

## TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

Revelation 2:18-29

Key Verses: 2:28-29

*“I will also give that one the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

The fourth letter of Jesus was addressed to the church in Thyatira. It’s relatively a long letter, mainly because Jesus wanted to rebuke the believers there for the corruption in the church. Again, the problems of the church were not confined to this particular church and to the particular time. They are relevant to us today. May the Lord help us to have ears to hear what the Spirit says to us!

### I. THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA (18-19)

Look at verse 18. *“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.”* Thyatira was a city in Asia Minor, built in a fertile plain on the borders of ancient Lydia and Mysia (today, it is a Turkish city called Akhisar). The city was founded around 300 B.C. as a military post by Seleucus I Nicator (one of the four generals who took power after the death of Alexander the Great). He named the city after his daughter. It was located strategically at the junction of trade routes, leading to Sardis, Smyrna, Laodicea, and Pergamum. It was an important trade post on the network of the Roman roads in Asia Minor.

We are familiar with the name of Thyatira from our Acts Bible study. During his second missionary journey, Paul met his first convert in Philippi who was a merchant from Thyatira. Luke describes the incident as follows: “On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us” (Ac 16:13-15). Paul had planned to continue the gospel work in the region of Asia Minor. But the Holy Spirit led him to Europe by sending a Macedonian man to plead with him to come to Europe. Lydia was his first Bible student in Europe. She became his faithful supporter for his ministry. We can imagine how thankful Paul was for this woman of God from Thyatira.

Thyatira was famous for its purple cloth which was used in making dresses for the rich and powerful in the Roman Empire. The purple dye which was called “royal purple” came from a fresh secretion of sea snails and it was very expensive. The city also had other industrial activities. Sitting on a plain with rivers, Thyatira had no natural fortress as Pergamum. Instead, it was a magnet for many industries because of the easy access to major cities nearby. It was a workingman’s town, with many trade guilds for

carpentry, pottery, and brick making in addition to cloth making and dyeing. It also supplied military equipment such as helmet, sword, and shield for the Roman army. Like our industrial cities today such as Houston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, Thyatira was full of hustle and bustle. And there were many trade guilds (or labor unions in today's terms). Practically every worker belonged to these trade guilds. And as in many working towns, widespread immoral activities were going on at night, including prostitution. It was a challenging environment for Christians to keep their faith in God.

How did Jesus introduce himself to the church in Thyatira? Look at verse 18 again. *“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.”* During his earthly ministry, Jesus often called himself humbly “son of man.” But here he calls himself the Son of God. Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Creator God who came to save sinners like us. Jesus is God who was, who is, and who is to come (Rev 1:8). In this verse, Jesus says that his eyes are like blazing fire and his feet are like burnished bronze. As we learned from chapter 1, Jesus' eyes are like blazing fire that can penetrate the heart. Nothing can be hidden from them. Jesus' feet are strong and radiant like burnished bronze, indicating his heavenly authority. All creation must prostrate under his feet.

Look at verse 19. *“I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.”* Jesus commended the faith of the believers in the church in Thyatira. He was aware of their love and faith, and their service and perseverance. He was also pleased to know that they were now doing more than they did at first. Unlike some of the believers in Ephesus, their love did not become cold over time. Their actions proved their faith in Jesus.

## II. YOU TOLERATE THAT WOMAN JEZEBEL (20-23)

What else did the blazing eyes of Jesus see in the church in Thyatira? Look at verse 20. *Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.* There was a spiritual threat for the church to overcome. The threat came from the inside the church. A woman was there teaching that immorality was not a serious matter. Somehow she held an influential position in the church. She called herself a prophet. By her teaching, she misled God's servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Jesus called the woman Jezebel. Who was Jezebel? We know her from the Old Testament. Jezebel was the most evil woman who ever lived. With her husband King Ahab, this pagan queen of Israel promoted Baal worship among the Israelites (1Ki 19:1-2; 21:1-15). Baal was a fertility god in Canaan. The worship of Baal was accompanied with sexually immoral activities. Male and female temple prostitutes would seduce its worshipers for money. Jezebel spread this seductive religion among God's people. She supported 850 pagan prophets who ate at her table. We remember how the Prophet Elijah had to fight against 450 Baal prophets on Mt. Carmel. He was victorious because

God appeared there to show that he is the living God. Still, Elijah was so exhausted in fighting against this evil and ruthless queen that he wished God would take his life.

Like Jezebel in the Old Testament, the influential woman in Thyatira preached an attractive idea—free sex and idol worship (22). She prepared lavish parties with food sacrificed to idols and invited church members to come and have a good time. The Christian workers were tempted to unwind their hard day at work by joining her parties at night. The physical temptations to follow her sinful practice must have been very strong for many Christians there. In addition, to work and live in the city, they had to join the trade guilds. The meetings of these trade unions were often accompanied with immoral activities related to the worship of pagan gods. In his commentary (*the Revelation of John*), William Barclay describes their meetings this way: “These guilds met frequently, and they met for a common meal. Such a meal was, at least in part, a religious ceremony. It would probably meet in a heathen temple, and it would certainly begin with a libation to the gods, and the meal itself would largely consist of meat offered to idols. The official position of the church meant that a Christian could not attend such a meal.”

Christian workers who wanted to live by faith had to make an important decision on whether or not to attend such meetings. A decision not to spend time with their managers and team members would have negative consequences at work. They would be passed over on promotions. Their bosses would give them a hard time for no obvious reasons. In this situation, this influential woman began to teach that it was no big deal to attend the meetings. She might have said things like, “If you lose your job, who is going to support your family? God loves you. He will understand if you enjoy some fun after your hard day at work.” Once they began to compromise a bit by attending the trade union meetings and eating the food offered to idols, other sinful practices followed. Sleeping with the temple prostitutes didn’t seem so bad.

The Lord had given the woman some time to repent, but she refused. The Lord could not just sit by and watch her destroying her flock through her evil influence. He loved his sheep too much to leave her alone. He promised to punish her and others who refused to repent. Look at verses 20-23. *“I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.”*

How can we apply the words of Christ to us? Are we tolerating Jezebel’s influence today? Are we guilty of ignoring or even tacitly approving the evil practice of sexual immorality and idol worship among us? If so, we must repent sincerely before God. One thing we should consider seriously is our spiritual influence in our work place. We Christians tend to face more temptations in our work place, when we are away from our human and spiritual families. For example, many decent Christian men commit sexual sins during their business trips to other cities. We live in a society where casual sex is an appealing idea. But sexual immorality is a serious sin. It destroys a person’s life by destroying his or her relationship with God. It destroys families and churches.

It is also not easy to identify ourselves as Christians in our work place. But we should. The fact is that we spend a lot of our time at work. Ever since the fall of man in Genesis 3, we humans have to work to survive. It is a curse that was put on us because of sin. And we look forward to the day when we will be liberated from this curse. Meanwhile, we spend most of our week days working to make a living. In our recent study of Ecclesiastes, we read Solomon saying, “What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless” (Ecc 2:22-23). This is often true. Yet, the fact is that we have to work to survive. Also, work gives us a meaning to get up in the morning. It gives us a purpose. Most of us cannot avoid it. So, it is important for us to find a way to be a good influence on others in our work place.

I thank God for Chris Sherrill for giving him the faith and courage to have a godly influence on his coworkers at work. Ever since he accepted Jesus in his life, Chris has not been shy about telling it to all his coworkers. I still remember how he and I composed a letter together, asking his boss to give him an extended vacation in summer 2009 so that he could go to Indonesia for a short term mission. I still have a copy of the letter. He stated clearly that the purpose of his trip was to teach the Bible and English to young people in the country. He also shared his life testimony by e-mailing it to all his coworkers. Many of them responded to him with encouraging comments.

### III. I WILL GIVE HIM THE MORNING STAR (24-29)

Look at verses 24-25. *“Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come.’”* There were believers in Thyatira who rejected the teaching of Jezebel. They refused to learn Satan’s so-called deep secrets. Today, Satan still tries to entice us with his so-called secrets for happiness. Many people are deceived by him. They subscribe to the idea that pleasure-seeking life would lead them to happiness. This is no secret. It is Satan’s lie. The Samaritan woman in John 4 was deceived by his lie. She married several men in search of happiness. But she was still thirsty and lonely. All the men she married could not satisfy her soul. Only Jesus could give her the spring of living water welling up to eternal life.

What did Jesus say to the faithful believers in Thyatira who rejected Satan’s lies? The Lord encouraged them with his words of promise. He said, *“I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come.”* Jesus told them he would not impose any burden on them other than encouraging them to hold on their faith. Above all, he told them that he was coming back. Jesus is coming back to take us to the kingdom of God to reign with him for ever and ever. Jesus promises further in verses 26-27: *“To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father.”* Earlier, Jesus introduced himself as the one whose feet are like burnished bronze. He is God who has authority over all nations. Now he promises to give us authority over the

nations. In this fallen world, the prince of darkness seems to rule over the world. Evil seems to be winning. But our Lord is sovereign. He is almighty. When we are victorious and do God's will to the end, he will give us authority over the nations. Our God reigns. In this hope, we should hold on to what we have—the word of God and our faith in Jesus Christ.

Now let us read our key verses 28-29. *"I will also give that one the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."* What does it mean that Jesus will give the faithful believers the morning star? A morning star appears just before dawn. It is a symbol of hope. It signals a new day dawning. It tells us the darkness of the night is over. Jesus is the morning star. He says so in Revelation 22: "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star" (22:16). Jesus is our hope. Living in a world where Balaams, Nicolatans, and Jezebels seem to rule, we know what it means to live in darkness. But Jesus promises us that he will give us the morning star if we endure to the end. St. Peter also says in 2 Peter 1:19, "We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." Peter knew that Christians in the first century were going through extreme persecutions. He encouraged them to pay attention to the word of God until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. May the Holy Spirit guide us every day and help us to hold on to what we have until Jesus comes—the truth of God!

In conclusion, the temptations and false teachings that challenged the believers in Thyatira are the same ones we have to overcome today. We need to watch out for Jezebel's evil influence so that we may remain true to Jesus not only in our church community but also in our work places. May God help us to be faithful to the end until Jesus the Morning Star comes in his great power and glory!