

Letters from Heaven ~ Study 5

“Arrogance Humbled”

Revelation 2: 18-29

Introduction:

The fourth of the seven letters to the churches is to the Christians in Thyatira. Here we have the longest of the seven letters and yet it is the place about which the least is known. What is known is that this city had an unusually large number of trade guilds, including those for bakers, potters, tanners, wool merchants, dyers, coppersmiths and slave traders, and they were extremely influential in the city. These trade guilds each paid homage to their own deity, and members of the guild were expected to conform, offer sacrifices and take part in the rituals in order to ensure economic prosperity. It may also be interesting to be aware that meat was not generally available in the Greek world. Normally the only time it was found was at the celebrations of the guilds, so the meat would have first been part of an offering in their pagan rituals.

One other piece of background information is that the word translated “burnished bronze” in v. 18 is not the usual word, *chalkos*, but a more precise word, *chalkibainos*, identifying a specific bronze alloy. This alloy was local to Thyatira.

Now read the passage

1. In v.18 we find the opening reference back to part of the picture of Jesus found in chapter 1. Imagine you are a Christian in Thyatira, under pressure to conform to the pagan worship of the trade guilds, what encouragement would you take from hearing “the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze”?
2. The words of this letter are really harsh, especially the description of God’s judgment on Jezebel and those who collude with her. Yet it’s clear the church was faithful and in fact doing more in their love and service than before (v.19). The only thing Jesus picks them up on is their tolerance, and he comes down on it so hard. Why do you think he is so passionate about their tolerance?
3. So what about this “Jezebel” - a false prophet tolerated by a (majority?) section of the church. This links straight back to Queen Jezebel whose deeds are recorded in 1 Kings. What do you know about Queen Jezebel and what might John have been seeking to communicate to the church of Thyatira by using her name?

4. The judgment on those who follow Jezebel is severe. Yet we also know God to be just (v.23b). The end result of their compromise is death. Whether she was specifically encouraging sexual immorality, or whether this is simply an image of general unfaithfulness, why do you think the judgment is so tough? Or is it simply a natural consequence of where she is leading them?
5. What are some of the “wrong teachings” we tolerate in contemporary society and life?
6. As you identify some of these, can you think through and see what some of the long term consequences of tolerating these things might be?
7. Jesus says that he has given the false prophet time to repent, but she has not taken that opportunity. What does this communicate to you about grace?
8. When you think of God’s grace in your own life, can you think of examples where you were grateful for God’s mercy but aware of how “lucky” you were to “get away with it this time”? Share your experiences.
9. How do you personally respond to this sense of living on borrowed time, of being in a place of grace, but one with limits?
10. There seems to be a paradox in this passage as the church are reprimanded for being tolerant of a teacher, yet Jesus himself appears to be tolerant in allowing space for repentance. How can you explain this apparent contradiction? What is the difference between tolerance and grace?
11. Not all the Christians were tolerating Jezebel, so there appears to have been some degree of division in the church. Those who did not tolerate her were not asked to do anything except “only to hold on” until Jesus comes. “Only holding on” sounds quite bleak, but being perceived to be intolerant and counter-cultural can be a bleak thing. Thinking of some of things you identified above as issues we tolerate in the world today, what might “only holding on” look like for people affected by them?
12. Looking at vv. 26-29 we arrive at the familiar end of the letters, outlining the reward for those who overcome. Bearing in mind the situation in Thyatira, what encouragement might you take from these rewards?

Prayer

Take time to pray for each other.