

## THE PROMISCUOUS CHURCH

### The Message to Thyatira

#### **Revelation 2:18-28**

<sup>18</sup> “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:

<sup>19</sup> “I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. <sup>20</sup> But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servant to practice fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. <sup>22</sup> 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; <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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; <sup>25</sup> only hold fast to what you have until I come. <sup>26</sup> To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end,

I will give authority over the nations;

<sup>27</sup> to rule them with an iron rod,

as when clay pots are shattered—

<sup>28</sup> even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. <sup>29</sup> Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

#### **Brief historical context:**

The town of Thyatira was founded by Alexander the Great as a military garrison. His soldiers worshipped Apollo who was their patron god – Apollo was called the son of god. By the time of the early church, Thyatira was an average prosperous town. Its main commodities were textile which was sorted after from all across the known world. Lydia who met Paul in Philippi and was converted was a seller of purple from Thyatira. Other commodities of Thyatira were bronze and silver which were also some of the best in the known world.

#### **Jesus’ Identity:**

The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze:

#### **Message:**

I know your works, love, service, and patient endurance, the works you do today are better than the works you did before.

Thyatira town structure was built around the Guilds, which were enormous pressure for Christians, since the town entire social, industrial, and religious interaction happened through these Guilds. A Guild was like a labour union and every single craft had its own Guild, (e.g. textiles, bronzes, silver, pottery, etc). However, it was far more than a labour union; it was the heart of their social-religious function as well as their work. It is said that Thyatira was a ‘closed shop’ town — all employees had to belong to the Guild for their particular craft.

The Guilds periodically held great festivals for all their members but the problem for Christians was that these festivals were held in the temple to Apollo, who was the patron to the Guilds, as he was the patron to the military garrison that was built to Apollo who was called the son of god. During these festivals they would often indulge in sexual immorality as worship to Apollo. If the Christians do not attend these festivals they risk the support and success of the Guilds, as Apollo would be angry with their particular craft. The Guilds only had one option, which was to expel them — so Christians lost their jobs striking them where it hurt the most — their livelihoods. Christians in Thyatira had to make a choice — Jesus or their jobs!

Despite the commendation, Jesus said “but I have something against you...” — **they tolerated the prophetess Jezebel** in their midst. The context suggests that this was a prophetess woman in the church who encouraged people to attend these festivals and to participate in idolatry and sexual immorality. It is not clear what her philosophy or theology was, but maybe something similar to the Nicolaitans, a sect in the early church that held to the teaching that the body was insignificant, so do with it whatever you wish — it’s okay to indulge in all kinds of sexual immorality and eat meat sacrifice to idols (participating in idol feast) etc. Whatever it was, Jesus referred to her intellectual approach as **the deep things of Satan** — heretical teachings.

This prophetess woman was a real problem in the church because Jesus calls her Jezebel who was the wife of Israel’s most wicked king (Ahab). Jezebel introduced “Baal worship” to Israel, and God greatly judged Ahab and Jezebel just before Israel’s captivity to enemy forces.

The point in all of this is “compromising to save your skin to make your life a little easier is a huge problem to Jesus Christ. The warning in this letter sounded a very serious note against heretical teachings (prophetess woman Jezebel).

Jesus identifies himself as the “**Son of God**” in the letter to the Church of Thyatira — ironically, that’s what Apollo called himself. To the bronze smith, Jesus said “my feet are like burnished bronze”, and to the refining fires of the industry Jesus said “my eyes are like flames of fire”. Jesus is far above all the things that plague the Christians lives — so the choice is clear, don’t let that false prophetess Jezebel muddle you up.

“How much is Jesus worth to you? What kind of value do you place on him? Do you value your job/career and the economy more than him?” That’s the stark choice Jesus gave the Christians in Thyatira!

## Rewards

To the faithful Jesus says, “Hold fast until I come!” — a reference to the *Parousia* (second coming) — and Jesus made the promise that they will reign with authority over the nations — the irony is that a marginalised people (church) that has no power in their earthly society will one day rule the nations with Jesus, their Lord — putting God’s ‘upside down kingdom’ in full view once again.

Jesus also said to the marginalised Christians in Thyatira, “to those who remain faithful to the end... I will give you a ‘Sceptre of Iron’ and with my Father you will smash the vessels of the authorities of this earth that have oppressed and persecuted you and I will give you the ‘Bright and Morning Star’.

In ancient times since the Babylonians, Venus — the morning star was seen as the source of ultimate authority — maybe this is a reference to Jesus Christ himself as, in Revelation 22:16 Jesus is called the ‘Bright and Morning Star’. So perhaps Jesus was saying to the Church of Thyatira — ‘I will give you myself’. This certainly recalls Jesus’ words in John 14, “Where I am there you may be also...” — suggesting eternal fellowship with the Son of God.

## Relevance

Pay the price upfront (faithfulness to Jesus amidst oppression and persecution) for an eternal gain at the end. Jesus calls his Church to value him more than anything else regardless of the price (take up your cross daily and follow me). To those who remain faithful to the end, Jesus says great will be your reward in heaven.

## Counter cultural reflection points:

- What does it mean to be faithful to Jesus in an ever increasing unfaithful and hostile world?
- Paul’s words in Romans 12 “do not conform... but be transformed...”
- Earthly suffering cannot compare with Jesus’ eternal rewards.
- What is most valuable to you in life?