

The Jezebel Church
Revelation 2:18-29

Introduction: 1) The name Jezebel is infamous and rightly so. She was probably the most wicked queen in Israel's history and we find her treacherous behavior described in 1 Kings 16 – 2 Kings 9. She was “the power behind the throne” as the wife of a weak and wimpish King Ahab. She led her husband to worship pagan gods (1 Kings 16:31), kill God's prophets (1 Kings 18:13), and murder a righteous and simple man named Naboth for his vineyard (1 Kings 21). She was evil personified and when God chastised a church for allowing false teaching into His Body, he said they were “tolerating the woman Jezebel” (v. 20). It has been well said we name our sons David and Paul, and our daughters Mary and Rachel, but we name our dogs Goliath and Nero; and we name our cats Jezebel! A Jezebel church is not a compliment.

2) Doctrinal and theological compromise is always a danger to the health, vitality and survival of the church. It can be like “spiritual kudzu” once it is allowed in. It will spread out of control sucking the life out of every living organism it touches.

3) Our Lord knew this and so He has a stern word for His people. Here is “tough love” on full display! It may not be easy to hear, but often it is absolutely necessary and for our good.

I. Christ is characterized for us by penetrating judgment 2:18

1) John for the 4th time is told to write to the angelic watcher over “the church in Thyatira.” This is the longest of the 7 letters and the most difficult, and as Hemer writes, it is also “addressed to the least known, least important, and least remarkable of the cities” (Quoted in Mounce, 84).

2) Thyatira was an expendable military outpost 40 miles southeast of Pergamos.

It was only important through its commerce in wool, linen, leatherwork, bronzework and especially purple dye. It had an extensive network of trade guilds or labor unions that dominated daily and civic life. Each union had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal celebrations that often included sexual immorality. Apollo the sun god and Diana the fertility god were the more significant deities. Acts 16:14 teaches us that Lydia, whom Paul led to Christ at Philippi, was from Thyatira and a seller of purple (Johnson, BSC, 50). It is quite possible she was instrumental in evangelizing Thyatira. By all worldly appearances the city was unimportant and the church rather insignificant.

This is not the judgment of Jesus. Big or small, well known or hardly known at all, every church is important to Jesus. Whether you have 10,000; 1, 000; 100; or 10 members makes no difference to Him. He wants you to be pure where you are planted. He wants you to honor Him wherever your home is.

1) Know that Jesus’ judgment is perceptive

- Christ is first noted as the “Son of God”, a title found only here in Revelation. It stands in contrast to the pagan god Apollo, son of Zeus, who was popular in Thyatira. It is Jesus who is the true Son of God not Apollo, son of a lifeless idol (Mounce, 153). Apollo is a piddly, pathetic, pseudo sun god, while Jesus is the eternal and majestic Son of God.
- His eyes are like a fiery flame (1:14; 19:12). This speaks of His omniscience; his penetrating, perceptive, and piercing ability to see all that is. He sees all actions, thoughts and emotions. Nothing escapes His vision. And you can rest assured; he sees thru the deceptive appearance and seductive teachings of the Jezebel. Burning indignation and purifying judgment blaze from these divine eyes that continually watch all that is happening.

2) Know that Jesus’ judgment is powerful

- His feet are like fine bronze (burnished bronze, *NIV*) speaks of strength and splendor. Thyatira was famous for its bronze work but their best pales in comparison to that of the Son of God. He is brilliant in appearance, unrivaled in strength, and utterly glorious as a judge. He is the master craftsmanship, the divine craftsmanship! There is stability and permanence to the judgments He renders. He is “prepared to tread

under his feet the enemies of the Christian faith. This stern portrayal prepares us for the equally stern words in verses 26-27” (Ladd, 50).

II. Christ commends us for faithful works 2:19

Jesus graciously praises this church for the good things He sees. Our Lord is always fair in His assessment of His people. Even when He must rebuke and correct them, He will affirm and encourage where He can. Every church would be wise to follow in Thyatira’s footsteps in verse 19.

1) Let us do good works for Jesus

Jesus praises His church for their works, their godly activity and efforts on His behalf. Specifically, He notes four things for which He delights in His faithful children.

- Love and faith (*HCSB*, “faithfulness”) addresses their motives for the works they do (Mounce, 85). Love (*agape*) for Christ and others and faith (*pistin*) in God inspired and moved this church to action. Unlike the church at Ephesus, their love for Christ had not grown cold. Unlike the church at Ephesus, their love for truth had. Ephesians 4:15 teaches us to “speak the truth in love.” 2 and 3 John emphasize the necessity of both for a balanced Christianity. Ephesus lacked love. Thyatira lacked truth. A healthy church needs both.

- Service (*diakonian*, “deacon-acts”) and endurance (*upomonen*; NIV, “perseverance”) notes the results which naturally follow from love and faith. A person with a servant’s heart is one, with longsuffering and steadfastness, who will give himself deliberately, voluntarily, sacrificially and joyfully to others in order that he may help meet their needs. He will walk away from his own concerns and private interests, and give himself, his time, his wisdom, his knowledge, his talents and gifts in order to help others. The qualities of the person with a genuine servant’s spirit will exhibit a spirit of humility, willing to stoop to serve another but never asking for recognition. Dependable (trustworthy), loyal, loving, patient, here are things every church should do. Oh, but it gets better.

2) Let us grow in our good works for Jesus

Jesus likes these characteristics of His church. He also loves that “Your last works are greater than the first.” They are not stagnant or satisfied in their service to their King. They had gotten better! They were doing more than ever! “Do good things and grow in good things” is a wonderful goal for any church of Christ, and that goal had been met in the church at Thyatira. Still, there was “a dark spot of cancerous sin eating away from the inside” (Swindoll, 59). Our Lord now moves to address the serious spiritual sickness that impaired the health of this body.

III. Christ condemns us for excessive tolerance 2:20

- William Hendriksen says, “Thyatira was indeed a lampstand, a light-bearer. But this does not constitute an excuse for failure to exercise discipline with respect to members who make a compromise with the world” (*More Than Conquerors*, 89). Now, we should be clear. God does not expect us to be perfect, though perfection is the mark we strive for (Matt. 5:48; Phil. 3:12-14). What He does expect is for us to be a “community of repenting sinners.” What He does expect is for us to call sin what He calls sin. Swimming against the currents of the culture will be hard and almost always unpopular. However, as Peter and the apostles said in Acts 5:22, “We must obey God rather than man” (cf. Gal. 1:10).
- Jesus addresses four areas of danger and temptation a church must recognize and confront immediately when they see them. The sooner the better. Delay can be deadly.

1) Guard against a personality cult

- Jesus has something against this church: “You tolerate the woman Jezebel.” This is most certainly a descriptive title and not the woman’s actual name. It would conjure up images of the evil and vile queen of Israel. However, I do believe our Lord is talking about an actual person. This woman was a powerful personality who had built her own

following and kingdom in our Lord's church. She was smart; influential in personality and powerful in speech. It was easy to join her because she made so much sense in what she said. However, like Jezebel of old, she was evil and deceptive, domineering and scheming, idolatrous and sexually immoral. The liberty she promised would actually lead them into slavery and away from God and the Lordship of Jesus.

- There is such a valuable lesson here and one we must never forget. Anything or anyone that gets your eyes off of Jesus is not of God. Anything or anyone that minimizes or adds to the gospel is not of God. Anything or anyone that compromises on biblical truth is not of God. The impressiveness of their abilities, gifts and visions makes no difference. Indeed, the greater the gifts, the greater the dangers.

2) Guard against an authority problem

This danger naturally flows from and is connected to the threat of "personality cults" in a church, denomination or Christian organization. The Jezebel (a man can be a Jezebel too!) called herself a "prophetess." Here was a self-proclaimed leader. Who said she was a prophetess? She did. Not God! She did. Now, that there is a legitimate gift of prophecy that may involve women is clearly taught in Scripture (Anna, Luke 2:36;

Philip's daughters, Acts 21:9; cf. also Joel 2:28 ff. – Acts 2:17; 1 Cor. 11:5). Here, however, was an illegitimate usurpation, an inappropriate seizing of raw ambition. Drawing upon parallels to the wicked Jezebel, we can say this woman was 1) cleverly deceptive, 2) manipulatively domineering, 3) viciously scheming, and 4) spiritually idolatrous. She clearly was a leader because people were following her. But leadership can be good or bad, a blessing or a curse. Someone should have stepped up and confronted her. But no one did. Fear paralyzed the good people in the church from dealing with this false teacher.

3) Guard against a theology problem

- A false prophet will mix truth with lies. Not everything they say will be false or wrong. If it were we would have no problem spotting it. No, it will contain just enough truth to deceive the gullible and shallow, those who for whatever reason cannot think in biblical categories and with a Christian worldview.
- The Jezebel “teaches and deceives my slaves” (Gr. *duolos*; *ESV*, “servants”). Her doctrine was attractive and seductive. At first blush it seemed insightful, deep, perceptive. She had a way of opening the Scriptures that were new and exciting. Her teachings promised freedom. They promised prosperity. They promised life. They

promised to exalt Jesus, but in actuality they dethroned Jesus. She claimed to have the truth but she peddled a lie. God's standard was perverted and God's Son removed from His preeminence (Col 1:18). The church must never lose sight of the fact that doctrine matters. Theology matters. Truth matters. We must continually be on guard. Truth is too easily compromised then lost.

4) Guard against a morality problem

The Jezebel taught and deceived God's servants to do two things: 1) commit sexual immorality and 2) participate in pagan idolatry. Robert Mounce is very helpful in putting this in historical context. It is striking how 21st century it sounds! He writes: "One thing we can state with a sense of confidence; the problem in Thyatira centered on the guilds. For persons to maintain their livelihood, some connection, indeed membership, in the guilds was a virtual necessity. For Christians the problem was that this mandated participation in the guild feasts, which themselves involved "meat offered to idols", since the patron gods of the guilds were always worshiped at the feasts. At times this could also involve immorality. The extent to which these feasts degenerated into debauchery is questionable, and many have argued that "commit adultery" here is an OT metaphor for idolatry...however, it is more likely

a reference to immoral practices (thought the noun form in 2:21 probably does have this figurative meaning). Whenever Christians refused to participate in the feasts because such participation would compromise their faith, they faced the anger of the pagan populace, and it had economic repercussions if they lost their jobs. Thus while at Pergamum it was a life-threatening situation, at Thyatira the problem was more economic and social. Jezebel probably “taught” that there was nothing wrong with a Christian taking part in the guild feasts and celebrations, for it was merely civil. Since idols were nothing, Christians would not destroy their faith by participating” (156-157).

- Jezebel said it is fine to compartmentalize your sacred and secular worlds. If you are going to survive in this dog eat dog world, you will have to make some allowances. On occasions you will have to compromise your convictions. It won't hurt anything. Jesus understands. He never expected that following Him could be bad for business. And remember, you are free in Christ! She was wrong. These compromises in belief and behavior set the Lord Jesus “against” His church.
- Sexual immorality and acts of idolatry, in any culture, are a big deal to God. God calls us to holiness not harlotry. He calls us to purity not

spiritual prostitution. God calls us to spiritual fidelity not spiritual adultery. God calls us to follow Him not follow the world (cf. 1 John 2:15-17).

- When the church looks like the world you have a sick church.
- When the church acts like the world you have an impotent church.
- When the church plays with the world you have an unfaithful church.

IV. God corrects us with loving discipline

21:21-25

Our God is a good Father. He is a perfect Father. He will not allow His children to walk a path of destruction without intervening. With loving, but firm discipline, He will get in “our business.” He will get involved in our lives and community up close and personal (cf. Heb. 12:5-13). Five aspects of God’s discipline for Thyatira are noted. They are very instructive.

1) God’s discipline is fair 2:21

- Jesus gave the Jezebel “time to repent.” However, “she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality.” Our Lord gave her time to “change her evil ways.” She said no.
- The Savior’s discipline is always wrapped in grace, love and mercy. Twice we see the word repent, meaning to change your mind that results in a change of action. Our Lord gave her time, she said no, and now

judgment falls. She will have no occasion to question the justice of God's judgment. Jeremiah promises it (Jer. 17:10). Paul promises it (Rom. 2:6). Jesus promises it too (Matt. 16:27).

2) God's discipline is full 2:22

- “Look” (*ESV*, “behold”)! I will throw her into a sickbed and those who follow her in sexual immorality. “Great tribulation” will be their lot unless they “repent” (3rd time). The imagery is vivid and striking. Sickbed may refer to actual disease and illness (1 Cor. 11:27-29). If so, the suffering will be intense for her and her followers. *The Message* says, “I’m about to lay her low, along with her partners, as they play their sex-and-religion games.” MacArthur, however, makes a distinction between the judgment on the Jezebel and her followers. He says, “In light of the finality of Jezebel’s refusal to repent, it is more likely that the bed refers to death and hell- the ultimate resting place for those who refuse to repent. Divine judgment was about to fall not only on Jezebel, but also on those who commit adultery with her. The Lord threatens to cast them into great tribulation – not the eschatological tribulation described in Revelation 4-19, but distress or trouble. Since these were the sinning Christians who had believed her lies, the Lord does not threaten to send them to hell as He did the false prophetess. He

promises to bring them severe chastening – possibly even physical death (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16) – unless they repent of her deeds” (102).

In either case, the Lord’ judgment will be certain and sure, intense and painful.

3) God’s discipline is final

2:23

“I will kill her children with the plague,” *The Message*: “The bastard offspring of their idol-whoring I’ll kill.” One hardly knows how to respond to these words. Her children speak of her spiritual offspring, those who share her nature, her DNA. In all likelihood John sees the Jezebel and her children as lost and unregenerate. To kill means to turn them over to the destruction and death they are pursuing and deserve. It is to sin away their day of grace and hope. Ladd is helpful in pointing out the difference between “those who commit adultery with her” and “her children.” He notes: “The text distinguishes between those who join in adultery with the prophetess and those who are called her children. The punishment of the latter is much more severe than the former: death. Apparently John intends us to distinguish between those who are still struggling with the problem of how to be loyal to Christ and at the same time to adapt fully to the business and social mores about them, and those who have unreservedly committed themselves to the teaching of the false prophetess.” (52).

4) God's discipline is fearful 2:23

When God takes out Jezebel and her children “all the churches will know.” And what will they know? “I am the One who examines minds and hearts, and I will give to each according to his works.” This statement expounds upon the fairness of God’s judgment, but intensifies it. It echoes Jeremiah 17:10, but also 1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 7:9; Proverbs 24:12; Jeremiah 11:20, and 20:12). MacArthur notes the phrase, “offers confirmation of Christ’s deity, since it is used in the Old Testament in reference to God” (102). Divine discernment peers into their souls seeing them for who they really are. Actions and motives are exposed to His piercing gaze. Jezebel and her clan may fool others, but they do not fool Christ “whose eyes are like a fiery flame” (v. 18).

5) God's discipline is faithful 2:24-25

Hope is not lost for this church. There are still some in Thyatira who “do not hold this teaching,” who have no knowledge (experiential knowledge is in view) of “the deep things of Satan – as they say.” The deep things of Satan may be Jezebel’s actual claim, though it is more likely a sarcastic caricature of their libertarian claims (cf. 2:9). Claiming to go deep in the things of God and adding to the simple gospel, they were actually propagating the doctrine of demons and the wisdom of Satan. Mounce,

however, believes there may have been something of an actual claim. He says, “knowing Satan’s deep secrets” is a reference to the view that in order to appreciate fully the grace of God one must plumb the depths of evil.

Later Gnosticism [the view that matter is evil and spirit is good] boasted that it was precisely by entering into the stronghold of Satan that believers could learn the limits of his power and emerge victorious” (89). Either way, Jezebel claims she could lead the church into the “deeper life”, into greater depths of spiritual understanding and experience. She offered a “Jesus plus theology.” However, what she actually gave them was the deeper lie of Satan, spiritual ignorance and a “no Jesus theology.” In contrast Jesus says,

- Stay with me and I will put (cast) on you no other burden.
- Stay with me. Don’t follow the seduction of Satan, the doctrine of demons.
- Jesus says “hold on” (imperative) to what you have until I come.

Holding on to Jesus, the gospel, and biblical truth would not be easy. Satan, Jezebel and her children will continue to try to steal those precious things from you. So, don’t let go. Stay where you are. You have Jesus and He is all you need.

We need to “never let go” of Jesus and the gospel. To do so is to experience true victory. Not to spells certain defeat. Overcomers, the “victorious,” “conquerors” (*ESV*) keep Christ’s works (*NIV*, “will”) to the end. Perseverance is proof of our profession (Matt. 24:13). To those who endure, persevere, Jesus promises a 2-fold promise.

1) We receive the authority of Christ’s power 2:26-27

Leon Morris says, “The Christian life is not a battle but a campaign.” To the victor Jesus says, “I will give him authority over the nations.” Christ honors His faithful disciples by allowing them to co-reign with Him in fulfillment of the messianic Psalm 2 (v. 27). This is a reference to His millennial kingdom (20:1-6) and possibly the eternal state (21:24). Believers will serve under Christ, sitting on thrones (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 20:4), jointly exercising his gracious, firm, and sovereign authority. Jesus “received this from His Father.” He now shares it with His subjects.

2) We receive the assurance of Christ’s presence 2:28-29

He will give us “the morning star.” This is Christ’s Himself as 22:16 makes clear (Mounce notes 6 options, 90-91). In the end we get what we started with. We get Jesus! Our Lord promises us Himself in all His fullness and glory. What more could we dream of or hope for?! Listen those of you who

have ears to hear. The Spirit is talking to all the churches. We all need this reminder. We all need to hold on to this hope.

Conclusion

- Jesus Christ is the same “yesterday, today and forever.” (Heb. 13:8).

The gospel is the same yesterday, today and forever.

God’s Word is the same yesterday, today and forever.

The Lord’s holiness is the same yesterday, today and forever.

- False teachers are always adding to or subtracting from God’s truth. John says, stay with the teaching you have in Christ. Adrian Rogers is right, “Some may preach the gospel of Jesus Christ better, but no one can preach a better gospel”.

I believe he is right. So would the apostle John. Stay with Jesus and the gospel.