

REVELATION 2:18-29

(Readings: Matthew 6:19-34; 1 Kings 16:29-34)

Thyatira - The Terribly Exciting!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

We come to the fourth church that the Lord specially writes to.

A church which is found in the smallest city of the seven addressed in these two chapters of Revelation.

A city which, unlike the preceding cities, wasn't impacted by other religious cults, especially the Emperor cult.

There was a dominant religion in Thyatira though!

As we'll see in different parts of this letter, there was definitely an idol to which virtually all in that town had to bow the knee.

Because it's not immediately evident in this passage, some background information on Thyatira helps us here.

And it's location gives us the first clue.

For it is on the major trading route between Asia and Europe.

It is a place where major rivers flow into and the overland road route goes through.

Thyatira also has some valuable industries of its own.

It was a well-known centre of the wool trade.

And also it was famous for its fabric dyeing industry.

After all, where was Lydia from?

Lydia - she was the first convert to Christianity in Europe when Paul came over.

She is described in Acts 16 verse 14 as "a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira."

This purple dye was very expensive.

That's naturally because it was so rare.

And it was rare because it was hard to produce.

The only way you could get this colour was either from a very small shell-fish called the *murex* or from the madder root which grew plentifully around Thyatira.

The going rate for this dye was over a thousand dollars for just 500 grams!

We can safely assume that Lydia was quite wealthy.
And we can certainly appreciate why Thyatira was flush with funds.
In fact, the religion she followed was - you guessed it - money.
She worshipped at the altar of Mammon, to quote those words of our Lord in Matthew 6:24.

In amongst this cashed-up society there was a church.
A church that was standing apart from this false religion.
In the words of the first aspect to our text, THIS IS A CHURCH GOING THE RIGHT WAY.

Congregation, verse 18 opens with the usual formula and a particular attribute regarding Christ from Revelation 1.
That particular attribute always gives us a clue to what follows.
In this case the qualities mentioned come from Revelation 1 verses 14 and 15.
They speak of the Lord having "eyes like blazing fire" and "feet like burnished bronze."

Briefly, we may say that the eyes tell us that Jesus looks through everything.
Nothing is hidden from his sight.

And the feet like burnished bronze represent the highest authority.
He who speaks is the One who will definitely act!

He says these words because this is His Church in that place.
Otherwise there would not be His Holy Spirit there, as symbolised by the "angel of the church in Thyatira."

This is what verse 19 confirms.
It's a wonderful commendation.
For when the Lord says He knows their deeds, He says they are a power for good in that community.
They preach the gospel!

It helps us to note these deeds are defined in the "love and faith," and the "service and perseverance."
These words are two pairs.
"Love" for the Lord develops into "faith".
And "service" for the Lord grows into "perseverance".

This congregation is confirming the words of the letter of James.

For doesn't he in say in verse 26 of chapter 2, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead"?

Knowing the wealth in this town, the church may well have been having a blessed ministry amongst the poor of the city.

For where you find great riches you often also meet terrible poverty.

So the ministry they had for each in the church flowed over to the least loved around them.

In fact, many of them were from such a background.

Doesn't the gospel often touch the most despised most of all?

Those who are rich have it all in themselves.

They are self-man men and they worship their Maker.

But these folk put others first.

They throw themselves into the gospel work.

The word "service" tells us of sacrifice.

If anyone was in need they'd be straight-away around.

The minister there might well be the last to know - because everyone else is on the go!

What we read further in verse 19 is how they were continuing to grow in this.

The Lord notes that "you are now doing more than what you did at first."

So there's a sanctifying work going on.

There's an enthusiasm and an energy there.

It would have been an alive group.

You'd truly be blessed being part of it.

So the Lord starts most positively here.

While we can pick up a hint in verse 18 that He will have some not so nice things to say, He wants that to be seen in perspective.

There are good things happening in the church there.

Good things that are increasingly being done!

THIS IS A CHURCH GOING THE RIGHT WAY.

But now, we note, secondly, THIS IS A CHURCH WHERE ONE IS LEADING ASTRAY.

Verse 20 spares no bones about the Lord's concern.

"Nevertheless," it begins.

And He continues, "I have this against you."

It didn't take long, did it?

Whatever this is, it is very serious.

And then we hear what it is.

Or rather, we hear **who** it is.

This is so bad He actually names the person involved!

"You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess."

And then the Lord details the wrong she has done.

"By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols."

It is a very serious charge.

But it's not a particularly unique charge.

Both the churches in Ephesus and Pergamum had been affected to some degree by this heresy.

It was what was specifically addressed at the first Synod in Acts 15.

The difference here is that this is being actively promoted from within the church.

And that's what Satan would have to do here.

Because this is a spiritually vibrant church.

That's why it would have to be poison from inside.

Mind you, we would have had a number of questions about verse 20.

How could someone in the church be called Jezebel, when that would have to be the most well-known association with evil anywhere in the Old Testament?

And then how could she come to prominence when she was a woman?

Fancy calling herself a prophetess!

Isn't Scripture clear on those in positions of preaching and leadership in the church having to be male?

You know, we don't even need to go out of our time and place to see how this happens.

For instance, how does someone like Joyce Meyer gain the millions she does as a televangelist?

You can't describe what she's advocating as orthodox teaching!

Exactly!

For what does she so much focus on?

Ah, it's the same as those other so-called prophets and apostles broadcast, isn't it?

Whether it be Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland or Creflo Dollar.

They all teach the 'health-and-wealth' gospel.

They are quite open that there's no reason why you cannot be as rich as anyone else.

In fact, if you aren't already a millionaire you've obviously not got enough faith!

Naturally, they are shining examples of their own teachings.

They have the huge mansions, private jets, and lavish clothing allowances.

You know, Jezebel would have been the same.

Whether or not her name was actually Jezebel we're not sure.

But the name distinctly identifies her with someone who seduces God's Bride into unfaithfulness.

2 Kings 9 verse 22 is clear about that.

The believers there certainly knew who the Lord was speaking of.

She was a person of some prominence.

Because she knew all the local politicians and business leaders.

That's why sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols is mentioned here.

You see, this is what happened when anyone wanted to get ahead financially in Thyatira.

Because you could not get into business there without being a member of a local trades guild.

And you didn't get to be a member of that trades guild without becoming involved in the worship of the god or goddess of that guild.

It's not that much different to the struggle Christians have had with trade unions for the last fifty years.

When you work in a particular industry and yet the union controlling that industry is involved in conduct and practice quite unbiblical, what do you do?

Is it a matter of 'business is business'?

Or is your commitment to Christ first?

It shouldn't be a question, should it?

But Jezebel had made it more than a question.

She had made compromise to the world the answer.

Now we realise how serious this is.

Beyond a doubt this compromise would have meant being swallowed up by paganism.

The light of the gospel would be snuffed out in utter darkness.

Congregation, this is a matter the Lord has been busy with for some time.

Such a person with strong personality, enormous ambition, and powerful persuasive influence, has been clearly warned a number of times.

She has been told to repent of her sin.

But she is hell-bent on getting her way.

And you can be sure she has, in turn, viciously attacked any who stood in her way.

Can't you hear her and her followers cry out, "Touch not the Lord's anointed!"

You know, that's exactly what was said to those who opposed the so-called 'Toronto Blessing' of the mid 1990's.

When concerned Christians published articles, or held meetings, which exposed the pagan roots of that alleged 'revival', they were viciously turned on.

They received letters and 'phone calls hurling curses upon them.

Even Bible College lecturers were turning out in their droves to support that latest move of the Lord!

You can begin to imagine a little of what it would have been like in Thyatira.

Perhaps that's why she'd been able to get away with it.

But in Thyatira the evil is also exposed.

Jezebel has been rebuked for her immorality.

Because that's what it is - whether physically or spiritually.

You see, the power these people increasingly gain goes to their heads.

What may have been a slight error blows up quickly.

They begin to believe it's more and more about them personally.

They even take on god-like status.

Well, the Lord will get her where it hurts.
Much as her looks and charisma might have moved
many before she's not going to have it any more!
She will be hurt where it hurts most!
"I will cast her on a bed of suffering,"
says the Lord.

And don't think her followers are going to get away
with it either.

They are no more being misled than the many
millions tuning in to those false prophets today.
They have chosen to go that way.
And they will pay for going that way.

In this way we come back to the opening attribute of
the Lord in verse 18.

As verse 23 speaks of the Lord as the One "who
searches hearts and minds" so we recognise the eyes "like
blazing fire."

Because He sees through everything.
And as the ultimate authority - the One
"whose feet are like burnished bronze" - He will punish them
accordingly.

But now the Lord returns to those who aren't caught up
in this error - and also those who have repented of it.

In verse 24 and following He addresses them.
And so we come to our third aspect this
afternoon.

For let's see now that THIS IS A CHURCH
EXHORTED TO DO WHAT THE LORD SAYS.

At first the Lord begins negatively here.
For He speaks of what is called Satan's "deep
secrets."

This is referring to what Jezebel would have been
claiming as the inspiration of the Lord.

From what we see in verse 20 it's likely that this
was the teaching that the best way to witness to the world
was to have been in the worst part of that world.

Then you're speaking from experience and
people will sit up and listen.

Now, isn't that still around today?
The more exciting the testimony, the better the
worship service.

And you will hear in many churches people share how they came out of witchcraft and drugs and prostitution to faith.

There was a well-known Christian comedian - Mike Warnke - who wrote the most incredible book detailing how bad he had been.

He had even been a high priest in devil worship.

He made a lot of money travelling the world using his testimony.

The only trouble was that it was a pack of lies. Eventually it all came out.

But just think, congregation, of all those taken in by it before that happened!

Especially think about all those who so much wished to have an experience just like that!

And there you have exactly what Jezebel promoted.

She's preaching you should sin all the more so that grace may abound all the more!

Except then it wasn't grace anymore!

Ah, the devil's designs.

Because Satan is always working at getting believers to look away from Jesus.

And if that's by always looking to themselves and to what they've done, then all the better!

This is why human testimonies should never be part of a worship service.

The only story you should hear about in church is Christ's story.

This is shown in verse 25 as the faithful believers there are urged to hold on to what they have.

You see, they too could fall into the temptation of the devil.

They too could be attracted by the sights that dazzle and the sounds which seduce.

Just like we can, congregation.

Because what's happening down town seems to have it all.

There's the night life, the social clubs, and all that's happening in their special events!

But how does that give you any more than what you've got here?

In fact, how does any of that help you to persevere?

When the Lord speaks of overcoming in verse 26 it is this very attitude that became so blatant with Jezebel.

Because once you go down the road of experience you can never have enough.

You'll always have to have the latest and greatest.

But if we want to rule with Christ we have to first live under Him.

If we will one day be kings with Him, as verse 26 says, we have to be servants now.

To have the deep secrets of God takes a lifetime of Christian commitment - quite different to the instant success the devil tries to trick us with.

Friend, the Christian life is not a single victory over sin, rather it is life-long faithfulness.

As one commentator wrote, "The Christian life is not a *battle*; it is a *campaign*."

To help the saints there focus on this, Christ in verse 27 quotes the second psalm.

That Psalm is a prophecy of the triumphant work of God's conquering Messiah.

How very appropriate that the little Christian Church, then under attack from the vast Roman Empire, should have that promise given it!

Looking at the situation humanly speaking, the Church could only look forward to being wiped out.

But from the divine view there is the most complete triumph up ahead!

Verse 28 confirms this with the most wonderful promise.

For this is the promise of "the morning star."

This declares that we will also share not only in Christ's reign but in His glory.

Later in Revelation 22 verse 16 the Risen Christ declares, "I am ... the bright Morning Star."

So what's being referred to here is none other than God's Son Himself.

Comparing this with Daniel 12:3 and Matthew 13:43, we see this is about the brightness of the Saviour's glory and the shining of the righteous.

Congregation, this is the ultimate rebuttal to Jezebel and her false teaching.

For when God's sanctification is complete in us we will meet Christ.

In the words of John first letter chapter 3 verse 2, "when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

Is there any greater prize?

The man who is faithful unto death will receive no other and no less than Jesus Christ Himself!

Why would you even think of having a moment with an idol here below when You've got eternity with Him waiting above?

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Lord Jesus, help us not to become distracted by what is here below.

While it may seem so exciting for a moment it does not help us for eternity.

Please help us to look only to You through Your Word.

Keep us faithful.

And then we too will share in Your power and Your glory.

May that great and coming Day come soon.

Marantha, Lord Jesus - come quickly!

Amen.