

Things to Come

#4 More Messages to the Church

I. Introduction

The letter to the church of Thyatira starts a second section of the messages. The first three churches (more or less) remained true to the faith. But starting with Thyatira, the situation is described as far worse. Large numbers of Christians were yielding to false teaching, immorality and idolatry. That downward spiritual spiral gets to its lowest point with the church at Laodicea.

II. Thyatira (2:18-29): The church that Tolerated Sin

Located 45 miles east of Pergamum, this is not a great city. It was founded as a military outpost but known for its commerce in wool, linen and bronze work. Its trades were organized into guilds and those guilds wielded much influence. They had their own patron gods and held festivals in their honor.

Likely, converts from Ephesus came and began the church in Thyatira (Acts 19:10). Lydia, a seller of purple was from Thyatira (Acts 16:14)

This fourth letter is the longest letter. The speaker is identified as:

1. The "Son of God": equivalent to the expression of "Son of Man"
2. One whose eyes are like a blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze. See Rev. 19:12

A. The Local Situation

1. The Commendations:
 - a. You are showing love for God and for each other
 - b. You are displaying strong faith
 - c. Out of love and faith, you are active in your service to others
 - d. Your deeds of late are greater in number than at first. You are growing and maturing

2. The Concern:

There is internal compromise. They tolerated the prophetess, Jezebel.

Women served as prophets in the New Testament (Luke 2:36, Acts 21:9 and I Cor. 11:5). However, there were rules associated with their ministry (I Cor. 14:34). Biblical prophets who spoke for God were correct 100% of the time (Deut. 18:21-22).

Jezebel: See I Kings 16, II Kings 9

3. The Consequence:

Death: It affected the prophetess, those who committed spiritual adultery with her and the "spiritual" children that followed her. Since this church had existed for about 40 years, there was plenty of time for others to fall into the same pattern.

Remember how the Lord handled Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5)

4. The Call for repentance: "repent of her ways"

5. The Promise of a Reward

a. Authority over the nations (See Ps. 2)

b. The gift of the "Morning Star"/ Christ Himself ...see Rev. 22:16

III. Sardis (3:1-6): the Dead Church

Located 30 miles south of Thyatira, Sardis had its glory in the past. The major temple was never finished, the luxurious living off of the significant trade routes led to moral decay. Its "claim to fame" during this period of history was the wool industry.

A. The local situation:

There is no mention of persecution. A dead church is not harassed. The church had a reputation, a name in the community, but the Lord knew their deeds. Sin had killed the church at Sardis.

B. The concern: the people were just going through the motions. They were "playing church." Nothing of substance was being accomplished.

C. The consequence: "I will come like a thief"

D. The call for repentance: "Wake Up!"

Strengthen things: focus on important spiritual realities

Remember what you have received/heard: See I Tim. 6:20

Keep/Obey what you have heard: Good theology isn't enough.

"It is better to obey than to sacrifice." (I Sam. 15:22)

E. The Promise of Reward:

White garments: Worn in major celebrations, like the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

Name not erased from the book of life: this is a threat of physical death. A book like this existed in ancient cities. It was a kind of register.

In this case, the name is not removed and instead Christ will affirm every believer's name before the Father. (Matt. 10:32)

IV. Philadelphia (3:7-13) The Faithful Church

Philadelphia is the youngest of the seven cities, and is situated about 25 miles southeast of Sardis. It sits on a high plateau. It was a strong fortress city that became a strong missionary outpost for the gospel.

A. The local situation:

What little strength they had produced quite an impact on their city. There was spiritual power in that church. They kept His word and did not deny His name. They persevered faithfully through trials and difficulties. They were steadfast (II Thess. 3:5)

B. The reward for their faithfulness:

1. He put before them an "Open Door." (Col. 4:2-3)
2. He will cause the church's enemies to submit to the church.
3. He "keep them from the hour of testing"

There are two possible renderings of the Greek phrase "keep from":

- a. "keep them out of"/ keep them away from the testing

This rendering supports the belief that the church will be saved from the hour of testing described as Jacob's trouble, the 70th week of Daniel or the seven years of tribulation.

- b. "Keep them while they are in the testing"...a similar idea to the prayer in John 17:15.

V. So What?

A church that tolerates sin will most assuredly spiritually die. So will an individual believer. The opportunity to be useful to the Savior comes on the heels of obedience. Sin cannot be tolerated.

Consider leprosy (Hansen's disease) as a picture of sin. (Lev. 13)