**Church of Thyatira**

**Revelation 2:18-29**

**July 20, 2024**

**The City of Thyatira:** Thyatira was an industrial city established by Seleucus I Nicator (a general who succeeded Alexander the Great ca. 330 BC), who founded the Seleucid Empire (Paul 91). It was located 40 miles southeast of Pergamos in a broad valley that lead to the Hermus River. In 190 B.C. the Romans entered the valley and conquered the city. It was located along major trade routes between Sardis and Pergamos and a major road connected it with Smyrna. Thus, its economic growth was stimulated by trade from these cities and it was a center of slave trade in the region (Paul 91). Local artisans produced a large variety of goods including items from bakers, painters, tanners, tailors, wool, linen, and leather workers, potters, and craftsmen in wood and metals including bronze-smiths. Lydia, who was converted in Philippi came from this town and was a dealer in purple cloth (see below). It was an industrial town that was controlled by trade guilds (unions) for all the craftsmen.

Socially, there was little separation between private and religious life and the trade guilds became meeting places for religious, union, and social activities (Paul 91). The unions paid homage to the pagan gods Artemis (goddess of the hunt, wilderness, wild animals, childbirth) and Apollo (god of the sun, light, music, prophecy) and members of the unions were obligated to attend festivals in honor of these gods, and to eat meat in their temples, and to engage in idolatry and sexual promiscuity. Noncompliance with these rules meant expulsion from the trade unions, unemployment, and poverty. Thus, Christians who refused to participate in these activities risked losing their jobs, material possessions, and were considered outcasts of the society. Life was difficult for believers because of the pressures from the trade guilds to participate in pagan festivals, idolatry, and to commit sexual immorality.

It may be that the gospel was first brought to Thyatira through the efforts of Lydia, a seller of purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was converted through the ministry of the Apostle Paul in Philippi (cf. Acts 16:14-15).

 There was a Christian (Greek Orthodox) community in Thyatira from NT times until 1922 when the Turkish government forced them out and the archbishop moved to London, England (Paul 92).

**2:18-19 *And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, these things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass: I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.***

A. The description of Jesus Christ to the church at Thyatira

 1. *“Son of God”;* this is the only place this phrase is used in the book of Revelation. It does not come from the first chapter. Jesus as the true Son of God would have been a challenge to Roman imperial authority. Domitian (in power at the time), is described in inscriptions at Thyatira as son of deified Vespasian, emperor, and high priest (Paul 92). Apollo, god of the sun and light also was considered a son of the gods. The use of the phrase encouraged the readers and reminded them of Jesus’ sovereignty and deity (Ps 2:7 Rev 2:27).

 2. "*Eyes like unto a flame of fire*” cf. 1:14-15 where Christ is described in similar terms as a judge. Nothing escapes his eyes; he, himself, is the one “who searches the minds and hearts”, cf. 2:23 (Kistemaker 136).

 3. “*and feet like fine brass*"; another reference to his judgment. This alloy which some think was made of copper and zinc was durable, stable, and firm. The gleam of the metal would catch people’s eyes and attention, so that they would notice his presence (Kistemaker 136). He is prepared to tread under his feet the enemies of the gospel.

 B. The knowledge of the Son of God

 1. *I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience;* to five of the churches, Jesus says he knows their works (deeds), i.e., Ephesus, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira.

 a. “Knows” (*oida*) means full knowledge; he is thoroughly acquainted with the people in the church and their deeds.

 b. Love (*agape*) and faith (*pistis)* are internal qualities leading to the expression of external acts of service (*diakonia)* and patience (*hupomone)* (Kistemaker 137)

 c. Love is the fulfillment of the Law (Matt 22:37-40), expressed both towards God and man; nothing is greater.

 d. Faith can mean trust and is the deep, continual, trusting reliance on Jesus.

 e. Service is the word from which we derive “deacon”, meaning generically, to wait on tables and includes humble lowly service; what the Master expects to find his servants doing; or, it could refer to the official work of a deacon (doubtful, I Tim 3:13). f. Patience; means perseverance; progressing towards the goal in the face of adversity (II Tim 1:1-14; 2:1-13; Jer 12:1-5).

 2. “*And as for your works, the last are more than the first”.* The church could receive no greater word of praise from the Lord (Kistemaker 137). Their labor of love, faith, service, and endurance were constantly increasing (I Thes 1:2-10). Remember that Ephesus was condemned for its lack of love whereas, here, the church is told that its love and all of its favorable attributes are increasing.

**2:20 *Nevertheless, I have this against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.***

A. The Lord strongly rebukes the church

 1. The change from praise to rebuke by the Lord is abrupt. The source of indictment for spiritual wickedness is allowing “*Jezebel*” to teach in the church. In spite of all the good works the church recently performed, this was unacceptable to the Lord. The Lord only had one principle objection against this church ("*a few things*" [KJV] is omitted from the best manuscripts), i.e., they tolerated “Jezebel” who taught and seduced members of the church to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. This offset their many good virtues.

 2. She apparently was a member of the church but was not a messenger of divine truth. Her true name and identity are not known, but her actions were similar to Jezebel of the O.T. (I Kings 16:33; 21:1-29; 19:2; II Kings 9:33-35), who was the epitome of corruption and a symbol of immorality and idolatry. In the O.T., Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab. She “urged Ahab to worship the pagan god, Baal (Phoenician, Canaanite god of fertility, reproduction, rain, storms, crops) and the goddess Asherah (goddess of love, consort of Baal, mother of gods) and to construct a (pagan) temple and sacred pole” for Asherah (I Kings 16:29-33; 21:25, II Kings 9:30- 37) (Kistemaker 137).

B. Jezebel called “herself a prophetess.”

 1. Women were permitted to prophesy in the N.T. (Lu 2:36; Acts 21:9; I Cor 11:5). Jezebel was a prophetess and held an influential place in the church; she was a powerful, recognized teacher who went unchallenged but her teaching was deceptive and evil.

 2. Prophesy can mean to foretell (predict) the future or to forth tell (preach) truth. Prophesy was very important in the early church, and, after the gift of apostleship, was the highest temporary gift in the church (I Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; Rom 12:6). She called herself a prophetess, but her teaching was false.

 3. Jezebel’s sin: “*to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols”.* She was well respected and was able to speak deceptively and the church leaders erred in tolerating her teaching. She persuaded a group in the church to engage in sexual immorality and to eat food offered to idols. This explains her name “Jezebel”, since she committed similar sins to her O.T. namesake. Under the appearance of true religion, she led people into the sin of adultery and the sin of spiritual apostasy
 (idolatry).

4. How did all this happen? We, quite possibly, have a situation similar to the kind of problem that the apostle Paul dealt with in I Cor 8, though the pressure on the Thyatiran Christians to conform would have been greater. The powerful trade guilds would have made it difficult for any Christian to earn a living without belonging to a guild. But membership involved attendance at guild banquets, which in turn meant eating meat which had been offered to idols. What was a Christian to do? If he did not conform he was out of a job.

5. So, Jezebel came up with the solution: She apparently taught that an idol was of no consequence (I Cor 8:4), and advised Christians to eat such meals. However, these meals were in honor of the guild gods and with the alcohol and feasting, they all readily degenerated into sexual looseness and immorality. That the Christians would have welcomed such a compromise is no real surprise. It enabled them to maintain a Christian profession while at the same time, satisfying their guild leaders and keeping their jobs. Appearances can be deceiving.

**2:21 “*And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality and she did not repent”.***

A. The Lord is patient and gave her time to repent of her immorality. The Lord’s judgments are not hasty. He gave her time (*chronos*) to repent but she would not. The words “allow” and“to teach and seduce my servants” (v 20), and “I gave her time” and “she did not” (v 21) indicate that a period of time has lapsed since Jezebel entered the church and began teaching. It might be that faithful pastors and teachers and even John, himself, might have tried to persuade her to repent and stop her deceptive teaching (Kistemaker 138).

B. “she did not repent”; refers to some definite event in the past when the Lord confronted her and called her to repentance. But she was unwilling. God is a God of mercy and does not want the death of sinners. He wants everyone to repent and come to obedience (Ezek 18:30-32). But if a person refuses to listen to his warnings, they choose the way of death. Jezebel refused all the Lord’s pleas to repent and unfortunately will go the way of death (Kistemaker 138).

**2:22 “*Indeed (behold) I will cast her into a sick bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.”***

A*.* Indeed or behold (*idou*, Gk) is a rhetorical device to slow down the reading of the text and call special attention to it (“*I tell you*”) (Fanning 152).

“*bed*" (*kline,* Gk) is a play on words (cf. 2:22-23). Since she deceived people to commit sexual immorality in a bed, the Lord will punish her by throwing her into a bed, a “*sick bed*”. The Greek simply reads “bed”, but the translators rendered the word as sick bed from the O.T. concept (Ex 21:18). The contrast is between a bed of adultery and a bed of sickness (or a bed of suffering), an action that Christ will do to her. It is an affliction with some sort of physical illness intended to produce repentance.

B. “*I will cast” is* an emphatic use of the present tense (I am casting) to emphasize that Christ was already to execute judgment on her and her followers.

 1. Likewise, *“those who commit adultery with her*”; refers primarily to those who followed her teaching, but since her teaching involved sexual immorality, the literal meaning must be included in the idea of adultery*.*

 2. I will cast into “great tribulation” carries the sense of severe distress (Fanning 152). In Acts 7:11, this phrase (*thilipsis megala*, Gk) means famine and starvation in Joseph’s time, which means difficult physical suffering or need (cf. II Cor 6:4; 8:2; Phil 4:14; Jas 1:27) (Fanning 152).

 3. Just as Jezebel was offered an opportunity to repent, there is hope her followers will repent and avoid this judgment. “*Unless they repent of her works*” expresses the possibility of their repentance and reinforces her culpability in their sin.

 4. I will cast into "great tribulation" may have a present and future use. "*Thilipsis*" (Gk) is used 45 times in the N.T. and can be used generally to signify trouble, distress, hard circumstances, or suffering in the 1st century (Acts 7:11; Rom 5:3, 8:35; II Cor 8:2; Phil 1:16). It also is used of the eschatologic Great Tribulation (Matt 24:9, 15, 31; Mark 13:24, Rev 7:14). Does it signify both great tribulation for Jezebel and her followers and the Great Tribulation for similar sinning believers just before the return of the Lord?

 This is possible and cannot be ruled out.

 5. “*unless they repent of their deeds”;* The Lord always holds out mercy to those who will repent. This is true throughout the whole book. Although these are very severe punishments, the Lord holds open the opportunity to repent.

**2:23 “*I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the minds and the hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.*"**

A. The Lord judges the unrepentant

 1. If there is no repentance by Jezebel and her associates, the Lord says “I will *kill her children with death”.* It is a very serious reminder for the unrepentant*.* It defines what happens to Jezebel and her “children” (i.e., co-adulterers, v 22; or, “children” could represent another younger “hardened” 2nd generation group of followers of Jezebel) when cast into “*great tribulation*”*.* The *“*great tribulation" mentioned in v. 22 does include "death", cf. Matt 24:9. The death could be caused by “pestilence” or disease.

 2. "*all the churches*" will witness Jezebel’s judgment. This represents the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 and all churches everywhere as referenced at the end of each of the seven letters (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) (Fanning 153). When Jezebel and her followers are put to death it is an emphatic, recognizable divine judgment of such magnitude that "*all the churches*" recognize God's hand in the judgment, i.e., that He is the one who searches the minds (*nephrous*) and the hearts (*kardias*) and judges accordingly.

 *3. nephrous* (Gk) is the word from which we get kidneys (cf. nephron) and means mind and thoughts. Along with the heart (*kardia*), they together represent the innermost being of an individual; the kidneys were looked upon as the seat of the emotions and the heart as the seat of the intellect (Heb 4:12). After searching the mind and heart, the Lord brings judgment.

 4. Fanning writes a very appropriate note of caution for all believers: “Christ will judge every person based on his searching knowledge of that person’s inward motives and outward actions. The true righteousness of someone’s conduct and intentions may not always be obvious, and “Jezebel’s” authoritative persona had evidently overwhelmed the discernment of some in the church. But not Christ’s. God’s penetrating awareness of all human desires and affections is a common biblical affirmation (Ps 7:9; Prov 24:12; Jer 11:20; 17:10; 20:12-13; Acts 1:24; Rom 8:27; Heb 4:12-13; cf. I Cor 2:10 of the Spirit). Here the Son of God (v 18b) claims that divine knowledge for himself (cf. John 2:24). And so, Christ will not be fooled or show favorites in his judgment (Rev 2:23c): “I will give to each of you according to your works”. “The prospect of facing his discerning and fully righteous judgment should prompt all humans to cry out for mercy and commit themselves to true obedience” (Fanning 154).

B. If this is the Great Tribulation (Matt 24:15) for the generation of believers alive on earth just prior to the Lord’s return, then “all the churches” are on the earth during the Great Tribulation and witness the judgment of the Lord; this will produce much needed repentance in all the churches (I Pet 4:7-19; Matt 13:24-30; II Thes 2:1-4; Luke 18:8; Rev 12:7-17).

**2:24 *“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden”***

A. Jesus separates out the faithful, obedient believers who have not followed Jezebel’s teaching. *“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as who do not have this doctrine.”* This verse is an exhortation to the godly remnant.

B. The Lord will not put another burden on them for righteous living. It assumes the previous godly virtues (burdens) of love, faith, service, perseverance, and good works are sufficient. A "*burden"* is any other requirement for godly living

C. Jezebel’s teaching:

 1. Jesus characterizes the teaching of Jezebel as the "*depths of Satan*" (immorality and idolatry; cf. I Cor 2:10 the "deep things of God").

 3. "*As they say*" can be the conclusion of the previous thought (best) or be an introduction to the next phrase. If the former, the faithful believers have characterized the doctrine of Jezebel as the “depths of Satan”. If the latter then the faithful believers know that God will not place any other requirement on the church for holy living, except to “hold fast” to what they were already doing. See the next verse.

**2:25 “*But hold fast what you have till I come”***

A. Jesus tells the church to be faithful to his commands.

 1*.* "*Hold fast”* explains “*no other burden*” of verse 24. It means to be faithful; don’t give in; take a firm grip on “*what you have*” and keep it; don’t let it go; keep doing it.

 2. It refers to their entire walk with the Lord; their love, faith, service, perseverance, and good works (2:19) as well as their doctrine and hope of the Lord’s return. Do not accept the teaching of Jezebel or her followers and do not turn your back on “*what you have*”

3. They are still expected to forbid any further teaching of Jezebel. She will soon be judged by the Lord and thrown into a bed of sickness. However, before that happens, the faithful in the church must put a stop to her teaching.

B. Jesus says to hold fast *“till I come*". It is a reference to the eschatologic second coming of Christ.

 1. Key: since he is talking to obedient believers, he is not talking about coming in judgment (cf. 2:5); this can only mean the Day of the Lord and the rapture of the church. This lends strong support to the concept of a near-far prophecy of v. 22-23 (where the church at Thyatira, i.e., the “near” 1st century church, pictures end time events in the last generation of churches just before the Lord comes, i.e., the “far”.

 2. What is pictured by the Thyatiran church are churches in the far distant future (at the end of the age) observing other churches and unfaithful believers severely chastened/judged for their tolerance of false teachers and sinfulness and cast into Great Tribulation.

This is intended to cleanse the church (I Pet 4:7-19; Matt 13:24-30; II Thes 1:3-10; 2:1-4; Luke 18:1-8).

**2:26-27 “*And he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels—as I have received from my father”***

A. “*he who overcomes (nikao*, Gk; cf. “Nike”, English) *and keeps my works”* includes all believers (every true believer is an “overcomer”). “My works” is the same as “*what you have*” in 2:25 and refers to the same things, i.e., their love, faith, service, perseverance, good works, doctrine, and hope of the Lord’s return, in contrast to Jezebel’s works. Overcoming (i.e., by all true believers) is absolutely required to receive the promise.

B. "*end*" (*telos*) has 2 possible meanings: A. the end of the lives (i.e., death) of the Thyatiran believers; or B. the "end of the age" (better; appears to be synonymous with “*till I come*”, v. 25 and fit the context of 26-27); it is the final "harvest" at the “end of the age” including the separation of the "wheat and tares", Matt 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50; 28:20; 24:1-14; I Cor 1:7-8. What Christ promises to the overcomer is a share in his rule over the whole world when he returns at the end of the age to rule the world (Fanning 156).

C. "*power over the nations*" is a quotation of Ps 2:7-9. “Power” (*exousia* = authority) is an important responsible position of authority awarded to believers in the Millennial Kingdom; it requires faithful effort, obedience, and faith now by believers and is received as a reward at the judgment seat of Christ. Psalm 2 begins with the rule of God’s anointed (v 2) who is the King of Zion and God’s Son (2:6-7). God grants him authority over “the nations” to the “ends of the earth” (v 8). Finally, God’s pledge to his Son is transferred to the overcomer: “you shall break them with a rod of iron, you shall shatter them like earthenware” (Fanning 156). This speaks to the ultimate power granted to the Son and his overcomers to crush resistance in the Millennial Kingdom. Resistance to God and the practice of sin will be crushed like clay pots. Christ will reign with supreme authority and willful sin will be dealt with swiftly.

D. "*rule*" (*poimanei;* usual verb for shepherding) *with a rod of iron”;* not the usual staff (Ps 23:4) but an iron scepter; “rule” is a word usually used to describe ashepherd, who administers mercy and care and direction to those who are his sheep as opposed to the goats (Matt 25:31-46). However, here it is linked to the strong idea that the shepherd will rule over the Lord’s kingdom and smash any sinful opposition, i.e., “*they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels”;* it alludes to the strong, autonomous, and independent nature of a shepherd protecting his sheep (they are his sheep; it is his grass; it is his field; he provides everything to the sheep, which he owns; his power over the sheep is complete). The expectation of sharing Christ’s rule over the world comes from the vision of Dan 7:9-14, “where one like the Son of man” comes before the Ancient of Days and receives rule and authority over the countries of the world. This is further explained in Daniel 7:18, 22 where “the saints of the Most-High” receive dominion that replaces the previous evil world rulers. This was understood in early Christianity as the future rule of Messiah and his saints (Matt 19:28; I Cor 6:2-3; II Tim 2:12; Heb 2:5-9) (Fanning 156).

**2:28-9 “*and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”.***

A. "*morning star*"; could be taken as representative of the believer’s final triumph, or, possibly it is a reference to Christ himself in his role as returning king who will rapture and resurrect his church at its time. Christ is referred to as the “*bright and morning star*” in 22:16 and it is highly probable that this is a reference to Christ which the Father gives to the faithful church members. It is a promise that the overcoming Christian will be part of God’s completed eternal salvation represented in Christ who is the “bright and morning star” (Rev 22:16) (Fanning 157).

B. “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”*

 1. This first phrase, *He who has an ear, let him hear* comes from the often repeated and familiar saying of Jesus (Matt 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35). In Revelation, the saying is expanded to include the additional phrase, *what the Spirit says to the churches,* and it is repeated in each of the seven letters to the churches, 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22. The first phrase refers to the *God given* capability of a person to hear along with an accompanying willingness to listen. The second part is a command to listen attentively and obediently to the word of God given by the Holy Spirit.

 2. Very importantly, the message to the church at Thyatira is directed not only to the congregation there, but to all *churches*. The message is intended for churches in all locations and all ages, even up to the time of the 2nd coming of Christ. KEY: Because of its universal application for all churches in all ages, it is best to understand its prophetic implications as a near-far prophecy, with application first for the church at Thyatira; and secondly, for all the churches up to the time of the parousia of Christ at the end of the age. This means that churches and individuals in existence right up to the time of our Lord’s return are subject to the same rebuke, warning, and judgment described in this letter if they (we) should follow the ways of “Jezebel” and *not repent*.