



When I travel out of the country I always like to have something that tells those around me that I am a Canadian. I may have a Canadian flag on my luggage or a maple leaf emblem on my camera strap. I do that because number of years ago when Kathy and I were in England, I found it was helpful to let people know that I was a Canadian. So when I went around the 'roundabout' the wrong way, I would mouth, "*Sorry, I am Canadian.*" And they would wave back with a smile and mutter, "*Bloody Canadian.*" When I got out of the car and went to fill up the gas tank on the wrong side, the gas attendant just shrugged his shoulders and said, "A Canadian, eh?"

In Turkey when we needed to exchange money, get directions, pretend to not understand the Turkish money during haggling over another 'purse' purchase, I would say, "*I am sorry. I am Canadian. Can you help me?*" They would smile and realizing I was from a Nice country full of Nice people, who lived in igloo's and lived off the land, they would help me.

This morning as we continue our series from Revelations 2 & 3 called "*You've Got Mail,*" we want look at a letter to Thyratira. Thyratira is the most Canadian Church listed in Revelations 2 & 3. I say that because this is the nicest church; it is a church who likes being nice and enjoys doing the nice thing and responding in a nice way to those in their church.

### **I. The City – Learned How to Compromise**

Thyratira (modern day Akhisar) is located 37 miles southeast of Pergamum along the most important road in the country. It is a beautiful little town in the middle of farming land. The road meanders through a series of valleys. Because the city was built in a valley it had no natural fortification, so the job of the small Roman garrison situated there, was to hold off any invader long enough for the capital city of Pergamum to prepare to defend itself. There are two things that you need to know about Thyratira:

(i) Because of its lack of fortifications, the city, over the years had become masters at negotiations, conciliation and compromise. When it came to religion it was a town that believed in the motto, "*Live and let live.*"

(ii) It was a city whose economic base was very blue collar; it was '*Union*' town, full of tanners, tent makers, weavers and dyers of purple. Remember that in Acts 16, the first person who became a Christian in Philippi was a woman named Lydia from Thyratira and a seller of purple dyed clothing. In this Union town, each Union Hall had its own '*deity*' that they worshiped and that each person in the Union was expected to offer sacrifices. The problem was that these Unions held banquets which became excuses for excessive drinking and orgies that went along with their union business. As we will see, one of the questions being raised here was, should Christians be involved in these unions when their involvement would include, at the very minimum, attendance at these events? Have you been in a position where you've had to choose between going along with the group at work or school when it took you to places you felt uncomfortable with as a Christian? Or you had to take the unpopular stand for what you believe in? That was the struggle these nice Christians were wrestling with. This was a city who had learned how to compromise well.

## II. **The Saviour - He Misses Nothing** (Revelations 2:18)

I think the church was very excited when the letter came from Bishop John on the Isle of Patmos with words from Jesus. As they began to read, they found that Jesus began by describing himself with characteristics which had a direct impact on what He said next. Revelations 2:18, *“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.”* He described Himself in the following ways:

(i) **“Son of God”** – In Revelations 1, we saw that Jesus is described as the “Son of Man”. This is the only place in the book of Revelation where the term ‘Son of God’ is used. You see, Thyatira was home to a special temple to Apollo who was known as the Sun god, primary son of Zeus. So when Jesus described Himself, in this setting, as the SON of God, he was setting Himself against the local deity, (Son of Zeus) saying that He was the TRUE Son of the TRUE God. It is a theme we find throughout Christian history.

For example, Christians celebrate Jesus’ birthday on December 25 every year. As you know, originally that was a pagan festival for the sun god Apollo. Early Christians chose this date intentionally. They did this on purpose, not to piggy pack (or Christianize) a pagan holiday but instead to establish a rival holiday, where they would celebrate the birth of Jesus, the True Son of God. The result 2000 years later is that no one celebrates the birth of Apollo, the deity from Thyatira but world-wide, Jesus the true Son of God is celebrated. Jesus begins by saying I am God, the one and only true Son of God who has at His command the power and authority of God.

Matthew 28:18, *“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*

ii) **“Blazing Eyes”** - He is the God who sees all things; His blazing eyes will see even things that we try to hide. Hebrews 4:13, *“Nothing is hidden from his sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”* As He looks at the church, He will not miss a thing. I think it is fair to say that describing the eyes with the word ‘blazing,’ may be a hint to the audience that He is angry at some things He sees.

iii) **“Bronze Feet”** - This goes back to Daniel 10:6, *“His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.”* Bronze was seen as the hardest metal of their day, which means that God is coming in strength to speak to them. This short description wants to leave His readers with the understanding that the God, who knows all things, does not compromise.

## III. **The Church - A Model for Us** (Revelations 2:19)

Revelations 2:19, *“I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.”*

I know your deeds. Have you noticed that this line keeps showing up week after week, letter after letter? When a God keeps repeating Himself like this, it is always for a reason. He wants us to hear that there is nothing we do that He does not see. When you helped that person who was down, when you slipped that extra money into someone’s mailbox or the offering plate, when you took meal over to someone or spent time in prayer – He saw it. Or when you cut that guy off in traffic, drank too much, spread that gossip, hurt someone with

your words or said that thing which you know will cause troubles in the church – again, He noticed.

Someone said, “True character is what you do when no one is watching.” Jesus is saying He is always watching. If you doubt that look at Revelations 2:23, “*I am He who searches the hearts and minds (intentions).*” He tells us that so we will live better. And speaking of living better, look at what He says about this great church: (Watch the progression as we go through this.)

### **1. Love**

Here is where it needs to start - with love for God and for each other. This church had built the kind of relationship with each other where they are there for each other. It isn't using the word love like 'I love olives on my pizza'; it is using the Greek word, *Agape*, which is the kind of love that keeps on giving without asking, “*What's in it for me?*” It is the kind of love I listened to being described by some of the Hub members on the Hub Pastoral Search Committee the other day. The kind of love that put the other person first, that holds friendship as precious and something to be cared for, not manipulated. It is what we all crave deep down. And it is what was happening at this special church and what God wants to see in every area of this church.

I Corinthians 13:1 – 3, “*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.*”

### **2. Faith**

What Jesus was saying that what He was seeing in that church was that their faith in Jesus, was leading them to a life of faithfulness. They were sticking to living like Christians daily. They were saying to each other, “*You can count on me to have your back – I will faithfully be your friend.*” And then to God they were saying, “*We will keep stepping out in what you want us to do, even when we don't completely understand or things don't work out exactly like we had hoped. We will attempt to follow you.*”

Karen Huxter, in Haiti, had all kinds of plans in place until the earthquake struck in Haiti. She has had to step out in faith to deliver food and water. Step in faith that the school could be repaired and step in faith that things would keep going. A every time she stepped out in that way, God smiled and walked with her. That is what was happening in this church and that is what God keeps calling us to do.

### **3. Service**

Remember that James says that faith without works is dead. Here is the progress I was talking about. Our talk about faith needed to be lived out with our walk of faith.

James 2:15 -16, “*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?*”

Tony Campolo tells a story about being a guest speaker at a mission rally in Philadelphia. During the meeting, the chairperson reported a prayer request from a missionary doctor in Venezuela. The need for her services was so great she had to turn people away. So she wanted to raise \$5000 to add on to the medical centre. Having shared the prayer request, the chairperson asked Tony to lead the meeting in prayer that the \$5000 would be raised. He

refused. He said he would only pray after every person in the room had emptied their pockets and placed all their cash on the table at the front. Then he would pray for God to make up the shortfall.

Tony began by putting his hand into his pocket and pulling out everything he had that day - just \$2.25. He put it down on the table and then asked the chairperson to do the same. She hesitated, *"Thank you Dr Campolo. I think we've all got the point."*

*"No! I don't think we have!"* said Tony, *"My \$2.25 is on the altar. Now it's your turn!"* So the startled and embarrassed woman opened her wallet and pulled out the \$10 she had in it. Tony then went round the room and got every person to do the same. By the time they finished they had \$8000. Tony concluded by saying, *"Just think of the audacity of asking God for five thousand dollars, when He has already provided us with more than eight thousand dollars in this room. We should not be asking God to supply our needs. He already has!"* God keeps asking those of us who love Him to be faithful in serving Him.

#### **4. Perseverance**

The other night I sat with our Elders, who have been working so hard on so many things and I thought about this word. Having served so well, cared so much and at times, put up with some very tough things, God was saying, *"Keep going. There is still much that needs to be done. Trust me. Keep at it. You're making a difference."* That is the call for all of us.

And then He adds one more little line, *"You are now doing more than you did at first."* Wow! Their faith and love in Jesus grew over the years so that today, they were more involved than they had been when they first started to follow Jesus.

#### **IV. The Situation – Danger from Within (Revelations 2:20 – 23)**

Just think. If we were reading this about our church how it would have warmed our hearts and encouraged us with the fact that Jesus was pleased with so much of what was happening in our church. Now I know there are some things that they need to be working on in this church which we will get to. But stop for a moment, like they did and, like them, enjoy the smile of God for how God is in this place, how so many say they feel He is present, how even last week someone asked Jesus into their heart, how men and women, boys and girls are being touched by Jesus and how so many are living with an increased passion and faith.

As in Thyatira, we need to stop and celebrate where God is blessing and where we are living in His power and stride. So often we are so quick to jump to that which is wrong and miss that when we don't celebrate the goodness of God and faithfulness of His people, we demean the work of God, steal the joy and rob the passion of God's people. God is here. God is present. This church has much to rejoice in. Yet while we are flawed, we are the active beautiful powerful bride of Christ.

Now, turn to Revelations 2:20 – 23, *"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds."*

## 1. The Power of a Person

Jesus says, *“Nevertheless (But) I have this against you.”* It would seem that there was this powerful woman in the church, who claimed to have prophetic gifts and was saying something like this, *“Despite the fact that these Union banquets end up to be drunks where strippers and temple prostitutes are present. God wants you to go to these meetings because He doesn’t want you to be poor and so you need to be part of these unions that give you work (He is the God who has abundance isn’t He?) and He wants you to be where your friends are hanging out (so you can have an influence on them and maybe even witness to them.)”*

And so the men in the church went off to these parties and instead of being a witness, ended up getting drunk, watching strippers and then ended up in bed with this lady. That is why Jesus called her a Jezebel. In the Old Testament there was a godly king named Ahab who married a Princess from Tyre. She not only led him but Israel away from God into Baal worship, a religion who sexual abuses were identical to what was happening in the Union halls in Thyatira.

Comments:

(i) Some people use this passage to speak against women leadership in the church. On July 4 I will be speaking about, *“The Place of Women in the Church”* and I will be saying, *“If the Lord gives gifts to women like preaching, teaching and leadership, who am I to stand in the way of freeing them to use their God given giftedness?”*

(ii) When someone tells you that they have a prophetic word of prophesy for you that you must obey, (just like this woman did) be cautious as it is easy to use the, *“God told me.”* comment like a trump card. What can you really say once they have said this? What you need to do if you feel you have a word from God for someone else, carry it graciously to them. Tell them what you feel God has said and then ask them to pray to see if it is God’s word for them or not. The job of the prophet is to carry what they feel are words of God and then let God and the person do business over it.

So, the lesson from this passage is. Test what is said from the pulpit, other teachers, the books you read and ‘prophets’ with scripture and through prayer so you hear only God’s Word and follow only God’s Word.

(iii) Real issue here was that this church was a NICE church who had allowed the mindset of their culture to become the culture of the church. They took the cities idea to *“Live and let live”* when it came to matters of religion and sexuality. They allowed friendships and the desire to do what was NICE become the reason for not facing tough issues and so nice trumped truth. They settled for compromise or inaction instead of calling an evil sexually promiscuous person what they really were - a sinner not a leader.

Here is the scary thing. While persecution from outside the church couldn’t destroy the church, a woman who was living in an ungodly way, left unchecked, almost destroyed the church. Sin, when we rename it, is still sin. Because of that we need to speak against it.

Over this past while I have mentioned living together, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, abortion and adultery as things that God stands against. As I do that I celebrate the fact that Jesus loves to forgive and allow us to move on, leave things behind us and live in victory. But I need to say these things out loud because God says that in this life and in the next, He will let the consequences of our actions touch us and those we love.

Look at verses 22 and 23, *“So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her*

*children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.”*

Don't miss the irony of this statement. For this woman, who ended up in bed with married Christian men, God's judgment would be that He would cast her into a bed of suffering. And He adds, *'I will repay each of you according to your deeds.'* This means that He will judge the men as well and adds that the actions of this lady will have an affect on her children. While that sounds harsh, we know from life that kids often end up living with the mess their parents created with their sin. Let me tell you that I take no pleasure in saying these things out loud. But I have sat with to many spouses who have destroyed their marriage by moving a 'justified' step at a time into a sin that they thought would never lead to such dire consequences. And I have cried with to many folks who said, if only they had listened to what the Bible said I would have saved myself and those I love from this horrible journey. Dave, warn others to stop before they start. Or to get out now if they are in the middle of the wrong stuff before it is to late.

The "Son of God" who sees all things, waves this red flag to warn us back into a safe, healthy and godly way to live.

## **2. The Responsibility of the Group**

How does this affect us as a church?

There is a church in the city with a gay Associate Pastor and a youth leader who was living with her boyfriend. The church felt that this was completely fine. I know of one young girl, a nice young lady whose life story now reads one night stands after another and there is hopelessness in her eyes that wasn't there before. I believe that this church has helped destroy her soul and life because they failed to follow what the Bible says. And I believe the Lord will judge that church for that.

So we need to ask ourselves how this church with love, faith, service and perseverance got to this place where they were letting their men do these wrong things and this woman speak such blatantly false things?

It happened because:

- (i) personally - people let things slide. They chose nice over truth.
- (ii) church wise - they let things slide. They chose nice over truth.

It is amazing how it takes all the church working together to make a difference and how it only take 2 or 3 people to blow things apart in a church. In this case it was a woman Jesus called Jezebel. In the case of other churches it has been a pastor who has sinned or a person within the church that wanted their way no matter what it cost. The Pope put it this way on Wednesday, *"Today, we see in a truly terrifying way that the greatest persecution of the Church does not come from outside enemies, but from the sin within the church itself. The church has a profound need to learn forgiveness and also the necessity of justice but forgiveness does not replace justice."*

Please hear me clearly. This church allows all of us to come as we are. Every one of us is in some way are the walking wounded and if you don't have it all together – Welcome! You are among friends and fellow strugglers. But, (a 'but' like Jesus used,) we are called to live holy lives. If we claim to be Followers of Jesus then we need to follow what He says we should do and live like He did. Why? While God will judge others for their actions, God will judge His church for their inactions. And that means that as a church, we have a responsibility, in love, to nudge each other when our words and actions are wrong. And it means that as a congregation, while we celebrate forgiveness, we do not substitute Nice for

Truth. We need to do it gently, humbly and carefully but we need to do it. Despite the fact that others see our Love, Faith, Service and Perseverance, they will stumble over the fact that we do not speak out against sin.

**V. The Solution** (Revelations 2:26 – 29)

Revelations 2:26 – 29, *“To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’— just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”-*

God promises to bless as we obey. So our call is to (i) hold unto what is true and (ii) do business where necessary. Why? We want us to be known for the first list of things – love, faith, service and perseverance that keeps on growing and not being a church that compromises where we are called to stand straight.

One day a musician in London noticed that all the men and women who road those delivery bikes around a certain part of the city always seemed to be whistling a little out of tune. He was surprised because that wasn’t happening anywhere else in London. Finally, after much research he found that Westminster Abbey’s bells were slightly out of tune. These folks were hearing it ring hour after hour and it had affected their ability whistle in tune.

This passage says that sometimes the circumstances in which we live can cause us to struggle to stay in tune spiritually. If it could happen to a great church like Thyatira, it could happen to us unless we stay in tune with God’s Word. So as we leave today, can I say to so many of you the Lord bless you for how you are living out your faith and to all of us, keep in tune with what the Lord says in His Word.

<p>For information about Brentview Baptist Church and its ministries, please contact the church office at: 3512 Charleswood Dr NW, Calgary, AB T2L 2C3 Phone: 403.284.4691 Fax: 403.284.0132 mail@brentviewbaptist.com www.brentviewbaptist.com</p>
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