

## JEZEBEL

**Revelation 2:18-29** <sup>18</sup> “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. <sup>19</sup> I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you, <sup>25</sup> except to hold on to what you have until I come.’

<sup>26</sup> To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— <sup>27</sup> that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father. <sup>28</sup> I will also give that one the morning star. <sup>29</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

### MESSAGE:

This year during our Lenten messages we’re addressing the question: “Is our church, God’s church?” For our sermon texts, we’re using Jesus’ letters to seven churches in Asia Minor which are recorded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> chapters of the *Book of Revelation*. In these letters Jesus is speaking not only as our Savior, but as the “*Commander of the Lord’s armies*.” (*Joshua 5:14*). Like General Eisenhower on the day before D-Day, he is inspecting His troops, making sure that they’re ready for combat, and urging them on to victory. Like any good commander, He praises them for their strengths, but He also points out their weaknesses so that they can correct them. After all, Jesus’ churches are the front line in the spiritual warfare that rages between the armies of God and the armies of Satan and He wants to make sure that the armies of God win the war.

Some Christian denominations nowadays consider it offensive to describe the mission of the church in terms of spiritual warfare. They prefer more moderate, less violent ways of proclaiming its mission. Some of them have even taken hymns like “*Onward Christian Soldiers*” out of their hymnals because they feel that they have too “militaristic” a tone and smack of what they call “Christian triumphalism”—a code word for the doctrine that Christianity considers itself the only true religion and Jesus Christ the only path to salvation. They are more comfortable with the idea that other religions may have something to offer and that there even may be “other roads to God.” Not surprisingly,

people who are not Christian find this creed more congenial than traditional Christianity and it helps keep the peace. But to those of us who believe the Bible to be the Word of God, that option is simply not acceptable. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life—no one comes to the Father except through me.”* And, *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* (Matt. 10:34-36) Spiritual warfare is real, it has real consequences and the stakes of winning or losing the war are enormous.

Before dictating His letters Jesus appears to John in a vision. He is standing in the middle of seven lampstands which symbolize the seven churches. It’s a beautiful image of how Jesus loves and cares for his church—walking among them, trimming their lamps and keeping them supplied with oil so that they can burn brightly. This image makes it clear that Jesus is the only source of the church’s light and it also provides a clue to our enemy’s strategy for destroying it. Satan is always tempting us to rely on something other than Jesus for our light. What he said to Eve in the garden, he continues to whisper in our ears: *“Did God really say that?”* To which he is hoping that we will respond, *“No! God couldn’t possibly have said that!”* It’s an effective strategy and has obviously worked rather well in the denominations we just talked about who appear to be more embarrassed by the Bible than inspired by it. This kind of thinking had gained a foothold in the church we will look at today: the church at Thyatira.

As he always does in these letters, Jesus begins by commending the church at Thyatira for its strengths. *“I know your deeds, your love and your faith, your service and your perseverance, and that you are doing more now than you did at first.”* (Rev. 2:19) However He then proceeds to fault the congregation for tolerating false teachers: *“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.”* (Rev. 2:20) Some members of the church at Thyatira were spreading their worship around: they worshipped Jesus but just to keep all their bases covered paid their respects to other gods as well. They were like the person we talked about last Sunday who worships God on Sunday and worships the world the rest of the week. This is idolatry, plain and simple, and it found its perfect image in one of the most despised figures in the *Old Testament*: Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, whom the Bible calls the worst king Israel ever had.

Jezebel herself was not an Israelite, she was the daughter of Ethbaal, a Sidonian Baal-worshipper. After marrying Ahab she began promoting pagan worship in Israel. Her mortal enemy was Elijah the prophet, who fiercely opposed all forms of worship other than the worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel. When Elijah gathered together all the priests of Baal and had them slaughtered, Jezebel had had enough and she sent her soldiers to kill him. It was only by God’s grace and protection that he survived.

To Jezebel Elijah was a narrow-minded, fanatical zealot, who was intolerant of any religion other than his own. And you know—she was right. Elijah was about as narrow-minded and zealous about religion as you can get. Of course, so was Jesus. *“I am the*

*way, the truth and the life—no one comes to the Father except through me*” is perhaps the most narrow-minded statement ever made. But it’s OK to be narrow minded when you’re right. Mathematicians are pretty narrow minded about the fact that two plus two equals four and not something else.

Elijah, was not looking for a truce with Jezebel. He was not looking for peace. He knew that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was God and that there were no other gods before Him—period. Baalism or any other pagan worship was a horrible, vicious, dangerous, cancerous lie, which, if it were allowed to go unchallenged, would subvert the faith of Israel and draw Israelites to their destruction. It could not be tolerated and must be destroyed. Truth is truth and lies are lies and never the twain shall meet.

In our day the religion that most threatens our church is the religion of “open-mindedness.” Open-mindedness these days appeals to a lot more people than claims to absolute truth. A kinder, gentler God who’s not particularly concerned about sin is more attractive than an angry God who is enraged by it. Spiritual warfare has been replaced by spiritual comfort food. Religion has become a hobby rather than the center of life.

In Homer’s epic poem, *The Odyssey*, in the course of his journeys Odysseus and his men have to sail close to an island inhabited by creatures called “Sirens”—mythical women who sang a beautiful song that had the power to mesmerize sailors on the ships that passed by and draw them to their island, where they were driven mad and torn to pieces. Odysseus wanted to hear the song of the sirens yet not be seduced by their call so he instructed his sailors to tie him to a mast with heavy rope and refuse to release him no matter how much he begged them to do so until they passed the island and the singing could no longer be heard. Then he ordered them to put wax in their ears and sail on by the island. The spiritual comfort food offered by today’s open-minded pagans is like the song of the Sirens: it pleases the ear but leads to madness and death.

We must always remember that Satan’s chief weapon is the lie. Jesus calls him, “a liar and the father of lies.” He continually offers us lies—especially spiritual lies—to tempt us away from believing the truth. He knows that anything a Christian places his confidence in other than Jesus Christ will fail him. Only in Jesus can he have eternal life. As appealing as the doctrine of open-mindedness may be with its suggestion that there may be many roads to God: **it’s a lie**. As appealing as its proposal of a kinder, gentler God to replace the God of the Bible may be: **it’s a lie**. As comforting as the idea of ecumenical peace among all religions may be: **it’s a lie**. It all amounts to an invitation to put our heads in the sand and ignore the testimony of the entire Bible. And that is a disaster waiting to happen. Elijah knew that and Jesus knew it too. His message to churches that invite the Jezebel beast of false religion or mixed religion or non-religion into their sanctuaries is violent: *“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.”* (Rev. 2:21-23) His words echo God’s treatment of the Jezebel of antiquity: He had her cast out of a window onto a pavement where her body was devoured by dogs. Later on, her sons and

grandsons were beheaded and their heads were stacked in piles for all the people to see. The judgment that fell upon Ahab and Jezebel was recorded in these words: *“There never was a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel, his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel.”* (1 Kings 21:25-26)

God takes religion seriously! Through the unimaginable suffering and death of His Son, Jesus Christ, He has given us grace and truth—the only things that can free us from the power of sin, death and Satan. He is a jealous God and like a parent who sees their child about to stray out onto a busy highway, He will not stand idly by and merely watch. When He sees His children tempted to follow other gods, other teachers, who will draw them to destruction and death, He acts to protect them. As for the rest of us, He says what Jesus said to the rest of the members of the church at Thyatira: *“... hold onto what you have until I come.”* (Rev. 2:25)

So what do Jesus' letters to the churches teach us thus far? First of all that as long as the church's first love is Jesus Christ and it takes its light from Jesus, it will shine brightly. But if that love falters, its light becomes dim. The focus of its members will turn inward and the idol of self-love will begin to creep in. Self-denial will give way to self-indulgence as a pattern of living and its members will begin to look for a new religion—one that will justify their spiritual narcissism. The Kingdom of God will begin to fade from their sight, like a small town that grows smaller and smaller in your rearview mirror as you leave it behind.

We'll see where that journey takes us next week.

Amen.

## **2 Kings 9:30-37 Jezebel Killed**

<sup>30</sup> Then Jehu went to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard about it, she put on eye makeup, arranged her hair and looked out of a window. <sup>31</sup> As Jehu entered the gate, she asked, “Have you come in peace, you Zimri, you murderer of your master?”

<sup>32</sup> He looked up at the window and called out, “Who is on my side? Who?” Two or three eunuchs looked down at him. <sup>33</sup> “Throw her down!” Jehu said. So they threw her down, and some of her blood spattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot.

<sup>34</sup> Jehu went in and ate and drank. “Take care of that cursed woman,” he said, “and bury her, for she was a king's daughter.” <sup>35</sup> But when they went out to bury her, they found nothing except her skull, her feet and her hands. <sup>36</sup> They went back and told Jehu, who said, “This is the word of the LORD that he spoke through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour Jezebel's flesh. <sup>37</sup> Jezebel's body will be like dung on the ground in the plot at Jezreel, so that no one will be able to say, ‘This is Jezebel.’”