

TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA

Revelation 2:18-29

Intro: Thyatira is mentioned only four times in the NT. It is mentioned three of those times in this book of The Revelation: 1:11; 2:18, 24. The other time is in Acts 16:24 where we read (including verse 23 with it):

13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul (Acts 16:13-14).

Thyatira was the first inland city of the seven. It was slightly south and west of Pergamos, and approximately halfway between Pergamos and Sardis. Barnes, in his commentary, said that Thyatira was a little less than thirty miles from Sardis, and on the map it was about the same distance from Pergamos. So travelers, making the circuit of the seven cities, would go from Pergamos to Thyatira, and then on south to Sardis.

Thyatira was famous in Bible times for its purple dye. Lydia, mentioned in the book of Acts (as we have read), was “a seller of purple.” The dye was made from the root of a plant which was grown in and around Thyatira, but no record of it remains today. This business was prominent also in Colosse and Laodicea, but apparently not to the extent that it was in Thyatira.

But from what I have been able to learn about Thyatira today, its name now is Ak-hissar. The Turks destroyed everything that had to do with the Christian faith, and no one really knows even where the church there was located. The work which carries the title Christian today, is only Christian in name. The dominant religion, as you would expect, is the Muslim religion.

However, it is not necessary to know a lot about the history of Thyatira in order to profit from our Lord's letter to the church that was there toward the end of the first century. That letter has remained the same since it was first sent to the believers there. We see what the Lord was pleased with in the church, and what strongly displeased Him. And we are to learn from

the letter as it is.

The pattern is basically the same that it has been in the letters we have already considered, but the details are peculiar to the situation in Thyatira. We have the Lord addressing Himself to the angel of the church in Thyatira, identifying Himself from the vision of Himself which John saw in chapter 1.

Then we have the Lord's commendation in verse 19.

This is followed in verses 20 through 23 with a rather lengthy statement of what was going on in the church that had the Lord's disapproval. As you can see it had to do with a false prophetess which He called Jezebel, and what she was doing in the church and to the church. She had been successful in leading some in the church astray, and so a severe warning was issued by the Lord to Jezebel and her followers.

But He followed His warning with a word of exhortation to the faithful in the church which we find in verses 24 and 25.

In verses 26, 27, and 28 we have the Lord's promise to the overcomers.

Finally, in verse 29 is the Lord's appeal to those who have even one ear, that they had better hear what He and the Spirit were saying to all of the churches – all of the seven churches to whom they were originally addressed, and to all churches from that day until this, and on to the end of time!

Now let us look at the details of this letter. First, we have, as is usual in all of these letters:

I. THE RECEIVER AND THE SENDER (Rev. 2:18).

The church is the ultimate receiver, but the immediate receiver is "the angel of the church in Thyatira," the pastor. So much of what Christians receive, they receive from their leaders. And what an inexcusable offence it is when the pastor and the leadership of any church fail in their mission. The ministry is not what we want it to be, or what we make it. The ministry has been ordained by God, and the leaders have no option but to give the Word of God to the people of God. I have said this before, but it cannot be said too often. We, like Paul, are stewards of the mysteries of God

which He has revealed in His Word. We are not psychologists. We are not philosophers. We are not politicians. We are teachers and preachers of the Word.

But how did the Lord describe Himself here. He appeared to John at this time as One whose “eyes” were “like unto a flame of fire, and His feet ... like fine brass.” This sounds to be like a disturbing picture of judgment. Doesn’t it sound that way to you?

Perhaps Rev. 19:11 and the first part of verse 12 will give us some help. This is what those verses have to tell us regarding the coming of the Lord:

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire ...

And then when we go down to verse 15 of Rev. 19 we read this about the feet of our Lord: “... and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

Solomon introduces his book of Proverbs with the statement, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7). But Paul, citing a number of OT passages to describe man, cited Psa. 36:1 which says regarding man, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” We see evidence of that every day.

The Bible also tells us in Heb. 10:31, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” And in Heb. 12:29 the writer of Hebrews said, “For our God is a consuming fire.” People had better get their ideas about God from the Bible because that is the only place that you get a full picture of God. God is merciful and gracious and patience and forgiving, but when we persist in sin of any kind we see that there is another side to God. He is holy. He is righteous. And when people persist in sin, they face the possibility of the wrath of God. And one thing that especially provokes the wrath of God is when unregenerate people seek to meddle in the lives of God’s people. This is what was going on in Thyatira. We will see that in a minute.

But first we see:

II. THE LORD’S COMMENDATION (Rev. 2:19).

Probably in reading this verse we ought to think of “works” as descriptive of their lives, which were characterized by love and faith and service and perseverance, and that their latest works were better than their first ones. In other words, there was real evidence of growth in the lives of the believers at Thyatira. While love for the Lord was diminishing in Ephesus, it was increasing in Thyatira.

But, as I have said before, and we always need to remember this, where there is spiritual blessing, the Devil is always going to be at work. And as unbelievable as it might seem, they were tolerating a condition in the church that was going to destroy the lives of people in the church, and the church itself, if something were not done about it. Let’s see what it was.

III. THE LORD’S STRONG REBUKE (Rev. 2 20-23).

In the light of the way the Lord was able to commend the people in verse 19, I find it difficult to believe that things were going on in the church through the influence of a wicked woman by which people in the church were being drawn more and more into gross sin.

I don’t know if this woman’s real name was Jezebel, or he simply called her Jezebel because she was like the Jezebel in the OT. Jezebel was the daughter of the king of the Zidonians, and Ahab, the king of Israel, married her. And this brought Baal worship to Israel. Jezebel was a very wicked woman. I don’t have the time to go into her story, but you will find it scattered over a large section of the OT, beginning with 1 Kings 16. It continues in chapters 18, 19, and 21 of 1 Kings. And then it is concluded in 2 Kings 9 when God’s judgment fell on Jezebel, This was during the days when Elijah was prophesying in Israel. It was a very terrible period in the history of Israel.

But going back to Thyatira, this woman was determined to break down all true holiness in the church of Thyatira. And the church was not taking a stand against her. But our Lord had been dealing with her. He gave her time, sufficient time, to repent, but she refused to do it, and kept right on with her wicked work. And so the Lord told the church through their pastor what He was going to do.

He was going to strike her with an illness that would take her life. Those who had followed her were going to experience “great tribulation,” not *the* Great Tribulation, but nevertheless “great tribulation,” a time of great

trouble like they had never experienced before. Those who persisted in following her were going to die under the judgment of God. And then the Lord said, “And all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the minds and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.”

Remember: These are the words of the Lord Jesus. And they are words that would certainly be fulfilled.

Two things are certain:

- 1) God does not tolerate the work of those who seek to draw His people into sin.
- 2) God is going to judge those even among His people who for any reason feel that they can sin and get away with it.

Dr. Lockwood gave me an article the other day which was printed in the Wall Street Journal written by a man who obviously knew the Lord. And it gave alarming statistics about where professing Christian young people in our country stand with regard to our Lord, and with regard to the Word, with regard to Satan, and with regard to works and salvation. In the article it said that 91% of teenagers who claimed that they were born again, said that there is no such thing as absolute truth.

It is becoming more and more apparent that we are not only in trouble as a nation because of our ungodliness, but in many ways we are also in trouble in the church. This is what makes the following verses so important.

IV. THE LORD’S WORD TO THE FAITHFUL (Rev. 2:24-25).

Isn’t it wonderful that the Lord always has people who are faithful? It is not to our glory if we are numbered among the faithful because He is the One Who has given us a love for Himself and a love for His truth which He has given us in the Word.

People come along, like this woman did in Thyatira, and tell us that we have done well as far as we have gone, but that there is more! We need to go deeper. But anything that leads us in any way away from the Word, although it may sound good, and others tempt us to go farther, is of the Devil. They are “the depths of Satan,” and to follow them is to go straight to hell.

Who could possibly give us more than we have in Christ? True happiness, lasting happiness is never found in departing from Scripture. And so we need to, as we used to say, “keep on keeping on.” The Word here is “hold fast.” This means we are to be strong in holding on to what we already have. We have Christ and the benefits of His death and life. What more could we possibly have, and what more could we possibly need. Stay with the Gospel. Stay with the Lord Jesus. Stay with the Word of God. Stay with the people of God.

“Hold fast”! How long? Until He comes. That means for us, *the rest of the way*.

And then the Lord adds a promise, or promises within a promise.

V. THE LORD’S PROMISE (Rev. 2:26-28).

This is actually a twofold promise.

The first has to do with the church and the nations. Right now the church is totally insignificant in the eyes of the world. Power and authority is on the side of the nations. The church has no place in the goals and plans of the world. In fact, to many the church stands in the way, and the world would rejoice to see it gone. But the day is coming when the people of God will rule with the Lord, and the nations will be broken in pieces like a potter’s vessel. That sounds totally impossible now, but it stands written in the Word of God, and therefore it stands absolutely certain.

The second is the promise of “the morning star.” The morning star has to do with certain season when the planet Venus appears in the east just before the rising of the sun. It heralds the end of the night, and arrives as the forerunner of a new day. But what or who is “the morning star” that the Lord will give to His people. Rev. 22:16 gives us our answer, and these, too, are the words of the Lord Jesus. Listen to what Rev. 22:16 gives us as a message from the Lord Himself:

16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, **and the bright and morning star.**

And so for the Lord Jesus to say, “And I will give him (i.e., the faithful one) the morning star,” means that the Lord will give Himself to His people as their supreme Reward.

So the choice stands before us. Who do you choose – Jezebel with all of her ungodliness and immorality, or Jesus, the spotless Son of God Who gave His life a ransom for many? For those of us who know the Savior, our decision is made. Others can have the world with all of its sin, but we take the Lord Jesus Christ.

But knowing that many are undecided, our Lord closed with a final appeal. It is what we have had three times before.

VI. OUR SAVIOR'S URGENT APPEAL (Rev. 2:29).

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Concl: Some who are present today have not yet really heard the Word of the Lord Jesus. If you had, you would not be living like you are living. May the Lord enable you to hear so that you will receive and follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you know the Lord, but sometimes look at the world with a longing eye, may you be awakened by the Holy Spirit to realize that there is a different way that seems right to men, but the end of that way is eternal death. Only in Christ is there true life, and ultimately “fulness of joy” when the Lord gives Himself to you as “the morning star.”