

Serve the Real King

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Please keep your Bibles open to Revelation 2, and we'll take a look at the letter to the church in Thyatira.

Well, we've been going through the book of Revelation for six weeks now, so perhaps it's good to stop and review at least the first three of Jesus' letters to the seven churches.

So let's take a look. The first letter, if you remember, goes to the church in Ephesus, whom Jesus praises for their commitment to the truth.

They cannot tolerate false teachings. That's a good thing. But Jesus demands that they repent because they have forsaken the love that they had at first. We will see that this is directly opposite to the church in Thyatira.

The second letter goes to Smyrna, where Christians suffer persecution, particularly by the Jewish people. And Jesus assures them that he is sovereign, he is the king, and he sympathizes because he too has been persecuted and he has died and he now lives.

[1 : 22] And then the third letter from last week goes to Pergamum, where the Christians suffer from persecution by the local government.

Pergamum was the major city, was the capital city of the province, to the point that someone from their church has died for their faith.

Antipas died for his faith. Jesus praises them for their faithfulness to him, but he rebukes them because some people in their midst try to combine temple worship and immorality with Christianity, syncretism.

Is that the word? And then the fourth letter goes to the church in Thyatira, which is our text today. But before we read, here's a bit of context of what was happening in the city of Thyatira.

So Thyatira was a small trading city, but although it was small, commerce was quite strong because it was a trading city.

[2 : 32] However, in order to thrive in the commercial life of that city, people had to participate in the trade guilds.

So people of the same trade or profession, they gather and they form a guild as a source of networking and also professional control.

Now, this posed a problem for Christians because without participation in the guilds, they would lose business and social life.

But to participate in a guild, Christians would also be expected to participate in the worship of the patron god of the guild.

And each trading guild would have its own patron god. So, while Christians in Pergamum last week faced a threat to their lives, the Christians in Thyatira struggled with economic pressure.

[3 : 35] Now, out of all the industries in Thyatira, the metalworking industry, metalworking, was one of the most prominent. And out of all the gods, Apollo, the sun god, was the most prominent.

And this is relevant to our text. Because given this context, verse 18 becomes polemical. Jesus says, To the angel of the church in Thyatira write, These are the words of the Son of God whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Jesus introduces himself as, first of all, the Son of God. This is the only place in the whole book of Revelation where the title Son of God is used.

And the context is fitting. Because Apollo, the sun god, was also the son of Zeus, the king of the gods.

Jesus is saying here that he is the true Son of God, not Apollo. And his father is the true king, not Zeus.

[4 : 50] Second, his eyes are like flaming fire. Apollo draws his power from the sun. He is the sun god. But Jesus doesn't need to do that because his eyes are already like fire.

And in fact, at the end of the book of Revelation, it says, Sorry, I should have shown you this. It says, The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives its light. And the lamp, that is Jesus, is its lamp. Doesn't need the sun because he shines the light. As if Jesus is saying here, Apollo draws his power from the sun.

I am the sun. And then third, Jesus' feet are like burnished bronze. Like I said, metalworking was the most prominent industry in that city.

And they usually supplied metal armors and metal weapons for the Roman soldiers. But there is also an indication that they thought, the metal workers thought, that they were working metals for Apollo.

[6 : 11] As we can see here on this coin. On this coin from Thyatira. So you can see on the right-hand side, there is a picture depicting a tradesman making a metal helmet for Apollo.

Now Jesus, however, doesn't need people to give him metal armors. He doesn't need any armor at all, because even his feet are like burnished bronze.

Strong. In other words, he is the better God, more superior than Apollo or even Zeus. So even in the way Jesus introduces himself, this description is quite comforting for the Christians who struggled in that city, but also polemical for the non-Christians who worshipped Apollo, because Jesus claims to be the better God, the better Lord, the better warrior.

We might even say infinitely better. So here we can stop and consider an implication for our engagement with the world.

Jesus' claim here gives the Christians in Thyatira not only encouragement, but also ammunition to counter the narrative of the society with the gospel, and to counter the gods of the society with Jesus.

[7 : 48] So we can do the same. We can counter the narrative of the society with the gospel. How do we do that? Well, we need to understand the narrative of the society, and we need to understand the gospel.

So, for example, today we have two opposite forces that exist in the same subculture. On the one hand, the narrative says, be yourself, like we said last week.

Be yourself. Reach your own happiness. Actualize your own self. Self-actualization. Don't care about what other people think. You reach your own destiny.

The self-centric narrative. But on the other hand, the same subculture also says, be like us and assimilate. Everyone else is accepting the new gender theory.

So should you. Everyone else is affirming all beliefs and all lifestyles. So should you. Because if you don't, we'll exclude you, we'll cancel you.

[8 : 58] The story of the gospel canters both narratives. On the one hand, the gospel says, don't be yourself, because your self is hidden in Christ, who is lovely and glorious and beautiful and perfect.

While also affirming the value of our self as created in the image of God, redeemed by Christ, and transformed by the spirit.

On the one hand, the gospel narrative, on the other hand, the gospel narrative also says, don't assimilate to the culture, be conformed to Jesus instead.

while also affirming the value of using human cultures for the sake of the gospel. Like Paul, caring about both Jewish and Greek cultures, being like a Jew to the Jews and being like a Gentile to the Gentiles.

And so, just as Jesus counts as the pagan narrative with his gospel, in verse 18, so we can try doing the same with the culture around us when we converse with our friends, our co-workers, our children, and grandchildren even.

[10 : 25] We need to understand their narrative, and we need to understand the gospel. And then, Jesus continues with outlining the good deeds that the Christians in Thyatira did, in verse 19.

I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

So there are four good deeds here. that Jesus commends them for having. Love, which very likely refers to both love for God and love for neighbors.

Faith, that is, trust in Jesus, even to the point of faithfulness to Jesus. Service, that is, serving others, which comes from love.

And perseverance, that is, endurance in the midst of pressure, social and economic pressures, which comes from trusting Jesus. But in verse 26, Jesus says, to the one who is victorious and does my will to the end.

[11 : 46] Oh, it's not there. But in verse 26, if you look at your Bible, Jesus says, to the one who is victorious and does my will to the end. Now, the literal translation there is, to the one who is victorious and keeps my deeds to the end.

It's the same word that is used in verse 19. So, very likely, keeping the deeds of Jesus means, refer to the, to these four deeds here.

And the Christians in Thyatira kept these deeds. And what's more, these deeds, these four deeds, have been increasing.

You are now doing more than you did at first. This is incredible. This is opposite to the church in Ephesus who has lost their, their love, their first love.

considering the pressure that they've, that they're facing in the society. This increase in good deeds is commendable indeed.

[12 : 51] They have not gone cold. How easy is it for us to lose that first love for God?

Or first fiery faith? Or first eagerness in service? Or first energy in endurance for Christ?

The longer we become Christians, the easier it is to decrease in love, faith, service, and endurance, right? But we ought to strive for the same praise from Jesus.

We ought to work that Jesus might say to us, I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Imagine Jesus saying that to us. We should aim for that praise. I know quite a few Christians in this church who have been Christians for so long and yet their love and faith and service and endurance are just exceptional and exemplary.

[14 : 03] And exemplary. Well done. Well done if you're those people. And thank you for giving me something to look up to, to aspire to.

But then, as previously, Jesus continues with the bad. And this time, the bad takes up a lot of verses. Nevertheless, I have this against you.

You tolerate that woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching, she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So again, this makes them opposite to the church in Ephesus. The Christians in Ephesus are good at not tolerating false teachers, but bad at keeping their first love.

The Christians in Thyatira are good at increasing their first love, but they tolerate the false prophet, Jezebel, which is very likely a nickname taken from the Old Testament, our first reading.

[15 : 29] In 1 Kings 16 onwards, it's not there, but in 1 Kings 16 onwards, Jezebel is the wife of King Ahab in the Old Testament who entices the whole Israel to worship Baal.

And so, this woman in this text claims to be a prophet and through her prophecies entices the Christians in Thyatira to eat food sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.

Both done, as we have said last week, both are done in the context of temple worship of idols. And so, they try to combine that with their Christian faith.

They still go to church, but they also go to the temples to worship their idols. So, like some Christians in Pergamum, they want to belong to both worlds.

They want to thrive and be accepted by the world by participating in pagan practices, but they also want to go to heaven when they die by worshiping Jesus.

[16 : 42] believers. But unlike the church in Pergamum that has followers of false teaching, the church in Thyatira not only has, but tolerates, and not only followers, but the leader, the prophet of the false teaching.

This is bad news, and so Jesus' next words are very harsh. verse 22 and 23. I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely unless they repent of her ways.

I will strike her children, that is, her followers, or the members of her community, not literal children, dead. So, Jesus will cause suffering for her and her followers.

even death. This probably refers to the time of suffering reserved for those who don't follow Jesus in Revelation 9, where it says, they were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

That is, people who don't believe in the God of the Bible. They were not allowed to kill them, but only to torture them for five months, and the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes.

[18:16] During those days, people will seek death, but will not find it. They will long to die, but death will elude them. This sounds scary.

They will suffer to the point that they will ask for death, but they won't find it. And it should be scary because it's a warning for those who reject Jesus, especially in this context, especially those who call themselves Christians, but are being unfaithful because they try to combine faith in Jesus with worldly idolatry.

It is a stern warning, and the only way out is to repent, which Jesus invites them to do in verse 22, unless they repent of her ways.

Now, the warning is not only to make those people repent, but also to give comfort to the other Christians who struggle economically and socially because they stay faithful to Christ.

I would imagine it would be easy for these faithful Christians to watch Jezebel and her followers and think, it's so unfair that these people can thrive in this world while we, the faithful, struggle.

[19:55] And so Jesus says in verse 23, Jesus makes it clear here that his eyes are indeed like blazing fire and can penetrate our hearts and our minds, our whole souls, and he will repay the wicked according to their deeds.

They can thrive here in this world, but a scary future is awaiting them. What about us today?

Given the context of Thyatira, it would have been very easy to follow Jezebel's teaching because, well, she claimed to be a prophet and her teaching was commercially beneficial.

If the Christians think they are allowed to participate in temple worship in addition to worshipping Jesus, then they can participate in the trade guilds and thrive professionally and financially.

It would be so easy for them to believe that. What are the commercial and financial pressures now that might make us unfaithful to Jesus because we want to benefit in this world?

[21:28] A friend of mine is an accountant in Indonesia and in that country so many, maybe even the majority of small and medium businesses fake their financial annual reports so that they can evade taxes.

it's become a social expectation even. So if they don't do that, they can't keep their prices low and they go bust because their competitors can afford their prices low by evading taxes.

So that situation makes it hard for Christian accountants like my friend in Indonesia. And so one day she was asked by her boss to create a fake financial report and she could not do that.

So she shared her struggle at church and she said it's not only a matter of ethics. She felt like she would betray Jesus if she did it because she knew that Christ wants honesty and integrity and justice.

What is fair? her boss made her leave her job. Now, she wasn't fired for being a Christian, but she was fired because she held on to Christian values, honesty, justice, and integrity.

[23:03] And because she refused to conform to the social expectation in that country, she held on to her Christian faith that demanded a lifestyle that's different to the world.

What are the commercial and financial and even social pressures that you are facing in your circles? whatever they are, know that Jesus is the true Lord and he is scanning our minds and hearts.

He knows what's going on and he will judge accordingly. And if we stay faithful to him, he gives us some great promises verses.

In verse 24 to 28, Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, I will not impose any other burden on you except to hold on to what you have until I come.

To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations, that one will rule them with an iron scepter, and will dash them to pieces like pottery, just as I have received authority from my Father.

[24:28] I will also give that one the morning star, whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. So to those people who do not hold to the false teaching, who do not try to combine Christ with worldly idolatry, Jesus puts no other burden except to hold on to him and his works.

Of course, holding on to Jesus includes rejecting others, rejecting other alternatives. But when we hold on, Christ will regard us victorious and he will let us participate in his rule as the king of kings. That's what verse 27 to 28 means. In verse 26, we will have authority over the nations like Jesus. In verse 27, Jesus uses Psalm 2, which is a messianic psalm that refers to Jesus as the one who rules with an iron scepter, but he assigns that rule to us, to the one who is victorious. That will happen to us. And again in verse 28, the morning star refers to Numbers 24, a prophecy that says a star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel, he will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the people of Sheth.

[26 : 11] Again, this is a messianic prophecy that refers to Jesus. The star is the ruling, the kingship of the Messiah, Jesus himself, but he will give that to the Christians who stay faithful.

Again, we see here a pattern of participation. We participate in the suffering of Christ, we participate in the death of Christ, we will participate in his life and resurrection, and here we will participate in his rule.

Kai, my son, who is a blessing and not a nuisance, has given me a lot of valuable lessons, and here is where I can learn from him again.

Kai has this certain stubbornness in him, and he has recently learned how to turn on the TV. using the remote, which is bad news for a two-year-old.

So now every time he sees the remote, right, he just runs towards it, he grabs it, he holds on to it like his life depended on it, and he doesn't let go.

[27 : 32] Even when we try to distract him, hey, this is a better thing, he keeps holding on. No! it's annoying to his parents, but perhaps that's what we should do with Jesus.

If we truly want him, and his life, and his resurrection, and his rule, we must run to him, embrace him, and keep holding on to him, and reject all distractions, reject all worldly alternatives.

The world might say, if you abandon Jesus, I'll give you money, a better position at work, acceptance. But we must hold on to Jesus like Kai holds on to the TV remote.

We must say, no, my life depends on this. In fact, rather than grabbing what the world offers, why not offer Jesus to them in a way that counters their culture and their narrative, just like John does in verse 18.

Because if we stay faithful, our reward is great. We get to participate in Jesus' perfect and just kingship with him by our side forever.

[29 : 05] Let's pray. Father, thank you for reminding us of our rewards, that if we hold on to Christ, we will participate in his eternal life, in his deeds, in his glorious rule, even as we also participate in his suffering and death.

life. So help us by the power of the Holy Spirit to persevere and hold on to Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.