

Sermon 14th July 2019

Revelation 2.18-29

Mark 1.14-15

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

Introduction

- One Christmas Eve the local vicar was talking with a woman at the end of the service
- During the conversation, the woman mentioned that earlier that week she had met a bearded fellow carrying a large sack over his shoulder
- The vicar was irritated by this anecdote, and told the woman that he did not like the mention of Santa Claus around the Christmas period
- The woman, visibly shocked, went on to explain, “Oh no, it was my teenage son returning from university with all his washing”
- Two teenage boys were caught by a policeman vandalising a bus shelter and spraying graffiti on it
- They were both arrested and taken down to the local police station
- The arresting sergeant gave them a dressing-down and to teach them a lesson, he had them put in a police cell
- Shutting the cell door, he told them they were entitled to make only one telephone call
- A little while later a man entered the police station

- “I assume that you’re the father of one of the teenage boys?” the sergeant asked
- “No”, he replied, “Then you must be their lawyer?”, the sergeant continued
- “No”, the man said again, “I’m here to deliver the pizza”
- We will get back to teenagers...

Background

- *“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”*
- For seven Sundays, we are looking at the seven letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation
- So far, we have looked at the letters to the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum
- And this Sunday it is the turn of the Church in Thyatira, and we will look at what the Lord Jesus has to say, prophetically, to that church
- Of interest first of all is that the letter to the Church Thyatira is the longest letter to the least important of the seven cities
- Thyatira was not a great city, but it was prominent as a centre of commerce situated as it was between two valleys and on trade routes
- As a consequence, there were a very large number of trade guilds within the city...
- ...and a large number of craftsmen and dealers in wool, linen, apparel, dyed cloths, slaves, pottery, leatherwork, and bronze

- And naturally, if you wanted to earn a living it was important to be a member of one of these trade guilds
- However, each trade guild had its own patron god or goddess, feasts and seasonal festivities...
- ...with Apollo the sun god and his twin sister Artemis, the goddess of hunting, particularly prominent in the city

Commendation

- And so like the other letters, the Lord Jesus opens his prophetic message to the Church in Thyatira with a commendation
- *“I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first”*
- This is a different message to that of the Church in Ephesus which had fallen from its first love, fallen from passion into apathy
- The Church in Thyatira, the Christians there, were improving and building themselves up in praiseworthy Christian qualities
- For an insignificant city, and hence insignificant church compared to the other cities, there was much to commend in Thyatira

Complaint

- But, and we know that the “but” was coming, but there is a complaint against the Church in Thyatira
- It was not that the commendation is quickly passed over or the progress of the church was not appreciate by the Lord Jesus, but... there was a problem

- *“But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practise fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication”*
- It appears that a woman, identified as Jezebel, has been leading Christians in Thyatira astray...
- ...in much the same way as the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans had misled Christians in Pergamum, as we talked about last Sunday
- Now there probably was not a woman actually called Jezebel – it was most likely a figure of speech – and she may or may not have been a member of the Church in Thyatira
- Nonetheless, some of the Christians there considered her to be a prophetess, listened to her teachings and acted on them...
- ...while others who may not have considered her a prophetess chose to ignore her and did not challenge her or her teachings
- Now, this was a prophetic message for the Church in Thyatira, a forthtelling of how the Lord Jesus saw the situation there...
- ...though this was a prophetic message for them, there are at least two points we can draw from the complaint that are relevant to us
- For the Church in Pergamum last Sunday the complaint was that the teachings and actions were leading others astray
- The complaint and warning here are different, the Lord Jesus is not complaining about the sin (though serious that it is) but He is complaining about the reluctance to repent

- The Christians there were allowing themselves to be led astray, not leading others astray in this case but themselves, almost like they wanted to be led astray
- And the warning is stark, if others are stubborn and reluctant to repent as this “Jezebel” is, then they too will suffer the same fate
- *“Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve”*
- The Lord Jesus has given Jezebel the opportunity to repent, the time to repent and she refused
- Likewise, others that “lie in the same bed” which can be taken to be literal or metaphorical, then they too will get what they “deserve”
- The sin of fornication is not the main issue here, strange as that may seem, but the stubbornness and refusal to repent
- The second issue, that arises and one that should speak to Christians today is compromise
- The probable reason that some Christians in Thyatira so easily accepted the teachings of “Jezebel” was that she said what they wanted to hear
- To work in Thyatira almost certainly meant having to be part of a trade guild, and to be part of a trade guild almost certainly meant having to feast on food sacrificed to their gods or goddesses and having to indulge in other pleasures of the flesh
- The question for Christians today, the question for us today is, “how much should we adopt the standards and practices of today?”

- To work, to be able to participate, to be acceptable to secular parts of society, what are we prepared to compromise and what are we not prepared to compromise?

Promise

- So, thank goodness there is a promise in this letter as well as a complaint and warning!
- The Lord Jesus promises that for those that do not hold to these teachings or who have repented of them
- That is to say, turned away from those teachings and practices, then no extra burden is to be placed on them – they are doing enough already!
- What a great place for a church to be in, “wait guys, don’t bother doing any more initiatives, you’re doing plenty, relax, put your feet up, you doing a great job as you are!”
- But the promise goes further, *“to everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered—even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star”*
- Wow! What a promise! But why should we believe the Lord Jesus? Why should the Christians in Thyatira take notice of these words?
- Because when introducing Himself in the letter, the Lord Jesus said, *“these are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze”*
- Because He is the true God, unlike the false god Apollo, the sun god, He, the Lord Jesus does have eyes like a flame of fire
- Talking to craftsmen, including workers of bronze who made images of false gods and goddesses, He truly has feet like

burnish bronze that are swift to pursue evil and swift to trample it underfoot

- Make no mistake, the Lord Jesus is saying, I have the authority to do what I say – the warning and the promise

Conclusion

- So, back to teenagers... aren't they infuriating?!
- You give them chance after chance after chance; you give and you give and you give
- And what do you get in return? Sullenness, surliness, disrespect and a lack of gratitude
- But most all there is a stubbornness and refusal to cooperate, a refusal to see that what they are doing is inconsiderate or maybe even wrong
- As Christians in Coniston and Torver, we can be like teenagers – sullen, surly, disrespectful, ungrateful but mostly stubborn
- It is not the sin that the Lord Jesus is most concerned with. Yes, sin, disobedience is not good, but stubbornness and a refusal to repent is far worse
- As we engage as Christians with an increasingly militant and persuasive secular society...
- ...we must judge our compromises with secular standards and practices ever more carefully
- And when the Lord Jesus, or those delegated authority, call us to account then we must be prepared to quickly and willingly repent
- Otherwise it is the warning to the Church in Thyatira, and not the promise, that will be applied to our lives

- *“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”*
- Thanks be to God. **Amen**