

“THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA.”

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 2:18-29

Thyatira: The City of Weakness Turning to Strength

To get to Thyatira from Pergamum we have to turn south-east and head into the interior of Turkey about 40 miles (modern Akhisar).

Thyatira was smaller and less important than the cities we have been to so far. It was for a time a garrison city, a military outpost to protect the capital Pergamum from the east.

Thyatira was a prosperous and wealth city because of her thriving trade guilds. Inscriptions have been found in the ruins of Thyatira that mention numerous trades: wool-workers, linen-workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave-dealers, and bronze-smiths. These were highly skilled craftsmen and tradesmen. The trades were more prolific here than in any other city of Asia Minor.

Thyatira was famous for dying, making colored cloth. You might recall Acts 16:14 when Paul and Silas were in Philippi in Greece, they stayed with a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple, from Thyatira. She helped them even after they were jailed and released.

Acts 16:14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God.

These the trade guilds were a little like unions, with some strict rules. In order to work you had to belong to the guild and in the guild you had to worship the god of that trade. This required participation in certain pagan religious activities.

Then, as now, some of the greatest challenges and frustrations to faith come in the work place and dealing with people out in the world. The choice was hard, worship a god and participate in the highly sensual company gatherings, or leave the union and lose your job and any hope of a livelihood.

Christians in some unions today face the challenge of their union dues going to support causes or political candidates they don't agree with.

While the geography and history are interesting and have some significance, the most important thing is the spiritual condition of the church. God looks on the heart more than on the externals. The church is reflecting the culture around it and we need to hear what Christ has to say about that.

Christ's Character Identified with the Church.

As we have seen before Christ singles out characteristics most relevant to each church. He has eyes like blazing fire to search the hearts and feet like burnished bronze powerful enough to

trample wickedness. The burnished bronze may also symbolize His purity, a purity more pure than the best work of the bronze workers in town.

The city prided itself on its unique bronze products and on the skill of their bronze guild. Their secret process and formula was carefully guarded, this unique kind of bronze could only be found in Thyatira.

But what they thought was so secret and special is known to Christ. This is a rebuke of their pride in their secret knowledge. Christ can see through anything, His penetrating gaze pierces to the depths of every heart, mind and soul.

Christ's piercing eyes and burnished bronze feet were like the sun at full strength, infinitely more terrible than the pagan sun-god Apollo who was worshipped in Thyatira.

Christ's Commendation and Condemnation.

Commendation

Jesus has some good things to say about the church. He recites a list of five virtues, a record of faithfulness:

Revelation 2:19 I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

I see your good works and they are good. Your offerings for those in need, your support of missionaries, your visits to the elderly and shut-ins, the special meals you serve, the clothes and food you collect for the needy, it's all good. And it's growing, great job, keep it up, don't get discouraged.

There is a spiritual life here and there is fruit, they are growing, making progress in the gospel. Their latter works exceed their first. This is real and generous praise from Jesus.

Would that Jesus could say that of me and of all of us. Are you and I doing more now than we were at the beginning?

It is a good thing when we can see the fruit of the Spirit in people's lives, and it is a better thing when we acknowledge it, speak of it, encourage growth in it.

Condemnation

As deep as their spiritual life was so also was the depth of their sinfulness. Jesus says, "You tolerate that woman Jezebel." Their issue was an issue of tolerance, tolerating the wrong thing. G. K. Chesterton said, "Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions."

This church was lacking in one fundamental way. Whatever they had done to try to address the sin, they were tolerating it in their midst. There apparently had been some effort at repentance, but she refused and so they weren't doing anything more about it.

Imposters in the church is a common problem. Wolves in sheep's clothing are all around. In Ephesus there were those who called themselves apostles but were not. In Smyrna there were those who said they were Jews but were actually of the synagogue of Satan. In Thyatira there was a woman who said she was a prophetess, but she is actually a servant of Satan.

Jesus' piercing eyes can see right through.

If Pergamum was a compromised church, Thyatira had gone farther and become a corrupt church. In Pergamum the threat and pressure were from the outside. In Thyatira the threat is from the inside.

This church had a serious problem. Her name may not have actually been Jezebel but her actions were like Jezebel's. You may remember Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Tyre, and the wife of Ahab, the king of Israel. She almost single handedly led the people into idolatry and made Baal worship the official religion of the northern kingdom of Israel. She destroyed the worship centers of Israel and replaced them with altars to Baal and Asherah. She killed Israel's prophets. She hastened Israel's spiritual decline and collapse.

There was a woman in the church who was leading the church astray by teaching "deep things" such as the soul wasn't affected by what you did in the body. So you could indulge the flesh without worrying about your soul or your spiritual destiny.

She said it was OK to attend the feast dedicated to pagan deities which usually ended in sensuality and promiscuity. This would have been a great relief since it made it much easier to mix the business and social pressures and temptations with being a Christian.

She was saying you could be a Christian and a fornicator, you could be a Christian and an adulterer, you could be a Christian and a homosexual. You didn't have to repent and turn from those things. God won't judge you, He is tolerant, He is OK with diverse and alternate life styles.

She was changing the Word of God when the Word of God is supposed to be changing us.

There are always Satan's workers who are busy trying to seduce God's bride into idolatry and adultery, into spiritual unfaithfulness.

II Timothy 4:3-4 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Among other things this was a failure of leadership. Those in authority had accepted this woman as a prophetess, claiming to be sent by God, putting on a show of wisdom and piety, professing knowledge of deep mysteries and able to open new and profounder teachings.

Pretending to have divine authority, perhaps using the Bible but really misusing it, her doctrinal error ends in the same place most doctrinal error ends which is moral decline and sexual immorality.

Once we depart from the truth and authority of Scripture the path never leads in a good direction. Once a trajectory is set, the inevitable result is corruption and ruin. Once you deviate from truth north, with every advancing mile you are farther and farther off course and lost.

This is a failure of discernment, a failure of church discipline, a failure to say no. The church had not done what those in Ephesus had done:

Revelation 2:2 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.

What rears her head here in Thyatira will grow to gigantic proportions in Revelation 17 and 18 when we encounter the great whore of Babylon arrayed in purple and scarlet making the world to drink of her cup of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.

Jesus says He has given her ample time to *repent*, but she refuses. She has been tolerated too long. Apparently there have been several attempts or calls to get her to repent but she has refused.

What a picture of grace, despite such great sin God has been patient beyond reason, holding out forgiveness. And if she or they would repent, He would forgive. No doubt God created opportunities, sent messengers, pricked their conscience.

How we respond to God when He convicts us of our sin is a serious matter. Do we respond with anger, or defensively, or deny it or resist correction? Those who love Jesus will be humble, contrite, even grateful for the opportunity to turn and confess and receive forgiveness.

By refusing to repent a person shows they are not regenerate, they don't have the Spirit, they are not born again.

Once this Jezebel made this clear the spiritual leadership in Thyatira should have removed her from the church to protect the flock from her evil influence. Those who tolerate such sinful influence bear the responsibility for the damage done and the souls put at risk.

At this point Jesus announces His judgment. This is actually one more opportunity to repent, one final opportunity to hear the truth and the spiritual danger ahead and change.

Christ's Challenge, Threats and Promises.

Everything hinges on repentance. Those who will not repent are threaten with suffering and death, both in the physical sense and in the spiritual sense.

Jesus announces a judgment that will be so great and so complete that everyone who sees it will know clearly Christ's opinion of such perversion and such tolerance of error and evil. His searching eye will penetrate to the sources and His feet will trample it to destruction.

Those who followed her and were united in her teaching will be united in her destruction.

The bed of her pleasures will become the bed of her punishment. Her proud teachings will become her shame and disgrace. Those who turn the people of God away from the source of truth and life will come to know the death they promote.

Proverbs 1:29-31 Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord,
30 would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof,
31 therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices.

Jesus is clear, He doesn't waver, or equivocate or beat around the bush. Jesus called evil evil. Anything that is contrary to Christ and His Word is demonic.

We need the same clarity and boldness. A trumpet that doesn't sound a clear note is worthless.

Promises authority over nations with a rod of iron.

To those who feel weak and powerless in the world, Christ promises authority over nations.

To those who had no fame and glory being on the outside of the guilds, Christ promises a superior position and power. Exercising church discipline now will prepare them for exercising Christ's authority in the age to come.

All rebellion and sin will be wiped out. Either through repentance and faith in Christ by which the old man is crucified. Or by wrath and judgment from God in hell.

Promises the morning star.

Venus is called the morning star and is the brightest object in the night sky. Whatever insignificance Christians may feel in this age, they will shine in the age to come.

The church that is faithful will shine like the morning dawn and their light will become an eternal day. They will reflect the light of Christ.

Revelation 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

Application and conclusion.

Tolerance is the cardinal virtue in our culture today. If you don't go along with or agree with, and support everyone and everything, you're bigoted, narrow-minded, discriminatory.

As Christians we tolerate other religions, they are free to worship just as we are. We don't impose our worship on them. In fact we defend religious liberties. We accept and tolerate that there are others who don't believe or think as we do.

But in the church of Jesus we cannot tolerate doctrinal heresy and immorality, teachings or practices that are contrary to the Bible. It's a sin to be more tolerant than Christ.

The Jezebel Syndrome is always with us. We are always being tempted to make small deviations from the truth, to rationalize small sins, to wink at small wrongs.

The Jezebel Syndrome embraces pluralism, we are big enough for everyone. We embrace acceptance and tolerance at the expense of truth, holiness, and purity.

The authority of the Word of God is the first thing to go. When our authority becomes culture and not Scripture we are in trouble at the core of our being. When our authority comes from the spirit of the age and not from the Spirit of Christ we are going to get way off course.

This assault on the Church of Jesus Christ will not cease until He comes again. Heresy and apostasy, lies and deception will relentlessly beat against the church. The pit of hell will not be satisfied until Jesus comes and all darkness and falsehood are vanquished forever.

Matthew 24:24 For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

Thyatira was abounding in good works but was not vigilant in upholding or defending the truth and authority of Christ and His Word.

Thyatira had lost the balance and is being rebuked by Jesus for being too tolerant or tolerant of the wrong things in the wrong way.

We must hold firmly to the Word of God. We must not compromise with the culture. We must stand firm on truth and righteousness, holiness and purity.

Jesus wants His Church to be pure and in so far as it depends on us He wants us to labor to that end. We cannot limp along and waver between two opinions, between Christ and culture, between the ways of the flesh and the ways of the Spirit.

We cannot remain aloof or indifferent to these matters, they are of eternal consequence.

We serve the holy God, the God of truth, the jealous God who tolerates no rivals.

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.