

Postcards – The Misled Church

2/23/20

Revelation 2:18-29

Sunday AM

Have you ever been duped? Scammed? Tricked? Cheated? Swindled? If you have, you know how frustrating it can feel. No one enjoys being misled?

Yet people trying to take advantage of others is a pervasive disorder in our world today. Did you know in 2019, there were 3.3 mil. internet scams attempting to steal another person's ID? The IRS reported 143+ mil. Americans experienced some sort of tax scam.

A few yrs ago I was in New Orleans for a conference, and a man came up to a friend of mine on the Bourbon St. and bet him \$5 he could guess where my friend – **got his shoes**. My friend took the bait – and the guy said, “You got them on your feet!” Now give me \$5.

As we continue our study of the seven churches in Revelation, today we're going to look at the church of Thyatira – or what I call the **MISLED** Church.

Thyatira was a city founded by Alexander the Great 300 yrs before Christ and was located some 40 miles SE of Pergamum. The name means **unceasing sacrifice** – likely referring to the reality that the city was a military buffer for Pergamum to protect the capital from an invading army. For that reason, Thyatira was somewhat of an expendable city constantly being sacked, torn down, and rebuilt.

It was also a blue-collar industrial city primarily known for its trade guilds/commerce. Tradesmen from around the world would buy/sell there. In particular, the city was renowned for an expensive purple dye often used by royalty. The dye was costly b/c divers were sent to the coast to find and extract a single drop of mucus from the throat a Murex snail. Once retrieved, it was joined w/ the water in Thyatira to create the dye (Turkey Red) – meaning it couldn't be reproduced anywhere else in the world.

Regarding their religion, unlike most of the cities in AM, Thyatira had no special pagan beliefs. It wasn't a center of Caesar/Greek worship although there was a strong occult presence w/ a fortune-telling shrine presided over by a female oracle name **Sambathe**. It was here the church at Thyatira sought to thrive.

Now, little is known of this church. Yet based on **Acts 16:14**, scholars believe the church was founded by a woman named **Lydia**. When Paul was in Philippi, he shared the message of Jesus to a group of women and the Bible says Lydia believed and was baptized.

One of those listening was from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. Acts 16:13-15

So, Lydia was a **business woman** from Thyatira on a business trip selling purple-dyed garments whose life was transformed by the Gospel under Paul's ministry.

Point – **God can meet people anywhere in any way** – we just need to be ready to give an account of the hope that's w/in us. You might be on a *business trip*, at the *grocery store*, on *vacation*, at the *ballpark* – you name it – just **be ready/available** to share when God moves.

At any rate, it's plausible, that after her salvation, Lydia returned to Thyatira and thru her witness, helped to launch a church in that city.

W/ this in mind, let's read what Jesus had to say:

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. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. 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. 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 w/ her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know I am He who searches hearts/minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who don't hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come. To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – that one 'will rule them w/ an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery' – just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 2:18-30

So, the church in Thyatira, in spite of the pagan culture around them, was a church doing some positive things to make a difference and yet they had one fatal issue – they were being duped/misled by a false teacher. They were being seduced by a prophetess.

Before we discuss the challenges, let's first look at the positives. For when it came to ministry engagement, this church was doing the **right things**, in the **right way**, for the **right reason**, w/ a **right heart**.

I True GC Ministry is an **ALL-Team** Effort

I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first...

After a thoughtful audit of their motives/ministries, Jesus said He had no complaints regarding their actions/attitudes as it pertained to sharing the Gospel.

In fact, He commended them that their ministry was **motivated** by His **love** (*agape*) and that they were in no way fickle in their faithfulness to the Christ.

faith – refers to being fully engaged/faithful. In other words, these believers weren't so busy w/ themselves they couldn't make time to serve God by ministering the Gospel to the world around them. **They understood the mission of the church to touch the world for Christ, and they willingly adjusted their earthly pursuits to make the Gospel their priority.**

Meaning – **they truly put Jesus first in their lives** and willingly served each other and the community around them w/ each person eagerly doing their part.

It reminds me of the story of Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about it, b/c it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could've done.

But this wasn't the case at Thyatira – everyone served.

But this church was more than just busy for Jesus – they were focused on the right mission. They weren't doing “ministry” for the sake of being busy – **they weren't playing church** – they were fully engaged in GC ministry by *exalting the Savior, evangelizing sinners, and edifying the saints*.

This wasn't a church consumed w/ themselves but w/ the world around them in need of Jesus. They didn't bunch up in holy huddles of us (4) no more and throw parties or host programs to amuse themselves to inoculate themselves from the world. They willingly and eagerly did it together as an ALL-Team effort.

Sadly, while they were doing the right things in the right way for the right reasons, they missed something.

II Be ALERT to False Teachers and Teachings

While the church at Thyatira appeared to be every-thing a church ought to be, at its heart there was a festering sore – and the church was hemorrhaging on b/c of a **sheep in wolves clothing** – an ungodly, false teaching leader.

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. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling...

Can I be honest? This is a big concern for me. I fear the church today is being **misled** by too many pseudo-pastors who are leading people away from God by teaching heresy for personal gain or by unintentionally trying to build an earthly kingdom thru unbiblical means/motives – thinking the end justifies the means.

In Thyatira, apparently there was a such a woman who Jesus identified as a **Jezebel** seducing His church.

Can I just say that when Jesus calls out this woman the name of the most infamous women in the Bible – you know she was up to some really bad stuff.

I'm reminded of what Vance Havner used to say about **Jezebel** – She spent the first ½ of her day putting on her war paint and the rest of the day on the war path.

Dr. R.G. Lee in his famous sermon, **Payday, Someday**, introduced Jezebel this way – *I introduce unto you, Jezebel, that slithering, snide serpent coiled beside the throne of Ahab the King, whispering in his ear to tempt him to do what was displeasing to his God.*

If you remember from our series on Elijah, Jezebel was the pagan wife of King Ahab of Israel. She was a worshiper of Baal and believed it was her job to rid Israel of Jehovah to plunge them into the sensual worship of the Canaanite god of fertility. And she was succeeding until God raised up Elijah who put a serious dent into her plans. Jezebel was a bad woman.

Whoever this woman was at Thyatira (a NT Jezebel), she had obtained a high level of influence over the church – and for whatever reason, the church was tolerating her sinful ideology and even embracing it.

This self-proclaimed prophetess was offering a *new* revelation teaching the church that since they were saved, they could indulge in sexual promiscuity and in eating things sacrificed to idols just like the pagans around them – and that God would turn a blind eye b/c of His grace. She was **seducing** them to sin.

A person is seduced when they're taken from doing something **good** to begin doing something **evil**, from something **right** to doing something **wrong**, from something **true** to doing something **untrue**.

Jezebelism – teaches that it's more important to be culturally relevant/accepted than it is to be Biblically accurate b/c it allows people to call themselves Christian while indulging in and living like the world.

Jerry Vines says Jezebelism in the church is the belief that somehow sin isn't sin and that a believer has the impression they can get away w/ ungodly behavior.

She was teaching it was okay for believers to indulge in pagan feasts and live like the world b/c in the end – God would forgive them. It's the idea that somehow God has a different set of rules for the saved than for the lost. ***But nothing could be further from the truth.***

Can I remind you of Peter's words – *W/ minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, don't conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, b/c I am holy."* 1 Peter 1:13-15

Point: Anyone who teaches that grace is a license to sin instead of a gift to free you into relationship w/ God is teaching heresy. We don't have a grace that affords us the ability to be irresponsible in the world, but a grace that empowers us to live responsibly under the influence of the H.S. for the glory of God.

Let me be clear – The Bible says – *The wages of sin is death.* This truth applies to the lost as well as to the saved b/c all sin has consequences. No matter who you are, if you're engage in sin, it'll cost you. For the lost, it could cost you an eternity separated from the God who loves you and desires to a relationship w/ you. And for the saved, while it won't cost you eternity, it will cost you intimacy w/ God this side of heaven and possibly a world of pain in the process.

This is why the cross is so important. B/c God loves you so much, He sent Jesus into the world to make it possible for your life to have victory over sin. That is, God sent Christ to the cross b/c He loves you too much to let sin wreck and ruin your life.

But, if you accept the lie that God doesn't care if you indulge in the ways of the world, then you can be sure the wages of sin will have their ***payday someday*** in your life. Yes, God can and will forgive, but that doesn't mean you will not bear the scars of that sin to serve as a reminder to never go back.

Which brings me to a simple conclusion – never believe anything anyone has to say as it pertains to the Scriptures until you have checked it out for yourself thru your own personal study and the leading of the H.S. **NEVER!** Even the humblest, and godliest of preachers/teachers can make a mistake, take a short cut, or infuse their misunderstanding of a passage w/ no ill-intent – and it can lead you astray. And just b/c a teacher gets one truth right one time doesn't mean he's necessarily going to be accurate on the next topic. Always take the time to study the teaching yourself before allowing it to take root in your soul.

So – *Study to show yourself approved by God as a workman who needs not to be ashamed but handles God's Word with accuracy.* 1 Timothy 2:15

So, what are we to learn from the church at Thyatira that'll help us to be all we can be for Jesus?

- True GC ministry is an **ALL-Team** Effort
- Always be **ALERT** to False Teachers/Teachings

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