

The Church at Thyatira: The False Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 June 2013

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] I want to go ahead and read the full text first of all.

Revelation chapter 2 verse 18. Verse 18.

Verse 18.

Verse 18.

Verse 18. Verse 18. Verse 18.

[2:28] Verse 18. Verse 18. Verse 18.

Verse 18. And so I'll just teach it a certain way, and you can do your own study and find out what some of the other people are saying about it.

The Thyatira, again, kind of using John Phillips' outline, Thyatira is the false church, the false church, and this kind of falls in line with what Phillips and others see as a kind of prophetic nature or character of these letters, a prophetic of the history of the church.

Now, we've seen Ephesus, the fallen church, Smyrna, the fearful church, Pergamos, the faltering church, and now here Thyatira, the false church.

Now, by way of introduction, before we get into the outline of this and into some of the specific portions of the letter, many Bible scholars believe that Lydia played a key role in the founding of this church through her witness, through her testimony of Christ.

[4:24] You certainly remember who Lydia was. She was one of Paul's first converts to Christ in Asia, and specifically in Philippi.

She was in Philippi at that time. And you might remember the story, Acts 16, 14, or where it kind of begins in the book of Acts, identifies Lydia as a seller of purple.

All right, now you're connecting with who Lydia was, you remember her. A seller of purple, and the Bible says there in Acts 16, 14, that she was of the city of Thyatira.

That's where this church is located, the church that Jesus wrote to. So, she's a seller of purple, of, that's the place of her birth, her origin, the city of Thyatira.

Now, so Thyatira was famous for the manufacturer of purple cloth. And Lydia was a seller of purple cloth, probably also, you know, was involved in the actual dye that made this cloth purple, the manufacturer of it.

[5:36] And so, she was a seller of purple, living in Philippi at the time when Paul made his missionary visit there. And she, along with some other women, if you remember the story, were down by the riverside.

And Paul went there. They were having a prayer meeting, these ladies. And so, he went there and spoke to them. And the end result was, they were all saved. And he baptized them there, there in that river.

And Lydia was one of those. So, you know, I'm just kind of throwing this out. This isn't something you want to say, well, the pastor said this is, you don't have any place in scripture that proves this. But there are just some interesting connections. Her origin and the, you know, the fact that the city of Thyatira was famous for purple cloth.

So, the speculation is that after Lydia was saved, she moved back to her home in Thyatira and witnessed of her faith, her faith in Christ, her conversion to Christ.

[6:39] And the result, more converts to Christ as a result of her witness. And eventually, a church was founded. And so, there's the idea that this woman named Lydia was responsible for the founding, or at least God used her, in the founding of this church in Thyatira.

Now, again, all that is somewhat speculation. And we can't, you know, say anything definitive about that. But, there is no speculation about this.

From the letter, it is clear that a woman, her name is given Jezebel. It's clear that Jezebel, in quotes, because that was not likely her name, that she played a key role in the troubles of the church.

Or, we could put it this way, a woman may have been responsible for the founding of the church, but a woman was clearly responsible for the founding of the church, the founding of it.

Verse 20 calls her, that woman Jezebel. It's just kind of an interesting way that Jesus identified her with that name, Jezebel.

[7 : 58] And so, the way it is worded in the text seems to identify this woman as the wife of a leading elder. This, too, is somewhat speculative.

She may have been the wife of a leading elder in the church. And her name most likely was not Jezebel. Jezebel.

She may have been the one who was a leading elder in the church. And they would have been well versed on that Jezebel from the Old Testament. And so, it's kind of like, you know, to call a woman Jezebel would be like calling a man Judas.

You know, you wouldn't have to just say he's a Judas, and that's not his name, but that is indicative of his character. And that was, I think, the point here. She probably was a very attractive woman.

You know, people were attracted to her. Kind of charismatic personality. A persuasive communicator. Very likely.

[9 : 28] We can kind of picture that. She probably possessed strong leadership qualities, which were not sinful. That's not sinful in and of itself, of course.

And God has used many women to be great leaders that God used in the progress of the church. According to verse 20, Jesus said that she calls herself a prophetess.

Now, not likely prophetess in the sense of like an Old Testament prophet. A foreteller. Speaking of future things.

Able to speak about future events. But a prophet in the sense of foretelling. You know the difference between the two. We don't have prophets today in the sense of foretelling.

And yet, I'm a prophet, but not in the sense of foretelling. We have prophets today in the sense of foretelling. That is, the communication and teaching and proclamation and explanation of God's word.

[10 : 38] Foretelling the word of God. Now, this woman, Jezebel, whatever her name was, she was a self-appointed preacher. She called herself a prophetess.

You know, the church didn't lay hands on her. And God never really called her. She called herself this. To teach and to seduce my servants, Jesus said.

To commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And we'll come back to that here in a little bit. So, that's kind of an introduction. Now, with that in mind, then, what I want us to do is consider three things about this letter to the church at Thyatira.

First one, what Jesus detected about this church. What he detected. And let me read verses 18 and 19 again.

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, These things says the Son of God. And then this interesting phrase, Who has eyes like a flame of fire. And then right after that, another interesting kind of metaphor.

[11 : 47] And his feet like fine brass. I know your works. Love, service, faith, your patience. And as for your works, the last are more than the first.

Alright. Let's kind of walk through this. To use a common expression, when Jesus looked at this church, it had fire in his eyes.

That's what that expression is pointing to. You've heard that expression. It had fire in his eyes.

There's a righteous anger. That is, and this is all metaphorical.

This fire in the eye is not a literal fire, but it's a metaphor of anger. A righteous anger. Now, prophetically speaking, and we've covered this early on in our study of these letters.

Prophetically, if you could take these letters as not only literal letters issued to a church with certain issues that really were occurring, and it is that, but if you could take it also as a kind of a dual purpose, that there was a prophetic purpose in these letters that point us to the various ages or seasons of the church within the church age, prophetically then, this letter addresses the period of church history between Constantine and the Reformation.

[13:19] And you might recall this kind of aspect of these letters, that they point prophetically. And so what Jesus detected about this church in Thyatira, as you understand what it is he's saying here, this perfectly matches the condition of the church in that period of time, the time of Constantine, at the end of Constantine, which was the birth of the Roman church, and before the Reformation.

So that period of time during the birth and growth of the Roman church, the Catholic church. And so this is the period. And it was in that period when pagan feasts became Christian festivals and holidays.

We have the remnants of some of that still today. In that period of time when pagan gods, with a little g, were merged or became Christian saints.

It was in that period of time when pagan priests and priestesses became incorporated into the church, servants of the church, that those various offices came into the church.

[14:41] And also when pagan superstitions became Christian dogma. and ritual. So, in that period of time when the Roman church was established after Constantine, there was this merger of paganism, spiritism, even some of the occult that merged with quote, Christianity, end quote.

And so that is the time period that many scholars would say that this letter is addressing or revealing that time period within church history. All right, now, so, here's the point then.

Jesus had fire in his eyes when he looked upon this church. And, by extension, he had the same, looked upon the church in the same way during that period of time between Constantine and the Reformation.

Now, what about this other expression? His feet like fine brass. Some translations, I think, have bronze. That's a symbol of judgment, coming judgment. So, there's fire in his eyes and he looks upon the wickedness of the church which was being cultivated by that woman Jezebel.

We've kind of put all this together. Cultivated by that woman Jezebel in that church. He then looks into the future and sees wickedness. The wickedness is yet to come.

[16:18] So, there's wickedness in the church fostered by, led by, that woman Jezebel in the church. And Jesus looks with fire in his eyes and he sees not only what's happening but what is coming and so he puts on his shoes of brass and that means judgment's on the way.

Judgment's on the way. Now, after that, then, we kind of abruptly kind of move, Jesus kind of moves to the church in general and seems to say some positive things.

Just a short kind of little blurb about some positive things and yet, we need to understand that what Jesus is doing here is also detecting what was very likely a contributing factor to this.

Not the evil and immorality itself, but some other things that the church was involved in. Things that were good, not bad things, but were somehow contributing to the advancement of this heresy within the church.

You might be a little confused, so let's move on. Verse 19, I know your works, he said. That's a positive thing. Love, service, faith, your patience or endurance.

[17:40] And as for your works, the last are more than the first. And it's that last phrase, works, more, the last works are more than the first, is what kind of tips us off to maybe the main point Jesus is trying to make.

So is he being positive or is he being negative? Well, he's being positive and he's also being negative. So on the one hand, what Jesus says then is a commendation, very positive, the church was a what?

Working church. I mean, that's what Jesus said. The church worked out of love and faith.

So, they were a working church that was motivated by a genuine love and faith. The church also worked with a patient endurance and the church was increasing in their works.

I mean, this was increasing. The last are more than the first. So on the one hand, that seems to be a commendation. On the other hand, given the context, the things that come before, the things that come after, what's said before and after, we've got to consider the flow of the letter, the context.

[19:02] Then, we understand that Jesus was identifying a contributing factor to their problem as a church. church. And that is just simply as good as the works are, what?

They can, if allowed to, can contribute to some serious problems in the church. The works are good, right? Good works are good.

true worship. So long as they do not keep you from true worship. When I say true worship, I'm not just talking about that time period that we spend before I get up and preach on Sunday morning and Sunday night.

I'm not just talking about, of course, the style of the worship or even to, in a general sense, the substance of the worship.

But worship in general that really consists of not only a practical thing, that is, a right practice, but also a right theology.

[20 : 14] If a church is moving away from its foundation, the mooring of sound doctrine, then all the works in the world are going to be meaningless and may even contribute to that drift away from doctrine.

And when I say the practice of worship and the theological kind of right doctrine of worship, that's what I'm talking about as a whole. So you need to worship, the Bible says, in spirit and in truth.

In spirit, as you're born again, but in truth from the standpoint of sound doctrine. And so what was happening? If I could just kind of summarize this point.

In summary, with fire in his eyes and with his feet shot with bronze or brass, his shoes of judgment, Jesus detected a wickedness and a paganism and with that a works that was void of true worship. They were busy but not worshipping right correctly. Not from the standpoint of correct doctrine. So this is what he detected. Number two, not only what the Lord detected, but second, what Jesus detested about this church.

[21 : 40] what he detested. I think we've already had a little word about that. But really, to put it in one word, the church of Thyatira was full of heresy.

Heresy. And Jesus describes four identifying features of this heresy. First of all, the source.

The source of the heresy, which was a cowardly, tolerance. So the source of this heresy that was growing in the church, side by side with their busyness and their works and their talk of love and faith, side by side with that, there was a heresy growing in the church and the source of it was tolerance.

A cowardly tolerance. Look at verse 20. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you because you, and here's the key word, allow that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess, to teach.

And then he goes on from there. But the key point, key word, is allow. I think King James used the word suffer an old kind of antiquated way of conveying this idea to allow, to be tolerant of.

[23 : 08] And so this Jezebel, whoever she was, was teaching heresy and the church leadership was tolerating. I say church leadership, I think primarily the responsibility lies with them, but could also include the church as a whole.

We're just allowing this, not only allowed it at the beginning of it, but also allowing it to grow within the church. Now, let's talk about Jezebel a minute because I don't want to assume that everyone in here just remembers the whole story about Jezebel in the Old Testament.

we need to be reminded of who she was so that we can, I think, get the full impact of what this particular woman, whatever her name was, full impact of what she was doing in the church in Thyatira.

You can read it for yourself in 1 Kings 16, chapter 16 through 21, and then in 2 Kings chapter 9, you can get pretty much the whole story about Jezebel and she was the wife of a king who, what was his name?

Oh, King Ahab. And so she was his wife, his queen. He was the king, but she was the ruler, the ruler of Israel in that day, and pity her husband or anyone else who would cross her, go against her, and stand in her way.

[24 : 40] Jezebel, though, was the daughter of a pagan king, the Bible tells us. Ethbael, even had the name of the pagan god in his name, Ethbael, king of the Sidonians, whoever they were.

All right, so that's who Jezebel was, pagan, daughter of a pagan king, and she then, when she kind of, in a sense, came to the throne of Israel, she single-handedly wiped out the worship of Yahweh in Israel.

Not to say that there were no Yahweh worshippers left, but they were the minority, and they were greatly oppressed and suppressed.

And so, if she did away with Yahweh worship, she replaced it with something else, of course, because everyone's going to worship something. And she replaced it, of course, with idolatry, the worship of Baal.

Jezebel had priests and priestesses, and almost an uncountable number, a whole lot of them, and they just kind of swarmed like a cloud of locusts throughout the land of Israel, and anyone that remained loyal and even outspoken about Yahweh worship was quickly dealt with, usually by the

sword.

[26 : 10] She was a woman to be reckoned with. So this is Jezebel. So then, evidently, Jezebel's spiritual heir was a member of this church in Thyatira.

And here's the problem. Their toleration of her was the source of the heresy in the church. Second, not only the source of the heresy, but the seriousness.

of the heresy and the seriousness of the heresy was their willful submission. Submission to her.

Tolerant and submissive to her leadership in the church.

Verse 20 says, You allow the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants. So they allowed her a place of authority in the church, clearly.

1 Timothy 12-14 speaks to this issue. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

[27 : 18] For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression. Now that's scripture, so ladies, if you have an issue with that, you'll take that up with God.

All right, so she called herself a prophetess, a self-appointed preacher. She put herself in a place of authority in the church, and they allowed her to, in that place of authority, to seduce them and lead them into pagan worship.

I don't know how long this took. I kind of have a sense that it wasn't all that gradual. It happened rather rapidly since they were first birthed as a church.

Seduce and instead they allowed that for to seduce and lead, which of course led them to sexual immorality. That's the way it's translated in the New King James and maybe some other translations.

I think King James has the word fornication. It is one word in the Greek. It is porneo. That's where we get our word pornography.

[28 : 28] But it's a general word that is used to describe any and all sexual immorality. So this was a part of what she was leading this church to do.

That's exactly what Jezebel did in the Old Testament as well. But not just sexual immorality, but also what we could call sacrilege. The eating of things sacrificed to idols.

Pagan idols. That's what she was leading them to do. So the source of the heresy a cowardly tolerance. The seriousness of the heresy a willful submission. And then third, the stubbornness of the heresy was a false assurance.

And it's rather interesting, I think. Verse 21 says, and I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality. And implied in that is he also gave those who are following her time to repent, space to repent, and she did not repent.

Did not. You see, God, and we know this about God, God in his mercy gives us time to repent, space to repent.

[29 : 45] You can put time to repent or space to repent, whichever you desire. That's what he gave this so-called Jezebel. That's what he gave the people of the church. But her, their heresy persisted.

And so she and they with her were stubborn, stubborn in their rebellion and sin. So this Jezebel and the people of the church, I think the idea is this, she and they had interpreted God's patience for acceptance.

That's what they had wrongly interpreted God's long suffering, His patience. They had equated that with His acceptance. There are some people like that.

They're caught up in some habitual sin. And I'm even talking about believers. They can be caught up in some struggle with habitual sin because God has not punished them right away.

they mistakenly believe that God has accepted it or allowed it. But God's long suffering and patience does not equal God's approval or acceptance or even God's indifference.

[31 : 06] Not at all. It's just simply God's mercy. Romans 2.4 for example, Lord, do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

So the fact that God gives time to repent can be misconstrued by many to mean that God's not going to judge or God's not going to do anything about it or God maybe has even accepted it or a host of other false conclusions.

So the source of the heresy a cowardly tolerance, seriousness of the heresy a willful submission, the stubbornness of the heresy a false assurance, and then the fourth thing is the suppression, suppression of the heresy and it's God's divine justice.

Verse 22 to 23, indeed I will cast her into a sickbed. Those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, those who are following her tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds, 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.

Now, in those two verses, three times in those verses, God says I will. You notice that? I will. Which means that God's judgment is sure.

[32 : 44] His justice is going to be accomplished. And he's not going to just stand idly by while these heresies persist inside this church. He loves the church and he's not going to let that go on just forever.

And there will come a judgment day. Now, three I wills. So the first I will speaks of his patience. Clearly.

I mean, his judgment will be patient. Don't misconstrue anything out of that. But he will be patient. His justice is patient. Once again, of course, in the first part of verse 22, he mentions the possibility of repentance.

The second time he says that. See, God's not mean old wrathful God. Now, his wrath is sure and God will have justice, but he does have mercy and he gives a possibility of repentance twice in this letter.

He says, I will, he says in verse 22, unless they repent of their deeds. Now, we have a prime example in the Old Testament, don't we, of this in regard to Nineveh.

[33 : 59] in the book of Jonah. And God's message through the prophet Jonah was, this is what's going to happen. Though in his message, at least what's recorded in Scripture, we don't have anything stated about repentance, but the people understood that they repented and God had mercy.

And so, this is what he's offering to even this woman that he names Jezebel and all those who follow. The second I will speaks of practicality.

That is, his judgment will be practical. He's going to accomplish something very practical. His judgment will stand as an example to other churches.

Verse 23, I will kill her children with death and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the mind and the hearts. that this is going to be a testimony to those who might be inclined to go the path of Jezebel and to follow her ways or others like her.

And so, this is what I'm going to do as an example to other churches. 1 Timothy 5.20 is also a good example of this teaching.

[35 : 15] Those who are sinning, it's what Paul is instructing young Timothy to do, those who are sinning, rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.

And we're not talking about secret private sin that is dealt with on a private basis. We're talking about public sin in the church that should be dealt with publicly so that the rest also may fear or reverence God.

The third I will speaks of perfection. Perfection, his judgment will be perfect. Verse 23, I will give to each one of you according to your works.

His judgment is going to be sure, but the degree of the judgment will vary from person to person. We're not talking about salvation here. We're talking about judgment.

And he's judging those who have followed the way of Jezebel into sexual immorality and paganism or idolatry and sacrilege.

[36 : 20] And he says, I'm going to judge each one of you according to your participation in this, your works. God's judgment is always perfect. He doesn't play favorites. Just ask King David about that.

He was the man after God's own heart and yet God sent his justice upon David for his sin. And God never punishes the wrong person for the wrong reason.

Either he's perfect in his judgment. Two testimonies from Scripture, Old Testament Scripture, Hannah proclaimed in 1 Samuel 2.3, the Lord, that's Yahweh, is the God of knowledge.

He knows all things. And by him actions are weighed. So he's God of knowledge. He knows all things. And so when he weighs the actions, he does it perfectly accurately. With perfect accuracy,

rather.

Daniel said to King Belshazzar in Daniel 5.27, you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. God found you wanting. That is, you're deficient.

[37:27] You don't measure up. You failed the test. And the God who knows all things is able to do that. Now we can't do that. We would make mistakes in our judgment because we can't see all things and don't know all things.

But God does. And so when he weighs a person, his evaluation is always perfectly accurate. And so this I will speaks of his perfection.

Alright, one final thing then. There's what the Lord detected, what the Lord detested. I guess we could define it this way. What the Lord detected, he detected wickedness and a tolerance to it. And what he detested was their heresy and their stubbornness about it. And then finally, what Jesus determined about this church. What he determined.

And I'm determined to finish this. Verse 24 and 25, Now to you I say, and to the rest of 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, but hold fast what you have till I come.

[38:41] So, we know then, by this, that not every member of the church was tolerant to this heresy. Not participating in it, not tolerant toward it, not everyone, because he says to you, to you, so he speaks to another group within the church, a specific group, a group he's not been addressing before, other than maybe in general, the part about their works.

And there are several things he says in that verse that clue you in to a specific group within the church. To you, he said, to the rest, he said, as many as do not have this doctrine, that is this heresy, this is a specific group within the church, who have not known the depths of Satan, that you didn't follow that path, you're not part of that.

And so the idea he's conveying to them, really on the surface, is continue to stay clear of this heresy. You know what's going on, you've not tolerated it, you've not participated in it, continue to stay clear of it, and continue to hold true to your faith, until, this is the idea, until I step in and clean house, what God is promising to do.

There may be a word here for those who hang in there in a church when church is going in the wrong direction. Sometimes church is going in the wrong direction. And some people are tempted, and some people succumb to the temptation to just bail out and go somewhere else.

Others stay in there and stick in there, and they continue in the right way, and they pray for their church, and they participate with the church, and they stick there until God does some cleaning up, takes care of business.

[40:27] So I think there might be an application there for those of us in the present-day church. Now, to the faithful in the church, then, he gives two promises, and both of them are future.

First, a power on earth. A power on earth. Verse 26 and 27, And he who overcomes and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations.

He shall rule them with a rod of iron, they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessel, as I also have received from my father. Now, what in the world is that about?

Well, obviously, he's not promising to the faithful few there in this church of Thyatira that if they could just stay faithful that pretty soon they're going to be able to rule over the nations.

That is the promise, but it's a promise for the future. In fact, it's still future for the true church. I think these verses point to the reader, to the future, to the day when Jesus will return and establish His kingdom, His millennial kingdom.

[41:38] By the way, when He returns to establish His millennium, who's coming with Him? The church is coming with Him. The bride of Christ will be coming.

And we will, the Bible says, during the millennial kingdom, reign with Him. And so, in that sense, we'll have power over the nations. And He also promises a possession in heaven.

And this, too, is future. Verses 20 and 29, And I will give Him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church.

Who's the morning star? It's Jesus Christ Himself. The morning star is Jesus Christ Himself. He is our inheritance. And I think you should conceptualize it this way.

I am His and He is mine. That's our inheritance, by the way. In glory, it's the Lord Jesus Himself. It's not the pearly gate, the street of gold, and some mansion somewhere there over the hilltop.

[42:46] As the song goes, our true inheritance is the Lord Himself. Thank you.