



# **MOUNT MERRION FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**[BELFAST NORTHERN IRELAND].**



## **Pulpit Ministry of Mount Merrion Free Presbyterian Church**

Lord's Day Morning 19 & 26<sup>th</sup> April 2009.

*Series The Seven Churches Of Revelation*

*No.4 Thyatira "A Church Who Tolerated Heresy."*

Scripture Reading Rev Ch 2:18-29

By. Rev. Paul Thompson.

The book of revelation is a systematic book and not a maze of confusing allegories and illustrations as is suggested by some. It would be so easy for any one to become intrigued with this volume, it is true that Revelation is an intriguing book, yet we ought not to become as Vern Poythress states, *“Preoccupied with isolated details. Rather, become engrossed in the overall story”* Don’t grab the knife by the blade, I.e. begin at the wrong end. It is systematic so treat it systematically. The book itself can be divided into various sections Ch1-Ch2 [*Intro and vision of the Son of Man in the midst of the seven lampstands*]. Ch2:1-Ch3:22 [*The letters to the seven Churches*]. Ch4:1-Ch22 [*Beginning with the vision of God and his throne right through to the new heavens and earth and conclusion*]. Presently we are studying the second section, the Seven letters. Notice the systematic approach in these letters; there is generally a logical flow (1) A command to write (2) Christ’s description *“these things saith”* (3) A commendation or accusation *“I know...”* (4) An exhortation to repent or encouragement to press on (5) A further exhortation is added for those who hear to receive the preceding message *“he that hath an ear let him hear...”* (6) There is a promise to those who overcome. As well as analysing the structure of each letter, there is also a systematic division to the seven Churches themselves. The first and last Churches; Ephesus and Laodicea are in danger of losing their identity as a Church of Christ, the candlestick at Ephesus would be removed and the Lord threatens to spue out the Laodicean Church. The second and sixth Church; Smyrna and Philadelphia although small and weak are the only two churches that receive no rebuke but only commendation. The remaining three central Churches Pergamos, Sardis and Thyatira have within them both those who are faithful and those who are unfaithful, hence Christ both commends and rebukes. Among these Pergamos is perhaps in the best condition and Sardis may be said to be in the worst condition of these three. What unites these three Churches is the element of compromise and toleration of evil that is found in all of them. What else unites these churches is that they were trying to witness for Christ in the midst of Pagan surroundings.

### **1) Christ’s Commendation of This Church.**

The most prominent quality of this Church was love. We discover that in this respect it is completely different from that of Ephesus, they were all doctrine and no love, they had left their first love. Thyatira was a Church that was warm and affectionate. For this the Lord commends them. But in his description there is no appearance of strength, it is an attractive Church but there is no real foundation.

### **2) Christ’s Revelation of Toleration in This Church.**

The Thyatiran Church was permitting a woman by the name of Jezebel to teach heretical doctrine in their midst. We have every reason to believe that the one referred to as ‘Jezebel’ was a literal woman. Whether her actual name was ‘Jezebel’ or not we cannot be dogmatic, however, the Son of God gives her the name to describe her character being similar to that of the Old Testament Jezebel wife of Israel’s worst King, Ahab [see

*“Seeing that a Pilot steers the ship in which we sail, who will never allow us to perish even in the midst of shipwrecks, there is no reason why our minds should be overwhelmed with fear and overcome with weariness.” ...John Calvin...*

1Ki 16:33], “*And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.*” Whoever she was, we are being told that her character was absolutely sensual and wretched. The intentions of the Thyatiran Jezebel are set forth by the fact that the Lord dispenses with any adjectives, no description, He just uses her name ‘Jezebel’, that teaches us that one name does more to unveil her Satanic character than a whole paragraph of adjectives.

If we consider Jezebel [Ahab’s Queen], we will discover that she was brought by marriage into the royal house of Israel from the land of Tyre. Tyre was at that time perhaps the foremost world power. However, with her appointment as Queen, she brought all the wickedness and tenets of idolatry with her, as a result she used her position to destroy and to root out all true worship to the God of Israel. This first century Jezebel had the same intentions as the wife of Ahab had centuries before. What were those intentions? They were to seduce Israel into heathen worship, something which she succeeded in doing. 1Kings Ch16:30-33; 2 Kings Ch9:22, 30-37, you will find that Jezebel seduced the Israelites into the false worship of Baal.

a) *What are the signs of Jezebel’s seduction in the Church?*

When Christians feel that they can participate in the world and remain unaffected. The city itself was not a political or religious center, but it was renowned for its trade, particularly in skills relating to bronze work and that of cloth material. You will recall how Lydia in Acts Ch16 who is referred to as a seller or ‘exporter’ of purple lived in this city. However, because of this, Thyatira was renowned for its ‘guilds’, or ‘lodges’, this was a means of those engaged in these several trades to come together. Being a member of these guilds, would mean the participation in sensual feasts, where food was offered to idols, sexual immorality was rampant in Thyatira especially at these feasts. This woman Jezebel was teaching that even members of Christ’s church could engage in such things and still remain unaffected. Why should Christian’s lose out in the fun and celebration of the world! Why should Christian’s lose out in economic benefits by refraining from these guilds? This was all part of her seductive reasoning! Jezebel represents the defence of sin in the Church. There were men and woman living immoral lives in the congregation at Thyatira, they had departed from the way of sanctification, but this wicked woman suggested that this was fine!

The teaching of Jezebel is abroad today, whereby Christians are told that unless you really want to appreciate the glory of grace, you have first got to descend into the depths of wickedness. That is a lie which is only intended to entrap the lives of men and woman in sin. You will be led to appreciate the depths of God’s grace by thinking upon the love of God for your soul and on the transformation that grace has made; appreciation for God’s mercy is never found by going back into the world! In Titus Ch2:11-12 we are told that “*The Grace of God [teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldliness and that we should] ...live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.*” “There is no blessing in descending into sin with the view to knowing God in an more intimate way!

*“The Church does not exist for its own glory...the church does not exist for the purpose of showing her own strength...but of manifesting the grace and power of the Lord her God.” ...Herman Hoeksema...*

### **3) There was a Rejection of Divine Authority.**

Thyatira was a church renowned for its love [v19]. But it had become so taken up with experience and emotion that it had no foundation to weigh up the teaching of Jezebel. Experience had come to replace the authority of God's word. It is here that the devil will seek to confuse God's people, he will seek to get their minds from of the objective to the subjective, by that I mean, that if Satan can cause God's people to place their faith on that which is man ward and not God ward, he has in many ways succeeded, in constructing a foothold for the decline of that particular church or body of believers. Therefore it is imperative that God's people have firmly within their minds the answer to the question, 'why do I believe what I do?' Is it because of some subjective experience, or is it firmly based upon objective truth. Long gone are the days when the words '*the bible says*' are found on the lips of many believers. The prevalent attitude among many Christians is 'does it really matter what we believe, as long as we believe something!!'

It almost seems that there is no one in this Church who is going to stand up and say, 'The Word of God says.' Where there is a failure to discern, to think, our lives will be governed by impulses, '*if it feels good, it must be good, it must be right!*' is the attitude of the world. We allow our children and ourselves to fill our minds with the impulsive attitudes of Hollywood and the world, let them unconsciously imbibe into their souls the doctrine of Jezebel. Jezebel would have our young men think that pornography is fine, because its not real, she will never tell them that it will scar and destroy their minds. Jezebel will tell our young women to abandon any thought of marriage, and to engage in multiple relationships, but she will never tell of them of the insecurity, depression and promiscuity that such a life breeds.

#### **a) The authority of the scriptures & the Believer. (Its relationship).**

Peter the fisherman, who hadn't the genius or massive intellect that the apostle Paul had; yet he is moved by the Holy Ghost to write concerning this matter in particular [Read 2 Peter Ch2;16-19], Peter was an eye witness of the transfiguration, what an experience! "*We have a more sure word of prophecy.*" He says look, I have had my experience, I was on the Mt of Transfiguration, I saw Christ glorified, yet I dare not put my faith in what I saw. Peter directs the attention of his readers to the very foundation of their faith, the scriptures.

It is true that our faith rests upon Christ, but where is Christ revealed, he is revealed in scripture. Furthermore Christ himself is the word. Our faith in Christ will only increase as far as our knowledge of the scriptures goes. Once we move away from the Word of God, we are upon a shaky foundation (in fact there is no foundation at all). That is why we contend for the supremacy and sufficiency of the scriptures. Had God not given the scriptures, by inspiring men, you would know nothing of God, Christ or salvation. Peter relates to the people his greatest experience, indeed the greatest experience that anyone could undergo, that is the witnessing of the transfiguration of Christ. And he says, don't even put your faith in this, above even the transfiguration of Christ. We have a more sure word of prophecy. Peter and Paul always reasoned from the scriptures that Jesus

was the Christ. Certainly they spoke of their own experiences but never presented them as authoritative over the word of God. Peter did not present his own experience to the people as a foundation for them to rest their upon; he presents the scriptures as the authoritative foundation upon which their faith ought to rest.

That danger, which was present in Peter's day, is equally as real in our present day and age. For what we have today is a setting to the one side the unchanging authority & supremacy of God's word. And that is being replaced by the transient temporal experience of men. When God's people are brought to the point where everything that they say or do, is dictated by the word of God, the church will be a different place.

b) *There was a failure to discern.*

Thyatira was a church renowned for its love [v19]. But it had become so taken up with experience and emotion that it had no foundation to weigh up the teaching of Jezebel. It almost seems that there is no one in this Church who is going to stand up and say, 'The Word of God says.' Where there is a failure to discern, to think, our lives will be governed by impulses, *'if it feels good, it must be good, it must be right!'* is the attitude of the world. We allow our children and ourselves to fill our minds with the impulsive attitudes of Hollywood, that unconsciously we are imbibing into our souls the doctrine of Jezebel. Jezebel would have our young men think that pornography is fine, because it's not real, she will never tell them that it will scar and destroy their minds. Jezebel will tell our young women to abandon any thought of marriage, and to engage in multiple relationships, but she will never tell them of the insecurity, depression and promiscuity that such a life breeds. Extra-marital affairs or pre-marital relationships are fine as long as you love that person, is the world's reasoning! How wrong!

c) *Covetousness is also a mark of Jezebel's doctrine.*

As we know Jezebel encouraged her husband Ahab to covet Naboth's vineyard. Tragically a badge of approval is put upon the violation of the tenth commandment by many who profess the name of Christ. The prosperity gospel will tell you that *'you can covet your neighbour's Mercedes in the name of Jesus!'* God's word says, *'be content with such things as ye have!'*

d) *where does all error heresy begin?*

It always begins with an overemphasis either with Christian experience or doctrine. A man begins to lose his balance between experience and doctrine, and the departure from revealed truth begins, and as he progresses down the road of error he eventually ends up with that which is at variance with God's word. That's always the way. That is exactly what John is writing about in his epistle. There were those who claimed authority from God, who claimed to have the spirit in an unusual manner, but were intolerant of definition and doctrine. When they had their dogmas put to the test they got all uptight and annoyed. Isn't that always the way? As soon as you begin to question the integrity of some person's experience, you usually get the response ***"Are you telling me that I don't know what I felt or heard or seen?"*** John says *"try the spirits to see whether they be*

of God” There has always been extremes in the religious world, one popular extreme today is the ‘Anti-theological’ group, who tell you, “*You don’t need doctrine.*”

Imbalance with doctrine & experience has always been a problem in the history of the church. People have a tendency to go to extremes. The reformation brought about the rise of numerous sects all with tendencies to go to excesses on different issues. Luther, Calvin & others were fighting the reformation on two fronts. You take the puritans of the 17<sup>th</sup>C, and you will find that within the ranks of the puritan movement there were those who ran to excess with immediate experience & neglected the word of God (Quakers). On the other hand you there were those who were guilty of a form of intellectualism, who discounted the spirit altogether & were more concerned about legalistic statements of truth. Then you had men like ‘John Owen’ ‘Thomas Goodwin’ & others who maintained a scriptural balance between the spirit & doctrine, so it therefore always has been a problem. Now that is history & some may say “*what’s the relevance for today?*” The point is that the same problem of extremes is still a problem in the church today. You take the ‘charismatic’ who is all on for the spirit & experience, in that persons thinking there is to a great degree an exclusion of solid doctrinal teaching. Or take the person who is so caught up in doctrine that all that he possesses is a head full of knowledge, absent of any heartfelt experience.

#### **4) How the Lord Deals with Such sin.**

As was noted with the Church of Pergamos, there was a failure to deal with the Nicolaitanes, a church that failed to discipline. He who had created the Church for his own glory was watching, He saw this woman’s agenda “*to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.*” Christ was watching his church, he speaks as the Son of God, “*these things saith the Son of God.*” This is the first time that Christ uses his familial title, ‘Son of God.’ Then by means of expressive description he has this church think on who he is, “*who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.*” The Lord had warned Jezebel to repent of her sin. With piercing eyes he sees beyond the cloak of deceit and holiness [her name means chaste one]. He has feet of brass, by which he will destroy her. Christ says I will ‘*cast her in a bed*’, in other words the Lord would let her be taken in some disease associated with her licentious living. Sin affects our children. For that reason young people need to consider well their course in life, for their decisions will affect their children, Gods judgement follows on the succeeding generations.

#### **5) Christ’s Promise to This Church.** “*will I give power over the nations.*”

As with all the churches, the Lord gives a promise to those who overcome. The promise is that they ‘*will be given power over the nations.*’ God does not conclude his message to this church with threatening of judgement, he calls on them to ‘hold fast’ in a corrupt world and to abstain from all fleshly lusts. There is a twofold meaning to this promise. What is meant here is that through the preaching of the gospel, God would endue it with such power that many from every nation would be converted to Christ’s cause and the kingdom of

Satan thus weakened. But what is also meant by this promise is that the faithful in the Thyatiran church would share in the victory of Christ, a victory that would be manifested at the end of time. Every promise that is given to the seven Churches relates to heaven Ephesus Ch2:7 - the tree of life. Smyrna Ch2:11 - No second death. Pergamos Ch2:17 - a new name. Thyatira Ch2:26 - a share in Christ's power and glory. There is an obvious reference to Psalm 2, where the powers of hell strive to smash Christ's power, but he will laugh and smash them like a potter's vessel. Jezebel will perish, sin is for a season, but victory with the lamb is for ever.

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