

THYATIRA

TRADE | Thyatira was a blue-collar, labor town that served as a trade city. It was built upon trades, guilds and crafts. In fact, trade guilds or unions served the area as the center of commerce. So John's description of Jesus' feet as "like burnished bronze" (Revelation 2:18) may have been familiar to a town with bronze guilds.

UNIONS | Trade unions dominated societal life. They had monthly meals and a strong pull on members. Plus, each union had a Greek god associated with it. Faithful worship was meant to ensure prosperity of the trade. Christians who refused to participate faced isolation and suffered economically.

THE APOLLO CULT | Thyatira housed a major cult of Apollo, the Greek god of the arts, the sun and prophecy. The emperor was linked to Apollo and was likely worshipped in the city as the human embodiment of Apollo.

THE CHURCH | Perhaps one of the first people from Thyatira to put their faith in Christ was a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple cloth. We read about her conversion in Acts 16:14 when the Apostle Paul visited Philippi (where she lived at the time) and he led her to the Lord.

This week, we explore the fourth letter of the seven written to the churches in Asia Minor. Thyatira seems split: some need strong warning, while others receive affirmation for their faithfulness. Thyatira was commended for their sense of true dedication. However, they had compromised in critical area of their lives, many lived a shameless life and would eat food sacrificed to idols. In other words, they chose idolatry.

Revelation 2:18-29

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.

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.

20 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.

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

22 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.

23 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.

24 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,

25 except to hold on to what you have until I come.'

26 To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—

27 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.

28 I will also give that one the morning star.

29 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

FOCUS ON CHRIST

In each of the seven letters, Christ is uniquely described. To Thyatira, Jesus describes himself as "whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze." Then he says, "I know." Therefore, The eyes may be an image of Jesus having the ability to see and know all. The feet are images of authority and action.

Q: *Why would Thyatira need to see Jesus with this perspective?*

They would have related to the bronze feet, since bronze making was prominent in Thyatira. However, they needed to also understand that Jesus could see all things. And His sight could pierce through the cloud of confusion and hiding. Jesus saw both those that were doing well and needed affirmation, but also was quite aware of their sin and who was engaging and those who were not.

FOCUS ON THE CHURCH

In this letter, we see that The Church of Thyatira receives both praise and correction.

Q: *How does Jesus affirm them?*

Q: *What progress had they made?*

Q: *What do you think it was like living as a Christian in this city?*

Q: *What pressures may they have felt?*

Q: *What needed correction in this church community?*

Q: *Why was this wrong?*

Q: *What progress have you seen in First Baptist Church's community?*

Q: *How do you respond if you see correction is needed?*

He affirms their faith, their service and their love. He also affirms those who have held onto their testimony, who haven't been swayed by the false teaching. They have done greater works than before, so they are growing in their impact.

This was a hard city in which to be a Christian. So much of commerce and government in the ancient world was tied to pagan worship. In Thyatira, it was specifically tied to Apollo who was the sun god. This seemed to have forced them to compromise and allow sexually immoral behavior to spread in the church. These acts came through a false prophet as we know, false teaching is dangerous to the church.

FOCUS ON ME

The people of Thyatira most likely faced enormous pressure to "fit in" financially, socially, and religiously. I find it ironic that our culture sends out messages constantly.

Q: *In our culture, who or what are the messengers and what are the messages that influence us to "fit in?"*

Q: *Which are the most subtle messages we receive to fit in?*

Q: *Which are the strongest messages that push us to fit in that conflict with obedience and faithfulness of the way of God?*

Broadly speaking, our culture sends lots of messages. Sexual immorality is rampant, the compromise of truth, as well as consumerism and greed that put ourselves first while allowing the poor and the oppressed to suffer. One reason we compromise is because we believe that the consequences of our sinful actions will not come into play. We believe that they either won't happen, we can avoid them, or they won't be that bad and will be worth the risk.

Q: *What's broken in this thinking? What's missing?*

The consequences of sin will always find us. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Whether now or later, eventually your sin will find you and you will experience their consequences.

There are only two groups mentioned here - those who need to repent and those who need to keep going. Read Philippians 1:3-6, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (v. 6).

Q: Which group are you in?

Q: Is Christ calling you to repent or to keep going?

We are often blind to our own shortcomings, so we should pray as we are instructed in Psalm 139: 23-24:

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

God will show us places He wants us to grow and change, when we ask Him! Encourage your group to be open to the Lord's leading!

He says, "I will repay each of you according to your deeds" (Revelation 2:23). Yet he adds, "Keep going....to those who are faithful", "I will give authority over the nations..." "I will give him the morning star." (v 26;28).

While we don't know exactly what this means, we do know it is going to be "REALLY GOOD" in the end.

So consider the encouragement to Keep going.

Your journey is not static.

Your quest is to continue growing in faith and perseverance!