

INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Now let's turn to the text of Scripture, Revelation chapter 2 and beginning at verse 18. This is
- ▶ the longest letter of the seven, to the church at Thyatira, which we have entitled today as:
- ▶ 'The Corrupt Church'..... *Revelation 2:18-27.*

THE CITY OF THYATIRA

Now, I believe that this is a very personal letter that should be taken very literally and that needs to be heard by all in the church, as it says: *'He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church'*. Now let's look first, as we have done each week, to the city in which this church is

- ▶ found, the city of Thyatira. It is the modern-day city of Akhisar located in Western Turkey, and it was relatively speaking an insignificant city, yet this church had the longest letter of these seven written to it... which shows us that the messages in these letters reach far beyond simply the immediate circumstances of each of these churches.

- ▶ This city is first mentioned in Acts 16 when Paul's was in Philippi preaching the gospel, we are told that a businesswoman from Thyatira, named Lydia, was born again by the Holy Spirit. The Lord opened her heart. She was a seller of purple which means she dealt with purple cloth or textiles. Thyatira, her hometown, was famous for its trade in purple dye, and indeed the textile industry in general was well known. There were more trade guilds in Thyatira than any other Asian city, and a trade guild is simply the equivalent of a trade union today. Now that is very important, and I want you to remember that because it is significant in our understanding of the predicament that the Christians in Thyatira faced. Now we do not exactly how this church at Thyatira began, and it may well have begun by the witness of Lydia who was from Thyatira. It is possible that she went home to her town and shared her faith and spoke the gospel. Now if that were the case, that is very ironic, isn't it? This church may have begun through a godly woman, 45 years later when Revelation was written it was eventually beginning to crumble by an ungodly woman, Jezebel. And I will explain that soon.

JESUS' CHARACTERISTICS

That is the city of Thyatira, let us move on to the characteristics of the Lord as He is revealed in this vision to the church at Thyatira. *Verse 18: "These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze."* The only time the Lord Jesus is described as the Son of God in the book of Revelation is here to the church at Thyatira... now, that must be significant.

- ▶ Why only here? Well, can I remind you of the words of *Hebrews 1: "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..."* The means by which God has communicated His full and complete revelation of Himself is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Now why is that significant? Well, a woman referred to as 'Jezebel' in Thyatira claimed to be a prophetess. She was claiming to have received revelations from God, and was teaching new understandings and revelations under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So, Christ comes to the church of Thyatira and reveals Himself as the supreme source of all divine revelation... and what a revelation He had for this church!
- ▶ His eyes are seen to be as flames of fire, piercing vision into the hearts of men, and into the bowels of this church. He sees all, He sees all as it is, the all-seeing, omniscient eyes of the Son of God. Now I don't know how you view things in your life, in the life of your church. Maybe you are satisfied with your view of your life, and your view of your church – but I wonder how the Lord Jesus Christ views it all, how He sees your life and mine, how He views your church and mine? You see, his blazing fiery eyes see through sham, hypocrisy, pretence, camouflage, playacting! How does He see you?

So He is described as the Son of God having eyes of fire and feet of brass, and we saw in previous weeks this speaks of judgement, brass refined in the fire. These feet are for walking, so He is walking in judgement in the church at Thyatira. Remember that verse in *1 Peter 4:17...*

► *"For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God?"*

So, let's put it all together as He is revealed in His characteristics: this Son of God who knows everything sees with these eyes of flame and fire into the depths of truth, and this One is moving to judge the church at Thyatira. It's an awful picture, isn't it? *It is the awfulness of Christ in the midst of the churches.* Now listen: I don't think we really have a grasp of this. The Lord Jesus Christ is now in the midst of His church. This is how He moves in the midst of corruptness, as the Son of God who knows all things, with eyes of fire that see all things, with feet of bronze that judge all things. He came to Ephesus in this judging way, and said: *'I will remove your lampstand unless you repent!'*. He came to Pergamos with a sword out of His mouth, and He says: *'Unless you deal with the false teachers teaching the teaching of Balaam, and the teaching of the Nicolaitans, I will come and fight against them with the sword of my mouth!'*. This is **the awfulness of Christ in the midst of the church**. Here we find the Lord Jesus Christ is coming, and He says in verses 22 and 23 that, according to how people have followed the teaching of this Jezebel, *"He will cast her into a sickbed, and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death"*.

► Is this how we view the Lord Jesus? Maybe we need to refocus on how the Lord Jesus is operating within the church of Jesus Christ in our age, particularly among churches that are corrupt, loveless, compromising, lukewarm, and dead. So, those are the characteristics as He is revealed to Thyatira.

► JESUS' COMMENDATION

Now come with me to verse 19 where we have the commendation: *"I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and [as] for your works, the last [are] more than the first."* Now Thyatira had much evil in it,

► and we shall see that in great detail in a few moments, but Christ looks first of all at what is to be commended! Seems like a great church, right? Like a strong healthy church, right?

► Now what would you think of a church that was doing the type of things that Thyatira was doing? A woman was taking the primary role in the church and she was teaching the Christians to commit fornication and to eat meat offered to idols. If I were to ask you now,

► after the meeting today: what do you think of a church like that? You would say, *'It's not a New Testament Church at all'*. Well, can I ask you: **did the Lord Jesus Christ get it wrong?**

For as He addresses this church of Thyatira here before us in verse 18, He is addressing it to the assembly, to God's people there. Now, there was in this assembly, as there is in most church assemblies even to this day, as mixture of people who were true converts of Christ

► and those who are false converts. This is very evident in the parables of Christ – *the wheat and the weeds, the sheep and the goats, the good fish and the bad fish, good soil hearers and stony ground hearers of the word, the wise builder and the foolish builder* – this is the teaching of true and false conversions by Jesus. You see, *profession of Christ is not the standard by which Christ*

► *judges His church, but possession*. Many will stand before Christ the judge one day and say, *"Lord, Lord..."* but he will tell them, *"I never knew you; depart from me you who practice lawlessness."* They professed Christ and

were religious, but they never possessed Him *because the fruits of the Spirit and of repentance were never evident*. I'm sure that there were a number of people in the church of Thyatira were not genuinely converted - and yet the Lord Jesus still addresses it as an assembly.

► There's a lesson I think I taught you a couple of weeks ago, and it's simply this: none of us have a right to judge anyone or any church, none of us, because we are not omniscient, we don't know everything. Now, of course we must judge righteous judgement according to the word of God, but we have no reason nor right to condemn anyone - unless they have completely rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have no right to say that they're not an assembly; that's not given to us, that's given to Christ. The Lord didn't get it wrong, and His strongest commendation of all the seven churches, believe it or not, is given to this church. Now, I have got a bit of work in trying to work that out, and I think you will have too! But those are the facts.

He commends them for their **work**, they were a busy church – boy, do we need that in these days! We need to be busy for the Master, and we should work while *“it is day because the night is coming” (John 9:4)*. It seemed there were no bystanders, there were no uncommitted persons, there were no hangers-on, there were no people sitting on their hands, simply warming the pews, and everyone was in it and at it - hard working!

The Lord commends them for their **love**. They loved! Now we have to take this at face value, that this love was genuine, otherwise they wouldn't have been commended for it. We must therefore assume that they loved God, they loved Christ, they loved fellow believers, they were loving the lost, they were loving the truth of God in some capacity at least - and when you went into this meeting at Thyatira you would have felt that love, the affection would have been almost tangible. It was a nice place to be. Now we need that, we could learn a thing or two from Thyatira. The church should be a welcoming place where we love one another and are known by the world that we love one another.

They are commended also for their **faith** and their **service**... this literally means their faithfulness in service which is their **perseverance** - their 'stickability'. Boy, I tell you we need this! In our service for Christ we're not to have a *'flash-in-the-pan'* mentality... meaning that we start a work this day and then give it up the next because we haven't got what it takes to follow through. We are called to be *faithful and endure, as soldiers of Jesus Christ, great hardship (2 Tim. 2:3)*. We need that in these days. And they certainly seem to be advancing because in verse 19 they seem to be doing more now for Christ than they ever had.

It would seem that they are outstanding as a church... however, even though there is all this activity, programs, and busyness, and visible love, and Thyatira has the picture of a very healthy church.... there are putrefying sores and a sickness that is deep in the body of this assembly. There is a cancer that is eating this church's life from the inside out. In verse 20 the Lord says: *“Nevertheless, I have a few things against you”*, and these x-ray eyes of Christ are seeing things that you or I could never see or uncover - what a lesson! What is the lesson? I believe it is this: few people realise how things really are in the churches. Look, let's face it: all of us can only see things on the surface. A church might seem to have an effective ministry, it might even be growing numerically, it might be filled with activity and love, and it might be going from strength to strength - **but it might be like Thyatira, and it is corrupt to the core!**

Do not forget that what we are reading are letters. This letter was delivered and picked up by one of the overseers in this church... and what do you think the shock would have been when it was read on the Lord's day? I tell you, if this had come to some of our churches, it would never have got a hearing! I don't think it would have been read! It was so far removed from what people thought was the reality, but it was inspired by the all-seeing Christ, and it was telling them that their great activity and love was all a cover-up for a great deal of sin! Do you see that this morning? Activity can hide a multitude of sins. I have seen that overactivity can often hide the fact that most of us are spiritually anaemic and biblically illiterate because we're not spending any time at the Master's feet. Listen to the words of that great old hymn that is not sung much these days:

▶ *'Take time to be holy, Speak oft with thy Lord; Abide in Him always, And feed on His word'.
'Take time to be holy, The world rushes on; Spend much time in secret, With Jesus alone'.
'Take time to be holy, Let Him be thy Guide; And run not before Him, Whatever betide'.
'Take time to be holy, Be calm in thy soul, Each thought and each motive Beneath His control'.*

Activity can be a great camouflage for the way your spiritual life really is. The Lord Jesus didn't judge this church on their activity, but rather what was beneath all the activity.

▶ JESUS' CRITICISM

Now come with me, for we must move on from the commendation to the criticism, for the letter focuses on this. In *verse 20* the Lord says: *'I have a few things against you, because you allow'*, you tolerate, *'that woman Jezebel'*. You might say, "now that's not very loving!" Listen, we like to talk about how loving our God is, but we also need to remember that there is no amount of love, no amount of sacrificial work that can compensate and cover up for tolerating what is evil!

Do you remember that Ephesus was criticised by the Lord because she was weak in love, but strong in judging false teachers? But here Thyatira is growing in love, but is too tolerant with false doctrine and immorality in her midst. Now there's a lesson for us all here: **both extremes are wrong!** We need a biblical balance: we want to avoid unloving Christianity – those who claim to know Christ but are cold, conservative, unkind, no look of love on their face, no word of love on their tongue. And we also want to avoid the opposite which is liberal Christianity – loving compromise, being all-tolerant, being so loving that it embraces everything, **even biblical error!** Listen to the balance of the Bible, it

▶ is found in *Ephesians 4:15*, we are to *"speak the truth in love."*

▶ **But here is the problem:** This church tolerated this woman, Jezebel. I don't believe her name literally was Jezebel, who would give that name to a child? It meant the same in those days as it does in ours (wicked, shameless, licentious), for this was a character from the Old Testament. It's kind of like today... do you know many women who name their daughters Delilah? That's just not a very good name because of the reputation of Samson and Delilah. We don't name our daughters Jezebel today because of the reputation of that name. However, the name signifies the character of this woman who was literally in this church. Her claim is seen in this verse, *she says she is a prophetess* - the Lord doesn't give her that title, she has given it self-appointed to herself. Now let me say the New Testament Church refers to several prophetesses, but never are they not running around claiming that title... it is something that was clearly evident to all. Yet this woman Jezebel, claiming to herself the prophetic gift, is actually teaching, functioning in the New Testament church, teaching and instructing the word of God. The result is given here: the Lord says *'She has seduced my servants'*. Now seduction simply is being taken from something that is good to something that is evil, from something that is right to something that is wrong, from something that is true to something that is erroneous. This self-appointed prophetess teaching in the assembly was doing exactly that.

Now why was she given the name 'Jezebel'? In the Old Testament there was a godly king named Ahab who was king over Israel, but he made a big mistake. He married a woman named Jezebel. She was the daughter of the king of Tyr and Sidon. You see, it was through Ahab's wife, Jezebel, that the worship of Baal idolatry was introduced to the Northern Kingdom. It was through Jezebel that the prophets of God were slain. Jezebel housed 850 prophets of Baal in her own home. She caused the murder of Naboth to get his vineyard. The Bible says she stirred Ahab to be one of the most wicked kings of all Israelite history. Listen to *1 Kings 16:33, Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him; 1 Kings 21:25, There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife.* Elijah prophesied that Jezebel would die by a wall and that dogs would eat her flesh – and that indeed happened!

Problems with Jezebel in the Church:

▶ **1.** But why was this woman called Jezebel in the church at Thyatira? For several reasons: one certainly is that it was Ahab's weak leadership as a male king that allowed the evil woman Jezebel to adulterate the nation. The weak leadership in the church at Thyatira among the male overseers was permitting this woman to do what apostolic teaching had forbidden her to do - what was that? To have spiritual authority in the assembly.

► Women Teaching In The Church: Let me just take a moment to address something at this point. There are some people who say any woman teaching in a church is heresy. Have you ever heard that? There are some preachers that say that. Let me tell you what is clear from the Bible. I believe God gifts many women to teach. I even believe God gifts some women to preach. I really do. I've even heard some wonderful women preachers. They have the gift of preaching and teaching... but the New Testament is very clear. A woman is not to stand in spiritual authority over a congregation. If you were to ask me, "Johnny, do you believe the New Testament teaches that women are to be ordained as pastors?" No, I don't believe it teaches that but if you were to ask me, "Johnny, do you believe that women can minister in the local church?" Yes, yes a thousand times yes! Listen, women can be missionaries and evangelise; women can preach the gospel to the lost; women can be Sunday School teachers and teach our children; women can teach in a home group, women can lead worship; women can pray publically; women can prophesy in the church; women can testify in the church what good things God has done... but I think the Bible is clear, women are not to be in a position of spiritual authority or leadership over a whole assembly (**1 Timothy 2**). Now I know that I'll get no awards from the politically correct movement for saying that, but I'm standing on the Bible, not on what is popular.

► **2.** So the first problem was that this woman had a position of spiritual authority, but the second problem was that she was claiming in her teaching that she was inspired as a prophetess... and that was a big problem. Why? Because *Jude v.3* tells us that *the faith was once for all delivered to the saints*, that means that every revelation that we need has been given to us in the Lord Jesus and the Apostles, and we have the apostles' doctrine in our hands in the New Testament Scriptures. Yet here in Thyatira, only 45 years after the Apostles, this woman was claiming that her revelations superseded the apostolic authority of the word of God - that was the problem! Now, what relevance has that today? It has an awful lot of relevance, because

► Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, wrote a book *called 'Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures'*, and she said that she had the key to understanding the Bible as it never had been understood before, and it was in her book. She was a liar and a

► false prophetess, and she was inspired by the devil. Ellen G White was the founding prophetess of Seven Day Adventism and the SDA organisation writes, "*We believe the revelation and inspiration of both the Bible and Ellen White's writings to be of equal quality. The superintendence of the Holy Spirit was just as careful and thorough in one case as in the other*". In the SDA creed, they write: *As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance,*

► *instruction, and correction.* Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, claimed to receive tablets of gold that nobody could find, that were strangely taken back to heaven and nobody had seen, and he interpreted and translated it and it became the Book of Mormon, which incidentally has also a subtitle as *'Another Revelation of Jesus Christ'* - there isn't another one! He was an impostor, and a liar, and a false prophet - just like this Jezebel!

Now how did this Jezebel get away with it? Well, the same way that many false

► prophets and prophetesses in cults do today. They are usually quite attractive, very intelligent and articulate, they have a charismatic personality as a gifted speaker - and the people were gullible and swallowed it all. Now, you might think that is very condescending to many followers in cults and religions today, but that's the long and short of it. You hear people saying: *'Oh, but they're so kind, they're so charismatic, they're so attractive, they're so good, they're so gifted - they couldn't be wrong!'* Don't be so gullible! God's word says that the angels of Satan, his emissaries and apostles, will come as angels of light. I remember listening to a recent documentary on Adolf Hitler and it was said that all the women in Germany loved him. I know that's a generalisation...but he was a very charming man you know, very charming but very evil. Don't be gullible.

So what was this woman seducing these believers to do? To fornicate (or commit acts of sexual immorality) and to eat things sacrificed to idols... they were ignoring the basic apostolic decree in Acts chapter 15 not to do those two things, among other things. They were ignoring 1 Corinthians 6 to flee fornication, they were ignoring 1 Corinthians 10 to flee idolatry, and this woman was teaching that these Scriptures don't apply any more the way they used to. She is saying to these believers: 'You're too rigid! The Bible doesn't need to be taken so literally now'. Now listen to me this morning: *you beware of anyone who tells you that the New Testament apostolic doctrine doesn't apply today!*

Here's a prime example of how she would seduce the people: I've mentioned before that in that time there were these trade guilds or trade unions. In other words, if you wanted to make a living, to be in a job, to have a business, you had to be part of a trade guild. Every now and then you'd be invited to a social function – quite often held in the temple of a pagan deity. There would be a big slap-up meal, the meat you would be eating at the table would have been offered to the idol, and then around were the temple virgins - and once the drink got in, self-control went out, and before you knew it that gathering could become an orgy of immorality that was understood to be great worship to that pagan deity. These Christians were faced with commercial suicide: they would either go to these social gatherings, or they would lose their livelihood and become destitute. To refuse the social circuit – builders, businesspeople, tradesmen - could have meant the end of their career!

Now, Jezebel comes in with her new revelation from God: 'You don't need to be so tight! You're so rigid and legalistic – be sensible! You have a wife, don't you? You have a couple of wee children, you have your family to think about. We're entering the second century now, we've moved on from all that stuff! Anyway, how do you expect to win these people for Christ if you're going to have that attitude?' In a brilliant way she convinced many of these believers to separate in their mind the spiritual and the secular. Now, do you grasp that this morning? She convinced them to have one set of principles for church, and one set of principles for work; one for the assembly, one for the office. You can understand how that was successful! How people embraced it! But do you understand how dangerous it is? That is such a dangerous teaching that you can commit immorality of any kind and it will not affect your spirit nor your standing before God.

That is just as dangerous as the belief that you can live your life anyway you choose because you've prayed a sinner's prayer and because God is love He will always forgive you, no matter what you do or say, and heaven is your reward no matter what. Why? Because you prayed the sinner's prayer! What nonsense! **Repeating a sinner's prayer has never saved anybody in the history of the church.** You know what saves? A Saviour! And He has commanded us to repent and to believe in the gospel. The only thing you can do to be ensured that your soul is saved from an eternity in hell is to repent from your sins and to place your trust in the Son of God! If that doesn't describe you today, then you need to do what Paul said, *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified"* (2 Cor. 13:5).

Now, see the graciousness of our Lord in verse 21, He gave them space and time to repent - which she didn't. I wonder is the Lord speaking to someone in our service right now, and He's giving you time to repent and you haven't done it yet. This is not, by the way, something just for unsaved people, this is something for Christians and the church of Jesus Christ. They would not repent, and so there was a condemnation in verses 21-23, and you will note there three 'I wills' that the Lord speaks. In other words, He is saying: *'If you don't deal with this woman, I will, I will, I will!'*

1. He says: 'I will give her a sickbed, a bed of tribulation in place of her bed of lust, and all those who have committed adultery with her will be thrown into that bed as well - a bed of great tribulation for people endorsing this falsehood'.
2. 'I will kill her children, those who adhere to this falsehood, with death', and that word is 'pestilence' or 'sickness'.
3. And He says, 'Unless they forsake her and escape from her deeds, I will do this so that all the churches will know I am watching, and am judging, and am rewarding according to your works.'

I'll tell you, this is serious stuff: this second generation of Christians in the church at Thyatira had fallen into what is called here *'the deep things of Satan'*, v.24. This basically means evils that appear good. It's deceptive. They should have been in what 1 Corinthians 2:10 calls *'the deep things of God revealed by the Spirit'*. Let us bring that into a modern comparison today: Is it possible that Christians know more about the world than they do about the Word? Is it possible that believers practise their freedom in Christ by their indulgence in all sorts of immorality? Is it possible that they express their liberty in the Spirit by their licence in sin, and they say "Well, I'm spiritual enough"? I'll say a few things now that I may get shot down for, but I don't care... it needs to be said. There are too many that think they are spiritual enough to handle a wee glass of wine beside their dinner, that it won't corrupt them – but they perhaps haven't seen what drink can do to a person nor to a home. There are those Christians who have such a taste for alcohol or beer, that they believe it's absolutely necessary for a gathering or celebration... or else, what will people say? They think, *"Oh, I can handle it. I can go to a nightclub and be a Christian... I can be a witness there, even though I can't talk because nobody can hear. I won't get tainted. It won't affect me. I can watch those fleshly things of lust, filth, and pornography on my device and it won't really matter. I can listen to that music that talks about all sorts of immorality and violence, and it won't affect me."* But the Lord Jesus says it does! Stay away!

▶ Jezebel's teaching is: 'You can live like the world and not be affected. You can have their social life, you can have their sex life, and still be in fellowship with the Lord Jesus and around the Lord's Table'. That was Thyatira – the Corrupt Church.

▶ JESUS' COMMITMENT

A commitment is given finally in verse 24 and following to the end, to the overcomers, the rest: *'As many as have not this doctrine'*. Praise God there's a faithful remnant, even in corrupt churches, and they weren't tainted by the false doctrine. Do you know something? God is speaking to the faithful remnant in the church and saying, *"I know you probably want to run and get out of this church, but I want you to stay and stand for truth."* A lot of people are good at getting up and walking out when things don't suit them - but that's not the way it's done. If you've got a case on the authority of this book, you've got cause to stand... so stand and hold fast. Hold fast to what? To the book! To the apostolic doctrine... and that's what we need to hear today. We need to get back to the Bible. The easy way is Jezebel's way, it's the popular way, the trendy way, the neo-evangelical way, the modern way, But it's the wrong way for it wasn't Christ's way! Jesus promises to those that overcome that they will be rewarded, that they will reign with Him during the millennium era. And I'll just point out something else beautiful here: the overcomers will be given the morning star. According to 2 Peter 1:19 and Revelation 22:16, the 'morning star' is Jesus. William Barclay (bible commentator) stated this: *"If the Christian is true, when life comes to an end he will possess Christ, never to lose him again."* Is that beautiful?

CONCLUSION

Now can I ask you as we close: could you have overcome in Thyatira? Let me ask you again: if the Lord Jesus Christ were to come today, would you be found to be faithful and true? I'm not asking you are you saved - now that's important, nothing is more important - but if you're a Christian, are you ready...are things right? What I mean is: would you be happy for the Lord Jesus to come now, right now? Would things be right in your business dealings? Would things be filled in right on your tax-return forms? Would money you owe be paid? Would things be right in your marriage? Would things be right with your children or your parents? What about your dealings in private? If you judged the way you have been living the last few months, the last few weeks or days, would you be happy if the Lord Jesus came tonight? I am always astounded by the reply of John Wesley when he was asked this question: if the Lord was to tell you that you were going to die this time tomorrow night, what would you do? He said: *'I would do the same things I did today'*. How many of us could say that? Or will it be in the words of that old song: *'By and by, when I look on His face, I'll wish I had given Him more'*.

Now we noted, and I think it's worthy of note again, that these churches can be understood in three ways. First of all, literally: these were seven literal churches in these seven literal geographical cities. Secondly, these churches are also understood universally, in that they illustrate the good and the bad in churches everywhere in every age. Seven similarities can be found in the seven mystery kingdom parables in Matthew 13, which also show us characteristics that will be in the kingdom of God displayed in the external church during the church age - very similar characteristics to what we're seeing in these seven churches of Asia Minor. So there is that universal approach, but then thirdly there is the prophetic understanding of these seven churches.

Let me remind you of how we have witnessed this. First of all in the church at Ephesus, which of course was the loveless church, we saw that this represented the post-apostolic Church, the church as it was coming up to the end of the first century and entering the second, the church that was generally speaking sound in doctrine but was starting to depart in small ways, but had lost the things that they had loved in the beginning. They ceased doing the work they had done at first. Then we saw secondly the church at Smyrna, the persecuted church, and that represented prophetically the church from the first to the fourth century that underwent persecutions from various emperors. The third church we looked at was Pergamos, which was the compromising church, and you remember 'Pergamos' means 'married', and this was a church historically speaking that had lost its fidelity to Jesus Christ, and had become allied with the world. This is the church of the fourth and the fifth century. Through Constantine's spurious conversion, Christianity became the state religion - it was married to the state, and in AD 313 that took place and many adverse spiritual effects came with it.

Now Thyatira that we're looking at tonight is the corrupt church, and the word 'Thyatira' literally means 'a continual sacrifice'. So prophetic scholars have seen, I believe correctly, that in the prophetic approach to this church we can see the rise of what we know today as Roman Catholicism, around the sixth and seventh century right through to the Reformation around the 16th century. Now you will note, as I have already pointed out to you, that this church was commended for her devotion and her zeal, and it has to be said that - like many false cults and religions - Catholicism has indeed shown much devotion to their cause and zeal in the execution of it. There were many godly saints during the Middle Ages who faithfully followed the Lord and sought to serve in a continual sacrifice of service. Even those in error could teach us a thing or two regarding how they are serving their particular cause. Yet Roman Catholicism can be seen in Thyatira in the sense of a continual sacrifice through the abomination of the mass. Of course, this was an invention historically of the Roman Catholic Church, the teaching that in the sacrament of the mass, through the broken bread and the poured out wine, there is a perpetual sacrifice over and over again of the Lord Jesus Christ in His death. That is why a priest is necessary - and so they believe that, through this continual sacrifice, we in some way can merit some grace.

So you can see how the name 'continuous sacrifice', is very apt if we are to liken this church historically and prophetically to the church of Rome. Jezebel could also picture the system,

the whole Romish system that has called herself 'the mother and mistress of all churches'. Eventually we will see in the book of Revelation, near the end, about chapters 17 and 18, that eventually this church of Rome will embrace many other false religions and will be found in what is called there 'the great whore of Babylon' that God will judge. Now that might seem very harsh language to some of you, but it's in this book of Revelation, Jesus Christ has revealed it to us. As Jezebel was in Thyatira, Rome has accommodated many elements of paganism, just as this prophetess in Thyatira did. She was encouraging the believers there, as we shall see, to commit fornication and to eat meat offered to idols. When Constantine made Christianity the religion of the state, many pagans brought their heathen baggage along with them. Catholicism down through the years has been notorious for marrying pagan rituals and principles to what they have called Christianity.

Let me give you two examples of that. Idolatry: the second commandment says, 'You shall not bow down to an idol'. The church of Rome has enshrined idol worship as a part of their devotion, they have even omitted the second commandment in the Ten Commandments. How do they get ten then? They split number 10, coveting, into two. A second way they have adopted pagan practice is the worship of Mary. The worship of Mary as the mother of God, setting her up as a co-redemptress, and indeed a female deity almost, to be worshipped and revered. That type of practice can be seen down through history in many pagan religions, right back to Babylon itself. Incidentally, the Old Testament character of Jezebel that we will touch on a little bit later, she was guilty of combining the worship of Jehovah with the worship of the god Baal. God condemned her for it, and Ahab her husband and the whole nation for going after her ways, because God Jehovah will not share His glory with another. He will not be worshipped as a graven image.

Now we shall see that Thyatira and Jezebel herself were given a chance to repent, and the Roman Catholic Church during the 16th century, at the time of the Reformation through godly men like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, John Knox, Wycliffe - you know them as well as I do - they were given an opportunity to rediscover the truths of Holy Scripture: that salvation is through grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone; and the Bible alone, sola scriptura, should be our only rule of faith. Largely speaking they did not heed that clarion call, and that is why we are left with an apostate system in Roman Catholicism which is far removed from the simplicity of what we find biblical Christianity is within the scriptures. A Roman Catholic once asked a bright little Christian schoolgirl: 'Where was your church before the days of Henry VIII?'. Catholicism would say that Protestant evangelical Christianity didn't exist before Henry VIII. The little girl was wiser than he thought: 'Why sir', she said, 'It was where yours never was - in the Bible'. That's not to be offensive, but it is to be real. We must judge everything by the word of God, and we see from this church at Thyatira that the Lord Jesus was going to judge it, and the Lord Jesus has judged and will judge its prophetic counterpart, the Roman Catholic system. Indeed, the Lord will judge her children, that's what the passage says, those who choose to come under her influence in ecumenism. The message is, and here I leave this prophetic approach: we as the church of Jesus Christ need to get back to the Bible.