

Hear What The Spirit Says Thyatira

Someone, somewhere designated October as Pastor Appreciation month. On behalf of the pastors of Carbondale, thank you for the love and appreciation and honor you show us on a regular basis. The board gave a monetary gift to each of the pastors this week and I'm speaking for all of us when I say thank you. Thanks for the cards and words of affirmation and kindness you've shown to us. I must say I am proud to serve alongside the pastoral team at Carbondale. We are blessed with dedicated, anointed, called, sincere, motivated women and men that share their gifts and their lives with us on a daily basis. I believe you know that. I know it. I love the pastors of this church and appreciate their hearts and dedication to God and to this church. Blessings to each of you. You are appreciated!

This morning we're looking at the fourth of the seven letters to the churches of Revelation. I remind you it's important we read and hear what the Spirit is saying, not only to these ancient churches, but that we hear what he is saying to his church today. Remember how the book of Revelation begins. **“The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place...Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” Revelation 1:1-3** It's important that we hear what the Spirit is saying to us and take this to heart, embrace it and obey it and live it!

This is the letter to the church at Thyatira. Thyatira is about 40 miles from Pergamum, the city and church we looked at last Sunday. Compared to the other seven cities, Thyatira is the least important although the letter to Thyatira is the longest of the seven. The city had been primarily known as a military outpost providing defense against invaders who would come from the east to attack Pergamum. Pergamum remember was where the governor lived and was the provincial capital. The outpost at Thyatira would hold off the invaders giving Pergamum time to prepare or to get the governor to safety. Apparently it had been destroyed and rebuilt more than once because Pergamum needed that eastern defense. As peace came during the reign of the Roman Empire, Thyatira became a commercial trading center. It was a city full of trade guilds or what we might call trade unions. Workers of wool and linen, garment makers, makers of dye, leather workers, potters, bakers, workers in bronze. If you remember in Acts 16, Paul was in Philippi and met a lady from Thyatira named Lydia who was a trader in purple cloth. The trade

guilds continued to expand and with their growth and influence, once again came problems for the believers.

What was the problem? When the trade guild members met, most likely in the temple of one of the gods, the meeting would begin with a sacrifice to the god. George Wood suggested the invitation to one of the trade union meetings might read like this. “I invite you to dine with me at the table of our lord.” It would include the name of the particular god. “A Christian then had a problem. If he was going to work, he had to belong to a trade guild. If he belonged he had to go to the meetings where there were sacrifices to the gods, the eating of meat in the temple to the god and often, the practice of immorality...” What were they to do? Compromise? Resist? So Jesus sends them a letter.

“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. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.” Revelation 2:18-19

So far so good! Notice “these are the words of the Son of God.” This is the only use of this title in Revelation. These are the words of the Son of God so we had better pay attention. Notice his reference back to the image of the ascended, glorified Christ seen in Revelation 1 – feet like burnished bronze and eyes like blazing fire. His eyes can see into our heart, discerning our motives and intentions. His eyes see beyond our excuses because he is about to bring to their attention compromise that was going on in the church. I think he is letting them know, before they start arguing or trying to spin this or justify this, “Remember who you are talking to, The Son of God, and that I can see into your heart. Now...you were saying...”

Once again he says “I know...” He knows us. “I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance and that you are now doing more than you did at first.” He knows their good deeds, their works of service. Love for others and for God expresses itself in service. It’s ministry. It’s serving the Lord, serving the community, other believers. Faith and perseverance go together. It’s faith that helps us endure and bear up under pressure and persecution. Faith helps us persevere, regardless of the circumstances. Faith keeps us going.

Jesus saw what they were doing and affirms them. He saw that they were doing more now than they did at first. That’s what Christian growth is all about. Moving forward, doing more than we did at the start.

There is always room for growth and Jesus is pleased when he sees it. How about you? Are you moving forward? Are you closer to Jesus and doing more for him than when you came to faith? More than what you were doing last month, last year? It's part of discipleship. Paul wrote to another church that he could rejoice "because your faith is growing more and more and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing." 2 Thessalonians 1:3. Keep moving forward, growing in the faith, doing more than we did before!

The Christians at Thyatira were growing in love and faith, service and perseverance, but their growth in holiness was lacking. Instead, they were allowing a woman who called herself a prophetess to openly teach doctrines that embraced compromise, immorality and idolatry! Look at Jesus' word to them. **"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols."** Revelation 2:20

Immorality and idolatry, the same two problems! We don't know if Jezebel was the real name of the woman or if this was symbolic, like the reference to Balaam last week. Jezebel was one of the most infamous women in the Old Testament. She was the wife of Ahab, king of Israel. She was not Jewish but the daughter of a pagan king. She was responsible for having the prophets of God killed and replacing them with pagan priests. She introduced baal worship to Israel and was responsible for trying to have Elijah the prophet killed after he called down fire from heaven on Mt. Carmel. She is the poster child for promoting idolatry, immorality and spiritual sin and compromise. She turned the heart of the people away from God.

Jezebel, "if that's your real name" was spreading the same kind of false teaching as we've heard described in the other churches as the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Once again it was about compromise in their behavior, their actions. **Christianity is not just who we are or what we believe, it is how we act and how we live!**

Does it really matter that Jezebel was teaching them to turn away from a holy life? Does God care? Hear what the bible says. **"It is God's will that you should be sanctified; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God...The Lord will punish men for all such sins as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure but to live a holy life."** 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7

The apostle Paul wrote, “[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” **Titus 2:14** What do you think? Holiness in our life is God’s plan and purpose and his calling for us. Holiness in our life and our character is a mark of being a Christian. We repent of our sins and ask Jesus into our heart as Savior and Lord of our life. Then we walk in obedience to him and his word. His Holy Spirit begins to work in our life, changing us and renewing our mind so that our choices and our behavior are pleasing to the Lord. Paul said **“He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” Ephesians 1:4** God intends us to live a holy and consecrated life and he isn’t happy with anyone who ignores his word or anyone who teaches his people to live otherwise!

Jezebel was probably telling the church it was okay to go to the guild dinners and offer sacrifice to the gods or to the Emperor. It was okay to engage in sexual immorality. She was telling them to act based on their own convictions rather than in obedience to God’s word. “Just follow your heart.” It’s dangerous to follow your heart because the bible says “the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9. (“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord...”Jer. 17:7) Trust in God and his word, not your heart!

Jezebel called herself a prophetess but she championed idolatry and immorality. Beware of those who call themselves religious or spiritual but reject accountability and defend immorality. They argue that morality and the Bible have to adjust to accommodate culture and then they justify behavior that clearly disobeys God’s word. They argue they have new revelation, we’ve misunderstood the bible all these years but now they’ve moved into a higher consciousness of God and truth. Jezebel and her followers were arguing they had learned the “secret things of God.” Jesus said these weren’t the secret things of God – he called them “Satan’s so called deep secrets” in verse 24.

I’m always suspicious of anyone who says they have uncovered the real truth, the truth that has been hidden to the church for the past 2,000 years. They argue that truth has evolved and now this new prophet has the truth and all you need to do is listen to this podcast and buy this latest book and the mystery will be revealed. How many times have I told you: the main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things. Paul says “here is the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the saints...Christ in you, the hope of glory!” Col. 1:27. Jesus is the mystery revealed. Jesus says, “Jezebel calls

this stuff the deep secrets of God, but trust me, I'm the Son of God and that stuff she's peddling is actually the deep secrets of Satan. It's a license to sin and I'm warning you judgment is about to fall on her and all who follow her and tolerate her teaching!" Look what Jesus says.

“Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 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 heart and minds and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.” Revelation 2:20-23

Okay. That's sobering. Troubling. Alarming. It's unsettling to hear of such judgement coming. But it essential that we hear and see how heaven, how Jesus views immorality and idolatry. He speaks of this judgement coming against Jezebel and those who commit adultery with her, those who join in her idolatry and sin. It's not unusual for Scripture to use irony as a lesson. Jesus says, the bed she has used for her adultery and immorality will be turned into a sick bed. Suffering will come and he says it will strike her children dead. I don't believe it is talking about her actual children. Rather, Jezebel is the spiritual mother of all who practice idolatry and immorality. He is saying judgment will come to those who ignore his commands and who continue to engage in sin. Think about what happens to the next generation, to her children. The sin one generation tolerates the next generation embraces and celebrates. The next generation will die, notice, unless they repent.

Make sure you see that in verse 21. “I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.” The bible tells us God is not willing that any should perish but that all would come to repentance. Jesus wants repentance, not punishment. This isn't his choice, it's her choice. She refuses, she is unwilling to repent. Jesus wants us to recognize we are going the wrong direction in our life, to repent and reverse course and return to what is right, to return to him and the life and forgiveness he offers. This is what he wants for you today!

Jezebel refuses to repent and Jesus indicates there will be consequences to her sin. She thought she would escape. Her idolatry and sin led her to believe she could live as she pleased without consequences. Jesus indicates that the judgement coming to her will serve as a warning, a strong lesson to others. “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.” All the churches, including Carbondale, should recognize that the Son of God has eyes like fire that search our heart and mind. Nothing is hidden from him and he will repay us according to our deeds. None of us want to think about this but this is the word of the Lord and we must hear what the Spirit says to the church. Jesus is letting the church at Thyatira and all of us know that there is judgment coming someday. Hear what he is saying: **Ultimately there will be a response from heaven for how we lived our lives!**

Revelation 20:12-15 says, **“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds...if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:12-15.**

In Revelation 22 Jesus says, **“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.” Revelation 22:12.**

Jesus is coming. The one who sees and knows and records it all is coming, and he is either coming with judgment or with reward. If you repent and turn to him and follow him, he will write your name in that book of life mentioned in Revelation 20 and you will have no cause to fear his coming nor to fear judgment for he has forgiven your sins. What you anticipate is not judgment but reward at his coming. Understand, it matters how you live your life! You choose.

Jesus tells them they have to make a choice. Which side are they on? **“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); only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’ – just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 2:24-29**

Let me try to quickly wrap this up. “I will not impose any other burden on you” was reminiscent of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 where the elders determined, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that no other burden be placed on the Gentile believers other than to abstain from sexual immorality and idolatry. Jesus affirms the church council.

He tells them “here is what you need to focus on - hold on to what you have until I come!” Hold fast he says. It is reminiscent of what Paul says in 1 Cor. 15. **“Therefore, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” 1 Corinthians 15:58**

Hold on. Hold fast. Stand firm. Don’t quit, don’t stop, don’t give up, don’t give in. Keep on loving and serving. Keep the faith, keep persevering.

“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); only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’ – just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 2:24-29

“Keep going and hold on to what you have because if you do my will to the end and overcome, reward is coming! Those who overcome, great responsibility and authority will be given to you. You will rule and reign with me.” And He says he will also give to the one who overcomes the morning star. We can speculate as to what that means, but in Revelation 22:16 Jesus says “I am the Root and the Offspring of David and the bring Morning Star.” I believe Jesus is saying to everyone who doesn’t quit, to everyone who obeys him and follows him and overcomes to the end, he will reward them and not only will we share in his authority but also in his glory. John Stott writes, “Rejecting Jezebel, they will receive Christ. They will be permitted to share not only in his authority but also in his glory. They will not only rule the nations, but also serve the Lord of the nations. Refusing to dive into the depths of Satan, they will fathom the depths of Christ. Turning their backs on the darkness of sin, they will see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Christian overcomers, however great their renunciations may have been on earth in the battle for holiness, will with this star, this Christ, remain absolutely and eternally content.”

He is coming and his reward is with him and his reward is worth it. It’s worth every sacrifice and whatever we might forego or give up in this life!

I like ending with the good news of reward and eternal blessing, but we aren’t there yet and I have to go back for just one moment. Back to verse 20. **“Nevertheless, I have this**

against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel...” There were those that embraced her teaching and were engaged in immorality and idolatry and he has already said they will suffer with her. But he is warning the church about tolerating her teaching. It’s not what they were participating in, but they were tolerating it. They were aware, but they just didn’t care. Jesus cares that they didn’t care!

Jezebel and her teaching is anything that tries to woo us away from Jesus through idolatry and immorality. Idolatry puts something or someone else on the throne of your life. Jezebel embraces this idea. She seduces you away from Jesus through idolatry and tempts you to defile yourself through sexual immorality. Not everyone in the church had embraced her teaching, but too many had simply decided to tolerate it, to turn a blind eye to it and their toleration, by default, had become promotion of it.

It would be easy to take this sermon and use it as a club, as a weapon to point fingers at other churches, at other Christians. “See what they are tolerating? See how they are allowing immorality into their church, how they are embracing sin?” I don’t want to let us off that easily. This isn’t about pointing a finger at other believers, or searching out the sin in others. This isn’t for anyone else, it’s for you! For me! What are we/you tolerating in your life that displeases Jesus? Is there some area where you have put something or someone else on the throne of your life other than Jesus? That’s idolatry. Have you allowed compromise into your life in some area that is pulling you into sin or sexual immorality? Jesus said he had given Jezebel time to repent of her immorality but she was unwilling. He is giving all of us time to repent today. The time and opportunity won’t always be there, but there is opportunity now, today. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. Examine your heart. Repent if needed. And hear his word to hold on to what you have until he comes. Pledge yourself to remain faithful and obedient to the end!

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.