

# The Great Voyage



By Tim Czaplewski

**Now a great and mighty Emperor ruled a vast domain with supreme authority. Although He was very powerful, His people served and admired Him greatly. This was because the wise Emperor interfered very little within the daily lives of his subjects and allowed them the freedom to pursue their own happiness of daily life.**

But within the realm arose a deceptive man who began to call himself a king. He, along with his wicked wife had conspired together and created a rival kingdom and he proudly declared himself, "The King of the North". This king began to prosper and as he conquered more territory he became exceedingly cruel, prohibiting his subjects from venturing away from his counterfeit domain.

Those whom he conquered cried out for deliverance! And when the Emperor heard of his wicked acts, He was greatly troubled. He foresaw that a kingdom such as this would eventually bring an end to the stability of His entire realm! So the mighty King devised a simple plan to bring an end to the wickedness of the King of the North.

The Emperor was very familiar with the territory possessed by the King of the North and He knew precisely where to strike the blow that would bring about his destruction. The Emperor ordered the construction of three great ships of war. These ships would have be built to withstand the heavy seas that the ships were destined to travel. He ordered them to be made from the strongest trees from the western coastlands. He named each ship and inscribed each oar with a unique inscription. He handpicked His captain and the crew. He gave them maps and instruments to guide them on their way. And as these warriors set sail, they sang songs of victory!

And lo! After many months of sailing, the seas began to swell. "Brace yourself men! we're getting closer to the battle", said the captain as he studied his map, "The closer we come, the higher the sea is going to swell"! The ship tossed greatly the winds howled, pushing the ships closer northward. But some of the sailors began to fear that the ships would break up and sink and so they began to create a panic. Suddenly they spotted a harbor along the coast and urged the captain to put the ships to port until the storm subsided. "Have faith men! There are just a few more hours of heavy sea," said the captain.

But the cowardly men could not be reasoned with and despair spread throughout the ships like a cancer. Fearing a total mutiny and the loss of his dignity, the captain gave in to their request and put the ships to port. As the captain gave the order to break from their course, a great feeling of sadness came over him. Deep inside, he realized that his mission was now destined for failure. When the men asked what the harbor was named, the captain looked at his map and sadly replied, "This harbor is called "Laodicea".

As the sailors entered the harbor, the winds mysteriously subsided. So they picked up their oars, rowed to the middle of the harbor and set their anchors. They were welcomed by the Laodiceans as soon as the reached the shore. The Laodiceans were awestruck as they beheld their ships! "How were you able to sail so far up these coastlands?" they asked. "There has never been a single vessel capable of such a feat let alone three ships"! And sure enough, the captain and his men scanned the entire harbor, all that could be seen were simple fishing boats. None seemed sturdy enough to sail the treacherous seas beyond them.

The hearty sailors were all treated like heroes and were the talk of Laodicea. The patient captain allowed his sea weary men to rest, but only for a time. Soon, the day arrived to call his men back to the sea and finish their journey. But some of the men were not willing to depart. The Laodiceans were hospitable, the food was plentiful and their women were beautiful! The captain was disappointed with those men for they convinced over half of the crew to remain with them. So the captain took the remaining portion, boarded the ships, and began to go back to the sea.



**The captain soon realized that venturing to sea with such a small crew was a mistake! There simply were not enough shipmates aboard the three vessels to overcome the great waves. His men knew that they were rowing in vain! Fearful that the ships would be tossed back and smashed upon the rocks, he ordered the ships back to port.**

The captain could have condensed his loyal crew into a single vessel and sail away, but he knew that the voyage set before them by his Emperor would require all three ships. The captain learned the sad lesson that Laodicea was indeed an easy port to enter, but ever so difficult to escape!

But the captain and his faithful crew were not going to give up easily. They entreated those backslidden sailors to set their minds on the Emperor's great commission, reminding them of the sad results the realm would experience should

they put off the day of battle. But their words fell upon deaf ears. Many conveniently chose a life of ease rather than pursue the noble course set forth by their Emperor. Sadly, none of these unfaithful sailors would be worthy to hear the words of commendation, "Well done good and faithful sailor" from the mouth of the great Emperor.

Over the years, the captain watched as one by one, the faithful portion of his crew married and settled into that life of ease the sleepy village provided. After a time, there seemed to be little difference between the hearty shipmen and the Laodiceans. After many years, the Captain was approached by the townspeople who had come with a petition stating that the ships had become a nuisance to the harbor. "They are always in the way of our fishing boats and they block our glorious view of the sea." The townspeople kindly offered a place to store the ships. "At the far corner of the harbor there is a moorage". "You can keep them there as long as you like". When the Captain looked at the names written on the petition, he noticed that many of the names listed were those who sailed into the harbor with him. The Captain knew that the sight of the ships brought conviction upon their hearts and they would happily prefer not so see them. The captain humbly obliged and moved the ships out from among their site.

The aging Captain never lost hope that a day would come when the ships would sail away from that place. His remaining crew constructed ramps and docks to prepare for a future departure. Knowing that he would never leave Laodicea alive, he enlisted the remnant of his faithful crew to erect a building in the center of the town where they could meet and keep alive the great commission set by the Emperor. There, they recounted the sailing songs and taught them to their children. When the old captain was satisfied that he had done all he could, he wrote out his will, updated his journal, and died a peaceful death.

The loss of the captain was felt throughout the entire harbor. Everyone in Laodicea attended his service and with many tears, they remembered his faithfulness. He was buried at a place overlooking those ships which he brought to port. According to his written will, an epitaph was etched into his tombstone. The mysterious words inscribed seemed to trouble the sea men. The inscription haunted their memories until one by one, the crewmen like their captain were laid to rest. Not one sailor could perceive nor could they ever forget his elusive prophecy;

**"When the great storm comes, they will leap like rats!"**

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