

Blessed are Those: A Journey Through Revelation – Part 4
The Seven Churches: Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea
Rev. 2:18-3:22

Crosspoint – Margie Auman – Jan. 26th, 2025

Thyatira - Serving Yet Corrupted (2:18-29)

¹⁸ **“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. ¹⁹ I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

²⁰ Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. ²² 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. ²³ 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.

²⁴ 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, ²⁵ except to hold on to what you have until I come.’

²⁶ To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— ²⁷ that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father. ²⁸ I will also give that one the morning star. ²⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

- Thyatira, located 35 miles southeast of Pergamum, received the longest letter despite being the smallest city of the seven churches addressed by Jesus. Thyatira was commended by Christ, but this church has been misled, has compromised & became corrupt.
- To the church of Thyatira, Jesus described Himself as the Son of God. Jesus is God & is holy. Jesus can be justifiably angry with sin and be righteous in His judgment. The Son of God terminology is quite appropriate and stands as a superior contrast to the patron god of Thyatira, which was Apollo, son of Zeus.
- Jesus is described as having eyes of blazing fire. He sees through a person's deepest secrets and thoughts. We may think we are hiding our sins but rest assured Jesus' eyes of blazing fire see & know all. And as fire purifies gold and silver of debris, He will purify His true disciples of sin and impurities.
- Jesus' bronze feet are like a Roman soldier's well-protected feet. He's ready to go to battle anywhere, any time. In addition, they reflect a biblical pattern where bronze is often an illustration of judgment. They also point to strength, a noticeable quality in a city where the metal worker's guild wielded enormous power.

- The church was commendable, yet they were corrupt. We see Jesus' indictment of the church in verses 20 to 23. They were misled and tolerated a woman who called herself a prophet. Like the false teachers in Pergamum, this woman referred to as Jezebel led the servants of the church in Thyatira to practice sexual immorality and to eat food offered to idols, thus violating the conscience of many. Is Jezebel her real name? Undoubtedly it is not but is symbolically saying that this disreputable prophetess was as wicked & dangerous an influence in Thyatira as Jezebel had been in Israel.
- In the Old Testament, Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, one of the wicked kings in Israel. She too was wicked. A murderous, deceitful woman, Jezebel had hundreds of prophets of the pagan gods Baal and Asherah eating at her table.
- We don't know if her teaching was sanctioned by the leaders of the church but we do know it was tolerated.
- Jesus patiently waited for this Jezebel like person to repent but she was unwilling. Therefore, Jesus will cast her on a bed of suffering. Jesus will not wait forever for our repentance. We would all do well to remember that there is a time limit to repent. Jezebel's bed of sinful sex & immorality will be replaced with a bed of severe sickness.
- Notice the severity of this judgment and what the judgment is for. It's for false teaching that led believers into sexual immorality & eating foods sacrificed to idols. These followers of Jezebel may represent Christians who, thought that since they were in Christ, they were free from the law & could do whatever they wanted. Whatever feels right to you, whatever's in your heart is OK.
- The error with this corrupt thinking is truth is determined subjectively by feelings or by the trends in culture instead of objectively by the timeless and eternal truth of Scripture.
- Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:3, "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." Paul warns us we cannot change Scripture regardless of what we feel or regardless of our culture.
- Is this punishment severe? Yes, but God is a loving God who is holy & whose righteous justice demands that sin be punished. Justice was satisfied by Jesus who, because of love, willingly bore God's wrath and died on the cross to pay for our sins. The sinner who does not repent, believe in & obey Jesus is left in a futile effort to pay for his own sins facing God's wrath without Jesus's covering.
- Jesus calls us to repent when we compromise with sin so that we don't become corrupt. To be convicted of sin is a gracious gift from God.
- Jesus, the coming King, promises to the repentant victorious that they will reign with Him over the nations when He returns. The victorious hold on to salvation in Jesus and the truths of Scripture. By God's grace, they will abide in Jesus until He returns or takes them home.
- Note the victorious are not sinless. But when they sin, the Spirit gives them the wisdom to recognize their sin and the conviction to repent. God provides them

power to repent, persevere, & walk in faith in Jesus. The victorious will have their reward when Jesus returns to reign as King. They will share with Jesus His authority to rule, symbolized by the iron scepter.

- Jesus, who is the morning star who defeated Satan on the cross, has given Himself to the victorious.
- Compromising God's truth corrupts the church & our personal lives. In what ways are you following along with the teachings of our corrupt culture? Are you honest in your dealings at work? Are you watching movies or reading books that do not honor God? Are you in a sexual relationship that is outside of the boundaries that God has laid out for us in Scripture? What are you hiding, forgetting that God sees all? Are you influencing the world? Or is the world influencing you?
- **Repentance is God's provided remedy to corruption.**

Sardis - Reputable But Dead (3:1-6)

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ²Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. ³Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

⁴Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. ⁵The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. ⁶Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

- Sardis was a commercially prosperous and militarily strategic city. It was an elevated acropolis. Being on high ground, it was almost impregnable, overrun only twice despite frequent attacks.
- It was located 35 miles SE of Thyatira & a little over 50 miles inland of Ephesus & Smyrna. It was a very pagan city with an unfinished temple for the goddess Artemis. The city's wealth came from purifying gold and making currency. It also had an extensive wool industry. Perhaps this was widely used for white garments which was mentioned twice in this passage.
- Jesus called Himself the one who holds the seven spirits of God. Jesus sent the fullness of the Holy Spirit when He ascended to heaven. He holds the seven stars or the angels over the churches. So, Jesus is the one who holds the authority over Sardis and the other churches that were mentioned. This church was in desperate need of the reviving power of the Spirit of Christ.

- The church in Sardis had the reputation of being alive but they were dead. The church may have been vibrant in the past but believers in Sardis were living off that past reputation of being a living church. Their present was in stark contrast to their past.
- They had lost their vitality and vibrancy. They had forgotten what they had heard and received. They were no longer focused on Christ and what He was doing currently in their church but depending on their past reputation. They were actively serving, but only to maintain an outward appearance. It seems reputation was more important to them. They had lapsed into lifelessness & confidence in their activities caused complacency.
- They were trying to be Christians without following the Holy Spirit in their lives. So, they did empty religious works. They probably attended church, gave money & even helped people. They looked spiritually alive and in fact they were probably pretty good people. Pretty good moral people, but they were spiritually dead on the inside & just going through the motions.
- Jesus gives this church 5 commands. Wake up, Strengthen, Remember, Hold fast & repent. "Wake up!" or Be watchful was Jesus' strong and urgent command in verse 2. This is a life or death emergency. Decisive action is needed. Strengthen & revitalize what remains, or else it too will die. Remember and hold fast to the truth. Focus on Christ and His Word. Repent and live for Jesus. Jesus is telling them to realize their spiritual condition & do something about it.
- Spiritual vitality is not completely lost suddenly. Failure to focus withers away faith. Complacency slowly takes away spiritual vitality. But they can be saved if they repent earnestly & refocus on Christ. Jesus' judgment and punishment will come like a thief to those who don't wake up. Like those two surprise attacks that overran the city that I mentioned earlier, Jesus' judgment will come suddenly on the unrepentant.
- Jesus promised rewards to the victorious. The faithful will walk with Jesus. Their bright white garments will reflect the glory of God. And the names of the faithful will never be blotted out of the Book of Life. They will enjoy life in eternity with Jesus.
- Victorious generals in those days acknowledged before the emperor what each of his faithful soldiers did. Jesus will do the same for the victorious who repent. The vibrancy and vitality of a church singularly focused on Christ and sincerely motivated by truth will be recognized by God.
- We can be invested in the things of this life. But never at the expense of cultivating an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Church, this temporal world is fading away. But anyone in a saving relationship with Jesus will live forever. Be concerned about the eternal.
- Has work replaced worship in your life? Has reputation replaced repentance? Are you just watching what's going on when you come to church? Or are you whole heartedly worshipping Jesus? When we serve, are we seeking the fame of our Savior or the praise of people.

- Jesus gives His wake-up call to be his victorious people. He wants us to be like Him -- triumphant, not defeated; powerful, not weak; alive, not dead. Jesus awakens sinners to repent and live for Him.
- **We must remember that failure to focus on Christ and His Word leads to lifelessness.**

Philadelphia – Steadfast Despite Suffering (3:7-13)

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. ¹³ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

- This ancient city was situated on a major Roman road that led from Troas in the west, through Pergamum, Thyatira & Sardis & then to Philadelphia in the east which is now in modern-day Turkey.
- The letter starts by identifying the sender, Jesus, not just by name but by character. Jesus is described as the one who is holy and true and holds the key of David.
- This church and the church today should listen to Jesus because He is the one who is holy and true, perfect, set apart, righteous, the one true God who can be fully trusted, and He holds the key of David. He and only He unlocks the eternal kingdom promised to David in 2 Samuel 7. This is Jesus claiming to be the Messiah of the Old Testament. He unlocks all of Scripture. He is the one who says who can and cannot enter His eternal kingdom. He is in the position of power -- not a synagogue ruler, or church leader but Jesus.
- Jesus, knowing their deeds, knows this church is weary, worn out & exhausted from their struggle. He knows how hard it has been and how they are holding fast to His Word and His name. You see, their struggles have not resulted in their walking away from Jesus, nor have they resulted in disobedience on their part. In fact, their struggles are drawing them closer to Jesus.

- 1 Corinthians 1:8b-9 says, “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. “
- Jesus knew my sorrow. And he knows yours too. Will you rely on Him and continue to obey Him despite your struggles & weakening strength? Will you allow Him to be your strength?
- For the body of believers in Philadelphia, Jesus acknowledges their struggle, their faithfulness to Him & He encourages them to press on. Seasons of great struggle and opposition are exhausting. And when we have little strength, it can be difficult to hold fast to God's Word.
- Some respond to great struggle and suffering and decide God must not be true to His name, that He must not be good, loving or gracious. In their limited vision, they decide they know better than God. Some respond to great struggle with a deep independence and refusal to seek the help of another. And some respond to suffering and struggle by losing sight of what it means to hold fast to His Word.
- This church’s witness for Jesus is what the synagogue of Satan didn’t like. They were probably excommunicated from the synagogue which was the social center in the life of a Jew. This would have been devastating. And we too will probably be excluded from some social gatherings because of our faith in Christ & willingness to shine brightly for Him.
- Jesus, the holy and true One, will handle their detractors. They’ll be vindicated from their enemies in such a way that those who persecute them will know the truth. When you are running out of strength and you can't see the end in sight, what is it that helps you keep going? It's hope. It's a deeply-rooted confidence that in the end, Jesus wins. Jesus is saying, "Your perseverance ends with vindication and even your enemies will acknowledge that."
- He continues in verse 10, "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth." The inhabitants of the earth is a repeated phrase in Revelation indicating the people under sin who have not accepted the salvation of Jesus. In this promise, Jesus alludes to a future time of greater suffering where they’ll be spiritually protected but it will test those who don’t know Jesus.
- There are various interpretations of the “hour of trial. But here’s what we know for sure: Jesus protects and keeps the church when we endure troubles in the present and in the trials to come. The struggle isn't going away. But Jesus assures them of His help in their struggles.
- They may live in an earthly city with persecution but they’ll persevere because Jesus assures the victorious ones will experience the restoration of God's people dwelling with God, living under God's rule, in perfect relationship with Him in the new Jerusalem. They’ll be in relationship with the triune God & have assurance of eternal life in His presence.

- Jesus commends this church for holding fast to what is true, for holding fast to His Word and His name. They believe Jesus is who He claims to be and that drives their day-to-day actions and decisions. It drives their endurance & their willingness to suffer patiently.
- **Believers overcome trials & persecution by holding on to Jesus & His promises.** Jim Elliot once said, Lord, make my way prosperous, not that I achieve a high station, but that my life may be an exhibit to the value of knowing God. Is your life an exhibit to the value of knowing God?

Laodicea – Self-sufficient but spiritually impoverished (3:14-22)

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

21 To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

- Laodicea was located about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia & about 100 miles east of Ephesus. It was a leading commercial city & the banking, textile and medical center for the region. It was a wealthy and self-sufficient city. And no doubt, the members of the church probably included some of the leaders of these industries as this church was known for its wealth and independence.
- As the letter opens, Jesus identifies Himself, in verse 14. He says, "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." The words of the Amen. Jesus is the final word, the true word, the ultimate word. He is the faithful and true witness, the One who sees and who speaks out. He is the ruler over all creation.
- Do you grasp the fullness of what Jesus is saying? "You are influential, affluent, and self-sufficient; and I am the One who rules over you. I rule over all creation. You have power within scope and your words have influence within scope, but I am the One who speaks and guarantees the power of My word which is the final

word. Jesus is the true witness when in comparison they had lost their witness & influence in the world.

- In verse 15 and 16, we learn they are neither hot or cold. They're lukewarm & Jesus is about to spit or vomit them out of his mouth. This was a church without zeal or intensity. Jesus says they weren't hot or cold and He wishes that they were one or the other. I used to understand that to mean Jesus wants us to be hot, meaning be on fire for him. Or it would be better if we didn't even know him because if we were cold then we were indifferent to spiritual things. But because we're lukewarm, we know Christ, but we're not really doing anything for him that that makes him vomit.
- But that's not what he's saying. He's saying Hot is good and cold is good but lukewarm is not good. This makes sense when you realize that Laodicea didn't have their own source of water supply. So, they had to pipe in water through aqueducts from other cities. 6 miles to the north, is Hieropolis where there were mineral Hot Springs. And about 10 miles West was the city of Colossae. It was higher in elevation & when the snow melted, they had cold, refreshing water. By the time the water from these places reached Laodicea, it was lukewarm & not anything you'd want to drink.
- Hot is good because it's healing. Cold is good because it's refreshing. But lukewarm is useless. Jesus is saying be an agent of healing or be an agent of refreshing. But if you're lukewarm you make me sick because you've completely lost the mission and purpose for the church. We are supposed to be agents of healing or refreshing to the world. But are we neither because we're consumed with ourselves?
- They had a medical school that specialized in treating eye diseases, but they couldn't see their own desperate need. They had a history of self-reliance. In AD 60 they were impacted by a great earthquake but rejected help from the Roman empire to rebuild. They thought they had everything they needed on their own and that led to complacency in their relationship with Jesus.
- One theologian stated, "They are beggars because they have nothing with which to purchase their forgiveness or entry into the Kingdom of God. They are naked because they have no clothes to fit them to stand before God. They are blind because they have no idea either of their spiritual poverty or their spiritual danger."
- Church, to have all the resources in the world but not have Jesus is to be in poverty.
- Before we judge this church, let me ask you, do you pray for hardship & suffering or for comfort & ease. I frequently pray for God to make life easier. But in this letter, we find a clear warning to the comfortable to not allow that comfort to lull us into spiritual complacency. After all, what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit his or her soul?
- While Jesus is telling the Laodiceans to "Be careful" & strongly rebuking them, we also see Jesus' tender heart & compassionate plea in verse 18. "I counsel for

you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and a salve to put on your eyes so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent."

- Jesus makes several promises to those who repent. In verse 20, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." If you have ever wondered if Jesus can forgive you because of whatever sins you've committed, this verse teaches us that Jesus is waiting with open arms for us to turn to Him in repentance. He will not turn you away.
- "To the victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as when I was victorious, I sat with the Father on His throne." This is a promise to reign with Christ in the future kingdom. And so we must remember, Jesus invites us to repent of self-reliance & rely on Him.
- Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." The prayer is not, "Give me enough bread for my entire life so I never know what it feels like to be hungry & I don't have to depend on you every day." The prayer is, "Give us this day our daily bread."
- **Jesus invites us to repent of self-reliance & rely on Him.**

Questions for Growth Groups

1. What sins are you trying to hide from Jesus?
2. In what ways are you following along with the teachings of our corrupt culture?
3. How are you standing for the truth of Jesus in your workplace?
4. Are you influencing the world? Or is the world influencing you? And how?
5. How are you more concerned with your reputation you're your relationship with Jesus?
6. How can you rely on Jesus and continue to obey Him despite your struggles & weakening strength?
7. What decisions have you made that reflect that you do not believe obedience to Jesus is worth it?
8. What interferes with your willingness to hold fast to Jesus and His Word?
9. Where are you struggling to depend on the Lord? Relying only on yourself....