

Revelation
Chapter 2:18-29
“What He Says To the Churches IV”
All scripture references are from the NASU unless otherwise noted

Calvary Chapel Fellowship of Enid
Matthew W. Thoms, Pastor/Teacher
January 2017

Teaching: The letter to the church at Thyatira.

Let's start with a little Bible trivia ... I have a \$10 gift certificate to The Portico Bookstore for the 1st person who can tell me what noted Bible character was from the community that we're looking at this morning ... Thyatira!

Acts 16:14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira ...

Thyatira was a small, but wealthy community, particularly famous for a special wool that was produced there. The majority of their wealth, in fact, came from that wool and the garments that were manufactured from it. Historians tell us that they were the most expensive garments in the known world at that time. They were the Gucci of their day.

But what made this wool so special wasn't the sheep or goat it came from, but the dye that turned in purple.

Off their coast in the Mediterranean Sea there was a small mollusk called Murex bandaris and when this tiny snail was squeezed it released a purple dye that became known as "Tyrian Purple." And if you convert the cost into modern day values, this Tyrian dye sold for about \$300.00 ... per drop.

Q. Now ... as far as the timeline of church history ... where does this letter to Thyatira fit in? ... Well, more than likely, it represents the season of the Catholic Church.

Now if you have a Catholic background ... and I know that many of you do ... please resist the temptation to get angry with me here ...

- 1.** First, because I'm merely teaching the scriptures, not passing human judgment.
- 2.** And second because when we get to the next church, the church at Sardis ... it's the Protestant's turn. And in many ways they get hit even harder.

One commentator said "By the time you finish a thorough study of these seven letters ... everyone will be offended!" And that's likely a true statement.

So it's not a condemnation of any denomination ... nor is it a contest. It's merely the Lord's inspection of all those who claim to be His kids. It's their report card and His recommendations for change.

Note with me, if you would, that none of the 1st three letters ... mention the Second Coming of the Lord, but it is mentioned in each of the last four letters. And that's helpful when it comes to putting these churches on the timeline of church history.

And what its likely telling us is that each of these last four churches or church systems still exist today and will continue to exist all the way through the Lord's return. In other words ... the Catholic Church and the protestant church, as well as others, will continue to exist all the way through the Rapture of all believers.

The last thing that I want to touch on in terms of introduction ... is the name, "Thyatira" itself. It means "continual sacrifice". Noteworthy because the belief in the "continual sacrifice", is one of the most grievous errors of the Catholic Church.

In fact, the Catholic Encyclopedia tells us that the very word "Mass" (or missa), coined by Pope Gregory The Great, means just that ... continual sacrifice.

Keep that in mind as we delve into the text ...

Verse 18: So Jesus Christ to the pastor (the messenger) of the church at Thyatira ...

And as with all the churches ... the Lord introduces Himself by emphasizing certain divine attributes. In this case, His eyes which were like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze.

It's an emphasis of His ability to, not only see all things, but to also test all things ... as if by fire (**1st Corinthians 3**), and subsequently, to righteously judge all things (Remember that when it's used symbolically in the Bible, Bronze or Brass speaks of divine judgment).

Verse 19:

Q. Stop there and ... who wants to go with me to join this church? -- An incredibly active fellowship.

Now overlay this on what we know of the Catholic Church today and it fits; an incredibly active fellowship.

And the Lord recognizes and commends their work, and their love, and their faith, and their service to humanity, and their perseverance and He even notes that their work increases with every passing year.

And it's true ... more helping-hand foundations, more hospitals, more meals served to the

indigent and on and on. Great stuff, but they also had a problem ...

Verse 20: They were faithful and busy, but there was a serious neglect of the purity that marks us as God's children. They'd turned a blind eye to the sin in their midst, probably because it was institutional sin ... top-down sin ... accepted, practiced ... and even taught.

Now this, Jezebel was not an actual person at Thyatira. In fact, the Greek indicates that it's not speaking of a person, but rather, a group or, more likely a system.

The name Jezebel however, is used to take the reader's mind back to the Jezebel of **1st and 2nd Kings**.

If you're not familiar with her story, you can catch the highlights in **1st Kings 16 & 21 along with 2nd Kings 9**.

But in brief ... she was a princess, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians and she became a queen when she married Ahab, king of Israel.

Ahab wasn't exactly a stand-up citizen in his own right, but under the influence of his wife ... he did some despicable things, including the heavy persecution of God's servants.

In fact, more than being evil, I would say that Ahab's problem was that he was spineless. He should have put his pants on and sternly and persistently corrected his wife, but he never did. He just kept saying "Yes dear!"

Now think with me about the history of the Catholic Church and in particular, their history of strong handedness:

1. Think of how they took the Word of God out of the hands of the people ... allowing it only in Latin so that the general congregant couldn't read it for themselves.
2. Or, how they took communion out of the hands of the people.
3. Or the Inquisitions where the history books estimate 2 million believers were put to death.
4. Or the institution of the confessional ... putting a man between the sinner in need of forgiveness and the Lord who can provide it.

It's much like the charge Jesus levels here in **verse 20** of this morning's text ... that this Jezebel had taken the title prophetess upon herself. It was self-proclaimed spiritual authority.

But again ... it points us to a religious system, not a woman ... and this religious system

has erred in this same way for the duration of its existence; lofty titles, heavy authority and spiritual elitism.

The Lord also charges her with teaching bad stuff and setting a bad example ... teaching and leading His bond-servants astray.

Things like the unbiblical teaching of Purgatory and the selling of Prayer Candles to try and get loved ones out of that imaginary, but profitable place. Or the transubstantiation of the blood and body of Christ in Communion.

“And as a result of the bad teaching and poor examples”, Jesus says that, “the people committed immorality and idolatry.”

The last straw for Martin Luther, the onetime adherent to the precepts of Catholicism was the selling of indulgences. Basically, this meant that the more money you had and the more money you were willing to give to the Catholic Church ... the more sin you were allowed to commit.

If you had the money, you could go to the priest on Friday and let him know about your weekend plans ... about the drunken debauchery that you planned to involve yourself in ... about the prostitute that you planned to hire and the bodily abuses that you planned to inflict and then you would be assigned a certain price for that collective future sin. And if you paid it ... you were declared to be pre-approved for forgiveness.

Q. Ya think that might have led to a little bit of immorality? --

And as far as the charge of idolatry ... remember that the Jezebel of the Old Testament was Phoenician by birth and upbringing, so she was an idol worshiper and introduced that to the children of God.

She had them bowing down to, and kissing, statues and worshipping relics and holding tradition above the scriptures ... all a central part of Phoenician worship and all very well represented in the Catholic Church ... even today.

Try to find a Catholic Church without some revered statuary or a practicing Catholic who doesn't venerate their Rosary.

Verse 21: Perhaps the saddest portion of this entire letter!

And what makes it truly heart wrenching is that when it says “... **she does not want to repent ...**” it's written in the Greek tense known as the “present, perfect tense” ... meaning then, now and evermore.

And again we see this in the Catholic Church. That even when faced with their own contradiction to the scriptures ... they refuse to repent.

In fact, when that happened in 1546 at the Council of Trent ... rather than repenting for their practices that did not square with the scriptures ... they simply added 14 new books to the Catholic Bible to justify those practices.

Verses 22-23: At first glance, it might seem that there are three groups being addressed here:

- 1.** Jezebel ...
- 2.** Those who commit adultery with her ... and ...
- 3.** Her children

But again ... I think the better interpretation is two groups of people and one church or religious system with whom they must do business ... the business of correcting or of accepting.

So the Lord describes those who are seduced by this religious system and those who are the children of it.

To those seduced by her ... He urges repentance, but to those knit to her by birth ... He says He will make them an example of His divine judgment.

Some people within the Catholic Church have merely been deceived. They didn't know enough of the Word of God when they got sucked into it ... they were seduced. And to them God says "Repent!"

Others however, know better. They know better, but persist in viewing the church as their savior.

And the Catholic Church has propagated that. Of all the Catholics I've known (and that's a large number because for several years the Lord gave me the Catholic population as my primary ministry when we lived in California) ... and of all the Catholics that I've ever known, I bet I could count on ... maybe two fingers ... the number of them who actually understood God's basic plan of salvation; being born again by submission to Jesus Christ.

That means that the vast majority of Catholics that I've known, were looking basically to the Catholic Church for salvation. So note what Jesus says here to those who think they're born again by the Catholic Church ...

Rev 2:23 ... I will kill [them] with pestilence ...

Because as He says in ...

John 14:6 ... no one comes to the Father but through Me.

No one will ever get to the Father through a church ... not any church!

And don't overlook the fact that the Lord says here that He will throw this Jezebel ... this

religious system, onto a bed of sickness.

Q. How and when will He do that? – I have no idea, but neither do I have any doubt that He will do it ... or perhaps ... is doing it.

Verses 24-25:

The Commendation in **verse 19** of the church as a whole...

The Condemnation in **verse 20** of those in error ...

And the Correction of that same group in **verses 21-23**

And here in **verses 24-25**, the Commission of that ever present, faithful remnant in this and every church and religious system ... to hold fast ... to keep on ... to stand firm.

All of which illustrates the truth of the Lord's preceding words ...

Rev 2:23 ... I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

Verses 26-27: This is the reward of reigning with our Lord in that period of time known as the Millennial Reign.

The one thousand years following:

- 1.** The Rapture of the church
- 2.** The Seven Years of Tribulation
- 3.** The Lord's Second Coming with us in-tow
- 4.** And the Battle of Armageddon

His rule during that season will be one of stern authority which is why the Bible describes it as a Christian utopia. A place of spiritual bliss ... at least a place of spiritual bliss for us as believers, but for those who've resisted the Potter's shaping hand during this lifetime ... crushing.

You can read the Old Testament picture of this in **Jeremiah chapter 18** if you'd like.

You can also read more about this time known as The Millennial Reign in **Isaiah chapter 30** and **Revelation chapters 12 and 19** if you want to get a head-start on that study.

Verse 28: So in addition to reigning with Him during the Millennium, He makes another

interesting promise to the overcomers at the church of Thyatira ... that He will give them the morning star.

Q. So what's that? –

Well, our understanding is aided by the fact that this phrase is used in only two other places in all of scripture and in each of those it's a title applied exclusively to Jesus Christ; **2nd Peter 1:19 & Revelation 22:16**.

So Jesus is offering Himself to those who hold fast ... not only during the Millennial Reign and the Heavenly Eternity ... but also during their time of trial and struggle here on earth.

Verse 29: If you have an ear ... then the Lord has been speaking to you.

Conclusion: This church was active in works, but they weren't bound to the Word.

To them ... social action superseded scriptural discernment. In fact, discernment and accountability had become four letter words that were not acceptable speech within the church of Thyatira.

But so that we may avoid their error let me give you three, easy to remember points that will help you discern between what is true and what is false in a minister or a ministry:

1. Their CHARACTER. Q. What do they live like? Is the Fruit of the Spirit evident in their life? What's their CHARACTER?

2. Their CREED. Q. What do they teach? What do they put forward as their beliefs?

And as you consider this one ... I would urge you to pay particular attention to what they say about Jesus Christ because that's where the line's drawn the majority of the time.

Q. Is He God Almighty or just a god or some form of god? And what about His work of redemption? Do they proclaim it to be complete? Or is it the work of Christ on the cross AND ...?

Q. What is their CREED?

3. Their CONVERTS: This provides the test of time. Anyone can fake fruitfulness in the springtime. The season is early and although the leaves are busting forth ... there's not yet any fruit to evaluate. But wait until the fall ... see how they weather the hot days of summer and whether or not the fruit actually comes forth. Look at their CONVERTS.

There's a South American fish that we Christians could learn a lot from. He's called the Four-Eyed Fish because he swims around with his eyes halfway above and halfway below the surface of the water. The top half of his eye has an air lens and the lower half has a water lens.

The purpose of that elaborate design is to help him keep a wary eye. He watches carefully for danger from above and for danger below. He can take things at face value, but at the same time look at the deeper things.

We Christians ought to be that same way.

The name Jezebel in Phoenician means chaste as in pure, but in the Hebrew it means dunghill.

Very descriptive ... looks pure as you glance at the outside, but inside ... a dunghill. Great package, but what's on the inside is awful.

There's a reason that the Lord used that particular name to warn us about this church system ... still around today and still unrepentant and still producing children of the church who think they're children of God.

And for them ... for us ... the Lord has this loving, but very stern word of correction ... repent and confess Jesus as the only one who can save us!