

Revelation (2020) - 2B

- Let's dive right back into our analysis of the seven letters of Revelation
 - As we do, let's begin with a review of the framework we established last week for interpreting the letters properly
 - We are using three complimentary methods of interpreting the letters
 - All three of these perspectives are necessary to gain a full understanding of what Jesus gave us here
 - The first was a literal, historical approach, reading the letters as they were written in their day, taking them for what they say at face value
 - We have seven literal churches (or communities of believers) living in the first century in Asia Minor
 - They were experiencing a variety of circumstances, they exhibited a variety of behaviors
 - And Jesus gives them a variety of instructions including commendations, critiques, warnings, and encouragement
 - The second way we will approach these letters is in a universal, timeless approach, recognizing Jesus wrote to the whole church not just seven
 - The symbolic meaning of the number seven told us that Jesus intended these letters to apply to 100% of the church
 - So as we read what they say we must consider how they apply to the church today, specifically to us personally
 - Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must consider the prophetic, eschatological meaning of these letters
 - Jesus selected these seven churches and arranged them in a certain order to represent the church changing over time
 - In total these letters tells us that the history of the Church will exist through seven periods
- I represented this third view of interpretation using a graphic that I will continue to use as our roadmap through the letters and even beyond
 - And the contents of the letters will bear out the prophetic interpretation

- We will be able to look back over the past 2,000 years to see a correlation with the things given in the letters
- Before that history was written, we wouldn't have been able to see this pattern nor recognize how the letters were prophetic
- Only in hindsight did scholars come to realize that the letters worked in this way
- That quality of the letters explains why they are included in the book of Revelation in the first place
 - Jesus didn't give us these letters to reveal the history of the Church *in advance*
 - On the contrary, He gave us these letters to show us the history of the Church after it had already taken place
 - And in that way, these letters function as a clock measuring time
 - But they aren't counting time up, but instead they are counting down time
- Secondly, the prophetic aspect of these letters confirms to us that Jesus truly is in control of His Church
 - He told us in advance what would happen to His Church
 - And now with the benefit of hindsight we see clearly He has been steering His Church through thousands of years of time
 - And if Jesus can control history so precisely, then we have confidence to know He is in control of the future too
- So the prophetic quality of these letters is the most important reason they are found in the book of Revelation
 - They are intended to alert the Church to the approaching end of the Church age
 - Only those living at the end of the age will be able to decode the meaning of these letters and benefit from that knowledge
 - And being near the end, that generation also needs assurance that what happens next is also according to God's plan
 - So let's go to the second letter, as we continue to follow the pattern we established last week in our study of the first letter to Ephesus

- Starting with observation of the literal, historical setting

Rev. 2:8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

Rev. 2:9 ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Rev. 2:10 ‘Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Rev. 2:11 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’

- As we learned last week, these letters are very structured, and the structure repeats from letter to letter, which helps us interpret them
 - Starting with meaning of the city’s name, Smyrna
 - The name is a transliteration of the Greek word *smurna* which is the word for myrrh
 - Myrrh is a natural gum or resin that comes from a Middle Eastern tree used to make a fragrant ointment
 - Myrrh was most commonly associated with death and burial since it was a primary embalming spice used to prepared dead bodies
 - Today Smyrna is called Izmir and it’s still a thriving city in Turkey
 - But in Jesus’ day it was just another Roman city, full of pagan temples, most notably a temple to the emperor Tiberias
 - That made this town the heart of emperor worship in Asia Minor, and as such it became an early persecutor of Christians
 - Roman law at the time prohibited any religion except emperor worship
 - Judaism was the only religion granted an exception due to the stubbornness of Jews to conform
 - For a time in the first century, Romans viewed Christians as an offshoot of Judaism, so the Church enjoyed the same protections
 - But before the end of the century, the Church had become predominantly Gentile

- As a result, the Romans came to see the Church as distinct from Judaism and a threat to the Empire
 - Furthermore, the Jews rejected and persecuted Christians thereby becoming allies with the Romans against the Church
 - Smyrna seems to have been on the forefront of this transition from tolerating Christianity to persecuting believers
 - Among those martyred in Smyrna was the early church bishop, Polycarp, a man disciplined by John himself
-  • Looking at the letter, we can see Smyrna's record of persecution reflected in Jesus' words to this church, beginning with the description of Jesus
- Jesus says He was the first and last, the One Who was dead and has come to life
 - Remember, Jesus addresses each church with a detail taken from John's description of Jesus in Chapter 1
 - The detail Jesus selects reflects what He intends to say to that church
 - In this case, the connection is obvious...a church destined for persecution should remember that death is not the end of us
 - Jesus died too, so He knows what it's like to face the death of the body
 - And then He rose again, proving He has the power to bring life back from death
 - And He has promised that those who believe in Him will experience the same transformation
 - So just as Jesus faced death obediently, so should Christians knowing death will not be the end of us
 - From there Jesus moves to acknowledging that this church is suffering tribulation and poverty
 - The tribulation was likely a result of Jewish opposition to Christianity though later the Romans joined in
 - And their poverty was closely connected to the persecution

- Most manual labor trades in Roman society were tightly controlled by powerful trade unions
 - Membership in the unions was required to work in your trade
 - These unions worshipped pagan gods and participation in ritual worship and sacrifice was required as part of union membership
 - A Christian who refused to worship the trade union's god would be set out of the union and unable to work leading to poverty
- Jesus blames the church's troubles on Jews who were not really Jews but were instruments of the devil, a synagogue of Satan
 - Jesus' words give you a clear indication of how Jesus views those of Jewish background who do not recognize Him as Messiah
 - They were Jewish but Jesus says they are Jewish in name only

Rom. 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.

Rom. 2:29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

- They may have been born of Abraham but they haven't done the deeds of Abraham, specifically they have not believed
- Abraham believed in God's promise of a Messiah, sight unseen, yet the Jews of that day hadn't received the Messiah in Person
- So the Lord sees those who aren't for Him to be those who are against Him, just as Satan is against Jesus
 - There are only two kinds of people in the world from God's point of view
 - We are either believers in Jesus or we are His enemies

1John 2:22 Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

1John 2:23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

- So Jesus says He knows the true heart of those persecuting the church, and yet Jesus doesn't say He will stop the persecution
 - Likewise, Jesus says He knows they have poverty, but He doesn't say He will remove it from them
 - Instead, He says they are actually rich...how is that true?
- Jesus is saying that their suffering and tribulation is earning for them Christ's approval and that approval will result in treasure in Heaven
 - They may be poor on earth, but because they endure that trial well and turn it into a witness, they will be rewarded by Christ
 - But that reward will not be on earth, because the rewards we await from Jesus are not given to us until we are resurrected
 - And that's far preferable since Heavenly rewards do not wear out and cannot be taken from us unlike earthly benefits
- Jesus is reminding the church to have eyes for eternity, to see your life and circumstances from an eternal perspective
 - Don't get caught up in what you can obtain here or in avoiding unpleasant experiences here and now
 - Endure them and turn them to a witness and ministry as the Lord allows, and as you do that you are earning treasure in Heaven

[Matt. 5:11](#) "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

[Matt. 5:12](#) "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- Notice in v.10 Jesus tells the Church how to make the most of these circumstances
 - He says not to fear the situation, even as they face death for their faith
 - Fearing death is an impediment to pleasing Jesus because it gets in the way of obedience and eternal reward
 - Fear of death causes us to make bad choices, selfish choices, that are the opposite of faith

- And that fear is ultimately pointless, since we know that death isn't a bad thing for a Christian...Paul says to die is gain for us
- This church couldn't let fear drive their response to their circumstances, but instead they should enter into their suffering with confidence
 - They are enduring tribulation and poverty, but the Lord isn't going to remove those things
 - Instead, He tells the church how to endure them with their witness intact
 - Jesus' goal for the church wasn't in preserving their earthly comfort or lengthening their earthly life
 - His goal was encouraging their earthly witness for His glory, and through that obedience they maximized their eternal reward
- He warns them that prison awaits and after a short time, where their faith would be tested, then would come death
 - Roman prisons were not places of permanent confinement
 - Romans had no incentive to house prisoners for long periods of time, after all, why give free food and clothing to criminals?
 - Romans would conduct swift trials, usually, and the punishment would follow quickly
 - A less serious penalty might include a fine or scourging or other torture
 - A more serious crime would mean death
 - Therefore, the deadline of 10 days is consistent with the time for the Roman justice system to bring a verdict and carry out a sentence
 - It may have been the time required to be transported into a Roman amphitheater where they would be fed to lions
 - But the number "10" in the Bible is also symbolic of testimony, so Jesus is hinting at an opportunity for testimony
 - In other words, the coming persecution would lead to the death of believers in Smyrna, and Jesus wasn't going to change that
 - It was Jesus' will that the church in Smyrna be martyred for His name's sake

- And that opportunity was a blessing for those Christians because of what was at stake
- If they made the most of the opportunity to be a witness in death, they stood to gain great things in Heaven
- As Jesus Himself promised us:

Matt. 5:10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- The key, Jesus says, is that the church face this coming trial faithfully
 - Faithful in this context doesn’t refer to the issue of salvation
 - These believers are already saved by their faith and nothing can change their eternal destiny

Rom. 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, **Rom. 8:39** nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Paul says nothing in death or in life can separate us from Christ
- Nothing on earth, under earth or in Heaven will separate us from Christ
- Bottom line: there is no such thing as being separated from Christ
- So being faithful in this context refers to the believer’s behavior in the face of persecution
 - What does that believer say and do in response to the persecution?
 - Do they agree to worship a pagan god to escape death? Do they recant faith in Jesus to avoid torture?
- If they made those choices, their relationship with Jesus wouldn’t be at risk – but an eternal reward would be
 - Specifically, Jesus says if they remain faithful through that short trial they would receive the crown of life

- So naturally we wonder what is the crown of life?
- What if we were tempted to conclude that the crown of life was salvation itself?
 - The only reason to make that assumption is the word “life” which might lead us to assume it refers to our eternal life in Christ
 - But if we make that assumption, we are not using the rules of interpretation we discussed on the first night
 - And as a result of bad interpretation, we paint ourselves into an unbiblical corner
 - First, a crown is a symbol and therefore we need to look at how the symbol of crowns is used throughout the Bible
 - Time doesn’t permit us to go through that process here
 - But if we did we would find that the Bible never uses a crown to refer to salvation
 - In fact, the Greek word for crown is *stephanos*, which refers to the wreath that the Greeks awarded to olympic athletes
 - In other words, a crown is an award for good performance
 - And every use of the crown symbol in the New Testament is associated with good works for Christ, as it is here

2Tim. 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

2Tim. 4:8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

- So the consistent meaning of the symbol of a crown precludes the interpretation that the crown of life is salvation
- Furthermore, the Bible never suggests that salvation is earned or secured by our efforts
 - Salvation is only ever described as a free gift given, which we receive apart from works
 - So not surprisingly, salvation is never described as a crown

- What is a crown then? Crowns are symbolic representations of our eternal reward, and different crowns are awarded for different acts of faithfulness
 - The crown of life is given to those who endure persecution faithfully as we see here
 - James confirms this interpretation

James 1:12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the **crown** of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

- And Paul also tells us that our performance in serving Christ determines the crown we receive

1Cor. 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

1Cor. 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

- So Smyrna was told that persecution was coming and it would lead to death at the hands of Jews who persecuted the church
 - But if they were faithful to Christ during their suffering, these believers would receive an eternal reward
 - And their reward, symbolized by the crown of life, would be eternal compensation for their short suffering
 - And when you compare 10 days of suffering to enjoying a heavenly reward for eternity, the trade off seems pretty good
- Finally, the letter ends with a promise that those who overcome will not be hurt by the second death
 - Now remember I said that each letter ends with an assurance to the believer that their eternal future is secure
 - No matter what happens to that church or how they respond to their circumstances, nevertheless they will always be with Christ
- We see that here clearly, because the term “to overcome” is a New Testament term for salvation by faith in Jesus

1John 5:4 For whatever is born of God **overcomes** the world; and this is the victory that has **overcome** the world – our faith.

1John 5:5 Who is the one who **overcomes** the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

- So Jesus tells the church that those who are saved (who overcome) will not be hurt by the second death
- These believers would experience the first death, the death of the body, but their faith would keep them from the second death
- This confirms that a lack of faithfulness in the face of persecution can't touch their eternal life
- So what about the prophetic value of this letter? We already know that Smyrna is the church of persecution or "death" and that reflects the history of the church
 - Following the first century, the church entered a period of persecution under Roman opposition lasting more than 200 years
 - This period began more or less with the emperor Domitian in AD 96 and continued until the early fourth century
 - There were ten emperors during that time who undertook persecution against the church
 - Prophetically, it seems the ten days of waiting mentioned in the letter also alludes to the ten emperors who attacked the church
 - The history of the church following the apostolic age, therefore, mirrors the events of the second letter
 - And therefore, we conclude that the second letter represents the second period of the church, the period of persecution
 - The dates for that persecution being in AD 100 (the division with the prior period)
 - And where do they end? They end with the beginning of the next period, which has a clearly-identifiable moment
- Which will be found in the next letter to Pergamum

Rev. 2:12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

[Rev. 2:13](#) 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

[Rev. 2:14](#) 'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.

[Rev. 2:15](#) 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

[Rev. 2:16](#) 'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

[Rev. 2:17](#) 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

- The name Pergamum comes from two Greek words, *pergos* and *gamos*
 - *Pergos* means a tower or citadel, like a powerful fortress
 - And *gamos* means matrimony or sexual union
 - So the two words together mean "married to a powerful institution or fortress"
 - Pergamum was a powerful city for many centuries and the seat of authority for the Roman province
 - The governor of Asia lived in this city and as governor, he held the "right of the sword" under Roman law
 - That meant he had the authority to decide when to apply capital punishment and to decide life and death
 - The city was a preeminent city of artistic and intellectual power in the region, with a library rivaling the one in Alexandria
 - It was steeped in Hellenistic culture, including having many pagan temples, monuments and cults dedicated to gods
 - The city featured an altar to Zeus, the son of Dionysis, and the Augustan Temple
 - It was also famous for the Asclepeion school of medicine, founded in the 4th century BC and famous as a place of "healing"

- The imagery Jesus uses to describe Himself to this church is as the One with the two-edged sword
 - A two-edged sword is a common expression in ancient times meaning a sword used for execution of criminals
 - As such it came to represent the authority of the seat of government in holding people accountable for their crime

Rom. 13:4 for [government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

- So when Jesus describes Himself to this church in this way, the implication is that of judgment and correction
- This church is making serious mistakes and Jesus is going to bring justice for them
- But first, Jesus acknowledges the good things the church had done
 - In v.13 Jesus says I know you dwell where Satan's throne is, which is certainly a scary notion
 - The city's dominance as a place of pagan worship meant it was a particular evil setting
 - And in particular, the city was home to a satanic cult that worshipped a snake idol called Esculapius
 - So spiritually speaking, this church was working in a very dark, challenging place
- Furthermore, the church was standing firm in the face of persecution, and Jesus cites the example of a man named Antipas
 - His name means "against all" and suggests he was a witness who stood opposed to the pagan, satanic worship in the city
 - He seems to have been martyred for his opposition, and despite the persecution the church remained firm in their confession
- But that's where the good news ended for this church, and now Jesus lists His complaints
 - In v.14 Jesus says some in the church held to the teaching of Balaam

- Balaam was not a literal character in Pergamum in that day
- Instead, Jesus uses the name of an Old Testament character to describes the kind of behavior taking place in the city
- Balaam was a prophet of God and his story begins in Numbers 22
 - Though he was a prophet of God (and therefore a believer), he was a corrupt, greedy man
 - When one of Israel's enemy's offered the prophet money if he would curse Israel, the prophet agreed to the deal
 - Though he tried to carry through with the plan, the Lord prevented him from speaking a curse against Israel
- In the New Testament, both Peter and Jude use the phrase "the way of Balaam" to refer to a believer who trades faithfulness to God for money
 - A person who follows the way of Balaam will place stumbling blocks before God's people
 - Because of their greedy motives, they will be moved to teach things that aren't true hoping to manipulate
 - And by their manipulation, they please people, hoping to be enriched from their lies
 - So, the error of Balaam is loving money and as a result, turning to a form of spiritual prostitution
- In Pergamum, these "Balaams" were teaching the church that it was OK to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of sexual immorality
 - Jesus says these teachings were placing stumbling blocks before His people, and it's easy to see how that would happen
 - Whenever someone tells us it's OK to do what we like to do, we're happy to hear that
 - So when a teacher in the church says God is OK with sexual immorality or doing something else we shouldn't, we like that
 - We like that so much, we move our attention to that person and away from those who tell us things we don't prefer
 - The Bible calls this tickling ears, and it always revolves around these same behaviors

- First, a shepherd who cares more about his own earthly comfort and pleasures than the eternal future of his flock
- Secondly, a teaching that encourages believers to follow after their lusts, whether greed, sexual or otherwise
- And third, a congregation more interested in satisfying their flesh's desires now than receiving spiritual blessing in eternity
- Notice in v.14 the Lord says there are "some" on the church who hold to this pattern of false teaching
 - This group are part of the church, yet they go after the false teaching rather than after the truth
 - Some were going after the teaching of Balaam and some after the Nicolaitans
- We remember the Nicolaitans from last week...these were men teaching that the church should observe a distinction between members
 - They tried to introduce the idea of clergy vs. laity, that some in the body should be designated as a distinct order
 - And that these orders within the church should possess special spiritual distinction or authority
 - The Nicolaitans were responsible for corrupting the biblical idea of the priesthood of the believer
 - Instead of all believers being priests, as the Bible says we are, these false teachers began designating only some as priests
 - Over time this teaching distanced the believer from Jesus, corrupting or stumbling believers into thinking that God was behind the teaching
 - And as the church began to move away from the scriptures, and into fleshly practices, it must be corrected
 - Jesus says in v.16 that the church must repent or else He will come and make war with the word of His mouth
 - The sword of His mouth is the word of God, but the symbol suggests an execution or cutting off of this church
 - And probably more specifically, the leaders who are directing the church into these unholy practices would be taken away

- Finally, the Lord says to the believers in the church that there is no cause for personal alarm despite the church's troubles corporately
 - The overcomer is the believer, and that person will receive hidden manna and a white stone with a new name
 - The hidden manna was intended to contrast with meat sacrificed to idols
 - While the church might be chasing their flesh's desires, the believer would see his or her soul satisfied in the end
- And the white stone is especially interesting because of a particular practice at the medical school in Pergamum
 - Patients visiting the school followed a certain ritual, where they entered the front to worship in the hope of healing
 - And after they received their "treatment" they exited out the rear of the building where they picked up a white stone
- They wrote their name on that stone as well as the disease they had supposedly been healed of and left it as a testimony
 - These stones were monuments to false gods and false healing
 - But Jesus says true believers will have a lasting memorial to their spiritual healing
- So how does this letter compare to the third period of the Church?
 - This church begins after the church of persecution, so we should ask what event brought Roman persecution to an end?
 - It happened in AD 313 when the Emperor Constantine experienced a vision on the battlefield
 - And as a result of his vision, he declared that Christianity would be the official religion of the Roman Empire
 - In that moment, the church was married to a powerful institution, a fortress called Rome (*pergamum*)
 - Persecution stopped but new problems quickly emerged for the church
 - Since Constantine ordered the church to be the state religion, everyone had to participate in the church

- Every Roman citizen immediately became “Christian” by order of the Caesar, and every child born was immediately considered Christian
- Infant baptism began and mass conversions were the order of the day
- How many of those forced converts were truly believers in Jesus Christ? We can’t know, but certainly many were not
 - Instantly, the church opened its doors to millions of Romans bringing pagan practices and pagan doctrine into the institution
 - They brought unbiblical ideas like temple priests, statues of idols, infant baptism, and various other mystical influences
 - And in time these influences crowded out Biblical practices
- The church was still there, of course, and the Gospel was still being preached, but that message was now competing with pagan voices
 - Constantine and the rest of Roman authorities became the Balaams by which Satan set stumbling blocks before believers
 - And Roman political authority infiltrated the church creating a perfect environment for distinctions in rank ultimately leading to clergy
 - And because every Roman citizen was automatically considered “Christian”, the church was flooded with unbelievers
 - And though some converted to the faith certainly, many others never did
- So as hundreds of thousands of pagans assembled in the church, worship of idols, various cult practices and other heresy entered too
 - But Jesus says He was coming with a sword to end it, and end it He did
 - The church had married the Roman Empire
 - But since the church itself wasn’t going to come to an end, the Lord brought the Roman Empire to an end
 - Rome was overrun by German hordes and the western part of the empire fractured into areas controlled by provincial church rulers

- So this was the church of Constantine, 313AD-600AD, leading to the end of the Roman Empire
- That brings us to the final letter for tonight

[Rev. 2:18](#) “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:

[Rev. 2:19](#) ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.

[Rev. 2:20](#) ‘But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

[Rev. 2:21](#) ‘I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.

[Rev. 2:22](#) ‘Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.

[Rev. 2:23](#) ‘And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

[Rev. 2:24](#) ‘But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them – I place no other burden on you.

[Rev. 2:25](#) ‘Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

[Rev. 2:26](#) ‘He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS;

[Rev. 2:27](#) AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father;

[Rev. 2:28](#) and I will give him the morning star.

[Rev. 2:29](#) ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

- Thyatira is another city in Asia Minor (Turkey), and the meaning of its name is a bit of a mystery
 - One suggestion made by some scholars is “unending (or perpetual) sacrifice” while Strong’s Concordance suggests “odor of affliction”
 - It was another Roman city full of pagan worship with the principle deity Apollo Trimnaeus

- He was said to be the son of Zeus and he was worshipped alongside the emperor god Apollo
- Both these gods were considered sons of other gods
- Thyatira had more trade and craft guilds (or unions) than any other Asian city and like Smyrna, each guild was dedicated to a patron god
 - During the regular guild meetings, meat sacrificed to the guild god was served
 - Often orgies were part of the meal
 - Refusing to participate in these meals could result in banishment from the guild and the inability to earn a living
- Looking at the letter, the description of Christ taken from Chapter 1 emphasizes Jesus' eyes of fire and His feet of glowing bronze
 - These symbols reflect the same meaning but in different ways
 - Eyes of flame or fire in the Bible represent all-seeing, a piercing vision capable of discerning all things
 - Feet of glowing bronze represent the fires of judgment
 - The testing of metal in fire to know if it's pure
- So taken together, the images testify to Christ's perfect judgment about everything and the authority to judge it righteously
 - Here again, that's not a very encouraging way to start the letter to His church
 - For reasons connected to the earlier letter, Christ continues to remind His church He is a Judge of His Church
- But also like Pergamum, Jesus first offers a positive comment about the church
 - In v.19 He says the church in Thyatira is a church known for its good works and love for one another
 - In fact the church has apparently increased in good works over time, becoming better organized and more active
 - More people are being fed, more people are being housed, more people are being taught, more people are receiving good works
 - They are working hard and pious it would seem

- Jesus is certainly a proponent of His church doing good works for His people and for humanity in general
 - But those good works cannot be divorced from the core mission of the church, which is to share the true Gospel
 - Saving souls through the preaching of the Gospel is the ultimate – and best – measure of the church’s obedience to Jesus
 - And to preach the good news properly, the church must know and teach that truth accurately
- But this church has lost sight of that mission and the degree of critique that follows makes that clear
 - Beginning in v.20, the letter turns negative and offers one of the lengthier condemnations in all the seven letters
 - Jesus begins by saying He has against them that they tolerate the woman Jezebel
- The original Jezebel was a Phoenician wife of the evil king Ahab
 - She persuaded her weak and godless husband to commit many immoralities in the Northern Kingdom of Israel
 - As a result, her name has become eponymous for any evil-hearted, manipulative woman leading weak men
 - There’s a reason parents almost never consider the name Jezebel for their baby daughters
- There is a lot of speculation concerning the identity of Jezebel and how she influenced this first century church
 - But like the mention of Balaam in Pergamum, we should understand Jesus is using this woman as a type
 - Just as today, women in that day weren’t called Jezebel
 - So Jesus is using the name to refer to the kind of influence present in the church
 - So there were women in Thyatira acting in similar ways, corrupting the church through an ungodly influence
 - Notice this negative influence has returned to an old favorite

- Believers were being persuaded to eat the meat sacrificed to idols in the temples or guild suppers
- And also to engage in the immoralities that accompanied those meals
- Clearly this was wrong, as Paul himself had written against the practice in his earlier letters to Corinth
- Christ says he gave time for the woman to repent, but she didn't want to cease her immoralities
 - She calls herself a prophetess, meaning she claims to hear from God
 - So like Pergamum, the church in Thyatira was infiltrated by a false influence that was leading the believers astray
 - In Pergamum, it was a Balaam, a believer motivated by greed to spread false teaching
 - In Thyatira, it was a Jezebel, an unbeliever with an evil heart seeking to do the enemy's will
- The Lord says He's been waiting for the "Jezebel" to repent but she doesn't want to turn from her immorality
 - So the Lord's piercing judgment will come upon the church, and a time of trial and testing will follow
 - In v.22 the Lord promises to throw the false leader on a bed of sickness
 - And all who followed her will go through a tribulation until they repent of their deeds in corrupting the church
 - The result of this bed of sickness will be the death of many, including children
 - The woman's "children" probably refers to her followers who will also die by a pestilence
 - In the day of the letter, we must imagine some illness came as Christ predicted
 - And since this letter was circulated among all churches in John's day, the other churches would have seen the illness as fulfilling Jesus words

- And when that happened, it would have struck fear into the church
- Notice in v.23 Jesus says all the church will know that He is the One Who searches minds and hearts
- Jesus knows what is going on in His church, down to a person
- We like to think we're able to hide our sin, even in the church, and that may be true for people...but the Lord knows and He cares
- With such a devastating judgment coming to that church, Jesus once again reassures those believers that the judgment is not personal and they are secure
 - He says in v.24 that those who do not hold to the false teaching of the Jezebel can breathe easy
 - Jesus will not place more burden on them because they have been burdened enough already with Jezebel in their midst
 - The false teaching is even being called the deep things or deep secrets of Satan
 - So the church had moved to the point of teaching things that were outwardly recognized to be from the enemy
 - So we've moved from Pergamum where believers were promoting bad teaching to Thyatira where unbelievers were in charge of teaching
 - We went from distorted biblical doctrine to outright satanic practices
 - And in both cases Jesus is stepping in to correct what He sees with perfect judgment
 - In the meantime, as the church awaits this devastating pestilence, Jesus tells them to hold fast to what they have
 - And what they have is a testimony against the Jezebel and a determination to maintain the truth
 - And Jesus reassures the believer in Thyatira that they can be assured they will one day rule with Jesus in the Kingdom
 - He will give them authority to rule and the morning star, which is a reference to Christ Himself in the Kingdom

- Ruling in the Kingdom is one of the promises Christ makes to all believers
 - Our future with Him is a real future of substance, of living on earth sinlessly, with possessions and a life we will enjoy
 - And it includes a job ruling over the world with Jesus
 - We will talk extensively about that future when we get to the end of this book
- So to finish tonight, how does this letter foretell the fourth period of the church in history?
 - This letter corresponds to the period of history in which the church was dominated by the Roman Catholic institution
 - That institution rose out of the ashes of the Roman Empire itself
 - Remember this church period follows the period of Pergamum when the church and the Empire were “married”
 - When the Roman Empire began to dissolve around 600 AD, it disintegrated in stages over many centuries
 - Initially, it split into two empires East-West with the west ruled from Constantinople and the East ruled from Rome
 - Then slowly over about 1,500 years these two halves fractured more into the nations of Europe and the Middle East
 - But as the Roman Empire crumbled, a power vacuum existed
 - And the only unifying world power capable of filling that vacuum was the church itself
 - So the new power became the Roman Catholic Church, which wielded power across the new borders
 - The church went from being in bed with a powerful government to becoming a powerful government
 - So during Thyatira, the church is the government for Europe
 - The popes battled opponents, kings were disposed and crowned and crusades were ordered
- The church ruled the world, except it wasn't ruling spiritually

- It was ruling politically, and its leaders made whatever compromises necessary to maintain power
 - Even still, the works of the church expanded greatly, as the church itself took over responsibility for social services
 - But these works were largely devoid of the true mission of the Gospel
- Conversion wasn't a matter of faith but of political necessity
 - And after centuries of unbelievers being forced into the church from birth, now the leaders themselves were unbelieving
 - The teaching included the deep things of Satan, things that led believers into false practices that obscured the Gospel
- During this period of history, the Catholic church introduced many heresies and spiritual immoralities that persist today:
 - Justification through works rather than faith alone
 - Worship of idols and images
 - Celibacy of priests (Nicolaitan teaching)
 - Confessing sins to an intercessor other than Christ
 - Purgatory, Indulgences, Penance, Worship of Mary
- So just as the original Jezebel introduced false practices by manipulating a weak leader so does the church during this period
 - Likewise the Jezebel of the Thyatira period is the Catholic church
 - Which gained its authority through a marriage to the Empire during the Pergamum period
 - And now during Thyatira's period it uses its influence over government to force false teaching into the church everywhere
- Obviously, Jesus isn't going to stand for this to happen in His church, though as He says He did give the church time to repent
 - As Jesus promised, the Thyatira church began at around 600 AD, and continued for at least a thousand years
 - It was centered in the Eastern Orthodox church in Constantinople and in the Roman Church in Rome

- By the thirteen century, the effects of this Jezebel had already influenced the entire Christian world
- Eventually, the penalty came just as Jesus said it would, Jezebel would be made sick, and together with her children, would suffer pestilence
 - It would be a great tribulation, and when we look at history, we see this judgment fulfilled during this period of church history
- In the late 13th century, Jesus' judgment of a terrible pestilence came as the Black Plague
 - Interestingly, the Black Plague began in two cities: Constantinople and Rome
 - It first appeared at the dawn of the fourteenth century starting in Constantinople
 - It resulted in nearly 40% of that city dying as a result
 - And the stench was everywhere, according to ancient reports, just as the name Thyatira suggests (odor of affliction)
 - The disease spread next by cargo ships to Sicily and it quickly moved north into the rest of Italy becoming centered in Rome
- By the mid-fourteenth century all Europe was infected, and it killed as much as 60% of Europe's population
 - As a result, it severely and permanently weakened the Catholic Church in Europe
 - Since priests and monks were often pressed into service in caring for the sick, they were among the worst hit
 - That left the leadership of the church devastated
 - And fear of the disease led people to refuse to attend mass leading to great financial loss for the church as well
- One of the lessor known effects of the Black Plague was that it helped give rise to the Reformation
 - As the church leadership weakened, the church's hold over government and society weakened too

- That allowed freer thinking to rise up and ultimately it gave Martin Luther the opportunity to challenge the authority of the church
- So we mark the end of the time of Thyatira to the fulfillment of Jesus' judgment of pestilence and the resulting end of Catholic hegemony
 - So this period dates from 600 AD to the Reformation of 1517 AD

