

PROPHETS WHO BRING NO PROFITS**Revelation 2:18-29****(Read Revelation 2:18-29)**

Intro: The director of Navajo Brethren in Christ Mission when I served there in the middle of the 1970s was Dr. Marion Heisey from Valley Chapel BIC which is an hour east of us in East Canton. In addition to his leadership of the various ministries and over 60 staff members at the mission, he was the chairman of the psychology department at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, about 150 miles south of us. He owned a home there and spent at least half of each week there caring for his teaching and administrative duties at UNM. This gave time to find good deals for the mission – Marion was NEVER able to pass up a good deal. One time he came home with an ancient John Deere backhoe. What do you need a backhoe for? Oh, men can come up with all kinds of things they are good for. Men like to dig.

Another time Marion came home with a building. Yes, a building. Somehow, he had located a steel building that was in pieces in a field outside of the city of Albuquerque. This was no little garden shed. It was 80 feet by 100 feet with an optional 30 by 100 foot lean-to that could be added to the one side. There were huge girders and purlins and piles of siding and boxes and boxes of hardware like nuts and bolts and plates and they were spread out in a field with weeds growing up around it all. He had the disassembled building delivered to the mission so that we could build what would become the Navajo Community Center. He envisioned conferences being held there and the space afforded by the lean-to was to be a kitchen and laundry mat that would be available to the Navajo community.

Once it was delivered he expected us to build it. So we did. Our little crew at the mission did a lot of the work, but farmers from Kansas and Oklahoma also came in for a week at a time with a number of workers from their congregations and they helped us build this huge building. (This is what it looks like 45+ years later)

As I said before it was a steel building with huge sheets of siding all around. It was decided, however that the west and east ends of the building would be concrete block with a brick face. This was a monumental task considering that these were the biggest walls in height and width.

The leader of our construction crew, Joe Reese, was a jack of all trades, one being that of expert block layer and he, along with several tenders who mixed mortar and supplied him with block, set about building the wall. It was a huge expanse and took a lot of time to build – weeks as I recall. When the block on the west end was about Three quarters of the way to completion, and probably about 25 feet high, an overnight windstorm, which are typical in the high desert, toppled that huge expanse into a jagged pile of concrete rubble. I will never forget coming out in the morning and looking at the mountain of debris. Joe was an expert block layer, but he had forgotten about reinforcement and support. We were all sick. All that work. All that time. All in a pile.

The Church in Thyatira that we just read about in our text for today, is praised by Jesus for its good works of love, faith, service, and perseverance. He applauds them because they are only getting better at it. And then, like an 80 foot wall of concrete block that crashes into rubble, Jesus continues with, BUT I have this against you . . .

All that work. All that time. All worthless in the face of compromise. All because they followed a false prophet who promise much and amounted to nothing but trouble and heartache.

As we have seen in the messages from Jesus to the previous churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum, there is timely teaching for us in 2024 in Ashland, Ohio. So, let's look at it and see.

Quick background on Thyatira

David Guzik tells us that “this is the smallest and least important of the seven cities Jesus addresses in Revelation 2 and 3.

Unlike Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum, in Thyatira there is no Temple to Caesar, though there were the ubiquitous temples to various Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. Instead of religion, Thyatira was known for its business and industry. In fact Acts 16 points out that Lydia, who was a seller of purple cloth in Philippi when Paul was there on a missionary journey, was from Thyatira. So, among other things, Thyatira was known for dyes and textiles. It was a business town with trade guilds for everything. Maybe you could say it was a union town and if you wanted to be successful, you needed to toe the line. Unlike the previous three churches

we studied, the Christ Followers in this city were not experiencing persecution for their faith. Instead, their faith was being tested by the temptation to compromise holiness and integrity in order to succeed economically. And this does not escape the attention of Jesus. In fact, you cannot hide from . . .

The God who sees

- Our text says these are the words of the Son of God. This is God speaking. Guzik is helpful here. He writes, *“In Jewish thought, to be the son of a thing meant you had the nature of that thing. The sons of the sorceress (Isaiah 57:3) had the nature of the sorceress. The sons of thunder (Mark 3:17) (James and John) had a nature like thunder. So the Son of God has the divine nature, the nature of God. Jesus is God. And he sees what Thyatira has been doing.”*
- And he isn't just watching – his eyes are like fire – they penetrate and see through to the truth. One of the songs from last summer's VBS gets a lot of airplay from Alexa at our house when Fiona and Grady are there. It's catchy and it's fun and it's true:
*When you're jumping, jumping up and down
When you're spinning, spinning round and round
God is seeing everything you do
Cause He's watching, watching over you
God is watching, watching over you,
24/7 watching over you
Your life is in His hands oooh
He's got great big plans cause
He's watching over you.*

Yes! It's true. But we seem to forget. God **IS** watching. That's comforting when we're on the right track and it's more than worrisome when we're not.

- Jesus's penetrating gaze sees the good things the church is doing and he praises them for it. Thyatira may have had the dubious distinction of being the least significant city but they were not hidden to Jesus. He sees their good works.
- The good works are love, service, faith, and patient endurance. This is great! Every church should be known for this. And then he ices the cake – your latter work exceeds the first. You keep doing these good works better and better. They are growing and improving.
- Jesus sees this and their good works are exemplary. **BUT . . .**

Good works are quickly undone

- No matter how well you are doing, all the good can be annulled. The wall can crumble if you compromise.
- Jesus levels a serious charge: *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.* Revelation 2:20. There are certain insults you just don't throw around. The name Jezebel would be a hugely sobering charge for Christ Followers who knew of the horrific reputation of King Ahab's wife in the Old Testament. This was not just some mean girl – Jezebel took evil to a new level. John Walvoord, writes this, *“The name Jezebel had a powerful association. If we call someone a Judas or a Hitler it means something strong. It was also a strong thing to call this woman Jezebel. “She was one of the most evil characters of the Old Testament, who attempted to combine the worship of Israel with the worship of the idol Baal... Jezebel herself had a most unenviable record of evil.”*
- This false prophet named Jezebel is charming people with her message and, they're falling for it. We aren't told exactly what her message was. It obviously involved sexual immorality which was prevalent in Greek and Roman culture and no doubt involved promiscuity of all kinds from sexual relations outside of marriage, adultery, and homosexuality. Her message may have involved some kind of Gnostic teaching which separated the spiritual from the physical. What I mean is, in simple terms, Gnosticism maintains that as long as you keep your spirit pure, it doesn't matter what you do with your body.

- The prophetess is also enticing some Christian business owners to participate in pagan rites. This is indicated by the fact they were eating food sacrificed to idols. To do that, the people who called Jesus Lord were obviously involved in pagan activities. Jezebel is seducing the servants of Christ. Remember Jesus's warning, *But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.* Mark 9:42. Jezebel is being fitted for a millstone.
- It seems this was all being done in the name of business – it's what is required to survive in the market. If you want to succeed in business you need to play the evil game.
- Notice that Jesus doesn't write this false prophetess off – he offers her grace. There is time for repentance. That's just the way Jesus is. My friend Greg posted this on Facebook this past week. Paul experienced that grace and if Jezebel had repented, she would have experienced it too.
*Grace, grace, God's grace,
 Grace that will pardon and cleanse within.
 Grace, grace, marvelous grace,
 Grace that is greater than all our sin.*

That grace was available for Jezebel and anyone who fell for her false message. We aren't told what she did in the end, but we can always hope.

- What we **ARE** told is . . .

Don't Compromise

- The church at Thyatira was doing just that and so Jesus was charging "*Because you tolerate that woman Jezebel*" Revelation 2:20b it shows your sin. On the outside, they were a model church, showing works, love, service, faith, and patience. Yet there was all this corruption inside the church. The sin of the church was that they allowed this corruption. Jesus is essentially saying "Watch who you listen to and don't compromise".
- As he did in his message to Pergamum he tells this church to hold fast to the message you know to be true. Don't fall for Satan's lies. Be faithful and become conquerors.
- If that means your business doesn't flourish – then so be it. If you need to be part of a pagan guild to succeed, then that is not the success you should seek. There may not have been religious persecution in Thyatira, but it seems there was economic persecution and as a result there was a temptation for Christ Followers to compromise their faith to do business. The saying is, business is business and it's the price of doing business. The problem is, business is business is not good business because God doesn't bless that kind of business.
- This works in the schools we choose, the politics we engage in, the clubs we participate in – anything!.
- Don't compromise. Follow Jesus and not a prophet who brings no profit.

Conclusion: Paul told us, *we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* Romans 8:37 and Jesus promises us the same here. Be faithful to the end and we will receive the morning star. For a good two thirds of the year Kathy and I take our daily walk in darkness – it's just the way of where we live here in Northern Ohio and how far west we are in the Eastern Time Zone. One of the positive things about that walk in the dark is, when it's clear (which hasn't been much lately), you can see Venus, the Morning Star, so clear and clean and sparkly that it's almost break taking. It's so bright I can and have taken numerous pictures of it with my phone. But do you know what we know when we see Venus in that predawn darkness? **DAYLIGHT IS COMING!** After the dark comes the dawn – and that is the promise of the morning star. Amen.