

Revelation 2:18-29 Finishing Well

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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We're continuing our walk through the book of Revelation this morning. Soon we'll be getting into so really wild stuff – a woman riding a beast, a dragon being cast down from heaven, waters turning to blood. But before we get to any of that, we see Jesus. After all, according to Revelation 1:1 this is “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” He is what we should be noticing in this book, even when we get to the wild stuff.

Right now we're looking at what He had to say to seven different churches as He evaluated their lives and ministry. And speaking of evaluations, it's the end of the first semester for most of our elementary, middle, and high school students; and at the end of the semester you get a what? A report card. Your teachers make an assessment of you - where you're doing well, and where you need to improve. And, depending on what's been going on in life, you're either looking forward to that report card, or you're dreading it. Some of us have even tried to hide a report card, tried to intercept it in the mail. We can be proud of the school's assessment, but we can also be embarrassed or ashamed, can't we?

Things don't change much as you grow – many of the adults in this room get something like a report card, it's called a performance review – and each year, their boss sits down and writes about what they're doing well and how they need to improve.

People are going to be making assessments of you for your entire life. But, there's one assessment you need to be more concerned about than any other, and that's the assessment that comes from Christ. When He looks at your life, is He going to give you an A+ or an F-? And can you change any of that?

We're going to take a look at what Jesus had to say to the church in a city called Thyatira this morning, and you'll see that there were both straight A students and those who were failing miserably and in danger of being punished if they didn't change things quickly.

Read it with me, will you?

18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,
“These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19 “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as* for your works, the last *are* more than the first. 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23 I will

kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

*27 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron;
They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—*

as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star.
29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."'

This is the fourth letter we've looked at, and hopefully you remember there is a pattern to them. Each one teaches us something about Christ, contains a commendation for what the church is doing right, a correction for the things they're doing wrong and ends with a promise for those who overcome.

So let's take a look at what this says about Jesus, and then we'll see what He says to the star students and those who are flunking.

I think you have to notice right away that the picture of Jesus here is of a strong Lord. He's the Son of God, with flaming eyes and feet like brass. And then, He talks about having power over nations, ruling them with a rod of iron and smashing things to pieces. Now, as we said last week, Yes, Jesus is gentle; He is mild. He is a nice guy. But He's also God – full of power and strength, the master of the universe and all that is in it. Nothing overcomes Jesus. He doesn't back down from a fight. He's not intimidated. He has the quiet confident professionalism of someone who knows they're going to win, no matter what happens.

Keep a finger here and flip over to Psalm 2 with me – you'll see where some of these ideas of Jesus, the Son of God, ruling with a rod of iron come from.

We have here a psalm, or song, about the way people thought they could resist God and go their own way and how God just laughed at their attempt. It shows us that when God establishes His authority there is no opting out, no walking away and doing your own thing. No one is going to escape His grading at the end of the semester.

Psalm 2:1 Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
2 The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,
3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us."

4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure:
6 "Yet I have set My King
On My holy hill of Zion."

7 "I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
'You *are* My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
8 Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
The nations *for* Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.
9 You shall break them with a rod of iron;
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' "

10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
11 Serve the LORD with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish *in* the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

We need to keep both visions of Jesus in our mind – He is the gentle one who let little children sit in His lap and He's the ultimate and final authority who shatters all who oppose Him.

When He looks at us with those flaming eyes we see in back in Revelation Chapter Two they pierce through us, burning through all the little lies we tell others and ourselves. He sees right through all our facades, all our makeup and dress up, all our attempts to paint things in a better light. He sees things as they really are. Hebrews 4:13 says "*there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must* give account.*"

To further make the point, Jesus says "*I am He who searches the minds and hearts.*" Jesus knows not only what you did, but why you did it. And to Him, motive is everything. Whether you are prone to making choices with your mind – maybe you're the rational one, you're just looking at what makes sense, or whether you're the more emotional one who follows their heart – both can be used for godliness, but both can also be used to lead us astray. And Jesus is looking at why you did what you did. Was your motive to please Him or to make a grab for yourself? At root, every choice can be boiled down to one of those two motives. Even things that seem morally neutral, like which shoes you chose to wear

this morning, can be tinged with a hint of narcissism, can't they? When you stop to think about it honestly you start to realize how deeply we're all infected with this desire to please and promote self. Jesus' flaming eyes see all of that and He judges our hearts and minds.

And then, it says He has feet "like fine brass." Now, that sounds a little odd to us, so you have to take yourself back a few centuries and remember what life was like. Most people either walked around barefoot or they wore light sandals made of a thin strip of leather. If you remember, John the Baptist announced that the Messiah was coming and John said he wasn't even worthy to stoop down and tie the Messiah's sandals. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples in the Upper Room because they were dirty from walking on dusty roads. They didn't have socks and shoes on.

And because your feet were so open and exposed, you had to be careful where you stepped and what you stepped on. If you've ever had to walk across a field of stickers or across hot asphalt with no shoes on, you know how delicately and carefully you have to step or how you have to hurry to get across. But now Jesus is standing there and His feet are wrapped in the strongest metal they had at this point in history. It made Him, in a sense, invincible – He could go wherever He wanted, get to whatever He wanted. There was no stopping Him. And feet like that could be a weapon – the Bible speaks of Him treading the winepress of His wrath – crushing things under foot.

So, once again, the picture here is of a strong Jesus and one who sees what is really happening. For some of the church in Thyatira that was good news, and for others...well, at least He was giving them time to repent.

Let's start with the good news. Let's look at Jesus' commendation.

There was a group within the church who were the straight A students, the honor roll. But, it's important to note – you don't become an A student in Christ's classroom by cramming really hard on the night before the test, you become an A student by spending time with Jesus, your tutor and teacher and simply trying to put His teaching into practice day by day.

That's what we see happening in Thyatira. He tells one group: [19 "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.](#)

This is what God wants our lives to look like. He wants us to have works – that is, things you're doing for Him. Are you doing anything for God? Now, we're talking motives here, not actual methods – you don't have to be on a one man crusade to end some great evil in the world, if you are, that's great - but do you do *any* of the things you do out of an awareness of God's presence in your life?

Does your love for God affect the way you pack your spouse's lunch – does the love you receive from God trickle down into the lives of anyone around you? Does your desire to walk with integrity before God compel you to say something about this new contract or proposal because there are parts of it that unethical or wrong? Are you saying, I'll let my brother or sister borrow my shirt or my ball or my toy because I know that sharing pleases

God? You see, your works can be manifest in all the daily details of life. It's not just some big religious thing you did this one time.

But here's the thing, when you start working for God in the daily aspects of life, you find it starts to radiate outward more and more and you find yourself looking for opportunities to serve in ministry in and out of the church. "Acts of service" Jesus calls them. Things you're doing to help others. We live in a 'service economy,' don't we? But why do people serve? For the chance to make a buck. That's the motive. Contrast that to the Christians in Thyatira who were actively serving others because they just loved God and loved people. It's a good challenge for us to consider: where, to whom, and how, are you giving yourself away?

Now, of course, there are those seasons in life where we just have to buckle down and take care of all the responsibilities in our immediate lives, and there's not much of us left to give to others. But sooner or later those seasons need to come to a conclusion and we need to start serving others with all that God has allowed us to experience, acquire, and learn. God sees your service, and if your heart is right, He is pleased.

And notice, Jesus says He sees their love – their motive –that's essential because you can be doing all kinds of acts of work and service and not be motivated by love. You can be motivated by obligation or by the desire to be noticed. Or you can simply be trying to do your part because then others have to do theirs. But Jesus sees your heart and mind, He knows.

And He knows it's not always easy to love, especially for long periods of time, so He commends the patience of the Christians in Thyatira. They are waiting well. They are wearing well with the ministry and lives He has entrusted to them. How about you?

Patience is an endangered species in most of our lives, isn't it? Who wants to wait? We want to click. Jesus is looking for what one author called, 'A long obedience in the same direction.' Patience is a fruit of the Spirit – if you feel like it's lacking in your life, turn to God and ask for more. And then hold on...

Finally, notice that Jesus says their works have been growing. They're improving with age. They're not backsliding, they're not growing weary, they're not pulling back as time goes on.

Many of you know Pastor Doug and Rose. Did you know Doug became a pastor AFTER he retired from being a CFO? Since he was retired he started showing up at church, helping out wherever needed and eventually, we learned about all his skill and experience they pulled him into administration. Then, when Calvary Chapel bought the castle in Hungary and started the Bible College there, he and Rose sold their home and moved to Europe to help get everything up and running. And then they came here and helped established this work, and now when Rose retires this summer, they're looking at how they can get back out on the mission field, their condo is going on the market soon. Their last works are more than their first and they show no signs of slowing down.

Pastor Bill and Marcella were involved in ministry in Cleveland a few years back. They moved to DC to help take care of a family member, and they got plugged into the church here and started serving. When there was a need in Children's Ministry, they stepped in and helped out and things just kept going from there as Bill got more and more involved in ministry and was eventually ordained. He's still overseeing Children's Ministry, but he's also leading ministry down at the Central Union Mission, leading home groups, and investing his life into discipling men, often leading them to get involved in ministry. A few years ago He began taking trips down to Haiti and God grabbed his heart and gave Him a vision and a passion for doing ministry down there. So he, and several others formed their own non-profit, and now, they're looking at moving to Haiti this summer to be more involved in what God is doing. Their last works are way more than their first.

Our pastors aren't slowing down and easing into retirement, they're picking up speed and finishing well – they're full of excitement and enthusiasm about what God might want to do next. All they've seen and done so far has only made them hungry for more.

And as Doug and Rose and Bill and Marcella prepare to leave, Matt and Peggy are wrapping up the ministry God called them to in Kenya and they'll be joining us here this summer – he's got big shoes to fill – but we're excited about what God is doing because we believe their works, and the works of this church will be greater in the future than they have been in the past as we all follow Jesus in the directions He leads us.

And just so you know a little more about him, Pastor Matt was a teenage college student when he first began leading worship and had no idea that following God – serving Him with love, faith, service, and patience, would lead to living on the mission field and then winding up in DC.

From where you're standing right now, you can't imagine what God might do, or where He might lead you if you just keep saying yes to Him. He wants your later works to be greater than the first. Will you let God make much of your life? Will you let Him give you a purpose and a vision? You don't have to wander and wonder through your sixty or seventy or eighty years on this earth – God will forgive the sins of your past and give you a future and a hope, and then your later works can be greater than your former as well.

And if you're on this course – if you're seeking to know God and be led and changed by Him, look at what Jesus says:

24 "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

27 *He shall rule them with a rod of iron;
They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'—*

as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star.
29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

If you have "works, love, service, faith, and patience" and your works just keep growing, then hold fast, hold tightly, to what you have until He comes and He will invite you to rule and reign with Him in the heavenly Kingdom and He'll give you more and more of Himself - Rev 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

But we can't finish here because we've skipped over something very important: Jesus' message to the failing students. Jesus is not pleased with that woman Jezebel or the direction she is leading people. Now, who was that? Well, most likely Jezebel wasn't her real name; He was calling her Jezebel as a reference to a real woman in Israel's past.

If you were here last week we said you needed to know your Old Testament to understand everything in the letter to Pergamos. Well, that's true of Jezebel as well. You find her story in 1 and 2 Kings interwoven with the story of the prophet Elijah. And it's not a good story. She was married to a man named Ahab who was king of Israel.

1 Kings 16:30 Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who *were* before him. 31 And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. 32 Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

He did more to make God angry than any other king, and he learned it all from her. After recording his death the Bible gives a final verdict on Ahab's life:

1 Kings 21:25 But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up.

So now there's a woman in Thyatira who is also leading people astray. Heresy comes in many flavors but it always has the same effect, it pulls people away from a personal, intimate, direct relationship with God. God hated that about those who followed the doctrine of Balaam, the Nicolaitans, and now Jezebel.

But here's the crazy thing. Did you notice? Jesus' greatest accusation is that this "Jezebel" did not repent. She was rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit in her heart, calling her to change. God is patient, He doesn't fly off the handle. He gives us time and space to repent, but if we do not, there must be consequences.

Jesus is either the Good Shepherd, whose rod and staff comfort you as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, or He is standing before you in judgment with a rod of iron.

Which is He for you today? When Jesus looks at your life, is He going to give you a passing grade for placing your trust in Him, or a failing grade for doing things your own way? God really does have a plan for your life. Now, it won't always be easy. Talk to Doug and Rose, talk to Bill and Marcella, talk to Matt and Peggy – ask them if it's always smooth sailing. Ask them if they have doubts and fears and questions at times and they'll tell you yes, of course they do. But they can also tell you story after story of the incredible things they've seen God do. God's plan is to fill your life with love, faith, service, and patience and to see you grow more and more as life goes on and then invite you into His kingdom to rule and reign.

He made all that possible for us through His sacrificial death on the cross which we remember this morning through communion. The worship team and the ushers are going to come forward at this time and I encourage you to spend a few moments, as they pass out the elements, laying your life out before God and asking Him to help you know, what is His honest evaluation of you? What does He want you to do, what does He want you to change, what does He want to encourage you to keep doing patiently? And then respond to Him, in your own way, right there where you're seated and we'll take communion together in just a moment.