



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Revelation 2.18-28

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I. Introduction to this Series and Study

This fourth week of our Lenten series we're reading a blog written to the church in Thyatira, who excelled in love, faith, service and perseverance, but tolerated false teaching. As can be the case, such heresy *seemed* justifiable in the context of everyday life in Thyatira. As a center of trade and commerce, Thyatira was home to a number of guilds (think "trade unions"). To succeed in business, then, you had to be a member.

In the 1990's, American Express ran an ad campaign declaring "Membership has it's privileges." And there were certainly privileges in Thyatira, too. But there were also demands. For now, let's just say that such demands were more than merely paying your dues. We could easily imagine someone thinking, "But, I've got to make money! How can I feed my family and pay my mortgage unless I..." What a profound question for us today!

II. Connecting with One Another

If you're married, can you remember your wedding day? Or better yet, when you got engaged? What comes to mind as you recall those events?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Revelation 2.18-19.

What comes to mind in the description of the Risen Jesus, the Son of God, in verse 18? How do you interpret the portrayal of Jesus' eyes and feet?

What comes to mind as you read the list of the Thyatiran's deeds in verse 19? Are there similar types of faithful witness taking place at Good Shepherd? If so, what are they?

b. Read Revelation 2.20-23.

The name "Jezebel" had a powerful connotation for this blog's original hearers. Before discussing the three possibilities of whom this was referring to in Thyatira, read 1st Kings 16.29-33 and 1st Kings 18. Ancient references to Jezebel "painting her face" may even imply that she was a prostitute.

Most likely, the "Jezebel" in Thyatira was not specifically named as such, but rather, this name was used to reference the sins of idolatry and sexual immorality. There are three main theories as to who this person was:

1. Some have theorized that this was none other than the bishop's wife, since, in Greek, the word for *woman* and *wife* is the same word (which would correspond to the original Jezebel, who was King Ahab's wife). Further, this "Jezebel" must have had significant power in the congregation, as the wife of the Thyatiran bishop would have.
2. Others have argued that "Jezebel" is a reference to a Thyatiran oracle who was a Jewish woman who engaged in sooth-saying, fortune-telling, and astrology.
3. Most likely, "Jezebel" is a powerful woman within the trade-guilds, which included during their meetings food sacrificed to idols, drunkenness, and fornication. If so, she was a part of such

unions and the church, and was teaching church members that such syncretism was acceptable for Christians. Some have gone so far to postulate that this "Jezebel" was Lydia, an early convert to Christianity who had returned to her hometown! (see Acts 16.13-15)

- c. In verse 20, we read that "Jezebel" calls herself a "prophet." We should be very clear here that there were female prophets and leaders in the early church. While at certain times and in certain places the Apostle Paul makes clear admonitions against women in leadership (see 1st Corinthians 14.34 and 1st Timothy 2.12), in other times and places we read of women who were in ministry (see Miriam in Exodus 15.20, Huldah in 2nd Kings 22, Anna in Luke 2.36, the four daughters of Philip the Evangelist in Acts 21.9, Phoebe in Romans 16.1, Junia in Romans 16.7). Though perhaps it goes without saying, we need to be clear: "Jezebel" was not criticized because she was a woman. She was criticized because of *who* she was, but rather because of *what* she was teaching the church!
- d. Notice that "Jezebel" is given time to repent (verse 21), though if she does not, her punishment will be "on a bed of suffering." This could refer either to a couch upon which one would sit during idolatrous feasts or upon a "sick-bed."

How do you understand verse 23, where the Risen Christ discusses striking down the children of "Jezebel"? Is that metaphorical children? A metaphorical striking down? Or literal!?

- e. In verse 23, the phrase "I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds", is most likely a reference to Jeremiah 17.10. Try reading Jeremiah 17.1-10. How does this passage relate to Revelation 2.18-28, if at all?
- f. Read Revelation 2.24-28.

The Risen Christ may be making an allusion to the "rest of you" who haven't learned the "deep secrets" of Gnosticism. William Barclay explains: "Gnostics declared that to be real Christians men must know far more than the simple truths of the gospel, that a special secret knowledge was needed, and they claimed to be able to supply it. They tried to make Christianity into an elaborate philosophy... They claimed to be able to provide men with the really *deep things of God*. It is as if the Risen Christ was saying: 'These men who claim that the gospel needs to be developed and filled out with their ideas and their speculative intellectualism are not really teaching you the deep things of God; they are in fact teaching you the 'deep things of Satan.' In the early Church there were certain men who said that the really wise and mature Christian must know life at its worst as well as its best, that he must deliberately experience the lowest as well as the highest."

Are there corollaries to this Gnostic idea in the Church or wider society today?

- g. Some scholars see a connection between the assertion "I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come" and James' statement in Acts 15.19-21. After studying Revelation 2, with its engagement of Jezebel, what do you think? Do you see a connection?
- h. The final phrases of Revelation 2 quote Psalm 2. How do you understand these verses?
- i. Throughout the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, God's people are depicted as His bride. How is the Thyatiran church being an unfaithful spouse?

IV. Pray

- a. Lift up those in our congregation who are concerned about our transition from the PC(USA), asking God to bring comfort, peace, and assurance of His presence and guidance during this time,
- b. Ask God to begin preparing the hearts of members of our community who will join us in worship on Easter Sunday, and for those who will lead us in worship, that God would receive all the glory!