

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

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Look! Listen! – And Overcome!

**"My New Name and What
Christ Expects of Me"**

Lord's Day Morning

October 21, 2007

Pastor Jeff Crippen

"Idolatry is anything which cools your desires after Christ." Oliver Cromwell

"A made god is no God." Matthew Henry

"Ultimately, all idolatry amounts to worship by the idolater of himself."
R.B. Kuiper

Sermon Text: Revelation 2:18-29

"We are all born idolaters." Thomas Adams

"Inordinate affections bring extraordinary affliction.:" Anon.

"All who forsake the Word fall into idolatry." John Calvin

"Every one of us is, from his mother's womb, expert in inventing idols."
Calvin

"Man's mind is like a store of idolatry and superstition; so much so that if a man believes his own mind, it is certain that he will forsake God and forge some idol in his own brain."
Calvin

"Idolatry is everywhere represented in Scripture as the greatest insult the creature can offer the Creator."

Charles Hodge

Worldliness & the Doctrine of Balaam

You recall that last time I asked everyone to give some serious consideration this past week to practical examples of *the doctrine of Balaam* we experience today. How might the Christian individually and as a church body love the world? How might the church tolerate the world in its midst? Here are some of the examples I received –

- Refusal to practice church discipline;
- A distortion of biblical love so that it becomes sinful *toleration*;
- Participation in outward marks of the world – clothing styles, tattoos/piercings – things that glorify self and identify one as a child of the world;
- Abuse of our freedom in Christ as an excuse to participate in the world's sins;
- Styling the church after the world's principles in the name of evangelism;
- Membership in certain organizations that require/imply allegiance to the world's philosophies and values;
- Inviting representatives of false religions to speak in the church in the name of "tolerance, understanding, and love";
- Worldly "Christian" youth ministries;
- Embracing the world's music
- Embracing the world's philosophies as presented in media/entertainment;
- Embracing the "carnal Christian" doctrine, thus denying Christ's demand that we obey Him;
- Handling material things (money, etc) as the world thinks of them and uses them.

"The way/doctrine of Balaam is the teaching that endorses a Christian's participation in the practices, philosophies, and religions of the world. It maintains that doing so is perfectly fine with the Lord - that the Christian can be at peace with Balak AND with the Lord."

Hidden Manna, a White Stone, and a New Name) -

Now, we still need to conclude a few matters connected with the third letter – the epistle to the church at Pergamum – in particular verse 17.

Every letter ends with a promise to *overcomers* –

- Ephesus – the Tree of Life;
- Smyrna – Not hurt by second death.

And now, Pergamum –

NKJ Revelation 2:17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

Remember –

For sake of brevity, let's just listen to John Stott's comments on verse 17 –

"The hiddenness of the manna probably alludes to the 'gold jar of manna' which was kept in the ark (Exodus 16:32-34; Heb 9:4), but the manna itself is Christ. Just as God's people were fed by manna in the wilderness, so today our spiritual hunger is satisfied by Christ, the bread of life. He himself, after feeding the five thousand, claimed to be 'the true bread from heaven...' which 'gives life to the world' (John 6:48-51) and the 'living bread that came down from heaven' so that 'if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever' (John 6:48-51). But the promised reward with which each of the seven letters closes is a reward to be inherited in heaven, not on earth. So the hidden manna must look beyond our present taste of Christ to the heavenly fest which awaits us....As for the white stone inscribed with the new name, commentators have tumbled over one another with the variety of their interpretations –

- *The white ballot pebble which acquitted a prisoner,*
- *The tessara given to winners in games*
- *Admission to the marriage supper of the Lamb*

But to me, Archbishop Trench's explanation is the most reasonable. He recalls how the mysterious 'Urim and Thummim,' mentioned many times in the OT, were consulted by the High Priest when he was seeking divine guidance. They were connected with the 12 precious stones, symbolizing the 12 tribes of Israel, which were set in the High Priest's breastplate. The 'Urim,' Trench thought, may have been a 'white stone' or diamond on which was written...the secret name of God. Since the pot of manna was hidden within the veil (which was entered only by the High Priest), and since the Urim was possessed and consulted by the High Priest only, Trench suggested that both the manna and the stone to be presented to the Christian conqueror represent the privileges of the high priest, which the Lord will ultimately bestow on all his people, whom he has made his priests (Rev 1:6; 5:10)."¹

But what of the secret name on the stone? Dennis Johnson concludes –

"The name is known only to the recipient, just as the name of the Word of God, who rides a white horse, is known only to Himself (Rev 19:12-13). The name is a shared secret between the Lord and the recipient, blending mystery and disclosure. The

¹ What Christ Thinks of the Church, John Stott

victor's 'new name' could be his transformed identity in Christ, as the renaming of Abram to Abraham and of Simon to Peter signaled their transformation by God's power and grace. To the one who holds fast his name (2:13) Jesus gives a new name, to mark us as his property and to reshape our identity to fit his perfection. *'For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.'* (Rom 8:29)"²

That old hymn that says "there's a new name written down in glory" may not have had this precise biblical truth in mind, but it is true – every real Christian has a new name assigned them by Christ Himself.

We need to pause and consider this matter of our *new name* very carefully. You were given a name at your first birth. It represented your earthly identity. When we are saved by Christ and as He fashions us progressively into His image, the Christian comes to – well, *hate*, who and what he once was. And yet, we still wear *this same name*. In Christ there has been a radical new birth and transformation of our person – but our sinful flesh is still present and we still bear our old name.

"The Lord Jesus Christ is telling us here that even this final remnant of who we once were will one day be taken away – we shall be given a new name."

Listen to Pastor Hoeksema –

"In close connection with this white stone is the new name written upon it, which they only shall be able to read who receive it. The name in Scripture is expressive of one's being and individual nature. That peculiar character of each person that causes him to differ from his fellow human being is his name. It is therefore but natural that in perfection the children of God shall receive a new name, in harmony with the perfect renewal of their being. In this dispensation their name so frequently spells imperfection and misery, both physically and spiritually. In principle, indeed, they already possess their new name in Christ. But the glory of that new name is still largely covered up by the darkness of their old name of sin so that frequently it hardly becomes manifest. Sin controls them often...But in the eternal kingdom this shall be different. If they persevere and overcome and are faithful to death, they shall once enter into glory everlasting. And in that perfect state the glory of their new name shall shine forth in all its splendor without

² Triumph of the Lamb, Dennis Johnson

interruption. Still more, not all the saints shall be alike, so that there should be an endless monotony of identically the same beings. There shall be a rich variety of individuals....Thus God shall be glorified in the new humanity, in which the image of God shall shine forth in all its fullness and beauty, radiating as it were, from the Lord Jesus Christ into all the members of his body...Each particular child of God shall then manifest his own peculiar shade of God's image."³

Give yourself to some extended thought and consideration of this matter this week. It really is freeing and incredible. You will be the same, yet you will not be the same. In heaven, no one will ever look at me again or hear my name again and say "Oh, yes, I know Jeff – he's the one who...". No. I will be free *even from who I once was!!*

The Fourth Letter - Thyatira

Alright then, let's move about 50 miles SE of Pergamum to the Lycus River valley where we come to the next city of Asia on this "postal route" – the city of *Thyatira* (Greek = Thuateiros).

Parents – when a daughter was born to you, do you remember the process of

deciding on a *name*? Isn't it interesting that what would seem to be a simple thing – affixing an identifier to a baby – turns out to be rather complicated after all. Why? Because a name represents the person, right? It says something about that child's identity. This was even more true in the days of the people we meet in the Bible. Names were HUGELY important then. God Himself has *names* by which He reveals truths about Himself to us.

Now, as you were choosing a suitable name for your daughter – let me ask you – *how many of you considered for even one instant the name –*

Jezebel?

We know the answer right off, don't we? NONE of you considered that name for your baby girl. Why not? Because the name Jezebel has been *infamous* for centuries. It belonged to a woman who lived in Israel some eight centuries before Christ, the wife of a wicked king named *Ahab*. She was the pinnacle of all that is ungodly in a woman. Detestable. Cursed by God. A hater of God and murderer of His prophets. In the end, the dogs licked up her blood.

No. None of you considered for a second naming your daughters *Jezebel* – which means, incidentally, *Baal is Prince*. [With the resurgence of

³ Behold the Lamb, Herman Hoeksema

paganism in our day it would not surprise me at all however if we see her name returning to baby names books!]

This *Jezebel* appears now in this fourth letter to the churches – she is found in the church at Thyatira, and the mighty, risen Lord Jesus Christ announces that her time is up – *The Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire is coming against her!* Here is our Lord's letter to His church –

NKJ Revelation 2:18 " And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.

20 "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. 21 "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.

22 "Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great

tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 "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. 24 "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. 25 "But hold fast what you have till I come.

26 "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations -- 27 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' -- as I also have received from My Father; 28 "and I will give him the morning star. 29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

Once again we must begin by familiarizing ourselves with the first century city – Thyatira. What was it like to live there and more specifically – to be a Christian there?

"Thyatira was a wealthy town in the northern part of Lydia of the Roman province of Asia, on the river Lycus. It stood so near to the borders of Mysia, that some of the early writers have

regarded it as belonging to that country. Its early history is not well known, for until it was refounded by Seleucus Nicator (301-281 BC) it was a small, insignificant town. It stood on none of the Greek trade routes, but upon the lesser road between Pergamos and Sardis, and derived its wealth from the Lycus valley in which it rapidly became a commercial center, but never a metropolis.

The name "Thyatira" means "the castle of Thya." Other names which it has borne are Pelopia and Semiramis. Before the time of Nicator the place was regarded as a holy city, for there stood the temple of the ancient Lydian sun-god, Tyrimnos; about it games were held in his honor. Upon the early coins of Thyatira this Asiatic god is represented as a horseman, bearing a double-headed battle-ax, similar to those represented on the sculptures of the Hittites. A goddess associated with him was Boreatene, a deity of less importance. Another temple at Thyatira was dedicated to Sambethe, and at this shrine was a prophetess, by some supposed to represent the Jezebel of Revelation 2:20, who uttered the sayings which this deity would impart to the worshippers.

Thyatira was specially noted for the trade guilds which were probably more completely organized there than in any other ancient city. Every artisan

belonged to a guild, and every guild, which was an incorporated organization, possessed property in its own name, made contracts for great constructions, and wielded a wide influence. Powerful among them was the guild of coppersmiths; another was the guild of the dyers, who, it is believed, made use of the madder-root instead of shell-fish for making the purple dyestuffs. A member of this guild seems to have been Lydia of Thyatira, who, according to Acts 16:14, sold her dyes in Philippi. The color obtained by the use of this dye is now called Turkish red. The guilds were closely connected with the Asiatic religion of the place. Pagan feasts, with which immoral practices were associated, were held, and therefore the nature of the guilds was such that they were opposed to Christianity. According to Acts 19:10, Paul may have preached there while he was living at Ephesus, but this is uncertain; yet Christianity reached there at an early time. It was taught by many of the early church that no Christian might belong to one of the guilds, and thus the greatest opposition to Christianity was presented.⁴

Once more we see the attractiveness of *compromise* with the world in such a setting and culture. To follow Christ

⁴ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

and thus refuse to belong to these labor unions and participate in their pagan feasts and idolatrous sexual immorality was to be ostracized from society. It opened the door to slander, persecution, and poverty.

Let's listen to some further comments about this city and life in it –

"If Thyatira was noted for anything, it had a commercial rather than a political distinction. It was evidently at that time a prosperous trading center. Inscriptions which archaeologists have brought to light reveal the interesting fact that Thyatira boasted numerous trade guilds. There were, for example, associations for bakers and bronze-workers, for clothiers and cobblers, weavers, tanners, dyers and potters. It was from Thyatira that Lydia, one of Philippi's most notable converts, had come. She traded in materials treated with Thyatira's purple dye and is described by Luke as a 'dealer in purple cloth' (Acts 16:14). Perhaps it was Lydia, newborn in Christ, who returned to her home in Thyatira and was the means of planting the Christian church there."⁵

Christ's Relevant Salutation (vs 18)

NKJ Revelation 2:18 " And to the angel of the church in Thyatira

write, ' These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:

Here is the particular aspect of the vision of Jesus Christ from chapter 1 which the Lord presents of Himself to this church. His burning gaze and His shining, conquering feet are images relevant to this church. As we move through the letter, we will see why these images are selected. For now, let's note that it is no coincidence that the Lord's feet are like burnished bronze as He comes to a city *famous for its bronze*.

Christ's Commendation (vs 19)

NKJ Revelation 2:19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as for your works, the last are more than the first.*

In some ways, Thyatira is the complement of the church at Ephesus. Remember Ephesus? That was the church that had left its first love – but it was very zealous for truth. The Ephesians carefully tested those who came claiming to be apostles or prophets and found them wanting. Thyatira on the other hand is commended by Christ for her *love* – but she is going to be reproved by Him for tolerating "that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess."

⁵ What Christ Thinks of the Church, John Stott

NOTE: By now we should be realizing that EVERY local Christian church has its strengths (unless it is a Laodicea) and its deficiencies/sins. If you are ever in a church where, for example, a pastoral search process is underway, understanding these things is vital. A potential pastor must realize – "OK, this church is going to have areas where the Lord commends it, and areas where the Lord is calling it to repentance." And the church must understand that. Otherwise, disaster looms.

Here then is Christ's commendation of the believers at Thyatira. Christ *knows their deeds* – and they are GOOD deeds in His sight! This was a church that –

- Zealously served Christ, working for Him;
- Loved Christ and loved others;
- Believed Christ;
- Persevered in serving Christ.

There is no mention in the letter of external persecution as was the case in Smyrna and Pergamum. As we will see, the attacks from the enemy were originating from *within the church*.

So it seems that this was a "happening" church. The people were busy serving Christ, and doing so *with the right motive* – love for Christ. A loving

church. A serving church. A faithful believing church.

In fact, later on in the letter (vs 24) we find that there was a portion of this congregation that was not guilty of the things Christ has against the others. That is to say, of these "unspotted" saints, *Christ puts no other burden on them*. He is – see it now – Christ sees their service of Him *and He is satisfied. It is the real thing*.

Think about this. What would it be to have Christ write us such a letter (which, remember, He really is doing in these 7 letters), and tell us that He *knows our deeds* and He finds them pleasing?

Notice one particular aspect of these Christians' service that the Lord Jesus specifically singles out for commendation –

"and that your deeds of late are greater than at first."

Here were believers who believed Christ with a real faith, who love Him genuinely, and as a result the fruit was *zealous and increasing labor for Him*.

Here then is a real challenge to us. We live in comparatively easy times and circumstances. And in such a setting it is easy to be lulled to sleep – that is the

very thing that had happened at Sardis

–

NKJ Revelation 3:1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

Just the opposite of the church at Thyatira, you see. Their works are less than at first, while those of the believers at Thyatira were greater than at first. And we face this very danger here in this church, don't we?

There is something that happens over time in a church. You see it in Old Testament Israel – those old glory days in the wilderness lapsing into lethargy and laziness in Canaan. That had not happened at Thyatira – just the opposite in fact. Sardis was another story however.

I can grow lazy and comfortable, and so can you – so can this entire church. So consider –

"If we do not see our deeds for Christ increasing, stretching, reaching, growing, then this is a symptom of an

underlying problem, namely – that our love for Christ and faith in Christ are atrophying."

And –

"Great love for Christ and great faith in Christ produces great deeds for Christ."

This is why it is vital for us to be prodded, to be challenged, even to be shaken. It is why we look into issues such as membership in church associations, new involvement in missions, new challenges to personal evangelism. It is why we pray that the Lord will direct us into new arenas of service for Him. Where such challenges are lacking, serious heart problems exist.

You see, the Christians at Thyatira were characterized by what we might call –

"a holy discontentment"

They wanted to do more and more and more because of what Christ had done for them. And so it is –

NKJ 2 Corinthians 5:13 For if we are beside ourselves, *it is* for God; or if we are of sound mind, *it is* for you. 14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge

thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

those who have given to the treasury; 44 "for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

Where real faith and genuine love for Christ exist, there will certainly be a measure of this holy discontentment, this holy compulsion to do more for Christ. Now this church at Thyatira was no doubt small and weak. Notice that we see NO "mega-churches" in these seven cities – perhaps membership was highest in the lukewarm church at Laodicea, we don't know. But the point is –

"The Lord Jesus commends a church whose deeds of late are greater than at first, even if those deeds are comparatively small."

Here is the pertinent principle in our Lord's teaching –

NKJ Mark 12:41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. 42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. 43 So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all

Understand? Christ does not evaluate you individually or this church corporately by comparing us to some other church or some other Christian. He considers who we are, where we are, and the abilities and resources He has entrusted to us – it is THESE which He requires us to use diligently in His service, be they small or great.

We close this morning then with a scrutinizing look at ourselves. We can be encouraged – we can indeed serve the Lord in a way that satisfies Him. It is not impossible. But a stagnant faith and service will not be acceptable to Him. We look then to our service for Christ and we ask –

1. Is my present service of Christ greater and growing, or
2. Am I living on the glory of past days when I was zealous for Christ, but the truth is I have grown groggy, sleepy, even dead in my deeds for Him?

If the first, Christ says "I know your deeds" and He is pleased. If the latter, He says "Wake up! For I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God."

May the Lord bless us with a faith in Him and love for Him that is so genuine that we simply will not be able to be content with spiritual "water-treading."