

All That Glitters is Not Gold

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[0 : 00] Well, today's Bible reading is taken from the book of Revelation, chapter 2, verse 18 to verse 29.

And to the angel of the church in Tyre Tyre 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 later 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 give 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 jubilation unless they repent of her works.

[1 : 15] 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 a calling to your works.

But to rest of you in Tyre Tyre, 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.

And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. These are the words of the Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, good morning, everyone.

[2 : 34] Welcome to the visitors with us this morning. We're in a series on the seven letters to the seven churches, and we're picking up the letter to Tyre Tyre this morning. I have been saying over the last few weeks that the word revelation itself means God revealing events of our world from his perspective.

And I said last week in the start of my sermon that what Jesus revealed was a real eye-opener for John. That is, Christ's passion for his church and his demand that we, as his died-for resurrection community, would reflect that passion.

It's a real eye-opener of how serious church is for Jesus, how central it is. Well, this morning I start by saying that what Jesus reveals is absolutely confronting.

We've got seven letters to seven churches, and it's God's symbolism of completeness. That's that letter, that word, the number seven is completeness.

And so what we have here in these seven letters is a diagnostic snapshot of the health of his church in general in John's day, right down through the generations to us here this morning.

[3 : 46] A diagnostic snapshot of the health of the church. Now, this is really important for how we think about and hear Jesus through these letters. We should not expect to find our church in any one of these letters so that one is relevant to us and the others aren't.

Rather, the strengths and weaknesses of each of these churches will be evident in our church at different times. So we ought to be looking across all seven letters, seeing strengths and seeing weaknesses.

It's a constant struggle to make sure that all the various activities of our church family life are an overflow of our heart for an allegiance to Jesus.

We've seen that in the letter to Ephesus. It's a constant struggle not to grow weary, reminding ourselves that Jesus is worth serving in every circumstance, including persecution.

It's a constant struggle to avoid creeping compromise by craving acceptance and approval by Jesus. More than that, over family and friends and neighbours and workmates.

[4 : 54] Friends, these words of Jesus are meant to be confronting. They need to be confronting, because we are such slow, reluctant learners.

And the big question this morning as we launch into yet another confronting letter is, very simply, are you confronted? Are you willing to think reflectively and deeply about the spiritual health of our church family unit, and yourself as part of it?

Are you willing to repent? This series is called a reset series. Are you willing to repent and reset, as we need to, as a church, as a unit, as you need to, as an individual within our church unit?

Friends, Jesus speaks words of healing and encouragement right through these letters. And as we'll hear today, even his warnings are delivered with opportunity and time to repent.

So, let's use this time wisely, this series wisely, as we identify where we need to reset. And let's do that as we jump into the next letter now and hear Christ's words to his community of Christians in Thyatira, and to us gathered in Zoom this morning.

[6 : 16] The first thing I want to say is that Jesus commends them for being faithful in this little church. He commends them for being faithful, not spectacularly successful.

Verses 18 and 19 are wonderful words of encouragement. To the angel of the church in Thyatira write, the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

I know your works, your love, your faith, and service, and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. Now, these are wonderful words of encouragement.

And remember, since they come from the Lord Jesus, they pack real punch. These aren't just cheap words of positivity. They come from the Lord Jesus, the Savior, who gladly got his hands dirty to save his people.

And he speaks in terms that these tradespeople and industrial workers, which marked Thyatira, would have easily identified with. The one feature dominating the skyline of Thyatira was a huge temple to Apollo, the Greek sun god.

[7 : 27] And most likely, that temple was dominated by a large bronze statue of Apollo. Now, the irony of all that is that Apollo was god of the fine arts and medicine.

And the local tradespeople in Thyatira would understand, in spite of the huge temple, Apollo would not actually be terribly interested in them.

And so playing on the words, I believe, Jesus introduces himself as the son of God, the one who actually came into the world as an ordinary person to bring real and immediate help and salvation to ordinary people, like the Christians in Thyatira.

He was neither lifeless nor disinterested, but got down and dirty for his people. Something that would resonate with these battlers in this industrial town.

They knew the value, the beauty, the purity, and strength of burnished bronze. Thyatira was famous for its bronze casting works. And Jesus, verse 19, speaks in that sort of language, in all his awesomeness.

[8 : 36] He's really saying to this church at Thyatira, I count you as really precious to myself. I'm really quite delighted with you, on the whole. Now, what are they commended for?

Well, verse 19, they're commended for the ordinariness, as it were, of getting on with ordinary gospel living. So, they may not live in an outstanding city, like Pergamum or Ephesus.

There may not be anything particularly exciting in their little church, but that does not mean they're hidden from Jesus or considered inferior by him. And so, we get the picture of the intensity of Jesus' all-seeing eyes, like a white-hot, smelting furnace fire that these locals would have been familiar with.

His eyes illuminate every thought, every desire, every action. And when Jesus illuminated the deep recesses of their heart, he liked what he saw, commending them for their passion and getting on with being the church.

That is a gospel-shaped resurrection community with actions shaped and motivated by their inner love and trust in Jesus and commitment to live under his rule in every circumstance of life.

[9 : 54] And best of all, end of verse 19, they're growing in spiritual maturity. Becoming more gospel-shaped as they go. And so, the tone of verse 19 commands the ordinariness of the church.

Steady, focused Christian commitment. I think it's just like you would expect in a small-town craftsperson. Nothing showy, just daily commitment to producing quality product.

And verse 25, jump over there for a minute. Jesus is content and delighted in seeing his own passion for the church reflected in this church family.

In a sense, we'll come back to the problem, but in a sense, Jesus is saying to them as a whole group, hey, you're doing well. Just stay focused. Stay on track and keep plodding along.

And he also commends them as the real power brokers and bright lights in the world. And we're going to be looking at the promises at the end, and then we'll come back to the difficult part in the middle there.

[11:06] So, Thyatira was famous for its bronze workers' guild. It was a bit like a powerful trade union. It had enormous influence in the town and surrounding district.

Effectively, it was able to decide who could work and who would be excluded socially and in terms of the industry. And no doubt this local guild would have despised the local Christians for probably their stupid beliefs, beliefs which risked offending the local gods.

And therefore, risk the well-being of everyone. But again, on the contrary, verses 26 and 27, look at that. Jesus encourages his unassuming faithful people to see that real power is with them.

Look at verse 26 and 27. 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, even as when earth and pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my father.

Real power is with them. Why? Because they are aligned with him, the king of the world. the image you hear is taken from Psalm 2, where the Son of God is given complete authority over the nations to declare and implement the rule of God.

[12:44] And so it's a perfect fit for Thyatira, where clay molds in which bronze was cast or imperfect pots are just smashed and discarded. They knew the picture that Jesus was giving them here.

complete power over that which has been created. And the point, I think, is that as faithful servants and ambassadors of King Jesus, remember the one with the piercing eyes and trampling feet, as ambassadors of this King Jesus and armed with his powerful word, they are more powerful.

They are building something far more beautiful than anything in this world. Now, I take it this would have really surprised the Christians in the little-known church at Thyatira.

They certainly didn't look as though they were significant. But the values of Jesus are not the values of this world. You see, again, it was their faithfulness that caught Jesus' attention.

and defines their usefulness in Christ's kingdom. Verse 28, Jesus promises that they will shine with the same brightness as Jesus.

[14:06] Why? Because he gladly associates with them and calls them brothers. And again, a reference to Apollo. It would not be Apollo, the sun god, who would offer a bright future to the people of Thyatira.

But Jesus, the morning star. And remember, the morning star marks the passing of the darkness and terror of night. It will not be the size or apparent success, my friends, of our church that will delight Jesus.

What will delight Jesus? Well, as in this church here, faithfulness will delight Jesus. one of the greatest dangers for any church is longing to be trend-setting, showy, spectacular.

Because we think that that is what will count most for Christ's kingdom. That is what will mark us out as a growing, go-ahead, exciting church. And it may well do in terms of the world's criteria.

But we'll have Christ's blessing when we are faithful in the basics rather than when we chase the spectacular.

[15:24] Now, hear me carefully. This is not to say that we shouldn't challenge ourselves into new enterprises and be creative. but we mustn't do so at the expense of faithfulness in the basics.

Now, it seems to me this is another huge potential point of reset for us. And turn it into a question then. What do you crave most for our church family?

Do you crave faithfulness more than anything else? Is that what you want us to be as a unit together? Or do you crave some alternative to faithfulness?

Perhaps you do crave success. Perhaps you crave reputation with other churches and other Christians so they look at our church and go, wow, that's a switched on church. I wish I was part of it.

Do we crave greater numbers to show that we are growing? Do we crave better buildings, more exciting programs, and so the list could go on? None of those things of themselves are bad to crave for.

[16 : 35] But if they're a substitute for faithfulness, then they become bad. Do you crave faithfulness more than anything else for us as a church and for yourself as a believer?

Well, the second point then I want to just highlight this morning is avoid the temptation to make the gospel fit society. Now, in spite of the church as a whole being commended by Jesus, there is a great danger within it.

And the great danger comes from a few influential individuals among them. The problem I'm calling this morning is the Jezebel factor because it may well be a single person called Jezebel, but most likely given the picture language and everything else in these letters, most likely this Jezebel represents a small but growing group of people within the church, clustered around a particular way of thinking and a particular way of living under the banner of being Christians and people who have effectively changed the gospel message by removing certain behavior from it.

Now, it appears, if you look at verses 21, 22, and 23 there, it appears that they were very convincing. They spoke what everybody considered to be deep things things that thought, wow, that's really enlightened.

That sort of stuff would really free me and bring me to maturity as a Christian. That's the sort of stuff that only mature free Christians would understand. But Jesus mocks their views.

[18 : 14] They may well be deep, according to their criteria, but they don't reflect Jesus or God. He calls them the deep things of Satan. That's how vile they are to the Lord Jesus, the Lord of his church.

Most likely the scenario would be that they argued that attending pagan feasts didn't mean you were part of them, so there's no issue. It would go something like this, and we know that this sort of teaching was in the early church.

We don't know exactly if this was the teaching at Thyatira, but it certainly fits what's been said here. It would go something like this. The deep thing is that as long as a Christian keeps his mind or her mind pure, believing the right things and fellowshiping with other Christians on Sundays, then what they did during the week wasn't really a gospel issue.

It was just to be thought of as part of living life. You have to live life, that's what you have to do, so it's okay providing you keep other things right and pure.

Now we can understand how appealing this theology would have been. For a start, it would make life much easier in Thyatira, because just about all of community life was built around worship of gods.

[19 : 34] And then again it would have suggested that Christians were really community minded, and that would have made them more acceptable. And perhaps even the argument would be that these things would open up more evangelistic opportunities.

But then it also gives the opportunity to dabble in some of the alluring aspects of what we would call today a sex saturated society, a bit like Iran I suppose, and lots of ways.

So the thinking of this Jezebel factor gave people the opportunity to dabble in some of the alluring aspects of that, while convincing yourself still that you were just showing that Christians have red blood in their veins too.

You want to show people that Christianity doesn't have to seriously curb your former lifestyle. We're just ordinary people like everybody else.

You can see why people would like that teaching. Christ's judgment on such thinking, very, very clear, very, very threatening words, very, very absolute words.

[20 : 45] What's appealing may well be damning. And again in verses 21 to 23, the same piercing eyes, the same powerful figure that gently commends faithfulness, now becomes terrifying as he describes how he will purify his church.

There will be consequences, severe consequences. Jesus will not stand idly by and allow his church to be led into destruction.

Christ is calling here for his people to be expressing deep purity in every area of life, and perhaps especially sexual behavior in this context.

Christ's eyes have quite hot intensity to find and burn out impurity. again, it's an industrial picture of the furnace. White hot intensity to find and burn out impurity.

Christ's feet are like fine brass. They're free from impurity, and that's what he wants his people to be like. See, boil it all down, and we can talk a lot about the actual specific details, but boil it all down as this.

[22 : 13] I think their culture was shaping how they lived the gospel rather than the gospel shaping how they lived their culture.

Christ wants us to be like him in a world that constantly wants to make us impure and corrupt. And Christ will take drastic measures to bring us to repentance and new purity. Friends, this whole Jezebel factor, I think we could say that it appears to be the mood of evangelicalism in our generation.

We have so-called evangelical church leaders who remove issue after issue from the script of the church saying that these things aren't really gospel issues.

So as long as we keep focused on Jesus, we can do this and this and this and this and this. And so we find in our world today in evangelicalism we find adultery, homosexuality, divorce, just open slather and watching movies with sex scenes, drugs and so on.

[23 : 37] There no longer seem to be real gospel issues. Young people sleeping together before they get married. They're just not even reading now on some radars.

And it's no surprise that people love this new easy Christianity. Many evangelicals, you'll hear them now saying that when it comes to evangelism, well, if we have to join their after work drinking sex-saturated conversation sessions to get the gospel out, then that's what we ought to do.

If we have to get involved in sport at the same level as our non-Christian friends, then that's what we have to do. If we have to make cafe latte and hipster dress, the focus of church because that's what people expect these days, then that's what we have to do.

I don't know where that leaves me, but I've heard that said. Friends, if we're to have Christ's approval as a church family, we must be faithful.

Having our lives shaped by the gospel at every point of our day. Look at verse 28. Jesus promises, I will give him the morning star.

[24 : 58] Are you drawn to the darkness and alluring autonomy and immorality of this world? And believe for me, it is very dark and very alluring.

and it's constantly trying to blur the guidelines and the edges for us. Are you drawn to the darkness and alluring autonomy and immorality of this world?

Or are you drawn to the bright morning star who dispels darkness and gives you light and life? question of faithfulness.

Is this another point for us as a church to consider whether we need to reset significantly? Whether you individually need to repent and reset significantly?

thank you very much for listening. Let me pray. Lord, open our minds to your confronting word.

[26 : 05] Open our hearts, Lord, to feel that word impact on us. And lead us, Lord, individually and together as a church unit to take whatever actions are necessary to repent.

We thank you, Lord, that in your graciousness you pursue us when we stumble and wander into sin. And we thank you, Lord, that you give us time and opportunity to repent.

Lord, I pray that we might think reflectively as a church family, that we might reset where we need to reset, and that ultimately we might praise you for both exposing our sin and helping us move through it into new purity.

Help us, we pray. Be merciful to us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.