

Thank-you for coming today. You could have stayed in your warm bed and just enjoyed the cozy confines of your room until you felt like getting up. But you're here. Thank-you again. But why are you here? If I were to pass around a hand held mike, we would hear many reasons. Some of you came because you had to. Your parents or some other family member expected you to come. So to keep the peace at home, you came. Some of you came because you had some responsibility this morning. So you fulfilled them by coming. Some of you came because you wanted to meet someone here or you like the people. You looked forward to connecting with them.

Some of you came out of habit. Some might have come because you had nothing better to do. Maybe you came because you needed encouragement or prayer. Maybe you came because you feel guilty and desire forgiveness. Or you're stuck and you need direction. Or you need some hope and motivation. Or you just wanted to connect with God amidst His people.

The church can be fellowship where some of our deepest needs are met. This can happen because the head of this church. Jesus Christ. When we come to Him, we can receive what we really need. What we need is not necessarily what we want. Sometimes the two match up. We want encouragement and Jesus provides it. We don't want correction, but Jesus reveals it. We may not want a prescription for what's wrong in our lives but Jesus offers it. We want motivation to keep going and Jesus describes the future. He always keeps His promises.

As we receive these from Jesus; as we grow in Christlikeness, we can offer these to one another – Encouragement; Correction; Prescription and motivation through God's promises. We offer these imperfectly. Jesus offers them perfectly. In fact, Jesus offers perfect spiritual direction for those who would receive it. But He doesn't only offer direction. His presence and power to go with us as we follow His direction. We need to depend on Him to keep going in the right direction. I wonder if you would be willing to receive from Jesus what He knows you need today. Here's the main point today - **Jesus' perfect spiritual direction requires our obedience and dependence on Him.**

But how does He give such direction? Jesus' pattern of spiritual direction is laid out in His messages to the 7 churches of Revelation. As He directs them, we can receive direction ourselves. Today, we will watch Him do this with 2 more of the 7 churches at the beginning of Revelation.

I pray that today, we will collectively and individually open ourselves to hear what Jesus has to say. Then we can act on what He commands in dependence upon the Gospel's power in us. Our text today is Revelation 2:18-3:6.

Revelation 2:18-3:6 (ESV)

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.

¹⁹ “‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. 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. 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. 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. 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. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority 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.’

3 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

“‘I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. ² Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. ³ Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. ⁴ Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. ⁵ The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. ⁶ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

This passage starts with Jesus’ message to the church at Thyatira. It sat on a major crossroads. There appear to have been a large number of trade guilds or organizations in the city – Wool workers, makers of outer garments, dyers, leather workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave dealers and bronze smiths. In Acts 16:14, we read about a woman named Lydia in Philippi. She was from Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. So it seems many people made their living from one of these trades. But this posed a problem for Christians.

Members of trade guilds had to participate in a pagan religious practices. The guilds met regularly for a common meal dedicated to some patron god. So eating that meal meant you affirmed the god’s help in your trade. Sometimes the meals degenerated into wild parties. But not to eat meant you got kicked out and couldn’t practice your trade. You

would lose your job and maybe have to move to another city. This appears to be the church's greatest challenge which Jesus will address.

He starts by declaring the words of the Son of God. This is the only letter where Jesus calls Himself the Son of God. It may have been a direct challenge to the emperor cult. The Roman emperors claimed divinity and that they were a son of the gods. But Jesus declares He is the Son of God. Then He references what John saw of Jesus in the vision of the Son of Man. He has eyes like a flame of fire. Flames penetrate and go through any façade. Jesus can see everything with His penetrating gaze. His eyes have perfect discernment. He also has the feet of burnished bronze indicating his strength and stability. Maybe the fire and bronze brought to mind common images in Thyatira with the metal workers.

Then in verse 19, Jesus **Commends – Works, Love, Faith, Service, Patience Endurance and Growth in Discipleship**. There was a lot of good going on in this church. They had works. But unlike Ephesus, they did not forget their first love. They loved Christ and one another. They had faith and served one another. They endured persecution. But their growth in the faith is most surprising. Jesus says, "Your latter works exceed those you did at first." Your recent behavior is better than before. They made progress in their Christian walk. They are growing as a community in spiritual maturity.

But then in verse 20, we discover Jesus **confronts their toleration of that woman Jezebel**. The name Jezebel, especially in Jewish circles, brought to mind a very negative history. No self-respecting Jew would name their daughter Jezebel. Because of a queen in the Old Testament named Jezebel, in 1 Kings 18-20 especially, we read about her devoted and systematic campaign against God's prophets. She sponsored 850 false prophets. She threatened to kill Elijah and sought to kill all God's prophets. She sponsored Baal worship and influence her husband Ahab to lead Israel away from God. The name Jezebel became a symbol for unfaithfulness to God.

We don't know if there was actually a woman named Jezebel in the church at Thyatira. Likely, she had another name but Jesus calls her Jezebel to clearly reveal her spiritual condition. She's leading others away from God. Notice in verse 20 that she calls herself a prophetess and teaches and seduces Jesus' servants. It's most likely that her teaching basically said – its okay for us to participate in the trade guild feasts. Even though they are dedicated to a pagan god you're okay as a Christian. She had come up with some way to justify this.

It solved the Christian's economic problem. "You don't have to choose between a trade guild and Christ. You can have both." That's what they wanted to hear. They didn't have to experience disruption because of their faith. One

commentator notes, “Not surprisingly, a prophet or prophetess who tells people what they want to hear can become really popular.”

But Jesus acts decisively and severely here because of the threat to their souls. He reveals in verse 21 that he gave her time to repent. Yet she refused. So he will act. He will throw her on a bed of sickness for she invited the church to get in bed with pagan gods. And Jesus warns that those who continue to follow her teaching will experience great tribulation unless they repent of her works. So her time of judgment has come. But her followers still have time to repent.

Verse 23 might shock us at first. Jesus says, “I will strike her children dead.” But Jesus is not talking about her offspring. He’s likely talking about her most devoted followers. Those, he will strike dead. Jesus will directly intervene in this church to stop this false teaching. This will testify to all churches that Jesus searches mind and hearts. He will act on His search bringing judgment upon those who follow Jezebel.

Now how does Jesus’ correction translate into our world today? This church practiced love and service. They grew in their faith. But they lacked discernment. **Jesus confronts a church that has become too tolerant with its world.**

This can happen to us. We must watch when we might step over from being in the world to becoming of the world – especially in our world. Temptations exist to compromise our faith so that we have a secure income. Craig Keener asks the question, when it comes to survival, who do we actually trust – the world? Our paycheck? Or the Lord? “There are many economic temptations out there to compromise our walk with Christ” he writes. “A young man in the projects in inner city USA can make hundreds of dollars a day dealing drugs compared to working at McDonalds. In corporations or businesses, some can only advance by going along with unethical practices. In universities and colleges, those who don’t tow the correct party line of the institution risk losing their jobs.” Too much toleration can lead to compromising our faith.

This can also happen in our beliefs. One of the biggest challenges we face today concerns our belief of the absolute necessity of faith in Christ alone for salvation. Keener notes “Over nineteen centuries of Christian missionary activity hinged on this belief alone. But studies reveal that this remains “the single most socially offensive aspect of Christian theology.” Claiming that there is only one way to God through Christ is offensive to many. And we see more and more Christians relaxing their grip on this belief in the name of tolerance.

It shows up like this. A Christian will say, “I believe that Jesus is the way to God for Christians. But other good people in their faiths can also find their way to God.” Have you ever heard that? Maybe you even agree with that. This is supposedly a much more tolerant and inclusive view. But it’s not as tolerant as it first appears.

Tim Keller points out that according to this belief, good people can find their way to God whatever path they choose. Okay. Who gets to define the measure of goodness? And what about the bad people? According to the supposedly tolerant view, all bad people, whoever they are, cannot find God. So the tolerant position excludes bad people.

What if I’m a bad person? What if I have done bad things? Does that exclude me from being the good person that finds God? Contrast that with the Gospel. It says even bad people can come to God and find forgiveness and hope. So if we back off the exclusive claim of the gospel thinking we are more tolerant, we simply substitute one exclusive claim for another.

This church had become too tolerant of the ways of its world. So now Jesus prescribes what they need to do to keep going in the right direction. He **prescribes hold fast or hold on to** until he comes. Take a firm grip of that which they already have. Along with your love and service, hold fast to the sum total of Christian doctrine, hope and privilege.

Friends, if there ever was a time to hold fast to our faith it is now. We see attacks coming to our faith from every side. We see the Summer Worker Grant attestation requiring churches to sign a basic belief statement written by the government, the movement to muzzle the Pregnancy Care Center’s abstinence teaching in schools, the marginalization of Christians to the sidelines, the dismissal of the Bible as relevant or reliable. Taking a firm hold is critical for us to continue in the Lord.

But it is difficult. It might seem easier to let go and give in or give up. Yet remember Jesus not only provides encouragement, correction and prescription. He promises what it will be like when we get there.

Verses 26-29 promise 2 blessings to overcomers. First, **Jesus promises a share in his shepherding rule over the nations.** Verse 26 – “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron.” The word translated rule literally means “shepherd.” This shepherd will have absolute power like that which shatters a pot. It points to the total victory that is coming for Christ and His followers. When Jesus returns we will somehow join Him in reigning on the earth.

He also promises those who overcome will be given **the morning star**. The ancients saw the planet Venus as the morning star because it rose before the sun. It may be a symbol of the Christian's resurrection. But in Revelation 22:16, Jesus calls himself the morning star. When Jesus returns it will be the dawning of the new age when God clearly reigns and all is set right. In a way, Jesus' first coming was a morning star pointing to the new life we have because of God. We will receive Him in His fullness when we see Him face to face.

So Jesus provides encouragement, correction, prescription and promise to the Christians in Thyatira. We can apply what He said to our lives by looking for too much tolerance for the world. Then we hold fast to what we have received by the power of Gospel in our lives. It is the power of God unto salvation into eternity for everyone who believes.

Then Jesus speaks to the church at Sardis, a wealthy city. It sat near deposits of gold that gave it easy access to a valuable mineral. It was also built in a very strategic location. Its citadel or main fortress had natural vertical walls that rose nearly 1500 feet. No army could just run up and assault Sardis. Yet the city was conquered twice. Both times, enemy troops climbed the walls at night. It would have been easy to stop them. A few watchmen with a bow and arrow or some rocks could have knocked them off the wall. But they were so confident in the height of the walls that they didn't set watchmen. So the soldiers climbed in and opened the one gate into the fortress. The city fell for lack of watchfulness. In this city dwelt another Christian community.

Jesus identifies Himself as the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. Remember the seven spirits from Revelation 1? I conclude this refers to the Holy Spirit or the fullness of the Spirit. Jesus with the Holy Spirit speaks to the Christians at Sardis. He **commends them for nothing**. Notice the end of the verse in 3:1. "You have the reputation for being alive but you are dead." This church is the most severely denounced of the 7. Jesus confronts their reputation for being alive but in fact dead. Satan did not have to bother with this church because it was spiritually dead. If Thyatira was a church too tolerant of the world, **Sardis was a church too comfortable in the world**.

So Jesus prescribes that they wake up; remember what they have received; repent. They needed to regain their watchfulness. They needed to get back to the Word and hear again from God what He called forth from their lives. If they will not repent, he will come to them in some kind of localized judgment. Just as the city had been captured by soldiers climbing the citadel at night, Jesus will come unexpectedly to judge them.

For us today, we're not spiritually dead as a church. The amount of spiritual conversations I am having and hearing about in our community overwhelms me. The amount of ministry that happens where many of you reach out and care for others is amazing. The amount of you in some sort of Bible Study or Small Group encourages me. But we need to be vigilant. Especially in our own lives, we need to guard against sliding towards slackness.

One way to prevent this is to ensure we get God's view and perspective into our lives. We need to hear from God through His Word. We need to learn from His wisdom. We need this so we can discern all the anti-god stuff that is happening out there.

So what are you doing to get God's word in your life? What space are you making to be encouraged by other Christians to keep going? If you're not pursuing God and actively seeking His presence and word, you're sliding backwards. We need to keep growing and going in God's perspective so we can remain true to Christ whatever this world sends us.

Yet there were a few who had remained with Christ. Revelation 3:4. Yet you still have a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments. They will walk with me in white for there are worthy." Apparently, worshippers to pagan temples would wear clean garments to worship. A dirty garment disqualified you from worship and dishonored the god.

Jesus talks about Christians wearing white garments. It seems like these clothes are a metaphor for the worshipper's spiritual condition. Throughout Revelation, God's people wear white. Revelation 4:4 – Around the throne were 24 thrones and seated on the thrones were 24 elders clothed in white garments. Revelation 7:9 – After this, I looked and behold, a great multitude that no one could number . . . clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. Revelation 19:14 – And the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. Those wearing white garments enjoy a close relationship with him. This doesn't mean they are morally perfect. It points to their salvation and justification because of their trust in Christ.

So Jesus **promises that those who conquer will not have their names blotted out of the book of life.** Does this mean that people can lose their salvation? Does this mean that if you do a bad thing, God will erase you? It's not wise to build a theology like that on an apocalyptic image. The concept of a divine ledger or record book starts back in Exodus 32. God was about to wipe out his people because of their unfaithfulness. But Moses intercedes for them. If God will not spare the people, Moses wishes to be blotted out of the book which you have written. In the Old Testament, the book of

life registered those who held citizenship in Israel. In Greek cities, there was a citizen's register. But they erased the names of convicted criminals. It seems Jesus refers to this in his promise to the Christians in Sardis. Those who continue to trust Him will have their names in the book of life. But those who have not and only say they are Christians when they are not, will not have their names in that book. But it is a promise of security for the believer. Finally, Jesus promises that He will confess the name of those who conquer before His Father and the angels Matthew 10:32 – Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.

So we've seen Jesus provide what these believer's needed – not what they necessarily wanted – Encouragement, Correction, Prescription and Promise. What need has Jesus addressed in your life today? Or maybe you have seen how Jesus can direct your life spiritually. I am comforted with Jesus' directing my life. I find in Him someone who I trust; someone on my side; someone who looks out for my best; but someone who cares about me enough to let me know when I mess up. Yet when He corrects me, He walks with me and is my strength to overcome whatever I face. I trust Him to lead me forward to what He has for me and what He calls from me. Jesus provides perfect spiritual direction. Then He calls us to obey and depend on Him to follow it. Will you do that now as we come to Him in prayer?