

Revelation 2:18-29 “Thyatira: Hold Fast Until I Come”
2 Kings 9
Psalm 2

May 26, 2019

Last week, we read from the prophet Micah.

In Micah chapter 6, the prophet Micah urged Israel to remember Balak and Balaam –
remember how Balaam taught Moab and Midian to try to seduce you,
using sexual immorality to lure you away from following the LORD.
And at the end of Micah 6, the prophet connected that to the story of Omri and Ahab.
“You have kept the statutes of Omri, and all the works of the house of Ahab;
and you have walked in their counsels,
that I may make you a desolation, and your inhabitants a hissing;
so you shall bear the scorn of my people.” (Micah 6:16-17).

Micah connects Balaam and Ahab –
and the connection is found in Jezebel.

Because Jezebel enticed her husband away from following the LORD.

Ahab hadn’t been all that devoted to the LORD –
but when he married Jezebel, a Sidonian princess from Tyre,
they were the ones who built a temple for Baal in Samaria,
turning Israel away from the LORD entirely,
turning Israel to the gods of the Canaanites.

Today our OT lesson comes from 2 Kings 9 –
the end of the story of Jezebel.

There’s a lot going on in this chapter

(and Mark Hanson has been teaching on the book of Kings in SS –
so if you want to know the story better, come and hear it!),
but I should give you a couple of clues to help you listen:

First, Elisha is a prophet – he had been the apprentice to Elijah –
and Elisha has been commissioned by God to anoint Hazael as king in Syria (ch 8)
and now to anoint Jehu as king in Israel (ch 9),
so that God can use them to bring judgment upon the house of Ahab.

Second, you’ll hear about Joram, the king of Israel.

Joram is the son of Ahab and Jezebel.

You’ll also hear about Ahaziah, the king of Judah.

Ahaziah is descended from King David on his father’s side.

But Ahaziah’s mother, Athaliah, was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel
(which makes Ahaziah the *nephew* of Joram).

In other words, the royal houses of Israel and Judah have become “wedded” together.
So when God says that he is going to destroy the house of Ahab,
this means that the royal line of David has been compromised by intermarriage
with Jezebel.

So hear now the Word of the LORD from 2 Kings chapter 9....

This is the word of the Lord.

It is striking to hear Jehu’s line:

“What peace can there be, so long as the whorings and the sorceries of your mother Jezebel
are so many?”

Jezebel has become infamous for her sexual immorality –
but we don’t actually know of any particular case of adultery.

The problem is that too many people take this statement literally.
Was Jezebel actually an adulteress or a sorceress?

We don’t know.
And it is entirely beside the point!!

The “whorings and sorceries” that Jehu is talking about
is the way in which Jezebel encouraged Ahab – and all Israel –
to turn away from the LORD and follow other gods.

If you think of Jezebel as this horrible, awful person who would make your skin crawl,
then you will not be prepared to recognize Jezebel when you meet her!

Jezebel was a princess – a queen! – a powerful, impressive, beautiful woman
who understood her husband, Ahab, and sought to help him to build up his kingdom.
She was, in many ways, a Proverbs 31 woman!

“The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life...
She considers a field and buys it [well, in Jezebel’s case,
it was more like, “she considers a vineyard and acquires it by ruthless means”]
So it might be better to say that she was a *counterfeit* Proverbs 31 woman!

But that’s fitting, because her husband, Ahab,
was a counterfeit Solomon.
(Ahab had built a temple for his god in the city of his father, Omri –
just like Solomon had built a temple for his god in the city of his father, David!)

The story of Ahab and his father Omri
is filled with parallels to the story of Solomon, and his father, David.

Our psalm of response is Psalm 2B – a song of the coming Son of David –
the one who will rule the nations with a rod of iron!

Sing TPH 2B

Read Revelation 2:18-29

We keep hearing this line at the end of every one of these letters:

“The one who conquers...”

Or “the one who overcomes” –

“the one who wins”!

But Jesus has a funny idea about how to win!

Winning, for Jesus, is not about scoring more points –

or “being the best” – the fastest – or the strongest.

For Jesus, winning is about perseverance.

“Hold fast what you have until I come.”

When everything else comes crashing down around you –

hold fast what you have until I come.

It’s not a particularly glamorous way of winning!

But then again, how did Jesus win?

He triumphed over the powers by being nailed to a cross!

In the letter to Thyatira, we start again with the question:

1. Who Is Jesus? (v18)

He is:

The Son of God (Daniel 3, 7, and 10)

¹⁸ *“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.’*

In Daniel 10, the one like a son of man had eyes like flaming torches,

and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze (10:6, 16).

But here Jesus identifies himself as the Son of God.

Some people have tried to make a big deal about the difference between “son of man”
and “son of God,”

but Jesus himself – here in the letter to the church in Thyatira – connects them.

Jesus identifies himself as the Son of God –
and yet uses Daniel’s description of the son of man to do so!
The point that Jesus is making is that he is *both* the Son of God *and* the Son of Man –
indeed, he has the characteristics and properties of God (as we saw last week –
he is the “first and the last”;
as we see this week, he is the one who judges the living and the dead);
and he has the characteristics and properties of man,
as the heir of David and son of Adam.

Part of what Jesus is doing here is setting himself in contrast to the emperor.
We keep seeing here in Revelation 2-3 that Jesus is concerned
with “eating food sacrificed to idols” –
and the people of Thyatira would have been tempted to call Caesar
“the son of God.”
Indeed, the temptation would be serious – because your economic well-being
would hinge on your willingness to participate in the religious and social idolatry
of the Roman Empire.

There are echoes here of Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,
who were ordered to bow down to the statue of Nebuchadnezzar.

When they refused, they were cast into the fiery furnace.
But after they had been cast into the fiery furnace
Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fire, and saw all three standing unscathed –
and with them stood a fourth –
whom Nebuchadnezzar identified as resembling a Son of God.

So a Son of God whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze
would remind people of the Son of God who rescued Daniel’s friends
when they faced a similar trial!

I had a moment this week that gave me particular clarity on what this can look like today.
We’re getting ready to close on our house on Navarre this Thursday.

I’m finding lots of enthusiasm from a variety of quarters for our project.
It has been largely enjoyable making these new connections
and talking with lots of people.
But there have been a couple of moments when it is very clear
that there are different visions of what people want to see at 417 W. Navarre.

Many have a focus on “civic virtue” – the honor and glory of South Bend.
It’s not all bad!
It is good for a city to take pride in her buildings and neighborhoods.

And I have no difficulty saying that I want to restore this old house
and make it a place that the city of South Bend can take pride in.

Because *Christian virtue* does not eradicate civic virtue.
But Christian virtue has a different core – a different heart.
Christian virtue has at its heart, the cross of Jesus.

It is becoming clear to me that moving downtown
may very well put me in situations more often where I am tempted to compromise.
Please pray that I will always remember the Son of God whose eyes are a flame of fire,
and whose feet are like burnished bronze!

Because I fear that I am more like the angel of the church in Thyatira than I would like to admit!

Remember that these letters are each addressed to the *angel* – the messenger – of the church.
While some think that it's just talking about “angels” (sort of like guardian angels),
others have pointed out that in Greek, the word *angelos* simply means *messenger*,
and preachers – pastors – are messengers;
so it is quite possible that Jesus is addressing the pastor of each church –
because the “you” in these letters is *singular*.

At the very least, we should recognize that Jesus addresses the “angel of the church”
as a way of addressing the leadership – those in authority –
because in every case, “repentance” will involve the leadership of the church
actually taking the lead and dealing with sin!

2. What's Up with the Church? (v19-25)

a. Works, Love, Faith, Service, Patient Endurance (v19)

¹⁹ “*I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.*”

By using you *singular* it suggests that Jesus is speaking to the pastor of the church –
or at least that this church has a particular character or quality
that is *singularly* defined.

I know so many pastors who fit verse 19!

Their works, their love and faith and service and patient endurance are truly remarkable!

And unlike the pastor in Ephesus – they have not forgotten their first love!

Look back at 2:2-4.

Jesus commended the angel of Ephesus for his works, his toil,
his patient endurance and how he proved false apostles false!

What was missing?

Love.

“you have abandoned the love you had at first”
and so you have ceased to do the works you did at first.

But for the angel of Thyatira,
his latter works exceed the first!
This is a pastor who is doing *better* in his preaching and discipleship
than he did before!

Thyatira has persevered in bearing witness to Jesus!
Their love and faith and service and patient endurance
has shown forth the gospel of Christ throughout the city.

But there’s a problem:

b. But You Tolerate Jezebel (v20-23)

i. Sexual Immorality – both Physical and Spiritual (v20)

²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

This is why we started today by thinking about Jezebel.

Jezebel incited Ahab and Israel to rebel against the LORD and worship Baal.

The same problem is present in Thyatira.

Thyatira was an economic hub with lots of guilds –
tradesmen’s associations.

And each guild would have a patron deity –
and therefore would have regular feasts where they would sacrifice to their gods.

If you are a Christian,
what are you going to do?

Members of the guild are required to participate!

Oh, and your wife is not invited to these feasts...
because there will be some sexual activity –
and she might not “enjoy” it so much!

What is a Christian supposed to do?

If you want to get ahead in your trade,
you need to be part of it!

If you refuse, you’re not going to get work!

It would be tempting to take a compromising approach!

What about this?

How about if you skip the opening sacrifice – the “ritual” part –

and only show up for the meal?!

That way you are not “worshipping” other gods!!

And sure, there’s an orgy –
but you don’t have to participate...
you can hang around...
enjoy yourself – just don’t go too far!!

And if you do go too far – don’t worry! – God forgives you!!

After all – you *need* to keep your job in order to feed your family!!

But Jesus says that this approach is the same as that of Jezebel.

There are churches today that have been listening to Jezebel.

There are churches where leaders commit adultery with no consequences.
There are churches where sexual immorality is tolerated – even celebrated!
where compromise with the world is considered a virtue.

“To allow these false prophets to continue would be to allow the satanic beast
access to devour God’s people through deceptive doctrine.” (B 261)
Later in Revelation John will talk about Babylon the Great – the Harlot,
who seeks to seduce and destroy God’s people.

Here Jesus is saying that such false teaching has crept into the *church*.

And Jesus says that such a church will face his judgment.

So, when is it too late to repent?
Look at verse 21:

ii. When Is It Too Late to Repent? (v21-23a)

²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, ²³ and I will strike her children dead.

Again – remember that we are talking about *the church*.

Jezebel is a false teacher in the church –
but she is urging the church to become more and more like the world.
Those who follow her –
those who share in her pattern of life –
will share in her judgment.

(remember how in the book of Kings,
God's judgment came upon the house of Ahab and Jezebel,
so that all of their children were killed by Jehu.
In the same way, those who become "her children" –
will share in her fate.

Jesus says that he gave her time to repent.
But she refuses to repent.
Or perhaps a better translation would be:
"she does not want to repent."

When is it too late to repent?
When you do not want to repent!
When you refuse to repent.
When you continue in your sin until God strikes you dead.

Notice how Jesus puts it in verse 22:
"those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation,
unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead."

So if you repent, then it is obviously not too late to repent!

What does it mean to repent?
Well, repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner,
out of a true sense of his sin
and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,
does, with grief and hatred of his sin,
turn from it, unto God,
with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience. (SC)

Repentance means that you see your sin for what it is:
you see how filthy and awful sin is!
But repentance also means that you see the mercy of God for what it is:
you see how God sent Jesus to die in our place!
And repentance also means that you turn away from sin – and turn to God –
seeking to love, trust, and obey him!

If you are planning on doing it again – then it's not really repentance!

If you persevere in sin – if you persist in refusing to repent –
then you will perish.
But if you persevere in *faith* – if you repent and believe the gospel –
and if you *continue* to repent and believe the gospel! –
then you will live.

And that is why Jesus says at the end of verse 23:

iii. Judgment Begins with the Household of God (v23b)

And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

Now we see what it means for Jesus to have eyes like a flame of fire:

“His knowledge pierces to the core of our being” (B 264).

He sees.

He knows.

He searches mind and heart with his flaming eyes!

And thus he gives to each of you according to your works.

This language is used all through the scriptures to speak of the final judgment.

At the final judgment, we are judged *according to* our works.

Not *on the basis of* our works – but *according to* our works.

What is the difference?

If we were judged “on the basis of” our works –

then none of us could stand in the judgment!

But we are judged “according” to our works.

If your sins have been forgiven through the blood of Christ,

then what will be left for God to judge at the final day?

Only those good works that God created you for in Christ Jesus!

A judgment according to works has no fear for those who trust in Jesus!

But those who have refused to repent – who have rejected the blood of Christ –
for them, a judgment according to works can only end in death.

And that’s why Jesus distinguishes between these two groups.

Those who have followed Jezebel will be destroyed.

c. Those Who Do Not Tolerate Jezebel Simply Need to Hold Fast (v24-25)

²⁴ *But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden.* ²⁵ *Only hold fast what you have until I come.*

Jesus is probably being a little sarcastic in labeling this teaching:

“the deep things of Satan.”

Probably the false teachers referred to it as “the deep things of God”!

The false teachers would say things like:

“God loves you so much – it doesn’t matter what you do,
he forgives you!”

That’s *not* what Jesus says!

Jesus *never* says “it doesn’t matter what you do”!!!

It *does* matter what you do!

If you persist in your sin – you will die.

If you think that you can just keep on sinning – I can do whatever I want! –
and God will forgive me!!

That’s *not* okay!!

That’s *not* the deep teaching of Christ –

That’s the deep teaching of Satan!

I like to sin – God likes to forgive – we make a great team!

NO!!!!!!

Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?

May it never be!!

How can we who died to sin still live in it?! (Rom 6:1-2)

If you would reject the way of Jezebel –

if you would walk in the way of Christ –

then hold fast what you have until he comes!

And to you Jesus makes this promise:

3. What Does Jesus Promise? (v26-29)

a. The One Who Conquers and Keeps My Works until the End (v26)

²⁶ *The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,*

Notice how Jesus says it:

“the one...who keeps my works until the end...”

Jesus said that he will judge us “according to our works” –
and yet now he reminds us that “our works” are really *his works*.

You are never going to “win favor” with God by trying to be “good enough.”

But you *can* keep the works of Jesus until the end.

You can persevere in faith, hope, and love –

trusting Jesus, hoping in Jesus, loving Jesus –
because you have been joined to *him*.

In verse 26 we hear that Jesus gives authority to his people – authority *over the nations*.

How does Christ’s authority become ours?

For that look at verse 27:

b. Jesus and Us – How Christ’s Authority Becomes Ours (Psalm 2) (v27)

²⁷ *and he will rule^[c] them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.*

In Psalm 2, Jesus is the one who rules the nations with a rod of iron.

But Jesus says that now the one who conquers and who keeps my works to the end –
the faithful – the saints – are the ones who will “rule with a rod of iron”!

How is this so?

Because Jesus is God who came in the flesh.

He became all that we are by nature, so that we might become all that he is by grace.

In our union with Christ, all that is his becomes ours –
even to the point that we share in his authority over the nations –
we share in his ruling with a rod of iron –
because all that the Father has given to the Son,
is now given to us in him!

Verse 28 then provides a striking way of saying it:

c. The Morning Star (Balaam’s Prophecy in Numbers 24) (v28)

²⁸ *And I will give him the morning star.*

What is the “morning star”?

Lots of ideas have been proposed,

but one has the advantage of fitting what Jesus has been doing in these letters!

The oracle of Balaam – the pagan seer – in Numbers 24:17 says:

“I see him, but not now;

I behold him, but not near:

A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;

it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.”

Now Jesus – who is himself the “morning star” that Balaam had foreseen –

Jesus promises that he will give us *himself*.

And in giving us himself, he gives us all that the Father has given to the Son.

²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Hear this – because it's not just that we *will* overcome.

It's not just that we *will* conquer.

We *do* conquer – we *do* win!

And it begins Now!

But our conquest is not measured in earthly values.

The Son of God conquered sin and death *through the cross –
through what he suffered.*

And therefore, so do we!

Our victory cannot be measured in dollars!

Our victory is measured in persevering in faith, hope, and love to the end!

As we hold fast in the midst of trials and tribulation –

as we cling to the cross of Jesus –

we triumph!

At table:

As we heard earlier from 1 Corinthians 6,
the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.
“Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers,
nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy,
nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.
And such were some of you...”

There was a recent case of someone who was a member of another church
who got drunk during a gathering at my house and passed out.
We are communicating with that person’s home church,
because they are the ones who are responsible for dealing with it;
but our session asked me to say to you today
that we take Paul’s admonition very seriously.
Drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God
because it is impossible for one who is drunk to love God and neighbor.

At the same time, as we come to the Lord’s Table,
we would remind you that this table is not for the perfect but for the sick.

We do not come to this table because we are sinless –
if you were sinless, you wouldn’t need this table!! –
because the bread that we break is a participation in the body of Christ;
the cup that we bless is a participation in the blood of Christ –
that body that was offered for us on the cross –
that blood that was shed for the remission of our sins!

We come to this table testifying that – apart from the blood of Christ –
we are weak and miserable sinners!
And our only holiness – our only righteousness is found in him!

As Paul continues,
“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”