

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

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To the Church in Thyatira – Joss Bray

We have been looking at what Jesus had to say to the churches in the first two chapters of Revelation.

There are seven churches that receive a personal message from Jesus. They were all known to John who recorded them to pass on and they would have been read out in the churches that were all on an important trade route around the area that Turkey is now.

Clearly, there are important principles for the present day church - things that we need to be aware of and learn from. Revelation wasn't included in the bible by chance - but because Jesus wants us to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches – and he repeats this several times in these messages.

There are things to learn about what Jesus commended them for and what he reprimanded them for. There are also great promises and encouragements for the churches. These are all things for us today.

So to recap

The first message was to the church at Ephesus. We saw that they were doing lots of good things and they believed all the right things and they persevered through difficulties. However, they had forsaken their first love. The passion and fire for God and for each other had subsided and although the church looked good on the outside, it had lost its heart.

Somewhere along the way, they changed their focus from what first brought them together and joined them together in their love for God and for fellow Christians. They changed from lovers first, to doers and thinkers first – and Jesus was not impressed – and even said words to the effect that he would close the church if they did not change.

Then it was the church in Smyrna - It was all about being faithful in suffering and overcoming the enemy's plans and the accusers'

testing. We reminded ourselves that we have been saved literally from a terrible future without God and that persevering brings a great reward.

Then there was Pergamum where there was so much immorality that Jesus describes it as where “Satan has his throne”. However – they remained true to the name of Jesus – they did not deny their faith in Jesus – they were prepared to die for Jesus.

But, there were people in the church who did not think that sinning was wrong because they had been saved by the grace of God. They believed that since grace was a free gift of God and all their sins were forgiven, then they could do what they liked. This was a big mistake.

But if they overcame all this – there was a great reward. Heavenly food and refreshment like they have never known, admission into the heavenly kingdom, having been declared innocent and guilt free.

So – there is a lot to think about there – but this week we are looking at Jesus’s message to the church at Thyatira.

A long and tricky message

And it has been used in very unfortunate ways – so it is well worth looking into to try and get to the bottom of it. Here it is:

REV 2:18 "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ¹⁹ I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

REV 2:20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²² So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. ²³ I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

²⁴ Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): ²⁵ Only hold on to what you have until I come.

REV 2:26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations-- ²⁷ He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' --just as I have received authority from my Father. ²⁸ I will also give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Thyatira

Thyatira is the ancient name for Akhisar in the west of modern Turkey and located south of Istanbul. Lydia lived there. She was a dealer in fine cloth mentioned in Acts 16. When she became a believer, she and all the members of her household were baptised. She was a great help to Paul and Silas before and after they were imprisoned.

Jesus introduces himself

He does this in all the messages and each description he uses of himself is slightly different in each one. Here he highlights his eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze. These eyes see with an intensity that cannot be resisted, they burn all the dross off and get to the heart of the matter. Even his feet are transformed and impressive – reflecting his glory in their polished appearance.

Jesus first commends the church

He knows them and what they do – they have love, they have faith. They serve and they persevere. They are doing more and more as time goes on. This is great, and Jesus wants them to know that he knows about these things.

However, something is very wrong

He says “you tolerate that woman Jezebel”. Jezebel was a queen of Israel who was married to Ahab – the king of Israel. The whole story is in 1 Kings 16 and 21 and 2 Kings 9 and several other chapters. Jezebel was the daughter of a king of the Sidonians who worshipped Baal. Jezebel influenced Ahab to worship Baal as well which angered and provoked God very much. Baal worship involved a lot of sexual immorality and practices that were totally against God’s law.

She also schemed to have Naboth killed when Ahab wanted his vineyard and then pursued Elijah when he defeated the prophets of Baal. Elijah was so afraid of her anger that he became suicidal and was ready to give up. She tried to seduce Jehu who had become the king of Israel and she was eventually literally thrown out by her servants – the eunuchs – and killed. The dogs then ate her body.

So in summary, she was manipulative, scheming, undermining of authority, seductive, a false prophet and false teacher and capable of great anger. She was also dead of course – so Jesus is referring to that sort of spirit that produces this sort of thing.

There were some in the church at Thyatira that had been seduced by it. They had allowed themselves to fall for other teaching, other standards, other ways of behaving rather than God's way. They had committed adultery – they are Christians but are having a spiritual affair. We all know that affairs never end well.

Jesus refers to "Satan's so-called deep secrets" which seem to be linked to the Jezebelic spirit. This may well be a Gnostic type of belief where - amongst other things – people believe that there is hidden knowledge and meaning that is above and beyond traditional faith and biblical teaching. This can foster a sense of superiority and "knowing the deep truth" in people which is not compatible with Jesus's teaching – or the fact that he is Lord of Lords and rules in authority and ultimate power.

Jesus will punish those who are taken in and do not repent

There are no two ways about it – Jesus wants repentance from this really destructive sin. He searches hearts and minds and what he sees will not go unpunished – suffering will ensue.

But not all are taken in

Jesus commends those who haven't gone down this route and basically tells them to "hold on" until he comes back. Against a Jezebelic spirit that can be quite hard – as Elijah found. The intensity of anger and undermining can be oppressive, and the false teaching can appear to sound good, but ultimately leads away from Jesus.

To those who do overcome

There is a promise of authority, power, and of the presence of the risen and glorious Jesus himself. Interestingly, these are all things that the Jezebelic spirit wants to undermine and use for its own satanic ends. The truly faithful will actually receive from Jesus what Jezebel falsely promises and can't deliver.

A note of caution

The Jezebelic spirit “label” can be misunderstood – especially by church leaders. Some have over emphasised it and some under emphasised it. Serious harm has been done by either seeing it in every corner, or by not recognising it at all. It can be used by leaders who feel under threat as a sort of disciplining tool – even when that spirit is not there – and church members get crushed. Or it can be ignored, and people in the church can be led astray and leaders destroyed.

And it is not to do with “strong” women – or even women in general. Clearly, Jezebel needed an Ahab – he was just as much to blame for what he did – possibly more in fact – he was the King! It is interesting that the other woman specifically associated with Thyatira in the bible was Lydia – who was clearly a strong woman in business and action, and in leading her household to Christ!

So what does this mean for the church now?

Do we have an ear for what the Spirit says? Well I hope so! Do we really want to obey Jesus and remain faithful under pressure? Yes! Do we want to receive the promises of God which far outweigh earthly offerings? Definitely!

So, learning from the message to the church in Thyatira –

Let us keep on in love for God and love for each other.

Let us not get tired of serving each other and our communities.

Let us keep the faith that God has given us in Jesus

Let us persevere – keep going – and do even more than we were doing before – even when the enemy opposes us – perhaps especially when he opposes us.

We need to be aware that the Jezebelic spirit is characterised by intense anger, the undermining of Godly authority, false teaching and prophesy, a sense of “spiritual superiority” and “deep secrets” that sound seductively good and plausible but lead away from Christ, sexual immorality, scheming, manipulation and deceit.

But the Jezebelic spirit – or its ways of thinking and behaving – can rise up in any of us if we are not vigilant. We need to examine our hearts and encourage others to help us in this as well. If we see one of our brothers or sisters going astray – then it is up to us to gently come alongside and point this out. After all – Jesus is clear that otherwise there will be severe consequences for people that do not repent.

In conclusion

The stakes are high for the church – for every church.

Remember above all that we overcome difficulties, pressures and enemy actions because of the Spirit of God who lives in us:

1JN 4:4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

And that Jesus says

MT 16:18..... I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.