

The Church in Thyatira Rev 2:18-29

I hope you've been enjoying our study, so far, in the book of Revelation. I expect that much will be revealed to us as we attempt to understand what Jesus is telling us in these words that have been preserved for so long. As the author John stated in the first chapter, verse 3: may we be blessed as we read, blessed as we hear, blessed as we keep the things which are written in this book. This morning we'll be looking at chapter 2 verses 18-29, which contain the message to the church in Thyatira. But first I'll start off by giving a little historical, cultural background on this city, and then we'll read the passage, and lastly we'll walk back through it verse by verse. There's lots of Old Testament connections and history to consider as we look at this passage and attempt to understand what's being said here, so I'll do my best to remind us of these connections as we go along.

Again, all of the cities where these churches gathered were located on the western side of the modern day country of Turkey, all grouped together within a circle diameter of about 175 miles. Just for perspective, that would be like all 7 of these churches being grouped in-between Highlands and Charlotte, NC. Persecution had forced followers of Jesus to flee to these cities, and by this time, much of the persecution had caught up with these believers even there. These cities are about 1,200 miles from Jerusalem, which would be about the distance from Brevard to Sioux Falls South Dakota. Any one been to South Dakota? That's a long way right? Would you want to walk there? At this point in history there is no such physical country as Israel, there is no temple in Jerusalem, Jewish genealogy records have been completely destroyed by the Romans, all the New Testament has been written and much of it's theme from the Jewish perspective is to find your identity not in an earthly kingdom nation state, not in a connection to Abraham- but rather find identity only in the connection to Jesus Christ and His coming Kingdom.

And when we read *church* here, the Bible is not referring to a physical church *building* in a city with a street address, cross on the lawn, and a steeple- the word *church* rather conveys simply the idea of a group of Jesus followers, individuals who have formed community together within the city, who would regularly meet together in order to pray, worship, study God's word, encourage one another- all based on their identity *in* and allegiance *to* King Jesus.

The city of Thyatira is situated between Pergamum and Sardis, a little off the main road which connected these two cities. It was founded by Alexander the Great after the overthrow of the Persian empire. One of the main Greek/Roman gods worshipped here was Apollo, who was considered the Sun-god, yet they worshipped him under the name of Tyrimnas. We know from historical evidence that Thyatira also promoted the worship of what was called a *sibyl*- a sibyl is a female oracle that was believed to be inspired by the gods to give prophetic words to her worshippers. Make a mental note here, we'll reference back to this in a little bit. Many other gods were worshipped as well, which was totally ok in Roman society. In fact, even the money used in this time period promoted worship of mere humans. Emperor Domitian ruled over the Roman empire during this time, and he claimed to be divine- he had declared himself to be on par with the other Roman gods, and he had a coin minted with the image of his son who had passed away. If you look at the screens you'll see a picture of this coin. On it you'll see Domitian's son sitting on the earth, with 7 stars encircling him. Who did we read about earlier that is described as having 7 stars in his hand? (Jesus) The image on this coin portrays the idea of a "son of god" with 7 stars around him, who is in control of the earth and the stars of heaven- but this coin is not in reference to Jesus, rather it's in reference to Domitian's son. Make a mental note here as well, we'll come back to this as we read the passage.

So as was common in most all the cities within the Roman Empire, in Thyatira there was a plethora of houses of worship for various Roman gods, where communities would gather, and most often the time of "worship" looked more like hanging out in a bar/brothel. The idea was to feast, to party, to get drunk and connect spiritually with these Roman gods, even connect *sexually* with these gods and their human representatives. And this was widely accepted as normal behavior. This is just what you did for community, culture, and entertainment. And as you can imagine, this is often where rub occurred between the early church leaders and people within the church- the officials of Rome and the "gods of Rome" were cool with a mix of worshipping Zeus, Apollo, Athena, a Sibyl, even Jesus, Yahweh- but from what Jesus says and from what is recorded throughout most all the pages of the Bible- we know that Jesus is *not* cool with a mix of worship. Jesus is very exclusive- you either worship Him alone, or you don't worship Him at all. And so the church leaders very often, as you can see throughout the New Testament, they often addressed a common problem of the Roman god worship culture rubbing off on those who professed faith in Jesus.

People were gathering for Jesus worship together on Sundays, after feasting in honor of demonic gods, getting drunk and interacting with the temple prostitutes the night before.

And before we get a little cocky and prideful and react with an attitude of “how dare they do that!”- the reality is that we in Christian culture are guilty of doing the same type of things- it might not as often be so in-your-face blatant but we have other more *subtle* ways of conforming to the culture around us, mixing in the worship of other things and people along with our worship of Jesus. We’re just a little more refined probably in how we do it in comparison to these being written to during this time period. There is still a strong temptation for Christians today to go with the flow, relax a little, fit in with the crowd, avoid looking like a Jesus freak- so that life is a little easier, so we don’t lose friends, so that we can hold on to a certain reputation, etc. Though that is a very real temptation for us today, perhaps the stakes were a little higher for those living in this time period in Thyatira. Thyatira was a small city that specialized in trades. Wool weavers, tailors, linen spinners, leather workers, shoemakers, bakers, dye makers, slave merchants, blacksmiths, potters, etc. And these groups organized themselves into unions of sorts- guilds, trade unions. These guilds gave the support system for relationships and business contacts, and quite often each trade guild had it’s specific Roman temple that they met at, their Roman god that they worshipped and treated as their mascot- the god they chose to bless their particular line of business. I think you can imagine the conflict, the potential for persecution for someone who might say, “no, I’m not hanging out with you guys after work, I only worship Jesus, and I’m not going to support the feasts and eat the food offered to Artemis, nor intoxicate myself with alcohol that might cause me to put my guard down and bond sexually with prostitutes.” You can imagine if that is what everyone in your line of work is doing, that you might even fear losing your lively hood if you buck up against that cultural trend too much. You can also imagine the temptation, out of a desire to keep your job and stay in the community, the temptation to relax and try to fit in- to hang out at the drunken feasts, drink a little, just ask for forgiveness the next morning after being “pressured” into sexual acts, etc. This is the reality of the cultural climate that most of these churches in this time period were facing. So let’s look at this passage together and see what Jesus has to say in response to this situation, and what it means for us today, as He speaks to the messenger of the church in Thyatira. **Revelation 2 verses 18-29...**

Each address to each of the churches includes a description of Jesus at the beginning- here in the 2nd half of **verse 18** Jesus describes Himself as the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet like burnished bronze. Verses 14 and 15 of the previous chapter also described Jesus' eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze- perhaps symbolizing the piercing sight that is able to consume, to take in, all that there is to see, bright flaming light that illuminates all things- no dark secret is hidden from His eyes; and His feet are firmly established and strong, nothing can move Him, His Kingdom is heavily, firmly planted. But again, before those descriptions, He refers to himself as the "*Son of God*." Now this is interesting, because what have I said a couple times was the phrase Jesus most often favored and used in referring to Himself, that linked Him to the Messiah passage contained in Daniel 7? *He used the term the Son of Man*. Jesus is the Son of Man- the human in the God setting of Daniel 7, but Jesus is also the Son of God- the God in the human setting, having been born on Earth. This place here in chapter 2 verse 18 is the only time the term Son of God is mentioned in Revelation, but it carries a lot of weight, and I think it is perhaps intended as a correction to the coin and Emperor divinity claims I mentioned earlier. Jesus here says, no- Domitian's son is *not* a son of god worthy of worship, Jesus is the only one who holds that title. Jesus is the only one divine, He is THE Son of God, the ruler of the heavens and the earth, the only one who holds stars in His hand.

Verse 19, here's the good things about the current state of the church- they are actively doing good things for each other and perhaps for the community, they love well, have strong faith, they serve well, they've had perseverance, and concerning their outward acts of faith- they've been doing more now than they were before. But here's the thing that isn't right, **verse 20**- let's read that again...

Ok, so let's attempt to identify who is being referred to here by the name Jezebel. More than likely, if this is referring to a specific woman, more than likely her name really isn't Jezebel, but that name is used as an Old Testament reference in order to describe the character, acts, beliefs of this particular woman. It would be like me saying to someone who has a farm with a lot of animals that they take care of, I might say something like, "Wow, aren't you a Noah," in reference to Old Testament Noah who built an boat to save all the animals from the flood. Or, in the *negative* sense, as is this passage, I might say "that bully over there is nothing but a Goliath we're about to take down." The

bully's name isn't actually Goliath, but I'm calling them that in reference to the tall and mighty Goliath that David killed using a single stone and a sling shot. And it seems this woman could be a specific woman, such as a Sibyl oracle lady that I mentioned earlier who would have been revered as a Roman god-like prophetess- perhaps one of these Sibyls attended the church gatherings, and was using the church as a platform to continue her fortune-telling mysticism. Perhaps she was attempting to hold onto the Roman gods while also holding onto Jesus, and for some reason the church was silent, unwilling to confront her in her syncretism. A church should definitely be a place of grace, forgiveness, and tolerance, but there also is a point in which a church should- in humility and love- confront behaviors, teachings, cultures, lifestyles that are in opposition to Jesus.

Jezebel, in the Old Testament was the wife of King Ahab, a particularly very evil king, in fact he is called out in the Bible as the most wicked king up to that point in history. King Ahab of Israel, took Jezebel as a wife from the king of the Sidonians, a people group who worshipped the false god Baal. It was a marriage of compromise, upon marrying her he too started worshipping Baal and leading the nation as a whole to worship Baal instead of the true God, Yahweh. Not only this, but Jezebel also convinced Ahab to kill off all the prophets of God, and only 100 escaped. This is the time period in which the prophet Elijah had a showdown on Mount Carmel to prove Yahweh as the true God and Baal as a false God. If you've read that passage from 1 Kings chapter 18, you might remember that after this amazing miracle in which God sent flames of fire down to consume the sacrifice and consume the water in the trenches around the sacrifice, after that, Queen Jezebel threatened Elijah and he ran for his life away from her into the wilderness. She must have been absolutely terrifying. (Cruella Deville?) And as if this weren't enough, later on Jezebel devised a plan to murder a man named Naboth so that King Ahab could then steal the vineyard that belonged to Naboth. God's patience lasted for quite a long time as she was doing all these evil things. If she had repented in sorrowful remorse for her sins, God would have completely forgiven her- but she didn't, and God's judgment caught up with her. Her death is recorded in 2 Kings 9- she was thrown down from a window, smashed against the ground, and dogs fed themselves on her dead corpse.

The comparison here is that a "Jezebel" is someone enticing someone to do something wrong, someone helping others, seducing others, to do something

that is against God's plan and ways. In reference to the church in Thyatira, it very well could have been a specific woman enticing the believers to do wrong, to embrace the culture instead of following Jesus; or the idea could have been more generic in that "the woman Jezebel" was a description referring to a general sentiment of several within the church- a general problem of several people compromising and enticing others to compromise in their faith. And the specific way in which this Jezebel or general Jezebel spirit was teaching and leading in evil was in regard to sexual immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols. As I mentioned at the beginning, these were 2 areas of compromise that were very tempting concerning the cultural environment of the day. It's interesting to note that these were the same 2 issues that the church in Pergamum struggled with as well, back in verse 14. Now I think you can see a direct application for us today concerning avoiding sexual immorality- it's no secret that sexual sin, perversions, promiscuity, pornography, gender confusion, sexual activity outside of marriage is still a big temptation and area of compromise amongst Christians and churches today. And admitting this issue is not excusing it, no- the message here to the church in Thyatira is the same message Jesus is saying today- the message is repent or judgement is coming- turn from sexual sin. Period.

Now, in contrast, the idea of *not* eating things sacrificed to idols doesn't really directly apply to us today, but the *principle* can definitely be applied in various applications. The principle that carries over to us today is the idea of not compromising our faith in our culture, not participating in activities that are against Jesus; it's refusing to engage in culturally acceptable customs that aren't pleasing to God. Jesus taught that it's not really specifically the food that taints the body spiritually, but rather the spirit, the mindset, the heart condition- in which food is eaten. So it's not that the food sacrificed to idols is specifically bad for your health, but rather it's the heart of compromise, it's the tip toe-ing over to the line that separates good from evil, it's playing too close to fire, it's flirting with spiritual forces of evil.

And what's interesting to remember, is that back when so many people from all kinds of different backgrounds, cultures, and religions were placing their faith in Jesus, back in the years that followed directly after Jesus' ascension- during this time the early church wrestled with what things from the Old Testament and Law of Moses should they continue to uphold and try to teach the new believers who didn't come from a Jewish background. The knew Jesus fulfilled the Old

Testament law, yet they still did certain things culturally that were designed to honor God- and so they were wrestling with not wanting to overload the new believers with all kinds of new customs and traditions, and rules- but still knew that in some way these new believers would need to look different culturally from the pagan culture around them, and so the early church leaders met in Jerusalem to decide how to instruct these new believers, and they decided to heed the advice of James- this is what James says in **Acts 15:19-20**, he says: *“it is my judgment that we do not cause trouble for those from the Gentiles who are turning to God, 20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols, from acts of sexual immorality, from what has been strangled, and from blood.”* And the whole church in Jerusalem agreed, and thus set this as the standard for all the Christians of the time, and for all those who would become Christians in the future who might wrestle with Judaism vs Christianity.

Now, of all the cultural teachings in the Old Testament, of all the things they *could* have said, they basically said don't eat bloody strangled meat or food sacrificed to idols *and* don't get involved in sexual sin. Which is crazy that these two things seem to be the 2 things that many churches (because of the culture around them) struggled with the most. In what ways do you think our Christian culture of today- in what ways do we struggle with conforming to the culture around us? Can you think of 2 specific ways? You don't have to answer that out loud, but I just want you to think about it for a moment. If Jesus were addressing the “Church of Brevard,” or the “Church of America”- what specific warnings do you think He would give us concerning our tendency to compromise and go along with the negative cultural norms around us? **Verses 21-22...**

God is very merciful and patient, and His desire is repentance- for people to turn from rejecting Him and doing wrong- to receiving Him and doing right. Part of the reason why the events of Revelation that we're going to be reading about shortly have *not* occurred quite yet- is because God is merciful and patient in waiting on mankind to repent. But as we'll see, even through the terrible difficult events that will happen, God is still desiring repentance that leads to forgiveness. Even through world catastrophes, God's heart is that people would see the catastrophes as signs pointing to Him. His judgement and wrath is definitely coming, but it's coming at the very tail end of all these things. The majority of the

events are being brought on as a call to repentance. But for those who do not humble themselves and repent, judgement and wrath is coming.

To the Jezebel, Jesus says her judgement will be Him throwing her onto a bed- the Greek word is “kline” it’s basically a couch used for sleep, or for rest in sickness, for sitting, or for eating. If I had to guess, I’d say it’s probably the word from which we developed the word recline. It’s the same word that would have described the place where people would sit and recline at the Roman temple to feast and drink to the gods, it’s the same word that would have described the place a temple prostitute would take someone for sex. And here Jesus says of the compromising and seducing Jezebel, the place of your rebellion against God, the place you took pleasure in, the place you ignored Him in- will be the very place of your judgement. As the Old Testament Jezebel caused others to rebel against God and was thrown down out of a window in judgement, so will *this* Jezebel be thrown down, and it won’t be *her* in control of throwing herself down on the bed like it has been all this time- no, God will do it and it will be the end of her and the end of all those who participate with her- *unless they repent*. Jesus is coming to flip over all the tables. The place you think you’re getting away with something, the place you enjoy too much that keeps you from turning in obedience to God- will be the place of judgement, unless you repent. **Verse 23...**

The use of the word “children” here is probably not talking about literal real life children of a specific woman, but rather the idea is more like those who have been figuratively “raised in the teaching,” those who have been “brought up in”- sharing in the practices of this Jezebel type spirit. This is the same type of figure of speech phrase Jesus used when saying to the pharisees that they were children of their father the devil. (John 8:44) They weren’t literally birthed by Satan, but rather they were acting like him, resembling him as a son would a father. So in other words, the meaning is that not only Jezebel will get judged if she doesn’t repent, but also all those who act like her- they will be judged as well in the same manner. The verse continues- *“and all the churches will know”*- and I think we can take this to mean not just these specific 7 churches of this time- but rather that *all* the churches- past, present, and future- will see that Jesus knows every mind and heart, and that He judges fairly- giving each person according to their life actions and according to what they truly deserve- whether good or bad. **Verses 24-25...**

So the whole church hasn't given into cultural compromise, there are those who have *not* embraced this line of thinking and living, who have *not* tip toed into the occult, who have *not* been enticed by spirituality, pleasure, prosperity that originates from Satan- to these he says just continue in what you are doing, continue to stay strong, continue to remain uncompromising, endure in your faith, persevere- until what? What does it say? Sustain in the faith until what happens? Until you're raptured up out of this world into Heaven? No- He says hold firmly (*here*), until He (Jesus) comes (*here*). We've had a few of these places in scripture recently where the author is telling the reader to anticipate not a rapture event in which we are called up to Heaven to be with Jesus, but rather we are told to anticipate and endure until we experience Jesus returning here for us- which is an event that takes place *after* (post) the Great Tribulation events described in this book. **Verses 26-27...**

Here is the part of the letter that mentions the reward to those who overcome- all 7 addresses to the churches contain at this part the phrase "to the one who overcomes," and then they each give a different description of the reward for the overcomers. And it seems to me most likely that this is the place in each letter where the focus turns from specific instructions to a specific historical church, to now a very general statement addressed to every church and every Christian for all of history. The one who overcomes and the one who keeps His deeds until the end- Jesus will give them authority over the nations, and then verse 27 quotes from Psalm 2- a very well known Messianic Psalm. It was very well know during this time period, as well as today, that Psalm 2 is referring to the Messiah figure Jesus. For time sake, we won't review the passage in detail, but it speaks of rulers and nations coming against Yahweh's Messiah (the Anointed One). But Yahweh just laughs at the people's rebellion, their might is no match for Him. And Yahweh declares this Messiah figure as "a son," who will be given these rebellious nations as His inheritance- all the earth will be in the Son's possession, and He will break them with a rod of iron, He will shatter them like pottery. And the Psalm ends by giving advice to revere this Son of Yahweh, to take refuge in Him, so that you don't experience His anger and wrath- so that you aren't broken and shattered by His judgment.

Listen, this is the fate of every earthly nation- they will all be shattered by Jesus. Why? So that only one nation remains- and that remaining nation state is not America or Israel- that nation state is the Kingdom of God. And what's mind-

blowing, is that here in Revelation 2- verses 26 and 27 are telling us that those who overcome in this world through Jesus, we will share in the Kingly rule of Jesus. You and I who sustain in our faith, remaining faithful until the end- until we pass from this earth or until He returns- you and I, along with all the others who made and who make Jesus their king, who endure faithfully until the end- we will share in the authority of Jesus to rule and shatter the earthly kingdoms of this world. But wait- there's more! **Verse 28...**

Since this time to today's present time, the planet Venus has been referred to as the "morning star" because it appears in the sky just before the sun rises. (Picture on the screens) And the idea has been that though the night is dark and long, and it may seem like all is lost, at the darkest time of night there appears the morning star- and you are then assured that morning, that daylight, is just around the corner. The morning star represents hope for the new day, it's appearance tells us that the darkness is just about to be broken. Now, that message of hope and rescue is beautiful- that's amazing this is promised to those who overcome. But the meaning is even deeper than this. Let's look ahead at what Jesus says in the closing of His Revelation message, **Revelation 22 verse 16...**

Jesus declares *Himself* as the morning star. Not only are those who overcome promised the hope of rescue, but the hope of rescue is Jesus Himself. We who overcome get Jesus Himself. And that's amazing too. But let's dig a little deeper. We have the re-occurring theme to the churches to overcome, and to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. These two commands are the only commands that are the same exact phrase repeated to every single one of the churches. Many people today, very prominent Bible teachers, say that the churches are not mentioned again in Revelation after chapter 3, and that *must* then mean that churches in general during the end times, will be raptured up to heaven before the great tribulation starts in chapter 5 and onwards. In other words, those who ascribe to a pre-tribulation rapture would say that the church (Christians) don't need to worry about any of the bad things described in chapters 5 and following. That idea would seem to go against the main theme of the warning for the churches to overcome and listen up closely to the Spirit. But, in addition to that, the main premise of the argument that the churches are not mentioned again is faulty. Here in verse 16 of chapter 22 that we just read, Jesus says in closing, that He is sending a messenger (angel) to tell the *churches* all

the things He just revealed. So it's not just the letters to the churches that pertain to the churches- the whole book pertains to the churches. So the idea that churches don't need to concern themselves with any of the events that happen in chapter 5 and onward, because they'll be raptured out beforehand, is completely false. Jesus says here that all the other stuff mentioned *after* the churches- all the great tribulation stuff- is for the churches too. If this isn't enough to convince you, I promise there will be much more, but for now let me give you just one more argument for a post-Tribulation rapture that pertains to the fact that Jesus is revealing Himself as the morning star.

In knowing that Jesus is the morning star- the whole metaphor being conveyed here is the idea of waiting through the entire night -overcome through the night, right up until the night is at it's darkest point, and *then* Jesus the morning star will appear in the sky, and you will then know that light and salvation is right around the corner. This is the simple metaphor representing even the whole book of Revelation. Things crescendo and get worse and we are warned to overcome, endure, and persevere- and right as things get so bad and so dark that all would perish -absent of God's mercy- Jesus the morning star appears in the sky in Revelation 19- returning for His bride the church, gathering us up to Him, transforming us in a twinkling of an eye, clothing us in white, to follow Him back to earth as He shatters the earthly nations and judges His enemies so that His earthly Kingdom can be installed with us on Earth, free from the distractions of evil, so that He can show us what real leadership governing rule should look like here on Earth.

In that understanding, Jesus' words from Matthew 24 make a little more sense. In **Matthew 24:13**, Jesus, speaking of the end times, says *"But the one who endures to the end is the one who will be saved."* **Matthew 24:22** also makes a lot more sense, Jesus says *"And if those days had not been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short."* In other words, if the events Jesus describes in Matthew 24, that coordinate with the same events He describes in the book of Revelation, if these Great Tribulation events that will happen are not cut short by His returning, then no one would see His return while on the earth, because we'd all be dead- believers and unbelievers both. The church is warned to endure up through even the darkest part of the "night," and the hope of the end will only come with Jesus the morning star appearing in the sky.

Jesus tells a parable in the next chapter, Matthew 25, of the 10 virgins (the 10 bridesmaids)- some who had enough oil in their lamp to make it through late into the night while waiting for the wedding party to start, and others who did not have enough oil to endure through the night. That's the parable. None of the bridesmaids were summoned up early as to miss the dark coldness of the night. All were *expected* to endure through the night, but only half of them were *prepared* to endure. Only half had the extra oil that would sustain them through the challenge of waiting in the darkness while the Bridegroom was delayed. Please do not place your hope in those who teach that the bridesmaids are rescued before nightfall. Be ready to endure the fullness of the night, waiting for the morning star to appear. As **verse 29** says, back in chapter 2 of Revelation- please hear this. This is the warning, this is the teaching from Jesus- it would be easy to ignore this and tickle our ears with all kinds of other popular end times theories. But Jesus says be prepared to hold firmly until He comes, overcome so that you can be ready to receive Him as the Morning Star. (*Prayer*)

(*Check with sound booth*) Share situation... Believe me, I was confident that the Lord would not leave us. I really trust Him... but He always surprises me. (Next day) I can't describe to you the happiness we are in. God has truly honored me with the greatest honor. I pray a prayer of thanks and praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. My eyes are tearing up from how much I long for the Lord Jesus Christ. The children are very happy.... Today we are together.... Today we have a prayer of thanks and praise in our small church. (*Remind about copies of Study guide*)