

Revelation 2:18-28

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Date: 02 August 2015

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[0 : 0 0] All right, so we are back in the book of Revelation tonight. This summer, if you've been with us, we've been studying Jesus' seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor.

And we've been seeing that these letters are sort of like spiritual sort of diagnoses, that Jesus addresses each one of these churches for their spiritual health, and in his letter to them, he gives them exactly what they need, the kind of prescription, as it were, to either become or to stay healthy and vibrant in their walk with him.

And of course, these letters are for us to today because we see our own lives and we see our own churches oftentimes in these sort of spiritual diagnoses. You know, often people will ask, well, how do I grow spiritually?

How do I get healthier, more vibrant? How do I flourish in my relationship with God? And that's part of what these letters are here for, to help us to do just that.

Tonight, we're looking at the fourth letter in this series, the letter to the church in a city called Thyatira. And it's found in the book of Revelation, chapter 2, verses 18 through 29.

[1 : 1 4] That's page 1029 in the Pew Bible, if you want to follow along there. Let me encourage you to turn there, actually. It'll be on the screen above as well. Page 1029, Revelation chapter 2, verses 18 through 29.

All right, let me read this for us. And to the angel of the church in Thyatira 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 their works, and I will strike her children dead.

And all of the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. 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.

[2 : 5 1] Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron as when earth and 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. Let's pray.

Lord, we ask that you would give us ears that hear what your Spirit is speaking to us tonight. God, we pray that as a church and as individuals, you would open our hearts to rightly respond to this message before us.

And God, as I seek to explain this passage, grant that I would do so with clarity and with grace, Father. Come before you in the name of Jesus. Amen. So what does the church need today? What do we need? What does the church need to be effective in its call to evangelism? That is, sharing the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ to heal our relationship with him?

[4 : 0 0] What do we need to actually sort of do that in a way that people will actually listen and that people will even want to listen? And what do we need today to be effective, not just in evangelism, but in discipleship?

What do we need to be effective in helping one another to live in line with the truth of the gospel? To encourage one another and to teach one another to live a life more and more shaped like Jesus? Jesus. And what do we need today to be effective in our highest calling?

Our calling to display the glory and the beauty of God to the world in our life together? What does the church need to reflect God's awesome nature out into the world and to reflect the praises of creation back to him?

What do we really need to be, in other words, God's image bearers, sort of that mirror of his glory in the world as a church? Well, the answer, what we need, you and I, might seem kind of simple at first.

The answer is love. Jesus himself said, people will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another. That's John 13, 35. And of course, Jesus isn't talking about a breezy, kind of self-serving, take it or leave it sort of love.

[5 : 25] You know, that sort of love when it's convenient for my schedule kind of love. No, the sort of love that Jesus has in mind is the kind of trusting, sacrificial, stick it out through thick and thin sort of love.

You know, that same night when Jesus told his disciples what I just read to you, he said this, he said, this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

And how did Jesus love us? He says in the next verse, John 15, 13, greater love is no one than this, that someone laid down his life for his friends. That's the kind of love that Jesus has shown us.

He's loved us with a sacrificial, lay down your life sort of love. And friends, that's what we need today, you and I, we need that kind of love. And this church in Thyatira that Jesus is talking to here, if you look at verse 19, that's exactly what they had, a trusting, sacrificial, stick it out through thick and thin love.

Jesus says, I know your works, your love, your faith, your trust, your service, your sacrifice, and your patient endurance. Here was a truly loving church. And not just that, it was an increasingly loving church.

[6 : 49] And the rest of verse 18, Jesus commends them. I know that your latter works exceed the first. You know, often when you get sort of excited about something, like, you know, my wife and I were just, we just moved into a new place and, you know, we're sort of excited about it.

We're, we're like doing lots of projects around the house and painting and scraping and cause it's an old place, you know, building stuff. But look, I know, and you, I mean, you and I both know that sooner or later that thrill is going to sort of wear off, right?

Like pretty soon we're just going to be sick of doing projects around the house and it's going to peter out. And isn't that how it is with so much of our life? And yet here, Jesus is saying, no, actually you have an increasing sort of love that when you first heard this unbelievably good news that God sent his son to pay for your sins and to reconcile you free of charge back to him.

When this church came to believe that and when they came alive through God's spirit, they began to love each other and they began to meet each other's physical needs and their emotional needs and they, and they started to overlook each other's faults and forgive each other's wrongs.

There was this love and peace instead of bitterness and gossip and all these ways. And then here's the amazing thing. Jesus says it didn't actually just trickle out and run out over time.

[8 : 09] This wasn't just a passing fad or an enthusiasm for something new. That this stream of love became a river. That as the amazing news of God's love for them settled deeper and deeper into their hearts, they loved each other more and more.

Their latter works exceeded their first. Now, friends, isn't that the kind of church that you want to be? Isn't that the kind of church you want to be a part of?

Where the love of God for us in Christ becomes just this torrent of love toward one another. I mean, imagine how much easier our witness would be to our neighbors.

Think of how much easier evangelism would be if I knew that like when my neighbor showed up to Trinity, they would just see a bunch of people who loved each other like crazy. I mean, I'm pretty sure that would increase their awareness or at least their curiosity into what this Jesus thing was all about.

Jesus commends this church in Thyatira for their love. But you know, there's a danger. There's a danger for churches that love well.

[9 : 26] And there's a danger for Christians that love well. And it's actually the opposite danger that we saw back in the beginning of chapter 2 in the letter to the church at Ephesus.

If you remember back there, we saw a picture of a church that was passionate about truth and sound doctrine, all very, very, very good things. But, Jesus says, you have no love. The problem in Ephesus was a loveless orthodoxy. But here in Thyatira, the problem is nearly the reverse. They love, but they haven't been careful to preserve what's true.

In particular, they've tolerated, as Jesus says at the beginning of verse 20, a kind of teaching that undermined holy living.

And this teaching, it seems, was being spread by a person that Jesus actually likens to the character of Jezebel in the Old Testament. And in case you're not familiar with the Old Testament, that's not a very flattering comparison.

[10:32] We learn about Jezebel in the book of 1 Kings, starting in chapter 16. She was the wife of a really bad king, Ahab, in the northern kingdom of Israel. And along with Ahab, she promoted idol worship and despised the words of the prophets and took advantage of the poor.

Pretty bad figure. And apparently here in Thyatira, there was a person, it seems a woman, who was promoting and seducing people into a certain kind of teaching that then led into just an embrace of idolatry and sexual immorality.

And she may have even been a prominent figure in the church. Who knows? She might have been a deacon. She might have been a recognized officer. She was maybe even a prophetess, someone who had the gift of prophecy, so it seemed.

And if you look down at verse 24, we see that this group, led by this particular person, was claiming to have some sort of secret knowledge, it seems. That they claimed to have figured out some sort of deep spiritual truth.

Maybe like Paul sort of references in 1 Corinthians 10, maybe this group was sort of teaching that, you know, idols aren't really anything. We know that there's one God, so these idols aren't nothing. Therefore, it doesn't matter if you go to the temple and feast with them and worship them.

[11:49] It doesn't matter, because we know idols aren't real and we figured out that deep, secret spiritual truth. And maybe they were also teaching that, you know, that for truly spiritual people who've understood these deep, secret things, you know, once you sort of see the truth as it really is, it doesn't really matter what you do with your body.

I mean, it's the spiritual thing that counts. So, you know, sex outside of marriage, not a big deal, because what you do in your body doesn't really affect your soul. So, you know, this is a sort of deeper teaching of Christianity.

Christianity. This is probably the kinds of things that they were saying. And Jesus looks upon all of these claims to a deeper insight.

These claims to really know the truth, and Jesus says, it's all a lie of Satan. That's what he says. He says, these deep things of Satan.

So, as I think we look over this letter, I think the first lesson for us is this. As we strive as a church to love well, and we should strive as a church with all the strength that God gives us to love well, we have to also be discerning.

[13:12] We have to recognize, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, that great love chapter in the New Testament, that love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

That that's part of what it means to love. In other words, we need love and truth. We need love and holiness. True love cares deeply about both.

In fact, it's almost as if Jesus is telling them here that, look, if you have this love without the sort of the skeleton of the truth of the gospel, it's all going to just turn into a puddle.

Imagine a body without a skeleton. It's not going to be a body much longer. And the second lesson, I think that we see here, is that Jesus' stern warning here, his stern warning, doesn't mean that there's no place for sinners in the church.

No, no, no. If you want to be a part of the church of Jesus, then you have to admit just that, that you're a complete moral failure.

[14:26] You know, that's the only way in. The only way in to the church of God is through admitting that you're a sinner and you're broken and you can't do it on your own.

In other words, the gospel of grace is just that. A gospel, a good message of news, of grace, of undeserved favor for people like you and me who don't get it and don't deserve it.

So Jesus isn't saying here that there's no room for sinners. But he is saying that unrepentant sin, sin that we don't acknowledge and don't turn away from, is deadly and is dangerous.

Look at verse 21. Jesus, in his mercy and in his kindness, gave this particular teacher time to repent.

He had been beckoning to them to turn around, to realize that you're headed in the wrong direction and to come home. Come back. But it seems in this particular instance, this particular teacher refused.

[15:43] So friend, maybe you're here tonight and maybe you're feeling like you've completely and utterly blown it. That you've stumbled into sin that maybe it's big sort of obvious sin and maybe stumble is kind of a euphemism because you just dove right in with both feet.

Friends, the message of this text for you is that Jesus is saying, come home. There's a place for you at my table and in my kingdom and my love for you hasn't changed so come.

There's time to turn tonight and come back. It's not too late. The third lesson I think we see here is that there's a warning.

There is a warning for those who willfully teach and support false teaching. In verse 22 through 23, Jesus issues a massively stern warning.

Sickness, suffering, even death, he says, is the outcome of knowingly and willingly teaching and leading God's people astray. This is very serious.

[17:01] And just as Jesus welcomes absolutely everyone who turns from sin, no matter what that sin is, and comes to him for grace, he also warns that those who persist in leading others astray are going to face ruin.

Particularly those who are in positions of authority and leadership who lead people away and who don't turn and repent. Jesus is the one, he says, who searches minds and hearts and will give to each according to their works.

Now what does that mean? It doesn't mean that Jesus is going to take all our good deeds and all our bad deeds and weigh them on a scale, see which way it tips and say, okay, that's what you get. That is nowhere in the Bible. He's not talking about the amount of deeds. He's talking about the disposition of the heart.

That's what it means that he's going to give according to their works. You see, for those who humbly listen to Jesus and turn to him in repentance and faith, he's going to grant abundant grace.

[18:06] Even if you have a modicum of turning to him, he will meet you with an overflow of grace. But, to the one who refuses to listen, the one who proudly thinks that they can do it their own way and find the loophole or the spiritual secret to justify their actions, to that one who remains unrepentant, Jesus says, okay, I'll give you what you ask for.

If you want to live life your own way, if you want to keep going in that direction, fine, it's yours. And that path is the path of ruin and disintegration and ultimately death.

But, you know, this stern warning isn't the last word of Jesus to this church and to us tonight. Jesus issues this call to repentance with a fresh glimpse of his person and of his promises.

You know, he opens in verse 18 by describing himself as he who has eyes like a flame of fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. Now, on the surface, Jesus is talking about his glory and his holiness here.

He's the one who sees our hearts. He's the one who shines with the glory of the Father. But, you know, to the citizens of this particular city of Thyatira in western Turkey, this sort of image of Jesus probably would have resonated a lot more deeply with them.

[19:34] Because one of the things that we know sort of from archaeology and from history is that the city of Thyatira on the one hand was politically and culturally basically unimportant. It was on the margins and it didn't have much status.

But, the one thing that Thyatira was known for, the one little claim to fame it had, was its metalworking. In particular, in Thyatira there was a guild, which is sort of a group of workmen. There was a guild of bronze workers who were just completely famous throughout the region. The city prided themselves on being able to make and fashion a certain kind of bronze that you could get nowhere else.

In fact, some scholars think that the unique language that Jesus uses for burnished bronze in verse 18 was a technical term for that same sort of bronze that they made in Thyatira. This bronze that you couldn't get anywhere.

And this bronze was made by a specialized process that this particular tradesman guild in Thyatira kept utterly secret and they guarded this secret because it was like their trade secret, right? It's like

they weren't just going to sort of broadcast it all over the place.

[20 : 40] Here's how you make the one thing that we actually have worth out of. And no one else could get it and no one else could make it and no one else had a claim to it. No one else that is except Jesus.

This prized thing that this city celebrated, this secret protected thing that made them feel the one thing that made them feel like they were some thing or some body.

Jesus says what you're actually looking for is me. I'm the one in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and worth are found.

You're looking for worth, for importance, for identity. You're being led astray by teachers who are telling you that they have this special insight but don't you see that I'm the treasure you're looking for?

How liberating is the end of verse 24. Jesus says to those who aren't being led astray by this teaching, look, I'm not laying on you.

[21 : 44] I'm not laying on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come. In other words, look friends, there's not a second tier, there's not a deeper plane, there's not a special secret you have to learn, there's no inner guild that you have to join.

Jesus is saying, if you have me, then you've got it all. I'm not going to lay on you some burden to prove yourself or to initiate yourself. Take my yoke upon you, Jesus once said in his earthly ministry.

My burden is easy and my yoke is light and you'll find rest for your souls. You see, what Jesus is showing us about his person as he issues this call for us to be both loving and discerning, what he's saying is, is that, look, my eyes are like fire, I see the very depths of your soul, but my feet are like burnished bronze on the treasure that you're longing for.

And you know, if we start to realize that in Christ we have all that we really need, then we actually can love well and make hard calls when something isn't right.

Why did the church in Thyatira tolerate this false teaching? Well, maybe it was, you know, maybe it was taught in such a way that made them feel important, that they were getting secret insight, that they were sort of advancing beyond maybe some of the other churches.

[23 : 19] They were feeling special. Or maybe they didn't like just not having people like them. They were a really loving church. They probably loved people.

And the thought of sort of saying no to something, well, they didn't want that disapproval. They didn't want that sort of reaction. But either way, Jesus is saying, look, in me, you've got all of that. You've got the one whose approval matters more than anything else. You've got the one whose worth and glory will last forever. But Jesus points not just to his person, but to his promises. For those who stay close to him, for those who overcome, as he says, he promises that they will rule with him in authority over the nations.

This image there at the end of our section of breaking pots and ruling with a rod of iron actually comes from Psalm chapter 2, Psalm number 2.

[24 : 26] And it's a picture, it's a very graphic picture, isn't it, in the Psalm of God's king ruling the world and putting down and putting to an end rebellion and evil and injustice and all the things that deep in our hearts we cry out against in the world.

It's a graphic picture of God bringing all of that to an end and establishing once again peace and wholeness. And Jesus is saying to us and to this church, look, I know you don't feel important now. I know you're tempted to let these important sounding teachers in the door and I know it's so much easier to just go along with it. Look, it would have been very, very, a whole lot easier in a pagan city like Thyatira to just give in to idol worship.

Look, everyone was doing it. The whole sort of culture revolved around these temples and these practices. It would have been so much easier in their context to just not worry about holiness and sexual purity and all those things.

But Jesus is saying, look, don't you see? I know you're feeling trampled now. I know you're feeling marginalized. But hold on to me.

[25 : 41] It's not always going to be that way. You are the kings and the queens of the world to come. You are the new humanity in the midst of the old.

You're the ones who are going to share my reign in the world to come. So don't be afraid to make distinctions now between what's good and what's evil, between what's right and what's wrong.

Don't be afraid to let your love express itself in holiness. Friends, you're going to share my authority one day, Jesus says. And Jesus promises in addition to all that in verse 28 at the very end, I will give to the one who overcomes, to the one who conquers, the morning star.

Now, what in the world is the morning star? Well, in the ancient world, the morning star would have been the planet Venus, actually, as it sort of rose. And it would have stood out as sort of the brightest star-like object in the sky.

It would have been sort of prominent and brighter than all the rest. But it's interesting, at the end of Revelation in chapter 22, verse 16, Jesus calls himself the morning star. At the very end of the book, he says, I am the root and descendant of David, the bright and morning star.

[27 : 08] The most radiant object in the night sky, the thing that you can't miss, the beauty among beauties, Jesus is saying, it's me.

And Jesus is telling them to hold fast. Hold fast.

And what will you receive? He's not just going to give you a throne, friends. He's saying, I'm going to give you my very self. You get the morning star.

You get all of me. You get me, Jesus says. And you know, at the end of the day, what Jesus is asking of us, what Jesus is calling us to in the gospel, is to give our whole selves to him.

To heed his word, to trust his ways, to give him our whole selves. And you know, friends, we know that that must be for our good.

[28 : 18] Because Jesus Christ has done the same thing for us. He has given himself to us. One day, we're going to embrace him in all of his beauty and glory, the bright morning star.

But you know, before that self-giving, long ago, before that, he had already given himself on the cross. That the morning star actually went into darkness.

And the ruler of the nations was crushed to pieces by the rulers of this age. He gave himself for us. So that when we give ourselves to him, we find righteousness and life and peace and joy. he gave himself for us so that all who put their trust in him could rule with him and could shine with him forever.

So friends, as we wrap up with this letter, let's love one another. let's love one another with a trusting, sacrificial, stick it out through thick and thin kind of love and in our loving, let's hold fast to truth and holiness even if it makes us unimportant in the world's eyes.

[29 : 44] Even if that makes us incredibly unpopular, even despised, not that we go sort of looking for people to not like us, but even if that's a result, even if it makes life hard, let's give ourselves to Christ with no reserves because, friends, he's the one who has given himself to us and who will give us so much more.

let's pray. Father, we do ask that you would give us the courage to love well.

God, so often we're fearful and afraid to love our brothers and sisters in the church and to love our neighbors as ourselves, so God, would you grant us courage to do that? And Lord, in our loving, would you help us to love also what is true and what is beautiful and what is good help us to hold fast to truth and to holiness and would that be an expression of our deep love for you and for others, God?

Jesus, we need your spirit not just to hear this message but to live it out, so would you come and would you dwell among us? Oh, bright morning star, oh, ruler of the nations, would you call us forth to yourself by your spirit so that we might live in a way that pleases you.

Amen. Well, friends, as a way of responding tonight, we're going to take the Lord's Supper together. Um, um, um,