

Revelation 2:18–29

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Our scripture reading today is taken from the book of Revelation 2, verses 18-29. This can be found in the Blue Bibles provided for you on page 10-29.

Again, the scripture text is Revelation 2, 18-29 on page 10-29. Please stand for the reading of God's word.

And to the angels of the church in Teotia, write the words of the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire and whose feet are like burnished bones.

I know your works, your love and faith and service and patience endurance, and that your latter works exceeded the first.

But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Isabel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

[1 : 18] I gave her time to repent, but she refused 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 dead, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.

But to the rest of you in Teotia, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you must 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 load of iron.

As when earth's paths are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father, and I will give him the morning star.

[2 : 43] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Well, before we begin preaching, I just want to say how great it is to have the Reddick family here, and having five children of my own, just a joy to know that there are other little ones already entering into the community of faith.

What a great day that is for us. So, welcome back. It's good to have you. Last week, Pastor Jackson put us on a tour bus, and it was the tour bus through Pergamum.

I'd like to put you on a tour bus today through the words of one researcher. Not stretching quite so far back as ancient Pergamum, but let's just say medieval times.

Let's put ourselves in London in the 12th century. One writer says, Had you actually arrived in London as a 12th century tourist, the impression that you'd happened upon a town of steeples would have been profound.

[4 : 10] By 1183, London was home to 13 monastic or convent churches and more than 100 parish churches. That translates into one church for every three acres.

Based on the contemporary population of that day, 30,000, a house of worship for every 300 residents. You and I would have seen steeples rising from the great medieval city.

Now, to understand how in the world 30,000 people could maintain, build, organize, and fund more than 113 churches, you need to have some knowledge of the ancient custom or interplay between the religious community and the business community.

Local churches were sponsored by merchant guilds. I'm sorry on your behalf, but I'm grateful on my own.

I'll see you if you're sleeping. Local churches were sponsored by merchant trade guilds. In 1996, Lisa and I took our family to London for six months, and we lived within the residence of St. Helen's Bishop's Gate, a 13th century church.

[5 : 48] In fact, it's the largest of the oldest churches within the city. And across the mall is Lloyd's of London Rising, the Gherkin right behind it, the NatWest Tower, all of the financial industry within literally a nine iron from St. Helen's front door.

The Leather Sellers Guild purchased the St. Helen's building in 1543. And with it, the responsibility and privileges of attending to the structure, and by it, the Leather Sellers Guild inevitably wielded some influence over the words, and the works, and the ways of life that stem from that particular congregation.

Now, think of it for a minute then. Why this opening word on the church of Thyatira emphasizing the relationship between economics and religion, between the religious sector and the business sector. From a historical point of view, we know that Thyatira was a bustling manufacturing city. It was a center for trade guilds.

Historians and biblical commentators alike tell us that it was the economic head and hub for a large number of trade guilds.

[7 : 23] Greg Beal, in his large commentary on Revelation, summarizes the extent data this way, quote, the city had a guild for almost every trade, and most people involved in any economic activity belonged to one guild or another.

And since all the guilds had pagan deities, Christian guild members would be expected to pay homage, to pagan gods at official guild meetings, which were usually festive occasions, often accompanied by immoral behavior.

Non-participation would lead to economic ostracism. Fascinating thought on the background of Thyatira.

Think of Thyatira, home to Lydia, a dyer of purple, and a maker of garments.

So if we were to define Thyatira in any unique way from all the other six churches in this letter, you would have to say that Thyatira was the city that works.

[8 : 35] That was its defining characteristic. A city that works. And with that, the most surprising verse in our text falls neatly into place.

Did you catch it in the reading? We're so used to hearing it one way, but it's written another. Take a look. The very first half of verse 26.

The one who conquers and who keeps my words until the end. No, that's not what it says, is it? The one who conquers and who keeps my works.

What a strange way to put it. We're used to, even in Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, is, blessed is the one who hears these words, these words, and does them.

Blessed is the one who keeps these words. But here, to Thyatira, blessed is the one who keeps my works.

[9 : 41] That word is prevalent in the text. In fact, I think it is the structural hanger upon which this text can be best understood. They're commended for their works.

And then we see the works which would ruin them. And then the reward of works if they repent from them.

Take a look. Verse 19. I know your works. Commendation. Verses 18 and 19.

For the works that they perform. But then, verses 20 to 25, that word appears again. The very end of verse 23, where he says, unless they repent from her works.

And all of that took place from verse 20 and on. There are a set of works that will ruin a church in any city. Commendation for works.

[10 : 42] A warning for the works that must be repented of lest they bring the whole congregation into ruin. And then that wonderful summary at the end of verse 23, I will give to each of you as your works deserve.

Absolute impartiality. Says the one with eyes that flame like a fire and whose feet are burnished like bronze.

Says the one who, according to verse 23, with those eyes, is capable of searching the mind and the heart. The risen Lord, the ascended Christ, the heavenly ruler over all the world is able to go to the very heart, the bone, the marrow of works and with impartiality render to each of us according to what we have done.

No wonder then the reward for works frames the latter part of the text. Verse 26, the one who conquers and who keeps my works. And we'll see that there are two rewards for repentance.

And so as we launch into this text, I hope you see how it simply is held together. Thyatira was a church that understood the nature of work.

[12:18] Take a look, verses 18 and 19. 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 burnished like bronze.

I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance and that your latter works exceed the first.

What a great commendation. We've seen one church already where their latter works had fallen off from the former but in Thyatira there is a growth trajectory.

The trend line has been one of increasing adherence to the words and works of Christ. What is the nature of their works?

Well, it's listed there in four words and then a completing phrase. The nature of the church's works were love, faith, service, and patient endurance.

[13:24] What is the work of the church today? Love, faith, service, and patient endurance.

and to be growing in them. Now notice, even in those words then, they comprise the idea and hold intention works and words.

These four words comprise witness and a way of life. When these words, faith, endurance, are put together in other places and revelation, they don't merely mean the things you're doing from nine to five.

They often mean the witness you are holding to and proclaiming. Take a look at chapter 13 and verse 10 where we find the very words of our text.

At the very close of verse 13, here is a call for the endurance, there's one of our words, and faith of the saints. So here's a call for endurance and faith.

[14:33] But in the preceding verses from chapter 13, 1 and on, that call is to adhere to the word given, not to blaspheme.

So when you come back to Revelation 2 and you consider the commendation for their works, it is a beautiful union between holding fast to God's word and witnessing for him and demonstrating through a way of life that you are faithful to him.

That's the nature of it. Well, if that's the case, then what in Thyatira was not to be applauded? What works were the works that lead to ruin?

Well, they're obviously there because in the end of verse 22, 22, we've seen that they need to repent of some works, namely, her works.

When you come back to verse 20, you begin to see the works that lead to ruin. But, verse 20, 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.

[15:56] Those are the works. Her works refer to one named Jezebel. And, more than likely, that wasn't her actual name.

But, as we read Revelation, we see, not only are we gleaning things historically, but we also see that much of this book is connected by way of metaphorical imagery to Old Testament texts.

Jezebel has a great and wicked role in the Old Testament. And what she leads the people of God to is a compromising of the gospel, an accommodation to external pressure, an intermingling of sexual immorality and pagan idolatry, as if it can all be wedded and maintained in the gospel without any negative consequence.

That's the very words put forth. It's her teaching and her seducing, which lead to sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols or idolatry.

Well, let's stop on this for a moment. What it is and what it means. There evidently was a woman in the church of Thyatira who, like Jezebel of old, came from the outside Jezebel, you might remember, in 1 Kings 16, ends up marrying Ahab, king of Israel, and rises to the prominent position of second in the land over God's people within God's family.

[17:35] And her teaching is what began to move God's people to the acceptance and then the proliferation of the worship of the Baals.

That was Jezebel. And the loose sensuality that went with the pagan idolatry. So Jezebel is a teacher in the church.

She has a sad connection to ancient Israel's compromised past. And we begin to see that she led God's people into ruin.

Well, what is the summary of her teaching or their sin or that which leads them to ruin? Is it not, verse 20, but I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel.

That's the word. A very common word in the New Testament scriptures, which means to let go, to permit, to abandon the church.

[18 : 49] Isn't it interesting then, when one begins to think that in Thyatira, there began to creep within the church of this bustling manufacturing city, the principle of toleration to the point that it led to gospel accommodation, and in that compromise, it had been taught the people that it would be without any consequence.

that it was perfectly fine for all of those things to be wedded together. You can imagine it then.

We can surmise on the basis of what we glean from history, and the basis of what we understand from the biblical text, that the trade guilds in Thyatira were so united to the church in regard to their pagan worship, that the Christian congregants would on annual or semi-annual or even more often have to be found in services where food was sacrificed to the pagan deities, and they had to participate in it as if nothing was the matter, and realize that all of the enormous pressure that you would feel to conform, and if you didn't conform, you would have been ostracized not only from the religious community, but from your economic ability to grow in the city.

So the situation in Thyatira is this, that your entire standing in the community hinged on your accommodation, and Jezebel was more than willing to tell you that's not a problem.

You can have your relationship with Christ and your union with the guild without any negative consequence before the Lord.

[20 : 44] Well, I ask you, first of all, this makes me appreciate our own country where those pressures are not as keenly felt, but are the principles at work today the principle of toleration?

of course, toleration is a wonderful principle. Let's not throw the whole thing out. I mean, one of the things that urbanization has led to is the necessity to live and work next to those that have highly competing views of life and God.

but when toleration moves beyond, when we begin to understand that religious relativism levels the playing field on any truth claims and that Christianity is not unique or uniquely true or in any way to be distinguished from any other belief system, then we are fighting the temptation of Thyatira.

I believe you probably have that temptation or that wrestling with the proper and improper balance of toleration almost every time you speak to someone in the city.

Or sexuality, and I'm not speaking of the culture here, I'm speaking of the religious constituency. Sexuality, of course, sexual immorality as it relates to just the demise of heterosexual standard among married men.

[22 : 38] It's deplorable. pornography is the great elephant under the rug of the evangelical church. Somewhere hidden in the mind of most Christian men is the notion that one can have Christ and your wife or girlfriend and 50, 60, 70, 180 in the next hour if you desire.

All without any negative consequence before God for we worship a God of grace. That's the temptation of Thyatira.

Or within the religious constituency, all of the notion today in regard to same-sex union, what it means for the ordination of clergy in every denomination in our country.

I'm not talking about there needs to be a difference here in our minds and in our thoughts if we explore this with more ability than this short part of the sermon warrant will give.

But there is certainly a difference between the civil status and what you might think in regard to what the state should do and what rights should be given and what privileges should be granted.

And there's a difference between that and the religious constituency between who ought to be ordained to gospel ministry and who ought not to be ordained to gospel ministry.

[24 : 09] And certainly there should be no support regardless of your viewpoint for hatred or bigotry or bashing. All of that is entirely undeserved and ungodly and not founded in the scripture.

But the question is what a morality, isn't it? that's the gospel question and the Christian faith believes that God gave boundaries for human sexuality and that those boundaries were actually instilled with created intention so that when he made a man, he complemented him with a woman and marriage, therefore, was between one man and one woman for life.

And Jesus says what God has joined, by that he quoted in Matthew 19 Genesis 2 and he also quoted Genesis 1 and he says that what God did in creation is what God intended.

So from the very dominical words of Christ, sexual morality becomes an issue of the gospel. And therefore, we would call any other union, a man with another woman outside of his wife, or a man in union with another man, or a woman in union with another woman, sin.

That's what the Bible declares. And when we live as we do, in a world in which the idea of human sexuality is falling on the church as if it has inconsequential makeup, well, then we've gone too far.

[26 : 14] This is where the Archbishop of Canterbury has gone too far. Because when one begins to argue for the inconsequential nature of one's sexuality and action, one moves away from God's intention and the gospel.

And Jezebel was one, Balaam was another, and we have, well, hundreds probably in churches within six miles of where you presently sit, who would argue for the inconsequential nature, both between what you do with your body and what accommodation you might make with religious relativism, and they would put it before you as the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. So let's just be very clear, straightforward, not overreactive, but the letter to the church of Thyatira is very simple.

There are works that ruin the church, and they have consequences. I mean, look at the consequences in verse 21 and following.

look at these phrases. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her, listen to these, hear those phrases?

[27 : 54] I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her, I will throw into a 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 as your works. Deserve absolute impartiality.

No need for anyone here to cast too many stones beyond the door when we realize that the temptation on Thyatira is the one you and I live with every day to accommodate the supreme gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and to wed it to any other religious ideology as if it can be wedded and married.

It's spiritual adultery. The works that ruin. The works that were commended.

What is the way forward? Well, I love the way forward. It's three times listed there. Verse 21, I gave her time to repent of her, but she refuses to repent.

[29 : 15] And then the end of verse 23, unless they repent. You must fight off the temptation and be willing to be ostracized.

If you're not willing in some nature to look a little freakish in this neighborhood, then you're just not willing to quite stand with the one who has eyes like flaming fire and feet like burnished bronze, who knows all and will render all to each according to what he or she has done.

The idea that you and I can seamlessly, quietly, be so assimilated into the world and have gospel productivity or fidelity is an illusion.

It's a dream. It's a mirage. And I don't care whether you're in the academy or you're in business or you're unemployed. It's a mirage. So, I've decided to live with being a bit freaky.

And the rewards will be great. They might not be great here. You might be thrown out of your guild. You might never be published again.

[30 : 43] Well, if you're not, I would say the gospel in some mysterious way will just burst from your life work in ways that you never imagined. So be it.

if not, then patiently endure. For the rewards are great. What are the rewards of repentance and a return to the works?

Verse 26, the one who conquers and who keeps my work until the end, I will give. We're going to get something. What do we get? Two things. I will give authority over the nations. Verse 28, I will give him the morning star.

Those are the rewards that await you if you conquer the sin and the temptation that was given to Thyatira. I need to mention a word about the word conquering.

I believe there's a great ironic use of it in Revelation to all the seven churches. What are they to conquer? I believe they're to conquer their sin. They're to conquer the temptation, which means that they will continue in suffering and in isolation and in ostracization.

[31 : 55] But the one who conquers, that is like Christ, the one who goes down and endures will on that day be lifted up, overcome, overcome the second death.

The idea that we're to conquer by making the world aligned to our view is not in sight here. The idea that we're to conquer Thyatira, that somehow they were to get all of Thyatira to live under their world view, is not what is meant here.

What's meant here is the one who conquers is the one who remains faithful and is willing to continue to endure the freakishness of the gospel. Well, to that one, what do they get?

Well, you better know what you're getting or you might not be able to stand up to it, but he says this wonderful thing, I will give him 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 I myself have received authority from the Father. The Son will give you a share in the authority that the Father has given to him. A direct quote here from Psalm 2 where the nations were raging and God elevates his Son and gives to him all the nations to give you a share of it all.

[33 : 20] Would you sacrifice a share of it all? for the accommodating influence of a few within your own generation?

What an unworthy exchange. What a glorious hope. And then he says, I will give him the morning star.

That's a reference all the way back to another teacher in Israel's history. Balaam who saw a star rising out of the tribe of Judah that all the nations would bow to.

That star I believe with some bit of conjecture relates to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and that he says, I'll give you myself.

You'll get me in the end. And my fellowship is much sweeter than the fellowship of accommodation.

Well, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

[34 : 41] Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, these letters so anciently written, so applicable today, even to our own hearts, each one of us, as we continue to go through them, may we be found keeping your works until the end.

In Christ's name, amen. Amen.