

Thyatira: “Hold on to What You Have”

Today is Forest Park Day. We are celebrating our 54th year together as a church. On such an occasion preaching through the seven letters addressed to the churches in the book of Revelation becomes a challenge.

Almost every one of these letters deal with negative problems in the church and this one is no different. The problems that the church in Thyatira are facing is identical to the ones that the church in Pergamum dealt with, which we looked at last week quite extensively.

There is a woman in the congregation in Thyatira who is leading the people astray and the church is tolerating her. She is referred to as Jezebel. That is not her real name. We do not know what her real name was. She was called Jezebel because it was derogatory term that had its origins in OT times. Jezebel was wicked the wife of King Ahab of Israel. (The Rolling Stones named her in one of their songs.) She was a powerful domineering woman who led Israel to worship the false gods of the Canaanite peoples who surrounded them. She was also a persecutor of Israel’s prophets. She put many of them to death.

This particular woman in Thyatira whom the risen Christ calls Jezebel is referred to as a prophetess. That is she is a teacher in the church. The only problem is that she is teaching things that are not in accordance with the Word of God and the will of Christ. She is teaching people that the freedom they have in Christ is a freedom that allows them to sleep with anyone they want, any time they want, no matter who they are. According to her there is no sin when it comes to sex. All sexual activity is blessed by God.

Last week I talked extensively about this problem and God’s solution for it because it was the same problem that was going on in the church in Pergamum. But this week I will defer and simply refer you to last week’s sermon for what all this entailed.

Jezebel is also teaching people in the church that it is ok for them to eat meat sacrificed to idols, which was a huge problem for the church in the NT times. It seems foreign to us but it is really not. What was at stake here was whether or not the church was going to faithfully live out in the world its confession that Jesus Christ alone is Lord. This woman had no problem with watering down the faith and compromising with the world in order to get along and have lots of friends. But again I will reference you back to last week’s message to find out more about this problem because it was the same thing that was happening to the church in Pergamum. Maybe there is something we can learn from the fact that the problems in these two churches are identical.

But back to our challenge. Today is Forest Park Day. How do we derive from this text a message that is appropriate for our special occasion? This challenge brought me to the words of Jesus found in verse 25 of the text. Jesus tells the church in Thyatira to “hold on to what they have until he returns.” By that he did not mean hold on to Jezebel. Jesus is actually angry at the church for tolerating her, for failing to exercise discipline, and for not showing her the door since she was unwilling to repent. The church was not to hold on to her, rather they were to let her go.

So what was it that they were to hold on to until the Lord returned? The answer to that question is found in v. 19 of the text. Here we find words of commendation from Jesus. One of the great things about the letters addressed to these seven churches is that in almost all of them Jesus compliments the church for the things they are doing well. Thyatira is one of those churches. Jesus says to them **“I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more that you did at first.”**

That’s what they are to hold on to until Jesus returns. They are to hold on to their love for Christ and for one another. They are to hold onto their faith in Jesus and they are to hold on to their service to God, to one another, to their neighbors, and they are to hold on to their perseverance in times of difficulty and persecution. That’s what they are to hold on to, not Jezebel, and if they will do that then they will overcome the works of Satan in this world and they will live and reign forever in the Kingdom of God.

I think one of the greatest challenges before a church on homecoming is what is it going to hold on to? Is she going to try to hold on to her past, which is futile and slipping away with each passing year? (The number of charter members who are alive gets shorter and shorter each Forest Park Day.) Or is it going to hold on to things that can give her life and a bright future as a faithful church of Jesus Christ?

Will we hold on to authority of God’s Word and God’s calling in our lives to be holy or will we tolerate Jezebel and compromise the truth of the Gospel in order to get along with the world while we lose our souls? Will we hold on to our love for one another, our love for Christ and His Word and will we seek to serve one another and our neighbors or will we be an inwardly focused half-hearted church living off the memories of the way things used to be?

Remembering our past is a good thing. It is appropriate to honor our past. God in His mercy gives us the gift of Homecoming and Forest Park Day to do this but holding on to the past is not an option for the church. We are living in the present and we must hold on to our Lord and His Word and only to those things which are pleasing to Him and will give new life to this church.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.