

## **Revelation 2 – Church in Thyatira**

### **Revelation 2:18-19**

<sup>18</sup>*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. <sup>19</sup>"I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first."*

When you read the entire letter to the Thyatira church, it has to do with a judgment against this woman called 'Jezebel' and her followers or disciples. In verses 22,23, Jesus says that he will put her in a sickbed, and that is, she will suffer a severe illness, perhaps unto death.

Now, this kind of discipline in the church today is a rare occurrence. This letter helps us see that the church's condition is not good and that Jesus will not put up with compromises. Today, many Christians can commit all kinds of sins in their respective churches, and yet nothing happens. Does not Hebrews 12:8 tell us that if God is not disciplining us, we are not His legitimate children?

### **Thyatira Church is dynamic in the Commandment to Love**

So Jesus begins with these virtues, these qualities in verse 18, and then in verse 19, he goes on to say, "*I know your works, your love and faith, and service and endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.*" This church is actually quite good! It is a growing church because she is doing more than what she did before, and those works are pleasing in God's sight. The brothers and sisters in that church do love one another. They were ready to serve one another and help those who do not know God.

Now even though the situation in Thyatira is no different from that in Pergamum, they continued to endure in verse 19. Being a disciple of Jesus in the first century is a risky thing. Hence, the need to endure. But you can see that they have gone beyond endurance. They were not passive but had been active all the while. The result is that the dynamic of God's love is seen in their works. So our Lord Jesus encourages them.

### **Need discernment from God to know if one is truly a servant of God**

We now read verses 20 and 24 because we want to concentrate on the problem in the Thyatira church.

### **Revelation 2:20, 24**

<sup>20</sup>*But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*

<sup>24</sup>*But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not know the **deep things of Satan**, as they call them – I place no other burden on you.*

This woman calls herself a prophetess. In other words, she is self-appointed. That is how Jesus looks at her. But in the community, quite a number of people think that she is truly a prophetess. Now, unless

you have the mind of Christ, you wouldn't know that this woman is self-appointed. It takes discernment to know whether somebody who calls himself apostle or prophet or, in today's application, a pastor, is self-appointed or not. We need to discern before the Lord. Only a true servant of God will know whether these servants of God are self-appointed or not. However, many people in Thyatira thought she is a true prophetess. That would mean she carries quite a lot of authority!

So you will find, for example, in the Ephesian church, you have people who call themselves apostles. Now, you have a so-called prophetess. These offices are highly regarded in the church, and people have a lot of respect for them. It is little wonder that many Christians would aspire to serve in these capacities. Unfortunately, the tendency to delusion is ever-present and, if one is not careful, could end up self-appointed or appointed by someone else who is equally, if not more, deluded.

### **The deeds of Jezebel and Balaam are similar; they lead the disciples of Jesus astray**

When Jesus says she's Jezebel, that is diagnostic. He uses the Old Testament to tell us what kind of person this woman is. She may not call herself Jezebel. In fact, she has her own name. Clearly, she doesn't see herself as a Jezebel. The reason why Jesus calls her Jezebel is that she has led the disciples astray. It says here, *"so that they commit immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols."*

Last week we were looking at the church in Pergamum, and we see a similarity. There was the person of Balaam, and now we are looking at Jezebel. The sin of them both are the same. The only difference between the two is that Balaam has a relationship with Yahweh and can communicate with Him. He was indeed a prophet. In contrast, Jezebel was a defiant and imposing unbeliever who brought idolatrous practices to Israel. Nevertheless, Balaam proved to be disobedient, and the outcome of both their deeds is the same.

### **Thyatira serves as a shield for Pergamum**

Now you have to understand the geography because Thyatira is very close to Pergamum. From background studies, I discovered that Thyatira was used as a shield to protect Pergamum. If there are invading armies, they have to pass Thyatira to get to Pergamum. So they know whether a particular army is strong or not just by looking at Thyatira from Pergamum. From the vantage point of the high mountain in Pergamum, the people are looking down towards Thyatira. So, if there is a Balaam or Jezebel in one, it is no surprise to find the same type of people in the other since the two cities are very close to each other.

### **How does Satan establish his throne?**

#### **Revelation 2:13-14**

<sup>13</sup>*I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

<sup>14</sup>*But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teachings of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.*

These verses are addressed to the church in Pergamum. Now I want to ask this question today: how does Satan establish his throne? Even if there's a church of God right there, clearly, he wants to establish his throne in that church too. Once we ask the right question, we know what the answer is. Satan establishes his throne through this person, who is called Balaam. Likewise, in Thyatira, since it is not far away. Satan's throne is extended there in the person of Jezebel. Both Balaam and Jezebel were thought of as a prophet and prophetess. Obviously, they would not see themselves as deceivers. But their teachings allowed the disciples to participate in temple worship and eat food sacrificed to idols. As a result, they became stumbling blocks to the churches.

### **Baal means lord, peace, and prosperity.**

Now one of the things we must grasp is that once you look in the Old Testament, you will see that both Balaam and Jezebel were involved in the worship of Baal. What then does Baal mean? In the Hebrew, Baal means lord. For example, Sarah called Abraham "my lord." Therefore Baal can mean husband too because, in the Old Testament, the husband owns the wife.

Now what is important here is that Baal is not just lord but he also represents fertility. In other words, if you come under his lordship, then he will make your life productive. Productive in the sense that you can have many children as well as become prosperous. Your business will be good, or you will flourish in your profession. So the bottom line here is prosperity.

There is yet one more meaning to Baal, and that is victory. He represents victory. In the archeology of the Old Testament, Baal is portrayed as a god holding a bolt of lightning. In other words, he protects society from the forces of chaos. In short, then, Baal would mean "peace and prosperity." If he protects you from the forces of chaos, then, of course, you have peace and security, and you have prosperity. Now, these are the things that we long for! Who doesn't want peace and prosperity? Everybody wants that! That is why Baal was the greatest threat to Israel in the Old Testament. If you talk about peace and prosperity, not only God can provide, but Baal too can provide the same things- so the false prophet would say.

Now there's one more thing here.

### **The false apostles preach righteousness and uphold morality**

#### **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**

*<sup>13</sup>For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup>And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup>So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*

In verse 15, these false apostles tell you to do what is right. They are people who uphold moral goodness. No church that you go to will tell you to steal and lie. Of course not! Every church would uphold morality. So it is hard to see the difference.

Paul says that they even preach righteousness, but they are servants of Satan. By the way, if you read the background of Thyatira, the people there speak of moral goodness. If you talk about the Emperor, everyone loves him because he is generous and kind, especially in times of natural disasters. More importantly, he brought peace and prosperity to the empire. We also saw that everyone who practices a particular trade belongs to the trade guild. Every trade guild is involved in good works. They donate money to people who are in need and care for them. So you can see that it is not that clear-cut. In general, everyone speaks and does what is morally good.

However, there is a tendency towards sexual immorality, but this was practiced in the context of idol worship. For these people, sexual activity has a spiritual significance. If someone has sex with the temple prostitute, that person becomes united to the god he worships. So they don't think of it as pure physical pleasure. It is not that simple. A lot of it has to do with mixing morality with a spiritual act.

Going back to 2 Corinthians 11, Paul regards these people as false apostles, but the Corinthians might not see them as such. So again, there has to be discernment before God.

### **Paul said they are proclaiming another Jesus, another gospel**

#### **2 Corinthians 11:4**

*For if someone comes and proclaims **another Jesus** than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a **different spirit** from the one you received, or if you accept a **different gospel** from the one you accepted, you **put up with it** readily enough.*

Paul says, "They are proclaiming another Jesus," and "they are giving out a different spirit and also a different gospel." Then he goes on, "you put up with it readily enough." The latter compares with what we have read in Revelation 2:20, "you tolerate this woman."

If we were there, I don't know if we can see whether this woman is truly from the Lord or not because it appears that she is emphasizing the need for the gospel and Jesus. The question is, how does this message translate into practice?

### **If Jezebel is allowed to continue, there will be a Satanic church and Satanic Christians**

#### **Revelation 2:9**

*I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a **synagogue of Satan**.*

#### **Revelation 3:9**

*Behold, I will make those of the **synagogue of Satan** who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie – behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you.*

We saw that there could be false apostles, false prophets, and now even the Jews can be of Satan too. You can sum up like this: there will be a Satanic church if this Jezebel is allowed to continue. Notice from

2 Corinthians 11: a Satanic gospel, a Satanic Jesus, a Satanic spirit, and now, Satanic Jews. Satanic Jews can translate into Satanic Christians. That is when it gets scary! So it is a very serious matter. The church of God can become a church of Satan. Again I need to stress: it doesn't mean they worship Satan. It simply means that they are under Satan's control, but they don't know it.

### **Jesus could see that Satan is getting the upper hand in Thyatira**

That is why Jesus reacted strongly to these people, who he called Jezebel and Balaam. Sometimes we don't understand why Jesus is so hostile. Remember that we are fighting a spiritual battle. Jesus can see that in the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira, Satan is gaining the upper hand. He is establishing his throne. Therefore, Jesus has to intervene to stop the dangerous trend. The problem is with the leadership: they did not discern the situation and therefore could not see the urgency of the matter. It's like allowing cancer to grow because you didn't know it is cancer, and therefore you can't do anything about it.

### **Cannot serve two masters – God and property**

Now let's go back to Lord Jesus' teaching.

#### **Matthew 6:24**

*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and **love** the other, or he will be **devoted** to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

Notice that this serving is defined as loving one and hate the other. So to serve God, we love Him so much that we end up hating money. "Whoa!" you say, "What is going on here?" Now the exact translation for "money" is "mammon," which in turn means property. That means everything you have and own in this world. This verse is very puzzling for most people, and that is how a Balaam or a Jezebel emerges. That's because you got to have balance. How can you just love God and hate your property? If you hate your property, what then do you do with something you hate? Presumably, you treat them like garbage!

Now while I was working on this verse, I accidentally discovered where Jesus got this from. Jesus doesn't just come up with teaching; he bases it on the Old Testament. Now, whereabouts in the Old Testament do you see this kind of teaching? Let's look at the next verse.

#### **Mammon/Possessions equivalent to Baal**

By the way, we looked at the word "devoted" in Greek, and it means to have a strong attachment to someone or something. In other words, you cannot have a strong attachment to God and property. You cannot have both. You say, "Oh! I have two hands so that I can hold on to one, and the other as well." But that is not the case here because the "strong attachment" would mean that you **grab** that one person or thing with your two hands.

Now, where did Jesus derive the teaching? Well, he got it from Hosea.

## **Hosea 9:10**

*I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your forefathers as the earliest fruit on the fig tree in its first season. But they came to Baal-peor and **devoted** themselves to shame. And they became a detestable as that which they **loved**.*

Did you notice? If you compare this verse with Matthew 6:24, they are identical. So it's not surprising that Jesus derives his teaching from this verse, or at least, this would be one of them.

Now one thing we must understand: in Matthew 6:24, Jesus was talking to whom? To the Jewish people. They were not worshipping any idol at all. During Jesus' time, the people were generally "faithful." Nobody worshipped any idols, neither Roman nor Greek idols. So in terms of devotion, they worshipped only Yahweh. And yet the Lord Jesus taught them Matthew 6:24: you cannot have both. In other words, the mammon in Matthew 6:24 is equivalent to Baal in Hosea 9:10.

What is important here is this: our Lord Jesus tells them that it doesn't have to be a literal idol. I am sure nobody in our churches worships literal idols, but possessions do mean a lot to us. Therefore it can become equivalent to worshipping Baal. Matthew 6:24 tells us that possessions and Yahweh are like oil and water. You cannot mix them; they are mutually exclusive. Now that's very surprising for a lot of people.

So how do you solve the problem? Well, you invent an emulsifier so that the oil and water can mix. That's how we make salad dressing and mayonnaise. When you teach the Word of God, you are already as guilty as Jezebel and Baal if you allow for both. That is what we see in Revelation 2. These two characters are trying to emulsify the worship of Yahweh and the worship of Idol.

## **Love and devotion to Yahweh must be absolute**

### **Numbers 25:3, 5**

<sup>3</sup>So Israel **yoked himself** to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

<sup>5</sup>And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you kill those of his men who have **yoked themselves** to Baal of Peor."

Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor because of the advice of Balaam given to the Moabites. It is "either-or." You either yoke yourself to Baal, or you yoke yourself to Yahweh.

Now you notice in verse 5, Moses is intolerant of this kind of attitude. Therefore he says, "Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal." In Revelation 2:22, if the likes of Jezebel and her disciples do not repent, Jesus says, "I will throw her into the deathbed, and I will kill her disciples." Wow! We think that is very extreme! But do we, together with our Lord Jesus, see the spiritual danger and destruction that belies a compromised gospel?

Now we understand what first-century Christianity is all about. Our love and devotion to Yahweh must be absolute. That is also the reason why Jesus said to the church in Ephesus, “You have lost your first love.” So we are back to that intensity of that devotion.

### **Mammon provides peace and security**

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:3**

*While people are saying, “There is **peace and security**,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

Now you can see why Baal is so dangerous. Going back to the Old Testament, why do people love Baal? As mentioned above, he can give you peace and security, just as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5. Applying to us then, why do we love mammon? Because it provides peace and security. Now we understand what Jesus is saying to us all. For us, mammon is in the place of literal idolatry. So it is the love for mammon that is what idolatry is all about today.

### **The prosperity gospel, the modern-day Baalism**

I would like to talk about one particular teaching with the remaining time, which is very common, and we all know that it exists today. This kind of teaching is very well received in North America and has spread throughout the whole world. When we were serving in India, this kind of teaching was very, very popular. A lot of people love to listen to this kind of teaching since the majority are poor. Even in the Philippines, where we were, we have the same situation. Then in Singapore, a lot of Christians love this teaching. That is why those who preach this kind of gospel usually end up having big churches. Many would flock in to listen to this message.

I am sure we are familiar with the prosperity gospel. This kind of gospel tells us that if you believe in God, He will give you your heart’s desires: money in the bank, health, thriving family, and boundless happiness. The blessings are primarily material and physical, apart from eternal life, i.e., a place in heaven. This prosperity gospel is, in fact, modern-day Baalism.

Now I was curious and wanted to know how this gospel came about. I am taking the information from this website: <https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/9/1/15951874/prosperity-gospel-explained-why-joel-osteen-believes-prayer-can-make-you-rich-trump> by Tara Isabella Burton on Sept 1, 2017

The title of this article is “The prosperity gospel explained: why Joel Osteen believes that prayer can make you rich.” This article was published only slightly more than three years ago, so it is still relevant. Now the article is a bit long, so I am just cherry-picking. There are three reasons.

- 1) New thought: if you could correctly channel your mental energy, you could harness its material results ... The upshot of New Thought, though, was the quintessentially American idea that the individual was responsible for his or her own happiness, health, and situation in life, and that applying mental energy in the appropriate direction was sufficient to cure any ills.

- 2) [Protestant Calvinists] felt the need to justify their own sense of themselves as the saved. They looked both for outward signs of God's favor (i.e., through material success) and for ways to express inward virtue (i.e., through hard work). Protestants and citizens of predominately Protestant countries tend to conflate labor with personal satisfaction more than those of other religious traditions.
- 3) Pentecostal churches are characterized by an emphasis on what is known as "spiritual gifts" ... A worshipful Christian might experience, for example, the gift of healing, or might suddenly start speaking "in tongues". This tradition of worship meant that, for a believer, the idea that God would manifest Himself to the faithful in concrete, miraculous ways *in the here and now* was more prevalent than it would be in, say, a mainline Episcopalian church.

The first one has to do with a new thought. This is the kind of philosophy or theory that exists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is not Christian, but the idea is right there in No. 1, "If you correctly channel your mental energy, you could harness its material results." Now this one goes with the American ideal that we are responsible for our own happiness and health.

The second point has to do with Protestant Calvinism. They believed that they are already saved. Now, if I am saved, I want to know if God is pleased with me. The answer is, it is through material success that you know God is blessing you. You must also be morally upright, and in order to be morally upright, you have to work hard. We are talking about good honest work. So, if you work hard, then God will bless you with material riches. You can see that the first and second points harmonize very well.

The third point has to do with spiritual gifts. In Christian experience, when you have gifts of healing and speaking in tongues, that would mean that God is present with you, here and now.

So then, if you have the gifts of the Spirit and believe that God will bless you with material riches since you have worked hard and are morally upright, then all these make for prosperity gospel.

Yet it was in Pentecostal churches – with their focus on immediate spiritual gifts and the power of God to confer favor (and wellness) immediately – that the prosperity gospel as we know it today took hold. The "Word of Faith" movement – a Pentecostal version of New Thought that saw positive affirmation as central to financial and material success – became more prominent.

This phenomenon happens in Pentecostal churches. Now I have to clarify here that I have nothing against Pentecostal churches as a whole. In every Christian movement, there are godly people. I know of some Christians from Pentecostal churches who do not teach prosperity gospel. It is this particular teaching that we are concerned about, not the movement as such. Anyway, the rest of the article says that if you have the word of faith, this faith is basically a "positive affirmation as central to financial and material success."

**Prosperity Gospel, a dangerous Satanic teaching**



Prosperity Gospel is dangerous teaching because it compromises your faith in God with love for material things. That's why it is very popular with people who want to have material abundance or keep what we have in the first place. Who doesn't want security? Who doesn't want peace? Who doesn't want prosperity? We must be wary of this dangerous teaching.

If we are the true church of God and have learned from Revelation 2, then we cannot tolerate this kind of teaching. Anyone who teaches this should not be allowed to serve in the church. Why? Because that person is going against the teaching of Scripture. I thank God that there are quite a number of scholars who are calling out this teaching. They are warning that it is unscriptural and rightly so. In fact, this teaching is Satanic in its essence, as I mentioned earlier.

Now, the immediate question is this. In this case, should we work or should we not work? If we have money, then what's going to happen? Some people say it is a question of stewardship. That is true, but we need to clarify further: are we talking about the stewardship of my money or the stewardship of God's money? Which one is it? Many people have not resolved this question. They still regard whatever property they have as theirs. If we start with that premise, then the question of stewardship has no meaning anymore because you decide in the end.

### **You lack nothing if you follow Yahweh**

So we must understand that in the first place, we don't live for ourselves anymore. That's what the call to discipleship is all about. Now I thank Yahweh that He has taught us quite a lot about this matter. When Israel was in the wilderness, Moses said to them, "you lacked nothing!" In other words, they always had enough but not more than enough. Everyday they had manna, and that manna only lasted for the day except the day before the Sabbath.

We, too, have experienced Yahweh's provision. After over the 30 years or so of serving Him, we have never lacked anything. We always have enough. When we went to Singapore to do His work, there was a recession there. A lot of people lost their jobs. But we were needed there. A certain brother came, and I think most of you know him. He is Pastor PK. He wanted to help with the work. Now, of course, we need to live from month to month. We have bills to pay. Pastor PK said to us, "I will look for a job so you can concentrate on the work." He was going to look for a job in the middle of a recession! With Yahweh, all things are possible! He opened a door, and PK found a teaching job in a certain Polytechnic. It was smooth sailing! He had one interview and got hired. From his salary, he gave us half, and that was almost enough for our daily needs. The rest came from Pastor Boon who also found a job in Singapore at that time.

Yahweh opened the door in the Polytechnic for another reason: PK could do outreach among the students there, which he did, and quite a few came to our church. So we thank Yahweh God that He meets our monthly needs. He never gave us more than what we needed. If it's more than we need, there must be some other purpose for that more.

That reminds me of a certain pastor. I think up to now, he is still working in Iraq. One day at the end of his United States visit, Yahweh told a certain church leader to give him a large sum of money. So when

he said goodbye to this pastor, he hugged him and put the envelope into his pocket. That leader assured him that Yahweh had instructed him to give him the money.

Iraq at that time was in a state of war. When he returned, somehow, he got kidnapped! Then he remembered that he had this amount of money with him. So he used it to pay for his own ransom and was able to walk free. Yahweh knew what would happen to this pastor and had arranged for his servant to pass him that amount. His future need was already anticipated and taken care of before it happened!

Now, please note that not all extras are meant for a crisis! Only God knows what you need and will need. Thankfully, He watches over us and provides for us!

**Store up treasure in heaven, not on earth**

Jesus said, "Store up treasure in heaven. Do not store up money on earth." If there's anything we have on earth, our thinking should be, "What can I contribute to the Kingdom of God?" We do have our monthly needs; we still need to pay our rents, our bills, children's education, and so on. Whatever our jobs are, everything belongs to Him. Yahweh gives and He takes. But let us remember, we are here on earth to advance His Kingdom. May the Yahweh deliver us from the love of mammon, the modern Baal.