



Bed, Wrath, and Beyond

The Church in Thyatira The Revelation 2:18-29

The men of Thyatira regularly dined in restaurants whose entertainments were far worse than a tableside cultural dance.

Thyatira was a manufacturing city where unions were prevalent & powerful. They called them trade guilds. Membership in a guild was mandatory. You were not allowed to work without membership. I came across the following depiction of guild life that explains why this was a problem for believers:

“In the bustling city of Thyatira, a trade guild meeting was more *burlesque* than *business*. Guild members gathered in grand halls scented with incense from the nearby pagan temples. Before the feast began, the finest meats were offered to the idols of gods like Baal and Astarte. As the wine flowed freely, the Temple prostitutes, known for their licentious behaviors, mingled among the men. Their touch was a dark invitation to indulgence and immorality.”

The Gospel came to town, likely through converted merchants. Lydia, for one. Her story is in the Book of Acts. She heard the Gospel from the apostle Paul in Philippi while on a business trip and carried the message back home to Thyatira.

The men who were saved would be union:

- Could they participate by eating meat sacrificed to idols? Should they?
- Could they participate in sexual acts with the temple priestesses? Should they?

The answer was clear and emphatic: “No!” What followed was instant unemployment and other social hardships.

Enter Jezebel.

Claiming divine authority and inspiration, she prophesied that it was perfectly fine for the men to participate in all the activities of the pagan Temples.

This wasn't Christianity; it was Gnosticism. Theologian A.I. Web explains Gnosticism:

The Gnostics taught that the body is an evil prison created by a lesser god, and the spirit is a divine spark trapped within it. You are saved by secret knowledge rather than by God redeeming the whole person. You could, therefore, indulge your senses, committing every kind of immorality without any consequences.

Rev 2:18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

Rev 2:19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.

"Angel" translates to *messenger*. Not the carrier of the letter, but the one charged with reading God's Word to the church: its pastor.

The apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians that the church was built on the foundation of apostles and prophets. After these men came evangelists and pastor-teachers. Christians met in homes for the first 200yrs or so. Archaeologists don't find churches. They find homes. They identify homes that could handle 10 to 15 guests, 15 to 20 guests, and then larger homes that can accommodate 50 people for a meeting.

Since Jesus addresses a singular "angel," we can assume at this time that the leadership of a church involved a regional pastor and several elders overseeing house churches.

Revelation is saturated with the Old Testament. The Son of God with blazing eyes and bronze feet was introduced in Daniel 10. John saw Jesus 600yrs later on Patmos.

Few Christians would choose Thyatira for their home church, yet this faithful remnant receives only praise from the risen Lord. They have zero to repent from!

You need not be drawn into the drama going on around you. In fact, you're expected and equipped to rise above it.

A couple of words into verse twenty and we suggest Jesus is no longer addressing the remnant:

Rev 2:20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

In Jewish history Jezebel was a Phoenician princess. She was married-off for political reasons to King Ahab of Israel. She immediately introduced Baal and Astarte worship, built a temple in Samaria, supported a large number of false prophets, and violently persecuted the prophets of the LORD.

Thyatira's Jezebel was doing the same thing - introducing pagan ceremonies with their indulgence and immorality. And though she had no power to murder other prophets, her contrary message was stumbling Christians.

I think it's more impactful if Jezebel was *not* the real name of this woman in Thyatira. She was **a** "Jezebel."

Any believer *can* & *should* confront false teaching. But with regard to Church Life, the apostle Paul wrote to pastors, "hold fast the faithful word as [you have] been taught, that [you] may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." (Titus 1:9).

To young Pastor Timothy Paul wrote, "Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (Second Timothy 4:2).

The leadership of the Church is tasked with teaching good doctrine and pointing out that which is heretical or false. It's part of their job description. A lot of this happens from the platform, as we teach sound doctrine.

That sounds straightforward enough. But it is rarely easy. I'd bet money that Jezebel started in the church as a beloved older woman ministering to the saints. Her prophecies and teaching went weird slowly.

She'd arrive at the gatherings of believers, meeting in homes scattered throughout the city. Her followers and sympathizers would no doubt surround her.

I'm sure that the believers prayed together. Certainly they prayed about the predicament tradesmen were in with regard to participation in the guild swinger's parties.

At some point Jezebel would utter her gnostic prophecy. In fact one of her prophecies has survived on a tiny fragment. It goes like this: "Thus says the LORD, Who has made all things to be richly enjoyed. Nothing of the body can harm the spirit. *Enjoy! Enjoy! Saturday nights' alright for fightin'; if you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with; so before you slip into unconsciousness, be sure to get once last kiss.*"

Rev 2:21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.

She was given "time," or your Bible might say "space," to "Repent!"

One of your favorite verses ought to be Second Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

God has given mankind a lot of space since we rebelled in the Garden of Eden:

- Nineveh was given space to repent, a lot more than the 40 days of Jonah's preaching.
- The generation of Noah was given 120 years.
- The nation of Israel before the Assyrian exile was warned by Isaiah.
- The nation of Judah before the Babylonian exile was warned by Jeremiah & Ezekiel.

From Noah to Nineveh, from Israel to Thyatira, God consistently warns before He wounds, calls before He corrects, and waits before He judges.

- When repentance happens, judgment is delayed or removed altogether.
- When repentance is refused, judgment becomes inevitable.

God is longsuffering to everyone of us here today. We all know Jesus is coming. He could come today as certainly as He could've come yesterday. If Jesus had come prior to February 1979, I would've been left behind. His longsuffering waited for me; it waited for you. If you're not a believer, **it waits for you.**

This truth is an important part of answering folks who ask the fundamental questions:

1. "Why doesn't God do something about suffering?"
2. "Where is the promise of this coming?"

Any unbeliever who resists the light of the Gospel might be the reason global evil continues. God is waiting for him... for her... **for you.**

We are told here in verse 21 that God had given Jezebel time to repent, and she did not. She remained an unbeliever.

Her followers also were given a genuine offer of salvation with time and space to repent.

Rev 2:22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.

Rev 2:23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

This is not the 7yr "Great Tribulation." It is a time of troubling deaths unique to Jezebel and her followers.

In the metaphor that follows, Jesus describes a terrible time of death that will come upon Jezebel & her followers. They will be in bed with their mother, which by itself is a grotesque image. The seductress and the seduced will all die in their sins and be judged by their works.

This is pure speculation on my part, but it could mean that after giving space and time to repent, God sent a targeted plague to kill them.

In the Old Testament book of Numbers, the Moabite women came into the camp of the Israelites, seduced the men, and engaged in the sexually deviant practices of the worship of Baal. A plague brought by God killed 24,000 Jews (25:1-13).

Rev 2:24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.

The "depths of Satan" is a reference to Jezebel and her followers claiming to have a deeper knowledge of spiritual things. They do - but its source is devilish & demonic.

Rev 2:25 But hold fast what you have till I come.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "We are not saved by our hold of Christ, but by Christ's hold of us - yet we are commanded to hold fast."

Have you ever told a child to hold on tight when crossing a busy street? It is *you* that holds fast, that holds tighter. You don't abandon him or her in the middle of the street because their hand relaxes.

Rev 2:26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations -

Rev 2:27 'HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON; THEY SHALL BE DASHED TO PIECES LIKE THE POTTER'S VESSELS' - as I also have received from My Father;

According to the Bible's timeline, after the seven years of the Great Tribulation, Jesus Christ returns to earth and establishes a Kingdom on earth that will last 1000 years. Jesus promises believers who are faithful that they will join Him in His Millennial rule.

Jesus pointed them, in their present distress, to Psalm 2. Believers sometimes find the wrong verse in their distress. *There is nothing wrong with the Bible!* The Bible is the verbally inspired, plenary authoritative, inerrant Word of God. I am in no way suggesting there are parts of it that don't speak to you.

But instead of waiting on the Lord, we go verse shopping. Let the Lord lead you to the passage that will fill your heart with the wonder of His love. It will often be a passage that you would never have picked to be applicable in your circumstances.

There must have been a Pottery Guild in Thyatira. Maybe it was the most aggressive towards the Christian craftsmen. Maybe they were going into pottery workshops and destroying the inventory of the non-union tradesmen.

We want to do that **to them!** We want the rod of iron **now**.

One commentator said, "The promise of ruling with a rod of iron reminds the Church that **victory is future**, not present. We overcome now by holding fast. When Jesus Christ returns, He will rule - and astonishingly, He will share that reign with His faithful saints. Until then, our power is spiritual, our weapons are not carnal, and our posture is patient faithfulness."

Rev 2:28 and I will give him the morning star.

The Morning Star isn't a star. It's the planet Venus. It is brilliantly bright and appears before the Sun, shining in darkness just ahead of the dawn. It promises the new day has come.

Jesus says He is the Morning Star. Each new day as you awaken He is the light of the world, but especially a lamp to your feet. And He has promises for you, for every new day.

Here are some things the Bible tells us come in the morning:

- "His mercies are new every morning" Lamentations 3:22-23.
- "Daily bread" - Matthew 6:11.
- "Morning by morning He awakens... to listen" Isaiah 50:4.
- "Every morning He shows forth His justice" - Zephaniah 3:5.
- "In the morning I will order my prayer to You" - Psalm 5:3.
- "Satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness" - Psalm 90:14.
- "Joy comes in the morning" - Psalm 30:5.
- "The inward man is renewed day by day" - Second Corinthians 4:16.
- "The LORD is your keeper... by day - Psalm 121:5.

Rev 2:29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

John Stott once said, "The primary aim of Bible study is not *information* but *transformation*. The Bible is not a book *about* God, but a book *from* God. Our study should lead us to a deeper knowledge of and communion with the living God."

The "Spirit" of God "says" things to the "Churches."

All you need is to be there with an "ear" anxious to "hear" from God. The question isn't "Did God speak to you?"

"What did God say to you this morning?"