first thing created; it means that He created all things. It means that all things have their beginning, their *origin*, in Him. As you read in Colossians 1:16,

Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

Reverencing Jesus as the Creator of all things puts the punctuation mark on this description of Jesus. By definition the creature ought to submit to the Creator. Thankfully the Creator is "faithful" and "true" and we should therefore always say "Amen" to His Word.

Jesus' comments and criticisms from this point forward will make more sense to you if you see that He is using, as an illustration, the sharing of a meal with them.

He says, for example, in verse twenty, "If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

But it was a dinner gone bad:

- He'll describe the things they serve Him as being neither hot or cold, but unappetizingly lukewarm.
- He'll indicate what they serve Him causes Him to be sick.

Rev 3:15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

Rev 3:16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

The Laodiceans were familiar with lukewarm water, because by the time water arrived from Hierapolis or Colosse, it had become lukewarm. Jesus was applying that same description to their works, comparing them to food being served Him at a dinner.

When we are talking about spiritual things, in our culture, we normally think of being "hot" as something good, and to be desired, and being "cold" as something bad, and to be avoided.

*We can't think that way here.* In the context of this letter to the Laodiceans, **there's absolutely nothing wrong with being cold.**

In fact, it can be a good thing. We've already said that the cold water of Colosse was something good and to be desired. It was a special treat to have cold water at a time before there was any means of refrigeration.

Also, when you're eating a meal, some things are better served hot, and other things are better served cold.

When something that ought to be hot or cold sits out too long it becomes lukewarm and is not as tasty.

Today we can just nuke it in the microwave, or put it back in the fridge or freezer. Not so in the first century. Lukewarm food was not very appealing.

Taste, however, is the least of the problems with lukewarm food. If hot food, or cold food, sits out too long at room temperature, it can allow bacteria to grow to dangerous levels that can cause severe illness.

I believe that this is what Jesus had in mind when He said they were neither hot, nor cold, but had become lukewarm. **The Laodiceans had assumed room temperature.**

Have you ever heard someone use the expression, "he assumed room temperature," as a cruelly humorous way of announcing that a person is dead? You have now.

Were the Laodiceans spiritually dead? Were they nonbelievers? Maybe; undoubtedly some were. Some of the language and description of them lends itself to their being spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins. The fact they were gathered as a church doesn't mean they were saved.

Other language in this letter, however, points to their being saved. For example in verse nineteen Jesus says He will discipline them the way you discipline your children.

I have to conclude that at least some of them were saved, even though terribly backslidden.

Can a believer be described as assuming room temperature?

A Christian can assume room temperature by being out too much in the world. You can take on the characteristics and habits and pursuits of the world, so much so that it is hard to distinguish you from the average nonbeliever.

I think this church was full of both nonbelievers and room-temperature, backslidden Christians. A case can be made for either, so why not both?

Room temperature food, that has been out too long, makes you sick. You'll likely vomit it up from food poisoning.

Jesus said that the Laodiceans were like that. They had assumed room temperature in such a way that it caused Him to "spew" them out of His mouth.

The worldliness that caused their lukewarmness is described in verse seventeen.

Rev 3:17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked -

"Rich" means just what you think it means. They had plenty of money.

"Have become wealthy" is better translated *increased with goods*. They used their money to buy this world's goods. They invested heavily in the world but not in Heaven.

Rich people who surround themselves with the comforts of this world begin to trust in the *external* rather than the *eternal*. It's easy to begin to think you have need of nothing.

Maybe we're not rich or wealthy or increased with goods. We can still want to be. The very love of those things, the love of the world, will just as quickly 'lukewarm' our works as actually having riches, wealth, and goods.

It's a mistake to assume you are just fine when, in fact, you've assumed room temperature.

You're familiar with anorexia sufferers who look in the mirror and, even though they are dangerously thin, see themselves as overweight.

Jesus held up a spiritual mirror to the Laodiceans to show them they were "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." They saw themselves otherwise; but spiritually they were blind beggars so wretched and miserable that they didn't even have clothes to wear, but were naked.

Look into the mirror of His Word. We need to believe the image in the mirror Jesus holds up - *not* the image we have of ourselves.

- Are you dead? You are unless you've been born-again.
- Are you backslidden? You are if you aren't saying "Amen" to everything in the Word of God, but are harboring sin. Agree with the Lord and stop sinning.



## #2 You Can Tweak Your Spiritual Temperature

(v18-22)

The USDA cautions you to keep hot foods hot, and cold foods cold. Bacteria grow most rapidly in the range of temperatures between 40°F and 140°F, doubling in number in as little as twenty minutes.

This range of temperatures is called the “Danger Zone.”

*You and I are constantly in a spiritual Danger Zone.* Jesus did not take us out of the world. He left us in the world, so that we could affect it for good. But He told us that in the world, we should expect tribulation. He told us since the world hated Him, it will hate us.

The Danger Zone is where we operate; and it's where we will continue to operate until we go to be with Jesus.

It becomes a problem, however, when we no longer see the world as a Danger Zone, but as our Comfort Zone.

Jesus tells us how to regulate our temperature to stay safe in the Danger Zone.

Rev 3:18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

There are three things that you need to know about the city of Laodicea:

1. It was a prosperous city noted for its many banks.
2. They manufactured a medicinal eye ointment.
3. They bred and raised sheep with unusual black wool and were noted for their garments.

The Laodiceans were wealthy, depositing gold into the many banks.

Maybe you follow the stock market, and maybe I should, but I don't. It bugs me that one of the apps that Apple won't let me delete is the one that checks the stock market.

I do own **one** share in Disney. My dividend last year was \$1.25.

The Laodiceans had all the gold they needed to pad the Danger Zone with the comforts and luxuries and distractions of the world, to make it more comfortable. As Darrell Cartrip said in *Cars*, "Short term gain, long term loss."

Actually, it's not even a short term gain, because you can't trust in this world's goods. The comfort they offer is fleeting and false.

Jesus is a better gold-broker than any banker. If for no other reason, He is able to store up your rewards in Heaven where they are safe from theft and corruption.

He is also a sort of alchemist when it comes to gold. He can make gold out of your trials. He says here it is "refined in the fire." He's talking about what we might call Job-gold.

Job said, "But He knows the way that I take; **When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold**" (23:10).

Real wealth isn't measured by how much gold you have in the bank, but by how much Job-gold has been refined through your life and its trials.

Jesus next said, "buy from Me... white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed."

I told you that Laodicea was famous for its black wool. It was a garment district, and I'm sure the Laodiceans were all decked-out in the finest apparel. They could afford to visit their own personal tailors, and have tailor-made outfits suitable for every occasion.

You've seen those red carpet interviews preceding major events. They always ask, "who are you wearing?"

The Laodiceans that they were wearing the world when they should have been wearing Jesus.

Think of it this way. On earth they could strut about in the finest black-wool garments. None of their earthly garments, however, would stand a chance in Heaven. They'd all be disintegrated - leaving them naked.

We saw in a previous study that the Bible uses clothing to illustrate your salvation. When you get saved, it's as if Jesus takes your inappropriate garments and gives you, instead, His robe of righteousness. It's the only garment that is Heaven approved.

Then we showed you how, in your obedience to the Lord, and in your service to Him, you can adorn the basic robe of righteousness with precious things that Jesus gives you at His reward seat.

We should therefore be busy adorning our robes, rather than falling in love with the things of the world.

"Only one life, will soon be passed; Only what's done for Christ will last."

Jesus next said, "... and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see." A popular eye ointment known as "Phrygian powder" was produced in Laodicea.

Jesus called them "blind." No amount of Phrygian powder would restore sight to the blind. But Jesus could anoint and thereby open blind eyes.

We talk about a person being "blind" to something that is going on in their life. They've been blinded by the god of this world. We then pray for them, that their eyes would be opened.

Well, in each of our lives, there are areas of blindness that require the anointing of Jesus so that we might see them.

One commentator wrote,

Sometimes, when you come to church, suddenly in the sermon you see yourself as you really are it is not a very nice sight and it is as though Jesus is putting the spittle on your eyes and saying: go and wash. It is as if Jesus is saying to you that he is putting salve on your eyes, the eyes of your soul, so that you can see yourself and see Him.

**Rev 3:19** As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

This sounds like family discipline, does it not? At least some of the Laodiceans must have been saved.

There was nothing good about the church of the Laodiceans, but God nevertheless held out hope that they would repent.

More than just holding out hope, the Lord commanded them to repent, for their own good.

If in any way, however so slight, you resemble a Laodicean, you should be "zealous" about repenting. Agree with Jesus and turn to Him from your sin. The Holy Spirit will enable your repentance.

Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

It has become popular for Bible teachers to say that this verse, used for evangelism, is really spoken to a church, and therefore it shouldn't be used as an evangelistic text.

That's not really fair, because, as we've seen, there were both believers and nonbelievers in Laodicea.

It **is** an appropriate verse for *anyone*, in whatever spiritual state you find yourself.

If you are not a Christian, the sinless, risen, ascended, Son of God sends His Holy Spirit to operate on your heart, by grace freeing your will to make a decision for Jesus.

He's "knock, knock, knockin' on your heart's door" - and that means you are being enabled to answer the knocking and let Him in.

I have no problem thinking of Jesus knocking on my heart's door when I'm backslidden. If I am in sin, I'm acting as if the Lord isn't present with me. He is, of course; but I'm not living that way.

His knocking is a metaphor to shock me into the realization I have kicked Him out, at least temporarily, while I sin.

Some of you, as children, might have the sad memory of your dad pulling up to a bar, or a casino, and asking you to wait in the car. Hours later, he'd emerge, either drunk, or broke, or both.

That's a little like what we try to do to Jesus. We ask Him to wait, outside, while we go in and sin. It's stupid, but we do it anyway.

You've heard it said, and it's true, that Jesus will not force His way through the door. You must open it from the inside.

But that doesn't mean Jesus isn't persistent. Jesus knocks, and I say He will knock incessantly. Knock... knock... knock... knock... knock. Louder at times, too. Each knock is intended to capture your spiritual attention - to get you to leave your sin in order to answer the knocking and get back into fellowship with Jesus.

He's gentle, but He's persistent, because He loves you.

Jesus wants to "dine" with you. One of the accusations that the religious leaders of Israel had against Jesus was that He was a glutton (Matthew 11:19). It seems that Jesus was always eating with people.

It helps to know the customs and the culture of first century Jews. Eating with someone was thought to be a form of intimate sharing and fellowship. As each person broke off a piece of bread from the loaf and dipped it in the common bowl, they were being nourished by the same food. It was an illustration of two people becoming more like each other, more familiar with each other, more intimate with each other.

Jesus ate with people, not because He was a glutton, but to demonstrate God's grace. God Himself, in the person of Jesus, was condescending to share intimate fellowship with sinners.

Rev 3:21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

We showed you last week that it is the Christian who overcomes, *not* the overcomer who becomes a Christian.

You CAN overcome the world; it's a choice you make moment-by-moment, day-by-day.

Jesus "overcame" by faithfully completing His mission to go to the Cross. He did it in the power of the Holy Spirit. He was raised from the dead and rewarded with a seat at the Father's right hand, from which He will return to rule the universe.

You can overcome by faithfully completing your mission - which is to walk with Jesus led by, and empowered by, the same Holy Spirit that led, empowered, and raised Jesus from the dead.

You will be raised from the dead, or raptured, and, when Jesus returns in His Second Coming, you will rule with Him.

What strikes me most about verse twenty-one is that you don't see it coming - not after the strong condemnation of the Laodiceans.

These self-sufficient, miserable, poor, wretched, naked and blind people are nevertheless given hope they can rule with Jesus.

Not just that they might barely make it into Heaven; but that they will have seats of honor.

Are you without hope today? You shouldn't be. The Lord wants to lift your head heavenward. Let Him.

Rev 3:22 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." ' "

Did Laodicea listen to this letter? Did they do anything about it?

No. It appears that nobody in that church let Jesus in. There is no future history of that church, there are no traditions, no legends, nothing has come down to us. If you go to the town today there is not even a trace of the church.

Am I listening to this letter? Are you?



