

Pr Mark Turner: Thyatira (10/8/19)

Scripture Reading: Revelation 2:18-29

Introduction:

Each church is different. If you travel around and visit a variety of churches you will notice that there are some obvious differences. It is no different with these churches.

One of these differences is the way in which they deal with sin. In Matthew 18 Jesus spells out how sin should be dealt with. In Ephesians, Paul speaks of God's desire for His church to be pure. So this is obviously an important issue for churches to get clear about.

The letter to the church in Thyatira is the longest of all of the messages to the seven churches. Fourth on the mail route, this church was a church that, as we will see, was characterised as a church that tolerated sin.

There were many good things going on in the church in Thyatira, but it is fairly obvious from the message that Jesus gives to this church that they were wanting in some areas.

City:

It was located about 70km from Pergamum. It was the smallest and least significant of the seven cities on this mail route. Yet it was an important commercial city that produced wool, linen, apparel, dyed goods, leatherwork, tanning and excellent bronze work.

Thyatira was known for its purple woollen goods that they sold to people of import (Acts 16:14).

One of the more notable things about the city of Thyatira was its many trade guilds. Each guild had its own patron deity, feasts and seasonal festivities including sexual revelries.

Church:

The Christians in Thyatira weren't under the oppression of emperor worship or Jewish opponents like those in Smyrna and Pergamum.

The real difficulty faced by the Christians in Thyatira had to do with the trade guilds. These guilds made it very difficult for anyone who was not a part of them to get work to survive and support their families. Because of this social pressure, the burning question for the Christians in Thyatira was: could they participate in their festivals and activities?

Correspondent:

Revelation 2:18 - "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass.'"

Jesus introduces Himself as "the Son of God..." with "feet like fine brass." Two of these phrases are taken from the description of Christ in Revelation 1:14,15.

The patron god of the bronze workers was Apollo, who was referred to as the son of the god Zeus, or simply 'the son of god.'

Commendation:

Revelation 2:19 - "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first."

The commendation from Jesus to His church in Thyatira was that they had several very admirable qualities. Let's look at a few of those.

"Love" - the believers in Thyatira were characterised by Christian love for one another. This is a great quality for a church to have, one that we would be very pleased to have here at Hinkler.

"Faith" - The greek word here could have been translated as either faith, or faithfulness. Faithfulness seems to be the best fit. As a whole, they were also known as a faithful church.

"Service" and "Patience/Endurance" - These are the products of love and faith. Out of their love and faithfulness flowed a patient service that Jesus spoke highly of.

He also went on to say that their last works were "more than their first." This speaks of improvement! This is a good thing. A great thing even. They were the opposite to the church in Ephesus. They were growing in their love, faithfulness, service and endurance.

- Ephesus was struggling with love, but they were committed to ensuring the holiness and fidelity of those who were their leaders.
- Thyatira were strong in love, but were struggling to test those who taught and influenced the people in their congregation.

Concern:

Revelation 2:20 - "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols."

Unfortunately, in spite of these great commendations, Jesus had major concerns for this church.

The first reference that we are going to spend a little bit of time looking at is that they "tolerate the woman Jezebel." (NASB). Today, tolerance is the buzz word. We would just about crucify someone for intolerance. Yet this is the very thing Jesus has against the church in Thyatira.

Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, did more evil to lead Israel into sin by supplanting the worship of God with the worship of Baal, than any other queen (1 Kings 16:30-33).

Jezebel, was purported to have been into both idolatry and witchcraft (2 Kings 9:22).

Now, it is most likely that "Jezebel" was not her real name, but rather this was probably a pseudonym as we saw with the Nicolaitans and Balaamites in the previous message. She was probably the leader of a movement which was afoot in the church that was promoting compromise, specifically compromise by joining in with the activities of the trade guilds in self-preservation (because of the persecution that was associated with not joining in with them).

Revelation 2:21 - "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent."

Notice the mercy that is associated with this concern. Jesus says that He "gave her time to repent... but she did not." Christ's strongest accusation is directed, not against 'Jezebel's' perversion, but against her refusal to repent.

Revelation 2:22 - "Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds."

Yet again, Jesus' first concern is that they would repent. He doesn't want to have to bring His judgment upon them. But as with 'Jezebel,' Christ's strongest accusation is regarding an unwillingness to repent.

Revelation 2:23 - "I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works."

The judgment that is pronounced is that her children will be killed "with death." This is an allusion to King Ahab's seventy children who were slaughtered by Jehu (2 Kings 10:6-8).

These spiritual children, Jesus says, will suffer serious judgment as a result of following the teachings of Jezebel. There are allusions of this same sort of thing in Acts 5 and 1 Corinthians 11:29,30. This would have been a frightening message for the church in Thyatira when it was delivered on a Sabbath morning.

We too, need to reflect on the ways in which we are being faithless and repent so that we don't force God's hand to the same kind of judgement.

Command:

Revelation 2:24,25 - "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come."

Christ's only command for those in Thyatira was that they "hold fast what you have till I come." This command was probably directed at those who had sufficient insight to penetrate Jezebel's deception. "Until I come" seems undoubtably to be a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus. He is saying to them 'be true to what you are doing a don't compromise because I will come and rescue you from all of this one day soon.

"The deep things of Satan" - this is a little bit of a complex reference that scholars still have some level of debate over its meaning. But it seems that Jesus is indicating that there is no need to experience the satanic elements of life if you haven't already. You don't need to be corrupted by the worst of evils in order to experience the goodness of God. All of us have to battle with self in some way or another and that is sufficient battle.

Counsel:

Revelation 2:26-28 - "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'— as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star."

Be an "overcomer," Jesus counsels them. Choose rather to loose your job (and even your life) than to compromise. "And," He adds, "keep my works till the end."

To those who overcome Jesus promises that they will:

- Receive authority and rule with Christ (Psalm 2:9, Revelation 5:10; 12:5; 19:15)
- Receive the morning star - Jesus (Revelation 22:16)

Revelation 2:29 - "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

What is the Spirit saying to you today? There are at least 3 messages that we can take home from this passage that the Spirit is saying to our hearts:

1. Be faithful.
2. Have a high regard for truth.
3. Don't compromise/tolerate sin.

"The experience of a minority of the believers in the church of Thyatira proves that love and faith manifested in Christian service and perseverance can be experienced even in churches where the majority have chosen to follow a way of compromise to the world's standards and conform to a non-Christian lifestyle... "...Christian service and perseverance are the result of the working and transforming influence of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, and they are not conditioned by favourable circumstances."

Ranko Stefanovic, Revelation of Jesus Christ.