

## Thyatira: Unloving Tolerance

- I. Good morning!
- II. This week we will dive into the fourth letter to the seven churches.
- III. Last week we looked at Pergamum; a church tempted to compromise and to accommodate the faith to their cultural context.
  - A. This week we will look at the neighbouring church in the neighbouring city, Thyatira.
    1. Jesus has more to say to Thyatira than any of the other churches.
    2. This is the longest and perhaps harshest of the 7 letters.
      - a) Jesus has some hard things to say to this church.
        - (1) Like Pergamum, Thyatira had allowed false teachers to persuade them to compromise their faith. . . to give in to the temptations swirling around them.
          - (a) Some of the Christians in Thyatira, actually began to participate in the pagan festivals with their sexual immorality and religious rituals praying and sacrificing to other gods besides Jesus.
- IV. So, Jesus has some harsh words for this church. . . perhaps this morning he has a harsh word for us as well.
  - A. Let's turn to the scripture reading this morning. . . Revelation 2:18-29
    1. 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.
    2. 19 " 'I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.
    3. 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.

4. 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,
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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,
8. 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.
9. 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.'

## **V. Pray**

A. Jesus has some hard things to say here to this church in Thyatira.

1. Although they are doing some great things in their city. . . and even though Jesus has a few good things to say.

a) Jesus has some serious problems with the church.

B. Tolerance has gone unchecked and as with any sin. . . once you allow for a little sin, slowly it will overwhelm you.

1. And it appears to be the case in Thyatira. . . unchecked tolerance of a false teaching has led to some going astray.

a) So, Jesus is calling them back. . .

**VI. Let's begin with how Jesus introduces himself to this church. . . remember his self-revelation is connected to his admonitions to this church.**

A. 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. Revelation 2:18

1. Two things we learn about Jesus here: we read that His eyes are like a flame of fire and feet are like burnished bronze.
2. The language goes back to Daniel’s vision of a “son of man”. . . if you go to Daniel 10. . . you can find some very interesting parallel’s.
3. THis son of man in Daniel’s vision is one of the OT’s clearest prophecies about Jesus, the messiah, through whom God would establish an eternal kingdom.

a) And when Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man or the son of God. . . it is an intentional reference to Daniel 10.

4. And we read that his:

a) **Eyes like a flame of fire:** this points Jesus who sees not only our superficial actions. . . but actually discerns the heart and the motives of a man.

(1) If you look down to vs 23 Jesus says: “And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart”

(2) eyes of flaming fire means that Jesus sees not only our actions, but can discern the motives of our heart.

**(3) 2 Chronicles 16:9**

(4) For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.

(5) Jesus sees all. . . and knows all. . . and he sees our actions and can discern the condition of our heart. . . the idea of eyes like fire, mean they pierce our inner being and can discern what lies behind our behaviour.

(a) He knows our heart and motives. . .

**b) Feet like bronze:**

(1) The idea of feet like bronze relates to two things: His power and his endurance.

(a) Roman and Persian soldiers had bronze protection for their feet and with their metal coverings they could walk over rough land for long periods of time. . . compared to sandals or bare feet.

(2) So, like the eyes of fire, Jesus is not only seeing everything, he walks among us and has power to crush his enemies under his feet.

5. So, the two traits here:

a) eyes of fire: speaks to the discerning eyes that pierce through our actions and discern the motives of our heart

b) feet of bronze: speaks to the omnipresence of Christ among us and the power he has over his enemies.

(1) These two traits are important as he turns to rebuke those who have gone astray in Thyatira.

## **VII. In vs 19, we read that on the outside, Thyatira looked good, unlike Ephesus, their latter works were greater than their first works.**

A. If you remember Ephesus had lost their first love and Jesus said go back to the beginning, those first works. . . but Thyatira's latter works exceeded their first!

1. 19 “ ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. — Revelation 2:19

a) So on the outside this church was doing all the right things. . . they looked healthy.

(1) Serving others with love and faith and patience self-sacrifice.

(a) They were taking care of the poor, the disadvantaged, they were making great sacrifices to help those around them.

(b) They probably had an amazing soup kitchen or outreach to the outcasts. . . widows and orphans.

(c) They were doing all the right things.

2. But remember, Jesus has eyes that can discern the motives of the heart.

**VIII. What does he also see happening in this church? Although they looked good on the outside. . . on the inside they had become lazy and corrupt. . .**

A. Look down to vs 20-23:

1. 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.
2. 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,
3. 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. - Revelation 2:20-23

B. Now, on one hand, this passage requires a lot of unpacking. . . but on the other hand it doesn't.

1. What is easy to understand is that Jesus is not happy with a false teaching that claims to be prophetic, speaking for God, but is really demonic. . . leading people to worship false gods and commit sexual immorality.
  - a) That much is easy to understand.
  - b) And on this false teacher, Jesus will send a sickness that will make her and her disciples (children in vs23 = disciples) sick, some even dying as a result.

**C. So, what are we to make of this hard teaching? It is hard. . . it's not the Jesus we are familiar with from the gospels is it?**

1. Revelation shows us a side of Jesus, that we also need to embrace and realise that Jesus is not just a loving gentle teacher on rolling hills with sheep and puppies frolicking in the sun, but he is also a just and mighty judge.

a) When Jesus returns we read later in Revelation, he will come on a white horse with a mighty army and he will come as a warrior and a judge. . . a mighty king who will strike down the wicked and uplift the poor and humble.

(1) And make right all the wrongs in this world.

(2) In revelation we see a picture of the ascended Jesus who sits on the throne and is King over this world.

(a) We have to maintain this balance of Jesus' identity. . . he is both the lion and the lamb. . . a gentle and patient teacher and mighty warrior and judge.

2. So, just as a husband loves and protects his wife from something that would harm her, Jesus takes a firm stand against this false prophet in the church at Thyatira. . . to protect his bride the church.

D. So, let's unpack these vss. together:

1. **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. Rev 2:20**

a) So, apparently, a woman prophetess has been allowed a certain amount of influence within the congregation and has led several away from Jesus' teaching.

(1) Prophets as we know from the OT speak on behalf of God. . . "thus sayeth the Lord". . .

(2) This Jezebel figure, probably not really her name, but like Jesus recalled Balaam last week, it is a reference to the Jezebel in Judges who led Israel into Baal worship in the day of Elijah.

(3) So, in the Spirit of Jezebel this prophetess here in Thyatira was leading some within the church to participate in the pagan rituals.

(a) Probably along the lines of syncretistic form of Christianity. . . you can be a Christian and still do these things. . . God's grace is unlimited and you can sin all you want God will forgive you.

(b) So, this prophetess was using her status to speak on behalf of God, but as Jesus makes clear in vs 24, she is actually speaking the deep things of satan, not of Jesus.

**b) So, the sin here in this church is basically tolerance. . . an unloving tolerance or acceptance of false teaching.**

(1) We can certainly relate to this can't we. . . in our contemporary society tolerance is the cardinal virtue.

(a) The only thing not tolerated in our society is intolerance.

(b) Yet Jesus calls us to be intolerant of certain behaviours, certain attitudes and certain teaching. . . Jesus says do not tolerate sin.

i) This I have against you, you tolerate a spirit of compromise and false teaching.

(2) Now, don't misunderstand me, Christians are called to be loving and gentle and never oppress others or use power to suppress others.

(a) If you look at the global church you will find a huge capacity to tolerate a wide-range of cultural and societal differences in various congregations across the globe.

i) But, sin and false teaching leads people into harmful, destructive patterns of behaviour. . . so it would be unloving for the church to tolerate that which harms us.

ii) It is like a loving parent does not tolerate certain behaviour in their children's lives. . .

(1) "Hi mom and dad, I'm going to take a bath with a toaster oven, ok." . . . no that would be unloving."

(2) My father, some of you may remember, always said to us when he was lovingly intolerant to our sinful behavior. . .

(a) Hey if you had a friend who was about to go into a truck and drive down a huge hill and you knew the

brakes didn't work, wouldn't you stop him from going in that truck?

(b) That was how my dad saw his job as a parent. . . loving intolerance of those things which can harm us.

(b) And we need to take false teaching and sinful behaviour seriously because these things will destroy us and our church.

i) Here the sin was sexual immorality. . .any form of sex outside of marriage. . . and here it was associated with pagan rituals.

ii) But today sexual immorality is just as common. . . even among our teens, some parents even create environments for their children to do this "safely".

(1) Same story different context. . .

(c) But God's truth which was true 2000 years ago is still true today. . . sin and false teaching leads people into harmful, destructive patterns of behaviour. . . so it would be unloving for parents and for a church to tolerate that which harms us.

i) This is un-loving tolerance. . . and this is the default mode of many in our contemporary society.

(1) ANd there are churches here in Frankfurt. . . that have given in to the spirit of jezebel. .

**E. So, what is the problem with a little false teaching here and a little false teaching there? A little tolerance here and a little tolerance there Well, let's see where it leads, look with me at vss 21-23a:**

1. 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. - Rev. 2:21-23a

a) So, Jesus says I was patient with this false teacher. . . patient, yes but also honest.

(1) Apparently, this prophetess, was rebuked or corrected, probably by the elders in the church. . . “I gave her time to repent”.

(2) But Jesus now sends a judgment of illness, a sickness upon her and those who follow her teaching and practices.

(a) Now, to understand how God’s judgement works in scripture it is primarily a removal of his hand of protection.

i) Sin and evil are destructive forces that aspire to destroy god’s good creation. . . but God holds satan at bay. . . with his sovereign hand God sets the pace of sin’s destructive results.

(1) So throughout scripture we find God’s patient hand at work holding back satan. . . at times allowing satan to ravish a people. . . other times holding satan back. . . God sovereignly rules over even satan.

ii) SO, when we read that God sends a plague, that means that He removes his hand of protection.

iii) After warning this prophet of the harm that her teaching and practices will do. . . God allows her to experience the consequences of her decisions.

(1) And today we know that rampant sexual immorality, unchecked sexual licentiousness leads to sexually transmitted diseases and emotional and psychological disorders. . . breakdown of the family and society at large.

(2) And so, Jesus removes his hand of protection over this false prophet and her disciples, those who follow her. . and they experience the consequences of their actions/behaviour.

b) As C.S. Lewis rightly says there are two people in the world those who say to the Lord, “thy will be done”. . . and those to whom the Lord says “thy will be done”.

(1) Meaning God allows us to face the consequences of our sin. . . and this is how His judgment works.

- (2) But look at the end of vss22: “Unless they repent.” Turn from false teaching turn from sinful behaviour and you will experience the love and forgiveness of a gentle loving father. . . . repentance is always on the table. . . that is amazing grace.
- (a) Sin is destructive and if you tolerate sin, sin will overwhelm you. . . it will become your master. . . and you will reap the consequence of what you sow.
- (b) But Jesus is lovingly calling you to repent. . . to come back. . . its not too late.
- i) Do you hear Jesus calling this morning. . . come back! Repent, turn from the path you are on. . . that is love.
- ii) If you hear that voice that is the holy spirit working on your heart this morning . . . don't ignore it.

**IX. Jesus lovingly warns the Church in Thyatira of what will come if they continue on the path the are on. . .if they get into that truck with faulty brakes.**

1. **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. - Revelation 2:23**
- a) Now, Jesus says something here that ought to make us sit up. “I will give to each of you according to your works.”
- (1) What?
- (a) Yes, your works do matter to God. . . our tolerance of sin is out of sync with what we believe. . . if sin is tolerated in our lives, it is out of sync with what the Spirit is doing in our hearts.
- (b) This is why Jesus begins with this: I am he who searches mind and heart. . . and then He speaks of our works.
- i) our works, our behavoiurs have a direct line to our heart motives. . . they show us what our faith looks like. . . they tell us what we really believe.

2. Faith and works must always be held in tension with one another.

**a) On one hand we must never say we can earn salvation through our good works. . . that is the good news of the gospel.**

(1) In Christ our works good or bad are never be an obstacle to God's love for us. never.

**b) But we must never say we can receive God's grace without also doing good works.**

(1) Because God's grace works itself out in how we live our lives.

(2) As the Spirit works in us. . . it is manifested in our behaviour. . . the fruits of the spirit, teaches us to say no to sin and to ungodliness. . . the spirit is called the holy spirit because he cannot tolerate sin. . .and so the Spirit purges sinful desires out of our hearts like a refining fire or a fullers soap working to purify our herats. . . which is then reflected in our beauvoir

(3) Faith and Works need to always be held in balance in tension with one another.

(a) Like two sides of one coin, our faith and works need to be in balance. When we fall to one side of the coin at the cost of the other. . . then we have abandoned the gospel.

i) We can never have a casual feeling towards sin. . . saying oh God will forgive me. . . . **and** at the same time we must never give in to a feeling of despair that our sin is greater than God's grace.

(1) OUR sin must first be bitter in order for the gospel to be sweet.

**3. The problem at Thyratira is that there was a casual, familiar, easy-going attitude toward sin. . . they tolerated. . . false teaching and sinful behaviour.**

a) Tehy lost the balance between faith and works. . .

b) They elevated the teaching of this prophetess above the teaching of scripture.

(1) We can never give weight to a human prophecy over and against what scripture clearly teaches. . . what the church Thyatira needed was to read scripture, because it was clear that their sins were the same as Jezebel or Balaam leading the israelites into the very same sins.

(a) Jesus is telling them to read the bible. . go back and read what Jezebel and Balaam led the people to do and believe.

(b) Jesus is basically saying “go read your bibles”.

(2) Scripture is our standard our guide for knowing what is true and good and what is false and evil.

c) So, how can we use scripture without becoming legalistic. . . we must never teach that we are saved through our works. . . and we may never teach we are saved regardless of our works.

(1) It is a paradox to be held in tension. . . how can we resist legalism and moral permissiveness at the same time

B. In the NT we have three ways we can use scripture’s commands to help us grow in holiness:

1. The reformers called this the “three uses of the law”.

(1) **Correction** - scripture’s commands can serve to show us where we have gotten off track. Paul calls it a school **teacher** that can show us where we made mistakes. Scripture has power to awaken our conscience.

(2) **Revelation** - The Law serves as a perfect reflection of who God is and what he wants from us. The law can be like a **mirror**, showing us God’s requirements and is good for driving us toward Jesus. . who has fulfilled the law on our behalf. Scripture has power to awaken gospel-filled gratitude.

(3) **Standard** -The law becomes the believer's helper. Empowered by the gospel truth of forgiveness and righteousness in Christ, the believer's new self eagerly desires to live to please God. Scripture is like a **guide** or **coach** spurring us on toward holiness. . . Scripture awakens our aspirations towards holy living. (Jesus uses this often in the gospels)

**X. The problem at Thyratira is that there was a casual, familiar, easy-going attitude toward sin. . . they tolerated. . . false teaching and sinful behaviour.**

A. They had fallen on the side of grace at the cost of works. . . . they needed to pick up the bible and read about jezebel and balaam. . .

1. The bible teaches that we will be judged according to our works. . . . not through our works, so that we can never earn our salvation. . . but rather our works become evidence of our salvation.

B. Faith and works are bound together. . . we read throughout scripture that we will be judged according to our works. . .

(a) Judged according to Works:

(b) Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; Rev. 2:23; 22:12

i) 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

2. Works matter and although we will never be saved through our works. . . we will be judged according to our works.

a) The bible teaches:

b) Salvation according to Works NOT earned through works:

(1) There will be an “accord” or an agreement between our salvation and our works . . . a harmony between our inner motives and our outer behaviour.

(2) This balance has to exist in the christian life. . . .

(a) We must never allow ourselves to fall into despair about our sins. . . but we also must never learn to walk as friends with our sins.

i) It is never loving to tolerate sin in our life or in our church. . . we should heed the warning from the church in Thyatira.

**XI. As we close, Jesus turns to the faithful in the church in Thyatira and says this:**

- A. 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.
  - B. 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,
  - C. 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. - Revelation 2:24-28
- 1.
  2. Jesus is the morning star:
    - a) 16 “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.” - Revelation 22:16

## XII. Pray

### Application Slide:

1. Jesus searches the heart motives behind our actions. Think of a situation that lays ahead of you this week. Ask yourself what will motivate your actions? Christ's rule or Self-rule?
2. The sin in Thyatira was tolerance. What sin in our life do we tend to tolerate and how might we repent from this sin and become intolerant to it?
3. Who can you ask to walk with you and help you to see yourself more fully?