

REVELATION

Thyatira and Sardis

Revelation 2:18

February 03, 2024

Thyatira (2:18-29 – the longest message and is the chiasmic center of the 7 messages)

Thyatira (modern-day Akhisar, Turkey) was located on the banks of the Hermus river, about 38 miles southeast of Pergamos.

The City

- Was the smallest and least important of the 7 cities listed in Revelation. It had no political importance or cultural significance. It was made up mostly of poor laborers and trades people.
- Its trade guilds were well known and far more organized than any other city in Asia Minor.
 - Every artisan in Thyatira belonged to a guild. Guilds wielded a significant amount of power and influence. Two of the most powerful guilds were those of the coppersmiths and the dyers. In order to run a business or hold a job a person had to belong to a trade guild.
 - Guild members were expected to attend the pagan festival associated with the guild's patron god. Refusal resulted in expulsion from the guild.
- Was home of the worship of the god Apollo (son of Zeus).
- Was famous for its dyeing and was a center of the indigo trade. Lydia, the 1st Christian convert in Europe, was originally from Thyatira.

The Church

Danger to the Christians of Thyatira came directly from the trade guilds, because they could not join them without participating in the guild festivals. This resulted in social isolation and further economic hardship.

To the angel at the church in Thyatira write:

Jesus presents Himself as, "The Son of God," "The One whose eyes are like flames of fire" and "Whose feet are like burnished bronze."

- To the church in Thyatira, Jesus is the Son of God. Nothing is hidden from His penetrating gaze. He stands uncompromisingly against the pagan influences infecting the church.

Jesus' appraisal:

- I know your love and faith, your service and your perseverance.
- I know your last works are greater than the former – in other words, unlike in Ephesus, the church in Thyatira was increasing in love and faithfulness.

BUT This I have against you:

- You tolerate the woman "Jezebel" who calls herself a prophetess and teaches false doctrines and leads my servants astray.
 - The real-life Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab of Israel. She is considered one of the most evil people in all of Scripture (1 Kings 16:30-33; 18:4; 19:1-2; 21).
 - In Thyatira, this woman claimed to be a prophetess with a direct message from God, stating that it was all right for Christians to go along with the requirements set by the guilds. Her seductive teachings caused many to commit spiritual adultery by compromising with paganism, which led to apostasy. This caused a great divide within the church.

Jesus' counsel and warning:

- I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.
- 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.
 - Why did Jesus use such severe language? He wanted to impress upon the believers the gravity of their actions. If someone is walking dangerously close to a cliff, you do not whisper ---- you shout. Compromise with the world on any level is dangerous to the life and ministry of God's people.
- Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold to her teaching and have not **known** (*to have experiential / intimate knowledge*) the deep things of Satan; I do not lay on you any other burden, only, hold on to what you have until I come.

Appeal to hear what the Spirit says to the churches

Promises to the overcomers:

- Will be given authority over the nations.
- Will rule over the nations with iron scepter.
- Will dash nations into pieces.
- Will be given the Morning Star (Jesus Himself).

******* This message applies to the condition of the church at large during the Middle Ages (538-1517). The danger to the church came from the inside – from those who claimed authority from God. Tradition completely replaced the Bible as the basis for teaching and belief. A human priesthood and sacred relics replaced Christ's priesthood, and works were regarded as the means to salvation. Those who rejected the corrupting influences of the institutional church experienced severe persecution and even death.**

Sardis (3:1-6)

Sardis (modern-day Sart, Turkey) was about 30 miles southeast of Thyatira.

The City

- Was noted for its wool, dyeing and garment-making industries.
- Was the ancient capital of the kingdom of Lydia and had been one of the greatest cities in the ancient world.
- Lydia's most famous king was Croesus. He was the 1st person to strike and issue pure gold and silver coins to be used in the marketplace. His father King Alyattes, minted and distributed the world's first coins.
- Was built on the top of a steep hill accessible by only one road – making it easy to defend. The citizens were so overconfident in their safety that the city walls were hardly guarded at all. The city was captured by surprise twice, once by Cyrus the Great and once by Antiochus III. The city was destroyed because of overconfidence.
- The patron deity was the goddess Cybele. Eunuch priests attended her temple. It was believed that Cybele possessed the special power to restore the dead to life.
- By the time of the Romans, Sardis had lost its prestige. While still enjoying prosperity and wealth, the city's glory and pride was rooted in its past rather than its present.

The Church

- Jesus has nothing good to say about this church. It possesses no positive qualities.

To the angel at the church in Sardis write:

Jesus presents Himself as "The One who has the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars."

- Jesus is coming to the church as the One with supreme authority (see John 16:8-11).

Jesus' appraisal:

- I know that you say you are alive – and you are dead.

The church received only one rebuke from Jesus. The members were not blamed for any specific sins or heresy, but for being lifeless. The church relied on its reputation for being alive. A tiny minority were committed Christians, but the majority were spiritually dead and their deeds lacked the transforming power of the gospel. The underlying issue was spiritual complacency and lethargy. Compromise with the pagan influences around them had killed their spiritual life.

Jesus' counsel and warning:

- Keep remembering what you received and heard and repent.
 - The only way to reclaim a wholehearted devotion to Christ is to keep past experiences fresh in the mind and apply them to the present.
- If you do not watch, I will come as a thief; you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.
 - If they do not wake up and repent, Jesus will come in judgment unexpectedly. Watchfulness is a characteristic of faithful Christians. If the church fails to watch, its destiny will mirror the history of the city. Just as Sardis was unexpectedly conquered due to lack of vigilance, so Christ will visit the church and it will be too late to repent.
- You have a few (a minority) names who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white garments, because they are worthy (have been faithful).

Appeal to hear what the Spirit says to the churches

Promises to the overcomers:

- Walk with Jesus.
- Dressed in white robes.
- Names not blotted out in the book of life.
- Acknowledged before the Father and before the Angels.

******* This message fits appropriately with the condition of the church in the post-Reformation period (1517-1755), known as Protestant Scholasticism. The gospel, which had been forgotten during the medieval period, was rediscovered by the Reformers and the Bible was put back into the hands of the people. New churches were established and Christianity became rejuvenated. Once the Reformers passed away, lifeless formalism began invading the church. Their successors became more and more involved in doctrinal debate and controversies, gradually degenerating into a state of spiritual lethargy. Toward the end of this period, under the impact of the rising tide of philosophical rationalism and secularism, the saving grace of the gospel and commitment to Christ decreased, giving place to rationalism and theological arguments. The church, although appearing alive, was actually spiritually dead.**