

"REVELATION MADE RELEVANT"

A verse by verse exposition of the Bible's most controversial book

Notes are Fr. Ward's personal observations with the exception of the historical background information

II. The Messages to the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22)

D. The Message to Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29)

1. Historical background of the city and church of Thyatira

- a) while not a great city like Ephesus, Smyrna, or Pergamum, Thyatira still was an important city about forty-five miles due east of Pergamum. It was an essential center of commerce with the production of wool, linen, apparel, dyed stuffs, leatherwork, tanning, and renowned bronze work. To support such work, there developed an extensive trade guild. This labor union network played a prominent role in the social, political, economic, and religious life of the city. Each guild had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal festivities that included sexual revelries. Unlike, the previous "big three" cities, there were few major temples, though the worship of Apollo and Artemis/Diana was still prominent.
- b) there was a Jewish community in the city as **Acts 16:14** mentions that Lydia came from the Jewish settlement at Thyatira and was a member of the wool/linen guild since she sold purple fabric. It is very likely that some of Paul's converts at Ephesus went out and evangelized Thyatira (**Acts 19:10**)

2. The Words of Christ to the Church in Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29)

- a) **v.18: "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:"** For the first and only time in Revelation, Christ reveals Himself as *the Son of God*. Both "Son of Man" and "Son of God" are used by Jesus and the prophets to reveal His divine status as both the Messianic figure promised by the prophets in the Old Testament Scriptures and the only Son of the Father. Christ's reference also anticipates the words from the Messianic **Psalms 2:8-9** which will be quoted later in verse 27! It also refutes those who called Caesar the Son of God. Finally, the imagery chosen from Christ's vision is significant. Christ's *eyes like a flame of fire* stand against the worship of the sun god Apollo and signifies His judgement of the false prophetess Jezebel (v. 20). The bronze like feet of Christ no doubt would have special significance to the bronze workers in the city.
- b) **v. 19: 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of later are greater than at first.'** Christ, the all-knowing One, recognizes the true faith of the believers in the city. Such faith will demonstrate itself in love that serves others and in faith that perseveres. In addition, the church is commended for doing even greater deeds as they have grown in the faith. And yet, all is not well in the church!
- c) **v. 20: 'But this I have against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.'** The church in Thyatira had allowed a false woman prophetess to infiltrate the teaching and ministry of the church. The gift of prophecy was highly respected in the early church. Along with apostles, teachers, pastors and evangelists, prophets were often elevated in leadership (**1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11**). Women also received the gift of prophecy (**Lk. 2:36; Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5**). Prophets

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generally brought direct revelation from God in the form of exhortation and directives as well as occasionally predicting what God would do in the future (**Acts 11:27**). This woman, called Jezebel, rose to prominence in the church due to her “special revelations” and her teaching. But it was false! She was leading believers into thinking that they could follow Jesus but also be active in the pagan religious community and commit sexual immorality. While we don’t know if her actual name was Jezebel we do know that the use of the name, Jezebel, links her to the Canaanite wife of Israel’s King Ahab, who not only led Ahab into the worship of her god Baal, but who convinced much of Israel to do the same (**1 Kings 16:31-33; 2 Kings 9:22**). Recall she even went after the prophet Elijah who at one point thought he was the only one who had not bowed down to Baal (**1 Kings 19:14**).

- d) **vv. 21-23: “I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according your deeds.”** Jesus, like His Father, is patient, not wanting any to perish. He has given this woman and her followers time to repent. But they refuse to repent and thus, continue in their evil ways. Jesus’ strongest judgment is always directed not to those who are sinning, but to those *who refuse* to repent and keep on sinning after confronted with their sin. Recall our Lord’s words to the woman caught in adultery in **Jn. 8** – He simply said, “Go, and sin no more.” As a result of the false prophetess’ refusal to repent, she will get sick and suffer, as well as those who follow her (i.e. “her children”). Could this judgment refer to the sickness and death that comes from sexually transmitted diseases? Certainly, all would know the folly of her ways when such consequences would be seen by others. The actual effects of this judgment would again highlight Jesus’ divine nature as the One who knows all things (**Ps. 7:9; Prov. 24:12; Jer.17:10; Heb. 4:12-13**), including the heart and mind of every man, woman, and child! He rewards those who are faithful (for true faith will result in good deeds) and judges those who are faithless (which results in bad deeds).
- e) **v. 24: “But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them- I place no other burden on you.”** Jesus has nothing more to say to those who are *already* following Him faithfully, *who have not known the deep things of Satan*. Again, Satan is behind all false teaching and religion and man-centered government! But what does the expression “*deep things of Satan*” mean? It could very well be an expression the false prophetess, Jezebel, used to convince the church to engage in immorality so that one could truly experience the real nature of sin and then by God’s grace overcome it! So by entering into Satan’s stronghold and experiencing the depths of paganism and its sexual immorality, one would be better equipped to serve Christ and be an example of freedom to his brothers! Such behavior would echo the antinomian (“against the law”) problem the Apostle Paul had faced a generation earlier when some argued that if one sins more, God’s grace is even more powerfully present! Paul refutes such thinking in **Rom. 6:1-2**.
- f) **vv. 25-29: “Nevertheless, hold fast until I come. He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels for the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have authority from My Father and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”** Jesus calls on His faithful remnant to always hold fast until He returns. Such simple and powerful words. Christ is coming back and once

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we place our faith in Him and follow Him we are to keep on keeping on! He then promises two incredible rewards. The first is that we will have authority over the nations and is taken from the Messianic Psalm 2 (underlined verse). In **Psalm 2**, the coming of God's Son is predicted and His rule over the nations will be established once and for all (**Rev. 11:18; 12:5; 19:15**). Those who follow Christ will rule with Him! That is the promise. We will be part of the judgment over angels and over the nations (**c.f. Rev. 1:6; 3:21; 20:6; I Cor. 6:2-3**). Jesus also says that He will give us the "*morning star*" which refers to Christ Himself (**Rev. 22:16**). That means that everything that is Christ's is ours. We live because He lives. He is the believer's very life essence. And yet, this will only fully take place at His return (**2 Pet. 1:19**) and at the resurrection of all the dead when like a morning star that breaks through the darkness so too will the resurrection to eternal life rise over the darkness of sin in our world and be victorious over it.

E. The Message to Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6)

1. Historical background of the city and church of Sardis

- a) an inland city about thirty miles south of Thyatira – the fifth stop on the route of delivering Revelation. Sardis controlled the trade of the Aegean Islands and the military road through the important Hermus River valley. It was commercially prosperous and militarily strategic. The city was noted for its acropolis which rose 800 feet above the north section of the city and was virtually impregnable because of its rock walls. It became a refuge for the people in times of siege. Due to this geographic advantage, Sardis was only captured twice in its history (first by the Persians in the 6th century BC and during which time became the Persian capital of Asia Minor and then by Antiochus some 200 years later.
- b) Sardis had a temple to Artemis that equaled the size of the one in Ephesus. It was also known for an impressive necropolis (cemetery) of "a thousand hills," so named because of the hundreds of burial mounds visible on the skyline some seven miles away.
- c) A great wool industry flourished in Sardis, and this may account for Christ's reference to clothing in v. 4.
- d) nothing is known specifically concerning the church in Sardis except what we have in Revelation.

2. The Words of Christ to the Church in Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6)

- a) **v.1: "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."** The image of Christ holding the seven Spirits of God (the Holy Spirit) and the seven stars (angels) highlights His spiritual authority over the churches. It also highlights the problem with the Sardis Church. Like the city itself, which had once been a glorious city under the Persian Empire and renown throughout Asia Minor, it was a city in decline. Moreover, there was a fascination with death in the city as the prominence of their impressive necropolis seven miles outside the city (see historical background above) showed. The church has become like the city! They look alive and clean on the outside but inwardly they are spiritually dead! Christ confronts the church in Sardis with the hypocrisy of their faith. They have become like the society they lived in. Rather than being agents of God's transforming power and love, they have become complacent and have accommodated the culture thereby forgoing any persecution.

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- b) **v. 2: “Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.”** As a result, Jesus tells them to “wake up!” They must recognize the urgency of their situation. If they don’t change their ways, things will only get worse and they will be in danger of the church itself dying. What fitting words for any of us who become complacent in our faith or who get preoccupied with the things of the world and forget the things of God’s Kingdom. Decline usually happens slowly in God’s Church when people become complacent and don’t take the gospel seriously. It is a familiar warning to the majority of the seven churches in Revelation. And it is a warning to all churches today, including St. Bartholomew’s!
- c) **v. 3: “So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.”** Jesus affirms that what you have received from God’s Word (i.e. the gospel) must be kept always. If we stray from God’s commands, the only remedy is to repent of our disobedience and return to the right path. Otherwise, the consequences of disobedience may hit us at a time we least expect it. Worse, Christ might call us home and we will have failed to fulfill His perfect will for our lives. The thief reference would be meaningful to the Sardis Church as it would bring back memories of how Persian King Cyrus defeated the city through a surprise attack centuries earlier. Supposedly, when one of the soldiers of Sardis went back to get his helmet on a path leading up the south or low side of the mighty acropolis, Persian soldiers secretly noticed and they followed him to find the backway into the strongest point of the city. This led to the Persian victory.
- d) **v. 4: “But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.”** In Sardis, wool production was prominent. Thus, the reference to garments was meant to let the church know that it is not outward appearance that God is most concerned about. The citizens of the city were expected to approach the gods with their best, clean garments. It was forbidden to enter the Temples with soiled or stained garments. For the believer, however, our cleanliness is not simply an “outside” endeavor. It is not determined by outside ritual or “good works.” Our spiritual purity comes from Christ’s work on the cross. Such purity comes from an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ. We walk with Him following His lead and obeying His commands. Our whiteness comes from abiding in Him (**Jn. 15:1-9**).
- e) **v. 5: “He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”** The promise of reward is clear. Those who continue to follow Christ will be clothed in white garments forever. They will be forever pure from the inside out! Their name will remain in the book of life and they will be acknowledged by Christ before His Father and angels in heaven (**Mt. 10:32-33; Lk. 10:20; Rev. 21:27; contrast now with Mk. 8:38; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:15**). In the ancient world, it was common practice when a citizen died to have their name removed from the city’s book of the living. For those in Christ, they will never have to worry about their name (their existence) being blotted out but they will live forever in God’s Kingdom! There is no better promise or reward.
- f) **v.6: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”** Again, what Christ says is the same as what the Holy Spirit says for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Ultimately, when we hear the voice of Christ today, it is the voice of His Spirit, the Holy Spirit.