



Sunday, October 15, 2023
Revelation 2:18-29

Today marks the midway point as we tackle the fourth of seven messages to the seven churches in Asia. And as we will soon see, the message to the church in Thyatira is a challenging one as they were hitting the mark on many fronts, but there were a few significant areas that needed to be addressed. And what's really interesting is that this is the only time in all of these letters where we see the exact same challenges being addressed as the previous church. This should cause our spiritual eyes and ears to perk up and pay attention. Again, it's important to understand that these messages need to be viewed through the lens of correction and discipline, not judgment. That these are in fact words of great love from Jesus as His goal is to course-correct so that the road to judgement that they are on can actually be avoided.

Revelation 2:18-29 (NKJV)

'18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,

'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

24 “Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

27 ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;
They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—
as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star.

29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’

The church in Thyatira was a church that, like many other churches seemed to be doing well. Jesus says I know you works, love, service, faith and patience and when it comes to your works, your latter are greater than your former. It’s hard to read this any other way than through the lens of true and effective discipleship. They haven’t lost their first love, they are serving in all ways, their faith is strong and they are being patient which indicates to me that they are leaning into the leading of the Holy Spirit. That perhaps, instead of moving ahead with their own plans they are choosing to be patient and wait on the Holy Spirit to lead them and guide them accordingly. In addition to all of this, Jesus also says that as it pertains to their works, what they are doing now is greater than when they first started. This says to me that there is great growth, great commitment from the congregation and a great vision for discipleship.

Yet, isn’t it interesting, that even a church as strong, and as committed as this can have challenges as great as the challenges that they are facing.

The church in Thyatira was eerily similar to the church in Pergamos in this regard because they both struggled with the same things. In Pergamos it was the pagan influence of Balaam and the Nicolaitans that influenced them to embrace idolatry and sexual immorality and here in Thyatira it is the pagan influence of a Jezebel-like woman that influences them to embrace the exact same things. And if that root isn’t plucked out quickly, it has the ability to suck and squeeze the very life out of the church.

So the first thing we see when we look at Jesus’ opening statement to Thyatira is that He introduces Himself now differently than before. Previously He introduced Himself as, ‘He who,’ or, ‘He that,’ even, ‘The first and last’.... Notice however, that now He introduces Himself as the Son of God. This is significant because this is actually the only time in the book of Revelation where He references

Himself as the Son of God - the significance of which is actually found in the context of the city to whom Jesus is speaking.

We really don't know a whole lot about the city of Thyatira as historically there isn't much said about it. From what little has been gathered though, it is enough to help paint a little bit of a historical perspective here. What is known is that Thyatira was the centre for the worship of Apollo the god of sunlight. In fact, Apollo was thought to be the divine guardian of their city. He was also known as the patron god of many of the cities trade guilds, and was regularly honoured and worshipped at all of the trade guild functions. Further to that, the people of Thyatira, also believed that Caesar was actually the incarnation of Apollo himself. So when Caesar was in their midst, it was believed that Apollo was with them. So this would give greater clarity then, to why people were embracing the worship of Caesar as god. Now in that region, Zeus was still the big cheese as far as gods were concerned and Apollo was viewed as his son. The Caesar at that time was named Domitian and absolutely loved the fact that people worshipped him as if he were a god. He bought into this big time and even referred to his son as the "son of God" and on his coins, his son is portrayed holding seven stars thus symbolizing his deity:



And because in this vision, one of the first things we see from Revelation 1 is Jesus amidst the seven stars, and due to his now introduction as the Son of God we can see that Jesus is clearly making bold declarations to the citizens of Thyatira that He himself is the One and only, the true Son of God - with eyes like a flame of fire and feet like fine brass. The eyes of fire peer into the deepest depths. Nothing can be hidden from Him - He sees all things. Fine brass on the other hand is brass that has gone through the fire to be refined suggesting that He alone is steadfast, immovable - He cannot be swayed by humanity.

Now interestingly, Thyatira was well-known as a prosperous commercial centre at that time. One historian has even recorded that, 'the roads which pass through its Valley, brought the trade of half the world to its doors.' In fact, Lydia, the first person the apostle Paul led to Jesus in Philippi was from Thyatira. She was likely in Philippi, selling the cities famous purple cloth. This information is important, because in order to accommodate the vast amount of trade and commerce in Thyatira, mandatory trade guilds were set up and established. Trade guilds were an association of craftsmen or merchants who came together based on their shared work in a particular craft or trade. There were guilds for everything from wool workers to metal fabricators to thread dyers...and so on and so forth. Each guild would work together to set standards of quality assurance and pricing so that the market would be regulated and not oversaturated. If you were not a part of such a guild, then you were greatly restricted from selling in the markets and thus making a living became a very real challenge.

All of this is well and good, except for the fact that upon acceptance into a guild, it was then expected that full participation in all of its functions would be embraced. These trade guilds had common meals together. The meal would begin and end with a cup of wine, poured out as an offering to the gods. It was, in fact, the pagan way of saying Grace before and now after a meal. Many of these meals would almost certainly have followed one of the regular pagan sacrifices where as we learned last week, the animal would be offered as a sacrifice on the altar. The meat would then be given to the worshipper to make a feast for his guild in honour of the god that they had just sacrificed to. Still further, this trade guild feast frequently degenerated into sexual immorality as drunkenness took its course and lewdness and sensuality took over.

And so, quite understandably, as a Christian, you wouldn't want to be a part of that. But.....you also had to make a living. So you had two options:

To go with the flow and embrace the rules of the trade guilds and thus be able to support your family.

Or to go against the flow knowing that providing for your family would be extremely difficult.

So as you can imagine, there was great tension in the church in this regard because there were two schools of thought. Some Christians just closed their eyes and took the whole, 'you gotta do what you gotta do,' mindset whereas other Christians embraced the 'thlipsis,' as they inevitably would have been restricted in their trade and commerce options.

However, where there was once tension between Christians on this issue, Jesus was now making it implicitly clear that following Him would mean greater sacrifice than some of them were willing to embrace. Again, just like in Pergamos last week, it's not the meat that was necessarily the issue

here, it was the embracing of the worship of idols that God did not make room for.

To make matters worse, we are now introduced to certain a woman in Thyatira who was teaching that it was actually okay to embrace compromise in these areas. Jesus uses the term Jezebel here - not as a specific identity but a general reference. We don't know exactly who this lady is, only that reference that Jesus uses to describe her is of one of the most evil figures in all of Israel's history.

So, who is this Jezebel of old?

To answer that we have to go all the way back to King Ahab. King Ahab was the king of Northern Israel and historically was known as a wicked king because he did not fear Jehovah God. His reign was marked by selfish greed and gain - well before marrying the Sidonian princess, Jezebel. She on the other hand was on a whole other level of wickedness and considered herself a priestess of the pagan god Baal. Baal was the god of fertility and storms and as such was believed to be the one to provide rain for the crops and fertility for childbearing. Due to this very nature, sexual degradation and lewdness were all common elements that were a consistent practice throughout Baal worship. History suggests that they even embraced the sacrificing of first-borns so that Baal would keep the people fertile. This was a wicked, wicked religion.

Upon Jezebel's marriage to Ahab, she convinced him to make the worship of Baal in Israel the sole focus of her existence. Many prophets came against her, but she had them all killed. Except for Elijah who prophesied that the rain would not come until Jehovah said so. This was a slap in the face of Baal - because they thought he controlled the rain. Elijah even challenged them to a duel on top of Mt. Carmel. An old fashioned show-down between Jehovah and Baal. Whoever's sacrifice burns up first wins. The prophets of Baal prayed all day and night and even cut themselves but nothing. Elijah steps up and simply declares the authority and lordship of Jehovah and even before he finishes, lightning and fire from heaven explode on the mountain top burning up the sacrifice/water and even the altar. Even after seeing these two incredible/supernatural feats, Jezebel would not repent. Her hatred blinded her to the truth thus fuelling greater persecution of God's people. And because she would not repent - according to the word of the Lord - Elijah prophesied that she would be killed and her remains eaten by dogs. History teaches us that during the reign of King Jehu this indeed took place as a reminder that there is no God but Jehovah God.

Now, while Jezebel was on the war path, part of the challenge was that some of the Israelites were starting to embrace elements of the worship of Baal as well as Jehovah. So part of the reason for the show-down on Mt. Carmel was a wake up call for the Israelites to get off the fence in which

Elijah said to all of Israel:

1 Kings 18:21b

'...How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.'

And so when we see this same Jezebel spirit at work in the church in Thyatira, we can see that she is advocating for the 'both/and' position of compromise. Somehow, she was able to coerce Christians into participating in these ungodly activities and convince them that it would not affect their worship of, or, relationship with, Jesus.

But the reality is exactly the opposite. This is why Jesus was so firm in his letter. Yes, they were doing many great things, and his commendation of them was generally quite glowing. However, in spite of their growth and maturity, they had begun to go down the road of tolerating the spirit of compromise, and that is a spirit that Jesus declares emphatically that He will not tolerate - nor should He. The last I checked, Jesus Christ is the only one in history, who has ever come to earth as a perfect human being to die a criminals death that covered all the sins of all humanity, for past present and future. Absolutely, He deserves all the glory, all the praise, forever, and ever Amen.

And so it says that even in His grace and mercy He gave opportunity for this Jezebel lady to repent - but she would not and so Jesus then pronounces judgement upon her for leading people astray in this manner. He then moves to the rest of the congregation and encourages them as, 'those who do not have this doctrine or have not known the depths of Satan,' to continue to remain steadfast. To persevere. To stand firm especially when the temptation to follow the world comes knocking on their door because there is great reward in doing so.

I find the language that is used to describe those still following Christ interesting here. He says that they, 'have not known the depths of Satan.' When connected to the actions of the Jezebel-like woman though, we can see that she had a way of presenting evil to the people that made them believe that evil was actually not evil, but good. She spun webs of deception and convinced people that it was truth. She likely never told even them that they were worshiping idols or committing sexual immorality but she blanketed it in such a way that blinded them from the truth. Her seeds of deception would lead them to believe the lie that sin is actually not sin. So instead of calling it idolatry she would say that they were simply doing what they had to do in order to feed their family. Well, when you put it like that, I guess it doesn't sound so bad right? What about fulfilling those God-given urges and desires that everyone around you is free to do? God doesn't really mean that you can't do that, after all He placed those desires in you, you're not hurting anyone either.....everyone is do-

ing it....(pull out apple) and it's just a little bite and it tastes so good!! How could God want to keep that from you???

Sound familiar??

This is deception of the deepest depths and it is the exact same thing that stole Adam and Eve away from the presence of God in the garden. This is the depths of Satan, to make you believe that sin is not sin. To make lies look like truth. To make truth look like lies. To make you think that God is not a God of truth but a god of lies. And how does he do this? He starts with one bite.

Just think of Jezebel of old. She saw Jehovah God stop the rain when her god was supposed to make it rain. She saw Jehovah God burn up the mountain while her god did nothing. No, there was no denying that Jehovah God was far superior in every way, shape and form. All those that were there that day witnessed these same things, and so her deception of the Israelites was not to get them to deny the power of God. No, she chose a different angle. She targeted their lustful desires and wills, because she knew that if they started to embrace the lusts of the flesh, then it was only a matter of time before they pulled away from God entirely because that's the nature of sin isn't it?

James 1:14-15 teaches us that:

'But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.'

Don't kid yourself, the lusts of the flesh are incredibly strong, and if we start embracing them, then it's only a matter of time before we start justifying them and then it's only a matter of time before we start calling truth, lies and lies, truth. This is the depths of Satan. The ability to make God's people turn from Him without even realizing it.

And this is why Jesus then says to:

Revelation 2:25-29

'...hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

27 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—

as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star.

29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."'

The morning star usually appears at the darkest time of the night - about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. It usually emerges at that point when the night is as dark as it is going to get. When it appears there is no sign of the dawn. But when it appears, very faint, and small, at first, you know that the night cannot withstand the dawn. It is just a matter of time until the dawn wipes the night away. It's a herald of a new day, symbolizing hope, new beginnings, and the dispelling of all darkness. Revelation 22:16 teaches us that Jesus Himself is the bright morning star. He is the divine authority and the dispeller of all darkness. The ultimate authority and sovereignty of Jesus Christ is declared over the nations and His judgment against rebellion and sin is final. So to those who repent from their wicked ways and turn to Jesus - to those who are faithful to Jesus - to those who are steadfast, our final reward is to be with Jesus. The morning star is Jesus Christ himself. Which is the greatest possible thing He could promise His church. He will give us Himself. We will see Him face to face. We will be His, and He will be ours.

But it is imperative to note that, as much as this is our hope for the future, it is also our hope for the present. The Holy Spirit is with us. He is the one who strengthens us; He is the One who leads us and He is the One who guides us. He is that iron rod within us that will allow us to say no to compromise. Because at the end of the day, it's not 'both/and' it's 'either/or.' For as long as humans have graced this planet, there has always existed the call to worship God and God alone. Whether it was in Egypt or Canaan or Jerusalem or Macedonia, or right here at Kingsview Community Church, the call remains the same. And so in the words of one of Israel's most courageous leaders, I leave you with this.

Joshua 24:14-15

'14 "Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! 15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'

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