

Revelation 2:18–29 (ESV)

To the Church in Thyatira

¹⁸ “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.

¹⁹ “ ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

²⁰ 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. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² 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 her works, ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. ²⁸ And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Today we’ve come to the letter to the church in Thyatira. Jesus has been dictating letters to John, for him to write to 7 different churches, on a circuit in what we now know as

Turkey. And today we've come to the **smallest** town on that circuit, but the **longest** of the letters.

Let's set the scene:

The town of Thyatira, wasn't a particularly significant sort of a place. The only thing it really had going for it, was it was on the road to somewhere else. The easiest place to build a road, has always been to follow the flatter ground of the river valleys, and Thyatira was situated on the Hermus River, which led to Pergamum (51 km away).

And what we know of Thyatira, is very little, because it was so **insignificant**. But evidence from archaeology, tell us that there was really only 2 industries there: One of those industries was trading (because it was on a major trade route). And **one** of the things it traded in, was purple dye. (Which was a local product of Thyatira, and it was **very** rare and **very** expensive. And in fact, in Acts, we meet a lady **from** Thyatira (named Lydia), who traded in purple cloth.)

And if you weren't involved in trade, the only **other major** employer, was the military garrison, stationed there to protect the trade route, and essentially to hold off invaders long enough so that Pergamum down the road could get ready to protect itself. And so Thyatira was like a 'sacrificial' town – they'd hold the enemies there long enough, and then withdraw to defend the more important places (like Pergamum).

So, Thyatira didn't have a lot going for it.

But there is one very important fact, that archaeologists **have** uncovered: For such a small and insignificant town, Thyatira had a very high concentration of "Trade guilds" What's a "trade guild", I hear you ask – Well, if you can think of a

militant trade union, and a chamber of commerce rolled in to one, you've got something like a trade guild. And so there would be a trade guild for the traders in purple die; a trade guild for the workers in bronze; a trade guild for this; and a trade guild for that...

And essentially what that meant, was unless you were a member of that trade guild, there was no way that you were allowed to work in that industry, or to trade your product. *It would be like trying to take up shearing 40 years ago (here in Australia), without being a card-carrying member of the AWU. Or it would be like getting your shearing done with non-union labour, and then trying to get them to handle your wool in the Wool Stores. It just wouldn't happen.*

So, why am I telling you this? What relevance does this have to the church in Thyatira? Well, a fair bit:

- if you're **not** a member of a "trade guild", you can't work; you can't trade; you barely survive
- But if you **are** a member of a "trade guild", you are obliged to attend their regular dinners.
- And at these dinners, an animal would be sacrificed to some heathen god.
- And then you would all say grace, thanking that god for the food,
- And then you'd eat the meat that had been dedicated to that god...
- And then once the wine had flowed freely, these trade guild dinners were well known for becoming something akin to a *Rural Queensland B&S Ball (but probably without the overdone utes doing circle-work on the flat)*...

They were a place, where all restraint was thrown out, and it would descend into something resembling a drunken orgy.

And as we discovered last week, as we studied the letter to the church at Pergamum, the Gentile Church (non-Jewish Christians) had been constantly warned (by the Apostles) to abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols, and to abstain from sexual immorality. And these Trade Guild Dinners, were pulling them in to **both** of these. And for **us**, as Christians today, when it comes to the sort of function that draws people into these sorts of sins, we should very much question, whether we should ever be a part of them”....

So, you **may** be noticing by now, that the church in Thyatira and the church in Pergamum (that we learned about last week), were facing some quite similar issues... But there are some very important differences, and we'll discover these as we work our way through it.

So, that's set the scene – let's begin at the beginning:

Once again, Jesus begins His letter by describing Himself. He says: “**The words of the Son of God**”... By the way, this is the only place, in the whole of Revelation, where Jesus describes Himself as “The Son of God”... And it's significant that He does it here, because later on in this letter, He's going to be quoting Psalm chapter 2, And Psalm 2 is written about “The Son of God”. OK, so Jesus is saying “I'm the Son of

God. What I'm quoting later, is about Me". But we'll come to that shortly.

He continues to describe Himself, then, as the one **who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.**

With His eyes, Jesus sees everything – nothing will escape His judgment – and with His Holy, powerful feet, He will trample whatever is ungodly.

So, what does Jesus have to say to this church at Thyatira? Well, there's a lot of good here: He says, "I know your works" – Alright, the good things that we do, please Jesus very much. Don't **ever** get so fixated on "grace vs works" that you begin to feel that Jesus doesn't want us to be doing good works – what a load of nonsense **that** is.

And when Jesus looked with His eyes of fire, at the church in Thyatira, this is what He saw:

- He saw their love
- He saw their faith
- He saw their service
- He saw their patient endurance.
- And He said to them, **your latter works exceed the first.** And that, my friends, is a rare quality.

Have you ever noticed that sometimes a church will start out strong, and the people have a new, vibrant love for God, and they begin all these new endeavours to serve God, but over time:

- it loses momentum;

- a few arguments happen in the church, and their love grows cold; and
- the church loses its passion for mission; and
- it falls into a maintenance mode, where

what **began** as an exciting vision for serving God, gives way to “Ho-hum, ordinary old, “I’ve still got my faith; I’m saved; that’s all that matters; but I’m not really on fire for God...”

A friend of mine calls that “Becoming a ‘stodgy’ Christian.” And when there’s enough of these “Stodgy Christians” in a fellowship, that can become the nature of the whole church...

But that **wasn’t** the character of the church in Thyatira. They loved; They were full of faith; They were busy serving... They were holding on to their faith; And rather than Christianity becoming old, boring and ‘stodgy’, their faith was more vigorous than the day it began.

This is the picture of a church in town:

- who really cares for their community.
- It’s a church that hasn’t grown tired
- It’s a church that love each other’s company,
- and they love their neighbour as themselves.

It sounds like a **great** church.

And I hope **you** value these things, because Jesus does. As we get to know Jesus more and more, He doesn’t want us ‘slacking off’... It’s a **good** thing, for us to grow in faith, love and service....

But that wasn't all that Jesus could see with His eyes of fire.
²⁰ 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. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.

In many segments of the Christian church, a much ignored gift of the Holy Spirit, is the gift of Prophecy. From what I've observed, I believe there are 2 common errors that the church can fall into, when it comes to the gift of Prophecy:

The first error, is when it's given too much prominence. It's when people come to expect a word from God (at their own demand), and people in that church, who have become recognised as prophets, (instead of saying "Nup, sorry, Got nothing for ya"), well they've gotta perform haven't they???

And there are many statements made today in the name of Prophecy (claiming to be words of the Lord), that are **not** prophetic words from God at all. Sometimes it comes in the form of:

- "cold reading" (where a vigilant eye can tell something about somebody by picking up tell-tale signs);
- Sometimes, they are so general in what they say, that it can apply to just about anyone;
- And sometimes, words claiming to be from God, are a deceptive lie from the devil....

So these are dangers with prophecy. And because of these dangers, the second error that many churches fall into, is they throw the gift of prophecy out altogether – they’ve seen it misused **so** many times, that “We don’t want to have anything to do with this”.

But the New Testament Scriptures are very clear – the gift of prophecy is a very important gift for the Christian churchⁱ. And the dangers can simply be dealt with, by the whole church, assessing the words of the prophet, to determine if what they are saying, is from God or notⁱⁱ.

And **that’s** what **should’ve** been done at this church in Thyatira, but it evidently hadn’t. There’s a woman there, named “Jezebel”, **who calls herself a prophetess**, but she’s not a prophet of God at all – we can tell this by what she’s been teaching. A **prophetic** word from God, will **never** be in conflict, with His written word... How could it be a word from God, if it’s leading people into sexual immorality and idolatry – what a nonsense.

So, who is this woman – this false prophetess, Jezebel?

Well firstly, it is **unlikely** (possible but unlikely) that Jezebel is her actual name. Certainly, nobody from a Jewish background would ever, ever name their baby girl, “Jezebel”, because that name, “Jezebel”, was a proverbial name of “wickedness”. That’d be like naming your baby boy “Adolf”...

The darkest period of Israel's history, was when King Ahab, married a heathen princess, by the name of Jezebel, and together they ruled over Israel. At Jezebel's coaxing, Ahab rejected God, and began to worship Baal (Jezebel's god). And this was a dreadful time: Child sacrifice; dreadful injustice; spiteful murder; the persecution of God's prophets... And ultimately, it led to the destruction of Israel.

And so the name "Jezebel", to Israel, had become the personification of "evil". By the way, I hope nobody's being offended by this (because your name happens to be "Jezebel") – That's just the way that name's being used here.

And Jezebel called herself a prophetess. And obviously people listened to her. And they were led astray by her. She led the people into idolatry and into sexual immorality. And this is why the Scriptures **warn** us (so often), to watch out for false prophets.

A false prophet, will tell us what our itching ears want to hear. A false prophet will give us "a **new** word from God", which they say, will help us to see things "differently", and the whole time, they're leading us astray....

There's a phrase in this letter about those who **haven't** followed Jezebel, and it refers to **them** as those **who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan**. Now, that is a strange phrase. What does it mean? Well we can't be sure, but this explanation makes sense to me.

Something a ‘false prophet’ will **often** do, is make you feel that they are providing you a service, by taking you ‘**deeper** into the things of God.’... A false prophet, presumes to speak the very word of God. And they’ll sometimes promote it, by saying “this is deeper” – this is a **new** thing God wants us to learn – this is a **new freedom** God wants us to have...

They might say something along the lines of :

- “What you’ve been getting taught up until now, is old and out-dated – God is always revealing more of Himself.”
- Or they might say “God has given us these **other** sources of wisdom and authority. Let’s learn from them.”
- Or they might twist Scripture, by saying “God is love. And because He loves you, He’s given you freedom to be free to be the person **you** want to be.”...
- And the whole time, they’ll be telling you that this is going deeper into God,
- and those other people who aren’t accepting it – well, they have a very shallow faith...

Alright, so the false prophet will be marketing this approach as the “deep things of God”, but they’re not really of God at all – it’s from Satan.

How does this play out in the church today? I just want to give you one example.

There is a movement in some churches today (mostly in the mainline denominations) called (by themselves of course) “Progressive theology” (progressive Christianity)... This is a movement which decides which parts of the Bible it’ll believe

and which parts it won't. It's a movement which seeks (what it calls) 'wisdom' from many places other than the Bible, such as philosophy, science, other religions...

And I've spoken with (and argued against) a number of people who follow this teaching, and they have all had one thing in common: In **their** eyes, "They have been enlightened". They believe, that **they're** the ones who have been able see things clearly, and they have a deeper understanding of God... Where as people like me, they see as "caught up in a fairy tale"... And a very common phrase of theirs would be "I no longer believe what I was taught at Sunday School – I now go deeper..."

And one of the noticeable products of the 'liberal theology' and 'progressive theology', is a very loose ethic where it comes to sexual immorality, and an acceptance of other gods. These movements will teach that you don't have to get married before you have sex – that's just old and out-dated. And they make the emphasis on "right relationships", rather than on marriage between one man and one woman... And so there isn't any surprise that the whole 'same-sex marriage' bandwagon, is flowing out of liberal and progressive theology movements.

And so they **believe** that **they're** the ones who are going deeper, but the whole time, their faith is getting shallower and shallower, until it's not faith in Jesus Christ at all...

Anyway, I'd better move on.

I said earlier that even though the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira were facing similar issues, there was a significant

difference, and here it is: At the church in Pergamum, they hadn't reached judgment yet – they were being warned, to repent of idolatry and sexual immorality, **before** the time of judgment came.

Where as Jezebel, has **already** been warned, and **now** her time of judgment has arrived... ²¹ **I gave her time to repent,**

but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.

²² **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 her works, ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all 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.**

Now, I don't know exactly what all of that means, but it doesn't look good, does it?

She's been given time to repent, but she didn't. And so this false prophetess is going to suffer (what looks to be) a severe illness, that will probably lead to her death.

But the **good** news is, those who have been led astray **by** her, still have time to repent. If they **don't** repent, it appears that death is the end for them as well... This, is a very harsh judgment.

On a personal note, I find it difficult to preach on this passage, without sharing a significant personal experience of mine. I used to be a minister in a certain denomination. And

that denomination, allowed teaching like Jezebel's to be taught within the church. And that teaching, was opening up the path to allow all sorts of sexual immorality within the church...

It had already been decided (at the highest level of the church) that being a practicing homosexual was no barrier to being a minister in that church, and they were just now beginning the discussion about whether or not they should marry same-sex couples...

*For many years, I believe the Lord had given me a direction, to **be** in that church, and to preach God's **truth**, and to call it to repent and to turn back to God (and I'd been doing that)...*

But then in the space of one week, the Lord began speaking to me, and through the Scriptures, I believe He was saying "It's time to go" ...

And then, on the Thursday night, I read a letter from the Moderator, telling people not to be too concerned about the proposal regarding 'same sex marriage', and she concluded that letter by saying that we should celebrate the fact that we're in a church who are willing to talk about these big issues...^{iiiiiv}

And then the next morning, in my daily bible reading, I was up to the letter to the church in Thyatira... And it talked about this church that had a lot going for it, but then it said: But I have this against you – you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who leads my people into sexual immorality... And as I continued to read it, I believe God was saying to me, the time for preaching has finished – The time for judgment has come...

And so, with a great deal of pain, and broken relationships, we were obedient to God, and we left that denomination...

That's just a personal story... Anyway, I'd better move on:

The church in Thyatira, have a very clear option before them: to either follow Jezebel's (so called) "deeper things", or to repent of **her** works, and to keep **God's** works...

Ultimately those who don't repent, their judgment ends in death...

But what about those who do repent? **Well**, what an **amazing** blessing we learn about here: And this is where Jesus quotes Psalm chapter 2:

Psalm chapter 2, talks about the Son of God. Jesus has already said, "I'm the Son of God". And then the Psalm goes on to say, how He will **rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces**

Alright, this is a picture of when Jesus returns – He will be the King of ultimate power and authority... Now, that would be a terrible thing, if He was a **bad** king... But because of who Jesus is (full of love & mercy & righteousness)... How wonderful it will be, that He will have **all** rule and reign, and **all** evil will be done away with...

But here in this letter, Jesus **also** promises that those who overcome – those who remain faithful to Him to the end, will

be ruling **with** Him – Did you know that??? – He says **to him**
I will give authority over the nations....

And so right here (right at the start of the revelation), we're getting a little glimpse of how it ends, when history is all completed, and evil is dealt with, and the new heavenly city has come... And if we go all the way forwards to Revelation 21:7 (ESV) ⁷ **The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.**

Jesus is the Son of God (and therefore He has authority to rule), but we become His sons – and we are included in His rule and reign...

And **then** Jesus says, I will give him the morning star – What's that mean? Well, in Rev 22:16, Jesus describes **Himself** as “the morning star”...

How's **that** for the deeper things of God??? No false prophet can ever take us **that** deep. No 'progressive theology' or 'liberal theology' could ever take us that deep... No other God – no other teaching, could ever take us that deep...

I get goose-bumps thinking about this – the depth that God draws the faithful in, to His very existence, and His rule and His reign... The fact that we will be in the very presence of Jesus Christ Himself, and that the Lord God almighty, chooses to call us His sons...

What wonder...

Let's Pray,

Lord Jesus Christ,
How amazed we are, to stand in your presence...
How wonderful You are, and how good, and how merciful,
That You would come to us, and die for us,
That we might be sons of God...

Oh, Lord, forgive us for the things we do, that put this in jeopardy.

Lord, help us to guard against any false prophet,
who would lead us astray from Your good purposes.
Let us hold on to what is true,
And may You lead us, into the depth of Your plan and purpose...

And Lord, we repent of the works of Jezebel that lure us from you.
(especially the lures to other gods, and sexual immorality)

Lord, help us to not tolerate such false teaching,
And to hold fast, until You come...

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.

ⁱ 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22 (ESV)

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil.

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 14:29–33 (ESV)

²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so

that all may learn and all be encouraged,³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.
³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.
As in all the churches of the saints,

iii ***Pastoral Letter from the Moderator for distribution to members 14th June, 2012, Queensland synod of Uniting Church of Australia. "Let us together celebrate being part of a church that grapples with big issues and tries to support members of all persuasions and theological thinking."***
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