

St Stephen's, Canonbury
Lent 2016 - Challenged to Change

Lent Reflection and Study Material

Lent 2: Hold onto what you have

Readings: Revelation 2:18-29 and Mark 7:21-27

Revelation 2: 18-29

"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— 'He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'— just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Mark 7: 21-27

At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time. "But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Questions

Begin by reading the two passages through. Is there anything that strikes you as particularly meaningful or puzzling or challenging? Just share any particular verses together or hold the words in prayer. Ask that God will help your understanding.

From what we know of Thyatira, it was a liberal, tolerant, multi-cultural and multi-faith society. Over the past 60 years our society has seen dramatic and rapid changes as our nation has become more liberal, tolerant, multi-faith and multi-cultural. Share some of your experiences of change in society and talk about whether you feel these have been good or bad.

Talk about how you feel these changes have challenged the Christian faith and the church in the UK. Is it harder now than it was 20, 30, 40 or 50 years ago to live a faithful Christian life?

The Christians in Thyatira were condemned for tolerating the practices of the followers of Jezebel.' Do you think that it is true that tolerance has the potential to in some way 'degrade' and 'corrupt' our faith?

The sermon asked the questions:

- How can you remain distinctive and faithful to the Gospel in a society that holds up tolerance as its golden rule?
- How can you be faithful to the gospel within a society that sees all spiritualities as legitimate pathways to God?
- How can you remain faithful to the gospel in a society that regards morals, ethics and personal behaviour as entirely relative – all things are a matter of personal choice and all things are acceptable, indeed commendable, as long as they do not infringe the freedom of others.

How would you answer these questions?

Jesus says to the Thyatirans: 'Hold onto what you have.' How do you keep your faith in the midst of what is often a noisy and chaotic world full of voices that call you away from Christ?

Are there any particular issues/practices accepted by society today that anger or irritate you personally that you feel you should not be tolerating but highlighting and speaking against?

Prayer

Lord, it is not easy to live as a Christian today,
There are many voices that would seek to call us away from Christ,
the world calls us to be tolerant even when our faith is threatened.
Help us to 'hold onto what we have' in the gospel,
That the precious jewel of faith may be shining brightly in our hearts on the day that we stand before you in glory;
Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Family friendly version

(The readings for this week are quite difficult to use with children so this is a series of questions to think about without using the readings)

Do you have any colleagues at work or friends at school or college who you know are Christians. Do you think there are other Christians that you don't know about? Why would that be?

How do you feel when you hear people saying things that are cruel to others or using Jesus' name as a swear word?

Write a list of the things about the world, your neighbourhood, your school or work place, that make you sad.

Is there anything you think you could do or say about these things?

Sometimes it is hard to be a Christian when so many others don't seem to want to know about Jesus. How can we help each other to hold onto our faith today?

Think of as many words as you can that describe what it means to you to know Jesus love and care and forgiveness in your life.

Jesus has said that one day he will come back to the earth. What do you think he will be looking for when he comes?

Prayer

Lord,
Sometimes it is hard to be a Christian.
Sometimes it is easier to be quiet about our faith
and stay hidden from other people.
Help me not to be a secret Christian but to stand up for Jesus
And help make the world a better place. Amen