

Jezebelian Compromise - Thyatira

Unlike the previous cities we've studied (Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum), which were all rather "upper-crust" and "white collar rich" within the Roman Empire, *Thyatira was more of a blue-collar town*. They were known for their huge outdoor market and factories and workshops. More specifically, they were *renowned for the beautiful purple fabric* they made in those factories and workshops, and sold in their outdoor market. It was the finest in the Roman Empire. *You want to talk about blue collar?* Getting the purple dye to make the fabric was hard work! It was very labor intensive, taking hours, even days, to get enough dye (which came from the hypobranchial glands of the murex snail). In fact, to get just one teaspoon of dye in powder form (because that's how it was sold and transported), *over 10K murex snails had to die!* Needless to say, a very labor intensive and time-consuming task. This is why our Lord praises the Christians of Thyatira. They were willing to take time away from their work to attend worship, *even though it cost them a lot of money to do so*.

But... as commendable as their dedication to be in worship was, there were still some problems... *big problems*, which is why our Lord specifically refers to Himself here as the One "*whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze*" (Revelation 2:18). With this description, He's letting them know that what He was about to tell them wasn't a mere matter of opinion. It was a matter of life and death... *eternal death*.

And what is it that troubled our Lord so? *Answer: Instead of leaving the sinful ways of the world behind, some Christians were bringing the world into the church*. I've used the analogy before. When a ship is in the ocean, that's good, but when the ocean starts getting into the ship... NOT GOOD! This was the problem with the Church at Thyatira. They were bringing the ocean into the ship.

To be sure, on the outside, things appeared great. As a matter of fact, the congregation was known throughout Asia for their good deeds, their love of God and neighbor, and their adherence to the faith of the apostles. And your Lord also praises them for all this too. "*You are now doing more than you did at first*" (Revelation 2:19).

How could this be? Well... the Christians of Thyatira didn't face all the same challenges those in Smyrna, Ephesus, and Pergamum faced. Those Christians, if you remember, were assaulted daily by the emperor cult, the extravagances of wealth, and the arrogance of those steeped in philosophy. As I said earlier, Thyatira was a small town of working people—*craftspeople and merchants—blue collar*. There were no temples to Rome or Caesar to contend with in Thyatira, only the usual shrines to Artemis and Apollo. High culture and

religious zeal didn't put Thyatira on the map. It was the purple fabric they made (and the water in their rivers that was chemically perfect for dyeing that fabric).

But do not be deceived! Although lacking in cultural amenities, Thyatira had its share of temptations. ***The devil didn't leave them alone because they were a small town.*** In fact, it was perhaps even harder to be a faithful Christian in Thyatira. Being small means each of you knows everyone else's business intimately, ***intensifying the pressure to conform***, which is where the craft guilds (unions) enter into the conversation. If you made and sold a product, such as the lovely purple cloth for which Thyatira was famous, you were expected to be a member of the guild. ***If you didn't join, your business would suffer. It's as simple as that.*** Nobody would buy cloth from someone who wasn't member of a local guild. Friends, neighbors... even family members wanted nothing to do with you. To survive economically, it was almost essential to join a guild.

But... as those Christians quickly discovered, joining a guild placed them in some "awkward" situations. You see, membership in a craft guild was more than simply showing up at the union meeting and discussing quality control, new technologies, and better marketing strategies. Part of the meeting also involved a meal in which everyone ate meat sacrificed to Apollo or Artemis. And several times a year, guild members participated in pagan festivals—festivals that often involved ritual sex with temple prostitutes. ***When you say yes to Christ, though, you also say no to such sinful and shameful things.*** But... joining the guild is the key to prosperity. Stay out, and your livelihood will die. Needless to say, they struggled with that decision. It would be so easy to compromise and join the craft guild. *"Those gods they worship aren't really gods,"* you might reason, *"so what difference does it make if I eat a little sacrificial meat? It's good for business! A man's gotta make a living, right?"*

That is what Jezebel was trying to tell them, that compromising person they had in their congregation. "Jezebel" wasn't this person's real name. We don't know this person's true identity... but the Christians of Thyatira did! *"We need to do what everyone else is doing! It's good for business! How can we survive if we don't?"*

Okay... so why "Jezebel"? We use that name as a kind of synonym for a ***homewrecker or a woman of loose morals, sexually-speaking***. Well... there's a reason your Lord specifically chooses this moniker. The original Jezebel was wicked King Ahab's wife. Ahab was a terrible, unfaithful king of Israel, and Jezebel, his queen, was the Baal-worshipping daughter of the king of Tyre and Sidon. Her goal in life was to ***destroy*** Israel's faith in Yahweh. Jezebel invited the prophets of Baal to eat at the king's table. Jezebel also slaughtered hundreds of Yahweh's prophets. Jezebel brought false charges against faithful Naboth so he would be killed and she could seize his vineyard as a gift for her husband.

Because of Jezebel's evil influence, all the members of Israel's royal family died violent deaths—her husband, Ahab; her sons; and all who might have a claim to Israel's throne. And when they were all dead, Jezebel then tried to seduce the new king of Israel, Jehu. ***This woman was all about power, and she knew how to play the game.*** With her painted eyes and her fancy hairdo, she appeared in a tower window of the palace, welcoming Jehu to her bed. ***He wasn't impressed.*** Instead, Jehu called to her servants, *"If you are on my side, throw her down."* They did. Her body was left unburied and was eaten by dogs. (See 2 Kings 9:30–37.)

Your Lord, with His fiery eyes and feet like burnished bronze, is warning the Christians of Thyatira that ***all the ugliness of Jezebel's story could become the story of their church if they continued to listen to this person/people in their congregation (and not God);*** if they began compromising, if they believed you can serve Jesus and the false gods of your neighbors as well, if they believed you can enjoy the forgiveness of sins while continuing to indulge in a promiscuous or self-serving lifestyle. The fiery-eyed One makes clear: **You can't.**

"But my behavior and my beliefs are a private matter! Besides, no one else will be affected by what I choose to do with my own life!" But Holy Scripture says: *"None of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone"* (Romans 14:7). All you do and say is observed and evaluated by others, and it all has an impact on their lives, ***for better and for worse.*** Ahab's entire family died because of the evil he allowed into his home through Jezebel. Jesus warns the Christians of Thyatira (and us today), *"I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. . . . I will strike her children dead"* (Revelation 2:22–23).

Jesus doesn't mean physical death here. He means ***spiritual death,*** and it's because the heart has become ***calloused by false doctrine and immoral behavior.*** This journey away from God (and into the bowels of hell) involves a growing darkness of mind and heart, infected with fear and guilt, which ultimately eat away at the soul. ***Before you come to hell, hell comes to you and starts to consume you.*** Worse, if you continue on this spiritual journey, others—friends and family who love and trust you—will ***imitate*** what you do and bring on themselves ***the same fate.*** Although we think our actions don't hurt anyone else or are done in secret, ***they never are.*** The one who has *"eyes like blazing fire"* always knows (Revelation 2:18). *"I am He who searches hearts and minds,"* says the Son of God who is coming in judgment. *"I will repay each of you according to your deeds"* (Revelation 2:23).

Wait... "Repay according to your deeds"? Isn't this works-righteousness? No! What does a Christian do in order to be saved? **Answer: Believe. That's it.** But... that belief/faith also produces good and God-pleasing fruit/works. This is

why St. James says, “*Faith without works is dead. It’s no faith at all.*” Up to this point, the fruits of faith the Christians of Thyatira had been producing were the ***good and God-pleasing deeds of faith, love, service, and perseverance.*** These deeds of love were given to them by the Holy Spirit, who strengthens faith through God’s Word and the Sacraments. Through these means of grace, God kept them steadfast in the one true faith. Our Lord urges them, “*Continue in this faith and dedication. Hold on to what you have until I come,*” (Revelation 2:23). The Lord will help. The suffering will last only a little while. ***Remember this when you feel the temptation to compromise.*** You have needs. Everyone does. But Jesus knows all about them and still cares for you. He promised you in the Sermon on the Mount: “*Seek first [God’s] kingdom and His righteousness and all these things [all that you need] will be given to you as well*” (Matthew 6:33).

Your Lord says to you tonight the same thing He said to the people of Thyatira. Good Christians: You have entrusted Jesus with your eternal soul, your ultimate destiny. You have believed that He died for you and lives again, forgiving all your sins and earning for you a place in heaven. ***If you trust Jesus for all this, can’t you trust Him to meet your daily needs?*** The apostle Paul has written: “*He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32). You do believe this, right?

I know there are times that it may look as if your needs will not be met without compromising your faith and values, **but that is Jezebel’s lie.** Look where listening to her got Ahab and his family! Jesus wants nothing but good for you, ***and as you remain in Him by faith, you will experience His goodness/peace in overflowing abundance.*** He says: “*To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the nations*” (Revelation 2:26). Why submit to the compromising authority of some Jezebel or any other influence that would rob you of a peaceful conscience and only enslave you? You have the promise of Jesus that you will reign with Him in heaven. Why “give in” for a few fleeting moments of what this world calls “comfort and peace” when you can spend eternity with Jesus, the bright morning star and Prince of Peace?

AMEN