

Revelation 2:18–29

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 May 2024

Preacher: Jeremy Meeks

[0 : 00] will be in Revelation chapter 2, verses 18 through 29. And 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. 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 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. 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 earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my father.

[1 : 44] And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Please be seated. A church's convictions about what they believe about the Bible are occasionally put to the test.

A text about peace in a time of war. A text on money when the church is just flat broke. Or a text about sexual immorality and idolatry on Mother's Day.

Happy Mother's Day. Like listen, if you're here for like the first time and you're going, what the heck is going on? Let me just put your mind at ease.

The reason why we're preaching this text on this day is simply because this text comes after the last text that we preached last Sunday. But I believe, and maybe you believe, that all of the Bible is good every day for all of life.

[3 : 05] Thus, this text counts for today too. Do you believe that? I hope you do. If not, I hope to persuade you of such a thing by the time that we're done.

And I ask you just to bear with me. To tolerate this text even for the next few minutes. You know, toleration is a tricky thing.

It is both beneficial, but it can be brutal. Just take Voltaire, the 17th century champion of reason. Here's what he says.

What is tolerance? Tolerance is the consequence of humanity. We are all formed of frailty and error. Let us pardon reciprocally each other's folly.

This is the first law of nature. Tolerance can be a real beneficial thing, but it can also be brutal. The late, brilliant, atheist Christopher Hitchens noted, I learned that very often the most intolerant and narrow-minded people are the ones who congratulate themselves on their tolerance and open-mindedness.

[4 : 16] There's something touching, but also troublesome with tolerance. The question is, when do we slide from touching into troublesome? That's the question that a text like this will answer for us.

So I take for my title this morning, The Trouble with Tolerance. This morning we are, like we have been for the past few weeks, reading somebody else's mail. A very unique set of letters in the Bible written by Jesus to churches.

These letters are for us, but not to us, and this letter is Jesus' letter to the church at Thyatira. In many ways, it's similar to the last letter that we looked at last week, the letter to Pergamum. As Dave told us, a both and kind of church. In Pergamum, there was significant political pressure from outside the church to participate in society that would lead them to disobey God, especially regarding religious practices and sexual standards.

You might go like, hold on a second, I wasn't paying real close attention to this letter, but it sounds very similar to that one, and you would be right. Apparently, the first century is not very different than the 21st century.

[5 : 37] And apparently, Jesus thought that this was such an issue that he doubled down on it and wrote two letters that are very similar. So it behooves us to say similar things this week than we did last week, simply because we're trying to follow what Jesus wrote to the church.

Jesus has some challenging things to say in this letter, but he starts with the upside. The upside is given to us in verses 18 and 19. I mean, shoot, one significant upside is the Jesus who is writing to this church.

He's quite a figure. I don't know if you've ever received a letter from anybody special. I remember when I was in my teens, I figured out that in Trivial Pursuit, which is one of the greatest games of all time, there was an error on one of the cards.

And so I wrote a letter to the makers of Trivial Pursuit. It said, you dummies got this one wrong. And they wrote me back and said, you're absolutely correct.

And I was expecting them to say, so you get free board games for life. Nope. They just said, you're right, but it felt good to be like, I am smarter than the writers of Trivial Pursuit. Hmm.

[6 : 50] I don't know if you've ever gotten a cool letter. This letter is quite something, mainly because of the one who wrote it. He's the Son of God. Very common title for Jesus, but it's only found here in the book of Revelation.

It's significant because it establishes His authority over anybody else. He's the boss. As God's true Son, He has, according to this passage, eyes of fire and feet of burnished bronze.

His eyes see everything. They burn through all the mess. His feet of burnished bronze, they're steadfast. They're not going anywhere. He sees everything. He ain't moving.

He's a fixed Son of God over everything. Quite a Jesus. It's not a Jesus you want to mess with, but isn't it the kind of God that you would want if one existed? One who is in charge could actually do something about the world and wasn't going anywhere.

Didn't just decide, oh, I'm going to do this today and that tomorrow. No, He sees everything, knows everything. He knows exactly what He's doing. I mean, shoot, even if you don't believe in God, I'd be willing to bet all the money I don't have that you wish a God like that existed.

[8 : 06] One who has standards and upholds them, that would be a significant upside in this world. Another upside is that this church, a lot like the church at Ephesus, the first church that it is written to, has a lot going for it.

They have a lot of works. Not just a lot of busyness, but a lot of admirable, specifically Christian, Christian traits. For example, unlike the church at Ephesus, this church, according to verse 19, was growing in its love.

Not only that, but Jesus also praises the church for its faith, its service, its patient endurance, and its hard work.

This is quite the church. You might even say it's a model church. Who doesn't want to be a part of a church like that? My goodness, you might say.

What more could one ask for? This is all upside. And let me be clear, these are significantly good things. They're things that should provoke us in this church.

[9 : 15] We should want to be like the church at least up until verse 19. So far, so good. But we dare not think we can pick and choose how we ought to live as a church.

Jesus is not happy with this church. As he's about to make clear, there is plenty of upside. There is also a significant downside.

And you move from the upside in 18 and 19 to the downside in verses 20 to 23. To put it mildly, the downside is the church is tolerating some rather problematic false teaching.

There seems to be a woman who's claiming to be a prophetess who is seducing some in the church to, according to verse 20, practice sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols.

She gets a nickname, Jezebel, which I don't know how much you know about the Bible, but is not one you want to have applied to you. You can go ahead and read about her. 1 Kings 16 to about 2 Kings 9 where dogs lick her blood after they kill her.

[10:30] It's great. Things go from not so great to terrible very quickly when it comes to Jezebel. Ahab, the king of Israel, marries her and very quickly Jezebel starts promoting the worship of Baal, a false god, and things go downhill from there.

Very quickly, she starts killing everybody who isn't on board with this whole worship of Baal thing, even seeking to kill the prophets of God. Now, a woman like that is being tolerated in the church that Jesus writes to.

You see, unlike Pergamum, that church that we looked at last week, Thyatira was not a center of the worship of Rome's political power, but it was a center of trade.

And trades functioned kind of like unions function today. Each union, though, was a very religiously centered thing.

They all had their own gods, and so you participate in the little club that we have. You get a job you can work by being part of our little guild and part of the things that the guild does as we worship this god and everything that comes along with it.

[11:40] So you have the false religious practices, at least those that are opposed to Christianity, plus a whole bunch of sex stuff, because, you know, don't know if you've figured this out yet in life or not, but sex is a powerful thing.

All through human history, sex and religion have been tied together. There's nothing to do. So here, it seems as if this Jezebel character was teaching the church that participation was fine.

It's as if she's saying, I mean, look, everybody's got to make a living, right? Just go along to get along. You don't want to be a social outcast, do you?

And the downside is that some in the church are tolerating this kind of teaching. I wonder if it sounds familiar.

It should. The religions, for sure, have changed, but not much has changed in the last 2,000 years. Just take the folk religion of consumerism, which claims that the world is whatever you want it to be, to express yourself with a very tailored set of products that you can kind of, but maybe, but probably not afford, which won't leave you satisfied or accepted or anything, but it'll at least give you the illusion for a moment until you figure out that that's not the thing, but maybe you can get another thing that we could also sell you, and if you get that thing, then maybe you'll fit in until you don't want to and want to join another group, in which case, we can also sell you that.

[13:19] And when you've got that, you also won't be satisfied, but I promise that utopia is right around the corner as long as you grasp for it, so keep grasping, kid, or at least post pictures on Instagram that show that you might be doing the thing so you can lie to all your friends.

Shoot, even your sexual preferences are up for grabs. Assume nothing, try everything. Change at whim. The only real standard is that you engage in this never-ending cycle of self-discovery and never quit because one day you can figure it out, but maybe not, but probably, but we'll just see. One day you'll be happy if you just try hard enough. If you don't do this, you're both repressed and repressing.

You don't have to like it, but everyone's got to make a living, right? Just go along to get along. You don't want to be a social outcast, do you?

You see, we may live in a very far distance from Thyatira as far as geography or time goes, but culturally, there are next-door neighbors. Let me be very clear.

[14:43] I am in absolutely no way talking about what happens outside of the church. But what happens outside of the church when it infiltrates and is tolerated by those inside the church?

Here's the thing. I don't know if you figured this out yet or not, but the world's going to do what the world's going to do. Jesus is not mad in this letter at the situation of the world, but that that situation is tolerated when practiced inside the church.

See, here's the thing, friends. It doesn't matter how much upside there is in a church that has this kind of downside. How do I know that?

Well, you just keep following along in the text. Jesus is about to fix this problem with a vengeance. Notice that according to verse 21, this Jezebel woman, whoever she was, was given time and opportunity to repent, and the time for repentance is over.

Jesus is going to come as a destructive force. Now, there does seem to be some hope for those who are, verse 22, those who commit adultery with her, those wrapped up in all of these teachings and practices, if they repent, just turn away from her and toward God.

[16:09] They do that and they'll be spared. Which means, friend, as you and I are reading somebody else's mail, if you here this morning are going like, oh no, I live firmly in Jezebel's camp, then flee to Jesus, the perfect and immovable judge, because he's going to act and what he does, according to verse 23, the whole world's going to know about it, and the church will benefit in seeing a practical example of Jesus' holiness and judgment upon the church.

the fact that Jesus acts as judge will, according to what Jesus himself writes, verse 23, all the churches will know that I am he who searches the mind and the heart, and I will give each of you according to your works.

This is the, this is the complicated nature of being the son of God, eyes of fire and feet of burnished bronze, he's going nowhere, he sees everything and he's in charge of it all, which means he knows you, and he knows me.

He knows us, which is either the best news I've got for you this morning or the worst nightmare humanly imaginable. I wonder how many of us are convinced we're fooling the whole world.

It says in testimony time you don't have to raise your hand, but I would be shocked that in a room this big some of you don't have some serious secrets that you're trying to hide from everybody.

[17:55] Know this, you could fool us but you can't fool Jesus. He sees it all, he ain't moving and he's in charge of everything. that Jesus is coming in destruction against this church for tolerating the practices of the world when they're inside the church.

Sometimes negative examples are the most powerful ones. This false prophetess and those who are tolerating her teaching will be taken out and friends, if you think that we're going to be different or whatever because we're Americans or something, you're wrong.

I don't know about you but every Sunday that I show up here I'm kind of shocked this is still happening and you should be too. I'm also incredibly grateful that this is all still happening but it's a miracle that all of us keep showing up and all of this keeps going on but know this, never take it for granted, always be grateful and know that should we tolerate the things that happen outside, inside here this place not only will but deserves to burn to the ground and when it does if it does Jesus will be able to step back put a notch on the wall and go how many times I got to do this?

Yeah, there's some upside to this church but there's also some downside.

You might think well, okay, here's the thing what are we supposed to do then? I don't want to be that church I don't know about you I don't want to be that church so what are we supposed to do? Because I mean living in this kind of way seems very challenging and it is.

[19:47] So how could we ever avoid becoming a church like that? Thankfully, Jesus gives us the answer as he moves from the upside to the downside to the right side in verses 24 through 29 here's some good news and man, this is some seriously good news what Jesus wants from those who hear his words and follow him is rather simple it's right there in verse 25 hold on to what you have until I come let me tell you what it doesn't say change the world fix everything remove all the sin from everywhere in Woodlawn if that's the call I quit and you should too why?

simple because you've got two hands in 24 hours you cannot change the world at least in the sense that we often tend to think about it you might be thinking hold on we just celebrated administer justice and like kids and stuff like come on oh sure we can we can move the needle and we should be grateful for every small act of kindness generosity training righteousness that we pursue here in our community I am not demeaning or degrading or downplaying any of that but if you think you can just fix everything it's over for all of us before it starts no friends the way that we keep this place alive is not by going out and fixing everything out there that we do good to those out there but it is by holding on to what we've been given this is the flip side of toleration if the downside is you all are tolerating

Jezebel's work inside then the upside is all you got to do is stick with what I gave you to stick with the truth of God's word come what may though simple sometimes hanging on to the truth and not tolerating false teaching is the hardest thing to do in the whole world I don't know if you're feeling it today wait for it you'll feel it eventually I wish it were otherwise but the church is surrounded by those who are teaching false things about God and how we are to live and they are far too often tolerated in the church you might ask why is it tolerated easy because they have the culture on their side and living counter culturally has always been uncomfortable capitulation often sadly trumps

courage why why

I mean you don't want to look like an idiot that's one thing who wants to look like they belong to some time in the past another reason though is found in what those on the right side are defined by those who according to verse 24 do not know the deep things of Satan almost surely a play on words and a jab at the opponents in Thyatira this Jezebel like woman and her people were probably promoting their false teachings as the deep things of God you see here's the thing like we should be a part of everything because God created everything so just try a little bit of everything and it's okay because if there is one God who's over everything then all the gods belong to him so just worship whatever

God you want just try a little bit of that keep God like the main God but you can have like PS gods like many gods under the gods build like a god tower gods at the top and all the other gods go along to get along you don't want to be a social outcast do you everybody's got to work you see capitulation often starts as a slow slide into the dark side of curiosity to want to know the deep things this is how curiosity leads to destruction works we rationalize our souls away I just have to get a peek at the dark side so I know what the light side looks like or if God made it all I should just try a little bit of this and a little bit of that so I can really know how could I ever preach the gospel to drug addicts if I don't try all the drugs myself which sounds stupid but that was me at 17 I'm just going to try it all why not

[25 : 04] God made plants I get it don't you want to just know a little bit more no matter what curiosity is a gift as long as it does not drive us to know that which we ought not to know to take a deep dive into the deep things of Satan I've been thinking a lot this week about Deuteronomy 29 29 one of my favorite verses in the whole Bible but also an uncomfortable one for one who's dedicated his life to philosophy and ethics!

But the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever that we may do all the works of this law Friends content yourself with what God has given you and not with the things that he hasn't God has told us how to live he's given us a good design on what to do with our bodies how we worship what we worship now if you're new to Christianity you might be thinking like well I don't know what all of that is well you're in the right place one of the big reasons we get together every week is so that we can all learn every single week just a little bit more about what it means to follow Jesus one of the reasons why we encourage you to read the Bible with other people in this church so that you can learn a little bit more every day about what it means to follow Jesus nobody's got it all figured out day one we're all in the process of learning what it means to follow Jesus that's what we're called to do hold fast to what God has given us friends and not the deep things of Satan we may be blamed and we will likely be blamed for being on the wrong side of history but we will always be on the right side of God for doing so the good news is that there's great reward for doing so according to this passage the reward is nothing short of eternal happiness for those who hold on to the truth of God's word come what may how do I know that well look at what it says here verse 26 those who are on the right side of God are called overcomers defined as those who keep Jesus' works until the end interestingly enough in this passage

Jesus knows the church's works verse 19 the works of Jezebel verse 22 will judge on the basis of all their works verse 23 yet the promise to conquerors for those who ultimately hold to his works it is participation in Jesus' words and works to the end that matters what we believe and how we live are never divorced from each other in any part of the Bible through his words and works we have been made into his people and now being his people we are to do as he did is that you this morning are you a disciple of Jesus one who faithfully follows after him come what may looking forward to a future in which righteousness will dwell and you'll participate you might say that sounds too good to be true I know I think it sounds too good to be true but what

Jesus tells us it's right there verses 26 and 27 I will give authority to the overcomers authority over the nations this language comes straight out of Psalm 2 wherein the people rejoice of the promised great king to come from God one who will fix everything and bring joy peace and rest forever according to all of the Bible Jesus is that king and the overcomers are promised the blessing of ruling with him in that ideal place for all time if that weren't enough Jesus will give us the morning star which I know sounds weird but if you keep reading in Revelation in chapter 22 verse 16 it's a title that Jesus himself gets so Jesus essentially says if you just make it to the end if you just hold on to what I gave you you get me so let me ask you friends is it enough don't you want to go there don't you want to be a part of that forever eternal happiness is for those who hold to the truth of

God's word come what may it's not wishful thinking it's a promise from the son of
[30 : 50] God himself to all who would hear and follow him let's pray God we thank you for this
complicated letter a letter with plenty of upside and downside a letter that helps us understand what
the right side is regarding toleration I pray that you would help us to hold on help us to hold on to
the truth of your word no matter what happens knowing that eternal happiness is our promised
reward

I pray for those here who are intrigued by these claims and promises would you open their eyes
would you help them to wrestle with who Jesus is pray for those who are in the camp of Jezebel this
morning those who realize that they both promote the ways of the world they tolerate it in the
church encourage others to do likewise would you help them to turn today help us all hear the word
of Jesus to the churches to flee to him to follow after him all the days of our life waiting for the day
that will come when we will rule with him in Jesus name we pray amen to
Thank you.