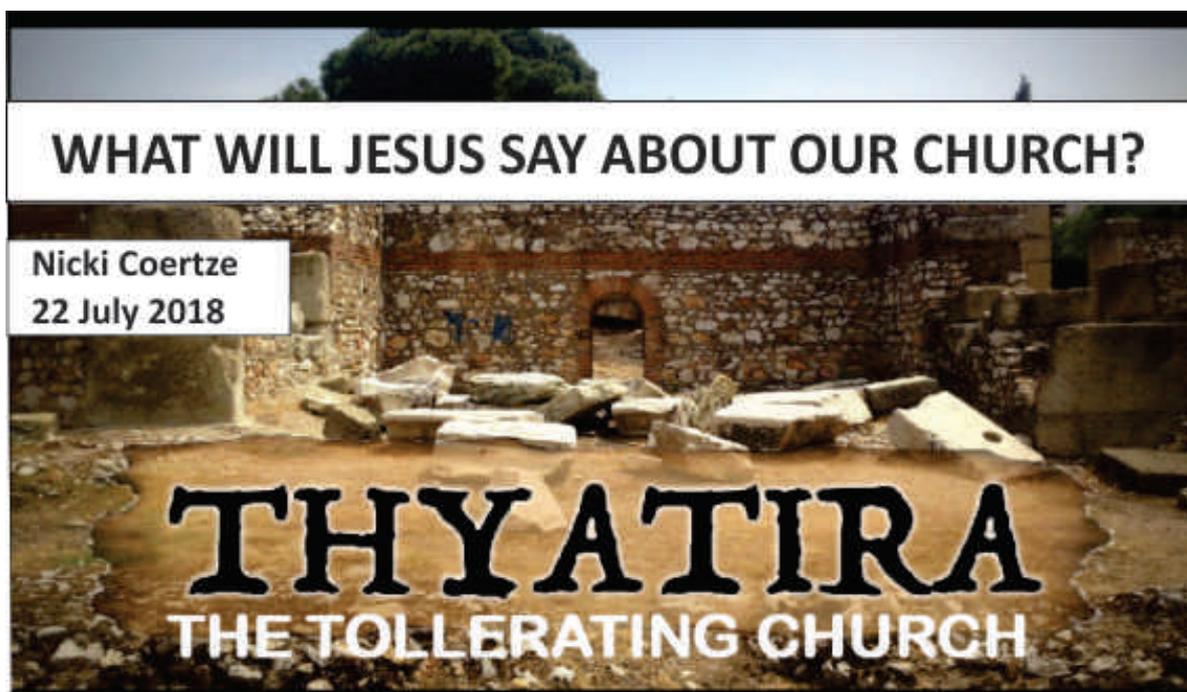


THYATIRA - THE TOLLERATING CHURCH



Introduction

We are busy with an exciting series where we see Christ revealed in all His glory in chapter 1 of Revelation, then we see Him applied in chapter 2 & 3 to the 7 churches of Asia. After that it is our joy to see His glory, and the revelation of Him applied to the churches of all ages.

To Ephesus He was the one walking amongst His golden lampstands and who holds the stars in His right hand. He knows their deeds. He knows that they have departed from their first love. To the church in Smyrna He is the First and the Last who knows their suffering and He is there for them. To Pergamum He says that He knows where they live, where Satan has his throne, and that there are those who are misled by the ways of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans, but that He comes with the Sword of His mouth and will deal with it.

Today we march on and we look at the church of Thyatira. Like Ephesus and Pergamum this church is commended, but also condemned. Let's read all about it:

. Thyatira - The tollerating church

Written by NJ Coertze
Sunday, 22 July 2018 06:00 -

Revelation 2:18-29 (ESV) ¹⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

19

“ ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

20

But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

21

I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.

22

Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works,

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and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

24

But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.

25

Only hold fast what you have until I come.

26

The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,

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and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.

28

And I will give him the morning star.

29

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Introduction.

Thyatira is probably the least known of the 7 churches. It was an economic hub, with lots of trade. It was a blue-collar community that made its existence from clothing, dying, tanning, pottery, baking and bronze smiting. It was located app, 64 km South East of Pergamum. Thyatira was the traditional home to Lydia the Purple seller, who came to salvation under Paul in Philippi. Some think that the gospel came through her to Thyatira. Emperor worship was not

. Thyatira - The tollerating church

Written by NJ Coertze
Sunday, 22 July 2018 06:00 -

as entrenched in this town as in the other towns. We are not sure how the church was started. This is a very interesting church which many churches can identify with.

So, what does Jesus have to say about this church?

Point 1. He introduces Himself as the Son of God.

Before we think that these are simply the word of John, Christ makes sure that we know who is speaking. He is the very Christ revealed in chapter 1. We now see in verse 18: “The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.” Again, that is how Christ was revealed in chapter 1 and is now applied. Look back at Revelation 1:14-15 (ESV) “¹⁴His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace,...” Christ wants them to know that He sees everything, even sin and that He has the final authority in all matters as everything is subject to His feet. He is strong enough to conquer and sure enough to judge.

Point 2. The commendation of Thyatira.

Most commentators focus on the condemnation of Thyatira, as the amount of verses in that regard overshadow the commendation. But, this church had a lot going for them.

¹⁹ “ I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.”

This is a mouth full, even though only one verse has been dedicated to it. To the Ephesian church Jesus said: “I know your works.” But He challenges them: Revelation 2:5 (ESV) “⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.” Jesus however says to the church of Thyatira that their latter works exceed the first. I wonder to how many believers today can Christ say, I know your works and your latter exceeds the first. Too often we slow down like the Ephesians, we tire, we become bored. Thyatira did not. Jesus says to them that He knows their love. The love of the Ephesians died down, and Christ says

. Thyatira - The tollerating church

Written by NJ Coertze
Sunday, 22 July 2018 06:00 -

that they must get back to first love. The church in Thyatira seemed to be okay in this department.

The church of Laodicea did not deny their faith in the Lord, and here Thyatira are commended for their faith. Smyrna were required to endure, Thyatira is commended for their patient endurance. And then they seemed to be a church with a servant heart as they served. Not a bad church. They were a growing church. Before we look at what they are condemned for, I believe we all need to test ourselves on these positives. Where do we stand on works, love, faith, service and patient endurance? And then have we tired in the works we did in the past? Or do our works exceed the first?

Point 3. The condemnation of Thyatira.

The same dreaded words as to Ephesus and Pergamum are now uttered to Thyatira. ²⁰ **But I have this against you,** that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols."

Being a good growing church did not minimize God's concern for this prophetess in the midst of the church for teaching and seducing His servants. Thyatira is a gentile church. In Acts 15 the apostles deal with the uniqueness of the gentile churches and whether they were to impose anything on these churches. They go for the following. Acts 15:20 (ESV) "²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood."

That is why many commentators believe that these were not the real issues per sé, but that she was simply opposing the teaching of the Apostles. Remember in Acts 2:37 the early church, held to the apostles teaching. In Acts 15:20 the apostles give a directive to the gentile churches, and here this prophetess opposes it and actually teaches the church to go against what the apostles taught, because she had a deeper understanding of things.

This prophetess claimed to understand the deep things of Satan, was teaching the opposite of the apostles teaching in the body. She had a heart and mind issue and God says that He knows it as He searches hearts and minds. Now, exactly what was going on in practice we do not know, but she is called Jezebel after the Jezebel in the Old Testament. Jezebel in the Old Testament was the daughter of Ethbaal, King of Sidon and the wife of Ahab, King of Israel. She practiced witchcraft (2 Kings 9:22), worshipped Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 16:32-33). She

. Thyatira - The tollerating church

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Sunday, 22 July 2018 06:00 -

supported 100's of false prophets (1 Kings 18:19) and tried to eliminate the true prophets (1 Kings 18:4), She was a cold-blooded thief and murderer as seen with the story of Naboth's vineyard. And she undermined the relationship of Ahab the King of Israel. And like the Jezebel of Revelation 2 goes against the teaching of the Apostles, the Jezebel of old went against the teaching of the prophets.

How much of the Thyatira Jezebel is symbolic, we don't know? But, what we do know is that she was a false prophetess, claimed to know the secret things of Satan. She might have called it the deep things of God, and Christ simply sets the record straight. We know that she deceived the saints, rather than directing them in the path of truth. She obviously was an enemy of Christ. Deuteronomy 18:20 (ESV) ²⁰ "But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die."
(ESV) In her case we can fall back on Isaiah 5:20 ²⁰ "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

Now, we might ask how this could happen in a growing, thriving church where it's members are commended for their works, faith, endurance etc. Sadly, this is how cults are born. You have leaders who are married to the world, who follow the ways of the world, and they use their supposed prophetic powers to influence people in the wrong direction. Think of Jim Jones, David Koresh and others. They were regarded as true prophets, before they were seen as true saviours. For that reason, the evil must be dealt with. There are many people around, parading a knowledge of deep things, who tend to prophecy over others, but they are enemies of the gospel. Personally, I believe that this lady joined the church without denouncing her pagan rites from the past. Paul reminds the Corinthian church in 1 Cor 6:15-20 and chapter 10:14 to flee from immorality and idolatry. Sadly, the church of Thyatira tolerated her teaching and she made disciples.

Point 4. The confrontation.

Four groups are confronted.

4.1 The church leaders.

. Thyatira - The tollerating church

Written by NJ Coertze
Sunday, 22 July 2018 06:00 -

“²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.”

If the leaders tolerate, the members will tolerate as well. They should have known differently and dealt with the Jezebel in their midst.

4.2 Jezebel.

“²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent...”

Oh, the wonder of the grace of God. Normally it is God who gives grace and man condemns without considering God's grace. God being true to the character of God, gives her an opportunity to repent of her ways, which simply means to turn from it, but she refused. And now Christ puts her under His feet that were like burnished bronze and He says that: “²² Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed,...”

God does not always throw a person on a sick bed due to sin, as we know that His grace is sufficient to forgive. But like the case of Ananias and Saphira and here, He makes an example of them, for the sake of the purity of the church.

4.3 Fellow spiritual harlots.

“²² Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works,”

She had followers, who are called by Christ to repent of her works, because this is what they followed. If they did not join her in her ways, her teaching would have failed.

. Thyatira - The tollerating church

Written by NJ Coertze
Sunday, 22 July 2018 06:00 -

4.4. Her offspring.

"²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works."

Sadly, false prophets and their followers breed another generation. There are those today who follow the weirdest teaching based on prophetic ministries of the past. Some even claim their anointing as coming from the likes of Kenyon, Hagen and others, and they persist to teach what these men have taught. It is interesting that the first generation are warned of tribulation, but the second generation is threatened with death. The fact is that second generation heretics spawn a third generation.

4.5 The faithful.

This group get's no rebuke, but they are challenged.

. Thyatira - The tollerating church

Written by NJ Coertze
Sunday, 22 July 2018 06:00 -

²⁴ But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come."

There is a lot here, but I will expound it on the surface.

Faithfulness requires no burden. Jesus said: "my yoke is easy and my burden is light". Those who did not fall for the teaching of the Jezebel of Thyatira were blessed. They are required to do nothing fancy, but to: "hold fast what you have until I come." We are not sure exactly of all of what she taught, but we need to realise that even in our day and age there are those who know new stuff, who know deeper stuff than you, who have prophetic words, who have new revelation, and they love to gather people who will hear them and follow them. To us, Jesus says, hold fast until He comes.

The reward will be: "²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father."

There are many verses in the Old Testament and New Testament that refer to this and this can become a major study in itself. The bottom line is simply this that Christ has the authority to give authority to whom He pleases. There is obviously eschatological thought in this. It boils down to the fact that those who are faithful in the little things, will be trusted with the big things. All they need to do is conquer, to keep His works till the end, and He will grant authority, because all

. Thyatira - The tollerating church

Written by NJ Coertze
Sunday, 22 July 2018 06:00 -

authority in heaven and earth belongs to Him.

There is a further reward. “²⁸ And I will give him the morning star.”

There is only one reference to this in the New Testament. Revelation 22:16 (ESV) “¹⁶ “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

So, when Jesus says He will give them the bright morning star, He is referring to Himself.

Thyatira was one of the original churches in Asia that is addressed in Revelation, but then the promises continue through the ages, and it is our promise as well. Endure, and you will receive Christ. Without Him ruling in and through us, our authority will mean nothing.

So, what have we learnt. It is not enough to hear and then to do nothing about it. We need to act in love, faith, endurance and works, even more as time advances. It is not good enough to be like a Jezebel who hears but does not change. Even if the church tolerates people like her, Christ will never. He died to receive a pure bride. The only thing that pleases Christ fully, is total obedience and endurance, and it will be rewarded. God is no man's debtor.

Amen!

Soli Deo Gloria

. Thyatira - The tollerating church

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Sunday, 22 July 2018 06:00 -

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