



THYATIRA

REVELATION 2:18-29

Catching up on the Story

In John's apocalyptic prophecy, we have been let in on John's vision of the heavenly throne room. We've noted some of the symbolism John uses as pointing to the churches of the world and Christ's presence among those churches. While many people read and encourage others to read Revelation as a book of doom and gloom, we noted that the work is a book of hope and encouragement amid times of trial and persecution. The wild imagery of Revelation was never meant to be taken literally but to describe both present and future realities. The faithful can remain faithful even at the risk of their life because God's Kingdom has come in Jesus Christ, and one day death and evil will be fully defeated.

After the heavenly throne room vision, John is instructed to write down what Jesus wants to say to the churches. Seven letters were written to seven different churches, struggling with similar yet different realities. While the numbers present in Revelation have meaning, they were never intended to be added up so that they might be used in predicting the future. The number seven represents complete wholeness. These seven letters aren't just to the churches specifically mentioned; they're also written to Christ's church everywhere.

Revelation 2:18-29

¹⁸ "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are 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, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. ²² Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. 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 to what you have until I

come. ²⁶To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end,
I will give authority over the nations;
²⁷ to rule them with an iron rod,
as when clay pots are shattered—
²⁸ even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. ²⁹Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. (NRSV)

Discussion Questions

Read the text aloud. Then, read the text to yourself quietly. Read it slowly, as if you were very unfamiliar with the story.

1. Why do you think Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of God?”
2. What similarities or differences might there be between the commendation Jesus gives Ephesus and Thyatira?
3. Who is Jezebel, and why does Jesus name the troublemaker in the church after her?
4. Jesus condemns Jezebel’s teaching. What might she be teaching that is so wrong?

5. Jesus mentions fornication, adultery, and eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Is Jesus just talking about those sins, or are they metaphorical? What makes you think this?

6. In verse 21, Jesus said he gave Jezebel time to repent. How long do you think she had? Why did Jesus choose now to bring about punishment?

7. What does the offer of forgiveness for someone who is actively deceiving Jesus' followers say about the nature of God?

8. What do you think the "deep things of Satan" are (verse 24)?

9. The quotation found at the end of verses 26 and 27 is from Psalm 2. What image does this evoke for you? How would that image change if we translated the verse like this, "I will give authority over the peoples of the earth; to shepherd them with an iron rod?"

10. We tend to read promises like this one as about the end times. What if Jesus was talking to the church right now?
11. The main problem the church in Thyatira struggled with was entangling themselves with the economic and political idolatry of the day, and it damaged their ability to truly participate in God's mission in the world. Has the church in the US done something similar? If so, how?

So What?

The Christians in Thyatira struggled with how to participate fully in their world while remaining faithful to the Kingdom Jesus brings. They believed that they could innocently participate in the trade guild meetings with its political and economic idolatry. Since they believed that the gods those guilds worshiped were of no consequence, they could go through the motions of the meetings without raising any suspicions. The things we do routinely are formative, even when we don't give them much thought.

Regardless of the success of their ability to participate in their city's political and economic life without being soiled by it, their behavior showed that they did not trust that complete allegiance to Christ would be sufficient.

I wonder how much the church today is like the church in Thyatira? Do we blindly follow teachers who tell us what we want to hear? Have we become convinced that even though we know activity or practice is steeped in political or economic idolatry that it is acceptable to participate in it without consequence? Do we believe that as long as we believe the right thing, it doesn't matter what we do with our bodies or the bodies of others? Have our political and economic stances deeply

hurt our ability to faithfully proclaim God's good news and participate in God's mission of reconciliation and restoration of creation and people?

Answering these questions is difficult. It's difficult because there seems to be no way to live in this world, to do business in it, without being soiled by it. But that doesn't give us a free pass, not if we're serious about participating in God's work in the world. The question becomes, how do we minimize our complicity in the economic or political idolatry all around us? Of what things do we need to confess and repent?

Works Cited

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