### Be Earnest/Zealous

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### Revelation 3:14-22

### Key Verse 19, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.”

 What kind of zeal do you have in your hearts? I believe that everyone has some zeal one way or another. Have you seen the movie, “the Passion of the Christ?” It showed the final 12 hours of Jesus' life, beginning with the [Agony in the Garden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agony_in_the_Garden) of [Gethsemane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gethsemane), and ending with his crucifixion and a brief scene of his [resurrection](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resurrection_of_Jesus). The film has been controversial and received mixed reviews, with some critics claiming that the extreme violence in the film "obscures its message." The Passion of the Christ is the highest grossing R-rated film in United States history. But I think that the film did a good job in showing Jesus’ great zeal to fulfill God’s will to the point of his death, reminding me of Isa. 42:13, “The LORD will march out like a champion, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.” Apostle Paul encourages us(Rm 12:11), “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” We don’t want to be men of impetuous passion but to be men and women of zeal like our Lord Jesus. Although he is our King and the Sovereign Lord, today in his letter he does not force us, but he gently and truthfully counsels us. Praise Jesus for his abundant grace! May the passage help us to have zeal for Jesus. There are 3 parts. Part 1, To the Church in Laodicea. (14) Part 2, Because you are Lukewarm. (15-17) Part 3, I am here! Open the door. (18-22)

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###  I. TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA (14)

###  First let us think about the sender of this letter & the letter’s recipients. Look at v 14. “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.” The city of Laodicea was located about 11 miles west of Colosse. The recipients were Laodicean church believers. The name Laodicea means "Rule of the people," or "The judgment of the people," or, simply, "People's rights." That is also the cry of our times, isn’t it? According to KJV, all previous 6 churches were called as the church of Ephesus or the church in Smyrna. But here Jesus points out that it’s the church of the Laodiceans. This church well represents a church run by majority rule instead of God’s rule. Like its name, it was the democratic Church, in which everything could be decided by popular opinion. It was pioneered by Epaphras who became a disciple when Paul raised up disciples in Ephesus. According to Paul’s letter, he was known as a man of zeal, wrestling in prayer to help Laodicean believers. They might have been praised by Jesus today if they had followed his example of zeal & prayer. But today there is nothing good to say about this church. The city was a major commercial and financial center of Asia Minor. It had a prominent medical school & their eye ointment was famous. Laodicea was the wealthy city. The city suffered from major earthquakes twice, but they didn’t need financial support from Rome to rebuild. With their money, they built impressive public buildings and luxurious houses. So Laodicea was a kind of BOA, Macy's Department Store, and UCLA hospital all rolled into one. However, the city had one serious problem. It did not have its own water supply. They had to bring water from the hot springs 6 miles away. By the time the water reached the city, it was lukewarm. It wasn’t pleasant to drink.

###  Now Jesus, the sender of this letter, introduces himself to the believers in Laodicea as “these are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.” Again the people in the city might be proud of their many achievements and progressive and fair political system. They might think that they lacked nothing. So they might say, “Why bother listening to anyone? We are just fine.” They had plenty of things to thrive. Jesus first introduces himself as the Amen. Usually we don’t name someone as Amen. Rather we are saying “amen” in prayers. The Hebrew word “amen” means “to be faithful, confirm, so be it, it is done truly.” 2 Cor 1:20 says, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.” Jesus is "the personification and the affirmation of the truth of God." So he himself is the Amen. Jesus also is the Faithful and True Witness, and this is a great contrast to the Laodiceans, who will be shown to be neither faithful nor true no matter how much they had achieved in this world. Jesus is the ruler of God’s creation. He is the head, the ultimate source, the origin & the end. Jesus is the ultimate ruler of the universe. “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.” No matter what happens we put our trust in Jesus and his truthful words rather than in ourselves or in the people and their colorfully changing opinions. Col. 1:16 reads, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.” May the Lord help us fix our eyes on Jesus and seek him until we see His full richness. Amen!

###  II. BECAUSE YOU ARE LUKEWARM (15-17)

###  In this part, Jesus helped Laodicean believers to know clearly what is lacking in them. Look at v 15-16. “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” Here what does it mean that Laodicean church was lukewarm? You might ask, “What’s wrong with being lukewarm? I like my tea to be warm, not too hot or not too cold.” But here being lukewarm is like drinking flat Coke-a-Cola at room temp. Jesus rebuked the believers for being lukewarm. From this, we learn that the problem of the believers in Laodicea was lukewarm attitude toward Jesus. Jesus wanted them to be hot or enthusiastic for Him. At least they were cold, meaning that they recognized their poor condition and repented before God with broken hearts. But they were indifferent to Jesus. According to dictionary, “Laodiceans” means indifferent or lukewarm. Complacency comes when you see yourself as having arrived and you think you have achieved quite a bit. You begin to tell yourself, “I’m rich. I’m wealthy. I don’t need anything. I’ve arrived. I’ve attained.” About 30 yrs ago, Paul wrote a letter(Col. 2:1–3), “I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” So in the beginning the Laodiceans must have been good with their struggle to attain the riches of God. However as time passed, complacency and lack of commitment might’ve developed when they started listening to what the world said. In humanistic Greek culture and money oriented society it seemed reasonable. Likewise the world keeps on telling us we have to have what everybody has. When we buy into that, then complacency and apathy set in. All of those “things” we’ve acquired start having their effect on us. We easily become lukewarm and complacent. We might say, “Well, maybe I haven’t arrived, but I’ve got enough. I am pretty good now.” In the same way the Laodicean believers must have gradually compromised the truth with the world. They had no passion for the work of God. They were complacent, half-hearted, and self-sufficient. They did not take a stand of anything. Their habitual, nominal, and mediocre Christian life was disgusting like the tepid water they had to endure. Jesus says, “So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” Let’s heed this warning of Jesus. Have we become lukewarm toward Christ nowadays? Is our personal Bible study lukewarm? Our daily bread time becomes lukewarm? Our group study sometimes feels like tepid rather than refreshing. Even our conference is like lukewarm water? How can we change all of these? Is our passion for mission on fire? Are we feeling the broken heart of Jesus to reach out to students? Have we become habitual and complacent? Let us ask these questions so that we may repent our lukewarm attitude toward Jesus.

###  Look at V17. It gives us a clue about why they became lukewarm. “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” Here we see that material blessings led Laodicean believers to be complacent and forgetful of the fact that God provided. It is easier to depend on a 20 dollar bill in our pocket than God the Almighty who is invisible. Jesus calls the wealthy Laodiceans who were complacent wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Jesus’ perception was different. Jesus helped them to see their truly needy condition. What a sad condition! There is a big difference between "you say," and "you are." Our Lord points out this stark difference. This is the words of "the Faithful and True witness" telling the whole truth, even though it hurts. Laodicean church had grown complacent for they may have had plenty of money, beautiful buildings, gifted and scholarly preachers, a great choir, a great band, and the respect of the community. Perhaps they thought they were doing well. But when Jesus looked at them, saying, "You are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."

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###  Why is there such a difference in these two views? It is because they were being measured by two different standards. Laodicea was using the standard of the world. It was pleasant, comfortable, approved by the community around, and they thought they were doing well. But Jesus is using the standard of what he intended his church to be like. It is definitely not to be a Country Club, run for the benefit of the members. It is not a Performing Arts Center either, with the sole intent of entertaining its visitors. It is not to be a Political Action Group, with a focus on taking sides on hot issues of the day. Sometimes, all these may be legitimate even in the church, but none are to be its *raison d'etre*, the purpose for which it exists. Jesus tells us what his church is to be like. It is to be salt and light of the world and a city on a hill, praying for all nations. One day in the temple courts Jesus found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, driving all from the temple courts, scattering the coins of the money changers, and overturning their tables. And he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” His disciples remembered what is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” The church is to be a place for us to worship God. It is also to be charged with the task of making people understand the purpose of God throughout history, and of interpreting the current times. Then we see what God is now doing, not what man intends to do. That is the authentic work of the church to declare the truth about men’s lost condition and the good news that Jesus is the Way and the Truth. Judged by that standard, Laodicea had nothing. They were naked, poor, pitiful, wretched, and blind.

###  III. HERE I AM! OPEN THE DOOR (18-22)

###  In this part, our Lord Jesus Christ graciously came up with solutions. Look at v 18. “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.” Jesus counseled them to buy 3 things. Living in our consumer culture, we understand Jesus’ words “buy from me” very well. We love to buy things, even things that we really don’t need just because they are on sale. So first what does Jesus mean we should buy from him gold refined in the fire so that we can become truly rich? 1 Pet 1:7 reads, “These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Faith in God. Faith in his Word. As we look to him our faith is awakened and stirred. Then we see how true his words are and how rich we’re truly in Jesus for He is the source of power to overcome the world & the source of eternal life, wisdom, strength and all we need to live a fruitful life. That is what this church needed first. If we lacked genuine faith, we will end up putting stock in something else. Surely the gold we can buy from Jesus is much more precious than anything else for the gold we get from Jesus has an eternal value. Jesus says(Mt 13:44), “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” The eternal life in the kingdom of heaven is the best bargain we will ever find on sale for it has the greatest value. The Laodiceans were proud of their famous black wool. But humorously Jesus counsels them to buy the white clothes from him so that they may be clothed in his righteousness. The Laodiceans were also proud of their famous eye ointment, but Jesus told them to buy spiritual salve from him to see the truth and know what is really going on in their pitiful condition. Then their eyes will be healthy again & their whole body is full of light. Then they’re able to see all richness of Jesus with 20/20 vision and they could shine in the dark world as Jesus’ light.

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###  Look at v 19. “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.” Simply Jesus could say, “Repent or Perish.” Rather those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. Last week, when P. John asked what would you do when you love someone, s. James hit the nail on the head, “I rebuke and discipline.” That is right! Our Lord is simply telling this church, despite its terrible weakness, "I love you, and it is because I love you that I rebuke you and discipline you." God’s purpose is not to punish or torture us, but to bring us back to him. So what can we do to overcome our lukewarm Christian life? How can we have a whole-hearted commitment to loving and serving our Lord Jesus? According to Jesus’ word, first we must be earnest. The word here “earnest” means “zealous.” KJV and many others reads, “Be zealous.” Interestingly, both “hot” and “zealous” stemmed from the same root (kham, kanous) in the original word. Zeal is the opposite of complacency. We want to be Christians who are zealous for Jesus. As a matter of fact none of us is without zeal—we, young or old, are almost all zealous about something. We are zealous for sports teams, we are zealous for new devices to be released, we are zealous for politics. As parents, we are also zealous for our children to excel in our society. I noticed M. Andrew has great zeal for dance. Her daughter may not like it though. You name it! “Zeal runs in our veins according to what we love.”

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###  What we want as Christians is zeal that is properly motivated and properly directed—godly zeal. Christian’s zeal may be defined (John Reynolds) as “an earnest desire and concern for all things pertaining to the glory of God and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus among men.” When I think about zeal, I can’t miss a name, Nicolaus Zinzeldorf who was the key member of Moravian movement across the Europe. When he was a 4 years old, he says, "I love the Saviour, and have abundant communion with Him. I am seeking God earnestly, and determines to become a true servant of Jesus Christ." Like him the Moravians were so concerned with one thing, that is to take the name of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Majority of them were born into a rich family in Europe, but in order to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the slaves on the plantations, they even decided to sell themselves into slavery. What a great passion for Jesus’ name!

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###  Lately I also learned that zeal has a powerful contagious quality. For the last couple of months we have been praying to be zealous by making the most of this conference through earnest repentance and spiritual revival. So we can clear up all misunderstandings and pray earnestly with one spirit and one mind. As you knew, P. John first wanted to be zealous for God through his personal revival. For instance whenever I came to church, he already came to the church earlier to make God’s lamp shine every morning. In turn he encouraged a few people, overseers to pray together. In this way they were able to catch holy fire. Soon growing disciples caught the flame of fire and willingly participated. Sooner or later whole church members joined and now we have a larger prayer meeting in this sanctuary. It is a kind of miracle for it’s not limited to few people any longer. When we light a fire in a person, P. John, gradually a seed of holy fire began to spread. My point here is, “Do not underestimate the value of a few zealous Christians. It is hotter than any physical fire. To be honest I was the person who underestimated it when I was struck with problems. I was tempted to give up without thinking about other option, prayer. But I was encouraged to keep praying despite my problems. Then I learned how important it’s to pray without giving up and how important it’s to live a life of faith. That is why Jesus’ name is the Amen, the faithful and true witness and the very ruler of God’s creation. Thanks to Jesus’ passionate love for sinners and his death and resurrection, we now became God’s holy temples. May the Lord help us resume Jesus’ great zeal in this lukewarm generation despite many things happening. Jesus says, “Be earnest and repent.” According to his word “earnest”, life is never a joke. We should not take the word of Christ lightly. We must repent. We must repent our self-reliant attitudes. We must repent of our complacency. We must repent of our materialistic ways of thinking and living. Now let us listen his personal invitation in V 20.

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###  Let us read all together v 20. “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” Because the Laodicean believers were wealthy and complacent, most likely they were busy to maintain their daily lives. They were so busy and successful with the worldly affairs that they might not have noticed that Jesus wanted to have fellowship with them. They did not have Christ’s presence among them. They didn’t think they needed him. They did not maintain personal relationship with Christ. But thank God for he did not give up on them, rather Jesus stood at the door of their hearts and kept knocking. Likewise Jesus wants us to open our hearts to him. He wants us to welcome him into our hearts so that we can have fellowship with him. He will not open the door though. He is not going to force anyone into fellowship. He offers it to us and we must open the door and invite him in. Then he will enter in and spend quality time of fellowship with us.

###  Look at verse 21. “To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.” To those who are victorious in fighting against complacency, Jesus will give the right to sit with him on his throne, just as he sat down with the Heavenly Father after he finished his redemptive work on earth by giving his life on the cross. Jesus is inviting us to be with him on his throne and reign with him. Finally, in verse 22, Jesus encourages us, saying, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (22) “Whoever” indicates that it must be done by individuals: the church will only get right by each man getting right in Him.

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###  Through preparing this message, I learned that I have to overcome my lukewarm attitude. When I came here as a missionary in 1995, I was very poor financially but I had a zeal for Jesus and his world mission command. I went out campus for fishing and spend the whole day to meet students and have one to one Bible study. One day I was reported to campus police due to my passionate approach to students. Still my heart was filled with joy and happiness. However as time passed by, by God’s grace I acquired and achieved many things. All my sons are now in college. I thought that I’ve tried to raise disciples. But when my Bible students lost their desire and disappeared one by one, I thought to myself, “Enough!”

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###  But when I was preparing this message, I read a heart moving story about msn. Ruby Kendrick. About 100 years ago, she had a great zeal to be a missionary to Korea when she was a teenager. But she was rejected for she was too young. At the age of 24, she was finally allowed to go out as a missionary to a poor country Korea. But she had an acute appendicitis in a remote town. Although she underwent a surgery later, it was too late. She left her last remark, “If I had a thousand lives to give Korea should have them all.” Her love for Korean souls prompted many Americans to become missionaries in Korea. Each of them were like a seed fallen into the ground like our Lord Jesus Christ. Although their spouse or children passed away in the middle, they didn’t shrink back but finished their life of mission with absolute faith. \* When Jesus called me as a missionary here, it was also a solemn calling of God for me to fall into the ground as a seed and die like my Lord Jesus Christ. God’s love never fails. Especially when my son was experiencing trouble, I was tempted to leave this land for my heart was filled with agony and shame. But I came to know that it’s high time and the most blessed time to renew my commitment for now I realized how our young Americans suffer. Newly I’ve heard Jesus’ voice through this passage, “So be earnest and repent.” I repent of my lukewarm attitude, calculation, and despair whatever reasons might be. I pray earnestly that I may pick up zeal and passion for Jesus. Through this conf., I may bring my sins of unbelief and complaints before Jesus and renew love relationship with Him and become hot, zealous for Jesus.

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###  In conclusion, today we learned that Jesus wants us to overcome our lukewarm attitude toward him and to be zealous for God through this conference. We pray earnestly that we may maintain holy fire in our hearts, overcoming daily temptations, and increasing one to one holy battle for God’s glory. One word: Be earnest!