

01a REV

This is Friday, the 29th of July, 2005. We continue tonight our study in the book of Revelation, where we will complete our review of the seven churches, and if all goes well, we'll actually move into resuming our study in Chapter 4. Let's take a moment as we begin to examine our souls and avail ourselves of the opportunity for prayer and cultivating the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, shall we pray? Father, we are grateful as always for the privilege of stopping our activities and setting aside the cares and the distractions of this life to focus our attention on those things which are most important, things that will affect our eternal future, to nourish and strengthen our souls through the study of your Word. We thank you for the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ, whose work on the cross made it possible for us to live the life that you have made possible for us, and we ask that as we study your Word this evening, we will find in it the truth that will strengthen us and direct us in the path that you have mapped out for us, that we can fulfill your purpose and be prepared for upcoming things. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We began last time our rather hasty review of what we spent some months covering a few years ago in the Letters to the Seven Churches. We reviewed the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to John on the Isle of Patmos. I went through sort of the standard points of introduction for the book of Revelation in terms of the author, the writing, the time, the audience, the theme, and so on.

And we covered the basics or the salient points regarding the first three churches at Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum. And we want to finish up looking at Thyatira, and then look at Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea so that we're sort of refreshed and have the frame of reference of those first three chapters as we move into the remainder of the book. Because, after all, this letter is addressed in its entirety to the seven churches.

And it is sometimes a point that is missed that once you get to 4.1, come up here, and you don't see the church mentioned for another 16 chapters or so, that maybe it doesn't really pertain to the church or isn't as important to the church except curiosity value since we won't be here. But, in fact, all of these things have been written for our instruction just as the truth of the Old Testament. So it's important for us to remember the context that this entire book is a message from the Lord Jesus to the church, formally to these seven churches, but in reality to all believers in the church age.

Well, the first three churches we have looked at in some detail, Ephesus, Myrna, and Pergamon. Let's pick up in chapter 2, verse 18, with the letter to Thyatira. After we cover these next four churches, I'm going to give you a few observations that were not a part of our original study that came out of some additional musing that took place this past week.

But in Revelation 2, verse 18, the angel to the angel of the church in Thyatira wrote, These things says the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire and his feet like fine brass. I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience. As for your works, the last are more than the first.

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you because you allow that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed, I will cast her into a sickbed and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation unless they repent of their deeds.

I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.

But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations. He shall rule them with a rod of iron, they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels.

Which of course is a quote from Psalm 2, 8 and 9. As I also have received from my Father, and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. And notice, the individual who has an ear, hears what the Spirit says to all of the churches.

Not just to this church, or to any other individual church. If you have the handout that I gave you last time, it is conveniently organized by church down the left side, and there are five categories across the top. The nature of the description of Christ, the nature of the commendation that is given to the church, six of the seven are commended for at least something.

Then there is a rebuke, five of the seven are rebuked for something. There is an exhortation to each of the churches, and there is a promise to the overcomers in each of the churches. And there is a relationship between these elements that are found in pretty much all of the seven letters.

And I will point that out here as we go along. But here in Thyatira, you have certain things that are commended. And on your chart you see deeds, love, faith, service, perseverance, doing more than at first.

But the rebuke is tolerating Jezebel with her immorality and idolatry. What does Jezebel represent? If you think back to the Old Testament days of Elijah the prophet, and you have Ahab and Jezebel, she is the queen, although she is not an Israelitis. She represents

the governing power of the godless.

This Jezebel calls herself a prophetess. She teaches and seduces the servants of Christ to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols. We addressed these issues in some detail when we went through the letters.

Because immediately it catches your eye, doesn't it? Because remember Paul talking about the fact that whether you eat meat offered to idols or not is sort of a matter of conscience. If it offends your conscience, you shouldn't do it. Or if it offends the conscience of other believers, you should not do it.

But there is nothing intrinsically wrong with eating a piece of meat that has laid in front of a rock for a couple of hours and then gone to the marketplace. But here Jezebel is seducing the servants of Christ to eat things sacrificed to idols. And because this is the product of a seduction, we know that it is for them sinful.

It doesn't mean that this is inherently a bad thing, but in this case, in Thyatira, it is. Because it goes against conscience and it does cause believers to stumble. So there is no real conflict here between what Paul has to say and what John records the Lord Jesus saying here.

Now, in the literal world of Thyatira, this Jezebel, her name was probably not Jezebel, but she was a woman who rose up in the Thyatiran church and sort of assumed a role of leadership. This is what Jezebel did in the days of ancient Israel, in Elijah's time. And she sort of dominated even Ahab the king.

She's the one that sort of lit the fire under Ahab and pretty well drove the train. And so she represents here the improper exercise of authority by those to whom God has not given such authority. This goes back, you see examples of it in the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, On, and the rest of those who decided that they should have as much authority as Moses and Aaron.

And God, although these men, there was nothing intrinsically wrong with them, they weren't inferior in any way, but they had not been assigned the task of leadership. They arrogated it to themselves or tried to, and God destroyed them. The same happens in the church where, for his own reasons, God has mandated that leadership in the church be assigned to men.

It's one of the few guidelines in the church. We have very few. It doesn't say how many pastors there ought to be.

It doesn't say how many deacons or elders. It doesn't say how large or small a church should be. It doesn't say what kind of facility it should meet in, what day it should meet on, how often it should meet, whether or not there should be music.

We have almost complete freedom to organize the church in any way that is honoring to the Lord and represents worship that is done decently and in good order. However, one of the restrictions is that women should not exert authority over men in a church setting. This means you do not have ordained women pastors.

Denominations that violate this guideline are unbiblical and they are wrong. They say, well, that was a cultural restriction back in the days of the apostles. I'm sorry, but there is nothing in the word of God that indicates that this was limited or time-bound.

The principle is that there is a picture involved, just as there was with the Levites, just as there was with Moses and Aaron. Miriam tried to assert authority and was struck with leprosy for her trouble. The earth opened up and swallowed men who tried to take authority to themselves where it did not belong.

This Jezebel calls herself a prophetess. Now, there is such a thing as prophetesses. You have daughters of prophets that were prophetesses and so on.

It's not that it's an illegitimate role, but if you are not a prophetess and you call yourself one and you arrogate to yourself authority and leadership in the church and then you begin to teach people to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols, and these two things seem to be related, this seems to have been a syncretistic type of operation where there was a mixture of Christianity with pagan elements. One of the reasons that there was a great stress on male leadership in the church is that most of the pagan religions of the day had priestesses and pagan temple prostitution. And so you have the Vestal Virgins and you have in the worship of almost any of the Greek and Roman pantheon prostitution and women in prominent roles and invisible roles in those.

And this was one of the things in the early days that distinguished the church because it was exclusively led by men. They were the sources of teaching. They were accountable before God.

They were trained in the first generation by the apostles. And even though you have wonderful women such as Priscilla and Phoebe and others who did a lot of wonderful things, leadership was reserved for the males. It was one of the ways of distinguishing it and separating it and preventing it from being contaminated as is the case in Thyatira here.

Notice God did not just strike her with lightning or have something remove her out of the way. It says in verse 21, Jesus says, I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality and she did not repent. Whether there was an apostolic warning or some other presentation of the word of God and the principles involved here, she was given the benefit of the doubt.

She was given information and she did not change her mind. She didn't respond. This

would have involved relinquishing authority and stopping these cultish practices which she did not do.

And this is the pattern with God. There is in the scriptures a clear pattern of warning and gracious tolerance before judgment. You think of Sodom and Gomorrah.

You say, well, did those people get any kind of notice before the fire and brimstone rained down on them? And if you just go to the chapter with Lot and Genesis 19 and so on, you say, well, Lot and his family were warned by the angels and everybody else was just hapless villagers. But remember, four or five chapters earlier, Abraham rescued the inhabitants and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah from the invading kings from the north and worshipped with Melchizedek in their sight and in their presence and paid a tithe and had bread and wine and there was a whole great testimony there. And he gave credit to God for the victory and they were all present.

And the king of Sodom tried to give Abraham some loot and he said, I won't even take a shoestring from you. This victory belongs to the God of my covenant, the God of my promise. So they had that testimony.

And they had the presence of Lot for many years and they did not respond. So there is always grace before judgment. So I gave her time to repent.

She did not repent. Indeed, I will cast her into a sick bed and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation unless they change their minds regarding their deeds. So even these others are given a space, are given an opportunity for change of mind.

It is not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should come to change of mind. I will kill her children with death and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts. Now what does it mean, I will kill her children with death? It means that she is not going to have any kind of perpetuation of this polluted and corrupted ministry.

Jesus, when he was traveling through Israel and talking to the Pharisees and so on in the first advent, he told the religious leaders, you are of your father the devil. Even though they were sons of Abraham, according to the flesh, spiritually speaking, they were sons of Belial. They were sons of the evil one.

And so the children of this Jezebel are those who follow in her footsteps, who espouse her philosophy, who believe her false teachings, who respond and go down this path. And he says, I will kill her children with death. All the churches shall know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts.

This is a matter of conscience. This is a matter of policy and choice in the soul. We have a lot of options in modern Christianity today.

There is a spectrum, an infinite spectrum of choices, ranging from the pure teaching of God's word to complete and total apostate nonsense in the name of Christ and in the name of Christianity, and everything in between available to believers today. How do we know that we are on the right path? How do we know that we have not been led astray, that we are not going to fall under some sort of condemnation at the judgment? Well, if you just try to establish a criteria, or if you just think, well, I've got a magic formula that will make sure that I'm always right, there is no such thing. This goes back to faith.

Your faith has to be in God, not in a denomination, not in a creed, not in any particular teacher or pastor. It has to be in God. And to ensure that you're in the faith, that you're walking the straight path and going through the narrow gate, go to God.

If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who will give abundantly. Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you will find.

Knock and the door will be opened. Anyone who finds himself in error, anyone who goes astray, anyone who is deceived, deluded, led out into the weeds, doesn't want the truth badly enough to avoid that fate. God will not let his children who ask him for bread end up with a rock, a snake, or a scorpion.

Remember Jesus talking about that? So it is not a matter of putting your faith in any given church or any given approach. For a long time, a lot of us were really given the benefits of the ICE method of teaching, Isagogics, Categories, and Exegesis, and whoever concentrates on those things, their teaching is going to be good. It's a wonderful system, but it's not foolproof, and it's not insurance against error.

There are a lot of ICE teachers and pastors who are as out in the weeds as anybody else. You cannot can, you can't bottle, you can't somehow get a human system of insurance to be sure that the truth is the truth and that you're walking the narrow path. It has to be a commitment between the believer and God, a request from the believer to God, claiming God's promise, and going to him and saying, Lord, if I am deceiving myself, if I'm being led astray, if I'm letting my itching ears be scratched by somebody, wake me up, let me know.

And to the extent that we have the desire for the truth, God will ensure that we get it. People who are casual about the truth are going to casually wander off the path of the truth. But our certainty about what we believe and in whom we believe is directly related to God himself and his character and the surety of his promises, and there's nothing else that we need.

God's promise is good enough, and it depends entirely on our commitment. So these who end up being cast into sickbeds, who are killed, God searches the mind and the hearts. God knows if we really want his truth or not.

And those who want it will get it. I will give to each one of you according to your works. Notice that works are discerned in the mind and in the heart.

We tend to think that works are the visible manifestations of what you do, but God searches the minds and hearts, and then he gives to each one according to his works. The works are meaningless if you don't look at the mind and the heart. Why did you do what you did? What is the motivation? What are the thoughts and intents behind the actions? That's what determines the strength of the works.

Now to you I say, the rest of Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine. What doctrine? The false doctrine of Jezebel. The false doctrine of immorality and distraction.

Who have not known the depths of Satan. As they say, I will put on you no other burden. Hold fast what you have till I come.

This sounds simple, but it's one of the hardest things to do, isn't it? To hold fast to what you have. We tend to get complacent, or we get bored, or we get distracted. To maintain a status quo, to maintain vigilance, to maintain diligence.

It's one thing when a sentry relieves the watch at 2 in the morning, and he's going to stand guard from 2 until 6 a.m. When he first relieves his predecessor, he's wide awake, he's alert, he walks his post. But it gets to be 2.30, quarter to 3, 3, 3.15, 3.30, all is quiet, nothing much is going on. And there's a natural tendency to relax.

There's a natural tendency to lose vigilance and to lose diligence. You think about the great alertness everyone had right after 9-11 in our country. And the toleration that everyone had for security measures at airports and so on, because everyone was in a heightened state of alert.

Well, we're still in, what, condition yellow, or heightened state of alert. But we don't have the same level of sensitivity that we had back then. As time has passed, people are starting to grouse and grumble and complain and talk about rights.

What about the prisoners? Nobody cared about the guys down in Guantanamo. But the longer time passes now, people are getting more concerned about freedom and all the rest of it. Without commenting on that per se, as time passes, our guard tends to drop.

Our diligence and our vigilance tend to dwindle. So this is not as easy as it sounds when he says, Hold fast to what you have. Hold fast to what you have.

Until I come. Now, this, if there was no other reason, you remember last week I gave you the classic view, I think probably a majority of interpreters think that the letters to the churches represent eras in history. And when you get to Thyatira, there was this certain period of time where that pertained.

But he says, hold fast until I come. Well, I don't think the Lord Jesus came at the end of 1500 AD. 500 to 1500 is the age of Thyatira.

Unless the Lord Jesus came back and we missed it in 1500, these people are supposed to still be holding fast. So this is a strong clue that these are not segmented into different parts of history. They all apply equally.

To he who overcomes and keeps my works until the end. Keeps my works until the end. Another reference.

All the way to the end of what? Well, for the vast majority of us, it's to the end of our life, right? And the end of our life and the return of Jesus is pretty much coterminous from our point of view, right? Keeps my works until the end. And to him I will give power over the nations. Then he quotes from Psalm 289 and reminds us that this is authority that is received from the Father.

And I will give him the morning star. What is the morning star? Well, I like Bob Thieme's explanation of this. He calls it the order of the morning star.

It's like the Croix de Guerre or the Iron Cross or the Medal of Honor. It is the name of an award. It's not literally the planet Venus or something.

This is one of the titles of the Lord Jesus. He is the bright and morning star. It's a title that Satan has attempted to arrogate to himself unsuccessfully.

He tries to masquerade as an angel of light and as the sun of the dawn and so on. But this award, this honor, bears one of the great and glorious titles of the Lord Jesus. Why is Jesus called the morning star? It talks about the morning star rising in our hearts.

This is a particular symbol of hope, isn't it? When the dawn is starting to break, many times you'll see the morning star before you see the sunrise itself. It's a precursor. It's a harbinger.

It's a preview of coming attractions. It lets you know something is imminent. And so it becomes a symbol of hope and it's the hope of a bright new day, a new kingdom, a new opportunity, something just over the horizon that's coming.

This is a particular award for hope, faith, hope, and love, the triad of great Christian virtues. Hope is that confident expectation. Hope is the motivation to persevere in a life of faith and to persevere in the manifesting of love toward God and toward others.

So to overcome and keep His works until the end, why would we do that? Why would you keep Christ's works? What are His works, by the way? It says, keeps my works. It would be handy to know what they are. What are the works of Christ? Is it healing or giving or teaching? What are the works of Christ? It's anything that's done in faith, isn't it?

Righteousness comes by faith.

Christ said, my Father is working and I am working. And our work, when you read the book of James, when you look at the gospel of John, the work that we do is driven by faith. So keeping my works until the end, this basically means doing our tasks.

Jesus did the work that the Father assigned Him. What is your assigned work? What's my assigned work? It's whatever comes up in our circumstances. Jesus had a very specific mission.

He's the Savior of the world. He's the Messiah to Israel. He had a definite set of tasks.

John the Baptist had a particular set of tasks. The Apostle Paul had a particular set of tasks. You and I have a particular set of tasks.

It could be being a parent, being a child, being a son or daughter, being a professional, running a business, working within a business, having responsibilities as a spouse, a husband or a wife. Whatever those are, this is the work that God has assigned us. This is our task.

We are not called to be apostles. We are not called to be prophets. Few of us are called to be evangelists or pastors or teachers.

Most of us are called to be faithful, ordinary citizens. But working the works of Christ is to do that task, whatever it is, by faith, characterized by walking in love and motivated by hope. And when we do that, we are awarded the Order of the Morning Star.

It is a sign, it is a special award for faith and love motivated by hope. And along with it comes power over the nations. Now, this is particularly interesting because this refers to a time when there are nations over which power is exerted by spiritual people.

Right now, Christians have very little influence over the nations, right? I can't really influence the policy or the fate of any nation on earth in any sort of direct way. When will this be true? Millennial Kingdom, right? It is not going to be one world government. The Lord Jesus is going to be in Jerusalem and He is going to be ruling over the kingdom that belongs to Israel specifically.

It is the territory of David and Solomon. It has borders and it has boundaries. And the rest of the world is divided up into nations.

And it says the kings of the earth are going to be subject. This puts us in mind of the Roman Empire where Rome did not engulf everything, but they subjugated and dominated other nations. And there were kings, local kings, who were suzerain, vassal relationship.

They had these treaties where they were still the king of the country, but they paid

tribute. They were subordinate. They were subject.

And that is how it will be in the Millennial Kingdom. Well, who is going to rule these other nations on other continents and outside the Middle East? Well, it says right here, To the one who overcomes and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations. Revelation 2, 26.

Now, if you had to guess as to the Greek word for power here, remember the five Greek words for power? Which one do you think it is? Dunamis or Kratos or Iskouas? Which one do you think it is? It is exousion, authority. Authority over the nations. He will rule them with a rod of iron.

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels. So this will be an extension of the rule of Christ on his throne, the throne of his father David in Jerusalem. There will be these faithful believers on the thrones of other kingdoms who are ensuring that this is like an extension of the authority of Christ.

It is a great privilege. I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Well, this brings us to chapter 3 and the church in Sardis. Jesus presents himself as the one holding the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. We reminded ourselves last week that stars and spirits suggest the angels.

You have a seven-fold spirit that is before the throne of God. We will talk about that in more detail when we go through the upcoming chapters of this book. He says, I know your works.

You have a name. You are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful.

Strengthen the things which remain, that they are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember, therefore, how you have received and heard. Hold fast and repent.

Therefore, if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments. They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments. I will not blot his name from the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

He who has an ear, let him hear. Well, Sardis, this is a little shorter than some of the others. He says, I have not found your works complete before God.

You are doing some things, but not everything. Have you ever taken a class in college and wound up with an incomplete? I have, to my chagrin. Sometimes you are going

along and you have paid the tuition and you go through all the angst and the woe and the heartburn and the stand-up late and the taking the test, but you get behind.

You don't turn a paper in on time or whatever. You get to the end and there is not enough information to assign your grade and you get an incomplete. Well, all of the rest of the work that you did in that class is kind of pointless if you don't finish.

I made this point not too long ago about whether it is a dentist or a mechanic. If a guy takes your engine all apart and puts in a new set of rings and gaskets and he puts it all back together, but he never gets around to tightening the head bolts back down or he doesn't bolt your carburetor back on or doesn't hook up your fuel injector or whatever you've got, doesn't hook up your fuel lines for your injectors. The rest of the work is kind of pointless.

You have to finish most things. You can measure ingredients exactly when you are baking a cake. You can do everything, but if you don't finish cooking it, it is just going to come out as a big gooey mess.

So finish what you start. Your works are not complete. You are off to a great start.

Remember what Paul tells the Galatians? You were running well. Who hindered you? You've stopped. You're chasing a butterfly and you're not running the race anymore.

What happened to you? I have not found your works finished. You started and then you kind of lost track. So what do you have to do? What's the solution for this? Remember.

We have mnemonic is the word in English. Remember how you have received and heard. Why does he say this? Remember how you have received and heard.

Remember that process where you first heard the gospel and you received that information. You heard the word of truth. Remember in the early days of your faith or in the early days of your catching on to the plan and purpose of God, you recognized the importance of the word of God.

You paid attention. You prioritized it. You thought about it.

You prayed over it. You spent time looking in your Bible and trying to remember what was in Bible class last week and the week before and the week before. Remember how you used to receive.

Remember how you used to hear. Well, if you want to finish your works, you've got to keep that in mind because receiving and hearing is the necessary precursor to finishing your works. You're not going to accomplish what you're supposed to accomplish if you don't receive and hear like you did at first.

Hold fast. When you get the system figured out and you recognize, yes, it's important to

take in the word of God, but it is equally and perhaps even more important to meditate on what you know, to pray in the light of what you know, to make your policies and your plans and your decisions, set your goals, establish your priorities, think through your values in the light of the word of God, and hold fast to that point of view. One of the hardest things we have is holding fast.

Everything seems so clear. You're sitting in the middle of Bible class and you think, ah, yes, the light has dawned. I can see the gates of the millennial kingdom swinging open.

But then it's the next day and you're in the midst of stuff and you get two-thirds of the way through the day if you're like me. Then you kind of stick your head up for air and you think, you know what, I haven't even thought about the fact that I'm a believer. Have I checked to make sure I'm doing things in a way that's pleasing to God or that reflects His glory? Have I prayed? Am I trying to be a servant of Christ here? Or am I just flying elbows and knees in my own strength? Remember how you received and heard.

Hold fast and change your mind. This is more than just making a different decision. This is change the way your mind works.

Metanoeo means your mind is transformed. Your mind is not the same as it was. It doesn't mean, well, I thought this, but now I've changed my mind.

I thought I liked that, but I've changed my mind. I thought Brussels sprouts were healthy and I would eat them, but I've changed my mind. I'm not going to eat them.

Metanoeo, I don't know if I've ever really dwelt on this before, but it's not viewing a decision. It's talking about the kind of mind that you have. Change of mind means you have a different kind of mind.

Metamorphosis is changing from a caterpillar to a butterfly or from a pupa to a moth, or I've kind of forgotten all the vocabulary there, but one little worm-like thing changes into something with wings that flies. Metanoeo is the transformation of the mind, and he says transform your mind, change your mind. If you will not watch, and this has the idea of diligence.

Be watchful. Look at verse 2. Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain. Hold fast to what you have.

Stir it up. Get it active. Pay attention.

Be alert. If you will not be alert, I will come upon you as a thief. Nothing worse than being surprised by the return of the Lord Jesus, being caught unprepared and unready and not happy when the Lord Jesus returns.

Then he talks about these white garments, and I want to save our discussion of that until

we come back from the break. But if this was all we could look at this evening, we would want to be sure that we hold fast to what we have. We've come a long way in the understanding of the Word of God and the opportunities that Christ has given us, and what a tragedy to fall short and to lose it.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll continue right here at the end of the letter to Sardis.