

Thyatira: The Corrupt Church

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn to the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation in chapter 2.

We're continuing our study of the seven churches of Revelation. And this evening we're looking at the church in Thyatira.

So Revelation chapter 2, and we're reading at verse 18. And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, this is Jesus speaking, the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works.

[1 : 30] And I will strike her children dead, and all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay, do not lay on you any other burden.

Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as earth and pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.

And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

What would Jesus say about your church? What would Jesus say about your church?

[2 : 42] If you remember, that's the question we're being asked as we study these seven letters to the churches in Revelation. What would Jesus say about your church?

What would Jesus say about Barber's Free Church? What would Jesus say about the spiritual health and condition of our congregation? Would Jesus commend us?

Would he condemn us? Would he comfort us? Would he have concerns about us? What would Jesus say about Barber's Free Church? And as we said before, these letters to the seven churches in Revelation were to view them as the results of a spiritual health check, where Dr. Jesus, the great physician of souls, he's giving the churches in Asia, which is now modern-day Turkey, Jesus is giving to them the results of their spiritual condition.

And some of the things that Dr. Jesus has discovered, they need to be rectified immediately, or they will have damaging effects upon the spiritual well-being of the Church of Christ.

And you know, the reason Jesus is giving the results of this spiritual health check is because Jesus wants his church to be faithful and obedient in a world that is hostile to the Gospel.

[4 : 01] And as we said before, that's what the book of Revelation is all about. It's all about revealing Jesus Christ as the exalted and reigning Saviour, so that the church will live faithful and obedient lives in the face of opposition and persecution.

And as we said, the reason there are seven churches is symbolic, because they represent the whole body of Christ, the whole church of Christ. And so the seven letters to these seven churches, they apply to every church in every generation.

They apply to us. And so we're to take heed to what these letters say, so that we will apply them, and we will apply the spiritual prescribed remedies to our own congregation.

Now, as you know, there are words and phrases that are repeated in each letter, and we've created the structure by looking at every letter.

Every letter is very similar. Most of the letters to the churches, they follow the similar structure of a word of commendation, then a word of condemnation, and then a word of consolation.

[5 : 12] And they are our headings again this evening. That as we consider the church, the letter to the church in Thyatira, which was the corrupt church. Thyatira was the corrupt church.

And Jesus, he has a word of commendation, a word of condemnation, and a word of consolation. So we look first of all at a word of commendation.

Jesus says in verse 18, To the angel of the church in Thyatira write, The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. Now, out of the seven letters to the churches, the letter to the church in Thyatira is the longest.

But, like all of the letters, it begins with the familiar phrase, To the angel of the church. And as we've said before, the angel of the church, it wasn't a guardian angel, it wasn't the spirit of the church, but the angel of the church is the pastor of the church.

[6 : 24] Because the word angel, it can also be translated as messenger. And that's what the pastor of a church is. He's God's messenger to God's people. And the pastor's responsibility is to bring the word of God to the people of God.

And the spiritual health and condition of a church, it is the responsibility of the pastor. It's the duty of the pastor to lead and shepherd and challenge and encourage his congregation to live faithful and obedient lives to God's glory.

And so Jesus addresses his letter to the angel of the church in Thyatira. But what was Thyatira like? And how did there come to be a church in Thyatira?

Well, the only other place that Thyatira is mentioned in the Bible is in the book of Acts in chapter 16.

Because it's there that we read about the apostle Paul and he had these three other traveling companions and they all received this missionary call to come over to Macedonia and help us.

And then a few days later, we read in Acts 16 that Paul and his companions, they arrived in Philippi, which we're told was the leading city in the district of Macedonia. And then on the Sabbath day, we're told that they went outside the gate to the riverside and they sat down and they spoke to some woman who had just gathered together there to pray.

[7 : 53] And one of the women who was there, she heard Paul preach. And she was a woman named Lydia. And as Paul preached, we're told that the Lord opened Lydia's heart.

But Lydia wasn't from the city of Philippi. Lydia was from the city of Thyatira. And Lydia wasn't just in Philippi. She wasn't just there by chance.

She was there, of course, to meet with the Lord. But she was also there selling her purple goods.

Lydia was a saleswoman. And yet she returned home to Thyatira with the best investment she had ever made.

Lydia returned home to Thyatira with a desire to reach out to her own people and extend Christ's kingdom in her own city. But as a seller of purple goods, it's clear that Lydia, she was not only a wealthy woman, but she was also heavily involved in her trade.

And that's what Thyatira was famous for. Thyatira, it wasn't a political or a cultural hub. It was a commercial city. Thyatira was known for its trade.

[9 : 08] Its trade of cloth making, cloth dyeing, and also pottery. And unlike Ephesus and Pergamos, where these cities, they were overrun by idolatry, Thyatira was a secular city.

It wasn't a particularly religious city. It didn't worship the emperor. It didn't have many ceremonies to Greek gods. Thyatira was very secular, very commercialized, very worldly, very materialistic.

And yet because of Lydia and many others, there was a church in Thyatira. And here Jesus, he's writing to the church in Thyatira, and he describes himself in verse 18.

He says, the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. You know, this is the only time in the book of Revelation that Jesus refers to himself as the Son of God.

But with this statement, Jesus is reminding the church in Thyatira that he is the one with absolute authority. He is the one who is anointed.

[10 : 23] He has been anointed by God the Father to be king and head over his church. Therefore, the church of Jesus Christ, he says, is not just a building or a spiritual empire.

It's a body of people. A body of people who are accountable to the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And because the church of Jesus Christ is accountable, Jesus says that he knows everything that's going on within his church.

He says, his eyes are like a flame of fire. Meaning that nothing is hidden from his sight. There's nothing that he doesn't know about.

His eyes are a flame of fire that can burn through every facade and every disguise that the church can try and devise to try and hide itself from its true self.

Hide the world. Hide itself from the world. You know, it doesn't matter how much spiritual makeup the church puts on. The eyes of King Jesus penetrate right into our heart.

[11 : 29] Nothing's hidden from him. And you know, it's this self-description of Jesus that was particularly relevant to the church in Thyatira. Because Jesus was just about to expose them for their corruption and their tolerance of immorality.

But you know, as Jesus, as he continues his self-description, he goes from head to toe and he says that his feet are like burnished bronze. And of course, burnished bronze or brass, it's an alloy metal consisting of copper and zinc.

It's a metal that's both pure and strong. And that's how Jesus describes his feet. He says his feet, they're pure to judge those who oppose him.

And his feet, they're strong enough to trample down his enemies and crush them. You know, we must notice that following his self-description, Jesus gives a word of commendation.

And similar to his other letters, Jesus says in verse 19, I know your works. And you know, it would have been a great encouragement to the church. That despite their many problems, despite their opposition, Jesus says, I know.

[12 : 42] I know what's going on. I understand what you're going through. I know what you're doing. He says, I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance and that your latter works exceed the first.

Jesus commends the church in Thyatira for their display of growth and development as a church. Jesus commends them for their demonstration. The demonstration of their love, their faith, their service, their patient endurance and their works.

Jesus commends them because they look as if they've grown in love for Jesus and love for one another. They look as if they've developed in their faith. They look as if they've matured in their service.

They look as if they're persevering despite their opposition. They look as if they're excelling in all their works and service to the Lord. And Jesus, he commends them because the church in Thyatira, it portrays itself as an active church.

The Christians, they seem to be growing in love for one another. They seem to be increasing in their faith. They seem to be involved in their community. They seem to be putting on many activities.

[13 : 52] They seem to be reaching out to the lost. On the surface, everything seems to be going well in Thyatira. On the surface, the church is just taking over and the congregation is slowly getting on with things.

On the surface, the church in Thyatira is showing signs that it's working harder than ever. But as Jesus has already warned, his eyes are like a flame of fire.

There's nothing hidden from his sight. And his eyes can penetrate right into their hearts. And you know, what's so sad is that even though Jesus commends the church in Thyatira for their display of love and faith and service and perseverance and works, he's just about to expose them for their corruption and tolerance of immorality.

And you know, it ought to be a solemn reminder, a reminder to us as a church and as a denomination that we should never be satisfied with what we see on the surface.

because we might look active, we might look busy, we might be displaying all the signs of a healthy church full of love and faith and service and perseverance and works and yet we might be like the seed, the seed that fell on the rocky ground.

[15 : 15] On the surface, it looked like it had life. It looked like there was activity. It looked like there was growth and development. But when the light of the sun shone on the rocky ground, it revealed

the true condition of the soil and all that grew upwards withered because it didn't grow downwards. And that was the problem in the church in Thyatira. It looked good on the surface, looked active, but they were in danger of having no depth, no earth and no root.

And as the light of the sun of God shone upon the church in Thyatira, Jesus exposes them. He exposes them for their corruption and their tolerance of immorality.

And so Jesus, he gives the church in Thyatira a word of commendation. But sadly, he also gives to the church in Thyatira a word of condemnation.

A word of condemnation. He says in verse 20, But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

[16:41] And you know, they are the dreaded words of every church where having received your spiritual health check, Dr. Jesus says, I have this against you.

And what Jesus had against the church in Thyatira was that they were tolerating corruption and immorality. Because the church was becoming very secularized, very commercialized, very worldly, very materialistic.

The church may have been in Thyatira but Thyatira was seeping into the church. And Jesus says that the church has tolerated that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess.

Now when Jesus speaks about this prophetess Jezebel, I don't believe he's actually referring to a particular woman in Thyatira. I believe he's referring to a secular worldview that was promoted in Thyatira.

But Jesus uses the name Jezebel in order to remind the church in Thyatira about one of the most corrupt, immoral, and ungodly queens to have ever sat upon the throne in Israel.

[17:59] Because we read in 1 Kings chapter 21, we read about the account of when Ahab, the king of Israel, he wanted to buy Naboth's vineyard. And although Ahab's request to buy Naboth's land, it was perfectly reasonable.

Naboth also had the right to refuse, which he did. But you know, it seems to me that Naboth refused Ahab's request more because Naboth loved the Lord.

And Naboth had no respect for King Ahab. Because King Ahab, he had married Jezebel, the daughter of a foreign king who worshipped foreign gods, who bowed down to idols.

But as the king in Israel, it was Ahab's covenant responsibility to lead the Lord's people to faithfully worship the Lord. But Ahab did nothing of the sort. Ahab didn't care about his covenant responsibility because he married this idolatrous woman called Jezebel.

But more than that, Ahab, he tolerated his wife and all of her false gods so much so that Ahab built altars and temples in the land of Israel for all of Jezebel's idols.

[19:14] My friend, the king of Israel, King Ahab, he had no backbone. He had no convictions. He had no personal opinions about the Lord and his word.

He just tolerated his wife. He tolerated all her gods and he tolerated her in the name of love and peace. And you know, anyone who tolerates idolatry and immorality in the name of love and peace, they're on the road to disaster.

Because the more Ahab tolerated his wife and all her gods, the more she took advantage, the more ground she got, the more traction she had in taking over the whole of the nation of Israel.

And you know, that's what will always happen with sin. Give it an inch, it'll take the mile. But with Ahab, he gave his wife Jezebel just the inch.

She took ten miles. Jezebel brought idolatry into the land of Israel. She funded them. She supported it. She even campaigned for her false religion.

[20:17] Jezebel, you could say, she was this charismatic figure that when it came to the worship of Baal, she was out front. She built more temples. She employed more prophets of Baal.

and in the process she sought to eradicate all of the Lord's prophets. Get them out, she said. Kill them off. And that's what she did. She killed many of the Lord's prophets.

She even tried to kill Elijah. And when Queen Jezebel got a foothold in the nation of Israel, she led the nation astray to worshiping false gods and bowing down to idols.

But you know, the incident we read about Naboth and his vineyard, it further proved that Jezebel was just a ruthless liar and a cold-blooded murderer.

Because Jezebel, with all the influence that she had, she manipulated the elders, she manipulated the leaders of the city, and she manipulated them to fabricate this story as to find out, to find Naboth

guilty of treason and have him put to death.

[21 : 26] That's how much power and influence Jezebel had. That she could get anyone in the nation, including her own husband, to do whatever she wanted.

Jezebel was a dangerous woman. And when the nation listened to her, they turned their back upon the Lord and they went astray. And this is why Jesus says in verse 20, but I have this against you. You tolerate that woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

Now, as I said, when Jesus speaks about this prophetess, Jezebel, he's not referring to a particular woman in Thyatira, but the secular worldview that was influencing the church.

And like Jezebel, who manipulated King Ahab and all of the elders in the city, it seems that this commercialized and materialistic city of Thyatira, it was influencing the church.

[22 : 34] And the influence and the manipulation, it was so strong and so powerful that Jesus says that the church was being seduced to practice sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols.

And you know, what had caused this seduction and manipulation was that the church in Thyatira had given an inch to the materialistic worldview that surrounded it.

And in no time at all, traction was made. Corruption took over. The rot set in. And the church was becoming more unlike Christ and more like the city of Thyatira.

And you know, this is because many of the members in the church, they would have been businessmen and women. Those in Thyatira, they would have been involved in the trades of making cloth and dyeing materials and creating pottery.

And because of all these trades in this city of Thyatira, there would have been many trade guilds. There was trade unions. And each trade in Thyatira had said that they all had their own patron deity whom they paid homage to now and again in exchange for economic blessing.

[23 : 55] And these pagan practices, they would have involved a combination of idolatry and immorality. people who have been but you know, when you become a Christian, when you confess Jesus Christ to be Lord over your life and that you want to follow in his footsteps and you desire to imitate Christ in your thoughts and your words and your deeds and you're part of the church of Jesus Christ and you're part of a body of believers that seek to put Christ first and have the Bible as your sole authority and Christ's preeminence and glory as your primary goal in life.

But as a Christian living as part of a commercial and materialistic culture that says if you want to get anywhere in your business you have to pay homage to your deity. There has to be a bit of manipulation.

There has to be some corruption that's overlooked. There has to you have to have your business open seven days a week. You have to attend all the feasts and the parties where there's food sacrificed to idols.

You might have to even sleep with someone in order to get your business to progress somewhere. But the Jezebel of Thyatira says that's okay. Jesus doesn't really mind because your work your work is for the greater good of society.

Surely Jesus wouldn't mind that. And the church in Thyatira was faced with a choice. Live a Christ centered life which will certainly mean that you lose your position you lose your reputation in society.

[25 : 31] You may be even reduced to poverty and exposed to persecution but still you'll faithfully live for Christ which is far better. Or what do you do?

You could do what the world wants and follow their pagan, materialistic, corrupt and immoral world view. You could tolerate it all so that you'll be accepted by your peers and your trade will flourish and your business will thrive but your soul will starve your Christianity will be compromised and your love for Christ will grow cold.

And many argue many will say well don't be so extreme that'll never happen I'll never compromise I can handle these situations I'll remain faithful even in a very secular very commercialized very worldly and very materialistic city.

but my friend that's what Ahab thought when he married Jezebel. That's what he thought when he gave the inch. And as the king of Israel Ahab thought that he would never compromise his position and he would never undermine the Lord.

But when Jezebel murdered innocent Naboth the prophet Elijah found Ahab and said to him I have found you because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord.

[26 : 56] And later on in the chapter we're told that there was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab whom Jezebel his wife encouraged.

Ahab sold himself to the godlessness and the corruption of his wife Jezebel. And you know Jesus he was using Ahab as an illustration to the church in Thyatira because Ahab was meant to be faithful to the Lord but he sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

And in a similar manner Jesus was condemning the church in Thyatira for selling themselves to Jezebel's secular materialistic and corrupt worldview.

Jesus condemned the church for tolerating sin and mixing the world with the church. And you know it's so relevant for us today. We might think that this book it's outdated and outmoded but you know it's so relevant because tolerance is a burning issue in the day and age we live in.

We live in a tolerant age that calls for ever increasing tolerance. We're we're to be tolerant in our theology. We're to say that Jesus is not the only way.

[28 : 18] We're to say that it's okay to have female ministers. It doesn't matter if they're unconverted. It doesn't matter if they're homosexual. We have to be tolerant. We have to be tolerant in religion.

We have to allow everyone to express their religion and allow those who have no religion to express their views even if it means that they completely disregard and sideline Christians and their Christianity.

all in the name of tolerance. And you know the most relevant one at the moment is that we have to be tolerant of sexuality and gender.

We have to tolerate the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender movement because they all have rights but the Christian has none. And those who call the loudest for tolerance their views and their lifestyles they are often the most intolerant of those who do not tolerate sin.

But you know the church of Jesus Christ has just been pushed and poked and prodded to be tolerant in the name of love. And yes without doubt we are to love them.

[29 : 28] Without doubt we're to show mercy. Without doubt we're to show kindness and grace. We're to walk like Jesus walked. Cross the boundary lights.

All these things. But the Christian and the church of Jesus Christ is not to tolerate sin at any point. We're not to sell ourselves to the secularism and worldliness and idolatry of our age. No, we're to do as Jesus did.

Do you know what Jesus did with the Jezebel of Thyatira? He called it to repent. He says in verse 21 I gave her time to repent but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.

Behold I will throw her onto a sick bed and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation unless they repent of her works. And I will strike her children dead and all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart and I will give to each of you according to your works.

[30 : 40] You know Jesus called the church of Thyatira to repent but how did he do that? How did he do that? Jesus did it through the faithful witness of some Christians who refused to compromise and tolerate sin.

Jesus called the businessmen and women of Thyatira to repent through the protests of the Christian church. And you know that's how Jesus will do it today.

Jesus will call our nation to repent through our faithful Christian witness and protest our protest against governments or councils.

They might not listen but the calling of the church is to remain faithful it's to stand firm it's to be obedient despite it's opposition.

Because when the end comes this risen exalted and glorified king Jesus says he will destroy them. He will destroy them.

[31 : 46] And you know that's the word of consolation Jesus gives to the church in Thyatira. And so a word of commendation a word of condemnation but lastly a word of consolation.

A word of consolation. Jesus says in verse 24 but to the rest of you in Thyatira who do not hold this teaching who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan to you I say I do not lay on you any other burden only hold fast what you have until I come.

The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end to him I will give authority over the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron as when earth and pots are broken in pieces even as myself have received even as I myself have received authority from my father and I will give him the

morning star.

Jesus makes very clear that although there were Christians in Thyatira who had sold themselves to the worldview of Jezebel there were others who refused to compromise and Jesus says they have not learned the deep things of Satan and it's for that reason that Jesus gives a word of consolation he encourages the church to hold fast until I come hold fast until I come Jesus says keep persevering until the end keep going the way you're going because I will give you the bright and morning star and the bright and morning star it's symbolic of Christ's second coming and so my friend Jesus was calling the church in Thyatira to be faithful until he comes again because you know he promises by quoting Psalm 2 a psalm that's all about Jesus as God's son and as the anointed king and Jesus says that when he returns he will rule with a rod of iron and he will break these corrupt worldly pots of clay these pots of clay that have built empires for themselves and gained a name for themselves

Jesus says he will break them all in pieces you know that's what we were singing about in Psalm 2 he in heaven sits shall laugh the Lord shall scorn them all but you know Jesus he concludes with a call to faithfulness and obedience he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches my friend the church in Thyatira was a corrupt church it had tolerated sin it had adopted the world view of wicked Queen Jezebel Thyatira was very secular very commercialized very worldly very materialistic the church was in Thyatira and sadly Thyatira was in the church and it didn't matter if the church in Thyatira was growing and developing in love and faith and service and perseverance and works if they didn't deal with the tolerance their tolerance of sin they were going to be like the house that was built upon the sand that when the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against the house it fell and great was the fall of it but you know

[35 : 20] Jesus he exposed the church in Thyatira out of love out of love for them in order for them to repent and Jesus exposes us he exposes us of our sin our misery in order that we will turn to him in repentance that we will turn to him and seek his face he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh Lord our gracious God that we would take the words of Jesus seriously that we would realize that the calling of the Christian is to be holy as he is holy to realize that this Jesus is one without sin he is a purer eye than to behold iniquity and to look upon sin and that is the calling of Thy church to be like

Jesus to imitate the Christ who loved us and gave himself for us and help us then we pray not to imitate the world that surrounds us but to imitate the Christ who saved us oh Lord bless us we ask thee make us faithful enable us to be obedient help us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and that where we err Lord where we sin that our Lord would forgive us give to us a spirit of repentance that we might confess our secret faults and even our presumptuous sins that thou Lord would be gracious to us oh Lord help us we pray thee to be a God honouring and God glorifying a Christ exalting congregation that seeks to live lives that bring glory to thy name and extend the kingdom of God in the place which thou hast placed us oh Lord do us good and we pray bless us in the week that lies ahead a week that is unknown to us but help us to confess that

Lord one who knows all things help us then we pray to commit everything into thine hand do us good we ask for Jesus sake Amen we shall bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 143 Psalm 143 in the Scottish Psalter page 439 Psalm 143 this is a psalm of repentance so we're singing from verse 6 down to the verse marked 8 lo I do stretch my hands to thee my help alone for thou well understand all my complaint and moan my thirsting soul desires and longeth after thee as thirsty ground requires with rain refreshed to be sing on to the verse marked 8 of Psalm 143 the second version of the psalm to God's praise song o I do stretch my hands to thee my help alone for thou well understand all my complaint and moan my thirsting so desires and longeth after thee as thirsting ground requires with great refresh to thee me

Lord let my prayer prevail to answer in his feet for though my strength doth fail I thought thy face in need lest I be like to those that do in darkness sin or in that word goes into that dreadful bin because I trust in thee oh

[40 : 45] Lord cause me to hear thy lovingkindness free when morning doth appear cause me to know the way when my path should be for my soul on high I do lift up to thee the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen