

STUDY 4 - THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA REV 2:18-29

Thyatira is 30 miles south of Pergumum. It was a military colony, but was particularly wellknown as a commercial centre. In Acts 16 we meet Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth who came from Thyatira. In the first century commerce posed just as much difficulty to the early church as politics or religion did - to work in many trades you needed to belong to a guild (an ancient trade union), and these guilds had idols they worshipped, and held banquets where guild members met which often ended in sexual immorality. Refusing to join these guilds meant isolation and economic hardship. Temptation to compromise came here in particular, and we see that from what Jesus says to this church.

Jesus reminds this church of his majestic greatness in verse 18, reminding us of 1:14 and 15. You don't mess with Jesus! His eyes are like "blazing fire". To have him look at you is not comfortable. He sees everything and has penetrating insight. His feet are like "burnished bronze". He has strength and power and is immovable. This is important to remember when we are ever tempted to compromise or move away from his word.

Jesus speaks some loving words of praise for this church. They work hard for him, out of real love for him and faith in him. Unlike the church in Ephesus, they are growing in these things, increasing day by day. Their love and faith can be seen.

Jesus moves on with some shocking words of condemnation for this church. It is important to notice that the issue in verse 20 is that there is someone within the church who has a public platform who is encouraging the church to compromise sexually and religiously. Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab in 1 Kings 16 who pulled him away from the LORD and to Baal, and a similar thing is happening here. Someone is being allowed a platform in the church to teach that the sexual immorality and idol worship of the culture are no big deal and that Christians can take part in them without worrying.

Jesus problem is not just that this teacher exists and is teaching these things, but it is also that she is "tolerated". No one is stopping her or discipline her. Therefore the church are at fault. What she is teaching clearly goes against the word of God (see Acts 15:19-21 for example). Jesus takes false teaching very seriously, not least because it leads to wrong living.

Jesus shows his patience in verse 21. He has given this teacher time to repent, but she refuses. The situation is so serious that he will act, both against her and those who follow her (verse 22). If the church will not use

church discipline against those who are denying Christ by their actions, Jesus will do it. Jesus will discipline his church, for the good of all his people (verse 23). The church must not be allowed to think that Jesus does not care about the purity and peace of his church, and the world must not be able to think that Jesus is unholy.

Jesus is just. There are those in the church who have not compromised - they have neither condoned the false teaching nor been lead astray by it (verse 24). He calls them to keep going.

Jesus holds out a promise to those who repent. If they rule the church well by disciplining "Jezebel" they will be given authority to rule over the nations, to reign with Christ in his kingdom. He quotes Psalm 2 where we are told Christ has been given authority to rule. Those who repent are also promised the "morning star", who is Jesus himself (Rev 22:16). The morning star comes at the end of a dark night - sin and compromise will not have the final word.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

What impression do you get from someone whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze (verse 18)?

What is good about the church in Thyatira? (Verse 19) How does this compare to the church in Ephesus (2:4-5)?

What does Jesus have against this church? Why is this so serious? What should the church have done with this woman?

Why does he use the name "Jezebel" to describe her? See 1 Kings 16:29-33.

The teaching of this woman seems so obviously wrong. Can you think of situations where this kind of teaching can slip into the church, and where we need to be particularly on our guard?

What does Jesus promise to do? (Verse 21-23) Is this just? Why will he do it?

Is everyone in the Thyatira church at fault? How does Jesus address those who are not (verse 24-25)?

In this context, what does "to overcome" look like? What promise does Jesus give to those who do? How is the promise linked to what they need to do? (Verse 26-27)

What else does Jesus promise? Who/what is the "morning star" (see Rev 22:16). What do you think is the significance of that image?