

To Thyatira

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much, Jamie and the band. And welcome, everyone. Let me add to Graham's welcome this morning. It's great to have you here. Why don't we pray? Father God, as we approach your word, will you open our hearts and minds to what you have to say to us?

And Lord Jesus, as we think of you as the speaker to this church so long ago, will you give us a bigger view of who you are, Jesus?

And let us listen to your voice to us today. Amen. So as Graham mentioned, we're continuing to look at these letters to the churches.

You've got mail, we're halfway through, and we're looking at the message to the church in Thyatira. You'll find it in Revelation chapter 2 and verses 18 to 29. And if you can get hold of a Bible, please get hold of one or see it on your phone or whatever.

Revelation 2, 18 to 29. Let's read it together now. 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.

[1 : 1 6] I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

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.

I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 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.

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.

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 except to hold on to what you have until I come.

[2 : 3 6] To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. 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.

I will also give that one the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

And it's been my prayer as I've read and prepared for this over recent days that quite simply God would have something to say to each of us. And that as that passage finishes by saying those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

So we would be discerning of what God and God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have to say to us this morning as individuals, perhaps as families and also as a church today.

My title for Thyatira is that Thyatira is both committed and compromised. I wonder if it seems often that we would have to either be one or the other.

[3 : 42] And so either you'd be expecting to be hearing about those who are fully committed or those who are in some ways at compromise, those who are no longer following Jesus.

But Thyatira is an interesting church because it seems that they are both committed to following Jesus, but they are also living in a way which for many of them amounts to compromise.

And so that's my challenge. It's been a challenge to my own heart this week about whether it's quite possible for me as an individual and for us as a church not to desert the faith. That's not what this church had done.

They were still carrying on. And at least superficially and externally, they appeared utterly committed. But yet the Spirit, Lord Jesus himself, speaks to that church and says, I commend you for your commitment, but I look and I also see real compromise.

So we want to get into that. And in three very simple sections, I want to look first of all at the speaker because I think it's important that we try to understand more about who is speaking to this church and how he describes himself.

[4 : 49] I want to look at their situation and I want to look at the solution to that situation. So first of all, the speaker here. And my question as I've reflected on the speaker is whether my view of Jesus is far too small.

And it's my question of you today as well. As you look at Revelation chapter 2 and look at this and look at how the speaker, Jesus himself, describes himself.

I wonder if we've made our view of Jesus far too small. Let's look back to chapter 1 so we get the context. Chapter 1, we also have a revelation of Jesus.

Verse 5, Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth, to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priest to serve his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever.

Amen. So there's that revelation of Jesus as he's described as the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth, and crucially as he's described as him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

[6 : 08] I want us to take a few minutes to recapture perhaps for some of us a real picture of who Jesus is as the speaker here this morning.

He is the one who loves us and if we're following him, he is the one who has freed us from our sins by his blood. But specifically, what aspects of his person does he emphasize to the church at Thyatira?

Well, look at chapter 2, verse 18. He says, The words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire. So we hear about his eyes, whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Still in verse 18. Verse 19, I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance. So we know about his, we hear about his mind, his knowledge, not only his eyes, not only his feet, but also his knowledge, his mind.

I know your deeds. And then we hear more about who he is and what he's doing. And when we look on to verse 23, where he says, I am he who searches hearts and minds.

[7 : 24] So something there about his eyes, something about his feet, something about his mind, and something about his activity as he searches hearts and minds.

I wonder if we've grasped and continue to grasp that Jesus sees us, knows us, he sees us, he knows us.

Do we, it seems such a basic truth, doesn't it? It's, and maybe, maybe you've got a greater awareness of it than I have, but I've just reminded myself as I've looked at this passage time and again, Jesus, you're the one who sees me and who knows me.

I wonder if we look at our own limited vision and our own eyes and how little we can see. Most of us can see around everybody who's in the room, but we certainly can't see what's going on in the houses across the road even.

And our vision is so, so limited as human beings that does that in some way cause us to have a limited sense of what it means when Jesus says, I see you and I know you.

[8 : 34] Have some of you been to see the great new film, Finding Dory, yet? I'm not seeing a sea of hands. Some of you have been, I'm glad to see, one or two of you have been to Finding Dory.

Well, I apologise if any of you are marine scientists here today. I'm not, but I learned something about the ability of whales from watching the film, Finding Dory, because it tells us quite a bit about echolocation and the fact that whales have got skills to sense what is going on, potentially miles away in the ocean, much greater skills than we would have on earth or if we were in the sea.

And according to Finding Dory, and I'm sure the very accurate science portrayed therein, those whales can detect even the slightest movement miles away in the ocean, thanks to that great ability they have of echolocation.

Or think about eyes of some of the animals. Think about the eyes of a hawk, which I understand flying at 1,500 feet could detect a rat or a mouse down on the ground and could swoop down at 100 miles an hour, maintaining its focus on that rat the whole way in order to grasp it and have it for supper.

So even in the animal kingdom, there are animals, creatures of our God which have got abilities to see and to sense way, way, way greater than ours can ever be.

[10 : 02] And why is it then that I suppose we sometimes have got such a limited, narrow view of Jesus, somehow or other, making him in our own image and thinking that we can live life in some ways away from his gates?

Because I suspect if you're anything like me, that's how we sometimes seem to act. Jesus says, he sees us and he knows us.

Of course, our knowledge and our sight is so imperfect, not just physically, but in terms of our ability to discern what is right, in terms of our ability to work out how we should live, in terms of our ability to make good judgments.

We read about that in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 where we read that now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face.

Now I know only in part, then I shall know fully even as I am fully known. And perhaps this morning we can come to Jesus and can acknowledge his perfect sight and perfect knowledge and acknowledge our great imperfections and therefore our utter dependence on him for him to guide us, for him to lead us, for him to show us how to live.

[11 : 18] I've been particularly struck by the need for that as I've done a bit of reading this week into the views of those who claim to follow Jesus in America and who are pronouncing somewhat diametrically opposed views on who the US country, the country of US should vote for come the US election.

Isn't it remarkable that you can read impassioned, in some ways well argued and thought out arguments from Christians as to why it's absolutely essential that you vote for Trump or why voting for Trump would be an absolutely heretical thing to do and certainly I've read both of them and thought yep you've got some quite strong arguments both ways.

I'm happy to discuss later which ones I found the most compelling but certainly it's just brought home to me again our incredibly limited sight, our incredibly limited vision and I trust causes us to turn all the more to Jesus as the only one who sees and knows and searches our hearts and minds.

Will we invite him this morning to say Jesus I'm glad that you see me I'm glad that you know me I'm glad that despite all that you see you love me I'm glad that you have freed me and forgive me from my sins through your blood and I invite you now to search me to know me to try me and see and to work in my life and to conform me more to your image.

I pray that that might be our attitude to the great Lord Jesus Christ this morning. So he sees he knows and he looks at this church in Thyatira with his eyes of blazing fire with his feet of burnished bronze speaking I think of his strength and his control and says I've got some really some really great words of commendation for you I know your deeds your love your faith your service your perseverance and that you're doing more than you did at first those hearing it must have been thinking this is fantastic Jesus is looking at us with his perfect vision and he's seeing all of this great stuff that we're doing now Jesus is seeing us today as well and I'm sure as he looks down on this gathering of followers of Jesus all in different situations he looks and maybe for some the word to you today is simply that Jesus sees your perseverance maybe it's just that Jesus sees the fact that you're still clinging on and he wants to commend you for still hanging on

[13 : 57] I see your perseverance I see the difficulties that you've been subjected to I know intimately all about the difficulties of your family life about all that's going on in your work about all that's going on in your own heart about your ill health about financial worries and you're persevering you've chosen to come here today once again to meet with God's people you're not giving up you're hanging on I see it and I commend you for your perseverance take that word of encouragement if that's for you this morning maybe for others you've done more than persevere maybe your life this week has been full of deeds love faith and service in which case Jesus sees it and he knows it maybe some of you are gearing up for a busy busy week with the holiday club at Brunsfield and again a word of encouragement for you Jesus sees what you're doing he sees and appreciates your love your faith your deeds and your perseverance and he assures you this morning no matter what may happen no matter what physical or immediate results you may see from that holiday club he assures you through his word 1 Corinthians 15 58 let nothing move you give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because your labour in the Lord is not in vain it's never in vain it's never wasted you're never laboring for the Lord for no reward or for no reason it's not in vain so folks those of you the great team that will be assembling this week throw yourselves wholeheartedly into that work not serving the kids first and foremost but serving the Lord knowing knowing for sure that it is not in vain so that's the situation that we see in Thyatira but of course there is a very big but coming in terms of what

Jesus sees and verse 20 says nevertheless I have this against you you tolerate that woman Jezebel who is not leading she is misleading and we see here a real challenge about those who are not leading effectively but who are misleading so what's going on here what's going on in this church at face value all that we're told is that a woman Jezebel has come into the church she's calling herself a prophet and she's misleading servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols she's been given time to repent she's unwilling and she's about to be cast on a bed of suffering and those committing adultery with her are also going to suffer intensely we need to understand a little bit more about the context I think to fully get to grips with what's going on here so first of all Jezebel rings bells I'm sure for many Jezebel was the wife of Ahab we read about her in 1 Kings one of the most wicked women who had ever lived and she was a woman who not only terrorised the prophet

Elijah you remember after his great victory in Mount Carmel Jezebel was the one who got a message to Elijah to say I'm going to have you dead and we saw Elijah running for his life a trembling wreck thanks to the power and fear that Jezebel could conjure up but particularly interestingly is that Jezebel it seems from what we read in 1 Kings didn't necessarily say to the Jews you must stop worshipping your God no no it's okay you can continue worshipping your God but also here's a whole heap of idols the prophets the Baals you should worship them too and so she introduced idolatrous worshipping worshipping practices to the people of God and we read about the hundreds of Baals and idols that she introduced and so I'm not sure there necessarily was a literal Jezebel maybe that was or was not the name of those who were misleading the people in Thyatira it doesn't really matter but I think we're being encouraged to think back to the characteristics of that woman Jezebel who has come along and has done similar things to this church in Thyatira what was their situation well they were in a town which we don't know an awful lot about but we do know that they had lots and lots of trades do you remember the story of Lydia

Lydia the seller of purple well she was from Thyatira so Lydia was a woman incidentally who could hardly stand in sharper contrast to Jezebel if you want to do a wee character study between the two but Lydia was the seller of purple who had come from Thyatira so her trade was in cloth and in dyeing cloths and equally we understand there were people who dealt in copper in bronze in other fabrics in leather and in that town in order to succeed in business it seems as though you had to be part of some of the very powerful trade guilds effectively the unions for the particular types of employment that you were dealing with and associated with those unions was a whole lifestyle it wasn't that you just had to be there to try and purely help with the trading of those goods but rather it was a whole lifestyle thing and there were all sorts of rituals there does seem as though within those unions there would be all sorts of deviant sexual practices going on and indeed there would be idolatrous worship and the eating of foods offered to these idols and the Christians in that church had heard clearly the word of God as it had been brought to them and they'd heard clearly the instructions that they were not under a whole heap of rules and regulations as followers of Jesus if you look back to some of the book of Acts and the instructions that were given to the church we don't have time to look at them in detail but those instructions were saying you know you don't have to be those of you who are not Jews and are now Gentiles you don't have to be circumcised not all about following the law you're under grace it's all about just following Jesus but there are some instructions that we've got for you avoid sexual immorality and avoid the food that's been offered to idols that was very inconvenient for these Christians in Thyatira because it meant that they couldn't really be part of the trade guilds it was potentially going to have an impact on their livelihood it was potentially going to have an impact on their income and so along comes this Jezebel or the Jezebel and says to them no no no no that's far too strict you've been drawing up the rules far too tightly here of course you should be worshipping Jesus and of course

I'm one of you and I also am a follower of Jesus but it's absolutely fine to be worshipping Jesus and in fact work hard serve others in the church be involved but at the same time you can be part of the trade guilds and Jesus won't mind if you participate in those rituals because you're free you're free you're not under law so no no don't describe that as idolatry or immorality it's absolutely fine and some of them some of the people in that church had followed Jezebel's teachings they hadn't departed from the faith but they had compromised they were committed and compromised they'd got back involved in all of the immorality the sexual immorality and idolatry of their past life they thought they could worship God and follow Jesus and continue to live as they liked and the solemn thing is maybe for many of them they've been doing that for quite a while and it didn't seem to be a problem maybe for some of them they've been living that way for years and years and years and they've grown increasingly confident that it was absolutely fine to follow Jesus and live as you like and then the eyes of him who had been seeing them all the time he reminds them that he's been watching them he's been seeing and knowing he's been urging them to turn from this he's been urging them to repent and many of them have been refusing to do so and now he's going to come to them in punishment and so how are we going to apply this ourselves because we know that we don't just read God's word simply to be informed but for our lives and hearts to be moved and changed and as I've thought long and hard about what the application of this is for my life and potentially for our church

[22 : 22] I've got three things to offer you this morning three risks that I think we can get into that might arise and that might be linked directly or indirectly to the sorts of ways in which the church at Thyatira were going astray and the first one it's right there and it is sexual immorality and idolatry do we think that we can continue in the church and follow Jesus while actually adopting the same sexual practices that are widespread among us in our world and idolatry in all of its forms actually seek thinking we can worship two gods Jesus spoke quite clearly about that didn't he you cannot serve two masters you can't serve God and money you'll either love the one you'll hate the other and you know you can't do it and I pause there lest any of us feel that as individuals what we've done is swallowed the lie of the Jezebel who said it's okay to continue to be a follower of Jesus while also engaging in sexual immorality and idolatry but I think there may be other risks for some of us who perhaps think yeah are there other ways in which we might be committed but compromised well I think sexual immorality and idolatry will be the risk for some

I think self-preservation and isolation may be a risk that we could also fall into as a church and as individuals self-preservation and isolation what do I mean I think it's easy to think well actually we will worship God and we will focus on Jesus but you know what we're a bit scared of the world out there and so we're going to separate ourselves from it we're going to isolate ourselves from it we might even seem a little bit angry about the world out there about all that's going on and actually our whole approach to life and faith will be one of self-preservation and isolation it's all about me it's all about my family it's all about my church it's about trying to stand up against the terrible government out of there this is fairly close to my heart as one who works for government and at times I have to say I observe in the Christian church an awful lot of self-preservation and isolation I don't think I observe an awful lot of we are absolutely praying for you as lawmakers we are with you we want to support you we want to stand with you whether that's in protecting the most vulnerable whether that's in welcoming the orphan and supporting the poor and the needy rather I think what I sometimes observe among the church is self-preservation and isolation and I suggest that if that's the route we go down then we may be swallowing the lie of the

Jezebel in the same way as if we went down the route of sexual immorality and idolatry but I suppose I've been challenged by a third way in which we might be swallowing a lie in which we might be committed but compromised today it's maybe not self-preservation and isolation I wonder if it's maybe silence and indifference and this is the one that comes closest to me to be honest where actually we think that we can be committed to Jesus and fully engaged in the life of the church and in service in the church but when it comes to the world out there when it comes to the spiritual well-being of our neighbours of our colleagues when it comes to the spiritual health of our nation actually we have nothing to say we are silent and we are indifferent might that be the mark of some of us and might that at times be the mark of the church we'll worship God but we don't feel we've really got a message for those who we are coming into contact with who do not know Jesus his love and forgiveness his power and his all-seeing and all-knowingness and we are silent and we are indifferent may you reflect on what it is

Jesus might have to say to you in your life is it about sexual immorality and idolatry is it self-preservation and isolation is it silence and indifference if it's any of these things then there is an invitation given to us by Jesus as he speaks to the church in Thyatira verse 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality isn't it great here that Jesus reminds them again that he is gracious that he is loving and that despite all that Jezebel had done she has had opportunities to turn and to leave behind her rejection of God and to turn again to Jesus and I trust that as we reflect on this letter to the church for some of us we might feel the call and know the need to repent to leave behind the areas of compromise and to turn again to our loving powerful

Jesus and to serve him wholeheartedly some were to repent and the message to others was to remain verse 24 I will not impose any other burden on those of you who do not hold to her teaching and who have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets just hold on to what you have until I come let's ensure that this morning we are ready and before God ready to repent and also ready to remain to cling tightly to him and to do his will to the end we're almost done but before I finish there is also a promise given to these Christians if they truly turn from the Jezebel if they repent and if they cling tightly to Christ there's a promise that they will be given authority that there's a great future for them verse 26 to the one who is victorious and does my will I will give authority over the nations again they're encouraged to see just beyond the immediate to look to the long term to recognize all the plans that

[28 : 38] Jesus has in store for them to realize all of his purposes and to look to the long term future as they commit to Christ and then this slightly curious word towards the end I will also give that one the morning star what does that mean as Jesus speaks to that church and leaves them with this promise that those who turn from their lack of those who turn from their compromise will be given the morning star well let me turn you to Revelation chapter 22 and to verse 16 Revelation 22 verse 16 I Jesus have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches I am the root and offspring of David and the bright morning star Jesus himself describes himself as the morning star

I think that's where we'll leave the church in Thyatira today we'll leave them with this great promise that if they turn from their compromise in whatever way that might be they will not only know blessing from Jesus they will not only know what it is to be doing the will of Jesus but they will have Jesus he who describes himself as the bright morning star will be theirs they will live their life in intimate fellowship connected to and knowing Jesus that promise is available for us isn't it a great one that we can know Jesus he will give to us the morning star he'll give us himself his presence his power his glory all that he promises all that he is he offers that to us but invites us to reflect and maybe to repent if there has been compromise alongside commitment in our lives let's pause and pray now

Lord Jesus we just want to turn our eyes to you albeit we know that if we could see you we would scarce be able to look at you face to face as we think of your eyes of blazing fire as we think of the fact that you tell us that you see us you know us and you search our hearts and our minds and as we linger for a few minutes together as we sing as we have this opportunity to take bread and to take this cup we simply open our lives and our hearts to you Lord Jesus as the one who sees us knows us searches our hearts and minds and yet the one who says again today I love you and I've laid down my life as the perfect sacrifice for your sin thank you

Jesus Amen