

TEXT SERMONS

SERIES: REVELATION CHAPTERS 1-3

MESSAGE #7

THYATIRA

“THE CHURCH WITH A JEZEBEL MEMBER”

Rev. 2:18-29

The longest of the seven letters was written to the church in the smallest of the seven cities. Let us look at the place called “Thyatira” which name means, oddly enough: “tireless sacrifice.”

I. THE PLACE OF THE CHURCH.

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write ...” (Rev.2:18)

There are no great claims to fame for city of Thyatira as for some of the other six. However there are several noteworthy things about the city that will help us understand the environment in which the church of Thyatira was located.

A. It Was The Smallest Of The Cities Addressed.

B. It Was A Protector City For The Capital City.

The Capital of Asia was Pergamos and Thyatira was a suburb of Pergamos and a military outpost. It was the duty of the citizens of Thyatira to protect Pergamos if attacking troops approached the capital.. It served as a “buffer town” – an early warning system when the barbarian hordes attacked.

C. It Was The Center Of Clothing & Dying Industry.

Thyatira is only mentioned one other time in the Bible – in Acts 16 where we are told that a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple dye and purple cloth was from the city of Thyatira. Lydia heard Paul’s message and was his first convert in Philippi. Some think she went back to Thyatira and was instrumental in starting the church there.

The purple dye came from the madder root and a shell fish called the murex. From the throat of this fish one drop of purple dye could be extracted. This dye was very expensive. One pound of this dye cost about \$2,000 by present day standards. Lydia was a wealthy woman.

D. It Was A Strong Labor-Union City.

This was perhaps its most famous claim. It is said that Thyatira was the birthplace of Labor Unions. There were many labor guilds there comprised of workers in wool, leather, linen, bronze, outer garments, dyers and potters – pottery was a big industry in Thyatira.

This was Thyatira, a little city with a church that had a big problem!

II. THE POSTURE OF CHRIST.

The posture of the Lord Jesus as He addresses the Thyatira church is a most severe one.

A. **“These things says the Son of God.”** (Rev.2:18)

This is the only church to which Jesus introduced Himself as “the son of God.” He is approaching this church as the Head of His church – the sovereign Lord and Judge.

B. **“who has eyes like a flame of fire”**

The “eyes like a flame of fire” speak of two things: (1) The Lord’s anger and (2) His penetrating and piercing insight.

Illust. This reminds me of a farmer who was having trouble with couples who were using his secluded, private property for their romantic trysts at night. All efforts to keep these couples off his land were unsuccessful until he put up an illuminated sign. There was a picture of an eye, and underneath was written, “God sees all that you do.” From that point on there was no more parking! And sparking on his property.

Those searching, penetrating eyes of the Son of God saw sin in the Thyatira church!

C. **“and His feet like fine brass.”**

In Rev.1:14,15 John saw Jesus on Patmos as One whose eyes were “like a flame of fire and feet were like fine brass”. Brass is a symbol that the Bible uses for judgment. For the situation that The Lord found in Thyatira there was nothing but judgment.

A posture like this would certainly be unsettling! This is the most severe, searching and terrible aspect of any that the Lord Jesus assumes as He addresses these seven churches.

III. THE PRAISE OF CHRIST.

“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first....” (Rev.2:19-20) Look at the praise points:

A. **“I know your works ...”**

Some of the believers in Thyatira were faithfully serving the Lord no matter what difficulties they faced.

B. **“Love.”**

The Christ of The Candlesticks criticized the church in Ephesus for their lack of love; here He commends Thyatira for their love.

C. **“Service.”**

The Greek word for service, “diakonian”, actually means ministry. There was ministry being carried out by some even though some others were involved in mischief.

D. **“faith.”**

The core of genuine Christians in Thyatira were operating on the faith principle even though there were those who were, as we shall see, operating on the flesh principle.

Isn't that the way it is in most churches today?

E. "and your patience."

They were patiently working, loving and serving in faith. Patience is peace under pressure. Remember, "Tribulation works patience." G. Campbell Morgan said, "Patience is the capacity for being still when all around is tempest tossed."

F. "and as for your works, the last are more than the first."

In other words, they were increasing in their ministry. No other church among the seven had so many different words of commendation as the church in Thyatira.

What a church! Jesus commends them on six points. This church, at first glance, looks like an excellent model. However, it is very odd that a church with so many virtues could be the breeding ground for so many vices. Let us look at the problem Jesus addresses in the church.

IV. THE PROBLEM IN THE CHURCH.

"Nevertheless I have a few things against you." (Rev 2:20)

The excellencies in the church were overshadowed by the evil in the church. Thyatira had two sources of problems – like churches today. One source was from outside the church, the other from inside the church.

The problem from outside the church in Thyatira was this: the trade unions, unlike those today, were connected to the heathen temples where false gods were worshiped, where drunken revelry and prostitution was rampant. The Trade Union meetings were held in the temple of the god that that Trade Union had adopted. The meetings began with a sacrifice to that god, asking his blessing upon their trade. Chuck Swindoll writes: "Each guild had its own patron deity, feasts, and festivities that included sexual revelries." It was not possible for Christians to be part of such a movement and consequently, Christians were denied employment.

But the greatest hindrance to the church in Thyatira was not one from outside the church. The second, and a far greater hindrance, was inside the church! Here is what Jesus said:

A. "you allow that woman Jezebel...."

A traitor in the camp is a greater threat than one outside the camp. We do not know her actual name but Jesus likened her to the evil woman Jezebel in the Old Testament. Of all the women mentioned in the Bible none was more deceptive, daring, dangerous and destructive than Jezebel.

In 1 Kings we learn that Ahab married Jezebel. Ahab was the king of Israel when he married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. Ahab set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. This angered God and He punished both Ahab and Jezebel. The Old

Testament Jezebel became canine cuisine! You can read all about it in 1st and 2nd Kings.

Just as Jezebel influenced Ahab to sin against God, this woman in the church of Thyatira was influencing some members of the church. By her teachings she misleads many into sexual immorality. She was a self-appointed spiritual “guru”.

This New Testament Jezebel of Thyatira was a clever, persuasive woman who claimed to understand the will of God. Many accepted her as a prophetess. Like her Old Testament counterpart, she enticed believers to lower their standards and, in so doing, to forsake loyalty to God. She may have been a pawn of the trade guilds to persuade Christians to accommodate and participate in idolatry.

You remember that there was a betrayer, Judas, among the Apostles; There were liars, Ananias & Sapphira, in the church in Jerusalem; there was a deserter, Demas, on the ministry team of Paul; there were the Balaamites and the Nicolaitans in the church in Pergamos; there was an immoral, Jezebel-like, woman in the church in Thyatira, and the devil wants a foothold in every true church of Jesus Christ! We must ever be vigilant.

B. “you allow...”

The 3 oldest manuscripts have: “You let alone”; “permit” or “tolerate”. Here was a person in the church whose doctrines and deeds were undermining the cause of Christ and the tolerant members did nothing about it! Note: she was a self-styled teacher – Jesus said she, “calls herself a prophetess.” Spiritual leadership should have dealt with the problem.

Charles Spurgeon wrote: “The Lord is most jealous of the purity of his church, and those who enter her midst and teach lasciviousness must expect condign punishment. No church ought to endure such, but should cast them out at once.” (Spurgeon’s Devotional Bible)

C. “You allow her to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.”

The Greek word used here for “sexual immorality” is “proneuo”. This is the word from which we get the word pornography. “Proneuo” means to engage in unlawful lust or sex.

Isn’t it amazing? We are facing this matter in churches today. Jesus’ letters to the 7 churches are needed just as much today as they were back in the 1st century! Toleration is dangerous and so some things are just not negotiable. The correct biblical balance is that we love the Lord enough to hate evil! What was Jesus prescription for the problems in Thyatira?

V. THE PRESCRIPTION FOR THE CHURCH.

There are three parts to Jesus’ prescription:

A. First, Repentance.

“And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent”. (Rev.2:21) This Jezebel-like woman could never say she was treated unfairly. Jesus said that He gave her “space to repent” but she refused.

Prov. 29:1 says, “He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

B. Second, Retribution.

“Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 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 of you according to your works.” (Rev.2:22-23)

There is a doctrine called the doctrine of retribution. Retribution is: “The act of receiving what one deserves.” It usually refers to punishment for doing evil. II Chron. 6:23 speaks of “bringing retribution on the wicked.” The principle of retribution is found often in the Bible; it is indicated by words such as wrath, vengeance, punishment, judgment, and hell. Retribution is the judgment of a holy God upon sin.

Romans 2 is full of the doctrine of retribution. The apostle Paul, comes very near to using the word itself, and gives a good description of it. He speaks of “the day of wrath And revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works.”

This Jezebel in Thyatira was promised retribution by the Lord Jesus. The Old Testament Jezebel experienced retribution – she was cast out of an upper floor of the palace and was eaten by the dogs.(She literally “went to the dogs”!) This New Testament Jezebel was to be “cast into a bed of suffering” That’s retribution. What does Heb 10:31 say? “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

VI. THE PROMISE TO THE CHURCH.

Just as there are three parts to Jesus’ prescription for the church, so there are three promises to the church:

A. Promise # One, Relief.

“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.” (Rev.2:24-25)

Relief to those who were not involved in sin – no other burden – what a relief!

B. Promise # Two, Return.

“But hold fast what you have till I come.” (Rev.2:25) Not everyone in the Church in

Thyatira was unfaithful to the Lord and he had a special word for them – “hold on” – persevere.

Illust. Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scout movement used to describe “faithfulness” as: “to keep on, keeping on.” Keep on holding on! How long? *Hold fast till I come.”

The old hymn, “Hold The Fort” had these encouraging words:

“See the mighty hosts advancing,
Satan leading on;
Mighty men around us falling,
Courage almost gone!

‘Hold the fort, for I am coming’,
Jesus signals still.
Wave the answer back to Heaven,
‘By Thy grace we will!’”

C. Promise # Three, Rewards.

“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations - ‘*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; and I will give him the morning star.” (Rev. 2:26-27) There are two promises here:

1. *We will share Christ’s Government.*

“To him I will give power over the nations” - This is a quotation from Psalm 2:8-9, “Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.” We shall rule and reign with Jesus Christ!

2. *We will share in Christ’s glory.*

“And I will give him the morning star. (Rev.2:28) What does He mean? Scripture is its own commentary.: “I am the bright and morning star.” (Rev.22:16) What does He mean? He means that he will give us Himself!

The morning star follows the darkness of night ...so we Christians can look forward to the dawn of a new day..... in a place where there is no night. Think of it: for all eternity sharing the glow of His glory. What a promise – what a prospect!

CONCLUSION

As we conclude this message, I call attention to the words: “He who overcomes” in verse 26. The Lord speaks of the overcomer at the end of each letter. Those who teach that the

Christian life is an easy life do not tell the whole truth. To overcome means to surmount, to conquer, to gain the victory. It means to:

- “fight the good fight,
- to finish the course and
- to keep the faith.”

The finish will be worth the fight, it will be worth it all when we see Jesus! For the Lord has said:

“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.” (Rev. 21:7)

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