

**What Jesus Says to His Church**  
**Part 8: Laodicea—the Nauseating Church**  
**Sermon Summary**

Wednesday, August 1, 2007, at the height of rush hour, traffic inched across the eight lanes of the I-35 bridge in Minneapolis. Without warning, it suddenly gave way in a catastrophic failure, plunging 111 vehicles into the mighty Mississippi below. One hundred forty-five were injured and thirteen died. It would be easy to blame this bridge failure on external factors—a growing city and the weight of too much traffic on it at one given time—but that would be inaccurate.

Government inspectors had known for years that the bridge was suffering from metal fatigue. See those bent supports? But as their third busiest bridge, carrying 140,000 vehicles daily, the city officials decided that it would be too disruptive to close it down for repair. Notice the date on this inspector's photo? June 10, 2003—a full four years before the collapse. Inspectors **knew** that this bridge, which looked solid to the untrained eye, was collapsing from within.

In the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation, we've seen that Jesus Christ inspected his church, and deemed it unsound. On the surface, **Ephesus** looked solid, with its good deeds and correct doctrine. But the Heavenly Inspector pointed out a weak spot—a lack of love that soon would lead to its lamp-stand being removed. In **Pergamum**, Jesus pointed out greed and compromise as the factor which soon enough would ruin this church as well. Corrupt **Thyatira** tolerated an immoral false prophetess who was leading Jesus' bond-servants astray. Jesus himself brought judgment on Thyatira, killing Jezebel and her followers. **Sardis** had a reputation of being alive, but the Heavenly Inspector pronounced that church D.O.A.

Today we've arrived at Jesus' seventh and final inspection of a church—and it ain't pretty. Jesus will tell Laodicea that they make him sick. He threatens to vomit them out of his mouth. But before we listen to this shocking letter, I want to point out Jesus' motive.

In verse 19, Jesus says to the church of Laodicea: "**Those whom I love**, I reprove and discipline." So the words we're about to hear **are** hard, but they're **not harsh**. These are **loving** words, designed to intervene in a very perilous situation. So, as you hear Jesus' shocking words, I want us also to look for proof of his love and generosity toward this church.

As you follow along in your sermon study guide, jot a "heart" in the margin of everything that indicates Jesus' love for this church. Jesus' letter to the church in Laodicea is two pages from the end of your guide. So, we'll jot a "heart" symbol next to anything that shows Jesus love and generosity.

Jesus said: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." Wow! Jesus' disappointment with Laodicea is obvious. But when we remember that Jesus was essentially holding an "intervention", we see these strong words in a different light. When you love someone who's destroying their life with alcohol or drugs, you've at least thought about running an intervention. In an intervention, you speak hard truths—**because** you love someone who's destroying their life. You lay out some concrete choices that will help them step back from the cliff and get onto a healthy, productive

path. That's what Jesus is doing with these churches. His hard words, are obvious, so let's take some time to find those indicators of his love, grace, and mercy.

First of all, there's Jesus' explicit statement that he is reproving and disciplining them **because** he loves them. Interventions are thankless events; people don't conduct interventions for folks they don't care about. So in addition to this **explicit declaration** of love, we ought to be able to find plenty of other **indicators** of love. Let's see...

Jesus began simply by stating what they affirm about themselves: You say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," Now, I don't love as well as Jesus does, because when *I* come across boastful people like that, I tend to excuse myself from their presence as quickly as I can. I just find them unpleasant. But Jesus, in love, engages them for **their** good. He replies:

You're mistaken. You do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. Love always **moves toward** people. Whereas I want to **disengage** from boastful people, Jesus **engages** with them. That takes love. The church of Laodicea **didn't** know this about themselves. They **genuinely** thought that they were rich, wealthy, and in need of nothing. It's kinda like when someone has spinach stuck between their teeth and **doesn't know it**. The loving thing is to tell them. But when it's that blow-hard bragger at work who got the spinach in his teeth, you just shut up and enjoy it! So even in this uncomfortable reply of Jesus', we already see love in action.

But then Jesus engages even more... Jesus says: I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, so that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. He offers to help them solve the problem that they don't even know about or are willing to acknowledge. Once again, love **moves toward** others—and that's what Jesus is doing here. He offers them true riches and wealth **of knowing him**. He offers them clothing—the purity of being covered by Jesus' blood—to cover the shame of their sin. And he offers to cure their blindness, by opening their eyes so they can see and believe in him.

**That's** love. But there's even more. See that first line: "I advise you to buy from me" ? Jesus **looks like** a price-gouging opportunist—he's found a bunch of needy people and says, "**You're in luck! I just happen to have** exactly what you need!" Like those home repair guys who show up after a hurricane. But there's an Old Testament background to Jesus' offer: Yes, he **says** "Come **buy** from me"—but his **price** is shocking: **it's all free!** Here's the Old Testament background to Jesus' offer to the Laodiceans:

"Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk—it's all free! Why spend your money on food that does not satisfy? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen, and you will find life. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you unfailing love..." Well, that puts it in a whole new light! Jesus says to a bunch of self-deceived braggarts, "You've got serious problems—let me solve them for you at no cost. All that's required is that you accept my gift." Jesus is looking a whole lot more loving than he did at first, isn't he?! But there's even one more gracious element.

Jesus doesn't force himself on anyone. He says "I **advise** you..." Isn't that amazing? Kings give **orders**, not advice. But not Jesus. He's a gentleman. He's Lord of all, and yet he **advises** us to **let him help**

**us** out of our predicament —**for free!** That’s amazing grace. Does that sound sweet to you? Grace **doesn’t** sound attractive to the proud of heart, but when God’s grace **does** sound attractive to a person, they’re perfectly positioned to experience his blessing.

Then, in verse 20, “Gentleman Jesus” makes this request and offer: Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. Look—he’s **always moving toward** us! Jesus is offering to share a meal with us; he’s offering intimate fellowship. But it’s an offer and a request—not a demand. If we **don’t** open the door, he **doesn’t** barge in. And remember—he wasn’t offering this to folks who were doing their best to please him. He was offering this to folks who **nauseated him** with their **braggadocio! Incredible! What kind of a God does that?!** And then it gets even better! Each of these seven letters ends with a promise to those who “over-come”. Remember what we learned about “over-comers”?

It comes from the Greek word, “Nike”. In Greek, “nike” means victory. (They pronounced it a bit differently. That’s the American way of saying it.) And do you remember what we learned it takes **to become** an over-comer? We looked at a passage which uses “nike” **four** times! Here it is...  
Whoever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world? He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Let’s highlight were those four occurrences of “nike” are: Whoever is born of God **overcomes** the world; and this is the **victory** that has **overcome** the world: our faith. Who is the one who **overcomes** the world? He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. But now let’s answer the question: “**Who** get’s the victory?” Take for example, me and LeBron James. We’d be willing to take on **any two** of you. And **guess who gets** the championship rings? **It ain’t you!** But notice that I said **rings**—plural. **Both** LeBron and I get rings—but **he** earned them for us. So, in the eternal, spiritual realm, “**Who** gets the victory?” Whoever is born of God **overcomes** the world; and this is the **victory** that has **overcome** the world: our faith. Who is the one who **overcomes** the world? He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Overcoming is **not** something that **we** accomplish. For each of these churches, Jesus tells them of actions they need to take. But taking those actions is not what makes them over-comers. Faith in Christ makes one an over-comer. Jesus carries us across the finish line. We **can’t** be victorious in our own effort, because God’s standard is perfection, and **one sin** dooms us. **But the right man** can carry **us** to victory—no matter how much of a liability **we** may be. So, **we truly** can be over-comers—Jesus says so in each of these letters—but **we** cannot **accomplish** the victory. **Jesus** does, and he **gives us** the victory. And when he gives it to us, then **we** truly possess it, even though **we did not** earn it—any more than **I** helped LeBron. On the basketball court, **I’m a liability**. But LeBron is **that good**. **Spiritually**, you and I are liabilities. We deserve condemnation in God’s eyes. But Jesus is so overwhelmingly victorious, that he single-handedly **carries us** to victory. We are “charity cases”.

So, **to whom** does Christ **give** the victory? **Not** to everyone. Only to...

1. those who are “born of God”. born again
2. those who “have faith” in Christ as savior.
3. those who “believe that Jesus is the Son of God” ie, all true Christians

And what do we charity cases receive? Well, what do **we** give to charity cases? Our loose change? Our cast-off clothes? Our grudging pity? Maybe so, but look what God gives to us charity cases: He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. Oh my! This is Jesus' offer to the lukewarm Laodiceans, who made him sick! Brothers and sisters— **what kind of a God do we have?!** Do you grasp the **generosity** of our God? When we, traitorous enemies, come to him in repentance and faith, he welcomes us and shares his throne with us?! I ask again: **What kind of a God do we have?!**

We have the kind of God who deserves our love, worship, adoration, and life-long loyal obedience. Yes, there are actions we must take—and want to take— **because** we love him and have been rescued. But our imperfect obedience does not make us an over-comer who sits on his throne. Grace through faith does that. Some of you are wiping a tear from your eye as you say in your heart: “Yes! Of course! That’s exactly what I want! I love you Lord Jesus!” But some of us are no where near these responses. Where are you? What is your heart-response to what Jesus says to his church? The seven churches of Revelation had a range of responses to Jesus as well.

If we the three colors of green, yellow, and red to represent the heart-condition of these seven churches, two of them received lavish praise, two of them received shocking condemnation, and three of them were a mixture. Ask yourself, “Where would I place myself?” Here is what we’ve learned over these past seven weeks: **Sardis**, the dead church, and **Laodicea**, the nauseating church, received shocking condemnation from the Lord. On the other end of the spectrum, Sweet Little **Sardis**, the persecuted church, and faithful **Philadelphia**, received lavish praise and encouragement. The middle zone is misleading, because it could lead one to think that these churches were on rather safe, solid ground, but that is misleading. They were in serious trouble—just not as immediate as Sardis and Laodicea. **Ephesus**, the loveless church, had it’s lamp-stand removed. **Pergamum**, the compromised church, held to the teaching of the immoral, idolatrous, Nicolaitans. Jesus said he’d come make war against them with the sword of his mouth if they didn’t repent. **Thyatira**, the corrupt church, tolerated that woman Jezebel and bragged about “the deep things of Satan”. Jesus **promised** to kill them with pestilence!

So, it would be a mistake to think, “Whew—I’m OK. I’m in the yellow zone.” The only “safe zone” with our “terrifying yet tender” Lord is the life of love, worship, adoration, and life-long loyal obedience to him. I hope that you see that. I remind us: Smyrna and Philadelphia weren’t perfect. There is no such thing as a perfect church. But they were doing well when it came to the important issues, and Jesus simply says, “Continue being faithful. Hold fast to your course. And don’t be afraid—I’ll carry you through the deep waters of persecution and suffering.”

So, what does Jesus say to the faithful church or disciple? If you would place yourself in the “green zone”, what would he say **to you?** He says: Do not fear suffering or persecution—I’ll bring you through it. Be faithful. You’re on the right path. Continue straight ahead. Hold fast to what you have—over-comers are called to persevere to the end.

What does Jesus say to who lukewarm or dead? If you would place yourself here, what would he say **to you?** He says: “Wake up!” You’re slumbering—and it’s a sleep that leads to death! “Strengthen what little bit remains before it’s too late.” “Remember the biblical truths you’ve received and heard.” “Keep my teaching. Knowledge is not enough—I require obedience.” “Be zealous! You cannot afford

a half-hearted response!” “Repent. You’re in danger—do a 180! Change course right now!”

And if you’re straddling the fence, Jesus says: “Remember your first love. Get off auto-pilot.” “Repent. This is a matter of life and death. Take it seriously.” “Resume. Do the deeds you did at first, when your love for me was new.”

This is what Jesus says to his church. What is he saying to you— **personally**? For eight weeks now we’ve been learning what Jesus says to his church. But churches are made up of **individuals**. And Jesus promises to over-comers are made **to individuals**. So, it’s time now to respond to the Lord Jesus as individuals. We’re going to take a minute or two now—it’ll feel like an eternity, but I promise you it’ll only be about a minute or two. We’re going to take a moment now of silent reflection to ask Jesus—“What about me? Which of these conditions **best** describes me? What responses do I need to offer to my Lord? And then we’re going to write our name in one of those blocks—red, yellow, or green. This is just between you and the Lord. Nobody else needs to know how you evaluate yourself. Jesus already knows—and I’m about to pray for each of us that he’ll speak to each of us individually about the condition of our hearts... and the response we need him to help us make.

Some of us are unsure if we’ll be able to fulfill what Jesus commands us to do. Truth is, **we** cannot, but **Christ** can. Christian living is supernatural living. We **cannot** live the Christian life in our own strength. You **cannot** fulfill the commitment you just made in your own strength. But Christ, he overwhelmingly conquers, and he enables us to make progress. Let’s close with my favorite passage in Scripture—Romans 8. “Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us? Can troubles or problems or sufferings or hunger or nakedness or danger or violent death? No! In all these things we are completely victorious through Christ who loves us. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation—will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Did I mention that this passage contains our word, “Nike”? It does. Well, not exactly. The words “completely victorious” actually are **an intensified form** of the word “nike”. Literally it is “hyper nike”! It’s the only occurrence of this word in the whole New Testament. Through the love of Christ, we “hyper nike”! As we conclude this series on “What Christ Says to His Church”, let’s stand and read this verse together as a church. Let’s do that. Would you stand please? And now, all together...

Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us? Can troubles or problems or sufferings or hunger or nakedness or danger or violent death? No! In all these things we are completely victorious through Christ who loves us. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation—will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And now, I’d like to pray and commit us to **trusting in** Christ’s “nike love” which enables us to be faithful, to hold fast, and to not fear. **Let’s pray...**