

REVELATION 3:14-22
 DEPENDING ON GOD!

Sports coaches feature large in the news at the moment. Andy Murray has a new tennis coach, Amelie Mauresmo, and those who watch tennis will be waiting to see what effect she has on his game. Vern Cotter is the new Scotland Rugby coach, with the team on his first tour, in the United States and Canada and how will the team perform under his leadership? The World Cup has started; the Commonwealth Games are coming and coaches will feature large in the minds of athletes even if the watching public doesn't see too much of them. Any and every sports coach will warn his or her charges of the dangers of complacency: it is probably the worst fault for any athlete, especially those who are good and who've had some success. "The moment you become complacent with your level of performance is also the exact moment you have forgotten where you were going." Complacency means that the athlete will forget to see the difficulties and take success for granted; he or she will stop working hard! People laugh when I tell them that I still get nervous walking out of the vestry on a Sunday morning; "you've been doing it for thirty and more years, surely you'll be used to it by now". But the moment when I stop being nervous is the moment that I've forgotten how momentous a thing it is to conduct the worship of God and what a great privilege it is to be involved in Christian ministry.

Complacent churches? What do complacent churches look like? I suppose that it starts with an attitude of success and strength and because churches are successful and strong they stop working hard and assume that the people who have been flocking through their doors will continue to flock through their doors regardless. They see no need to change, no need to take risks and they want simply to carry on doing the things they've always done in the way they've always done them because it will still leave them strong and successful; more than that, they have money in the bank! Churches take on personal characteristics and become like those in positions of leadership: if the leaders think that everything is fine and good, then the church will think that way. Most people living in the real world of Christianity in Scotland will understand that there is very little room for complacency!

Laodicea is the last stop on our little journey through Turkey. The city doesn't exist any more, but in its day was the wealthiest city in that part of Asia Minor. It was famous for three things: it was a commercial city famous for its banking and exchange, a city of millionaires who refused government aid after the earthquake; it was famous for its garment industry, making high quality garments of glossy black wool; it was famous for its medical school and the eye salve that was developed there for the benefit of many people. But it had one problem: its terrible water supply. Its water came to the city piped from hot springs some miles away and by the time it got there it was tepid; it was not the hot healing water of Hierapolis; it was not the cold refreshing water of Colossae by the river Lycus; it was tepid water that had very few uses at all, it simply made people sick. The city was eventually abandoned and the people of Laodicea built a new town nearer a goods supply of water. The Church in Laodicea may well have been founded by Epaphras who came from this part of the world and went up and down the valley evangelising these three cities and founding churches in all three places.

In these letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, these letters from Jesus to His Church, we have seen a little pattern: first of all, there is something good about the Church, then a complaint and finally, the remedy for that complaint. We've seen a couple of places where there has been no complaint, but Jesus has simply tried to encourage the church in its life. Here, there is nothing good said about the church in Laodicea; it is all complaint! We find the usual phrase "*I know...*" (*Revelation 3:15*)

but it is followed straightaway by a complaint. Jesus knows His Church; Jesus sees His church and while that can be a huge encouragement, the notion that Jesus sees His church is also a huge challenge to us; He is Lord of His Church and His Church must live in Jesus' way; when it doesn't... well, here are three complaints; see how they relate to the city!

1. The Church is lukewarm: remember the water supply, neither one thing nor the other: *"I know..." (Revelation 3:15f)* The water supply was hot when it left the springs and it came to the city through a hi-tec stone pipeline, bored and cemented together, but by the time the water reached Laodicea, the water was lukewarm. The hot water that had healing properties when it left the springs, but now it just made people sick! What do lukewarm Christians look like? What does a lukewarm church look like? On outside it looks fine; there is a display of religion, of Christianity; people are going through the motions of religion and faith, but it doesn't touch their hearts and lives. There is no real desire to learn what the Bible teaches, there is no real commitment to prayer; there is a bit of a desire to 'do the Christian thing' for their neighbour if it is not too demanding. We want to keep a foot in the Christian camp just in case! We sit on the fence: we don't want to reject Christ 'just in case' but we don't want the whole package because that is too costly in terms of commitment. What about a Church with a wholehearted passion?

2. The Church is complacent: Remember the three things for which the city is famous: its banking community, its luxury textile industry and its medical school. *"You say..." (Revelation 3:17)* Here was a church saying "we have all that we need; we don't need anything and we don't need to depend on God." In fact, Jesus has a whole different way of describing the Christians in Laodicea, none of it complementary: *"wretched..." (Revelation 3:17b)* all of these descriptions opposite to their own self-understanding. Jesus told a story of a rich farmer: the farmer was quite right in seeing that he needed bigger barns to house his crops; it was his attitude that got him into trouble: *"I'll say..." (Luke 12:19)* His was an attitude that was centred on himself and his achievement and he saw no need for faith; *"This is..." (Luke 12:21)* Here in Laodicea was a people who had forgotten to depend on God, who had forgotten that all they had comes from God; Jesus went on from the story of the rich farmer to teach people what it means to depend on God, not to worry about life, but to trust God.

There is a wonderful phrase at the end of the parable: "Rich towards God!" The Church is invited *"I counsel..." (Revelation 3:18)* It is Christ who gives lasting wealth, true honour and real sight. Jesus takes the three things for which the city is famous - banking, garments and eye salve – and turns them into pictures of the spiritual blessing that He gives. Jesus gives us the spiritual wealth of faith, hope, love, peace, grace – a whole list of blessings are ours in Christ; salvation is like a new set of clothes for us to wear; Jesus gives us ability to see ourselves as we really are, a people greatly blessed, but a people always in need of grace. These are the gifts Jesus gives for faith, to people who depend on Him, to people who have learned to trust Him. This is what it means to be "rich towards God", to have learned to trust and depend on God for grace and salvation rather than be self-centred, thinking we need nothing. A people with wholehearted trust?

It is hard to trust. We're brought up to be self-sufficient, independent human beings who rely on ourselves to survive the traumas of life. We've trusted other people and they've let us down, so we retreat into our own self-contained world. Then we're told that trusting God is good, but every instinct goes against that; so we find it hard to trust. But when we make that first step of trust, to pray that God will bless us, or to put a situation into God's hands in a spirit of complete dependence, we discover that

it works. God is trustable; God is worthy of our trust. He keeps His promises and He listens to our prayers and He gives to us far more than He expects from us. No-one teaches children to trust; they learn by experience to trust. The person who catches a child when they jump from the tree, the child will trust them again the next time. Trust or faith – it is the same quality - opens the door to us being rich towards God; the blessing of God is poured into the hearts of those who trust Jesus.

3. The Church has forgotten Jesus: there is a very famous painting by Holman Hunt, an English artist who died in 1910. The painting is called *The Light of the world*; it depicts Jesus carrying a lamp, knocking on a door; the door is overgrown with weeds and has no handle on the outside. He is knocking, looking to be let in and the door can only be opened from the inside. The preacher will make great play of the fact that the door can only be opened from the inside, as the person responds to His knock and invites Him in; Jesus is waiting to be invited in. "*Here I...*" (*Revelation 3:20*) Have you ever wondered why Jesus is seen standing outside, knocking, asking to come in? How did He get outside in the first place? If this is a picture of the Church in Laodicea, how come Jesus is outside, waiting to be let in? Here, it would seem, is a Church that has forgotten Jesus, that has pushed Jesus outside; that no longer takes Jesus seriously. A Church that has forgotten Jesus and that pushes Jesus out, is a church that has seriously lost its way.

The basic confession of Christian faith is very simple: "Jesus is Lord". "The confession of "Jesus is Lord" is a challenge to take seriously the absolute and ongoing centrality of Jesus for Christianity as a whole and thus for the local church." (Alan Hirsch) Jesus has to stand at the centre of all that we are and all that we do. Jesus is Lord. He is Lord of His Church, King and head of His Church, the One who gives the Church its life, the One who will shape and direct His church, if we let Him. He is Lord of the Christian, the One who gives us our life and the One who shapes and directs our life if and when we let Him. The Church has to be the community of people with Jesus at the centre and the challenge we face today is for faith and commitment to Jesus to be whole-hearted: "lukewarm" suggests a people in two minds, hearts divided, not altogether committed to Jesus; "complacent" suggests a people who have taken their eye off the ball, lost their way, forgotten to trust, forgotten that Jesus is Lord. "*Be earnest...*" (*Revelation 3:19*) Whole-hearted faith, commitment, giving of ourselves are to be at the heart of the Christian and the because Jesus is the centre of the Christian life and the Church.

What kind of church will we be? It's a question of values! We've seen, in these seven letters, a church that needs to be devoted to Jesus, to be faithful, repentant, persevering, awake and loyal, and today we've seen a Church with Jesus at the centre. Values for the Church are hugely important. Often the values we hold for Church are set by the values that we have as individuals; a Church in which Jesus is honoured as Lord is created by individuals who see and recognise and live with Jesus as Lord of our lives; churches with a keen sense of the blessing of God for the church and the world will come from individuals who have a keen sense of being rich towards God; churches that depend on God in faith and trust will come from individuals who have learned to trust God and depend on Him. What kind of Church will we be? What will be our values of Church? Will we be a whole-hearted, loyal, Christ-centred people?