

## JEZEBEL

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**Scripture:** Revelation 2: 18-29

We've been looking at the churches mentioned in the first few chapters of Revelation, three so far, and all of these are from Asia Minor, present day Turkey. All the churches have a commendation, a rebuke, an instruction, a promise. All have rebukes except the church at Smyrna and the church at Philadelphia. But otherwise, there was something that Jesus had against the other churches.

### **The Church at Ephesus**

The commendation for Ephesus, as we saw the first Sunday, was that they were hard workers, that they persevered, and rejected the false apostles. But the rebuke to them was that they had abandoned their first love or their fervor for Christ. The instruction to them was: Remember, repent, and do the things they did at first. Go back to the time when you first met Jesus and then try and bring back that kind of devotion and fervor that you had. In other words, despite doctrinal purity, their passion for Christ had faded.

### **The Church at Smyrna**

The commendation was that they were enduring suffering and poverty and yet spiritually rich. There was no rebuke but an instruction that said: Be faithful until death despite upcoming trials and imprisonment. So there was a warning that things were going to get even more difficult and to remain faithful to the end. And the promise was the crown of life and immunity from the second death. In other words, this church, despite persecution, received no rebuke from Christ.

### **The Church at Pergamum**

Commendation: they held fast to Christ's name despite being in a morally corrupt city.

Rebuke: tolerating the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, doctrines of compromise and immorality.

Warning: Repent.

Reward: The promise that they would partake of the hidden manna and a white stone with a new name for those who overcome.

In other words, they allowed false teachings and moral compromise within the church.

So, those are the first three churches that we looked at, and we are always looking at these churches, not just in their historical context, but in our present everyday context, and saying: We are the church; we are the people who could have been part of those churches. So, what is the Spirit of God saying to each one of us?

Today I want us to look at the fourth church, the Church of Thyatira.

## **THE CHURCH OF THYATIRA**

Revelation 2: 18-29

<sup>18</sup> *"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:*

*The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:*

<sup>19</sup> *'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than [\[u\]](#)at first. <sup>20</sup> But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that*

*they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. <sup>22</sup> Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. <sup>23</sup> And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. <sup>24</sup> But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. <sup>25</sup> Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. <sup>26</sup> He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; <sup>27</sup> and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; <sup>28</sup> and I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

Our loving Heavenly Father. speak Lord, through the words of Your Son in the power of Your Spirit, that we would be open to receive it. Lord, that we would be even malleable enough to have You mould and remould if necessary. And also Lord, take away our often stubborn presences and attitudes and replace it with a willingness to align our will with Your holy will. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

### **The Church at Thyatira**

The commendation for them was that their deeds were good, that they had a love; their faith and service was good, perseverance was present, and their growth was even greater than what they had in the beginning. But the indictment starts in v.20 and goes on to v.23 – they tolerate Jezebel.

Now in this passage, Jesus is addressing the church in Thyatira through the apostle John and rebukes them for tolerating a woman referred to as Jezebel. She's described as someone who calls herself a prophetess, and teaches people to engage in sexual immorality and eat foods sacrificed to idols. This Jezebel is a symbol of wickedness and false teaching, much like the historical Jezebel from the Old Testament, the wife of King Ahab in 1 Kings 16-21, who led the people into idolatry and rebellion against God. The use of her name here implies that the person or group in the Church of Thyatira was leading others astray in a similar manner.

Now I want to emphasize here that while we may look at Jezebel, and the fact that Jezebel is referred to as a woman, that it applies to all the men who are sitting here as well. it is not a good woman that he is talking about. He's talking about the kind of person who would lead people astray, one who would lead people into sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. Anybody who could lead somebody astray from the truth of the word of God. And then he says, "These people now follow her teachings that lead to immorality and then eat things that are sacrificed to idols.

Now, in the ancient world, a lot of the rituals that were done in the temples involved food, food that was sacrificed to the idols. And sometimes it was almost a threat to Christians that if they did not participate, they would get into trouble, because Thyatira had what they called a 'Traders Guild', where everybody who was a trader came together and then partook of meals that were sacrificed to idols. So this was a grave indictment that Jesus was bringing because it could lead people astray. For those who came into the faith, they looked at Christians participating in this and thought: Oh, that's okay to be able to bring in their old practices into the Christian faith.

Paul puts it very well in 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14, where he explains that while eating food sacrificed to idols might not inherently be sinful for a believer who recognizing that idols are meaningless, it could become a stumbling block for others. If weaker believers who still struggled with their previous associations saw other Christians eating such food, it could confuse or lead them astray. Which brings us to this very important fact that we have a responsibility to lead the kind of

lives that will not let other people go astray. Jesus said, "It is better for a millstone to be put around a person's neck than for one to lead any of these weaker ones astray." So, we need to be so careful that our behavior is consistent with the word of God, that we don't indulge in anything, so that people looking at what we are doing can say: Oh, I guess this is allowable, even though they don't understand what you have understood about the situation.

This whole term of Jezebel leading to sexual immorality and food sacrificed to idols was told to them. But the Bible says that they were unrepentant. Then there were dire consequences that are mentioned here in the word. It says, "They will be thrown into sickness if unrepentant. Those who commit adultery with her or with these practices will experience great tribulation. Their children will be killed by pestilence." The church at Thyatira was settling into this kind of practice. And Jesus is saying: There are serious consequences for you if this is the way you plan to live your lives.

But, in the middle of this, in v.23, it's like God inserted Himself into the midst of this passage to show Himself who He is. It says He is the one who searches the mind and the heart and will reward according to our deeds. Something God has interjected into this passage and it says 'omniscience'. God is saying, "I look beyond behaviors. I look at the heart. I look at intent. I look at attitudes. I look at thoughts." And those are the determining factors of how a Christian life should be look, not just on behavior.

Look at scriptures that talk about this.

Jeremiah 17:10 *"I the Lord searched the heart and examined the mind to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve."*

1 Samuel 16:7 *The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.*

Psalm 139:1-2 *You have searched me, Lord, and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise, You perceive my thoughts from afar.*

Revelation 2:23 *and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you according to your works.*

Sometimes we think that accepting Jesus is enough. I'm a Christian, and now I'll just wait till Jesus takes me to heaven. And yet, the point that is being made here is that there are things that need to be done as well, that there are deeds that need to be done. From the time that we are saved to the time that we leave this world, God watches how we have lived our lives, and based on that, rewards will be given in heaven.

You and I won't get judged on whether we go to heaven or hell if today you sit here knowing that Jesus is your Savior. That's not the judgment for you and me. The judgment for us will be before Jesus. The white throne judgment, that judgment where He says, "From the time that I saved you to the time that you stand face to face with Me, what have you done?" That's what we will be judged on, and based on that, rewards will be given. So, far be it for us to sit here and think: I don't need to do anything more. I've got my ticket to heaven and that's enough. Beloved, it isn't. the rewards come from the way we live our lives post-salvation to the point of glorification.

God rewards according to our deeds. So two things:

- I know. I'm omniscient, and so I know the things that you do, and think and have intent.
- I will reward according to the way you have lived.

Key scriptural references to that.

Romans 2:6. *God will repay each person according to what they have done.*

2 Corinthians 5:10. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. While in the body, while we are alive and have breath.*

Matthew 16:27. *For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels and then He will reward each person according to what they have done.*

Galatians 6:7-8. *Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh from the flesh will reap destruction. Whosoever sows to please the spirit from the spirit will reap eternal life.*

Revelation 20:12-13. *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. And the books were opened. Another book was opened which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.*

That's how seriously God takes the life that we live, post knowing Him as Savior. He expects us, that people will see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. Our lamp cannot be under a bushel. The city on a hill will shine. And that's where we need to be.

So those two things, so important, stuck in the middle of this passage. God's knowledge, His omniscience of exactly what we are doing, how we think, our intent, our motive, our attitudes. And they will be rewarded for what is good and discarded for what is bad.

Vs. 24-28 And He says: "To those of you who are not part of this group," That means that in the Church of Thyatira, there was a group of people who didn't succumb to these false teachings. He says, "To you I place no burden upon you." He exhorts them to held fast until Jesus returns, and they will be rewarded with authority over nations. Jesus is promising a great reward to those who conquer, to those who overcome by remaining faithful to Him despite the trials, temptations, and pressures that they face in life. The promise of authority over the nations and ruling with the rod of iron points to believers' future participation in Christ's reign. Just as Christ received authority from God the Father to rule over all creation, He will give that authority to us.

Then he says, "He will also be given the morning star." We sang a song earlier – Come unto Jesus and in Him, you will be able to enjoy all the wonderful attributes that Jesus brings into our lives. Come unto Him.

That's why Paul in Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, always talks about In Him, this is who you are. In Him, and he says that I will let you have an intimate relationship with Christ who is described in Revelation 22 as the morning star. Basically, he says to them: Persevere, overcome, stay the course, and then get rewarded.

Then the final words: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches. It's pointless if we can listen and not heed the word of God. We must listen and we must be obedient to it.

If we sum up the Church at Thyatira:

- Commendation – love, faith, service, perseverance
- Rebuke. – tolerating the prophetess Jezebel, who led believers into idolatry and immorality

- Instruction – hold fast to the truth and reject Jezebel’s teachings
- Promise – authority over nations in the Morning Star for those who overcome.

In other words, their love and service were commendable, but they tolerated grave sin and false teaching.

The question that came uppermost to me after I went through this passage and did due research, and just meditated on it was this: How is it possible to have all of these qualities – love, faith, service, perseverance, and at the same time, to have another rail which is running parallel with immorality and sin? Think about it. On the one hand, a commendation, and yet, to the same people, this was what was going on. There were two lives that were being lived – one that showcased all that needed to be showcased as Christians, and the other that involved the false teachings of sexual immorality and sin.

How is that possible? How is it possible for us to live lives that don’t intersect? Where the word of God doesn’t intersect with our lives, that we can read it in a kind of vacuum and think I’ve done that, and then go and live my life the way I want to live it. And yet, that was the indictment to the church at Thyatira, that this parallel life was what God was coming against. That wrong teaching that coexisted along with good works had several problems, dire consequences for the people of the church. Why?

It led to spiritual corruption and the dilution of truth. the coexistence of false teaching with good practices gradually leads to the watering down of good doctrine and theology. It leads to the dilution of God’s truth in our lives. Because as we accept it, then the things that are against it need to be pushed down to allow it to coexist. And so, God’s truth gets pushed out. And sin comes in. There’s moral and ethical compromise.

False teachings often justify or tolerate sinful behaviors.

For a long time, we’ve been careful at CAP, right from day one, about the kind of teaching that came into the church. We’re very careful of who gets to speak from this pulpit. We’re very careful about people who come in here and mix with the congregation and hand out things. We have our leaders who watch out for these kinds of people. We’re very careful of people who try to find people in the congregation and then use wrong theology and talk to them. We are very careful. Why? so that we can stay strong in the doctrines that God has given us, lest we begin to let some kind of immorality come in and dilute God’s perfect, beautiful and pure word.

Then it also leads to deception. It’s misleading for people in the community. We are known as Christians, and when we go out and we do something that is non-Christian, which is against the principles of the Bible, the world, the community, our friends look at us and think: he/she is a Christian. And yet, this is what they do. Is that part of the Christian faith? And the Christian faith gets a beating. We bring down the beauty of Jesus. That’s the danger in allowing false teaching to erode and corrupt a church.

One of the words I think, that has been bandied around for so long, especially in the Christian church, is the word tolerance. I think we have leaned over backwards in being tolerant about things that we ought not to have been. We have accepted wrong things; we have accepted sin under the banner of being a tolerant community.

And yet, God’s word here is saying: No! That can never be. Tolerance becomes harmful. There’s a place for tolerance, but tolerance can also lead to problems. It can compromise core values that we have in a church. It causes one to ignore and compromise important moral, ethical, or spiritual

beliefs. Ask yourself when is the time in the last week that you were challenged about a moral issue, or an ethical issue, or a spiritual one. and how did you respond? Did you give in, thinking I need to be tolerant in this issue? Or did you stand firm and say: That's a line I will not cross? Dishonesty, injustice in the name of tolerance can damage relationships and communities.

Then, tolerance enables harmful behavior. When tolerance permits actions that hurt others, whether through abuse, exploitation, or injustice, it becomes problematic. And we accept abuse, exploitation and injustice all in the name of tolerance.

Tolerance that is unchallenged can have long-term negative consequences for individuals and societies. Tolerating falsehoods or misinformation. In some cases, being overly tolerant on misinformation, false teachings or harmful ideologies can lead people astray. People come in and think, if this is what it is, I don't want to have any part of it. and they move away.

Tolerance also fosters division because there's a group of people who say that this is acceptable, and a group of people who say this is not acceptable. And division and disunity are caused in the church.

To summarize, tolerance is a virtue when it promotes peace, when it leads to understanding, and it welcomes diversity – that we accept people of all kinds, all backgrounds, all situations. But it becomes a problem when it allows harm, falsehood, or injustice to persist unchecked.

The key for us as we look at our lives, as we look at the many, many influences that keep coming to us, both within and without all the things that we do – the key is balance. Tolerance should coexist with discernment and accountability. Discernment and accountability. To be able to look at the Lord and say: Lord, would You help me to see what is right and what is wrong? Lord, I want to be accountable only to You. One day I want to stand before You, Lord, and not have to hear You say, "How did you let this happen? How did you buy into this, or how did you do this? Lord, I want to stand before You and hear good words from You. I want to live my life as well as I can under the power and the anointing of Your Holy Spirit, Lord. so help me."

That beloved, must be our position as we take leanings and learnings from the church at Thyatira.

Amen.

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