

has been who A light to shine upon the road and meet me to the blood.

Where is the blessedness by you when I first saw the Lord?

Where is the strong, refreshing view of Jesus and his Word?

More peace, more love, I once enjoyed, how sweet that there is still.

A day of death, a living point, a world that never failed.

[22 : 57] Return, O Holy Doe, return, sweet messenger of rest.

I hither slid and with thee more and only draw my rest.

O dearest title I have known, what ever died of thee.

Help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee.

So shall my God be lost with God, thou answer me thy claim.

[24 : 13] O pure I shall mark the road that each be true alone.

Let's pray as we come back to this passage.

Lord Jesus we thank you for this revelation that we are given in this book we thank you that we are taken to a place where we are enabled to see something of the glory and the power and the majesty of the risen Christ and we thank you that as we read these verses we are able to see and hear what you think of your church and although we see a letter that is addressed to a church in Ephesus we know that this is a letter that extends from Ephesus to us and so we pray that you would give us ears to hear that we would hear what you are saying to us as part of your church and we know that the church is not the buildings it's the people so help us as individuals to hear what you are saying to us that you would speak into our hearts and that we would be open and responsive to your word so help us we pray those who are in the building here those who watch just now at a distance in their homes those who may watch later in different places minister to us we pray through your word and what we pray for ourselves here we pray for others also we think of Gordon as he preaches in Shabbos tonight we think of Scott as he preaches in Crossbost we think of Farrakhar as he preaches in Leverborough and we ask that what we look for here that you would give to them in these different places that they would know the help of the Holy Spirit and that the the gospel would go forth in power so hear us and help us we pray we ask this in Jesus name Amen when I began preparing at the beginning of this week or middle of this week there was a letter sitting on my desk well it was actually more than a letter it was a a test certificate an MOT test certificate for one of the cars and on this certificate there is some good news the cars passed the test that was good news it's been given another year to be driven on the roads but there's also bad news there are advisories two tyres are both worn they're close to the legal limit they're still on the legal limit I'm aware there's police officers in the house I won't tell you which car it is but in the report there is there's good news there's bad news there's things to be thankful for there's things to be alert to there are things to ignore not to ignore but to to act upon advisories what does it say here it says things to monitor and repair and revelation chapter 2 and revelation chapter 3 they're a bit like a series of

MOT test certificates for various churches there are seven letters which were addressed to seven real churches in Asia but these churches as I said earlier represent all churches in all places at all times it's not just for them it's for us one commentator Chandler writes when the book of revelation was written there were far more than seven churches in Asia Minor from the book of Acts we know that there were churches in Colossae Lystra and Miletus but they aren't mentioned here the letters to the seven churches means letters to the complete church the church everywhere always the number seven in revelation symbolizes completeness so Jesus in this section is carrying out an assessment on his church universal and in this first letter that we come to there's good news there are signs of encouragement which they received and which we can look for there are marks of health which are encouraging to see and in this letter and in these letters there's also bad news there are advisories that Jesus notifies things that we need to be alert to things that we need to act upon now thinking about the car although the car passed the the MOT with advisories if I was to ignore the advice on worn tires for long enough and the tires will get worse and worse they'll eventually have no grip and they will be the cause of a crash and what we know from experience and from biblical truth is that churches can crash and get into all kinds of trouble if we don't listen to and if we don't act upon what Jesus tells us this is his church he is the one who is qualified he is the one who has the knowledge to see and know and instruct who we should be and what we should do so what does

[30 : 42] Jesus have to say to this church in Ephesus well there's four things and we'll just step through them first of all there are commendations start with the good news there's three of them and then there's a complaint which is a serious complaint the third thing we'll see is there's a command a twofold command and finally there is a commitment which is both positive and negative so first of all the commendations and we see them in verses 1 to verse 3 so we'll step through these verses verse 1 to the angel of the church in Ephesus write the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand who walks among the seven golden lampstands so what we see right away in this letter in the preamble to the letter is that the one who's carrying out this assessment this inspection of each church it's Jesus he's the one who's looking he is the one who is speaking and so the report it may be shared with the angels who are assigned to the churches but the one who is speaking is Jesus and immediately he gives encouragement to the church back then and to the church here now

Jesus assures the church in Ephesus that he's not far away he's not carrying out some remote desktop study rather he he says in verse one that he is holding his church the the word used is the word of holding tightly kind of palm in the hand type holding he's holding his church he's holding his people securely in his hand and he gives them the assurance also that he's walking with them there's great encouragement in knowing these things and what Jesus said to them back there he says to us here tonight Jesus as he looks into his church in North Harris he is saying to us I'm holding you and it's only the fact that he's holding us that's the only reason that we're upright the only reason that we are that we are the church is because Jesus has his hold on us we don't have the strength the wherewithal to keep ourselves upright he is holding us and he is walking with us and actually we should think of that each time that we meet together sometimes I know that as people are thinking about whether or not they'll come out to a service there's a battle that goes on I have to be here but you don't have to be here and so for some people there's a battle that goes on between half past five and ten to six there's a battle on a

Wednesday evening from quarter to seven to a quarter past will I go why not go and there can be reluctance in our minds and there can be a wrestle where we're thinking well I don't know if I'm bothered tonight right what should motivate us more than anything as we think about the prospect that's coming together as the Lord's people is the fact that as we gather together he is with us whether it's a Sunday evening in this building whether it's a Wednesday evening next door whether it's somebody's front room when you meet together to pray for two or three of the Lord's people to come together we have the assurance that he is present he walks amongst us tonight we can see each other but do we realize that as we sit here just now

Jesus walks amongst us and as we sing he hears our voice and I hope he does as we open our Bibles he sees our reactions he knows our hearts and he's with us and all the way through these letters not just in Ephesus but all the way through these different letters Jesus keeps saying I know I know I know your heart I know your church I know what's going on in this place and with that knowledge Jesus commends this church in Ephesus for three things the first thing he commends them for is their toil verse 2 he says

[36 : 38] I know your works your toil and your patient endurance so as we get this picture of this church in Ephesus this was a hard working church when the intimations went out on a Sunday morning or when the email went out to the Ephesus district there was probably a long list of notices this was a busy church this was a church that worked hard John Stott says the Ephesian church was an active church busy in the service of God and human beings one may imagine that its members were fully occupied entertaining the lonely nursing the sick teaching the young visiting the aged the church in Ephesus was a veritable beehive of industry their toil was famous and that was a good thing they weren't lazy they weren't inactive they weren't in maintenance mode they were in mission mode they worked hard and they persevered with patient endurance as a church and Jesus saw that and he commends them for their toil the second commendation from Jesus concerns their commitment to the truth

Jesus says I know how you cannot bear with those who are evil but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false so this is a church the second thing we see about this church is that this is a church that was committed to the truth they were sound doctrinally they held firmly to the truth of God's word in verse 6 just slightly further down Jesus mentions the Nicolaitans yet this you have he says you hate the works of the Nicolaitans which I also hate one commentator Brooks tells us that the Nicolaitans urged a lifestyle of sexual freedom

and carnal satisfaction and as they pushed forward their views they did it claiming to be apostles they were claiming to be speaking

God's word but this church in Ephesus they tested what the Nicolaitans were saying against the Bible against God's word and they had the courage and the commitment to say to the Nicolaitans what you're saying is false you're false prophets we will not tolerate you we will not listen to you they closed them down and Jesus saw that and Jesus commends them for that they're committed to the truth he commends them for their toil he commends them for their commitment to the truth and he commends them thirdly for the way that they endured trials for Jesus sake verse 3 he says I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake and you have not grown weary now

Ephesus as a city was known for being very pluralistic there were temples everywhere it was a multi-faith centre it was a place where there were many religions many spiritual ways so when Christians claimed that there was one way to be saved and that was through Jesus and only through Jesus that message was not a popular message in the city of Ephesus so it's not surprising that this church in Ephesus suffered for Jesus sake but rather than giving up and capitulating to the spirit of the age they they endured patiently under trial they did not grow weary under persecution and Jesus commends them for that so these are the commendations that's how the letter begins with commendations three commendations and if we just take a moment to apply this if we are wondering this evening how we can receive the commendation of

Jesus here's three things here's three things that Jesus is making clear to us that he will commend one our toil Jesus is encouraging us through this letter to work hard for his name's sake we're not to be a lazy church if we are those who have been saved by the grace of Jesus that's Ephesians 2 chapter 2 verses 8 and 9 if we are those who have been saved by the grace of Jesus we have been saved in order to do the good works that have been prepared in advance by Jesus that's Ephesians 2 chapter 10 so we should toil we should work hard we should give it all for Jesus he commends us for that he calls us out if we're not doing it our thing we can do to receive the commendation of Jesus is to hold on to the truth of the word of God there will always be

[42 : 37] Nicolaitans there will always be people who try to steer us away from the word of God and our calling is to resist and not tolerate any teaching that does not line up with the Bible because if we drift from God's word we drift from truth we drift from life we drift into death so we want the commendation of Jesus we are to be committed to the truth of the Bible and if we want the commendation of Jesus we are to persevere under trials in some places at some times it will be hard to be a Christian in Scotland today it's not hard compared to many countries but it's not as easy as it used to be there will be places we go there will be conversations we are pulled into and it will be hard to say

I belong to Jesus I believe the Bible but to receive the commendation of Jesus we are to endure patiently under trial for his name's sake commendations that's how the letter begins the second point is the complaint that Jesus brings against this church now if we think back to the MOT imagine we took our car into an MOT station and the tester said to us you know your tyres are absolutely perfect they're like the day they went on and the body work of this car is absolutely immaculate your brakes the discs are pristine the sound system is not like anything I've ever heard before congratulations and all these great things about your car but there's just one thing I've got to tell you your engine seized it won't go anywhere it's on a trailer out the back that kind of report would be a disaster and that kind of report is actually the report that

Jesus gives to this church in Ephesus he says in verse 4 but I have this against you that you have abandoned the love that you had at first so here we see a church and they look good they're doing all the right things they have a big long list of notices and this is a church that sounds good they're saying the right things they are known for their good doctrine there's no heresy but there's a heart problem and Jesus says to them you have abandoned you have forsaken you have left behind your first love!

that was the complaint that Jesus pressed in them that was the complaint that he brought against them and the question that you and I have to ask is is this a complaint that Jesus could have against us as a church is this a complaint that Jesus could have against me and against you as individuals have we abandoned the love for Jesus that we had at first how would we know one old writer gave a helpful eight point checklist for self examination he lists some of the marks of a declining love for

Jesus and I'll just give you these eight marks and you can think about them as I have what does it look like to have a love that is declining for Jesus well he says here's the first thing here's the first mark God becoming less of an object of fervent desire holy delight and frequent contemplation that's the mark of a declining love for Jesus God becoming less of an object of fervent desire holy delight and frequent contemplation Mark two loss of that sweet confidence and simple trust of a child before God as our father Mark three hard thoughts of

[48 : 41] God in some of his dealings Mark four duty rather than privilege when it comes to spiritual exercises Mark five a less tender walk with God that is to say less trembling at the thought of offending him and so lighter views of sin Mark six Christ becoming less glorious to the eye and less precious to the heart Mark seven love of or to Christ's people starting to decay Mark eight our interest in the advancement and prosperity of Christ's cause beginning to wane and that's just one writer giving an eight point checklist it's far from exhaustive it's just some of the marks that we can look for in our own hearts are we seeing these things if we're seeing these things these are indicators that our love for

Jesus is on the downward spiral and if we're losing our love for Jesus even if we are sound and we are busy Jesus has a complaint against us I remember some years ago during a family service asking the question what does God want us to do the children were given all kinds of answers as they do the kind of things that God wants us to do read the Bible yep right answer pray yep good answer go to church yes YF Sunday school yep great answers and through the list they went and eventually when they got to all the answers there was one little hand just over where Renai was sitting and it was still up and I said yeah what what is it your what's your answer and this little voice said love him and that was the key answer that's what Jesus looks for from us and everything else should flow from that we should love him and that was where the church in Ephesus had drifted what caused this we don't know we're not told maybe they were so busy doing things for God they neglected taking time to be still with God Paul Mallard says we can be diligent in our religion and distant in our relationship that's true I know it or maybe as a church that were known for being sound and faithful they became proud and their love for

Jesus cooled and that was the complaint that Jesus brought against them commendations a serious complaint the third point is the command that Jesus gives verse 5 it's very simple remember therefore says Jesus from where you have fallen repent and do the works you did at first so just these two things that we're told to do there we're given the alliteration we don't even have to look for it Jesus says remember and the tense says keep on remembering and repent keep on repenting Jesus says remember remember the way things used to be at first remember how thankful you used to be for all that I did for you on the cross remember the sense of wonder that you had when you came to Calvary remember the sense of delight when you first realised that the guilt of your sin had been lifted remember that says

Jesus remember how much you used to love to listen to my voice as you opened the Bible remember the thrill that there was and the excitement as you opened the word of God saying speak Lord remember that and remember the times of intimacy when you lingered in my presence as you prayed remember these things says Jesus and I repent go and do what you used to do go back again and survey the wondrous cross until that wonder is there again get back into reading your Bible remembering that this is the word of God get back into your closet get back here on a [54 : 31] Wednesday evening commit to praying the hymn we sang actually it almost follows the track of what Jesus commands this church to do it gives words to someone whose love for Jesus has grown cold it gives expression to someone who has drifted from the Lord and who wants to come back because we see these two aspects in the hymn the hymn writer who longs for this close walk with God he remembers how things used to be where is the blessed unless I knew when first I sought the Lord where is the so refreshing view of Jesus and his word what peaceful hours I once enjoyed how sweet their memory still yet they've left an aching void the world can never fill the hymn writer he's looking back and he's remembering then he repents return oh holy dove return sweet messenger of rest

I hate the sins that made thee mourn and drove thee from my breast the dearest idol I have known whatever that idol be help me tear it from thy throne and worship and love only thee so that was and that is the command of Jesus remember and repent and finally as we finish there's the commitment that Jesus makes and it's got two sides to it there's a positive and there's a negative so first of all the negative verse five there's a word of warning here for this church that Jesus addresses he says

if they don't remember if they don't repent verse five I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent repent and

Jesus spells out for this church what will happen if they don't repent if their love for Jesus is not rekindled Jesus says to them in spite of your long notice sheet in spite of your sound doctrine you will die and that would have seemed impossible for this great church the prospect of death because this was a church that was planted by the apostle Paul he was the church planter of the church in Ephesus Timothy was their minister John the apostle who is receiving this revelation from God he had been a minister of this church in Ephesus and so this is a church that was as solid as is possible to be this is a church that seems to be totally secure you look at its heritage and yet Jesus says no you're not secure and if you don't repent if your love for me is not rekindled you will die and you know the tragedy is that this church did die one commentator Myers says sadly history tells us that the Ephesian church did not heed the warnings their light was indeed snuffed out it appears that they did not repent and return to their first works they did not return to Jesus their first love as a result they never regained their former glory today the best and greatest church in the New Testament is no more it has passed away the region is now almost entirely Muslim and Jesus warned them that was the commitment that he made if they did not repent he would remove them the light would go out and to a large extent it did but then there's the positive commitment that Jesus makes and he says to the one who conquers to the one who perseveres I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God so the promise of Jesus for this church if it continues if it repents if it gets back to loving and trusting and following Jesus the commitment the promise that Jesus makes is that they will know the paradise of God they will know love that is uninterrupted they will know life that is eternal so this letter to the church in

[60 : 20] Ephesus it really just concludes with the offer of the gospel the offer that is repeated throughout all of scripture and that offer is life that never ends for those who love Jesus or death that never ends for those that leave Jesus and Jesus is asking them and he's asking us what will you do what will you choose he who has an ear says Jesus let him hear what the spirit says to the churches let's pray Lord

Jesus we thank you for the clarity and the challenge that comes from this letter we thank you that we are given such clear instruction as to what pleases you and what you commend your people for and yet we thank you also that you have given us such clarity over what you complain against and we pray Holy Spirit that you would search us as a congregation and as individuals that we would see where we are in our hearts and if our love for you Lord Jesus is cooling if we are drifting help us to remember and to repent and to know once more the blessing of a close walk with God and we pray this in

Jesus name Amen we sing to conclude mission praise 37 mission praise 37 as the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you you and I long to worship you.

You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.

I want you more than gold or silver, only you can satisfy.

[63 : 58] You alone are the real joy, ever and beyond the love of my life.

You alone are my strength, my shield. You alone make my spirit heal.

You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.

You are my friend, my blue, my brother, even though you are a king.

I love you more than any other so much more than anything.

[64 : 56] You alone are my strength, my shield. You alone make my spirit heal.

You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forevermore.

Amen.