

Revelation 2 (Part 2):8-29 – Letter to Smyrna, Pergamum and Thyatira

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Let's get into the word here tonight. Revelation chapter two. Open your Bible there. Revelation no "S" on the end. Just Revelation chapter two. I don't know how many churches we're going to get through. I had mentioned earlier that I was going to take a week with every church, and I don't think I'm going to do that. I think I'm going to go faster than that. We'll see how far we get tonight. It just all depends on how fast you guys listen.

Let's pray. Jesus, we look to you as we get into the word. We come humbly and pray for your Holy Spirit. Pray for you to teach us from the scriptures. Pray for you to open our hearts to the things that we need to hear. Lord, this is your book. It's about you, and we pray that you would reveal your heart and the revelation of your plan to your people. Thank you, Father, for giving it to us and preserving it for us, and we ask you to guide and direct our study of the scripture tonight. In Jesus precious name, Amen. Amen.

Last week, we discussed an idea that is held by some students of the Bible that says that each of these letters, in addition to being a letter written to a real church in the first century in Western Asia Minor, that these letters also represent or provide for us a prophetic snapshot of different periods in church history. I think that there's enough here for us to take this into consideration. We called this the historical prophetic view, and I'm going to put it on the screen for you again so that we can kind of revisit how these things are laid out.

You'll remember that we dealt with the church at Ephesus last week. Which we said not only was Jesus dictating a letter to a real church that was having issues and needed to address those issues, but that the letter that He wrote and the character of that letter is characteristic of the entire apostolic period, and we talked last week about why that is.

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The Historical-Prophetic View of the 7 Churches

Ephesus – Apostolic church (AD30-100)

Smyrna – Persecuted church (AD100-313)

Pergamum – State church (AD313-590)
Thyatira – Papal church (AD590-1517)
Sardis – Reformed church (AD1517-1730)
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Laodicea – Apostate church (AD1900-)

Now, as we get into the next letter here, you can see that we're going to be dealing with Smyrna, which we believe is a representation of a period of time from around AD100 to approximately AD313, and it represents the Persecuted church. And we'll talk tonight about why we believe that and then we'll get into Pergamum the State church, Thyatira the Papal church, Sardis the Reformed church, Philadelphia the Missionary church, and finally, Laodicea the Apostate church. And you can see the relative dates next to those. If nothing else, these are fascinating and it's something that we, in our time period, have the privilege of being able to see because of when we live.

We live in the last days of the last days, and we have the ability to look back on church history and we know what these different time periods were like in the history of the church, and we can see whether or not they match up to what is being said by Jesus to these churches and what the churches themselves kind of represent.

We're going to get into the letter to the church of Smyrna here tonight. That begins at verse eight. And if you look in your Bible it says: *"⁸And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.'"*

Let me stop you right there because I want to talk for just a minute about this church and particularly the area. In fact, let me put a map up on the screen so that you can see where this is located.

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I've circled it for you. Again, this is modern day Turkey, but back then it was referred to as Asia Minor. This is the western part of that country. You can see from the map there that Smyrna was right on the coast.

In fact, it was what we call a seaport city. And the fact that it was on a major trade route meant that Smyrna was a place of great wealth. There was a lot of money coming and going and goods of course, into the city. And whenever there's a lot of money and a lot of goods, you're going to have a lot of people. And there were a lot of people in Smyrna.

But I want you to note something very interesting about the name Smyrna: it means myrrh. And if you'll remember, myrrh was a particular fragrant resin. They actually got it from trees and they used it as a perfume to prepare bodies for burial. You'll recall that and we'll talk more about the connection to the meaning of the name of this city to this time period in history in just a bit.

This city contained a respectable number of Jews who were hostile to Christianity and the Christian Church, but it also contained an even larger number of gentiles who were very passionately loyal to Rome and to the Roman emperor. In fact, this is during a time when the worship of the emperor was

actually going. So the worship of any other God was considered in many places in the Roman Empire to be illegal and punishable by death.

You can kind of imagine what it was probably like to live in a place like Smyrna at that time with some pretty violent Jews and other gentiles. It was kind of a tinder box waiting to explode. And I want you to notice how the Lord identifies Himself to this church in this very volatile region of the Roman Empire. Once again, He said that these are *"The words of the first and the last,"* and then notice how He says, I am *"the one who died and came to life."* Now that's an interesting thing to say to a people who are suffering, who are living in a violent area where there is violence going on against them. He begins by reminding them that He is the one who conquered death and the grave. He goes on to say, if you'll look with me in verse nine:

"⁹I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

¹⁰Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." (ESV)

Wow, how would you like to get a letter from the Lord to your church saying these sorts of things. Now again, I believe that these are the kinds of trials that the people in Smyrna were experiencing there in the first century. But I also believe that this is a picture of the Persecuted church. Jesus reminds such believers who are dealing with persecution that though they may be in poverty, they are in fact rich.

And he tells them that he's aware of those who are slandering their name. He exhorts them not to fear the suffering that lay ahead of them. And he speaks, you'll notice, of this time of testing. He says satan is going to cast some of you into prison. But He reminds them that the crown of life awaits them for both their faithful and their patient endurance of these sorts of situations. It was truly a terrible place to live if you were a born again Christian.

Now, once again, I want to remind you that this is, I believe, a prophetic snapshot of the time period just after the Apostolic church. We'll put these back up on the screen and this time I'll highlight now the church in Smyrna. And I want to remind you, this is the Persecuted church after what we called the apostolic period.

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The Historical-Prophetic View of the 7 Churches

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The church entered into a time, that ended around AD313 but began around AD100, into a period of incredible persecution and violence against the church. This is that time period that we read about in the history books when the Roman amphitheater were alive with Christians being fed to hungry lions while the onlookers cheered wildly. This is the time period when many people were crucified, I'm talking about believers. Many Christians were covered, literally sewn into animal skins while wild dogs literally tortured them to death. Some were covered in tar and burned alive. Others were boiled in oil and some were even burned at the stake.

One particular church historian claims that during this period, as many as 5million born again Christians were martyred simply because they confessed Jesus as their savior. Now, it's not that difficult when we think of this from a historical perspective to connect this church as a prophetic snapshot of that time in church history when all this persecution was going on.

Once again, I want to remind you that the name of the city means myrrh and myrrh, again, has that connection to death and to burial. And when we make all of these connections, it's rather enlightening. The letter ends with the Lord simply saying, *"¹¹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."*

What does the Lord mean by this? Well, obviously if there's a second death, then there must be a first death. And there in fact is, and that is the death of the body. That is the first death. But the second death is actually described for us later in this book, the book of Revelation.

I'll put it up on the screen and it is from Revelation chapter twenty, where it says:

Revelation 20:14-15 (ESV)

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second

death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

But I want you to notice the promise that Jesus gave to the people of Smyrna, the one who conquers. And that means the one who holds on to faith, to holds onto confidence that Jesus paid for your sins and there is no other way to be saved. That is what it means to conquer. He says that the second death will have no power over them and they cannot be hurt by it. Now, He goes on to address the next church.

I want you to notice in verse twelve, He says: *"¹²And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.'"* Once again, let's put the map up on the screen. We'll take a look at where Pergamum is located.

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You can see the circle there on the screen. And I want you to take note of this and remember it. The name Pergamum means thoroughly married. Thoroughly married. Again, we'll talk about that meaning here in just a moment. But Pergamum was an important capital city at one time. It had a huge center of the worship of many pagan deities. So there were many temples and many altars of these various pagan gods there in the city of Pergamum.

And you can imagine how challenging it would've been to hold fast to your confession of Christ and your devotion to the Lord in a city with such incredibly vast influences like the city of Pergamum with all of its pagan practices and all of its temples. And Jesus, you'll notice, begins by introducing Himself in verse twelve as *"him who has the sharp two-edged sword."*

And we know that this is a reference to the word of God. More about that in a bit. Jesus tells them in verse thirteen, and this is interesting, He says, *"¹³I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is."* Doesn't that sound like a place you want to go visit?

Well, I've never interpreted this reference as saying that Pergamum was the center of all satanic and demonic activity at that time, as if Pergamum was the place where Satan decided to set up shop or that was his ground zero of all his activity. I don't think that's what the Lord means at all. Instead, I believe that this comment saying that Pergamum has his throne there is simply due to the fact of the high level of pagan worship that was going on. And the many many pagan temples that were located there in the city of Pergamum at that time with this strong satanic influence that goes along with pagan idolatry to the degree that the city was almost completely given over to the darkness of paganistic practices.

And yet it's interesting too that even after announcing that satan is literally enthroned and that there's a great center of satanic activity there in that city, I want you to notice that Jesus goes on in verse thirteen to say to some of the believers there, *"Yet you hold fast my name."* Isn't that fascinating? What does it mean to hold fast the name of the Lord? Remember in the Bible, whenever we say the name of the Lord, it refers to everything that God says about Himself, all His declarations and all that is true about Him. So if they're holding fast to the name of the Lord, they're holding fast to everything Jesus said about Himself.

Anything the apostles declared to be true about the nature, purpose, and ministry of Jesus Christ, they were holding fast. Even in the midst of this incredible paganistic influence. And He goes on there to say, *"and you did not deny my faith"* meaning the faith that is given to them passed along by the apostles and by which they've been saved. They were not moved even living in all of this paganism.

I think of Pergamum alongside the United States of America today, because we're living in a culture that is still very paganistic. We may not have little figurines that people bow down and worship to, but paganism is much more

broad than just worshiping little statues or statuettes of various gods. It's basically worshiping anything that you declare to be your purpose for living that is outside of the one true God. Somebody could be worshiping at the feet of beauty, physical beauty. Somebody could be worshiping at the feet of physical pleasure and sexual immorality and that sort of thing. There's all kinds of things that people can bow down and worship to. So we're living in a very paganistic society today.

Is it possible to live a Christian life in the midst of the kind of society that we live in today? Yes it is. The people in Pergamum proved it. Here they were living with all of this, a pagan temple probably on every corner. And yet Jesus says to them, *"you hold fast my name."* You're holding fast. You have not denied the faith and so forth. And the Lord even goes on to say at the end of that verse, *"even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."*

Can you imagine somebody from our fellowship who was maybe murdered just because that person belonged to Jesus, confessed Christ? Can you imagine the shockwave that would send through even just a fellowship like ours? Or how about the Christian Churches just here in this area, knowing that a believer, and simply because they were a believer, they were put to death. No other reason, just because they were a believer.

And the Lord says, even then you held fast. You didn't waiver, you didn't freak out. You held fast. By the way, we don't know anything about this Antipas man. History doesn't tell us; we don't have any record of who he was or how he was even martyred. The biblical text says that he was, we know that's a fact, but we don't have a historical record of him. Except that he was martyred for his faith and the people were commended for holding fast even in the midst of it.

But the Lord, however, does have some words of warning for this church. And they take up in verse fourteen. Look with me there in your Bible. It says, *"¹⁴But I have a few things against you: You have some there"* He says, obviously this isn't the whole church, but *"you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality."*

Now, why is Jesus making the point about some in the church? If it was just some in the church, is it that big of a deal? I mean, obviously there's people who are holding fast and He already commended those people. So why not just kind of go to the end of the letter and say, Hey, so hang on guys. Just do the best you can and hang on. I know things aren't perfect. But just hang on because I know

some of you are really holding fast, so keep holding fast. God bless you. Whatever. Goodbye. Why bring it up? Why bring it up? Well, the reason why He had to bring it up, even though He says that there are some of you who hold to these things, is because it only takes a little bit of yeast to work through the whole batch of dough (Galatians 5:9).

And that's something we learn elsewhere in the scripture. Yeast is always that picture in the Bible of sin. And the reason it is a beautiful picture of sin and a very accurate picture of sin is because it permeates. And that's what sin does. Even just a little will permeate the body of Christ.

And so this is an important warning for the church to get. So the first warning is there are some who hold to the teaching of Balaam. He goes on in verse fifteen to say, *"¹⁵So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans."* We talked about this last week when we talked and studied through the letter to the church in Ephesus. And you'll remember that they despised the teachings of the Nicolaitans. And Jesus said you hate their teaching just like I do. And so he commended the church in Ephesus, but some of the people here in Pergamum are actually embracing and becoming tolerant of these things. So we got these two things.

Verse sixteen, He says, *"¹⁶Therefore, repent."* That means turn. Turn away. Turn back. *"If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth."* There's the reference now to the sword. He says, I'll come and war against you with the word. So He brings up these two things, the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Let's talk about these for just a moment, because it's important to understand what Jesus is warning them about.

The doctrine of Balaam is apparently named after the Balaam of the Old Testament in the book of Numbers. If your Old Testament, Balaam was a seer, a diviner, who was hired by the king of Moab to curse the Israelites. The Israelites were nearing the promised land. They were almost there after their 40 years of wandering, and Balak, the king of Moab, was afraid of these people. He didn't want them passing through his land or anywhere close to his land. He knew they were too big to war against in terms militarily.

So he said, we're going to turn to some spiritual warfare. So he tries to hire Balaam, who's a seer, and he says, I'll pay you an amount of money if you'll come and curse them for me. Balaam first kind of resisted, but then later went with the King of Moab to go and do just what he asked. The problem was every time he got up to curse these people, he opened his mouth and out came a blessing.

In fact, you read in that in the book of Numbers, some of the most beautiful blessings that are spoken about the nation of Israel came out of the mouth of Balaam. It really is some lovely things that the Lord said through him. And even after several opportunities that Balaam was given to curse these people, he continued to just simply speak a word of blessing over them much to Balak's anger and frustration. And he couldn't do it. And the story seems to kind of end there.

But eventually the desire for wealth got the better of Balaam. And he went to the king of Moab and he said, listen, you're not going to defeat these people by trying to call down curses, because God's not going to let that happen. There's only one way you're going to defeat these people, and that is if you beat them from within. In other words, what you need to do is you need to turn them against their God or in essence, turn their God's wrath against them.

And so what Balaam counseled the king of Moab to do was to send all of his pretty young Moabite women down into the Israelite camp and to woo the men into pagan sacrificial practices, which along with them was sexual immorality. Often pagan gods were worshiped through immoral sexual activity. You can read all about that in Numbers chapter 25.

Now as they're talking here in Revelation about the doctrine of Balaam, we can see that it centers on the idea of mingling the worship of the one true God with paganism in this case, mingling Christianity with paganism because He says there are some among you who are tolerating this teaching of Balaam.

And so there were people in the church who were beginning to loosen their grip against things like merging or mingling Christianity with certain aspects of pagan worship. And I want you to remember that the meaning, I told you this at the beginning of Pergamum, I want you to remember that the meaning of the name or the title Pergamum is thoroughly married. And that would seem to speak of the mingling of the Christian faith with pagan practices that were being tolerated by some of the people in the church.

Now concerning the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, when we talked about this last week, I told you that we don't have any biblical evidence as to what the teachings of the Nicolaitans were all about. We don't know. In fact, the only thing we really have is just the name and what it might mean. Whatever it was, the church in Pergamum was beginning to tolerate it.

And frankly, that's the way things . . . have you noticed, some of you guys who are as old as I am or older, you can look back in your own life and you can say,

that's kind of the way things go. We start off strongly opposed to certain things and then we soften on them as time goes by. Have you guys noticed that? I've noticed it. I mean, what wouldn't have been tolerated 50 years ago is now tolerated in many parts of the Christian Church. Things like couples living together outside of wedlock. 50 years ago, they would've told them you're living in immorality. That's fornication. We barely wink at it today as a church. So this is the way we go. We soften on things. We begin to tolerate things.

And this is what was going on in the church at Pergamum. And it was happening related to the teachings of the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. And by the way, the title which comes from kind of a, it's more of a phrase, Nikolaos. It carries the idea of a hierarchical separation between church leaders and the flock. The Bible doesn't give us any insights on the teaching of the Nicolaitans, but just the name alone. The root word or the root phrase where we get this name speaks of a separation between church leaders and the flock.

Now, today, once again, we think nothing of talking about the clergy and the laity. Now we don't use those terms much here at Life Bible Ministry, but I'm assuming you know what they mean. The clergy refers to people who are in positions of church leadership, we call them the clergy. You might go to the hospital and see a sign, clergy parking, or something like that. And then the word laity simply means the people. So, and all laity means is distinct from the clergy. Okay, well, we take those terms today for granted, but are they biblical? That's the question we have to ask. Are they biblical?

And you guys know, if you ever call me Reverend, I'm liable to smack ya. I hate that title because it speaks of someone who ought to be revered. That's where it comes from, and it comes from this idea of the separation between clergy and laity. And once again, I ask you the question, is it biblical? Should the clergy rule over the laity? Well, let me show what Jesus had to say about leaders from Matthew chapter twenty up on the screen:

Matthew 20:25-28 (ESV)

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

That is what leadership in the Christian Church is supposed to look like. There's not to be this clergy and laity separation. This is what we believe the doctrine of

the Nicolaitans could very well have included. There were probably other things as well, we just don't know. But based on the name. Now let me show you again on the screen:

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Pergamum – State church (AD313-590)

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Laodicea – Apostate church (AD1900-)

From AD313 to roughly AD590 is the period of church history we call the State church. Why do we do that? Well, it all comes down to the fact that in AD313 the emperor of Rome, a man by the name of Constantine, came to Christ. And there are debates among historians as to just how devoted he was in his determination to follow after Christ. But frankly, that's beside the fact.

What we do know, when Constantine became a believer, is that first of all, the persecutions stopped suddenly. Remember the period of time right before then was the Persecuted church time period where people died in huge numbers up to 5 million in that time period. Suddenly it stopped because Constantine made Christianity the state religion of Rome. It became the state religion. And whenever something becomes a state religion, it has devastating effects on that devotion, on that faith. The men who put together our constitution knew that, and so they made provision to keep the state out of the church.

And that's what that separation of church and state is all about. It's been totally redefined to mean the freedom from the church. That's what it means today, but that's not what it was intended by the founding fathers of our country. They knew from history that when the state starts running the church, the church becomes corrupt.

You know why? Because suddenly it becomes advantageous for people to confess Christianity for political reasons. Once Constantine, the Roman emperor, became a Christian, what am I going to do to suck up to the emperor? I'm going to start talking Christianity. I'm going to even tell him, oh yeah, I'm a Christian too. Doesn't matter whether I'm or not. I'll tell him I am. Why? Because I want to advance my political aspirations. And that's what happened.

During this time period we call the State church, the church became corrupt, and people began to confess Christ in word only. But they kept on living like pagans. The pagans that they had been born and raised as. Nothing got changed.

There was no transformation in their lives, which the Bible tells us must take place. We are not to be conformed to the image of this world, but to be transformed through the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2).

That wasn't happening during the period of the State church for the most part. Many attempted also to integrate their pagan practices into Christian beliefs because they knew Christian beliefs were popular with the emperor. Well, but I'm not really buying this whole Christian thing, so I'm going to try to amalgamate my pagan beliefs and practices in with Christianity. And that's going to come to full flower in the next time period, which will I think we'll get to.

This letter ends with Jesus speaking to those faithful few who held on to the faith. And he said in verse seventeen, *"¹⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers"* (and again, conquering with faith, holding on to faith) *"I will give some of the hidden manna,"* Now, what's that all about? That's Jesus, you guys. He is the hidden manna. He is the true bread, the bread of life that came down from heaven. He says, *"and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."*

That's an interesting sort of a deal. We don't really know what Jesus meant or had in mind when he talked about a white stone because in ancient cultures, white stones were given for lots of different reasons. A white stone might be given to you as a form of an invitation to a fancy party or a banquet. People would literally do those on white stones. White stones will even be given to some people just as a expression of friendship. And there were many other reasons white stones might be given. We're not sure exactly what Jesus is connecting the white stone too as it relates to this promise that He is giving. I guess in this case we'll just have to wait and see what it's all about.

We're going to come to the church of Thyatira. Read verse eighteen with me in your Bible. It says, *"¹⁸And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God,'"* I want you to know very clearly people, when Jesus introduces Himself to this church as the Son of God, He is declaring deity.

I have told you many times that whenever the Bible refers to something or someone as the son of something or someone, it literally means that thing or

person shares the nature of whatever they are the son of. Okay. And they are the originator of that and so forth. This is etched in Jewish thought, to be the son of something means to have the same nature of that thing of which you are the son of. So He's declaring Himself to be God.

He goes on to say, *"who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze."* Those are two interesting pictures that the Lord chooses to start this letter with. Speaking of Himself, eyes like flame of fire speaks of the penetrating judgment of fire and feet like burnished bronze. By the way, your Bible may say brass instead of bronze. Either way, it seems to speak of strength to execute judgment. These are references that would go with judgment.

Before we go any further, one more map on the screen for you.

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As you look there circled at Thyatira, by the way, very close to Smyrna and Pergamum. You can see, in fact, all these cities are on the western edge of what was Asia Minor at that time. Thyatira was actually the smallest of all of the seven towns. It was the least important in terms of its value to the Roman Empire. Historically, we're not aware of any real persecution that went on there.

Isn't that interesting? In Pergamum it was just hot and heavy persecution. But here, we don't have any record of any believers being persecuted.

But we do have archeological evidence in this region to show that there were pagan altars in this area. They've uncovered a lot of places where people worship pagan deities in this small area. And even though it was small, Thyatira was known for its manufacturing. And I'm not talking about big manufacturing plants like we have today. But things like cloth making, dying cloth different colors was a very expensive process. Things like leather working, bronze working, pottery and that sort of thing. A lot of these were going on in Thyatira.

In fact, you might recall that when Paul made his way to Philippi, do you remember his first convert in Philippi was a woman by the name of Lydia who was a seller, a merchant in purple cloth (Acts 16:14). Remember that? Well, it says she was from Thyatira and that's the kind of stuff that went on in that area. Here's something to tuck away: the name of the city of Thyatira means perpetual sacrifice. Okay. It means perpetual sacrifice. And that's very fascinating in light of the fact that in the historical prophetic view, which we'll put back up on the screen now, and we highlight Thyatira, this is the Papal church.

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And by the way, papal means relating to the pope or the papacy, which is a word that it means the office of the pope. You'll notice on the screen a long period of time, almost a thousand years, incredibly long compared to the other time periods.

Well, here's what the Lord says to this church in verse nineteen: *"¹⁹I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first."* So as Jesus speaks to this church, He tells them that there are some in the church of Thyatira who are growing in their faith and their work showed it. He says, the things that you did now are greater than the

things you did at first. In other words, you haven't slacked off in your service to the Lord. You've kept it going and you've kept it growing and He commended them for their growth, but that was a short commendation. He has much more to say to them as a warning, verse twenty. He says,

"²⁰But 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 sacrifice to idols. ²¹I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²²Behold, 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, ²³and 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." (ESV)

All right, so let's kind of talk a little bit here about this warning that is given to the church in Thyatira. We really don't know whether this woman's name truly was Jezebel or whether or not the Lord is using this name as a reflection to speak of this Old Testament character, Jezebel, who back in the Old Testament, introduced Baal worship to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 16:31).

She was a marriage of convenience to one of the kings of Israel. And she was a Phoenician princess who brought Baal worship from her area of Phoenicia into Israel. And it could be that the Lord is simply using the name Jezebel as more of a title that would speak of the evil nature of this woman. We don't really know. Either way, this woman we're told was teaching and seducing genuine believers into sexual immorality and participating in pagan festivals where they were eating food that had been sacrificed or dedicated to idols.

Now on that latter element of eating food sacrificed to idols, you'll remember that the Apostle Paul deals with this issue quite extensively in his epistles. And he essentially tells those who are mature in their faith that it's really not a big deal eating food sacrificed to idols because when you're mature, you know that an idol really is nothing at all. And God owns the cattle on a thousand hills and they all belong to him (Psalm 50:10). And don't worry about it, because there was a superstitious belief in the young Christians that if they consumed meat that had been sacrificed to a pagan idol, that they would ingest that idol. And by ingesting that idol, they would be completely defiled and potentially even lose their salvation.

It was nothing of the sort, but it was a superstitious belief held by believers whose faith was still very weak. And so Paul encouraged them to say, don't worry about it if somebody puts a slab of meat in front of you for dinner, don't

ask any questions. Don't ask whether this was sacrificed to an idol. Just eat it and don't worry about it because an idol is really nothing at all. Now, there were some people who were still very superstitious, and so Paul said to the mature believers, if you're eating with somebody who really cares about eating meat sacrificed to idols then don't eat it for their sake, just abstain for their sake. Not because an idol is anything that's going to hurt you. But just so you don't wound their conscience (1 Corinthians 8:4-13).

That was kind of what Paul gave as his essential information. So we can assume that what was going on here with this Jezebel was much more than just simply eating meat. It probably had to do with, once again, attending these pagan festivals. And we believe that because Thyatira was a business community, that people were being lured into these associations with these pagan temples to simply keep their business contacts stable.

Because you do know that when people became Christians, the pagans or even the Jews learned of their Christian beliefs, they would pull away from them and no longer do business with them, no longer trade with them. So you could lose your entire ability to earn wealth and support your family by simply being a Christian. So it's very possible that this teaching of Jezebel was drawing people into these pagan festivals as a way of keeping their business connections alive. In other words, she was saying, Hey, if you want to feed your family, you have to be a part of these and go ahead and eat all the stuff that they're . . . and then just the whole participation.

Jezebel becomes a fitting picture for this time period in church history and what happened to the Christian Church during this time period, which by the way, we called the dark ages and we called it the dark ages for a reason. It was dark. And what Jezebel, this woman, whatever her name was, who was trying to do with these people in Thyatira, was she was trying to get them to compromise their Christian faith by participating with pagan festivals.

And this is what we see happened during the Papal church. Christianity was being merged with paganism. And to this day . . . again, I want to be so careful. I want you to know I don't have it in for Roman Catholicism or Roman Catholics or people that were raised in Roman Catholics. I really don't. I don't. We have a lot of people in our fellowship who were raised Roman Catholic.

To this day, however, Roman Catholicism still bears some of its paganistic origins. They're still there. Some of the beliefs are still present in modern day Roman Catholicism. And one of the reasons that paganism became so merged with the Papal church during that time period is that the Roman Catholic

Church began to believe that the kingdom of God was on earth. Jesus said otherwise. He said, *"My kingdom is not of this world."* (John 18:36)

The Roman Catholic Church during the dark ages believed that the world, the earth, was the kingdom of God. And so in order to eliminate unbelief, their idea was to convert people to Roman Catholicism. And they would do it at the edge of a sword. There was no confessing Christ. There was no four spiritual laws. It was basically, they would literally take their army and conquer a people and then haul them out to the local beach, wherever there was water and do mass baptisms. And if people wouldn't confess Roman Catholicism, they'd be put to death.

But see, that's what they believed that unbelief was a cancer in the kingdom of God. And the only way to get rid of that cancer was to eliminate people who don't believe, who are unbelievers in their sense of understanding what an unbeliever is.

So, you can imagine what people would do at the edge of a sword. Yeah, I'm in, take me out in the water, dunk me. Right? They had no desire to follow Christ. They didn't even hear about the gospel. All they were told is you need to do this to become a Roman Catholic. And so they would submit. And they never changed their ways. They never altered their paganistic lifestyles. They became Roman Catholics.

But the priests began to be sent out to these different areas to teach Roman Catholic practices. And so the people were learning Roman Catholicism and they were practicing Roman Catholicism right alongside their paganism. And this was the characterization of the Papal church during this time period.

Now, as I've said to you before, and I'm sure I'll say it again, God has always had a remnant. There has always been a people during every time period that remained true to the Lord. True to his word. That held fast. But by and large, this time period, which we call the Papal church, was characterized by the merging of Roman Catholicism and paganism.

Now He says in verse twenty four, *"²⁴But 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. ²⁵Only hold fast what you have until I come."*

These people are in such a compromised environment that all he says, I don't want to put any burden on you at this time. All I'm going to tell you is hold fast.

Just hold on. You ever been that place in life where all you can do is just hold on. You can't take a step forward. All you can do is just hold on and just try not to be moved.

And then comes the promise. *"²⁶The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,"* So Jesus promises that these believers will reign with Him. We believe this is during the millennial kingdom. *"²⁷and 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.²⁸And I will give him the morning star."* The Morning Star. That's He Himself. So He says, *"²⁹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

Remember I told you that the name Thyatira means perpetual sacrifice. It doesn't take any effort at all. I've done this before. I've shown you these sorts of things before. I got on the internet. I simply just Googled Roman Catholic Eucharist, found the first website I found. Here's a quote I just copied and pasted.

(slide)

The Eucharist is the very sacrifice of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus which he instituted to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until his return in glory.

-St Peter Catholic Church – Madison, WI

This is from a Roman Catholic Church in Madison, Wisconsin. This is from a modern Roman Catholic Church in our country, right here in America. And they tell you right there that the Eucharist, which they celebrate in every mass, is given that the sacrifice of Jesus might be perpetuated. That means ongoing, might be continued, right?

What does Thyatira mean? Perpetual sacrifice. Is that biblical? Well, no, it runs completely contrary to biblical Christianity. Which teaches that Jesus Christ's death on the cross was accomplished once and is now finished. That's why we refer to our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is not ongoing. It is not perpetual. Jesus Himself said, *"It is finished,"* (John 19:30) and I'm going to go with his words. Amen. We'll take last three churches next time.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for giving us this time tonight to dig into your word. Lord, once again, I have no desire to throw stones at any religious system

or organization, but Father, you have charged me with the task of declaring the truth, and the truth is laid out in your word and we must hold to it so as not to compromise. And Lord, the world today uses the word tolerance a lot, but we've seen just in these letters, how often you reminded the church that they're not to tolerate the sins of this world. So as to wink at them, or worse yet, let them into the church itself.

Lord, I pray that we would be tolerant of people's hearts, but that we would not tolerate sinful activity. And that we would not compromise and say it's okay, or God has changed His mind. But that we would continue to hold to what the word says. Even though that's going to be unpopular. Even though this cancel culture that we live in today may cancel us in some way and we see, Lord, in the word that this cancel culture's been going on for a long time. Lord, help us to hold fast. Patient endurance.

Thank you for your word tonight. Continue to fill us with wisdom and grace. We pray in Jesus' precious name, and all God's people said together: Amen. God bless you.