

## **TOLERATING JEZEBEL**

**Revelation 2:18–29**

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Scripture today is from Revelation 2:18–29: “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. 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 hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. 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” (NIV).

### **I. This is the fourth letter to the Lord to the churches of Revelation.**

Thyatira was the least important city of the seven. If you were traveling along the road from Pergamum toward Sardis you would encounter this town of Thyatira on the way. It is in a valley. It is just south of a river. It is a journey of about forty miles from the city we looked at last week.

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Someone has said that this letter is the longest and the most difficult of the seven letters to look at, and it is written to the least important and the least remarkable of the cities. Which is a way of saying that God maybe has a lot to say to unimportant people sometimes.

It is a relatively unimportant town. We know it to have been a military town for its position was to be a military garrison outpost city to defend against invaders from the east who would want to push west on to Pergamum. Pergamum was the citadel city. When it was founded, the whole function of the town of Thyatira was to delay invaders for about 24 hours or so, so Pergamum could have time to defend itself. It was kind of a city that no matter who held it, it had to be defended, and whoever took it, it had to rebuild it again because it was an important city. It lay in the path of invasion. It would sort of like you'd be fighting by means of conventional warfare and someone was coming from the north and driving toward Los Angeles. In between San Francisco and Los Angeles, as you're coming from the inland route, is the city of Bakersfield. If we were living in ancient days, Bakersfield would be a very important military outpost city I would think. You would need to conquer it to move on to Los Angeles. It's not nearly as important as San Francisco or Los Angeles but it's there. The factor of its being a military city is somewhat important in the Lord's description of that city. In fact in the coinage of the city, their god is pictured as going forth to war with a double bladed battle-ax over his shoulder ready to defend.

In Romans times peace had pretty much settled in on this valley city of Thyatira. It had become a commercial trading center. It was just beginning to be a successful city commercially at the time of the writing of Revelation. Of all the cities of Asia, this city archaeologically gives the most evidence of having trade guilds, what we would perhaps call today trade unions. At Thyatira there were trade unions of wool workers, linen workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather

workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers, and bronze smiths. We know from Acts 16 that the lady named Lydia living at the city of Philippi was a dealer in purple from the city of Thyatira.

This factor of this town being an important guild center perhaps provides the backdrop for the problem that dominates the letter. Correction is being given to the teaching of Jezebel. It was the practice of these trade union guilds to have their meetings in association with dedicating the meeting to a god. With the god of this little town of Thyatira, it would be expected that when the trade guild members met—most likely in a temple—that the meeting would begin with a sacrifice to the god. Then, following the sacrifice, meat would be eaten by the worshipers. Often, as was the case with heathen or pagan types of rituals, at the end of the feast drunken revelry and the practice of immorality followed.

An example to an invitation to one of these trade union guild meetings might go something like this—you would receive an invitation that said, “I invite you to dine with me at the table of our lord.” A Christian 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 the sacrifices to the gods, the eating of meat in the temple, and, often, the practice of immorality in association with that worship. That appears to be the problem.

**II. So Christ brings this letter to the church and He first of all introduces himself by way of His character as He does in all of the letters.**

He identifies himself first of all as the Son of God. As familiar as this term is to our lips it is not a familiar term in Revelation. In fact it’s only used one time in the Book of Revelation and here it is in this letter. Strikingly it’s used because the Lord wants to remind this church of His authority as He speaks. He is the one who has the right to command the church because He is the

Son of God who has the right to order our lives. He is in effect telling this church, I am the one who gives orders. There are some in the church who are disobeying clear orders, which I am giving. There are all kinds of ways to disobey orders of the Lord, to substitute our own reasoning of the way things ought to be done as we'll see in this letter. The Lord says "I am the Son of God and I issue the orders and it's your responsibility to obey."

In verse 18, the Lord describes himself as having flaming eyes. He is the one who, with flashing insight, sees past the façade and the arguments that are made by those who would disobey Him. The Lord is looking with penetrating gaze at His church and His feet are burnished bronze. At Thyatira there were bronze makers. The word in the Greek that's used here is used only twice in the New Testament, both times in the letters of the seven churches, meaning a kind of metal. Burnished means it's highly polished and radiant. The Lord has that on His feet. It's symbolic. It's a way of saying that when soldiers go off to war they don't wear flip-flops or go barefoot or wear sandals. They wear boots because they're going to be treading on rocks in tough places. When the Lord marches in judgment, His feet are protected. Whatever He steps on cracks under His step. The imagery that's being used here is one of authority in contrast to the sinful, luxurious kind of condition that some in this church tolerate.

**III. Once the Lord has attention of the church, He then gives it a commendation in verse 19.**

The striking thing about this commendation is that it is the longest word of commendation or approval that's given to any of the churches. There are two churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, that are given no word of condemnation but only commendation. But this word of commendation or approval is even longer than the approval given to the churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna for whom the Lord had nothing critical to say.

Sometimes we look at things in black and white and forget in the midst of our failures the Lord may also see some very redeeming qualities that are present in our life. He takes note of the redeeming qualities before He gets around to letting us be aware of what He wants corrected. What is there to commend in this church? What, therefore, does the Lord commend when He sees the same thing in our lives? He commends their love. I would like to link the words—love and service—together with words—faith and perseverance. For love is the inner thing and the outer thing is service. Love expresses itself in service. The word here is ministry. It's serving the saints. It's serving the Lord. Here is a body of people that have this wonderful characteristic of not only having love but they express it. Sometimes there are people who express ministry but don't have love. Then there are other times where a person is terribly infatuated with the Lord and with God's people but won't do a single thing. Love doesn't issue in service. Here's a body of people that has it together. Love issues in service and faith issues in patient endurance. That is their strong faith in the Lord has kept them true in the midst of this problem regarding whether they going to be able to earn a livelihood. Their faith has made them endure.

We often equate faith with deliverance. If you have enough faith you'll get delivered. Faith is a very important part of deliverance, but it's striking to see that the majority of times the word "faith" is associated with another word in the New Testament, it's not associated with the word deliverance. It's associated with the word "endurance." Faith gives you the staying power to hang in there when things are rough. It's a terrible thing to have to hang in there without faith. What good is faith unless it can remain steadfast? In Revelation 2:19, the Lord then says that here is a body that is making progress—"Your latter works exceed your first works"—in contrast to Ephesus where love had grown cold. This church is maturing, is more alive in Christ than the

day on which they were started. What a tremendous commendation to give a person! I'd like to have the Lord commend me for that.

What would the Lord commend me for if He were commending? What a tremendous goal to be commended for these things. Yet the Lord as He commends this church sees also its flaws.

**IV. As the Lord of the church He brings a word of condemnation to it: verse 10.**

The condemnation is very simple. There are a number of verses, which explain the condemnation. But the condemnation itself is "I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel" (Revelation 2:20). I doubt that's her real name. Jezebel is one of the most infamous persons in the Old Testament. She was the daughter of the Phoenician king of Tyre who was married by political alliance to King Ahab of Israel. She brought with her from the north her worship of Baal and integrated it into the Israelites' religious practices and turned Ahab's heart aside so that he did worse than all the kings who were before him. Ahab tried to keep one foot in the worship of the Lord and the other foot in worship to Baal and it didn't work. The Lord says as He looks at this particular person in the church who's evidently well respected and is called prophetess. She is evidently part of the group, which in other letters have been identified as the Nicolaitans or the Balaamites. They all believe the same thing. They believe in compromise with the world. What evidently, this woman Jezebel is saying to this church is, "We've got to earn a living don't we? If we have to go to the pagan feasts at the temples, then go. What harm is there if the body is engaged in sin. The spirit cannot sin. Therefore, serve God and engage in the heathen practices as much as you like." In fact there's a word that the Lord uses in verse 24 that there are some in Thyatira who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan. This probably refers to one of the distinctive doctrines which this group said, "If you really want to know what it's like on the inside, let's get the super special teaching that's not in the Bible and

no one else has and we'll lead you into the real deep mystery of God." We know from the second century there was a group in the church that said sin all you want because the trick is to soil your body in sin but keep your spirit pure while you're in the midst of the worse kind of debauchery. That's the deep things of Satan. They were evidently calling it the deep things of God. Jesus is turning it around and saying the deep things of Satan.

It's not just good enough to look at the first-century setting. We have to realize that this is a continual war with the people of God. It's a continual war with us. How far should the Christian accept and adopt contemporary standards and conduct in practices? The human body: Is it mine to do with what I please or is it the Lord's to do with as He orders? We face the assault in regard to our mind, especially in a school setting where the Christian view comes across as terribly narrow-minded and bigoted. The view that Christians believe that Jesus is the only way to God, isn't that rather narrow-minded? Somehow the Lord, in the correction of this woman Jezebel, is coming across as a rather stiff, narrow-minded person. He's not tolerant. So often believers who really take a stand for righteousness are seen in the eyes of others as being intolerant people. Yet the Lord here is calling for intolerance in His people in respect to sin.

I grew up in a particular setting in which attendance at movies was the number one sin. At least it was the one most frequently preached against, I think. It was taught, for example, that if the Lord came and you were in the movie theater you'd be on the ground! I remember the fright at the first movie I ever attended, the absolute terror that came to me all during the rather innocent film. But I was just sure that the Lord would take that precise moment to come again. He would do it to me! That is a terrible view of God. Over the years we've come to realize there's such a thing as moderation in TV watching and news magazine reading and book reading and all these kinds of things that are thrown into a heap and we need consistency. It strikes me now how it seems in

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Christian circles that people are going to the other end of the extreme. Where once we said, “No, not at all,” Now everything is permissive. There’s a certain sense in which we need to say, too much is too much.

An article I was reading said when the ratings on movies first came out over 50 percent of the movies had G ratings. But once the ratings began to be attached, G ratings began to go down. Now they only have about 12 percent of the market, and they’re Walt Disney films. And only kids will go to Walt Disney films. If you want to attract teenagers you’ve at least got to have PG which means you’ve got to have a little bit of profanity, sex, and murder. I think in regard to that we’ve got to re-examine our attitude and our involvement in some things, which clearly would be uncomfortable for Jesus himself to be present at. If Jesus would be uncomfortable there, then ought we also to be as well? It seems to me this is the kind of issue that the Lord was dealing with in His letter to the church at Thyatira—tolerating Jezebel. He views it abhorrently.

Christ brings correction to this group. He says first of all to Thyatira about Jezebel, “I gave her time to repent” (Revelation 2:21). How good of the Lord. Even about a person involved in encouraging people to immorality as she was doing, He said “I gave her time to repent but she refuses.” It’s ongoing persistent action that she refuses to give up her teaching of accommodation and the practice of sexual license. So in verse 22 the Lord says the judgment is going to come upon her: “I will throw her into a sick bed.” In contrast to the feasting bed and the immoral bed, which she has enjoyed, now, it is to be a sick bed. This could be very literally taken that the Lord is going to smite her with sickness, or it may mean that the fate of any such group that tries to have its way and still claim to be Christian is ultimately going to be death, that such a group cannot hang on to the title of being Christians and still have a vitality of faith. Death must eventually come. Those who commit adultery with her, the Lord says, unless they repent of her

doings He will throw into great tribulation (Revelation 2:22). The adulterers here are probably those who are vacillating back and forth between loyalty to Christ and loyalty to this woman's teaching. They're not repenting of her wrong. And the Lord says they're going to go through some rather great trouble. In verse 23, the Lord says, "I will strike her children dead." That's probably a symbolic way of saying the whole group is going to die of its own weight because a person cannot practice that kind of license and long remain in the faith.

It's striking that this woman's followers are called "children." Because it is indicating that among those who follow such teaching there is a total lack of maturity. They are not adults. But they are people who simply follow and they have never grown up in Christ. They follow a leader and not the word or the counsel of Christ.

To the church the Lord gives a word of correction. He says their only admonition is to be intolerant of Jezebel and her teaching. Otherwise, in verse 24, the Lord says, "I lay upon you no other burden. Words reminiscent of Acts 15 when the Early Church was told it should abstain from fornication and from things offered to idols. Upon them was given no other burden. And they are told to hold fast what they have until Christ comes. Just a little bit of correction. "Too tolerant" is the Lord's word to this church.

**V. Christ then gives a challenge to the church.**

His challenge is twofold as it is in all the letters. The challenge first to conquer and secondly a challenge to hear. This time the order is reversed. Always before in the first three letters it's been the challenge to hear and then the challenge to conquer. Now for the first time, and through the rest of the letters, the order is reversed.

The challenge to conquer is given to those who finish, who do not drop out. "He who conquers and who keeps My word to the end, I will give him power over the nations. He shall rule them

with a rod of iron,” (Revelation 2:25-26). The first promise that Christ makes is power over the nations. I think this is especially striking for Thyatira because it was a little power city. Thyatira had always been ruled by somebody else. It was a garrison town. It was like saying to the believers of Bakersfield, “I will make you the capital of the United States.” Bakersfield? It seems incongruous that Bakersfield would be the capital.

It must have struck these Christians as extremely odd and unique that the Lord would say “You, little Thyatira, ruled over by invaders coming through all the time, you I’m going to give power over the nations. They’ll break you no more. Instead you’ll break them. You’ll rule.” The word “rule” here is literally the word “shepherd.” You will shepherd the nations. This prerogative of shepherd ruling is one that is given to Christ, which Christ extends to us when He says we’ll rule and reign with Him (Revelation 20:6).

You’ll rule with a rod of iron. The rod of iron is probably what the shepherd used, an open club which was tipped or capped with iron and which was used to ward off the attacks of marauding beasts. To this group of people, who were being attacked by the world, the Lord points in verse 27 to His future, one in which with your rod of iron you will strike earthen pots and they will be broken to pieces. You will rule with a rod of iron when earthen pots are broken in pieces.

That’s an unusual phrase. You have to get a little bit of history to understand what the Lord is meaning by this. The custom of breaking earthen pots as a sign of ruling was a custom of Egyptian and Mesopotamian kings. When a king was inaugurated with their coronation there were earthen pots set down in front of them. On the earthen pots were written the names of their enemies and of all the other nations they wanted to conquer. Then the king would take a rod of iron and smash the pots, indicative of his desire to rule over his enemies. This is language which

was used in Psalm 2 to describe the reigning rule of Christ by His authority over the nations.

He's going to give this to us.

It seems incongruous that Christians should have a club. Do you feel a little bit uncomfortable with this? The Lord has come to bring life and joy and peace. What's this business of Christians with a club? And a rod of iron?

There is a satisfaction that will come to the Lord's people when no longer is there any force that is evil that can rule over them. They have power. And, in verses 26–28, Jesus says, "You'll share that power with Me...I'll give you the morning star." We could go a long time on what the "morning star" means, but some think the morning star is a reference to Satan, Isaiah 14:12.

Others think the morning star is immortality, Daniel 12:3. There are others, among whom I am, who feel that the Morning Star is Jesus, 2 Peter 1:19 and Revelation 22:16, "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star" (NIV).

What is the meaning of this term "bright morning star"? It struck me very simply that planetarily the ancients regarded Venus as the morning star. It stayed up in the heavens so long it could be seen at the breaking of the day. All the other stars had disappeared but the morning star was still out. This is such a beautiful figure of speech in reference to Christ because, when the night of the world is gone and the morning has come, all the other stars have faded from view and only He is left to gaze at. All the stars of human personality. All the stars of great ideas and wise men. All that fades in comparison to the glory of Christ who continues to shine in the day. Jesus says "I'll give you Myself in the morning." But all the other stars have burned out. He is the only star still shining. The Lord says to us then in Revelation 2:29, "He who has an ear to hear let him hear."

As the Lord closed His Sermon on the Mount with an admonition to hear His words and to act in accordance with them, so He tells us, He tells this church, to hear His call of condemnation. But

to hear his call of commendation as well. To put away tolerance of sin which would soil us with the dirty linen of the world and to wait for Him and His power, power with a rod and His presence—the Morning Star.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father, we call upon you this moment very conscious of the Spirit's presence among us knowing that again today You have had a word to speak to us. Lord, as we just in this moment of soberness in Your presence look at our lives we can visualize areas of our lives where we may have been engaged in those matters which Your presence was uncomfortable in. We have been tolerant toward things in our lives, which You Yourself would cry for us to be intolerant in. Something of Your nature, Your hatred of sin of that which really perverts our personality and drags us down to the level of earth, Lord strip that away from us that we might put off as Paul says the garments of the night and walk in the robes of the day. Thank You Lord for saying good things about us too. For knowing when we've really sought to please You and when we have progressed in love and growth. Thank You Lord for the Spirit's affirmation of our personality, the Spirit's witness to us that we are Your children. Thank You Lord for the correction that You bring. And thank You Lord Jesus for the challenge that You give, the knowledge that we are not earthbound people, that we have a home in heaven. Our pilgrimage here is short stay. We were meant for better things. We're people designed for higher life, for habitation with thee in the eternal palaces. We from our hearts do ache and long for that day when the kingdom in all of its final glory will come and when You the king shall appear. There shall be no more crying or pain or sickness or sorrow or darkness or death anymore. But You will give to us Yourself and Your power, which You will share with us unto the ages. This moment is hallowed by the reality of

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things yet to be, certain knowledge that we converse with You even now in the heavens. Thank You Lord for bringing us restoration unto Yourself. Amen.