

“The Cure for Compromise” – Revelation Part 6
Revelation 2:18-29 (Letter to Thyatira)

Jesus wrote the longest letter in Revelation to its smallest church, an indicator that the issue we will be studying today is a crucial one. Thyatira was located 40 miles east of Pergamum. If Pergamum was the Washington, D.C. of ancient Asia, Thyatira was their Chicago – a blue-collar workers’ town. Her economy depended heavily on merchants and craftspeople. Purple dye, the most coveted in the ancient world, was made from the roots of the madder plant, abundant in the region.

And central to her economy were the trade unions that dominated her life. Every industry had one. Each trade union had its own patron god or goddess. Each week the union would meet together to worship its deity. An animal would be sacrificed on the altar of that god, then eaten in a feast. Drunken orgies would often follow. If you did not attend the meetings of your trade union, you could not work. You could not support yourself or your family. You might starve to death.

Moral compromise was the greatest temptation in Thyatira. And it’s just as grave a threat in our society today. [P] Our options are two ... Compromise or Courage.

The Call to Compromise

Look at v. 20 – *“I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching, she misleads my servants ...”* “Jezebel” is the voice of compromise, then and today.

The original woman by this name was the wife of King Ahab. She sponsored 850 false prophets. She was responsible for bringing Baal worship into the nation and corrupting its soul (1 Kg. 16). By referring to the false teacher of Thyatira as “Jezebel,” the implication was clear: this person is guilty of turning the people away from the one true God – even more specifically, away from the “*Son of God*” who now addresses them (v. 18).

This Jezebel has the same message: Go along to get along. “You have a responsibility to support your family. So, compromise for the sake of those you care about. These false gods are harmless. What difference does it make if you participate in the vain sacrifices

and base pleasures of the culture? You're supposed to be in the world, not withdrawn from it. Compromise is the way the real-world works. Why not go to church on Sunday and the Apollo union meeting on Monday? Why not go to your prayer group, then to your guild party for that patron god what's-his-name? Why not have your church life and your "real world" life? It all seems to be working well enough ..."

Jezebel, like every false prophet, like the deceiver himself, will twist the Word of God: "After all, didn't you hear, Jesus commends *your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance ...*" (v. 19). Noble actions, to the love and faith which prompt them, to the ministry and dedication which makes them effective, so that we are doing more than we've ever done!"

"We're reaching out to the community. We are doing ministry around the world. Why be more committed to Jesus than we already are? So long as we're in Thyatira, we have to get along with the people who live in Thyatira. That's just the way it is."

Such is the message of Jezebel. [P] Now hear the message of Jesus.

The Call to Courage

Jesus proclaims at the start, "*These are the words of the Son of God*"(v. 18). This is the only time the title "Son of God" is used in Revelation. Why is it especially significant? Asia hailed emperors as deities and saviors. An emperor was also considered a son of a god – the previous emperor. And in Thyatira, the patron deity was Apollo – the son of Zeus, the chief of the gods. Jesus' first words to them are to make it abundantly clear – I am the Son; I am your God. There is none other.

His "*eyes are like blazing fire*" – all-seeing, all-knowing. His "*feet are like burnished bronze.*" Metalworking was a prominent industry in Thyatira, so its people would be familiar with the image of glowing bronze and what it symbolizes here: glory & holiness.

As the Holy One, Jesus will bring to account all who advocate such compromise. Vs 22-23 are especially sobering: "*I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of their ways. I will strike her children dead.*" Very strong words. What

is this referring to? This is a warning to those who have embraced the false teaching and immoral living advanced by the Jezebel in their midst. It is a call to repentance.

So, “*her children*” most likely refers to her followers. As for those committing “*adultery*” with her – this could be referring to spiritual unfaithfulness to God in their participation in the idolatry of the culture, or to the sexual immorality that was often associated with it, or likely a combination of both. In any case, this is a word of impending judgment to those who refuse to respond to Christ’s call to return.

The One whose eyes are like blazing fire continues (23): “*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*” – as gently as he can or as harshly as he must. He will do whatever it takes to remove the cancer of compromise from the soul of his Church, the body of Christ. [P]

Then the Son of God turns his attention to those “*who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets*” (24) What are Satan’s so-called secrets? Language such as “secrets” or “mysteries” often referred to the discovery of profound truths associated with divine wisdom. God’s special revelation to us – the Scriptures, and ultimately the Son of God himself – is the source of wisdom disclosing divine mysteries and deep secrets. So, when one advocates another source of revelation to such profound truth, it is in fact the secrets of Satan – it is false revelation that only leads astray.

And so the One who is the Truth affirms those who have refused to fall for the lies – who have rejected the easy way of going along to get along – who have chosen courage over compromise. He reassures those enduring these days of danger, “*I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come.*” Jesus says, “I am coming. Until then, continue to endure! And do so by *holding on* to what you have – hold on to your sincere faith in me, your sacrificial love for each other, your living hope in the glory to come. Be of good courage, for I am coming!”

Then the Coming One makes a promise to those who stand with courage: “*To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations*” (26). As children of the King, as co-heirs with Christ, we shall rule with him. To be clear, Christ will always have the supremacy. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Creator, Redeemer,

Sustainer and Consummator. He has dominion over all – now and forever. He is our Lord. We live in joyful surrender to him. But not as slaves. We are his Bride. We are his royal priesthood declaring his praises.

Revelation 20:6 – *“Blessed and holy are those who share in the resurrection ... they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him.”* And this reigning reality is not only promised in this book.

Romans 8:17 – *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*

Ephesians 2:4-6 – *“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”*

2 Timothy 2:12 – *“If we endure, we will also reign with him!”*

We were enemies of God. But his love was too great to leave us as such. Because of Christ, we have been *reconciled* to the Father. Because of Christ, we are *raised* to new life. And because of Christ, we will one day *reign* with him.

Which leads to the best part of the promise: *“I will also give that one the morning star.”* What is the significance of the “morning star?” Ancients revered the planet Venus as the “morning star” and sometimes applied the image to glorious rulers. Romans associated Venus with triumph and reign, hence they praised Venus for their conquests. But again, Jesus debunks all this. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus calls himself “the bright Morning Star.”

Again, the message to them would have been clear: “The emperor is not the Son of God. And one of the planets that I created with a word is not worthy of your praise. Victory is not found in Venus. Victory is found in Me. I AM the promised Morning Star!” [P]

So when Jesus says, “I will give you the morning star,” he offers us the greatest gift of all – Himself! We are given the most intimate, joyful, life-transforming relationship with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. [P] *He repays every sacrifice our courage requires.* [P]

But to see life this way – where courage is better than compromise – it requires a change in our way of understanding our world. If Thyatira is our home/destination/end, then we will

embrace the ways of Thyatira. If America is our home, our purpose, our definition of success and significance, then we will do whatever it takes to be prosperous and happy here. But what if it's not? What if we are going about life in the wrong way?

According to the word of God, life on earth is the journey, not the destination. As with the children of Israel, we are in the wilderness, traveling to the Promised Land. If Christ is your Savior, you have been freed from bondage. You are on your way to that Land which none of us has yet seen. You are traveling in the wilderness now. It is the means, not the end; the road, not the reward. [P] Seeing life that way changes everything.

We can settle down in the desert and make the best of things here, but we will miss all that is waiting for us. We can follow the trajectory of our culture, or follow the pillar of cloud and fire which is leading us home. He alone knows the way, for He is the Way. He alone can give us manna for the journey. He alone can give us protection and purpose in the wilderness, until we follow him to the eternal joy of our eternal home.

So, what will you choose? Where will you turn? To the *compromise of our culture* or to *courage for the Kingdom*? To the *Jezebel* that leads astray or to the *Jesus* who leads to life?

You and I were made for an eternal home, not this fleeting one. Have you noticed that the best in this life is never good enough? The finest meal isn't quite enough; the most delightful walk through the woods is somehow imperfect. In the best moments, it's as though there's something more, something missing, something beyond this. Because there is. Augustine was right: "*God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you*" (Confessions 1.1).

But when we rest in him, when we live for eternity and not the wilderness, when we pay *the price of courage* by refusing *the peril of compromise*, we find a joy in the journey that we'll discover in no other way. We find a purpose to every day, a direction to every step, a hope in every hardship. The problems and pains of this fallen world are just as real ... just less significant when compared to the promise we have in Christ. We consider that the present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed (Romans 8:18).

There is true joy waiting for us even in Thyatira ... if we will trade Jezebel for Jesus.