Dear Church: Thyatira

Revelation 2:18-29

Well Good Morning Woodhaven!

Let’s Pray before we begin.

I’m glad you all are here and I’m excited about our time this morning. If you have your bible, turn with me to Revelation chapter 2. **Today we’re covering the letter to the church in Thyatira. This our 4th letter in the Dear Church series**…and we’re a little beyond half way in the series. So far we’ve covered the letters to Ephesus (the loveless), Smyrna (the faithful church), and Pergamum (the compromising church). In our time today we’ll consider what Jesus has to say to his bride in Thyatira.

We live in a day and time where there’s been a **noticeable change in culture and these changes have brought of a barrage of new virtues invading multiple aspect of society and creating new norms.** In some ways these changes have been hopeful and redemptive, but in other ways they’ve been disheartening. In our postmodern context, it doesn’t take much to identify how and where these virtues are expressed. We see them expressed in academia and with major corporations (Gillette and Victoria’s Secret to name a few, that are marching to the beat of the LGBTQ….), but we also see it’s influence in theologically liberal circles as well.(Affirming and Inclusive Churches, Social Justice Churches, etc)

Regardless of where we are within a historical moment, the virtues that we celebrate and embrace as believers, must be **deconstructed and reconstructed by the gospel.** And regardless of what happening in culture, our Lord’s desires HIS people/bride to remain faithful to him in cultures where virtues and norms are constantly changing.

I believe that in our text today in the letter to the church in Thyatira, we’ll be reminded of the ingredients to faithful witness in the culture. (2x)

**The Self-Description:**

If you’ve been with me through this study, you’ll recall that each letter begins with a self-description of Jesus, and following suit with all of the previous intros, v. 18 reads:

*“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.”*

**This self-description comes to a church that is the least well known, least impressive and least important of the 7 cities.** But **interestingly they are noted for 2 accomplishments:** **1)** its **commercial enterprise** and **2)** as being the center for **manufacturing and marketing**. And because of these accomplishments, Thyatira has the distinguishing characteristic of being home to the largest number of trade guilds. **And these trade guilds, which are like our modern-day unions, posed a special problem for Christians.** Here’s why – because non participation within the trade guilds brought economic marginalization and judgement.

And the imagery that Jesus uses to describe himself is to communicate the reality of His Authority.

It’s critical for the church in Thyatira to know that this letter comes from the *“Son of God”* – who IS the ONLY mediator of their Salvation. **It comes from a heart of profound concern for the church He loves** – and it’s from the very throne room of God – and **whatever the appearance of the circumstance from the church’s finite vantage point**, **God in control, and He is King!**

While the plight of Christians in Thyatira is going seemingly unnoticed, they are seen by the one who *“has eyes like a flame of fire”* – These eyes penetrate through every conceivable façade and defense. These eyes (according to 2:23), “search the mind and heart”.

**Remember the Church’s Spiritual Work**

It’s in v. 19 that we get our 1st ingredient to faithful witness within the culture and it comes just after self-description – v. 19 reads

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

This commendation of the church’s spiritual work – and this is our 1st ingredient – **Remember the Church’s Spiritual Work** (her mission) .

We see signs of grace in the life of this church in v.19 – **This is a church that is EXTENDING and EXPENDING their lives for other believers and for the sake of the gospel.** What’s unique about these believers is that they are praised for the deeds that Ephesus had, along with the love that Ephesus lacked.

The church squabbling over the color of the carpet or type of wood to use for a pew - they’re a church that’s pursuing the spiritual work they’ve been called to in a fallen world. And they are demonstrating a **love**, a **faith**, a **service**, and a **patient endurance** that is **rooted in the authority of Jesus.**

And Jesus’s adds to the commendation and says, *“your latter works are exceeding the first”.* **What a compliment from our Lord to his bride!** They **believe** the gospel and are **behaving the gospel**, and they are **growing in some significant ways!** They’re a church that remembers the spiritual work they’ve been called.

But as we’ll read further, we’ll see that this church has a blind spot.

**Recognize the Church’s Spiritual Danger**

In v. 20 the tone of the letter changes as Jesus speaks to their blind spot and renders an indictment and it reads:

*“but I have this against you, you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat foods sacrificed to idols”*

This indictment leads us to consider the 2nd ingredient to faithful witness within the culture, and its – **Recognize the Church’s Spiritual Danger**

In this passage the spiritual danger that Thyatira failed to recognize was their Tolerance – specifically their tolerance of “the woman Jezebel”. It was **undiscerning and blindly affirming.**

I want to pause here and say – **Isn’t it encouraging to know that Christ loves His Bride enough to confront the dangers of Her sin, so that She might rejoice in truth?** This is exactly what he’s doing with Thyatira in pointing out their spiritual danger.

**The church has failed to see that their toleration of “the woman Jezebel” is destroying the work of the gospel in that church.** And just like the Jezebel of the OT (1 Kings 16-22), who was married to King Ahab and led the people of God to sin and compromise in worshipping Baal, and to deny the power of God’s covenant grace (who was pushed out of a tower, trampled on by horses, and eaten up by dogs – 2 Kings (9:30-37) - **The influence of the woman Jezebel within the church is a spiritual danger just like her OT name-sake.**

What a comparison!!!! And what a dire circumstance that this church is in!

**Jesus isn’t calling his church to “affirm her, dialogue with her, or wait and see what happens” – he wants them to have discipline and confront it**. Why? **Because it’s personal…it’s about his glory!** (look and v. 20 again)… she is “teaching and seducing MY servants to practice sexual immorality and eat foods sacrificed to idols”

Sinclair Fergusson, speaking on this passage states: **“Tolerance can be a virtue when it’s the expression of a heart of mercy, grace, and love** – **but it can be a vice when there’s toleration of Jezebel.”**

**Before we drive 90 in a 30 in our condemnation of this church**, **let’s miss our Lords mercy in v. 21 as this woman is given an opportunity to repent.** **How merciful of our Lord to be patient with his enemies, and gracious of our Lord to extend that to us.**

We read further that even though she is given an opportunity to repent, but she wouldn’t. Instead, she hardens her heart against the ministry that Christ has instituted for her good.

And Jesus is now faulting the church for continuing to tolerate Jezebel and not excluding her. **We need to keep in mind that the tolerating of Jezebel was not a mark of their great love, but a mark of their unfaithfulness.** They tolerated and embrace ideas and teaching that oppose the gospel and aims to undermine, destabilize, and overthrow biblical truth.

vv. 22-23 spells out the judgment that Jesus has reserved for her and her followers – Jesus says,

*“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 her works, 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”*

This judgment from our Lord is fitting or the offense – Why? Because our God is passionate about His glory – and Jezebel’s teaching is in direct opposition to the gospel.

**Rejoice in the Church’s Spiritual Promise**

The end of the letter gives us our final ingredient to faithful witness within the culture. - which is to **Rejoice in the Church’s Spiritual Promise.**

vv. 24-25 read, *“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 – Only hold fast what you have until I come.*

The text tell us that there were members of the church who weren’t seduced by the woman Jezebel and they are told to *“hold fast to what you have”*

**Now, what did they *“have”* that the others didn’t?** **They had a right understanding of the contours and content of the gospel.** **They understood the grammar and scope of the gospel.**

And here, **Jesus is telling them to hold fast to what they know foundationally of the grace of God,** hold it firm……but **remember that this “holding fast”, should never be confused with ignorance**. **When we hold fast to the message of the gospel and the truth of scripture it leads to AWE and DELIGHT in the promises of God!** And this AWE and DELIGHT is **expressed in faith and obedience.**

As the letter ends, Jesus reminds’ this church that their rejoicing is 2-fold:

1. The first reason is found in vv. 26-27 which reads:

*“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 earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father”*

Here Jesus uses the language of Psalm 2 where he receives authority to rule, BUT what’s unique about the passage in v. 26-27 is that the focus is on OUR rule with Christ. Think about that – We will not only be subjects of His, but we will also reign with him. **Our elevated status of reigning with Christ in a reason to rejoice.**

1. The 2nd reason to rejoice is in v. 28, and it reads:

 *“And I will give him the morning star”*

What exactly is the morning star? In chapter 22:16 of Revelation, it reads:

*“I, Jesus have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”*

The morning star is Jesus! **HE, himself - is the reward to the overcomer!** And this is a reason to rejoice because no matter the circumstance within any culture, **God has given us his best by giving us himself through his Son!**

**Conclusion:**

My hope for us as we come to a close this morning is that we would “hear what the spirit says to this church”. And that listening would transact faith and obedience as we:

 **Remember** the great work that we’ve been called to as the Lord’s bride

 **Recognize** spiritual dangers as we pursue that great work

 **Rejoice** in the incomparable and unshakable promises of our great God and King

Let’s pray