

Thyatira: The Tolerating Church

Text: Revelation 2.18-29

Theme: Without holiness, no one will see the Lord; but He sees us with holy eyes.

INTRODUCTION **Toleration: burning issue of our day**

- we live in tolerant age, calls for more and more toleration every day
- churches not exempt from this
- grow more tolerant in areas of theology, church relationships, sexuality & gender
- those who call loudest for tolerance of **their** views, often most intolerant of any whose view different from **their** own
- when it comes down to it, they're not very tolerant at all

So, what do you think: should we all just become more tolerant?

- was told yesterday that G.K. Chesterton once said:
Toleration is a virtue to the man who has no convictions
- should church be more tolerant; Albion be more tolerant of other views?
- if so, in what areas and how?
- if not, in what areas and how?
- not left without clear instruction in Scripture, even as we see here before us
- Jesus, in His message to church at Thyatira addresses these very matters
- how does Jesus handle this church's tolerance?
- what message does He bring that we must use today?

Recently given this wise advice about preaching

- I'm going to tell you what I'm going to say
- then I'm going to say it
- and at the end, I'll tell you what I said
- so, here we go: here's the main point of this message to Thyatira
- Without holiness, no one will see the Lord; but He sees us with holy eyes.
- we'll see this as we identify the speaker and hear His words of encouragement
- but then we need to sit up and pay attention as Jesus addresses...
- the grave sin of tolerance
- but Jesus never leaves us there, in our doom and gloom moments

- in order to overcome, we must hold fast, even when others do not
- if Thyatira does this if we do this we will see Christ in all His holiness

Now, let's look to God's Word & hear what Spirit is saying to us: let's pray

First, we see and hear...

I. THE SPEAKER & HIS ENCOURAGEMENT

- in v. 18 we see the same pattern as before
- Jesus identifies Himself in unique manner to church
- when you read this, you come to know something of Jesus
- all Christians, then & now, are made stronger by their knowing Christ
- ch. 1 does this & Jesus uses descriptions from there to speak each church

1. The Lord over His church

- it seems that each descriptor has something very specific for each church
- *Son of God*: set against that of Caesar, who was viewed as a god
- if that Caesar's son took the throne, he was declared a son of a god
- Jesus says: no pretender here; I AM the very Son of God, ruler over you
- as such, for Thyatira, they will see Jesus as holy & righteous Judge
- His eyes are like flames of fire: they see into every heart
- there is a parallel here with the image of the Son of Man Daniel saw in 10.6
- *"His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude."*
- feet like burnished bronze represent the strongest of purity to judge as well
- Jesus says to each believer & each church
- "I see you, everything about you and I purify you"
- "receive this as a mercy, as one of My precious children; let Me cleanse you"
- in His mercy He warns them, a harsh & stern warning, but warning nevertheless

2. The recipients of this letter

- Thyatira, as city, just doesn't stand out
- not seat of gov't, nor of emperor worship
- one writer: least known, least important, least remarkable of all the cities
- take comfort in that if you think of Cokato or Albion as not that much
- Jesus knows us: and that's what truly matters

- Thyatira: manufacturing town: pottery, leather works, bronze and more
- as such, trade guilds were extremely important & powerful
- anyone who worked or owned business belonged to one
- these guilds at center of much that was evil in eyes of Christians there
- regular feasts to various gods/goddesses: food offered to idols given to attendees
- when meals ended, great deal of sexually licentious behavior
- all posed problems for a Christian in Thyatira, as well as entire church
- if failed to participate, economic & social standing most likely doomed
- you'd become an outcast, cut off from community
- and yet Jesus knows all the temptations connected with this

3. The encouragement

- v. 19 Jesus praises believers for their love & faithfulness & good works
- James, earthly ½ brother of Jesus, would have praised this church
- they professed faith and let it show through their good works for others
- Jesus sees that not only are they serving out of love...
- not only are they remaining steadfast in endurance...
- they are growing greatly in these deeds

But here comes Jesus' words of rebuke about...

II. THE GRAVE SIN OF TOLERATION

- v. 20 *But this I have against you*
- those words are quite pointed here, as we'll see
- there is a woman, not literally named Jezebel (who would do that?)
- but like woman of 1 Kings 16, strongly encourages sin of all vile sorts
- she was wife of King Ahab, brought in idols & sexual immorality to Israel
- here, this self-proclaimed prophetess does the same
- very similar to what we've seen already in Pergamum
- this Jezebel is like Balaam of old
- tempting to all sorts of wickedness in idolatry and sexual immorality
- Thyatira, however, unlike Pergamum, who hadn't fully succumbed
- no, this church had caved and not only that, was tolerating very one teaching this

1. Rebuked already?

- v. 21 quite possible John has rebuked her already
- she's been given time to repent, but refused: now her time is up

- it might be possible that she simply felt that no punishment was coming
- presumed on grace of God and continued in her sin
- add to this, entire church was willing to just look the other way
- no discipline enacted, even though Jesus commands it in Matthew 18
- *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

(Matthew 18:15-18 ESV)

2. So now, judgment is coming, v. 22

- not only upon this evil woman, but her followers
- but note: still called to repent
- Jesus and holiness of living are completely serious for Christian
- this is the judgment He will bring upon those who mock it, scoff at it

3. Here is the key verse

- v. 23 is middle sentence in middle letter of seven letters
- all the churches are brought to bear in this
- I believe this verse is not only pertinent to Thyatira
- I believe by it's very position, it is key to all churches, including today

4. Divine use of sarcasm, v. 24

- this woman tempting others with secrets & so-called deeper things
- sadly mistaken: God has given all we need life & godliness in Bible
- you want to know how to live a holy life? It is given in this Book
- stop listening to those who will sell your life for a buck
- note it carefully: there are no deep things of Satan
- only judgment – harsh judgment, at that – awaits you

Now comes Jesus' words of promise...

III. HOLD FAST, EVEN WHEN OTHERS DO NOT

- v. 25 – small number not taken in by this false prophetess
- no other burden laid upon them but to persevere
- that, in itself, would be hard enough

1. Messianic promise to those who conquer

- v. 26-29
- to the few who had not compromised their faith, Jesus now speaks
- to those who refuse to become like the world, Jesus would use to impact world
- part of this “authority” they exercise is the power of preaching the gospel
- they will see God’s great Word change the world around them
- but a future element to this as well
- John quotes from Psalm 2, thus making a strong messianic connection
- Christians will rule with Christ in His future kingdom
- and given morning star: Jesus Himself

2. Key to understanding and hearing well

- back to v. 23: *I will give to each of you according to your works*
- “works” 5x in these verses; 3x refers to our deeds
- and this bothers us: Gospel is message about forgiveness of sins
- of salvation as free gift
- of our righteousness being that which God gives thru Christ
- we are justified by faith alone, not by works
- we know wages of sin is death, but gift of God is eternal life

3. So what is Jesus saying about works for the believer?

- here, Jesus tells even us, as church, we **MUST** obey
- must turn away from sin & keep His commandments
- we must practice good deeds of love & faith...OR ELSE!
- Why? I think Jesus intended to hit Christians right between eyes
- sadly, too often we pay too little attention to this
- and then we cry: Legalism! Pharisees! Avoid it! Under grace, not works!
- other temptation: just ignore it
- we fail to take seriously Bible’s demands of godliness & holiness

4. Hear: pay attention to Jesus’ words in v. 23

- He’s speaking to a congregation of Christians!
- so, He’s not talking about “how to be saved”
- and He’s addressing this to all seven churches

- and I think this means He's still speaking this to us today
- it is central for our life

5. Revelation is full of grace & salvation by faith

- we're told time & time again to mind our lives
- commanded to perform deeds of love & faith
- called strongly to godliness & holiness or judgment will come
- this is theme throughout Scripture
- Matthew 7.21 *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*
- John himself wrote: *"an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."*

6. Salvation God gives us is a free gift no question about it

- but it MUST produce a godly life of faith & love it must!
- the latter is proof of the former
- this is one of my chief duties as your pastor:
- to call you to look to Jesus Christ & count on Him alone for salvation
- but must also follow this up for you who believe: must obey & serve

7. Jesus making a clear distinction in this letter between true & false

- distinction? What they were doing & how they were living
- Jesus distinguishes those saved from those lost
- does this not by their confession Christians had done that
- He does this by their deeds
- here is the choice He puts to you:
- you live life of v. 19 deeds of love & faith
- or you live life of v. 20 compromise with unbelieving world
- I think Thyatira is one of most relevant portions of Revelation
- our society loves the tolerating, compromising slacker Christian
- they don't offend the world
- those who go hard after holiness, however, are hated

8. Jesus is telling us in this letter that legalism is not our problem

- legalist lies awake at night, worried if he or she make it to heaven

- this is not the issue here...or with any of the seven churches
- Problem then & now is antinomianism
- anti against; nomos law: against God's commands & demands
- slacker Christians don't count up brownie points; doesn't have to
- she is convinced God doesn't really care how she lives her life
- whatever his life is like, it will be good enough
- what about blatant sin? God will forgive; that's His job, right?
- besides, I'm a Christian; God won't punish me

9. And this is where Thyatira & we find ourselves

- God is indeed a gracious God
- Jesus is our Savior, even our Friend
- but He is also Son of God, w/ flaming eyes that see into every single heart & mind
- He knows the motives behind everything act we ever commit
- this is why He calls for repentance...or else!
- His righteousness must not be a cloak to our sin
- Christ's cross does not purify us if we keep on contaminating ourselves with world's sin & muck
- Jesus didn't die to make it possible for you to live a worldly life
- He died to present you holy and blameless before God the Father
- God's grace appeared to teach us to say "no" to ungodliness

CONCLUSION This comes at great cost

- believers in ancient Thyatira knew this
- essentially, if follow Jesus wholeheartedly, economic and social suicide
- but, as one ancient historian/pastor said, when parishioner whined he couldn't make such a commitment because he had to live & make a living
- pastor asked him, "Do you?"
- hear the Lord, who says He searches heart & mind
- Lord knows our lives, top to bottom
- He knows motives, attitudes, thoughts about Him, about others
- He knows if our deeds are real act of obedience or not

And so, we've heard from our Lord & His words of commendation

- we've heard His clear condemnation against the toleration of sin & evil

- and we are given His great & precious promises if we hold fast, even if no other church would do so

To those who conquer the fear of world...

- to those who overcome with love of the Lord...
- we get Christ Himself
- what more could you ask for?