**Be Zealous**

Revelation 3:14-22

***Who really enjoys a hot cup of coffee?***

***How about an ice-cold Dr. Pepper or Cherry Coke?*** Ah, remember back when you just drank the sugar and didn’t care? Now, we settle for Coke Zero and LaCroix Limoncello but they’re just reminders of what we really want.

Now. Take that hot cup of coffee and pour it into that ice-cold Dr. Pepper. Anyone want that particular beverage? Disgusting right? Now you’ve got a lukewarm glass of weird flavors.

When Jesus looked at the church in Laodicea, that’s ***exactly how he felt***: who wants to drink this gross mixture? It isn’t hot. It isn’t cold. It smells really bad. Yuck. Remember how the letters follow a consistent pattern: Jesus is introduced, then he affirms something in the church before confronting their sin and then exhorting them to a better way. ***But this church has NOTHING to affirm.***

“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot… So, because you are lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth.” Revelation 3:15-16

When Jesus looks at a church, you really hope it doesn’t make him nauseous. But Laodicea did. And the whole congregation was in danger of missing out on salvation, eternal life and the opportunity to work with the Lord Jesus on His redemptive mission.

I don’t think this is a threat to a believing congregation that they could LOSE their salvation. I think this is a warning to ***a gathering of church-goers who were NEVER really saved to begin with***. This is the kind of person to whom Jesus would say, “Depart from me, I never knew you,” even though they preached sermons about him, cast out demons and healed people in his name, dressed nice and had Bible studies.

Ephesus was a church that lost their first love. They had saving faith to begin with but had lost their zeal and passion for the Lord. Laodicea never had that true faith or love to begin with. Yet they were still going through the motions of doing church.

***This is a serious warning to all churches and church-goers today!***

It is possible to dress like a Christian, talk like a Christian, go to church like a Christian, attend small group like a Christian and serve in the Nursery like a good little Christian - and NOT ACTUALLY BE a Christian. In fact, it’s possible for a whole church full of people to be self-deceived in this way.

Now, I’m not saying that everyone who attends a Catholic or liberal church is unsaved. We are not omniscient and cannot see the heart and whether true faith is there or not. But I think this letter is very appropriate for the vast majority of Catholic and liberal churches and church-goers on all three levels the Lord Jesus addresses here: sight, salvation and service.

The leaders of these churches ***THINK they see very clearly***. They think they understand the truth about God, themselves and the world. They preach and teach from elaborate systems of theology and practice. This is so much like Laodicea!

“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, bind and naked.” Revelation 3:17

The liberal church in particular has ***abandoned the Bible*** and bases their belief system that everyone will be saved and go to heaven and there is no hell on the work of German theologians from 200 years ago. They feel completely self-sufficient and even proud of their open-minded, inclusive beliefs such as “love wins.” It sounds very warm and fuzzy but is tremendously arrogant and toxically dangerous. Their sight is cloudy and in fact they are blind but they think they see clearly.

Therefore ***their salvation is a false hope***. They are trusting in their own ideas and a completely false, man-made construction of a god who does not exist and cannot save anyone. One thing you can commend in the Catholic and liberal church is ***their service***: they do try to help people and do good in the world. Food pantries, homeless shelters, adoption services. But they have lost the heart of the gospel and the full vision of God’s plan to restore all things in Christ, so their work is all bandaids and no cure.

But today this letter is not for “those people” but **for US PEOPLE right here**. We need to pray for the people around us - church-goers or not - that God will open their eyes, change their hearts and bring them into His world transforming mission. In the end, we need the same treatment they do: eyes to see, hearts that trust and hands and feet that serve. We will see three prayers in this letter, cries to the Lord Jesus to help us see clearly, trust fully in His salvation and serve zealously according to His purposes.

***Lord Jesus, please help us have ears to hear and eyes to see what we need to hear and see today!***

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us **See** the truth clearly

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.” Revelation 3:14

As the letter opens ***we see Jesus as the true Amen***, the one in whom all of God’s promises find their YES and fulfillment. He is the faithful and true witness who spoke the truth of God’s love and grace, who embodied God’s identity and character in Himself as the eternal and living Word of God. He is the source of all creation. Not the first thing created, but the one who accomplished that creation. He is the alpha, the beginning of all things, and the omega who will conclude history and renew creation.

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us **See** the truth clearly
   * **Jesus:** sees, saves and serves the church

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.” Revelation 3:14

***We need to see the truth clearly about Jesus,*** ourselves and the world. Sight begins with Jesus. He opened the eyes of literally, physically blind people. But all of us start out spiritually blind and in need of God’s miraculous intervention to help us begin to understand who He is and who we are before Him.

Jesus alone sees everything clearly. We do not. ***Our vantage point is limited in every way imaginable.*** We live such a short time, even a long life is 100 years, a tiny fragment of history. Our experience is condensed to a very small geography. Our smart phones and news apps make us think we see the world, but we see only a microscopic sliver of what is really happening in the world, and the lens through which we see it is often very distorted.

When Job questioned the goodness of God, this was his real failing: ***thinking he could see the big picture.*** God widened the lens for Job, bringing him back to the dawn of creation and bringing him up to the heights to see the whole world. When we judge God, we are doing the same thing: accusing Him of failing based on our minute level of understanding.

Jesus is the one who sees. He is the one who testified to the truth. So we can trust everything he said and rest in the comfort that in His inscrutable grace ***He saw through time and chose a couple of wretched sinners called you and me*** to become the children of God and partners in His eternal kingdom.

***Jesus sees, saves and SERVES the church***. In the most amazing twist, Jesus serves the church primarily THROUGH the church. His love is applied to you and me mostly through other believers. Yes, we experience His love personally and directly as we pray and spend time with Him, but the vast majority of our minutes and days are spent experiencing (and hopefully participating in) Jesus’ service through other believers.

Even letters like this are Jesus’ service to us. ***He is constantly purifying His bride***, preparing us for the great wedding celebration that will begin when He comes back. Listen to this powerful and personal message from the Lord:

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us **See** the truth clearly
   * **Jesus:** sees, saves and serves the church

“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich…”

Revelation 3:18

***Jesus wants us to have TRUE RICHES*** - to store up treasure in heaven that no one and nothing can take away. So, He has to constantly be prying our hands off of the treasures of this world that will rot even as we hold them. Our Savior is pleading with us to listen to His advice and tune out the tempter; helping us see what true wealth is.

**Jesus is “The way, the truth and the life.”** He sees and speaks the truth. He opened the way of salvation. He invites us into a life of purpose that will matter for eternity. Do we have ears to hear our Good Shepherd calling us?

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us **See** the truth clearly
   * **Us:** confused, corrupt, captive

“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.” Revelation 3:17

It is not hard to spot pride in someone else. It’s pretty glaring and gross. ***But one of the hardest things to spot in YOURSELF is pride*** because any pride you feel, you feel entitled to.

***How would you rate yourself in HUMILITY?*** 1 to 10. “I am one of the most amazing, remarkable, shockingly humble people in the world. I’m not bragging, I just want to be honest.”

The mark of true humility is that the more humble you become ***the more you can see your own arrogance.*** So, the most humble person in the room would rate their humility as a 1. Maybe a zero. Yes, it was a trick question. I make no claim to be humble.

Look at what the believers were saying in Laodicea: ***“I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.”*** There are recurring warnings throughout the Bible and especially the NT about the dangers of WEALTH. Jesus spoke more about money than he did about heaven and hell. “You cannot serve both God and money.”

***The source of the pride in this church was money.*** They had prospered economically, and that comfort and success seeped into their hearts, so they had come to believe, “I need nothing.”

Lord, help us see the truth about ourselves – and ***the first truth is that we cannot see***. We feel like we understand but we are confused. We think we see, but we are blind. At best our perception is clouded. At worst we are simply the blind leading the blind. Because we don’t see clearly, we have chosen poorly. We have strayed into every trap and fallen for every temptation of the enemy.

***We trust in OURSELVES with all of our hearts*** and lean not on the LORD’S understanding. In all of our ways we acknowledge OURSELVES and therefore direct our own paths.

Confused by the lures of the world and lies of the devil, we have become corrupt. We may feel confident, we may feel self-assured, we may not feel any conviction. But as the Apostle PAUL wrote, “that does not make us innocent.”

***The wealthier you are*** monetarily, the more seriously you need to take this warning. Those of us who are broke just breathed a sigh of relief. Ha! You rich suckas! Well. If we are broke because we just spend every dollar that comes in on our own desires and give nothing away to help others then we are just as bad as the rich folk, just with lower dollar amounts.

The truth is, as Americans, ***we are all ridiculously wealthy*** in terms of history and global economics. We are in the top 1% of global wealth. Some of you are in the top 1% of that 1%. But greed is one of the slipperiest of the deadly sins because no matter how rich you are, you know a few people who are a good bit richer. You judge their indulgence, but by comparison your indulgence seems reasonable. So, the better comparison is not with someone a step or two AHEAD of you, but a step or five BEHIND YOU. How do they live? How much do they live on?

So, we feel rich. ***But in truth we are poor in the things that matter.*** We are corrupt in our selfish, sinful desires. And we are captive to them. Listen to the words Jesus uses to describe this self-righteous, self-reliant church: “You are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.”

Money is power. That’s our modern belief, and it runs deep. But not in the kingdom of God. ***Money is ANTI-power in the kingdom.*** Money is pride and pride destroys prayer. The root of true power and the source of real blessing is the first beatitude: “Blessed are the POOR in spirit.” Those who realize they are powerless. Helpless. Wretched. Pitiable. Blind. Naked. Poor. Are we seeing a little more clearly? Jesus sees, saves and serves the church. We are confused, corrupt captives. The world:

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us **See** the truth clearly
   * **The World:** deceptive, depraved, decaying

“So, because you are lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth.” Revelation 3:16

These are Jesus’ words to a church, but it’s a false church so his feeling and the result of being vomited out by God applies to the whole world. This world, meaning Babylon and the sinful institutions built of power, the fear of death, violence and selfishness are utterly disgusting to our holy God of love.

But before we judge the world, ***let’s remember who got vomited out***. It wasn’t the people of Nineveh in that wicked, idolatrous kingdom of Assyria. The one who go spewed out of a mouth was the prophet of God named JONAH.

Jonah was completely off course. Sailing intentionally and directly AWAY from God’s clearly stated purpose for him. So, in His grace, God turned the wayward prophet around and had this huge fish barf Jonah back in the right direction.

***Can you relate?***

We are like toddlers who keep running for the street. Like dogs chasing the bumpers of cars. Our Father and Lord keep calling us back and grabbing us to keep us from these deadly traps. But as soon as we feel a little freedom we reach again for the cookie jar, we grasp after money and fame and success and beauty as defined by this dark and broken world.

So, God has no choice but to **put us into gross, smelly fish** and then to have them vomit us back in the right direction. Anyone feel like you’re in a fish right now? The smell, the touch, the darkness. Again, I’m not omniscient so maybe your current suffering has ZERO to do with you. But at least recognize the possibility that SOME of your suffering could be the Lord disciplining you and calling you back in His direction.

***Because this world is fading away.*** Jesus will not let us settle in and get comfortable in a world that is falling apart under our feet. He wants us with Him in the eternal kingdom! Ok, that’s the truth. Lord, help us see! Second.

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us Trust completely in your **Salvation**

“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich…”

Revelation 3:18

If we see Jesus as the truth-teller, Savior and Church-builder, we will trust completely in Him and His saving work. Verse 18 gives us three powerful visuals of our salvation: gold, garments and eye goop.

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us Trust completely in your **Salvation**
   * Forgiveness, Freedom, Fulfillment

“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich…”

Revelation 3:18

Jesus starts with gold, referring to kingdom rewards – ***treasure in heaven, which I’ve summarized as FULFILLMENT***. Jesus came to give us life and the fullness of life. Fulfillment is His goal both in this life and for all of eternity. Look down at verse 21, we will not float around on clouds forever, we will REIGN with Jesus, on His own throne forever. We will exercise dominion over this whole universe on behalf of King Jesus. It will be epic.

***How are you doing at storing up treasure in heaven?*** Jesus gave three examples in the sermon on the mount: praying, fasting and giving. If you want treasure in heaven, you have to do these things secretly, because if you do anything to impress people then however much they are impressed is your only reward.

***So how is your prayer life that no one sees?*** How about that fasting? How is that going? Just banking heavenly notes, right? Ching, ching, ching. I know Oakwood is generous with giving – we finished last year with really robust contributions even though people gave almost $140,000 over and above our regular budget.

***We could add service.*** How are you doing at quietly serving the least and the lost? The ones who can’t pay you back? Remember, we shouldn’t throw dinner parties for our rich friends who will have us over to their place. ZERO reward for that. Nope. Parties that store up heavenly currency are for the poor, blind, crippled, outcasts, sinners, addicts. The ones nobody invites over. Go find some of those.

Buy some gold from Jesus. That’s where true treasure, reward and fulfillment is found.

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us Trust completely in your **Salvation**
   * Forgiveness, Freedom, Fulfillment

“I counsel you to buy from me… white garments so that you may clothe yourself…” Revelation 3:18

White garments are the mark of ***God’s holy people in Revelation***. The world is dark, ugly and sinful. But God identifies His own with His own glorious splendor and righteousness.

Think of your life before Jesus as if ***every sin, every bad choice was a stain on your clothing***. Before long all your clothes are covered with greasy, slimy, dark stains. Then you add new layers of selfishness, pride and idolatry. After years and years of following your worldly desires, you would look like the grimiest homeless person, the dirtiest prisoner of war coming right out of a mud run 5K.

But, at the moment you called on Jesus to save you, ***he took your dirty clothes upon Himself***. He BECAME SIN on the cross, taking every one of your evil choices and every one of mine, into his human body. And the weight and evil of that sin crushed him. He suffocated under the slime of our sin.

And when Jesus rose again, all of that sin was gone and paid for. Every dirty piece of fabric was vaporized on the cross. And in exchange, ***Jesus took His robe of perfect, glorious righteousness and placed that on your shoulders.*** He covered you in His holiness and goodness and pronounced you JUSTIFIED. Not just forgiven, with your sins paid for, but RIGHTEOUS, because you belong to Him. Holy. Perfect. Glorious.

That is the great exchange of the gospel. Jesus takes your sin and gives you His righteousness. White robes. It’s interesting that Jesus says here “BUY” from me gold and white robes and salve for your eyes. ***With what can we BUY these things?*** Forgiveness, freedom, fullness… We have nothing! No worthiness, no goodness, no basis for any petition. This is a reference to Isaiah 55.

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us Trust completely in your **Salvation**
   * Forgiveness, Freedom, Fulfillment

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Isaiah 55:1

God knows that we have no money, no resources, no way to buy our own salvation. But He offers us the water of eternal life and the bread that you can eat and be fully satisfied WITHOUT PRICE. **We BUY IT but it’s free**.

In other words, put all your chips on this number called JESUS. You have nothing of value, but take everything you ARE, everything you HAVE and ***surrender it to King Jesus.*** To save your life you have to LOSE IT. To live you first have to die. To believe in Jesus you must repent, turning away from your sin.

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us Trust completely in your **Salvation**
   * Forgiveness, Freedom, Fulfillment

“I counsel you to buy from me… salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.” Revelation 3:18

The white robes signify forgiveness. The gold stands for fulfillment and treasure in heaven. One more gospel gift we buy for free: ***salve to heal our blind eyes*** and enable us to see, representing freedom from the bondage of this world.

This goes back to our first prayer that Jesus would help us see the truth clearly about God, ourselves and the world. We need a miracle of God’s grace to help us perceive these things. ***“The world has been pulled over our eyes,”*** as Morpheus told Neo in the Matrix. Neo had to take the red pill to be located and set free from the Matrix. He was held captive in a pod, totally unaware of his situation and utterly incapable of escaping it. Until the rebels got his attention, and he made the choice to let them set him free.

So, we ask the Lord to help us SEE, to help us trust fully in His salvation and one more prayer:

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us **Serve** your Kingdom purposes diligently
   * Radical, responsive, reigning with Christ

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.” Revelation 3:19

This church was self-deceived. They thought they were rich and prosperous. They thought they had everything they needed. Just one little thing was missing: JESUS. So, Jesus counseled them to buy from HIM gold, white robes and eye salve.

***Why does Jesus confront us when we stray?*** Because He loves us! Like a good parent who won’t let his children stray into danger, and a good shepherd who leaves the 99 to find the one lost sheep, Jesus reproves us, confronts us, disciplines us to call us back to Himself.

This is the central exhortation of this letter: ***“Be zealous and repent.”*** We all settle into a lukewarm posture toward the Lord. The world entices us to love other things more than Jesus. So, when we SEE this drifting of the heart we must be honest about it and stir up our zeal, coming back humbly to the Lord. This is a call for RADICAL repentance.

It’s about getting to the root of your relationship with God. Sincere repentance. Humble faith. Genuine love.

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us **Serve** your Kingdom purposes diligently
   * Radical, responsive, reigning with Christ

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in…” Revelation 3:20

Jesus invites everyone into a living relationship with Him. But you have to open the door. Jesus will not force His way in. This is true of your initial salvation and of your time with the Lord every day. He is always there waiting, always available. But we have to open the door. And look at the promise: ***He will come in and EAT WITH US.*** This is an offer of table fellowship, of close, intimate friendship.

Be zealous and repent. Radical honesty. Responsive faith. And if we overcome…

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us **Serve** your Kingdom purposes diligently
   * Radical, responsive, reigning with Christ

“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne…” Revelation 3:21

The gospel promise of the Lord Jesus is not just to be forgiven and free from sin, ***but to serve the Lord now and REIGN with Him forever.*** Just as God the Father exalted Jesus to the highest place and seated Him in the position of glory and honor in the heavenly places, so Jesus promises us that same place WITH HIM. At His side in glory.

Eternity will not be us floating around on clouds with harps singing “Shout to the Lord.” We will worship the Lord Jesus forever, yes. But we will REIGN with Him, coming back to the original creation mandate to fill the earth and subdue it, having dominion over everything on behalf of the Lord. Look at Revelation 22, the last book of the Bible.

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us **Serve** your Kingdom purposes diligently
   * Radical, responsive, reigning with Christ

“They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” Revelation 22:5

The promises in Revelation are for **those who OVERCOME**. Who resist the temptations and deceptions of this dark and dying world and stand firm in their faith and devotion to the Lord Jesus.

***So how is your faith?*** How is your love for the Lord Jesus? Are you on fire for the Lord right now? Are you passionate and zealous in your devotion and service? Or, if you’re honest, have you become a little tepid, a little lukewarm?

Here is our summary for today:

**Three Prayers to the Lord Jesus to Renew our Zeal:**

1. Help us **See** the truth clearly
   * About Jesus, ourselves and the world
2. Help us Trust completely in your **Salvation**
   * Forgiveness, Freedom, Fulfillment
3. Help us **Serve** your Kingdom purposes diligently
   * Radical, responsive, reigning

First, ***we need Jesus to open our blind eyes to see the truth*** about our own hearts, about His glorious supremacy and about the deceptive idols of this world.

Second, ***we need Jesus to help us believe and fully trust*** in the good news of salvation. Not only can Jesus offer forgiveness of sins but also freedom from the power of sin and fullness of life both now and forever.

Finally, ***we need Jesus to help us change our priorities to serve Him***, seeking His kingdom first and His righteousness above all. This requires a radical repentance, a responsive heart as the Lord knocks and we must let Him in. And the promise, for those who believe and stand firm and overcome, is that we will reign with Jesus, seated on His throne forever.

***Be zealous and repent!***

Let’s pray.