

## Lessons from the Lamps: Jealous Lover

Revelation 2:18-29

June 21, 2015

Dan Hoffman

**~Our good deeds are irrelevant when we let Jezebel reign in church, and only holding on to Jesus will evict her~**

[Pray]

With the exception of the previous two weeks where we had some special services, for the last little while we have been turning our attention to the book of Revelation.

Now most people find Revelation to be a bit of an enigma – a mystery. As a result many don't read it at all, or read it with the wrong focus. They use it to tell the future. They try to determine whether Jesus will come back before, after or in the middle of the tribulation. They want to know was Hitler the beast, or was it Stalin, or is it Obama, or the Pope, or their in-laws. And of course people get excited about predicting when the end of the world will occur.

For example Pastor John Hagee currently predicts that sometime between April of 2014 and September of 2015 Jesus will return. He has a couple months left to be right, but his predictions put him in some pretty risky company.

You see people have been predicting the return of Christ for literally 2000 years. Rasputin used his interpretations of Revelation to suggest August 23<sup>rd</sup> of 2013 as judgment day. Harold Camping connected the devastating earthquakes of 2011 to the prophecies in Revelation and determined May 21<sup>st</sup> would be the day... Then when that date came and went he recalculated to October 21<sup>st</sup>. In 1990 Pat Robertson wrote a book that suggested Jesus would return April 29<sup>th</sup> 2007.

And if you haven't heard of those names perhaps you will recognize Sir Isaac Newton or Jonathan Edwards who both looked at the Scriptures and concluded that Christ's 1000 year reign would begin in year 2000.

Now those are just a few of the most notable predictions involving the last 15 years. Wikipedia actually has a list of hundreds of others I could have chosen.<sup>1</sup>

You see people have been enamored with knowing the future forever. But the problem with these predictions, besides that 100% of them have been wrong – which is a problem – is that they have tried to use Revelation as a crystal ball instead of a discipleship tool teaching how to live today so that when Jesus returns we will be on His side.

---

<sup>1</sup> All prophecies mentioned taken from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_dates\\_predicted\\_for\\_apocalyptic\\_events](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_dates_predicted_for_apocalyptic_events)

Those two things are not the same – they aren't even related! And Revelation is fundamentally the second kind of book – it is a book about how to live in the world we find ourselves in while not becoming “of it” – how to live in the world, but not be of the world.

Now certainly there are prophecies of the future in Revelation, but their purpose is never that we will be able to predict what will happen, but rather that we will place our confidence in God. So Revelation says:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth.... And to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. (Revelation 20:7-8)

Now that sounds bad. But the point of these verses is not to figure out when Satan's release will happen so it can somehow be avoided or prepared for. The point is in the next verses where we read:

But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur (Revelation 20:9-10)

The point is if you are on Jesus' side you win! So don't waste your time preparing for the devil to do something bad – he's not important enough to base your life around – get into Jesus – He's who's important! No matter how bad things get trust God's sovereignty. That's the point of Revelation.

And there is a word that defines what it means to trust Jesus more and more, and that word is “discipleship”.

So Revelation is primarily about discipleship, it was written to encourage the church, which always finds itself living in the middle of a world full of sin, to live in the world but not become of it.

Alright, that's Revelation in a nutshell – not nearly as mysterious as it is made out to be.. Now at the beginning of the book Jesus dictated 7 letters to the seven churches of Asia – 7 letters that really speak into every situation and every church of all time – so they are written for us.

And each of these letters follows a similar format. First Jesus reveals Himself in a personal way that breaths life into our situation. Then He encourages us where we are doing well – Jesus isn't blind to our success. But He also warns us where we are failing and His warnings are severe. He says things like:

If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. (Revelation 2:5)

Friend, you do not want to stand before Jesus on Judgment Day having been part of a church that had no lampstand – that wasn't a light for Jesus... But praise God there is hope. In each case Jesus ends with a promise that if we repent and reform our ways – if we overcome the temptation to be of the world and follow Jesus – then He will heap blessings on us. That sounds good right?

And each of the letters basically follows that format. So if you haven't already please open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 2 starting in verse 18.

...

Today the big idea of this text is that: **Our good deeds are irrelevant when we let Jezebel reign in church, and only holding on to Jesus will evict her.**

Now just before we get into the text let me establish two points of context.

First Thyatira, like most cities in Rome, was a religious center for the worship of the Roman gods. And one of the big gods here was Apollo who was thought to be the guardian of the city. And the Thyatirans believed that in fact the Emperor was an incarnation of Apollo.

Now Domitian, who was Emperor when John penned this, liked to think of himself as god and even named his son “son of god”. We have found coins picturing Domitian's son with the words “son of god” inscribed above.<sup>2</sup> So Thyatira was a city devoted to the worship of their Emperor.

The second significant point of context is that Thyatira was controlled by several strong trade guilds – think unions. So if you were a leather worker or a clothing maker you had to be part of one of these guilds or else you couldn't do business in the city.

In Acts 16 Luke tells us Lydia was “a dealer in purple clothe” from Thyatira, so she would have been part of one of these guilds. And she was in Philippi, selling her wares, when Paul came to preach and she became a Christian.<sup>3</sup>

But these guilds proved to be a major problem for the early Christians because of the expectations they put on their members.

Commentator William Barclay describes the situation like this:

---

<sup>2</sup> Darrell Johnson “Discipleship on the Edge” (Vancouver, Regent College Press), 2004. pg 88.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 16:14

“These trade guilds had common meals together. The meal would begin and end with a cup of wine poured out as an... offering to the gods. It was in fact the heathen grace before and after the meal... Still further, such a meal would almost certainly follow a sacrifice. The token part of an animal would be offered on the altar. The meat of it would be given to the worshipper to make a feast for the members of his trade guild... Still further, this trade guild feast not infrequently degenerated into carousals where drunkenness and immorality were the order of the day.”<sup>4</sup>

So being in a trade guild meant giving in to idolatry and immorality. And that’s the cultural backdrop that Jesus speaks this letter into.

Now as for the church in Thyatira, it was a thriving organization. Look down at verse 18.

[Read Revelation 2:18-19]

This is quite the verse. Jesus, the Son of God, gives Thyatira one of the most strikingly positive commendations of any of the 7 churches. They had a lot going for them. First, they were a loving church. That means that when people showed up there they felt accepted and people made room for them to join. Isn’t that something every church aspires to be? Jesus says they nailed it.

Second, they were a faithful church. They showed up week after week. They never let their duties slide. You could count on them. That’s good too.

Third, they were a serving church. They cared about each other and their city and gave of themselves generously to meet the needs around them.

Fourth, they were a persevering church – all the previous things that they did well they kept doing well.

And finally Jesus says they were a growing church. They had started off well, but now were doing even more than they had done at first. That’s growth.

...

Now just imagine you came across a church you could say this many good things about. It would be impressive, right? I mean the Christians in Thyatira were making a difference in their city... But Jesus wasn’t impressed.

It turns out that **Our good deeds can become irrelevant**. A church can do all sorts of outward things well but still be failing. And that’s because it isn’t just what we do, but why we do it that matters. And in Thyatira’s case the problem they were facing was that Jezebel had influenced their beliefs and deceived them into tolerating idolatry and immorality. They were in the world and of it.

---

<sup>4</sup> William Barclay, “Letters to the Seven Churches” (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press) 2001, pg 65.

So Jesus says **Our good deeds become irrelevant when we let Jezebel reign in church...**; let's pick it up in verse 20:

[Read Revelation 2:20-23]

So as we saw with the context Thyatira found itself in hostile territory. The guilds made it really difficult to follow Jesus. But similar to what we saw in Ephesus and Pergamum the biggest threat the Christians in Thyatira faced was not from outside, but had already snuck into the church.

Jezebel was a member in Thyatira; she was on the board. But her passion wasn't for Jesus.

Now most theologians suspect that this woman's name wasn't actually Jezebel, but that she had something the Jews referred to as a "Jezebel Spirit" on her.

In Israelite tradition "Jezebel" was a slang name for someone who was rebellious against God and brought trouble on the faith community. And of course that was because Queen Jezebel in the Old Testament had such a dastardly impact on the nation. You remember the story:<sup>5</sup>

Jezebel was the King of Tyre's daughter, and Tyre was one of Israel's enemies. And so, as was common back then, when two nations wanted to make peace they would marry their children into each other's royal families. But YHWH had told Israel not to do this because marriage with non-Israelite women meant introducing their gods into Israel. And this is what happened with Jezebel. She was a worshipper of Baal, the chief nature and fertility god.

And Jezebel was a powerful and influential woman and so very quickly Ahab, Israel's king, began to follow her lead. He built an altar to Baal in Samaria and went on to set up Asherah poles around Israel. Asherah was Baal's female counterpart. And in doing this the Scriptures say:

Ahab... did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him. (1 Kings 16:33)

Ahab is remembered as Israel's wickedest king – that's quite a legacy. And he won this dishonour because he sold Israel out. The king's job was to lead the people to YHWH but instead he actually allowed his wife to hunt down YHWH's prophets and kill them if they opposed her.

Now Jezebel was fine with people worshipping YHWH, but what she didn't like was that people would only worship YHWH. Her answer was to introduce Baal worship right along side YHWH worship as was customary in her homeland.

---

<sup>5</sup> Read the story yourself in 1 Kings 16:29-18:18.

But here's the problem, this aroused YHWH's anger, His jealousy. YHWH is not just another god, He is *The* God. And He would not share His place with Baal. With YHWH it has always been either/or and never both/and. Israel could have Him or they could have Baal, but He would never be part of any partnership.

And so YHWH sent Elijah the prophet to remind Israel of this reality and he challenged them saying:

How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him. (1 Kings 18:21)

Of course the story ends with fire falling from heaven and proving Elijah's God was God; and then Elijah rallied the people to systematically kill all of Baal's prophets. In the end Jezebel got thrown out a window and her dead body was eaten by dogs.<sup>6</sup>

...

Alright, now that nobodies hungry, let's get back to Thyatira. Similar to what had happened in the Old Testament, here Jezebel the self-proclaimed prophet, had introduced a both/and theology in church. Her position was that people could follow Jesus while being part of the trade unions at the same time.

And they could do this because she taught that what people did with their bodies wasn't connected to what they did with their souls. Christians could engage in all the activities of their neighbours without compromising their faith in Jesus.

But hear this; that's not true. Friends, what we do with our bodies affects our souls because our souls and our bodies are tied together. We touched on this when we looked at the letter to Pergamum.

To say what we do with our bodies doesn't matter is to deny they are the Holy Spirit's temple.<sup>7</sup> And that's why Jesus comes down so strong in this letter. In verses 22 and 23 Jesus says I'm coming to defend my bride, throw Jezebel out the window because I've got no tolerance for sin tolerance.

But why not? Why is Jesus so down on a church that was doing so many good things for His kingdom? They obviously loved Him, but just wanted to keep a bit of their lives for some side affections – affections that would help them get a job! Is this really such a big deal?

...

Jesus says "Yes." And that's because when we practice compromise rather than being solely devoted to YHWH, we commit spiritual adultery. And YHWH is a jealous lover of His bride.

...

---

<sup>6</sup> 2 Kings 9:30-37

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Now at the human level we get this. If Nikki came home one day and said “Dan, I love you a lot, I love you more than I love anyone else, but I met this other guy and I’m going to be his wife one day a week. But don’t get too excited because I still love you six times more than I love him.”

We get that that would be repulsive to me and I wouldn’t tolerate it. And Nikki wouldn’t tolerate it if I attempted the same stunt with her. A marriage relationship is an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman, and to deviate from this is to destroy marriage.

And so Jesus says it is not alright for us, His bride, to whore ourselves out to any other god. With Jesus it is either/or and never both/and.

...

Alright, but none of us worship Baal. That’s just something weird people did a long time ago right? True, but Jezebel and her temptations are very much alive today.

So for example Jezebel is present when you believe that what you watch on TV doesn’t matter. If you enjoy shows that promote sexual promiscuity or violence or atheism believing they have no affect on your soul – if you believe you can love Jesus and watch what you want – that’s Jezebel’s influence.

Or here’s a different angle. Jezebel is present when you believe you can eat or shop to escape; you can find your strength in God on Sunday, but then when the stress of life hits on Monday you go shopping or eat ice cream. That’s Jezebel’s influence.

Or Jezebel is present when you believe that what you do with your money is up to you. So you buy the biggest house and the fanciest car you can. Sure you give some money to God once in a while, but you make sure you can afford everything you want. That’s Jezebel’s influence.

...

“Now Come on” you say, “that’s ridiculous.” But here’s the thing: it is not sin to watch TV or to go shopping or eat ice cream or buy nice things. None of these things are sin. But they become sin when they become a source of life for us.

So when your cure for a bad day at work is to eat or shop you are bowing before an idol to get life. Or if you are motivated to buy nice stuff because it makes you feel important you are saying “my identity depends on what people think of me.” That’s idolatry because Jesus is the source of our identity. Or when you watch stuff that you wouldn’t if Jesus was sitting beside you, you are saying it’s ok for me to offer filth in the Holy Spirit’s temple – and that’s idolatry.

Let me go a little farther: If you enjoy a glass of wine or a beer with dinner the Bible does not say that’s wrong. But if you turn to alcohol when you are frightened or discouraged or depressed or anxious or lonely that’s a problem.

If you can't look at the bright side of life until you've got a few drinks in you what you have done is turn alcohol into your source of joy – your god. And Jesus says don't try to get joy by getting full of wine, get joy by getting full of the Spirit.<sup>8</sup> You can have Me as your source, or you can have alcohol, but you can't have us both. That's idolatry.

You see Jesus will be our only source of life or He won't be our God at all. To ask Him to share our heart is the most insulting thing we can say to the God of the universe, and He won't endure it.

...

Now let me clarify again. This doesn't mean you can't enjoy ice cream or shopping or TV or new things or anything else. There is nothing wrong with enjoying the wonderful world Jesus has put us in. But there is a difference between enjoying something and worshipping something. And that difference comes down to where we go to receive life. If you feel depleted and go anywhere but to Jesus, that's idolatry.

Now notice that in Thyatira the question was not whether Jezebel would seek to introduce plural sources, she was already in. The question was what to do now. And the reality is that it is the same today. The Jezebel temptation to tolerate sin is always present and many of us have given in to her lies.

Take a second and ask yourself "Where do I go, what do I do, when I'm scared or frustrated, or exhausted, or lonely, or rejected?"... What do I do? Is there a pattern? Do you turn on the TV or shop or eat or drink?... If you're a Christian, but you go anywhere besides to Jesus, you have fallen into Jezebel's trap and are worshipping at other alters... Jezebel's not far away, is she?

So the question is how do we overcome her?

...

Look with me at verse 24.

[Read Revelation 2:24-29]

Now there is a lot here, and a big prize. But the key for how to be victorious comes in the bottom of verse 24. There Jesus says "I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come"... **Our good deeds become irrelevant when we let Jezebel reign in church, and only holding on to Jesus will evict her.**

Friends, the power to overcome the gods that seek our worship comes when we realize what we have in Jesus and hold on tight. And there are several pictures of Jesus worth holding onto in this text; I'll give you five.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 5:15-18

<sup>9</sup> List adapted from Johnson, pg 92-95



First, in verse 18 Jesus says I am the Son of God. Now Thyatira thought Caesar's son was the son of god but Jesus says "No, it's Me." I am the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.<sup>10</sup> I am everything that God is and I offer to be your source of joy and life. So there is nowhere better for us to turn. Jesus alone has the words of eternal life.<sup>11</sup>

Second, His eyes are like blazing fire and His feet are burnished bronze. This is both a terrifying and comforting image. It is terrifying because His eyes pierce darkness with penetrating precision. He shines His light on the dark corners of our lives and finds what we would rather hide and His feet are able to trample it. But it is comforting because what He seeks to burn and trample is the cancer that would destroy us. Jesus wants you to have life to the full.<sup>12</sup>

Third, look down at verse 21 where Jesus says: "I have given [Jezebel] time to repent... but she is unwilling." Jesus, the one with flaming eyes and bronze feet is merciful even to the worst of us. He offers repentance. He isn't hasty in judgment. So wherever you find yourself today you haven't fallen too far. Jesus will forgive you. But don't wait too long to repent.

Fourth, in verse 23 Jesus says "I will repay each of you according to your deeds." These are "fear of the Lord" words. The fact is Jesus respects our free will. He honours the decisions we make rather than forcing Himself on us. But that means we bear the consequences of our actions. Jesus will not protect us when we drink from other fountains. If we do the deeds of Jezebel, giving ourselves to idolatry and immorality, we will inherit her destruction, but if we do the deeds of Jesus we will inherit His reward – we will be joined to Him and the Father.

And finally, in verse 26 and 27 Jesus is the one who makes incredible promises. He says those who are victorious will rule with Him. Jesus promises to share His authority with us if we refuse to give into Jezebel's lies and worship lesser gods. So friends it is worth giving up the cheap, but immediately gratifying alternatives you go to for life.

Even more amazingly Jesus promises to give the Morning Star to those who overcome. This is amazing because at the end of Revelation we learn that Jesus is the Morning Star.<sup>13</sup> Jesus is the reward for those who seek Him first.

So brothers and sisters let go of Jezebel, let go of her lies that you can find life, or find more life, by bowing before multiple alters. Instead hold on to Jesus because He is the Son of God, and He knows what is best for you, and He wants to give it to you.

---

<sup>10</sup> Colossians 1:15

<sup>11</sup> John 6:68

<sup>12</sup> John 10:10

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 22:26