

Revelation 2:18-29
 Church of Thyatira
 The Spirit of Jezebel

Open your Bible's to the second chapter of Revelation.

- We will be looking at the last church in chapter 2; the fourth church overall
 - It's the longest letter of the seven and so we will be breaking this down in to two teachings
 - And finish the letter next week
- I find that I've been challenged to exegete the all that God has said in His letters
 - So, with this being the longest, it's probably a good idea to not take on more than I can

Let's begin in the 18th verse: **18** "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

- This fourth letter is written to a church in the city of Thyatira
 - Which is now known as modern day Akhisar
 - Ironically, as this is the longest of the letters; Thyatira was a small city
- It sat about 40 miles SE of Pergamos
 - And wasn't a particularly important city – at least not to Rome or to the Emperor
 - It was considered expendable from a military point of view
 - And since it was on the main trade route, it was often conquered
- It's said that in religion didn't play a big part of life in the city
 - Meaning It wasn't a major center of Caesar worship or Greek deity
 - Though its local god was Tyrimnus – A god that rode a horse and armed with a battle-ax and a club.
 - Religiously speaking, they had a fairly well known female fortune teller by the name of Sambethe,

At the time of John's writing, probably the most outstanding feature in Thyatiran life was the institution of trade-guilds. . . .

- A trade guild would be similar to our modern day Labor Unions (not exact; but similar)
 - So they had guilds of bakers, potters, workers in brass, tanners, leather-cutters, workers in wool and flax, and so on;

- We see in the book of Acts, where we find the only other mention of Thyatira outside the book of Revelation
 - We see there in Acts 16 a lady by the name of Lydia
 - Who is described as “a seller of purple”
 - She was likely part of the wool and dyers guild

One important thing to note about these guilds – especially as we move into our study –

- Is that you couldn’t work if you didn’t belong to a guild representing your trade.
 - And the real challenge for the Christian was that each guild was dedicated to, and worshipped, a pagan god or goddess.
- And each year you were expected to attend a feast to the god or goddess of your guild.
 - Where at that feast, the food you were about to eat was first offered as a sacrifice.
 - It would be like a Christian being expected to attend a Muslim party
 - Where the meat served was first dedicated to Allah
 - These pagan gods or goddesses would also be honored with ceremonies and rituals that involved grossly immoral practices and sexual orgies

Of course this created a dilemma for the shopkeepers and craftsmen among the city's Christian community

- who risked a loss of income for refusing to join guilds or for not taking part in their rituals
 - It was a tremendous burden and struggle for the Christian
 - Who was faced feeding his family and surviving
- And faced with the question of how far.
 - How far could, or should, they go as a members of the trade guilds and still be ok with God?
- It was a real breeding ground for compromise in their faith
 - And created a searching for loop holes in the faith to accommodate both physical and spiritual needs
 - It’s a real picture of the Christian who has one foot in the world and one foot in Christ
 - And their lives were getting messed up

Back to verse 18, Jesus, like He does with all the letters, He introduces Himself to this church in a very specific way

And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,

- ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass’
 - Before Jesus pronounces His examination of this church
 - Jesus announces Himself in three intentional ways
 - As the Son of God
 - As He who has eyes like a flame of fire
 - And as He who has feet like fine brass
- Interestingly, in chapter 1 Jesus is described as “one like the Son of Man”
 - But here He reveals Himself as the Son of God
 - Which is connected to verse 27 where He quotes Psalm 2
 - “He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’ as I also have received from My Father”
 - This quote from Psalm 2 speaks of judgment and a sentencing
- So this title of Son of God, joined with the flame of fire and feet like fine brass
 - All speak of scrutiny of the church and His judgment against them
 - How interesting that this is how Jesus choses to introduce Himself to this church
- This church is in a very serious condition according to Jesus
 - And the examination of this church is filled with warning and admonition to turn to the Lord

What really strikes me here and what really makes me pause in my own Christian walk

- And really, what I think Jesus is petitioning for everyone of us to stop what we’re doing to listen and consider His words,
 - Is that with every church Jesus examines, and scrutinizes and requires repentance with
 - There is evidence of a spiritual life
 - But that even with that evidence, their faith was deficient
- I’ll show you what I mean. Look at verse 19
 - **19** “I know your works, love, service, faith,[b] and your patience; and *as* for your works, the last *are* more than the first. **20** Nevertheless” (stop!)

Do you notice the list here? That's a great list of spiritual characteristics.

- The church in Thyatira was a **hard working church!**
 - Their works, and their types of works, gave evidence of a strong spiritual life
- And they were motivated properly – **by love.**
 - The Lord says “I know your love” –
 - Here is that blessed word “agape”. I know, Jesus says, that you're motivated by sacrificial and God ordained love for me and for the church
- Their works, their love and **their service**
 - They had evidence of an effective ministry life
 - And **their faith** – in the Greek we see the definite article “the” before “faith”
 - And so it's not talking about the faith we have in the Lord
 - But about the sum total of what God's Word is
- And they **were patience.** They had an endurance
 - The word used here describes a spiritual endurance that would bear up under a heavy load
 - Think of the man who goes to the well and fills up a couple of buckets, puts them on a stick on his shoulders
 - And walks back home under a heavy load
- And look **at their growth!** "As for your works, the last are more than the first"
 - In their works for the Lord, they were growing
 - They were developing spiritually

This church is very interesting to me because of the strong commendation given to them.

- Jesus describes them as being hard working, loving, effective in ministry
 - Patiently holding to the faith and growing in their spiritual life
 - And then the first word of verse 20 “**Nevertheless**”
 - And here's that word again that we saw in the description of the first church in Ephesus –
 - Nevertheless: Alla
 - A very strong word of contrast.
- Jesus is saying to those in the church
 - I know all these great things about you. I see them. I'm familiar with them

- NEVERTHELESS!

And it is at this point I stop everything and pay very close attention!

- And I ask myself the question – Would Jesus say “nevertheless” to me?
 - Does my Christian life give Jesus reason to say “nevertheless” to me?
 - That is such a hard question to ask ourselves!
- And as I’m holding my life up to the mirror of God’s word
 - I am faced with a deep and jarring truth
 - And that is this: That **spiritual compromise can be among the spiritually strong.**
- I don’t mean to necessarily alarm anyone or to lay an unnecessary burden on the heart
 - Because I know what that type of statement does in the heart
 - of him who is simply just trying to love the Lord the best they know how

But, if we are being honest in our application of the text

- These types of difficult questions must be invited and even welcomed if we would grow in Christ
 - And many, even many in churches today, would benefit from this type of examination
 - This is what Paul did to the Corinthian church in 2 Cor. 13: 5 “Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?”
 - And of course we examine and test ourselves by the light and truth of God’s word
- In the context of our passage this morning, we know that the devil has many strategies to sap the Christian of their power in Christ
 - And one of his ploys is to get us as Christians involved in the pagan practices of the culture around us.
 - That’s what happened in the church in Thyatira
- And their issues can be summed up in one word: **Jezebel**
 - Some of the Christians in this church were compromising their faith with what some have called “Jezebelism” or “the spirit of Jezebel”
 - And it can be a very serious issue in the church if not dealt with
 - And it was a very serious issue in this church and they didn’t deal with it - so Jesus is

Look again at verse 19 “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as* for your works, the last *are* more than the first. **20** Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you **allow** that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.”

There are a number of things I want us to notice about this Jezebel named here.

- First, it’s likely this is not the real name of the woman in Thyatira that was leading people astray.
 - Yes, there was a woman in the church teaching and leading people astray
 - but this was not likely her real name
- More likely, it’s the name Jesus gives of her type of influence on the people
 - She had the spirit of Jezebel
 - Because she had similar character and conduct to the notorious Jezebel in the Old Testament

You can read about Jezebel in 1 Kings 16 and in 2 Kings 9, but in brief:

- Jezebel the daughter of the king of Tyre (king of Sidon); a man named Ethbaal
 - Ethbaal was priest of the cult of Baal; a cruel, sensuous and revolting false god whose worship involved sexual degradation and lewdness
 - Ethbaal was also priest of Astarte (aka. Ashtoroth), the Phoenician equivalent of the Greek Aphrodite and the Roman Venus
- The king of Israel at this time was Ahab
 - And in order to form an alliance with the Sidonians, Ahab married Ethbaal’s daughter –Jezebel
 - And once she was enthroned as queen, Jezebel introduced the worship of Astarte and Baal to Israel.
 - She persuaded Ahab to build a temple to Astarte in his capital, Samaria.
 - She supported eight-hundred fifty prophets of Baal and then systematically killed-off any true prophets of God she could get her hands on.
- Jezebel was well-known for what the Bible labeled harlotries and sorceries
 - So sinister and harmful to the Children of Israel was this marriage

- That in 2 Kings 9 the Lord said: **7** “You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel. **8** For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; and I will cut off from Ahab all the males in Israel, both bond and free. **9** So I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. **10** The dogs shall eat Jezebel on the plot *of ground* at Jezreel, and *there shall be none to bury her.*”
- When we talk about the spirit of Jezebel, there is nothing good about it.
 - Jezebel was probably the most evil woman in all the OT

Another thing I’d like us to notice about Jezebelism in the church is with the word “allow”

- **20** Nevertheless I have a few things against you, **because you allow that woman Jezebel,**
 - The Greek word is <eao> (ay-ah-oh)
 - And it means to allow; to permit
 - I like the ESV rendering of this word because it is very fitting
 - It’s says “because you tolerate that woman Jezebel”
 - Tolerate! - If ever there were a buzz word in our day, its tolerate.

Every day we are bombarded with the ideology of being tolerant.

- We are force fed in our media, in our schools, in our colleges, in our places of work
 - That we are to be tolerant and being so-called “intolerant” now days can get you fired, arrested and even have your sermon’s subpoenaed
 - As is the recent case with the 5 pastors in Houston
- We are to be tolerant with everyone’s choice, everyone’s belief system
 - But usually the tolerance is accepted at the expense of truth. Of God’s truth

And so let me ask you a question – As a Christian, **should we be tolerant?**

- I’m sure many are struggling with that question even when it’s asked. It’s a tough question

- Some may think that they are tolerant and that their tolerance is actually extending God's grace (we will deal with that in a moment).
 - They are more loving and gracious and progressive in their ways because they don't judge
- Others will answer that question by flat out saying **no**. Christians should not be tolerant, because tolerance equals compromise
 - And so refusing tolerance is refusing to compromise.
 - Yet still, others are unsure.
 - It depends what context, what is meant by tolerance.
- The issue is a tough issue – especially in our culture where sin is promoted and celebrated
 - And those that stand opposed to this sin are being labeled as unloving, intolerant, prejudiced, narrow-minded. Even bigoted
 - G.K. Chesterton: ““Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions.”
 - Aristotle said: “Tolerance is the last virtue of a dying society”

Here in the US, we have what's called a **plausibility structure** of tolerance

- Boiled down, a Plausibility Structure refers to the conditions in a society that make certain beliefs seem reasonable or unreasonable
 - It's the cultural structure that the overwhelming majority of people in that culture find plausible (credible, reasonable, believable);
 - And by contrast, opinions and stances outside that structure seem hopelessly *implausible* (unlikely, in-credible, unbelievable). (adapted from DA Carson)
 - To quote DA Carson: “If tolerance is part of the West's plausibility structure, then even to suggest that we should not tolerate something...is to sound bizarre, out of date, out of step with the contemporary world, mean, [and] even (and here's irony) evil”
 - Does any of this sound contemporary?
- The ideology of tolerance has so permeated our culture that tolerance is an assumed virtue for all men
 - It's so **accepted** and so widely held that it's becoming, and in many cases **already is**, unquestioned that we should be tolerant of all thing
 - And this “Plausibility Structure” then becomes the dictator of all our choices

- The societal and personal decisions that are made, the identities that are chosen and the lifestyles that are lived
 - Sand apparently in some cities, even the bathroom we are allowed to go into

And so when the question is asked – should Christian be tolerant, it is a very difficult subject to broach.

- So where do we start. Let's start with a very basic premise: We should not be more tolerant than Jesus.
 - Jesus defines our parameters for tolerance, does He not?
 - And really, in many ways, God is the most tolerant Being ever!
- Think about God's patience and forbearance
 - Especially in the light of the sin and idolatry and hatred of Him
 - God tolerates a world of evil
- And yet, He doesn't have to do this.
 - He has the ability to shut it down at any time He chooses
 - It seems the Lord puts up with us within the constraints of His perfect timing and patience
 - He withholds His wrath with the foolishness of man
 - A God this holy, that puts up with a world this unholy, is a God more tolerant than we can quantify
- This is the biblical doctrine of tolerance
 - And is not akin to the doctrine of "new tolerance"
 - What our world defines as tolerance today

2 Peter 3: 9 "The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

- This is the "why" He tolerates with longsuffering the sin of man – to give them opportunity for repentance
 - We see that here in our study in verse 21 in speaking about jezebel
 - "I gave her time to repent"
- But here in our text in Revelation, Jesus rebukes the church for being tolerant
 - And that's because God's longsuffering is not eternal
 - His LONG suffering is not ETERNAL suffering
 - It will come to an end

- Which is really what the entire book of Revelation is about. The end of God's longsuffering
- Both of these ideas, that God is longsuffering and that His longsuffering has an end
 - Should be employed in our walks
 - And notice, that God is longsuffering with the people – not necessarily the ideology
 - He has compassion on the people; not on their assassination of his truth
 - Henegraff used to say something like this: "Tolerance for the sake of relationships is a virtue; but tolerance at the expense of truth is a travesty"

We can love people and pray for people and share with people the person of Jesus

- so that they would come to repentance in the longsuffering of God's mercy
 - But, I believe, it's a sin if we are tolerant at the expense of God's truth as described for us in the Bible
 - We are to contend the gospel once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3)
 - We are to hold fast to that which is defined as good in the bible and reject what is not (1 Thes. 5)
 - We are charged to "2 Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables"

And Jesus here, as we make our way back to our text, Jesus' longsuffering is almost fulfilled. It's almost done.

- And, in His mercy, He shoots a warning shot - so to speak - by telling this church that He has things against them
 - Because they allow, they tolerate, the woman Jezebel

- ... “who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols”

So far this morning, what we’ve notice about Jezebelism – or the spirit of Jezebel

- Is first, that this woman, though it’s unlikely that her actual name was Jezebel
 - But she embodied the spirit of Jezebel
 - Meaning her character and conduct was similar to the notorious Jezebel of the OT
 - And Jesus is warning us that this ideology can happen within churches
- The next thing we noticed about the spirit of Jezebel
 - Is that it is one of worldly tolerance
 - This is a tolerance that goes beyond the biblical illustration of God’s tolerance – which I would say is defined as penitent longsuffering
 - This is in stark contrast to today’s definition of acceptance of all sorts of sin and debauchery
 - It goes beyond the admonition to love your neighbor
 - To the acceptance of your neighbors pagan ideology into your Christian walk

The next thing we notice here when seeking to understand the spirit of Jezebel...

- Notice here that SHE calls *herself* a prophetess.
 - God doesn’t call her a prophetess – she drums that title up herself
 - Have you ever noticed those that are trying to seduce and deceive God’s people
 - Those that seek to undermine God’s word with their heretical teaching and ungodly ways
 - They create for themselves titles of importance. Titles that usually proclaim themselves as speakers of God of some sort
 - I like this comment that I ran across on this passage:
 - “Perhaps the most telltale aspect of those who are not truly hearing from God is their incessant self-proclamation.
- This is often evidence of *pride* and an inability to produce the genuine gift of the Spirit which they claim.

- God's Word indicates a different pattern for those who would serve Him in humility:
 - "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips" (Pr. 27:2),
 - "17 But "he who glories, let him glory in the Lord."[c] 18 For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends." (2Cor. 10:17-18).

I got an email this week for the "Apostolic Fire Conference of 2014"

- Of course it was promoted as: "This is a must event of a lifetime!" Because we could encounter "the voice of God in the Holy Ghost Fire" – whatever that is
 - But most of the speakers were named "Prophet such and such" and "Apostle so and so"
 - We could even be blessed by Elder Betty and her musical talents
 - All these titles reminded me of this verse "who calls herself a prophetess"
 - Some people have to convince others of their so-called influence in God's church and sadly, people buy in because they are
 - But what we see here is both her *position of influence* and the *content* of her teaching were repugnant to God

Look for the last time this morning at verse 20 again: "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, **to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.** 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent."

- This self-proclaimed prophetess, whom the Lord Jesus calls "Jezebel"
 - This spirit of Jezebel that was being tolerated in this church
 - Was identified by two main things:
 - The seducing and teaching of sexual immorality
 - And the seducing and teaching of eating things offered to idols

I would venture to say that this woman would be very popular in today's Christianity.

- Very likeable; able to influence by going against the stereotypical norms of the church
 - With new ways of doing things and new, progressive ideology

- And it played well into the culture of the day where the Christians were struggling to hold fast to the doctrine of Jesus
 - With the trade guild issues and the sacrifices of food to idols and the sexual issues they were facing
- It became much easier to listen to a person who said they were God's mouthpiece
 - And then what came out of that mouth was cultural capitulation
 - Giving in to the societal norm was much easier and didn't cause the loss of income or job or reputation
- And we have much of this in the so-called church today
 - Where the culturally consented sexual immorality of the world is now becoming the culturally consented doctrine of the church
 - But what does Jesus say about this? He is against it!
 - He is against the teaching and labels it Jezebelian seduction

You cannot study this and not come away with the understanding that churches that teach sexual immorality are partakers in the spirit of Jezebel.

- Notice right off the bat that it this word isn't specific.
 - Jesus doesn't say those that teach homosexuality are Jezebelian
 - Those that teach same sex marriage are of the spirit of Jezebel
- No! This word is far broader reaching than just one aspect
 - This is a catch all phrase for all definitions of **sexual activity outside the confines of scripture**
 - This is all sexual immortality
 - This is sex outside of marriage; sex with anyone other than your spouse;
 - sex outside the biblically defined parameters of one woman and one man until death do you part
 - This is way of catching all sexual debauchery
- But what this woman was teaching is much of what is being taught in some circles today. That...
 - That the practice of adultery is in agreement with Christianity
 - That the practice of fornication is in agreement with Christianity
 - That the practice of homosexuality is in agreement with Christianity

- That the involvement with pornography is in agreement with Christianity
 - And behind it all is the spirit of man that says I don't refused to change to God's will;
 - so I will change the doctrine so that I can do what I want

That is the teaching and seducing the church with sexual immorality.

- And the other identifier here in verse
 - Is that of teaching God's people to eat things offered to idols.
- Now, we're running out of time this morning so I will likely go more in-depth with this next week
 - But let me say that this is more than participating in the worship rituals of other gods
 - It has to do with putting a stumbling block before God's people
 - If you're interested and want a sneak peak into next week
 - Read 1 Cor. 8 and 10

But what I want to leave you with is verse 21 this morning

- "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent" – literally – "she does not wish to repent"
 - This church was so heavily influenced by this woman
 - She was causing God's children to stumble and to commit sexual immorality
- Yet God was willing to wait for repentance.
 - That is such a lovely thought
 - That Jesus would give time for repentance
 - Seems this is a good pattern for us in dealing with others as well
- But notice too, that His patience in the process is not unlimited.
 - There is a time when God says "My Spirit will not strive with man forever" (Gen 6:3)
 - Which means God gives us time to repent from our sin
 - And we must take advantage of that time.

Today is the day of salvation....