

Revelation Part VI

This week we return to Revelation for our sixth study in the series. In previous weeks we examined the messages to the churches at Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum.

We are going to continue our practice of reading the scripture aloud beginning at Revelation Chapter three verse one where we find the message that John directed to the church at Thyatira on behalf of Jesus.

“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Thyatira. This is the message from the Son of God, whose eyes are like flames of fire, whose feet are like polished bronze:

“I know all the things you do. I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things.

“But I have this complaint against you. You are permitting that woman—that Jezebel who calls herself a prophet—to lead my servants astray. She teaches them to commit sexual sin and to eat food offered to idols.

I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to turn away from her immorality.

“Therefore, I will throw her on a bed of suffering, and those who commit adultery with her will suffer greatly unless they repent and turn away from her evil deeds. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches out the thoughts and intentions of every person. And I will give to each of you whatever you deserve.

“But I also have a message for the rest of you in Thyatira who have not followed this false teaching (‘deeper truths,’ as they call them—depths of Satan, actually). I will ask nothing more of you except that you hold tightly to what you have until I come. To all who are victorious, who obey me to the very end,

To them I will give authority over all the nations. They will rule the nations with an iron rod and smash them like clay pots. They will have the same authority I received from my Father, and I will also give them the morning star!

“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.

This message to the believers at Thyatira is the longest of the seven messages to the churches and is somewhat ironical in that it was directed to probably the least significant of the seven cities.

It was a city of craftsmen and traders. It was a city with lots of pagan worship but had none of the grand temples and shrines that adorned other cities.

Like we have seen in previous messages, the opening paragraph reveals more character aspects of Jesus.

This is the message from the Son of God, whose eyes are like flames of fire, whose feet are like polished bronze:

The eyes of flaming fire here speak symbolically of the righteous anger of Jesus. One of the trades in Thyatira was the casting of bronze and it is likely that this symbolic picture of our Lord’s bronze feet was easily understood by the people at Thyatira to represent strength and immovable stability.

There is a tendency in contemporary Christianity today to focus almost entirely on the compassionate and forgiving picture of Jesus found throughout the New Testament.

And these are genuine and important aspects of our Lord's character. But the New Testament also contains the book of Revelation and in this book, we see the righteous anger of Jesus directed to the sin that was going on in Thyatira and other places.

Revelation reminds us that Jesus is both saviour and judge. Revelation reminds us that Jesus is the third person of a Holy Godhead, a godhead that is merciful and just.

His holiness demands justice for those who sin but fortunately we have a God who designed and delivered a plan of salvation made available to all. A chance to have sin forgiven, expunged from the record, and forever forgotten.

But the Holiness of God calls for sin to be punished, for justice to be carried out when the merciful and graceful opportunities for repentance and forgiveness are ignored.

This letter to Thyatira contains both commendation and a call for repentance.

With the reference to our Lord's righteous anger in our minds, we go first of all to the critique offered to the church at Thyatira and the call for the repentance of those engaged in sinful practices.

“But I have this complaint against you. You are permitting that woman—that Jezebel who calls herself a

prophet—to lead my servants astray. She teaches them to commit sexual sin and to eat food offered to idols.

It is probable that this refers to a real woman within the church at Thyatira. But it is quite possible that Jezebel was not her real name but was simply called that while alluding to the sinful Jezebel of the Old Testament.

There are two key foundational principles that we see throughout scripture.

First God’s declaration that he is the one and only God, and the only one to be worshiped.

In Exodus twenty beginning at verse two we read:

“I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. “You must not have any other god but me. “You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods.

Secondly, God’s people are consistently called to live moral lives within the bounds of marriage. And marriage partners should be within the family of God’s people.

Exodus twenty fourteen says:

“You must not commit adultery.

The reference to the Jezebel of the Old Testament provides a powerful example of what happens when these principles are not followed.

Jezebel first appears I Kings sixteen 30-33:

But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the LORD's sight, even more than any of the kings before him. And as though it were not enough to follow the sinful example of Jeroboam, he married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and he began to bow down in worship of Baal. First Ahab built a temple and an altar for Baal in Samaria. Then he set up an Asherah pole. He did more to provoke the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than any of the other kings of Israel before him.

This is quite an indictment of a king of Judah and his foreign wife. The marriage resulted in idolatry and eventually the murder of innocent people.

God's righteous anger was aroused because of their actions and the righteous anger of Jesus is aroused against this segment of the believers at Thyatira who were permitting this teaching and allowing, perhaps even encouraging and engaging in immoral practices.

Someone recently forwarded to the conclusions of a recent study done on opinions of people who claimed to be Christians on sexual relationships within and without the bounds of marriage. It was quite alarming to see how many people claiming to be believers have gone soft on this key issue.

We do well to note carefully our Lord's response:

I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to turn away from her immorality.

Note here the merciful and graceful response of our Lord. Time was provided to repent, to turn away from the wicked ways and habits and return to the Lord.

Note the past tense, time had already been given, and now yet another warning being provided in this letter. Our Lord demonstrating his longsuffering nature, not willing that any would perish.

The warning that comes is very severe. You may want to add it to your list of verses you wish were not in the Bible. But it is there, a warning of severe consequences to follow should repentance not be forth coming.

“Therefore, I will throw her on a bed of suffering, and those who commit adultery with her will suffer greatly unless they repent and turn away from her evil deeds. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches out the thoughts and intentions of every person. And I will give to each of you whatever you deserve.

Idolatry, sinful lives, and immoral relationships affect not only the individuals involved but subsequent generations. Going back to the ten commandments in Exodus twenty beginning at verse five we read these words:

You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me.

But I lavish unflinching love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.

But there is a positive message for those who hear the warning and decide to live within God's established boundaries. Note carefully the promise in verse six:

But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.

And now we turn to the commendation given by our Lord to the church at Thyatira:

"I know all the things you do. I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things."

The NIV reads:

"you are now doing more than you did at first."

What a comparison with the church at Ephesus! Jesus criticized them because their love for him and each other was losing its intensity.

But Jesus is saying to the church at Thyatira I have seen your love for me and each other, I've seen your faith in me and I've seen the way you serve, I've seen the way you persevere in spite of the hardship and in all these things I am seeing constant improvement

Wow! What an amazing commendation to the folks at Thyatira who had remained faithful to their calling.

They were not a people who were coasting to the finish line but were determined to continue to improve in every aspect of their Christian life until Christ came back or death took them to be with him.

What if we were to allow the Holy Spirit to do some self examination today.

If he were to examine where we are today compared with a few years ago or compared to when we first confessed our sin, asked forgiveness and promised to live for him, would the results of that examination label us much like the Ephesians or could it be said that when it came to our love for Christ, our love for each other, our faith, our service and our patient endurance that there was evidence of continual improvement?

So where is our heart today as individuals? Is our mindset one where we are pressing for continual improvement? I hope so!

Where is our mindset with respect to our church? To some degree this covid season has induced a time of coasting. We really have been restricted in what we are able to do?

Where is our mindset as we hopefully emerge from the covid season? Are we determined to press ahead? Are we ready to press for continuous improvement?

We now turn to the last words of promise provided to the faithful at Thyatira. A promise that the faithful would someday rule with Jesus.

“But I also have a message for the rest of you in Thyatira who have not followed this false teaching (‘deeper truths,’ as they call them—depths of Satan, actually). I will ask nothing more of you except that you hold tightly to what you have until I come. To all who are victorious, who obey me to the very end,

To them I will give authority over all the nations. They will rule the nations with an iron rod and smash them like clay pots. They will have the same authority I received from my Father, and I will also give them the morning star!

Ruling with Jesus! Our minds may find that concept hard to comprehend! How will that happen? Exactly how and when is a bit of a mystery now, but the promise to believers that they will someday be ruling with him appears in other scriptures as well.

Consider Matt 12 28:

Jesus replied, "I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And Paul's words first I Cor 6:2:

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Don't you realize that someday we believers will judge the world? And since you are going to judge the world, can't you decide even these little things among yourselves? Don't you realize that we will judge angels?

And then from II Timothy 2:11-13:

This is a trustworthy saying: If we die with him, we will also live with him. If we endure hardship, we will reign with him.

What an amazing promise to the faithful at Thyatira and to us, that we will someday reign with Christ.

Now for our last thoughts for today we want to look briefly at the message to the church at Sardis.

“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis. This is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars:

“I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead. I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God. Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again. If you don’t wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief.

“Yet there are some in the church in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes with evil. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine.

“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.

Author John Yeats writes: The city of Sardis had a church comprised of nominal self-satisfied Christians. There was no evidence of persecution. The difficulty was spiritual apathy which is often present when there is no persecution. The Christians at Sardis present a contrast with those in Smyrna where physical death was all around but they were spiritually alive. In Sardis Christians gave the appearance of being alive but were spiritually dead.

Our Lord's call to them was to wake up!. Historically their city had been invaded and conquered twice by stealthy attacks while the people slept.

Jesus calls on them to wake up before it is too late. Wake up, repent, turn back with fervour to the Lord.

Today in US political circles some are accused of belonging to the RINO party. Republican in name only. I think if Jesus were to write an assessment of churches today he might well conclude that there are many Christians in name only. Their commitment to the cause and their willingness to serve has grown cold.

Is there any more relevant words that Jesus could give to our churches and ourselves today than to wake up, wake up, repent, serve with the fervour of that first love.