

FGBC: The Son and His Churches: Drinking Bath Water

Revelation 3:14-22

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We are weird. There are a little over a hundred people in this room. If our world had only 100 people imagine what that would look like. 84 of us would not be white. There would be 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 8 Africans and 5 people from North America – 4 and a half of those 5 of us would be from the States. 70 of us would be unable to read. 50 would suffer from malnutrition and only 1 would have a university education.¹ What I'm saying is we are not normal by human standards. We are so weird.

Did you know that the richest 10% of people hold 85% of the world's wealth? At the other end of the spectrum the bottom 50 percent of the world lives on less than \$2.50 a day, and 80% lives on less than \$10 a day.²

StatsCan reports that the median after-tax income of Canadian households is \$59,800 – that's take home.³ That works out to roughly \$5000 a month or \$250 a day. Does it make you feel a little funny that this is a hundred times more than the \$2.50 that half the world lives on? And yet the craziest thing is that we don't generally think of ourselves as rich. But could you imagine what the average person thinks of us? They are making \$2.50 a day and we are making a hundred times more. They think we are loaded!

Now some of us are thinking, "Well, I'm on a fixed income. I make way less than \$5000 a month. Others of us are students and we are like "I work at Starbucks on the weekend." And that's true. But measure yourself against the person on disability in BC who survives on roughly a thousand dollars a month. Imagine where they live and what they eat. How wealthy are you compared to them?

Here's the crazy thing, if you make roughly a thousand dollars a month you still qualify for being in the richest 10% of everyone on earth. It's so crazy! Imagine walking into a room of a hundred people who all simultaneously won the lottery. And that's us.

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Now the twist, we usually think wealth is a blessing. We are always thanking God for what we have, and it's good to be thankful. But Jesus says wealth isn't the blessing we think it is. He says our wealth puts us at a severe disadvantage to getting into heaven.

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Alright, go ahead and grab the Bible from the pew in front of you, or open the one on your phone, to Revelation chapter 3. If you are new with us you've walked in on a doozy. We've been looking at seven letters Jesus gave to the churches of the first century and today. And this morning we are looking at the last one – Jesus' letter to Laodicea.⁴

¹ <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/aisle-of-man/> (Accessed November 8, 2019)

² <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats> (Accessed November 8, 2019)

³ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190226/t003b-eng.htm> (Accessed November 8, 2019)

⁴ Sermon roughly based on Francis Chan's "Luke Warm and Loving it" from Youtube.

Would you stand with me for the reading of Jesus' words? Revelation 3 starting in verse 14:

[Read Revelation 3:14-18]

Now every one of these letters is packed with context that brings clarity to what Jesus says, and it's the same here. So Laodicea was a wealthy city that had pretty much everything going for it, except that they had a shortage of good drinking water.

A couple cities over there was a beautiful mountain spring that gave cold fresh water, and a couple cities in the other direction there was a hot spring that was rumored to have healing properties. But Laodicea was right in the middle where the waters met. And so they just had a bunch of lukewarm sulphur water to drink.

So the other day I walked in on my three boys having a bath. Now they bath about once a week, so their little bodies need it when it comes. Imagine all the floaties. It's gross, but okay. What's not okay is that my little guy was having a drink.

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Now today I don't want to get lost in the context of this passage because we could get so excited about the origin of the drinking water in Laodicea that we totally miss what Jesus is saying. So let's just read the words and take them in.

In verse 14 Jesus says "I'm the ruler of creation. I'm the Amen. I get the last word. It's like what we read in Colossians. Jesus is the beginning and the end. He holds everything together. All of God's fullness dwells in Him. And through Him and His death God is reconciling all things to Himself. It's an awesome picture.

And this is similar to Cosmic Jesus shows up on Patmos and puts all the suffering John and the early church was experiencing into perspective. "I'm the biggest most terrifying thing on this island. In fact I'm holding stars in My hand and I've got the power to crush kingdoms in My boots. Jesus is awesome.

So what happens when we encounter the infinitely awesome God in the flesh? C.S. Lewis once wrote about how first century people responded when they met Jesus. He says: "Jesus Christ produced mainly three effects – hatred, terror, adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval."⁵

And I think this makes sense. When you're out in a little boat in the middle of a storm and you're going to drown. And then you see someone walking on the water you aren't mildly intrigued. You need to change your pants.

⁵ C.S. Lewis "What Are We To Make Of Jesus Christ? In God In The Dock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pg 158

And yet 60 years after Jesus conquered the grave Laodicea has another response. They weren't fresh spring water or healing hot spring water; they were like lukewarm bathwater. And Jesus takes a drink and wants to vomit.

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What happened? Verse 17 happened. The Christians got wealthy.

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Now wealth isn't a sin. David was wealthy. Abraham was wealthy. But by far, throughout the New Testament there is one message about wealth. So for example in Luke 18 we read about the rich young ruler who asks Jesus "What should I do to inherit eternal life?"

It's a great question posed by a rich guy who wants to go to heaven. It's relevant to us! And Jesus says obey the commandments. And he responds "I've kept them all." And then Jesus says:

"There is still one thing you haven't done. Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me."

But when the man heard this he became very sad, for he was very rich.

When Jesus saw this, He said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God! In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:22-25)

Now we know this story. And by and large we don't like it because it's about a hard working, church attending guy who got born into the right family, was able to get ahead... and then goes to hell. And so we try to find a way out.

SO I've heard people preach about how Jesus wasn't really saying sell everything – 10% is probably good. And the eye of the needle was a little door that a camel couple kind of squeeze through. And we think, good, I can make it. The problem is that the text continues and the disciples clarify what they heard Jesus say. But they don't say "So, 10% and I'm good right?" Instead we read:

Those who heard this said, "Then who in the world can be saved?"

He replied, "What is impossible for people is possible with God." (Luke 18:26-27)

Jesus just comes right out and says, "Yeah, you got it. By and large rich people miss out on everything that matters. It's impossible for rich people to be saved. But of course God can do the impossible. But don't miss My point – it's not great to be rich." But we miss Jesus' point. And we aren't alone.

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Did you know that essentially everyone in the world covets the life we've got? When Nikki and I lived in South Korea we saw a 3000-year-old nation bending over backwards to Westernize because they want the kind of money we've got. And so a whole generation of young people were leaving their farms and their parents who had looked after their parents who had looked after their parents. And instead they were heading to the city to university and get good jobs to get rich.

Now I'm not down on Koreans. I'm just saying the whole world is trying to get what we've got and we're trying to get more. But Jesus has a different perspective. He says "Outside of a miracle, if you are wealthy you're not coming to God."

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Now there is a silver lining on the cloud, and it comes from Peter. He chimes in:

"We've left our homes to follow you."

"Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, will be repaid many times over in this life, and will have eternal life in the world to come." (Luke 18:28-30)

This is Jesus unpacking "It's impossible, but God can even save rich people." And Jesus says Peter's put God's kingdom first and he's going to be rewarded. But I want to know about me.

So ask yourself: What have I traded in order to put Jesus' kingdom first? What could I trade today in order to have Jesus say this of me? Now I'm not saying works salvation. I'm saying saved people look saved. This is what Jesus wants us to consider.

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And in the very next chapter Jesus tells us about a short rich dude who climbs a tree. So Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in the region. He was well into the top 10%, he might even have been the 1%.

And one day he hears Jesus and a crowd of tall people are walking down his street – you tall people are always causing us trouble. So Zacchaeus climbs a tree. But this is weird. When was the last time you saw a business executive up a tree?

I've climbed a ton of trees, but the last one I climbed was probably in my early 20's. And I can't think of a good reason to ever do that again. If there's something up there I want I'll just send one of my many children to fetch it. It's undignified to climb trees.

But Zacchaeus climbs the tree and Jesus notices. And so He says: "Come down, I'm coming to your house for dinner."

Now the crowd wasn't impressed. Jesus was hanging out with a sinner instead of them! But Jesus was impressed by the foolish looking guy in the tree.

And Zacchaeus couldn't believe his good fortune. Jesus noticed me. Why!? He wants what Jesus offers so bad because he's realized he's got nothing. He's a wretch. He's a thief that everyone hates. He knows he isn't worthy of Jesus' visit. And he doesn't think this counts for anything, but it does. This is the one thing Jesus wants.

And so at dinner Zacchaeus blurts out: "Here, I give half of everything I've got to the poor, and if I stole anything I'll pay it back four times." And Jesus responds:

Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. (Luke 19:9)

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This isn't works salvation, Zacchaeus has bumped into Jesus' salvation and the evidence is now he does weird things. He's a rich guy that God is miraculously drawing to Himself. And we see this because he's can't wait to trade his riches for Jesus and the kingdom. He's the opposite of the rich young ruler who goes away sad because he looks at what he's got and thinks "Um, I see what you are offering Jesus. It's good, but what I've got is good too. And I just can't decide. I don't know. I think I'm going to stick with what I've got."

That's what normal rich people do. That's what the Laodiceans were doing. And that's what we do. We look down at the little chunk of dirt we've got and the little RRSP and the minivan in our driveway. And we look up at Cosmic Jesus who is holding stars in His right hand in total control of the universe and we say: "I see what you're offering Jesus, I really do. But I'm just not sure. I don't know if I'm ready to go all in. You see I've got something going on too Jesus, and it's pretty good."

And Jesus responds "When I hear that it's like I'm drinking bath water. You put the God of the universe on one side of the scale and what you've got going on, on the other. And you think it's close? That's disgusting."

You see Zacchaeus didn't think it was close. He thought it was a no brainer. He's like the guy who finds treasure in a field and in his joy goes and sells everything he's got to buy the field. He gets it.

And this is what Jesus says "People who get it don't fret about how much it costs to get the kingdom. They know that the treasure in the field is worth it. And this is where Jesus goes in verse 18.

[Read Revelation 3:18]

Friends, Jesus wants something good for us. He wants real wealth. He wants our real nakedness to be covered. He wants us to see. Jesus wants abundant life for us. And He hates that we are deceived by the counterfeit version of all these things. He hates that a little bit of earthly wealth can distract us from what is really real.

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Remember Cosmic Jesus from chapter 1? So far the book of Revelation hasn't been about how to figure out when Jesus is coming back, the point has been how to live our lives in light of real reality. And here Jesus talks to what I think is the biggest threat people like us are going to face when it comes to this.

Wealth, which we have got lots of, by nature deceives. When people get it they think "We don't need a thing." "What do you get the guy for Christmas who has everything?" Don't we ask that?

Our money makes us feel safe. We sure don't need to pray for our daily bread. We can buy it. And we don't need to worry about our future we've got RRSP's.

But real reality is that all of us always come to God as wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. That's real reality whether we've got money or not. Revelation is about living our lives in light of real reality.

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Now here's the scary part to me. I know this is the correct reading of this text. I know that money produces lukewarm Christians because it convinces us we don't really need Jesus. But I've been drinking the North American Cool-aid long enough that I tend to believe I'm different.

Did you know that lottery winners are statistically more likely than anyone else to be bankrupt within 3-5 years? And when the money's gone the vast majority with they never won. Their lives are ruined. People in their family are dead. Relationships are broken. Generally it's bad and yet I think I could handle it. I could handle having even more money than I have right now and it wouldn't wreck me. I could still pursue God. How about you?

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The point of this passage is that people like us have a severe disadvantage when it comes to entering Jesus' kingdom because wealth deceives us. Jesus says real reality is that rich people don't go to heaven.... Well that's the norm, but there are actually a few that do. God can even save rich people.

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And that's good news for us. But it isn't a blanket statement. Jesus says He's knocking on our door right now offering us the impossible, and it's up to us. Look at verse 19.

[Read Revelation 19-22]

Jesus says "If you are hearing this message it's because I love you and don't want to spit you out of My mouth. I want you to be hot. I want you to see that what I've got is infinitely more valuable than the dirt you've got and your savings account. So Repent.

"I'm standing at your door and knocking. I want to come into your house just like I came into Zacchaeus' house. And I've got abundant life with Me. In fact I've got the throne of heaven. If you'll open up you'll get it all."

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If you've got your Bible open, just peek ahead at chapter 4. It's called "The Throne in Heaven." So John hears a voice like a trumpet. And he looks and sees the throne of heaven. And there's someone sitting on it. It's Jesus.

Jesus is shining like precious jewels – jasper and emeralds. There is a rainbow around the throne and there is lighting coming out of it. And there are 24 elders all bowing down and taking their crowns off and throwing them at Jesus' feet.

And there are these four creatures with eyes all over their body, and they are crying out "holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." And they never stop. And there are ten thousand times ten thousand angels encircling the throne and the creatures and the elders. And they are all saying "Worthy, worthy is the Lamb".

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And Jesus says if you are victorious I will let you sit on My throne with Me ... If you've got ears, take this in."

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Friends, everything is on the line. Jesus isn't looking for nice people who will give a portion of their lives to Him. This is what Laodicea had done and this is what rich people are tempted to do. We want a little Jesus. We want what He offers. But we want what we've got too.

But Jesus isn't interested in sharing our allegiance. So 10% is totally unimpressive to Him. 50% is unimpressive. Us giving Him 99% devotion and 1% bath water is repulsive to Him. He will be God in our lives or He won't have anything to do with us at all.

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So if like me, you are a wealthy person who wants to go to heaven this text urges us to wrestle. Yes, it is true that rich people can be saved. Yes, there are saved rich people in the Bible. But, if this makes you feel like what Jesus says here doesn't apply to you then you've missed Jesus' point. Jesus says the only way we get saved is if we buy what He's selling and it costs everything. So wrestle with this.

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I don't have a simple application today – just do this and you're good – because I don't think this text gives us one. It wants rich people to feel very uncomfortable.

So I will give you two ways to wrestle. First, set a date this week – while this is fresh – to pray through the question "Is Jesus and His kingdom my passion, or is my passion divided? Am I lukewarm and going to be spit out of Jesus' mouth or am I totally 100% hot for Jesus? Don't be content with giving Jesus your bathwater. If you've got a spouse talk this through with them. Ask each other "Does Jesus think we are seeking His kingdom first, or is something else in the way? How do we give Him 100%?"

Second, I come to church because I recognize that by myself my faith cools – do you ever notice that about yourself? But when I'm with you I'm encouraged. And I want to be encouraged to get this right, so I need you.

Now I've been part of investors clubs that get together to talk about making money. What if there was a group who met and challenged each other to invest in Jesus' kingdom? Wouldn't that be weird and scary? Who am I kidding - if you're interested in talking about your money in this way you're crazy! And I want to be surrounded by crazy Jesus lovers who want to live for His glory because it will infect me. If you want to be part of a group like that fire me an email or catch me after the service.

Friends, Jesus wants us to receive what He's offering. But He only accepts tree-climbing red-hot passion and gratitude. He takes people who recognize the treasure in the field and trade anything to get it. He gives abundant life to those who buy the gold He's selling. But when we offer Him the bath water of our partial commitment He spits us out of His mouth, so make sure your wealth hasn't deceived you.