

Sermon 4th August 2019

Revelation 3.14-22

Luke 9.23-27

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

Introduction

- In the 1850s, Scotland's Reformed Church issued a plea for missionaries to go the islands of the South Pacific
- John Paton responded, and sailed from Scotland on April 16, 1858, landing on the islands in November of that year
- Paton found himself among cannibals, endangered again and again. "They encircled us in a deadly ring", he wrote of one incident, "and one kept urging another to strike the first blow"
- "My heart rose up to the Lord Jesus; I saw him watching all the scene. My peace came back to me like a wave from God. I realized that my life was immortal till my Master's work with me was done"
- The turning point came when Paton decided to dig a well to provide fresh water for the people. The islanders, terrified at bringing "rain from below", watched with deepest foreboding
- Paton dug deeper and deeper until finally, at thirty feet, he tapped into a stream of water. Opposition to his mission work ceased, and the wide-eyed islanders gave him their full respect
- Chief Mamokei accepted Christ as Saviour, then a few others made the daring step. On October 24, 1869, nearly eleven years after his arrival, Paton led his first communion service
- Twelve converted cannibals partook of the Lord's Supper. "As I put

the bread and wine into those hands once stained with the blood of cannibalism, now stretched out to receive and partake the emblems of the Redeemer's love", he wrote, "I had a foretaste of the joy of Glory that well-nigh broke my heart to pieces"

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, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia
- And this Sunday, we reach our final Church as we look at the prophetic message to the Church in Laodicea
- The prophetic message to the Church in Laodicea is probably the best-known letter of the letters to the seven churches – but what do we really know of Laodicea?
- The ancient city of Laodicea lay on a very important Roman road and two other important roads leading to the sub-region of Phrygia
- The city was extremely wealthy, partly because of the production of glossy black wool that was used in the manufacture of clothing
- And partly because of a prestigious school of medicine sited in the city that produced a powder used in ointments for the healing of several eye diseases
- Within Laodicea were a number of temples, with several dedicated to healing

- As a consequence, Laodicea was also a commercial centre specializing in banking
- So, wealthy was Laodicea in fact, that when it was again devastated by an earthquake in 60 AD the city paid for the restoration itself, and did not draw on central Roman funds
- The city's water supply came via a six-mile long aqueduct from south of the city
- It is thought that the water originated from hot springs that cooled down over the six-mile journey, or came from a cool spring and heated up in the strong sun
- Whichever it was, the water arriving at Laodicea was lukewarm, and the city was as famous for its poor quality of water as it was for its wealth

Commendation

- So, returning to the letter, how does the Lord Jesus open his letter and commend the Church in Laodicea? In short, he doesn't
- *"I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth"*
- There is no Commendation in the letter to the Church in Laodicea, but instead one of the harshest (and well-known) rebukes
- What makes the rebuke doubly harsh is not simply the accusation of their half-hearted nature...
- ...but also the reminder of the poor quality of the city's water – an embarrassment for such a wealthy city and its proud citizens

- The Lord Jesus does not simply remind them of their spiritual failings but also their worldly failings – they cannot take pride in either their spiritual or worldly prowess
- So, the Commendation for the Church of Laodicea is not a commendation at all but more of a complaint

Complaint

- But, and there is always a “but”, then the Lord Jesus moves on to the real Complaint
- *“For you say, “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.” You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked”*
- Now, like the Lord Jesus’ opening complaint dressed up as a commendation...
- ...this Complaint really hits where it hurts, this complaint is both personal and direct
- For indeed the city of Laodicea and its citizens, including the Christians there, did think that they were rich, they thought they were prosperous in their business...
- ...and did not need help, as exemplified by financing the rebuilding the city themselves after the earthquake of 60 AD
- But, and it is a big “but”, but the Lord Jesus tells them they are wretched and pitiable, and are instead poor, blind and naked
- Now for a city and its citizens famed for its banking, medicine for eye diseases, and trading in black wool for clothing...
- ...you could possibly understanding why this may be a stinging rebuke and stomach-blow of a complaint

- This Complaint would have really hurt and hit home, not only were the Christians of Laodicea half-hearted and lukewarm...
- ...but they were also blind and ignorant of their own pitiful spiritual state in the eyes of the Lord Jesus
- But there are questions that obviously arise from these complaints – what exactly is it that makes the Laodicean Christians so poor, so blind and so naked?
- What is it that results in the Lord Jesus viewing them as half-hearted and lukewarm, only worthy of being spat out?
- What would it mean or what would they have to do or be, to be viewed as hot? Cold we understand, but what does hot look like?
- In our Gospel reading this morning, there is the familiar command from the same Lord Jesus to his would-be disciples to *“deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me”*
- Now most interpretations are that we deny ourselves, of course, and in taking up our cross we put to death our desires to follow Jesus’ desires for our lives
- But how about we ask a question – Why did Jesus take up His cross, the Cross?
- Jesus took up the Cross to conquer death and then offer eternal life to all that believed and trusted in Him – put simply, Jesus died so that others could live
- I believe that the same is true for us; we take up our cross so that others may live
- Or in other words, to promote the Lord Jesus’ great commission to make disciples of all nations...

- ...to seek out the Lost and declare the Good News of the Kingdom of God, that is to say, to share our faith
- The Laodicean Christians were wretched and pitiable, lukewarm in their faith and half-hearted in sharing that faith with others

Promise

- But all is not lost, although the Christians in Laodicea were poor, blind and naked the Lord Jesus offers them a way out
- *“Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see”*
- The Lord Jesus offers the solution to their pitiful state
- *“I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me”*
- If the Laodicean Christian would but listen to the Lord Jesus’ rebuke – a rebuke for those He loves – if they listen and repent...
- ...then instead of spitting them out, rejecting them, the Lord Jesus will once again be with them
- And as with all the other letters to the churches, the Lord Jesus then offers a Promise
- *“To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne”*

- For those Christians in Laodicea who repent and no longer act half-heartedly towards their faith...
- ...not only will the Lord Jesus once more sit with them, but they will sit with Him in glory forever – that is some promise!

Conclusion

- Being hot, and not lukewarm, does not mean you have to be like John Paton, travelling to a distant island to be surrounded by cannibals
- But it does mean that you need to be serious about your own faith, and you need to be serious about sharing that faith with others
- Otherwise, you might think you are rich, comfortable and safe, but the Lord Jesus might have a completely different perception
- *“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”*
- Thanks be to God. **Amen**