

Thyatira

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[0 : 00] The Risen Lord of the Churches in Asia Now this is the fourth of the messages from the Risen Lord to the churches in Asia.

And as you've seen, that's the area which we would today describe as Western Turkey, where there are very few professing Christians in a present there, compared with the situation that existed in John's day.

You know that John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos because of his faithfulness to the Gospel during a time of fish persecution that broke out against the Christian Church.

And on that Isle, he was given on the Lord's Day a vision of the glorified, ascended and reigning Lord.

A vision which was calculated to encourage the persecuted Christian Church in the knowledge that our Lord was in control of the situation.

[1 : 21] And the various messages which are delivered through John to the churches and to the leaders of each church, these messages are calculated to encourage the Christians to continue in the exercise of their faith.

Now as you read the messages, you discover that the circumstances varied greatly from area to area. There were one or two churches which were very strong in faith and in Christian service, and against whom the Lord had nothing.

That is, there was no condemnation from him delivered against these churches. Most of them, however, were not in that condition.

And one of such was Thyatira. That was an area which was, which had become a famous for its, either for its dye or for a certain type of a cloth.

Now you know that it was from this area that Lydia came to Europe, probably as people would refer to today, maybe as a representative of some company which was marketing either the cloth or the dye.

[3 : 01] Perhaps both. And it was while she was on business in Europe that she heard the gospel from the lips of Paul that Sabbath morning in Philippi.

Well, that's the area to which this message is directed, Thyatira. A rich, prosperous, commercial area in which there was a strong Christian witness.

And you notice that in common with all the other messages, our Lord designates himself here as well. He is designated as, He, the Son of God, who has his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass.

And I mentioned earlier that each self designation of the Lord is meant to, is closely connected with the situation that existed in the church to which he wrote.

In other words, he presents himself to the church as a person who has a message which is relevant to a particular situation.

[4 : 26] Now, without going overboard in any way by, in spiritualizing, the vision that John was given of the risen Lord recorded for us in chapter one.

We would recognize that when the Lord speaks of himself as the Son of God, who has his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass, that whatever else he means to convey, with this picture of himself in his glory and in his exalted sovereignty, he wants us immediately to understand that he is none other than God himself.

He is the Son of God. And you know that when the New Testament uses these terms of the Lord Jesus Christ, it means us to understand, it wants us to understand from these terms that this person is none other than God himself, the Son of God.

He has been the Son of God. He is the Son of God, and he is the Son of God. He has the Son of God. But as such, to him belongs both omniscience and omnipotence.

And I think that it would be sufficient for us to understand these words to convey that. He whose eyes are like unto a flame of fire, and his feet like unto fine brass.

[6 : 04] Here is the Lord of the church, glorified and exalted in heaven, seeing everything within the church, having a minute awareness of all that goes on in it, of all that it does, and of all that it doesn't do.

He searches, as he says, he's going to say later on, I am the one who tries the reins and who searches the hearts of every one.

He is omniscient. He is, say, he searches the reins and the hearts of every individual. He is omniscient. He has a minute knowledge and understanding of our thoughts, of our motives, and of all that we do.

He sees us, as he sees us gathered in this church tonight. And then that person is also omnipotent.

He is possessed of omnipotent strength. Now, I think that that is what is meant here by these words, that his feet are like unto fine brass.

[7 : 28] The church was in a situation when she was subject to be moved, as it were, from her moorings. Some of these churches were departing from the faith.

And they weren't living the way they ought to live. They weren't putting into practice the counsel that the Lord had given to them. But he is not like that.

There is nothing either in himself or external to himself that is capable at all of moving.

This great and exalted Savior, who himself walks in the midst of the candlesticks. He moves amongst the church.

He takes note of all that goes on. He sees everything. But there is no power that is at work either within the church or out with the church, against the church, which is capable of influencing him in any way.

[8 : 34] He cannot be moved. He is the immutable, unshakable, immovable, glorified Savior of the church.

Now, that's the person who delivers this message through John to the leader of the church in Thyatira.

And we look tonight and we ask one or two things. What was it in connection with this church that he commended? Well, we have that in verse 19.

I know thy works and charity and service and faith and patience and works, and the last to be more than the first.

Now, here you have a very interesting picture. If you contrast this church with a church referred to at the beginning of the chapter, Ephesus, here are two churches which function, as it were, in different ways.

[9 : 40] Now, you know, and probably I should really say this in connection with every single address when dealing with this theme, that the church is the number or the body of people called by the grace of God from the service of sin to the service of Christ and organized in the world as his church.

Not a denomination, the church of Christ, all who love the Lord Jesus, organized into his own church in the world. Now, Ephesus, that church, was very perceptive.

It had deep spiritual understanding of the truth and was faithful on the side of the truth. It was zealous in its defense of the faith and it wouldn't tolerate any error whatsoever within its borders.

That was the kind of church Ephesus was. It did not tolerate error, but it was defective in its love. Here you have a church which is almost the exact opposite.

It is commended because of its love, because of its zeal, because of its faith, because of its charity and patience and all its works.

[11 : 14] Here was a church which was serving the community, if you want to put it like that. It was putting into practice the things that it believed in reference to those with whom it rubbed shoulders.

Not only did it believe the truth, but it had charity. It showed love in action towards its neighbors.

And not only that, but it was increasing in this context. It was enduring. That's how many of patience. It was enduring in the exercise of its faith in Christ. It was continuing to love as the Lord Jesus Christ commanded them to love.

And it was increasing in that way. The last was more than the first. That is, it was developing in this practice. It was the exact opposite of Ephesus in its connection.

It was full of loving service service in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have a church here, really.

[12 : 25] You have a picture here, surely, of intense activity. Earn a seal in the works of charity and in love.

Ministering to the ones and to the needs of the community. It was like this, as though it were, living in an area, it looked at the problems of that area and it sought to deal with them and to meet with them.

Now that's the way the church always ought to be. There is no denying of that fact and no one can opt out of its obligations and its responsibilities in this connection.

This is the way the church is meant to be. The church is to emulate our Lord in loving service. As he went about doing good, so every single member of the Christian church is meant to exercise.

The best neighbor ought to be the professing Christian. Now you would think that here is a picture of a perfect church.

[13 : 38] But it was far from perfect because the Lord then goes on to condemn it. Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee because thou sufferest that woman, Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to reduce my servants, to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

And this is the most amazing situation, that here you have a church which side by side with its loving activity, Christian service, here was a church which tolerated self-destroying error on those who taught that error.

In effect, as it sought to emulate its Lord, it became indifferent to the truth that the Lord had given it to defend.

Let us always remember this, that there are two sides, at least to the church's activity. Not only is it to be an act of service in the interests of the community, in the name of our Lord, but she is also to defend the truth that the Lord has given to her.

And through which and by which she herself came into be, she is the pillar of the truth. And really the happy situation of all would be to merge Ephesus and Thyatira.

[15 : 06] To give to Ephesus the loving concern of Thyatira and to give to Thyatira the loving concern of Ephesus for the truth. Now Thyatira didn't have that.

It tolerated error. And as it extended its charity to the community, so it extended unfortunately its charity to errorists and false teachers.

Now I'm sure that you yourselves have come across this from time to time. Churches, and I'm not speaking about any particular denomination when I mention these things.

This can be true of our own church. It could be true of any church. That seeking to emphasize its interest in love, it will tolerate error within its borders.

And when it does that, it is in grave danger of disappearing. Just as Thyatira disappeared. The problem here was this, that without her realizing it, working within her borders was this insidious error, which because she failed to deal with it, destroyed her.

[16 : 27] What was the error? Well, this is how it's referred to. Thou sufferest that woman, Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess to teach and reduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

Now, commentators are more or less unanimous in that claim, and this is that the use of this term, Jezebel, may be a sort of a code name for a special kind of error which had crept into the church in Thyatira.

And the reason why the term Jezebel is used probably is this. It is used so that we will understand what happened in the history of Israel when Jezebel came, was united with Ahab on the throne of Israel.

And you have an account of that in 1 Kings, particularly chapter 21. Well, what happened briefly was this. As you know, Ahab took his wife, his bride, Jezebel, from the kingdom of Tyre, a place which was associated with a godless pomp and idolatry and all kinds of immoral behavior flowing from that kind of emphasis.

And when Jezebel came to the throne of Israel with Ahab, together with Ahab, she was responsible for leading Israel away from the worship of the living God into idolatry and into all kinds of immoral practices.

[18 : 15] And Elijah's role in the days of Ahab and Jezebel was to call the nation back to the service of the living God.

And you remember that in the cut of time when Ahab came face to face with Elijah, you remember what he said to him. Oh, he said to Elijah, art thou he that troubleth Israel?

Israel. That was the condition into which moral and that was the moral and religious degenerate condition of the king at that time that he was accusing the prophet of God of troubling Israel rather than seeing that he and his wife were responsible for the sad condition of the nation at that time.

in short Jezebel led Israel away from God and into godlessness and immorality.

And what was happening in Thyatira was this that they had crept into the church maybe through an influential woman we're not very sure but they had crept into the church this practice which was leading unbelievably leading the members of the Christian church away from the worship of the living God into practices from which God himself was excluded.

[19 : 54] That was the situation in Thyatira. in the same way as we saw last week Pergamos fell away from the worship of God because it compromised Christian principles and was led astray by the principles and the practices and the standards of the world.

So it is possible for people to be led away by the principles and the standards of a practice from which God is excluded and the church becomes corrupted.

And I said earlier a church which tolerates heresy is bound in the long term to be destroyed.

It will eat into its very fabric until the structure will ultimately collapse.

And this is a danger when a church is not on its guard. Now I know full well and everyone else knows this that a church which seeks as I've said in the past few weeks a church which seeks to defend vigorously the truth and the faith delivered unto it and that is its responsibility in every age to present the truth and to defend the truth and not to allow any error to creep into its practice or its profession.

[21 : 43] A church which does that will be exposed to censure and ridicule. Of course it will. But it's far better for a church to be exposed to censure and ridicule than for a church to tolerate in the spirit of love so-called the error which is one day going to destroy it.

And that was the message that the Lord had for this church as we considered thirdly the punishment that he was going to mete out. I gave her, he says, verse 21, space to repent of her fornication she repented not.

Behold, I will cast her into her bed and them that commit a adultery with her into great tribulation except they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death and all the churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins and hearts and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Now here is something very interesting indeed. What he's saying in effect here is that her sin is to become her punishment.

The very practice that was being condoned was to be the means of her destruction. Error will destroy the church in and of itself.

[23 : 06] It weakens as it defiles. It takes away the church's strength. And here you have a picture of the church left helpless on the very bed in which she was committing all this sin.

And her punishment was to be exposed to punishment. In order he says that all all the churches shall know that I am he which shut the reins and ties the hearts.

The shame and the disgrace that was going to be brought upon the church was to become known as the chastisement and the punishment of God upon her for her sin.

Now as you know just as well as I do there are people who don't believe this kind of teaching. There are people who do not believe for example as we've heard in the past few years that the tremendous advance that for example the disease of AIDS has and I just raise as an example that that is not accepted by people as the evidence of God's chastisement and God's punishment because of sin and the reason they don't accept it of course is this that they don't accept the reality of sin itself and this plague is therefore not considered as a plague it is not considered as judgment at all from God the whole idea is laughter of court it is ridiculed and I'm sure you've heard people and you've seen people in the media who have ridiculed that kind of approach to this awful and gruesome subject but you know you cannot escape this from the word of

God that there are situations in which God in time he will do it in eternity anyway at the day of judgment but in time there are circumstances and situations in which God is going to display his judgment upon sin sin will be judged by God and he goes on here to illustrate the principle on which he acts because he says I search the ruins and the hearts and I will give unto every one of you according to your works you know that that is a fearful statement we have in the Old Testament be sure your sin find you out it ought to strike terror into the heart of every one of us here tonight if it be that you live in a life of sin and departing from the living

[26 : 27] God you may cover your sin there may not be a soul in the world who knows what's going on but yourself you may be afraid at times that it will come out but be sure of this it will if not in time it will at the day of judgment because this is a principle upon which God of necessity must work I will give unto every one of you according to your works you know that Paul for example speaking of the day of judgment says this we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that we may receive each one of us according that which we have done whether it be good or evil you know as well as I do that salvation is not based upon any works that you do but at the same time the works that is the character that you form by the kind of person you are by the thought processes that you have the motives that move you to do particular actions at particular times that works the innermost feelings and desires and motives that make you the kind of person that you are and that determine that you do the things that you do these things will be exposed by him and on the basis of the kind of person that you are

God will judge you because he says I try the reins I search the heart you know what the word rain means what we speak today of the kidneys and the Bible uses that term to speak of the innermost feelings and motives and desires of the human heart and the the the the secrets the secret chamber of your soul the thoughts arise there that no one knows of but that God sees as we sang here tonight from afar and that he sees even before you think them he searches his eyes scrutinize your whole being he searches the heart the seat of your emotions and your feelings and your very being he knows you through and through and you will never ever at any time escape the omniscience of

Jehovah nor the judgment of his son that's the principle on which he acts and he says here finally as he brings his promises and encouragement to bear upon the church unto you he says unto the rest in Thyatira as many as have not this doctrine of course the whole church was corrupted there were some people who didn't accept this teaching there were some people who were appalled by the circumstances they were appalled by the error that was creeping into church they were appalled at the weakness that that was bringing to bear upon the church I say this to you as many of you as have not known the depths of Satan have not in any way compromised with those people who think that they know more than

I do people who are deceptive like Satan himself who are motivated and ruled by Satan you know I'm sure you've heard this seeing this has crossed my mind I'm sure you know the reaction if for example error crept into the church awful error it crept into Thyatira and someone stood up and said look this is from Satan this is from the pit the media would laugh you out of court they would probably make you feel embarrassed that you should ever attribute anything that is wrong to satanic influence and you and I live in a day when it is becoming increasingly difficult to defend the truth as it is becoming difficult to propagate the truth because people don't believe in sin they don't believe in Satan nor in his influence everything should be tolerated in the spirit of love well that's what

Thyatira tried with disastrous consequences to her witness but he says to you who are faithful I will ask you to do nothing but what you have already done hold fast till I come you and I may ask ourselves tonight this question what does the Lord want me to do in reference to his word in reference to the gospel and to the truth this is what he wants you to do hold on to it don't give it up hold fast to the whole truth in the face of the most awful difficulty and ridicule and persecution that's all he says I ask you to do hold fast fast till I come and then he gives this promise to him that overcometh and keep my works unto the end remember this is a thrust in all the messages and this is the message that it has to each one of us here tonight these messages are relevant to us in 1989 there is nothing else that you can do as a

[32 : 54] Christian but to overcome you've got to battle on and you've got to keep going and there's no opting out there's no discharge from this war it's a constant struggle and you've got to keep on because it is he who perseveres unto the end who shall be saved that's the meaning of overcoming you're going to make difficulties and problems and obstacles but you've got to keep going even when there are times when you may be ridiculed for believing what you believe hold fast for being what you are in the light of what you believe hold fast and he says I will add no other burden I don't ask anything else but that and you know that if it be the case that the Lord Jesus Christ has laid this burden upon you as someone put it no

Christ given burden can crush by its weight because he gives grace to bear the burden that we shoulder the danger is not that we sink under the burden the danger lies in letting it go through our neglect and if the Lord has endeared his truth to your heart you hold on to it and whatever it may cost you to believe keep on it's well worth shouldering that burden and that's all that he asks you to do I will lay no other burden upon and then he gives the church this threefold promise to him who overcomes will I give power over the nations the second one he shall rule them with a rod of iron the service of a potter shall be broken to shivers even as

I receive to my father and the third is I will give him the morning star what does this mean well just briefly this he assures the church and all the members of the church who overcome and who continue steadfast in the faith that they will partake in the final triumph and glory of the saviour they will be associated with him in his glory when he comes again it doesn't mean that they are going to hold as individuals offices of trust under the Lord it just means that they will be associated with him in the triumph that is going to be his when he comes and his triumph of this he will have power over the nations now remember the relevance of this promise the church was persecuted the nations of the world were in danger of annihilating the church but he is in control and he will come and he will show us power over the nations and if you continue steadfast you will be associated with him in that glory then secondly you will partake in the reign of

Christ and you know that verse 27 is a direct quotation from the psalm we sang here tonight psalm 2 this is what he says take the end first I received this promise of my father that I would rule the nation with a rod of iron and as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shiver here is our reference to the invincible power and the strength and the power of the risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ you know at any given moment in the church is experience the world seems so powerful doesn't it it seems so powerful we're hearing this last Friday evening in the town hall comparatively speaking the world is so powerful the church is so small so insignificant so weak it is so ridiculous in many places persecuted people might meet in fear of their lives to worship the

Lord Jesus Christ the world seems to have it all its own way but my friend that is not the case the Lord reigns it's not that he's going to reign he is reigning in the interest of his church of course the world doesn't see that and he will come for the destruction of his enemies and the world which seems so powerful now will have no power left there will be no power to oppose Christ because he will rule them with a rod of iron showing his strength showing his sovereignty and as the vessels of a party shall they be broken to shivers the world seems so organized so compacted tonight just like a huge vessel but the Lord and his sovereignty is going to destroy that vessel broken to pieces that's the promise that the

[38 : 53] Lord has been given by the father I have received that promise from my father and no promise that God has given to the son will ever be unfulfilled and the encouragement of the church is this you will share with him and you will partake with him in that glorious reign of his when he comes again to judge the world that's to encourage the church to keep on hold fast and overcome and finally I will give him the morning star now revelation 22 verse 16 refers the star to Jesus himself I am the bright and the morning star the church is going to receive Christ himself now someone may say but how I mean what does that mean well I it means lots of things but it means this that is the greatest blessing of all because in receiving him she is going to receive all that she has ever striven for all that she has ever asked for she already possesses him as a

Lord and a Saviour and a Redeemer but in that day she's going to possess him in all his fullness she'll be conformed to him she'll be holy as he is holy righteous as he is righteous clothed with the beauty that he possesses as Lord and as Saviour and surely nothing is going to satisfy the church of Jesus Christ quite like this the darkness of the struggle of our night will come to an end and will be dispelled eternal day will usher in the reign of eternal truth all the misery associated with her conflict in the world will be at an end all the dangers which she has been exposed will have gone all her fears and all her weariness and all her weakness which she felt in the conflict will have been left behind there will be no night there no more night nor will she need the sun to give her light but the

Lord God shall lighten them and the lamb shall be her light in her eternal world this is her encouragement to keep on because I will give you the morning star he that hath an ear that him hear what the spirit said unto the churches as I said earlier this has relevance for us all of course our circumstances are different tonight to what they were at the end of the first Christian century of course they're different in many respects they're different to what they were in that area of what is now western Turkey but you and I have to contend with forces of evil as well you and I have to contend with difficulties and danger and error as we are challenged as

Christians by the conditions of our own environment and it's up to you to give an ear to what the spirit says to the churches he has a message for you tonight and for me a message that we might increase in faith and charity and patience a message that we would hold fast the truth and a message that we would overcome and refuse to cave in under the most awful trying circumstances and influences that are brought to bear upon you and this message as well the message of a glorious promise if you overcome continue to overcome in the conflict do you not think that

Christ and the Christian faith are worth contending for in this evil world let us pray bless to us Lord thy truth we pray that thou wouldst apply it with meaning to our needy hearts and help us to carry away with us something of its relevance and of its permanence forgive us for our sins in holy things and go before us preparing us for all our duties and responsibilities for Jesus sake Amen