

Revelation

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[0 : 00] If there is a wicked witch in the Bible, her name is Jezebel. And we just read of her demise and when she died, I think you can hear the cheer and the clap go up throughout the scriptures, rejoicing at the death of this evil woman.

The clash between her evil empire and the kingdom of God is one of the gripping and colossal stories in the Old Testament. Isn't it? When we read what we called the children's picture Bible to my kids, as young kids, so 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, we raised them on this Bible.

I think it's out there, it's the Action Bible and it's got quite a lot of detail from the Old Testament in it and you learn the names of kings and queens as you go along. You're not trying to teach them all that sort of stuff, but they just pick it up.

And my kids would ask for the Jezebel story over and over again because her end comes so violently, she goes out the windows, the dog eats her up and there's nothing left on the ground hardly.

And they thought it was fantastic. Ding dong, the witch is dead. Now she first gets a mention in 1 Kings 16.

[1 : 13] I hope you hear what Steve said last week. He said about bogs in our hands and flicking through and following where we are. Go to 1 Kings 16 and 17 and keep up with me, I'll bounce around.

She's first mentioned there because Ahab, the king of Israel, marries her. And you go, so what? Well, verse 31 of chapter 16 tells us the so what.

As if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Sidonians, and he went and served Baal and worshipped him.

She captured his heart. He deserted his God, even more than he'd already been deserting his God. And Jezebel is actually an escalation in the sin of God's people because she brings the fertility gods, Baal and Baal's female consort, Ashtaroth.

They go together, Baal and Ashtaroth. They have sex together to bring fertility. He brings the worship of these gods to their marriage and to the nation. Gods that had been thrown out by the Lord when his people conquered the land, they're worshipped again.

[2 : 35] They bring them back. God threw them out and they bring them back. And so it's as though ideas from the outside threaten God's people.

People are beginning to tolerate again what God was completely intolerant of. Now the word tolerance is going to pop up a few times tonight and I think we think of tolerant as a really good word and it is a good and it's a respectful word in terms of how we conduct relationships with one another.

But I just want to say at the outset tonight that when we talk about tolerance here, I want you to see very clearly that there are certain things that God is completely intolerant of and for him in some circumstances tolerance is not a virtue.

And what you've got here is sex and false worship going together, hand in hand. Ahab takes this sexy bride Jezebel, she brings sexy worship to Israel by bringing her fertility gods with her. You want to break a drought? Stop the famine. Make it rain. We'll have sex with the temple prostitutes. That's the sort of religion that she has just brought back into Israel.

[4 : 02] When you go down the path of idolatry, it is always a path which takes you further away from the Lord. It doesn't take you towards him. It takes you away from him.

The king and his bride, as they take on these new gods, they're effectively turning their back on the Lord and walking away from him. And they make this, it's ridiculous, but they make this huge

investment in gods that aren't really even gods.

They participate in the very carnal pleasures that go with them. That's the nature of idolatry. You think something, you're in it for good. You're in it for what you think is something better and God is displaced from his rightful place and he is no longer seen as gloriously special and he becomes one option amongst many that we worship and he will not tolerate it.

So God provokes this enormous confrontation here in the Old Testament in 1 Kings chapter 18.

Calls his prophet Elijah onto the stage and he says, to Elijah, go therefore and gather all of Israel to me at Mount Carmel, the 450 prophets of Baal, the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table, bring them all.

And it's really interesting because Elijah doesn't confront Jezebel directly, he's got nothing to say to her, but he speaks to God's people who are in great danger from being harmed by her teaching and he lets rip.

[5 : 42] Chapter 18, verse 21. Elijah came near to all the people and he said, how long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him.

And if Baal is God, follow him. And I heard a sermon once where the preacher finished like that and he said, if Baal is God, follow him and go to hell. Well, that's how he finished his sermon. But it's full on confrontation and he follows it up by putting his life on the line with this contest at Mount Carmel. He does something that could get him killed. Let's see who the real God is. 850 of you guys, do a sacrifice, call out to Baal, see if he can do anything.

I'll pray to the Lord, the one who answers with fire, he's real. And the prophets, they go, prophets of Baal, they go first, they dance, they prance all day and Elijah's just sitting there with his hat on in the shade while these guys are getting tighter and tighter and calling out to their God and he's sitting on the sidelines and he's mocking them and he said, maybe he's on the loo, maybe he hasn't heard.

Maybe you need to dance harder, call louder, do more, get his attention, he's asleep, wake him up. And they finish the day exhausted and collapsed in a heap and nothing's happened.

[7 : 09] And Elijah steps forward and he prays a really simple prayer to God after soaking the altar in all sorts of water and the Lord answers with fire and consumes the light and Elijah then goes and has 850 of Jezebel's prophets slaughtered.

Kills a lot of them. Huge faith, an emphatic victory and if you've been reading around what's been going on, you go, yes, there is only one true God and we had better follow him.

Next day, Jezebel's in a rage. I'm going to get you Elijah by the end of the day if I'm just going to get you and he hears what she says and guess what he does?

He runs for his life in crippling fear and depression. She's going to get me. He's human. Probably very empty.

But God is God and he just proved it and Jezebel's religion has just been exposed as a complete and utter fraud. Faith. There are 850 empty seats at her dinner table.

[8 : 30] The prophets are dead. She's not dead. She still has influence. Her bitter cruelty to God's people is seen in 1 Kings 21. A bloke called Naboth had a field next to Ahab's palace and Ahab, the king, offers to buy it and Naboth replies, the Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.

He loves the Lord. He loves what the Lord has given him. It's part of the Lord's gracious gift of salvation of having been brought into the promised land and receiving the inheritance.

But for Ahab, it's business. He just put the real estate leaflet in his letterbox with an offer. I like your place, I'd like to buy it and I'll pay you what it's worth.

Locker ground, fair price. But for Naboth, it's much more than that. This is cash for faith. The Lord forbid that I do such a thing. I won't trade my future for a handful of cash.

Naboth doesn't care how good the property market is and the prices are and how they're going up and up and up. He won't cash in, he won't be bought.

[10 : 01] And Ahab, the king, he doesn't understand, he just goes home sulking. I'm the king. I made a fair offer. Life for him's business. He's got power, he's king, he's generous enough but he can't seal the deal.

He doesn't get what he wants. He's frustrated by Naboth's stubborn faith. He's a religious nutter. Fancy letting religion get in the way of life.

That's the Ahab attitude. You know, it's alright to have faith as long as it doesn't interfere in the practical realities of life. You know, a young person can do year 13.

It's a great thing for them to do. There's lots of parents that will be happy for their kids to do year 13. You know, it's safe, it's not sex and drugs and rock and roll and a gap year. You know, but don't you dare not go to uni.

Don't you dare go and do any more theological training or go overseas and serve on some mission. Don't you dare do that. Or if you're working, you know, your boss tolerates your faith at work, even commends you.

[11 : 14] Oh, yeah, Christian, good value, all that sort of stuff, but then you refuse to fudge the book or do something that's illegal that gets in the way of the business plans. You won't write the report in the way that she wants because it distorts the truth.

Well, Jezebel takes care of Abraham's depression. Go to bed, honey. Cheer up. I'll get you your field.

And she goes to the elders and the leaders of the city and easily corrupts them. They should have thrown her out the window then and there. If they'd done that, that would have solved a lot of problems. But they get a couple of liars to come to court and tell the court that Naboth has spoken against God and he's spoken against the king.

It's a malicious lie. It's the complete opposite of the truth. It's exactly the same thing that was said to Jesus at his trial before he was executed. And so Naboth is stoned to death.

He loses his life for no other reason than faithfulness to the Lord. He refuses to be compromised and Ahab, the king, gets his field. Jezebel never was one of God's people.

[12 : 31] Ahab is, but he is clueless about what it means to be in a real relationship with Yahweh. He's in the family, she's outside the family, but both of them are deals as far as understanding faith.

They have no regard for the Lord's power and his authority. God to them is nothing. You can be at church and not know Jesus.

And being at church does not mean that you treasure Jesus. Might be that you're here finding out about Jesus, that's a good thing and that's a good reason to be here.

Jezebel exercises a corrupting influence over God's people.

She's godless. She doesn't believe in the Lord. She'd rather have her own gods. She still has no fear of the Lord despite Elijah's huge victory over her prophet.

[13 : 32] She won't acknowledge what's happened. The nobles and elders of the city should never have lied and carried out the execution of a righteous man. They were enticed into doing evil.

They allowed themselves to be enticed into doing evil. And you can probably imagine it's very tough living in a scenario where wicked people bring ideas and actions that harm the people of God.

That pressure us to do what is wrong. To be in a church where the ways of the world are impacting the congregation and its leadership. where ideas from outside threaten God's people.

Went to the Oxygen conference the other week with a couple of thousand pastors. It was a great time of refreshment and Don Carson who's a great Bible teacher spoke to us on leadership and one of the things he said which was such a wonderful thing for me to hear was he said that when we're choosing leaders we want people with character before we want people with capability.

We want people with character before we want people with capability. We want capability but it doesn't matter how capable and how honoured you are in the workplace or in your school or in your place of endeavour whatever it is if you do not have Christian character to go with it you have no place as a leader in God's church.

[14 : 59] Ideas from the outside can do huge harm to the people of God. And you get to this point in the message and you think is this an Old Testament sermon or is this a New Testament sermon?

And so I want to turn to Revelation chapter 2 because something verse 19 something pretty nasty is impacting the church at Thyatira and the Lord Jesus says 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 eat food sacrificed to idols.

they get a huge trap I know your works I know your faith your love your service your patient endurance and that the latter exceeds the first you're a great loving church what a great thing to hear about our own church in terms of this commendation for the Lord Jesus to say things about 5pm your love your faith your steadfastness your standing firm even when really difficult things are going on around about you these guys are not like the church in Ephesus that have lost their first love they are continuing to grow in their fruitfulness or it appears so and their latter works are even

more fruitful than their initial ones and so you scratch your head and say but what's wrong well they're not as healthy as they appear and they get this very weighty warning from Jesus himself 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 now Jezebel is an outsider who is impacting some of God's people she's having an impact on the insiders she's teaching and seducing my servants and the wider church is putting up with her in a way that they really shouldn't be putting up with her there is a time and a place for naming evil amongst us

Paul did it when he rebuked the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 he says it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans he rebukes insiders he rebukes us and he says wake up and it's really interesting he doesn't go on a moral crusade against the rotten state of the world and all the terrible things that people do out there he strongly rebukes the church for what they are putting up with what they tolerate in here did it in a different way in Galatians chapter 1 he said I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel and not that there is another one but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ but even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preach to you let him be accursed a pox on false gospels that's what he's saying and I am even more astonished that you so quickly listen to them what is it with you guys that you put up with this stuff that's what I wrote

Jezebel's a loaded nickname she's somebody who is known in the city she's a real person she has a view of herself she sees herself as a prophetess she sees herself as bringing teaching and a word that is from God himself and tragically the outcome of her teaching is to lead God's people into two activities that are expressly forbidden us sexual immorality and participation in the worship of other deities are never alright for Christian believers we draw the line somewhere and this is where the line is drawn I had a church warden once a leader who said that he felt like we get too hung up on sexual teaching and he got under my skin and his view was that sexual immorality goes on in the world all the time and we ought to get over it and at that level well he's right it does that is how the world is don't expect any better of the world but it's never okay in the church in any form adultery homosexual practice feeding on pornography sleeping around with men or women outside of marriage and this is not just you know this is not hypocritical nitpicking or hypocritical moralists with one another we know that Jesus knows what's in our hearts and not just what goes on in outward action so Jesus is talking more than just about outward action he's talking about what our hearts are like but it's not the unforgivable sin but it does need to be repented of and at its heart sexual immorality porneia is the word in the scriptures is a powerful form of idolatry that drives

[20 : 48] Jesus and his love from our hearts it reduces Jesus it takes us away from him it impacts how we treasure him together but there is a way back and the only way back from it is to give God his rightful place again to repent and to seek his joy and his filling it's not unforgivable we don't tell the world how to live but God tells us how to live a joyous and full life as his redeemed people Steve's been calling the different cities I forget it was Canberra last week and Sydney one week I've lost track now but Thyatira was a Wollongong or a Geelong type of city working class lots of industry and we don't know heaps about the city or its circumstances it's buried under a modern city these days so there's even very little archaeology because you can't get to it through the current city that's there

Lydia was a trader in purple that was a very important colour for regal and royal robes and she gets a mention in Acts chapter 16 she came from Thyatira seems like the people who worked in Thyatira were workers in bronze they knew how brilliantly shiny molten bronze was and bronze mirrors that could be created by the tradecraft of the area to do business in a city like that you'd need to belong to a craft guild it was the ancient equivalent of a union a trade union and I guess no card no work nothing wrong with that except that membership would sometimes mean going to the union Christmas parties eating food which had been sacrificed and offered to the local sun god with his image made of bronze demonstrating your commitment to the cause with the cultic prostitutes and so immediately there are several dilemmas if you're in

Christ have a Christian friend he went to an industry conference like that in Sydney what would you do when your roommate brought back to your room your roommate for the conference brought back to your room one of the conference provided and paid for prostitutes the ancient world isn't so

ancient and to participate or not could have a huge effect economically how I'm seen by my peers whether I'm going to rat them out am I trustworthy I'm not corrupted by this sort of behaviour you're in or you are out do you bow to the local deity and you know we know as Christians that we can rationalise any other god away because we know that none of them are real we know that there is only one real god so every other god is a nonsense at one level these so called gods aren't really gods at all but you want business to go well we have people in our church family we've had people in our church family who came to

Australia from Penang in Malaysia and they made a new life here because as Christians and as Chinese they can only rise to a middle level in Malaysian society and to go higher to be more successful they would need to convert to Islam do you rationalise it away and do you say if you're feeling the pressure of Islam do you say things like well we all believe in one god don't we or Islam and Jesus both believe that Jesus is a prophet which is true but we make compromises which deny the uniqueness of Christ and so we reduce Jesus to something that he is not we've been looking a number of times in this series to our northern Iraq and talking about Christians in northern Iraq and the mark of the Nazarene lives on the line and livelihoods and everything you own and possess on the line over a confession of Jesus

Christ crucified and risen again lose your life or convert to Islam and pay the tax say something that would get me killed in many places it's a nonsense it's an invention of one man's mind written six centuries after Jesus it is a nonsense when you move to a position of toleration you minimize the Lord you make him less in our society we have huge pressure that comes from a secular world's value highest value of toleration I think the Newcastle Herald you probably wouldn't read it but it's done award winning journalism exposing the appalling sexual abuse of children in the Newcastle area and the journalism and the journalism which led to the world's sexual abuse and that paper has done the whole of

[26 : 41] Australia an enormous favour in bringing those issues out into the fore and making us consider the evil stuff that's been going on even in churches they've done wonderful work really wonderful work something to be proud of but that same paper has also run stories for years against the Anglican Church's intolerance of homosexual clergy practising homosexual clergy and through their campaign the paper's campaign they have made it very hard for the Christians in that church to drive a very small number of immoral men from positions of trust and leadership within the church see being in Christ automatically brings us into conflict with the world Jesus says to us if the world hates you bear in mind that it hated me first John 15

Revelation chapter 2 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 the antidote to the power of idolatry is a true picture of God himself and it's here in this passage

God God and verse 23 this nothing less than God Jesus himself will strike her children dead and all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart God will unashamedly judge he he is to be feared by those who reject him Jezebel is doomed and because she refuses to repent and those who have followed her evil are implored to repent or they are dead too but it's not just judgment because when you read this really carefully you see it's full of grace Jezebel could have repented but she chose not to her followers haven't been judged yet they're offered a way to safety they still have opportunity to repent to turn back to Christ and to ask for mercy and forgiveness the mercy of God is strongly on view here if we're struggling in any of these ways that we've talked about already it's just saying to us repent come back turn around admit failure throw yourself on the safety of Christ there's hope full of hope full of hope in the face of great evil in verse 23

Jesus says I am he the big picture of Jesus I am he who searches hearts and minds his eyes see and penetrate everything including deeply inside us and he isn't filled by outward appearance he knows our hearts and minds there's no deceiving him we are totally exposed before him and he has acted with extraordinary love to redeem us despite us he knows what we're like and he still loves us and has acted to preserve us amazing he's a wonderful lord and his feet aren't like clay fragile like yours and mine they're burnished bronze in this passage he's powerful he's more brilliant than any bronze the workers in Thyatira have ever worked with he's strong and he's powerful and he's brilliantly glorious and so John uses pictures that are deeply encouraging to anybody who's doing it tough in the world which is urging them to compromise a world which is intolerant of true faith in Jesus the Jesus we worship is mightier than anyone in the commercial world with any power they

bring to bear he's stronger than the toughest person who gives you grief at school who shames you at university you know when we we can feel very isolated and very fearful under the pressure of evil vastly outnumbered nobody believes what we do or is doing it as tough as I am that's how we feel and Elijah the next day after this magnificent victory on Mount

Carmel against Jezebel's prophets after standing strong and staring down evil he runs away the next day and he says to God I'm the only one and God said actually I've got 7,000 people who haven't bowed their knee to bale yet you're not alone I have many people standing firm and you see that here in Thyatira so these words of warning are not to the whole church there's a bunch of people here who verse 24 to the rest of you a whole bunch of them haven't caved in under pressure the rest of you in Thyatira who do not hold this teaching who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan I say to you I do not lay on you any other burden hold fast what you have until I come they aren't called to repent like some people in other churches they're called to stand firm hang on keep on keeping on don't compromise what you know to be true don't tolerate evil don't yield to sexual immorality don't bring the values of the world into church don't make compromises to protect your job or to secure a future advancement in your career seek your security in Christ not in idols and Jesus makes the most glorious promises we won't miss out we might feel weak we might feel powerless people might think we're insignificant right now in the face of great evil but we have a guaranteed future with extraordinary privilege verse 26 the one who conquers and keeps my works until the end to him

[34 : 40] I will give authority over the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron as when earthen pots are broken to pieces even as I myself have received authority from my father and I will give him the morning star quote psalm 2 it's full of old testament this passage great song of God's kingship over all the nations the song that looks ahead into the future the son of God that God would raise up to rule the nations the one who would receive universal authority and power and right here in revelation 2 he tells believers that we will share in his rule and in his authority and I read that and I just cannot get my head around it that God would share such rule and authority with me we will be authorised by God himself to exercise his good rule over nations one important job that's an important job God will entrust us to rule for good for him take us back to the very beginning of the

Bible in Genesis 2 and we won't get it wrong next time with Genesis 3 pretty amazing promise but you know there's an even better promise here I will give him the morning star it's a picture of a king that's promised in Numbers 24 and this king gets a mention again in the last couple of sentences of the whole of the Bible at the end of Revelation chapter 22 verse 16 I Jesus have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches I am the root and the descendant of David the bright morning star I will give him the morning star I will give him Jesus the one who overcomes I will give him

Jesus said this morning to somebody who's not a believer this is foolishness I reckon only an insider can understand this what could be better than power and influence what could be better than being loved and respected what could be better than being a mover and a shaker what could be better than being independently wealthy what could be better than having a revered name or coming from an esteemed family what could be better than a strong moral code what could be better than finding Mr or Miss right what could be better than having the right look tells us Jesus Jesus far higher than all the other idols and gods of this world the one to whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess to know

Jesus to be known by Jesus to be safe in the presence of Jesus I will give him Jesus and he could well have written and he didn't write but Jesus is indeed our greatest treasure thou know every way to him he and he but