

Our passage today covers the letter to the fourth church in the Asia circuit. The first was Ephesus, the church that left its first love. (2:4) Next was Smyrna the first church in Asia without fault. They were persecuted and in poverty, but they were spiritually rich. (2:9) Third was Pergamum, a church that stood up under persecution, but tolerated the morally compromised teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. (2:14-15) Now Jesus addresses the church in the smallest of the seven cities, Thyatira.

Jesus first gives the description of Himself that corresponds to the message He is about to speak. 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. Fire and bronze are symbols of judgment and purification. The description warns of what is coming. First, Jesus is the Son of God. In Psalm chapter 2 the Son of the King will bring judgment to the earth. (Psalm 2:9-12) We'll see this again at the end of the letter as Jesus quotes part of that Psalm.*

His eyes are like a flame of fire. After describing the powerful penetrating force of the Word of God, the author of Hebrews continues, ¹³ *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.* Hebrews 4:13 (ESV) He sees right into the very thoughts and intentions of our hearts. (Hebrews 4:12) Thyatira and churches of our day may look like they are full of upright and sacrificial lovers of God and His goodness, but Jesus sees past the surface. He looks right into the very motivations behind their actions. He sees what each person is truly desiring. He knows what they would do if they thought they could get away with it. We should always think of Jesus as having eyes like flames of fire.

His feet are like burnished bronze. Bronze is the material of judgment. Remember that the snake on the pole in the wilderness was made of bronze. (Numbers 21:9) The great altar and the laver (Sea) outside the Tabernacle were made of bronze. (Exodus 30:18; 39:39) The altar was where sacrifices for sin were offered to the Lord. The picture was of the animal taking our punishment, the death that we deserve because of sin. Ultimately it was pointing to the Lamb of God, Jesus, who would give Himself as a sacrifice in our place. The laver was for the cleansing of the priests before they entered the Holy Place. So we see bronze used to deal with sin. The title Son of God, the eyes like a flame of fire, and the feet like burnished bronze all warned of the judgment on sin that was coming.

¹⁹ *"I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.* Jesus begins with a commendation. He is looking for the good in the church. He is searching for those whose hearts are fully committed to Him. Just as with the church of Ephesus, Jesus declares He knows their works. (2:2) We

Commented [notes1]: Revelation 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

Commented [notes2]: Revelation 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Commented [notes3]: Revelation 2:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. ¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Commented [notes4]: Psalm 2:9-12 (ESV)

⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. E

¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.

¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Commented [notes5]: Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Commented [notes6]: Numbers 21:9 (ESV)

⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Commented [notes7]: Exodus 30:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it,

Commented [notes8]: Exodus 39:39 (ESV)

³⁹ the bronze altar, and its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils; the basin and its stand;

Commented [notes9]: Revelation 2:2 (ESV)

² E'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

know that works do not earn our salvation, but as James taught, our faith is made evident by our works. (James 2:18) There were those in the church who were faithful servants of the Lord.

Jesus elaborates on the type of works they had: love, faith, service and patient endurance. That is exactly the type of works that Jesus expects when His presence is directing our lives. The Great Command is first, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. They had works of love. They had works of faithfulness. They did not give in to pressure just to save their jobs. And they were not self-serving, but followed Jesus' example in serving others. (Matthew 20:28) To top it all off, they had to suffer for their faith like the other churches, and they were patiently enduring. They weren't complaining about their difficulties, but instead were patiently bearing up under the threats and mistreatment. (Titus 3:14)

That is a pretty amazing description of a church, but the most impressive part of all is that, unlike Ephesus, their works of love, faith, service and patient endurance were increasing. (2Peter 1:8) They obviously hadn't left their first love but were growing in love and faith that resulted in those increased works. But like Pergamum, they refused to confront evil.

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. There was a woman in their midst who gave herself the title of prophetess. Jesus calls her Jezebel because of her similarity to Jezebel of the Old Testament. The wife of King Ahab led people in worshiping Baal, which involved cultic orgies. (1Kings 18:19) She was teaching and seducing Jesus' servants to practice immorality. We have previously talked about the immorality of some of the Roman temples. Apparently she was teaching that, contrary to the Apostles' council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:29), it was fine to participate in the feasts of these temples that involved sex acts as part of their worship. In fact, she even seduced them into doing so.

Why would the elders of the church of Thyatira allow this to go on? She must have been quite an influential person with a large following. They may have been worried about people leaving the church if they denounced her. The passage doesn't tell us why, but it definitely leaves us with the impression that something should have been done. The shepherds of this fold, for one reason or another, would not confront this evil that was leading their sheep astray. It was not only spiritually damaging to those who listened to her, it probably took its toll on their marriages, the witness of the church in the community, and on their physical well-being. The elders were failing the Lord and their flock by tolerating this evil in their midst. (Acts 20:29-31) Paul taught that when someone gives a prophecy, others should judge it. (1Corinthians 14:29) They should see if it lines up with the Word. Apparently they were not doing that with this woman.

Commented [notes10]: James 2:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Commented [notes11]: Matthew 20:28 (ESV)

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Commented [notes12]: Titus 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.

Commented [notes13]: 2 Peter 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes14]: 1 Kings 18:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.

Commented [notes15]: Acts 15:29 (ESV)

²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

Commented [notes16]: Acts 20:29-31 (ESV)

²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;
³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.
³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

Commented [notes17]: 1 Corinthians 14:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

We have the same type of thing in the church at large today. People take on the title of prophet as if they were in the office of the Old Testament prophet. (Luke 16:16) They claim authority over the local church elders. When they are allowed to teach false doctrine, it is the elders who are responsible. (1Peter 5:2) **They should take a stand and tell why the prophecy contradicts the Word of God.** I know that sometimes when they do so they are the ones who end up being expelled from the church, but that does not change their responsibility before God. We do not serve the Lord only if things turn out as we'd like. We serve because Jesus is our Lord and Master.

²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. The Lord brought conviction to her, but she would not listen. She refused to repent. She hardened her heart and decided that she was going to continue in her ways regardless of God's warnings to her. Her sexual immorality gave her power over others and she was not willing to let that go. It became her god.

This is the pattern of every backsliding soul. Something in the old nature finds a foothold. (Ephesians 4:27) Then they justify the sin. Then it is even glorified as something beneficial. The Spirit of God brings warnings. We see the consequences that this sin produces. Then we must choose whether we will go on serving this sin or have a change of mind about its nature and the effects in our life. We turn back to God, or we make the sin our new god. The power she derived from her immorality became her new god.

Though the local shepherds would not act, the Great Shepherd will! *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.* God's next action to save the church of Thyatira was to bring physical affliction. When those she had misled see it, they will have a chance to repent. The children who were born of her adultery would die like the child of David and Bathsheba. (2Samuel 12:14) (This could be referring to her spiritual children who refused to repent.) In that age, they understood that sickness was often a warning or judgment from God. (The Greek text does not mention sickness and is added to explain the word "bed".) Today we consider ourselves much too sophisticated for that kind of thinking. I've seen it. I know some illnesses were the hand of God on the rebellious. That is not always the case, but it does happen. In one case, the timing was so obvious that everyone but the afflicted person could see it. Their heart was too hardened to even consider it.

God does not always judge in this life. That was one of the quandaries of the psalmist. Why do the wicked seem to prosper and the godly are often afflicted or struggling to survive? He says that it wasn't until he entered the sanctuary of God and considered their end that he understood. (Psalm 73:16-19) God will balance the books. Sometimes He does it in this life so that others can be warned. The judgment on this woman was to cause those servants of Jesus who had followed her teaching to repent and see the truth.

Commented [notes18]: Luke 16:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

Commented [notes19]: 1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)

² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

Commented [notes20]: Ephesians 4:27 (ESV)

²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.

Commented [notes21]: 2 Samuel 12:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.

Commented [notes22]: Psalm 73:16-19 (ESV)

¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,

¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.

¹⁸ Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.

¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!

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 was to wake up the other churches that were compromising with immorality. It was to make the body of Christ in Asia aware that Jesus searches the mind and heart. **Jesus is identifying Himself with the God of the Old Testament who is called the One who searches hearts and minds.** (1Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 7:9) He knows what is behind our actions. He knows what is really the god of our life. He knows what we dedicate our thought life to. He knows what our heart longs for. He is just! He will give us according to our works because our works flow from our heart. (Matthew 19:27) If they were good works and from a heart filled with Jesus and love for Him, then He will reward us beyond our imagination. If our heart was dedicated to the creation and we worshiped and worked for selfishness, then He will reward us with judgment for rebellion against our Maker. (Romans 1:21-23)

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. Jesus taught that there would be tares among the wheat. (Matthew 13:30) The church will always have in our midst those who serve other gods. We are told not to try to remove them. We can't see their heart. Of course this does not apply to the false teachers. We are instructed to confront them. We are told not to tolerate evil, but in most cases, we can't tell what is really in the heart. Only God can see that. And so we have our imperfect church that is waiting for the day of our perfection when the tares are pulled and the wheat is fully ripe.

There were those in this tolerant church who were faithful to the Spirit of God. They refused to compromise. Their increasing works of love, faith, and service were a sign of their true heart condition, people who loved Jesus with their all. They refused the temptation to learn the secrets of the deep things of Satan. (1Corinthians 14:20) They rejected the enticement of power, choosing rather to be satisfied with their Savior. Jesus did not need to add any other burden to them. They are yoked to Him and their burden is light. (Matthew 12:29-30)

They only need to do one more thing, the thing we all need to do. *²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come.* Hold tight to your faith and love for God and His glorious Son Jesus. Never give up or give in. Persevere! If the Lord had given that woman time to repent, she may have been a believer. But she did not hold fast to the end. The seduction of evil enticed her old nature and she gave herself over to her desires. Desire conceived sin and when sin was full grown it gave birth to death. (James 1:15) Watch your heart. (1Timothy 4:16) **Sin is seductive. It often comes in the wake of dissatisfaction** with how things turned out and entices you to accept a compromise. One compromise leads to another. We justify it and make it out to be something spiritual, but in fact, we have talked ourselves out of the true faith because we didn't get what our flesh desired. (2Thessalonians 2:10-12)

They only need to do one more thing, the thing we all need to do. *²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come.* Hold tight to your faith and love for God and His glorious Son Jesus. Never give up or give in. Persevere! If the Lord had given that woman time to repent, she may have been a believer. But she did not hold fast to the end. The seduction of evil enticed her old nature and she gave herself over to her desires. Desire conceived sin and when sin was full grown it gave birth to death. (James 1:15) Watch your heart. (1Timothy 4:16) **Sin is seductive. It often comes in the wake of dissatisfaction** with how things turned out and entices you to accept a compromise. One compromise leads to another. We justify it and make it out to be something spiritual, but in fact, we have talked ourselves out of the true faith because we didn't get what our flesh desired. (2Thessalonians 2:10-12)

Commented [notes23]: 1 Chronicles 28:9 (ESV)

⁹And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever.

Commented [notes24]: Psalm 7:9 (ESV)

⁹Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous -you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God!

Commented [notes25]: Matthew 16:27 (ESV)

²⁷For 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.

Commented [notes26]: Romans 1:21-23 (ESV)

²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Commented [notes27]: Matthew 13:30 (ESV)

³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.

Commented [notes28]: 1 Corinthians 14:20 (ESV)

²⁰Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

Commented [notes29]: Matthew 11:29-30 (ESV)

²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Commented [notes30]: James 1:15 (ESV)

¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Commented [notes31]: 1 Timothy 4:16 (ESV)

¹⁶Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Commented [notes32]: 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 (ESV)

¹⁰and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹²in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Jesus closes each letter with a promise to the conquerors, to the ones who do hold fast till His return. ²⁶ *The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,* Remember when Jesus was tempted by Satan? One of the temptations was authority of the nations. (Matthew 4:8-9) It was not God's time or God's way, but Jesus would ultimately end up with authority over all nations. We are back to Psalm 2. In that psalm, God promises the Son the gift of all nations. ⁸ *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.* Psalm 2:8 (ESV) Jesus promises to give that authority to the conquerors who keep His work until the end. His work is to believe on the Son. (John 6:29) His work is letting yourself be yoked to Jesus. His work is daily obedience to the Holy Spirit. Then, as the body of Christ, you will have authority over the nations of this world. The disciples were rebuked for fighting over that authority before Jesus was arrested. (Luke 22:24) All we need to do is keep up His work until the end. But that requires a daily fueling of the flame, a life lived in communion with Him. Brothers and sisters, endure, and you will rule 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.* The quote from Psalm 2 continues, but Jesus applies it to us as the body of Christ. ⁹ *You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.* Psalm 2:9 (ESV) Jesus was given this authority at the resurrection. (Matthew 28:18) He will assign it to the conquerors. I believe that this is ruling over nations during the Millennial Kingdom. The meek will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5) But there is more.

²⁸ *And I will give him the morning star.* It would be enough to be rewarded with authority over nations, but what is this that Jesus is promising? It is the same thing that He has promised the other church overcomers, Himself. In 22:16, Jesus calls Himself the morning star. At the end of each letter He promises the ultimate gift of all. If we could grasp this, to know Him as we are known, undisturbed fellowship with the One who loved us to the point of death, we would be so fixated on living for Him each and every moment that there would be no need to ask us to hold fast till He comes. We'd be clinging ever tighter.

²⁹ *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.* Sadly this church in Pergamum did not have an ear to hear. During the second century another false prophet led the church into the heresy of continued revelation that eventually destroyed the church. It is a heresy that is rampant today, prophets claiming to speak for God without submitting to the judgment of the elders. (1Corinthians 14:29)

Do we hear the call to refuse to tolerate evil that leads others astray in our church? Do you hear the Spirit telling us to persevere in works that flow from the Spirit and to let them increase as time passes? Do you hear the Spirit tell us to hold fast till He comes? And do you hear Jesus' promise that if you do you will rule nations and receive the

Commented [notes33]: Matthew 4:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Commented [notes34]: John 6:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

Commented [notes35]: Luke 22:24 (ESV)

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

Commented [notes36]: Matthew 28:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Commented [notes37]: Matthew 5:5 (ESV)

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Commented [notes38]: Revelation 22:16 (ESV)

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."

Commented [notes39]: 1 Corinthians 14:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

ultimate prize of all, the glorious presence of Jesus, the bright Morning Star? May God give us grace to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches!

Questions

- 1 Go over the main point from the previous churches.
- 2 What is the sense from Jesus description of Himself?
- 3 What were the good qualities of this church?
- 4 Why did Jesus use the name Jezebel?
- 5 Who should have confronted her?
- 6 Why may they not have done so?
- 7 Why wouldn't she repent?
- 8 What was going to happen to her? Why?
- 9 What did Jesus say to the believers that didn't follow her?
- 10 What is the promise to the conquerors?