

# Sermon 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2019

Revelation 2.1-7

Mark 10.17-22

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

## **Introduction**

- *“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near”*
- For the next seven Sundays we will be looking at the prophetic messages to the seven churches in Anatolia, modern-day Turkey as it is better known
- Each of these prophetic messages comes in the form of a letter written by the disciple and apostle John
- John received an astonishing vision or more likely set of visions from the LORD God which he now shared
- John was imprisoned on the island of Patmos, just off the coast of Anatolia, and he has been condemned to hard labour in his old age
- But while there, each day he looked across to the mainland and to the churches that he had helped to establish and nurture
- The vision or visions he received are both local and global, an intimate picture and the big picture of the state of the Kingdom as God sees it
- It is important to remember that each of these letters is prophetic, that is to say, they are foretelling events in places but most often and most importantly they are forth-telling – telling it as it is

- Equally it is important to remember that these letters are not dusty old letters that are like those found in the attic of an old house...
- ...ancient and irrelevant to the current occupiers and readers. The letters, the vision, the prophecy, are fresh and renewed in the hands of the reader – you and me
- As each vision says *“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”*
- As we hold each of these letters in our hands, as we read these words, these prophecies, like the original readers we have a choice...
- ...we can listen to the Spirit, act on those words and live, or we can ignore, prevaricate over or disagree with those words and die – in this world and the next
- None of the seven churches in Anatolia, modern-day Turkey still exist, *“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”*

## **Background**

- The author of the seven letters to the seven churches is not the apostle John. He writes the words but it is someone else who directs the pen
- The author is, *“him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands”*
- This is the same person who John has encountered at the start of his vision or visions, and whom John describes as,
- *“one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white*

*as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force”*

- And to fully understand the importance of that person, and therefore, the authority of the letters, John says next, *“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead”*
- Each of the letters contains similar elements – a commendation, a complaint or complaints and finally a promise
- This is a pattern you will often see in prophetic words from the LORD God, including prophecies today
- The Lord wants first to encourage, He then wants to correct and finally He gives us a choice – His sovereign will, will be done, but we can chose to be in line with His will or not
- If we heed the Lord’s correction, like a correction in the course of a voyage or journey, then we will flourish. If we do not then we will not flourish, we will die – as a church and as an individual
- These letters, these prophecies were for the churches, they were primarily for the churches to hear together and respond together
- But, individuals must also hear and make their choices, but primarily the commendation, the complaint and the promise apply to the church
- As we hear – and hopefully listen – to these words, we should also reflect on what the Spirit is saying to the Church in Colton/Penny Bridge and then to ourselves as individuals
- *“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”*

## Commendation

- This week we have heard the letter read out, we have heard the prophecy, to the Church in Ephesus
- Ephesus was a large city port in Anatolia, not the capital of the province but a significant city, rich in resources but also in culture
- The city was renowned as a place of culture but it also had a decadent underbelly – the magnificent Library of Celsius was situated opposite to a large brothel
- It was a place of pagan worship, the spirits of the Nature and the Earth, but also the Greek goddess, Artemis
- Think for a moment of this area in which our church is situated. What is distinctive? What is typical? What or who is worshipped? What matters to people here? What are their idols?
- Now, turning to our letter, what does the LORD God say to Ephesus?
- *“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary”*
- Again, think for a moment, what would the Lord commend you for? What would the Lord commend Colton/Penny Bridge for as a church?
- If you cannot think of anything then I would begin to worry...

## Complaint

- ...because next we must look at the complaint from the Lord
- *“But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent”*
- What do you think this “love you had at first” means? That does not sound too serious a complaint does it? It would be easy to think, “I could live with that”
- Our Gospel reading this morning tells the familiar story of Jesus’ encounter with the rich, young man
- This eager, young man was keen to inherit eternal life; life was good for him and he wanted to live forever like that
- But even though he had lived (on the surface) an exemplary life, Jesus got straight to the core of the problem, to the complaint...
- ...he had to share his good life with others; he needed others and moreover, he needed the Lord God more than the good things in life – for that is eternal life
- Jesus looked at the rich, young man and loved him, we are told, but Jesus still made his complaint known
- The Church in Ephesus was comfortable, the people who made up the church were comfortable, well-off, relatively rich
- In their comfort they had forgotten their first love, their zeal, their passion for the LORD God
- Where are you? Where is this church? Could you swap your weekly offering to the church with your weekly shopping allowance? Could you eat for the week from your usual church offering?

- What service for another person (in the name of Jesus) have you done this week? Have you forgotten your first love?

## **Promise**

- Finally, the promise – of course, the first promise is that if the church at Ephesus did not repent then the Lord would remove the lampstand – they would be a church no more
- But there is another, more encouraging, promise me to the church at Ephesus and, by extension, ourselves
- *“To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God”*
- The promise is very simple to understand, if you want to be in heaven and not in hell, then you need to conquer – but conquer what?
- Well, whatever the complaints are that the LORD God highlights
- Maybe it is losing that passion; maybe, it is being distracted by the wealth and comfort of life; maybe, it is the idols we follow, the ways we pass “our” time
- If we, if you, if I conquer these things, if at the very least we acknowledge we should conquer these things then our faith is genuine – if not, then maybe not

## **Conclusion**

- In the next six Sundays, we will hear more commendations, more complaints and more promises from the LORD God
- Some will be relevant to us, some will not, but, *“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”*
- Thanks be to God. **Amen**