

The church in Thyatira

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is taken from the book of Revelation, chapter 2, beginning at verse 18, and it can be found on page 1236 of the Church Bibles.

To the church in Tyreteria, and to the angel of the church in Tyreteria, 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 sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her, I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works.

[1 : 18] 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.

But to the rest of you in Tyreteria, 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 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. Thanks, Estee.

Morning. I'm Jake, part of the church family here. I do keep Revelation chapter 2 open if you've closed it, and let's pray as we begin. Our Father, we thank you so much for time together this morning as a family.

[2 : 47] And we praise you so much that we get to hear your word read and explained and preached, and we pray that you would speak to us this morning. Please be with us by your Spirit, teaching us and training us, helping us to live as a church more like Jesus would have us do.

Amen. Don't you know there's a war on? It's a familiar refrain in lots of popular World War I and World War II TV sitcoms.

And it's appropriate for us too here at Grace Church, as the war between Jesus and his church and the devil rages.

We're halfway through this series of letters to the churches in Asia, in the first couple of chapters of Revelation, Jesus writing to each church.

Chapter 1, though, reveals the majesty of Jesus. He is the risen, reigning Lord over all the nations. He's defeated sin and crushed Satan.

[3 : 57] But we noted from chapter 12 a few weeks ago, the devil is furious at his demise.

And on his way to destruction, it's as if he's clawing at the church and the world, trying to wreak as much havoc as he can, before he is finally crushed once and for all. And so Jesus has won the complete and ultimate battle.

But we live in a war zone. And these letters give us the instructions we need if we're going to fight along with Jesus until the end, until his return.

Now, each letter has a similar structure, starting with a reminder about the power and majesty of Jesus, followed by some kind of report on the status of how the church are doing and what they're up to and how things are going.

Then a warning or a problem. Then some instructions to repent and to press on with Jesus. Each often ends with a promise of the future to come and a cry from Jesus, Listen to me.

[5 : 08] But notice, as we get into this letter to Thyatira, the reminder Jesus gives the church about his identity. Have a look at verse 18. Verse 18.

The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, writes to this little church in Thyatira. He sees all that is going on. Nothing escapes his fiery gaze, good or bad, right or wrong.

And his solid bronze feet are steadfast. Ready to bring judgment on all evil and wickedness.

He's writing with majestic authority and gentle love to warn them and to encourage them.

[6 : 15] And the first thing we see is Christ's commendation. Christ's commendation. I know your works and love. See, things are going well at Grace Church Thyatira.

It's a hive of gospel activity. Have a look with me at verse 19. Jesus says, I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance and that your latter works exceed the first.

All the marks of a lively church, Grace Church Thyatira have them and they're growing in them.

Maybe you can imagine arriving there on a Sunday morning, handshakes and hugs as you're welcomed warmly, an offer of lunch before the service, even before you've introduced yourselves.

You hear that there's a buzzing youth group. The preaching you see is enthusiastic. There's loads of outreach and people are becoming Christians, trusting Jesus. In many ways, the church is thriving.

Grace Church Thyatira, it's a church of gospel works, gospel love, gospel faith and gospel endurance in the face of hardship. And so Christ, seeing all that, commends them for it.

[7 : 28] Like a positive appraisal at work or a top-notch report card from your teacher. Things look good. And where we see similarities between Grace Church Thyatira and Grace Church Dulwich, we can be encouraged by Christ's commendation.

Maybe Jesus would write to us, Grace Church Dulwich, I see your love for one another and me. At Grace Church Dulwich, I see your fervor and passion for evangelism.

I know that faithfulness of your prayers and generous giving. And it might be that we need to hear that encouragement this morning if we've been faithfully serving week by week and maybe we're beginning to feel weary.

Maybe it feels like nobody notices. We come to church, we set up for creche, we thoroughly prepare for Sunday club or growth group. We faithfully, diligently record and edit and then upload the sermon to the website.

Lots of unseen, unthanked tasks. And then we're prayerful and we're giving and we're quick to speak about Jesus but nobody knows about it.

[8 : 41] Well, the reigning, ruling Lord of all, he sees. He sees our efforts in evangelism, our faithfulness, our love. He sees it all.

Nothing escapes his eye. And he'd commend us where we're faithful and loving and hard at work for the gospel. And we can be encouraged. Let's not get carried away though for Grace Church, Thyatira or Grace Church, Dulwich.

It's not all positive in this letter. And things come down with a bit of a bump as we get, secondly, Christ's condemnation. But you tolerate false teachers.

The church are full of faith but Jesus says, 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.

[9 : 50] The same reigning, ruling Lord Jesus who encourages them, he looks at the church in Thyatira and sees a dangerous problem. They're too tolerant.

Specifically, they tolerate false teachers. Of course, there are lots of positives to tolerance, aren't there? We want to be a tolerant people, tolerant of different ideas and ways of doing things, tolerant of people from every different background and nation and culture.

Jesus, if you read about him in the Gospels, was wonderfully tolerant of all sorts of people. But there is bad tolerance too, isn't there? It's wrong to tolerate bullying, wrong to tolerate abuse or neglect.

The list could go on and on. But Jesus would add false teaching to the list. He'd make sure it was there. Wrong to tolerate false teaching.

Because false teaching is wicked and it leads Christians into sin and away from Jesus. Now, it's hard to be sure whether Jesus is referring to a specific woman in Thyatira called Jezebel who is a false teacher or whether he's using her as a reference point to talk about false teachers generally. [11:08] The reason I think that's tricky is because in One and Two Kings we meet a Jezebel, a woman who worships the false god Baal and marries the king of Israel, Ahab.

She marries him and then she draws him away from the true god into Baal worship himself. She threatens and kills the true prophets of God and she eventually persuades Ahab to make Baal the religion of the nation, worshipping him instead of the true god.

She's drawn a whole nation away from the true god into idolatry, worshipping a false god. And she's widely considered to be one of the most evil, wicked women in the whole Old Testament.

And it's likely then that Jesus wants the church in Thyatira to see the link. False teachers in their church are just as dangerous, just as wicked as Jezebel in One and Two Kings.

They deceive people into sin and idol worship and away from the true god. And they're not to be tolerated. It's possible it works something like this.

[12:25] Thyatira is a trading town. You might remember it from Acts chapter 16 where Lydia becomes a Christian. She's a trader in purple cloth. Across the town you'd have all sorts of trading guilds.

You might have the purple cloth trading guild and the fine linen trading guild and some others that I couldn't quite get to the bottom of. Now these guilds would have regular feasts and each god would have its, each guild would have its own false god.

And so for the Christian as a member of one of these guilds things could get a bit awkward. As the master of ceremonies stands up at the feast and announces, let us praise our great god Zeus for this food and all the rich blessings we enjoy and eat and drink in worship to him.

Suddenly this simple banqueting guild, guild banquet sorry, has become a worship service to Zeus. Now does the Christian stick to her Christian convictions or join in?

She knows that Zeus doesn't exist. He's a false god. There's only one true god. She knows this ceremony to him isn't real. But if she joins in, she is joining in worship to Zeus.

[13:47] Worship of a false god. She could stand up and leave or sit it out. And maybe she'd get opportunities to speak about why and talk about Jesus.

But more likely she'll be shunned, scoffed at, laughed out of there. Business will suffer. That might be the end of her career, her livelihood. And what about the children?

They need to eat. Well thankfully along comes Jezebel, a so-called prophet and she says, Christians, your faith, it's a private thing.

Between God and your heart, if you have him there, he isn't so much concerned with what you do the rest of the time. And it sounds kind of good and that means she can join in with the worship of this false god and not worry about it.

It can be subtle, tweaking the truth and so drifting into sin and idol worship. But it is falsehood and Jesus does see.

[14:57] In London, in the 21st century, there's all sorts of false teaching around. It's more likely that for us it will be dealing with marriage and the questions that surround the existence of hell and the seriousness of sin.

Numerous other areas too. And these teachings, they often sound more appealing to our culture. They mean the church will fit in a bit better. And they open up all sorts of options for how I can live. If hell doesn't exist and sin isn't that bad, I can do what I want and live for whatever pleases me. And so ultimately, all these kinds of false teachings, they leave the way open to all sorts of sexual immorality and idol worship.

To follow these false teachings is to go into sin against God and to depart from Jesus. And it's so serious. Have a look how Jesus responds to it in verse 21.

I gave her time to repent but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I'll throw her onto a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation unless they repent of her works.

[16:23] 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.

Jesus will judge Jezebel and he will judge all false teachers. With his authoritative burnished bronze feet he will trample out all wickedness and evil and he'll bring justice.

And notice those who commit adultery with her those who follow false teachers they'll be judged too unless they repent of those false works.

Jesus sees it all and he is resolute. He will not tolerate false teachers and so neither should Grace Church Thyatira or Grace Church Dulwich.

I wonder how you'd respond if you found out the babysitter you'd employed was letting your children play with these paracetamol sweeties. You'll be glad to know it's just an empty box in case the children play with it later.

[17 : 39] You find out your babysitter has been letting them play with them you'd confront them wouldn't you? What on earth are you doing? Oh don't worry don't worry they won't do any harm they're just playing with them it'll be fine worst case they eat one or two.

You just wouldn't tolerate it would you? not for a moment and so let's not tolerate false teachers toying around with playing with our spiritual life potentially leading us and our church away from Christ and into his fierce judgment.

Maybe it will be subtle false teaching from the front here or in our growth groups. We'll need to keep an eye out we'll need to have our Bibles open making sure that what we're being taught is indeed God's word his truth from the scriptures and if it's not we'll need to confront the teacher gently but robustly in love and call them to repentance and if they won't we're not to tolerate it and we're not to give them a platform if they won't stop and then if they won't leave it may well be that we need to so serious now it might be that some of us actually need to repent ourselves where we've been listening to and swayed by false teaching and begun to believe it where we're drifting away from the truth about

Jesus we need to turn around and come back to him and his word and we'll need to keep an eye on our own hearts too it could be that we look around this church and think we're a good church we don't have false teaching and wonderfully that's very much true but it could be that we just become our own false teachers we need to keep an eye on our hearts as we subtly slowly tweak and adapt what we know to be true about God what we know that we've read in the Bible and we change it to suit our own desires and wants maybe we forget what we know about God's holiness and justice and tell ourselves that well sin isn't that bad and so we can indulge and enjoy its pleasures it can be subtle of course I know that an affair would be awful sinful and pornography

I know that that's evil and wicked but sexual fantasy who does that hurt but Jesus he sees all the things that I try to justify and I could become my own false teacher maybe we do it in a different way we serve faithfully and we give generously week by week and we we just really want that career and step up on the salary scale so we convince ourselves that we're doing it so that we can give more I'm going to work harder so I can give more God will love that when in reality subtly what we've done and what we might be doing is worshipping the false gods of money and status and we're essentially asking Jesus on his throne to just budge up and give other things some room up there and much of this will be very subtle and the devil doesn't often use obvious schemes in his battle plans and so we'll need to examine our hearts carefully in community with one another encouraging each other and helping each other it could be that you look around

[21 : 47] London and you see all the false teaching in this country and across the world and you just attempted to completely despair what can we do it's bleak it's horrible we fret and we worry and yet here we see Jesus he sees it all and he will judge false teachers and so we can be confident of that and we can trust him with all those scenarios Christ's commendation I know your works and love Christ's condemnation you tolerate false teaching thirdly and finally Christ's call Christ's call hold fast to me as the battle plan as the battle between the devil and Christ and his church continues there are all sorts of things he could call for he might say church you're naive all of you go to bible college and learn lots of theology then you'll be safe at church you're weak all of you do some spiritual gym workouts both those things might be good but his actual call to grace church thyatira and therefore us is incredibly simple and wonderfully liberating have a look at verse 24 but to the rest of you in thyatira who do not hold this teaching you have sorry 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 nothing extra for the church no new law or teaching simply hold fast what you have until I come which of course begs the question what is it they have that they know to hold fast to until Jesus comes just turn back a page to chapter 1 verse 4 we're at the beginning of this letter to these seven churches they're all

given a reminder of what they have verse 4 grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood the church in Thyatira all these churches all Christian churches have peace with God undeserved grace from him a peace with the God of the universe the one we by nature turn our backs on we have peace with him all because all in and through Christ who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood it's as if Jesus is saying grace church Thyatira you have everything you need in the gospel in me hold fast to me Jesus says so until he returns crushing Satan and bringing in a new world they simply need to cling to him now imagine being lost at sea for a moment the darkness of the night sky the cold of the water thick against your skin it's a bleak scenario but in the distance you hear roaring as the helicopter comes overhead as it grows closer you see the bright lights relief a rescue has arrived for you and your friends in the sea and from the blinding light above a silhouette comes down grabs you and picks you out of the water and what do you do? you cling on don't you? you hold tight you don't let go stick with him and you'll be safe or as you're being winched up to safety and other of the other people stranded they start shouting up to you don't go with him cling on to your money and cling on to your career and cling on to your hopes of a family that would just be ridiculous wouldn't it? nothing and no one else can save us and so only holding fast to your saviour whatever it costs until you're safe will do and maybe we're tempted to let go of Jesus it's hard this battle that we're in and we wonder if it's worth it well it is but in case we and Grace Church Thyatira need some more motivation Jesus gives two final promises to keep us clinging on have a look at verse 26 the one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end to him I will give authority over the nations Psalm 2 speaks of God appointing a king to rule over all creation and over all the nations we read in [27 : 46] Revelation chapter 1 verse 5 that that is king Jesus he's the one who rules but here he says to those who conquer I will share my authority share my rule and so those struggling marginalized Christians at Thyatira they're on Jesus' victorious team and he draws them and us up into the strategy room of this battle gives us a seat at the champions parade and then sets us off to rule with him in the new creation Jesus is not a far off dictator with kind of minion lowly subjects he's the humble servant king willing to share authority and delegate power there's no king or leader like Jesus and we'll get to rule with him but there's one other promise the one who conquers and keeps my works until the end verse 28

I'll give him the morning star now I think that sounds quite cool on its own I only know of night stars so whatever a morning star is I'm in but if we do do a bit more digging it all becomes clear in numbers 22 verse 17 there's a prophecy about a descendant of Jacob who will be the morning star and then in revelation chapter 22 verse 16 right at the end of the bible in its closing lines Jesus says this I Jesus have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches I'm the root and the descendant of David or Jacob the bright morning star I Jesus I am the bright morning star to the one who conquers and holds fast till the end I will give myself now weddings are quite fun aren't they generally beautiful dresses family friends dancing food big celebrations but the thing that's best about a wedding the real beauty of the wedding for the bride and groom is that they get each other everything else is good but each other that's the point of it all bride and groom become husband and wife they get to eat and dance and party but sweetest still he gets her and she gets him and the new creation the world that Jesus is going to bring in it will be glorious but the best bit the real beauty of it will get to be with him grace church diatira needed needed to hear these warnings about false teachers and hear these promises and so do we

Christ commends our gospel works and love but where we tolerate false truths and false teaching he condemns because the consequences are so severe drifting from Christ and his truth leads to judgment and so Christ wants to remind them and us in him we have all we need so hold fast to him living for Jesus in this war zone holding fast to him may mean we don't get the promotion we're hoping for we're overlooked may mean we don't have the career we want we might forfeit opportunities for stepping up the status or salary ladder it might be costly with friends and family there are so many sinful pleasures and vices that we'll need to say no to but we will rule with the Lord Jesus and we will get to be with him the one who promises to and will bring in the new creation where there's no more pain or suffering or death the one who promises to wipe every tear from our eyes the one who created joy and fun and pleasure in the first place will get to be with him and that

will be sweeter than anything else life can offer us and it will be sweeter than anything the devil might tempt us with and so

Grace Church Dulwich let's together cling on to Christ alone let's pray father father we ask please that you would help us to see where we need to be aware of the problem of false teaching in the world around us but also in our own lives and in our church please help us to not tolerate it and please above all please help us to see Jesus and cling to him and we long that he would come soon to finish the war amen