

SEVEN LETTERS to SEVEN CHURCHES



SMALL GROUP NOTES: Sunday 12th July – Week 4 ‘THYATIRA’

Working Week

What is your average workday/weekday like? Spend a few moments sharing with each other.

In what ways is Sunday different?

To what extent do you feel your focus is more on God on a Sunday to other days?

Read Revelation 2.18-29

Guilds and gods

It seems that Thyatira was a city dominated by the trade guilds – a centre of industry and trade – a hub for imports and exports. The real challenge for the Christian tradesmen and women would have been how to live lives of devotion to Jesus when they were also expected to be devoted to the patron gods of their particular guild.

Enter the false teaching of Jezebel that says you can do both – have some devotion to Jesus and also to the local gods. The thing about false teaching is that is attractive, feels reasonable and ultimately offers us what we would really like at that time. I wonder if false teaching is often quite hard to spot because if we're honest, we don't want to spot it!

How do you react to this?

Jezebel's influence of king Ahab in 1 Kings 16-22 led in some part to the introduction of worship of Baal, the rival local god to Israel – worship to the one true God continued in places but God's people were sharing their devotion between the Lord God Almighty and Baal. They were unfaithful and seduced in their hearts to worship Baal whilst paying lip service to God Almighty.

Well something similar was going on in the church of Thyatira – teaching had come into the church that said 'by all means worship the Lord God Almighty but your devotion need not be exclusive. It's OK to worship other gods as well – perhaps like the gods of the guilds.

How do you react to the strong language in this letter?

Why do you think the problem of Thyatira is described using quite sexual language?

(my take on this is that the sexual nature of the language in this letter is probably more to do with conveying a lack of faithfulness to Jesus – the bride of Christ, the church, running

after other gods – rather than anything more literal. Often in the Old Testament, lack of devotion to God by his people is described in terms that include ‘unfaithfulness’ ‘adultery’ ‘fornication’ etc. Read the book of Hosea if you need any convincing).

Today we may not face the challenges in the work place over devotion to the patron gods of our organisation (!) ...**but are there times when it feels as a Christian you have to make very deliberate choices not to be involved – either with behaviour or cultures within the workplace, or values and philosophies that underpin your working context?**

If you are retired or not at work, you might want to reflect back on previous employment, or translate this question to your context right now.

Interestingly Jesus’ reaction to what was going on was strong – ‘stop’it’ – not ‘I understand’, or ‘let’s plot a phased return to faithfulness,’ but a command to sort themselves out immediately.

**To what extent is there a place for straight-talking like this today in the church?
When do we get ‘straight-talking’ terribly wrong?**

Lydia or Jezebel?

Read Acts 16.11-15

In Acts 16 we encounter Lydia, who originates from Thyatira.

Given Lydia’s connection with Thyatira and purple cloth, it is almost certain that sometime before meeting up with Paul and Luke, Lydia was a worshiper of the patron god of textile manufacturers or merchants. She too had faced a choice – a question of passion.

Who would have her heart, her devotion? And how would she live? And she responded because her heart was opened up to the plans and purposes of God. She chooses the Lord God Almighty.

The letter to Thyatira raises powerful questions – **to what extent do we follow in the footsteps of Lydia or Jezebel. Who has our devotion? Our passion?**

It might be difficult to talk with each other about such matters but it might be worth pausing together and just taking five minutes to be together in silence thinking through these personal questions. Perhaps one or two people might be willing to share a little afterwards – but no pressure.

The Morning Star

The letter ends with a wonderful promise for those whose passion is for Christ and Christ alone. Jesus will “give them the morning star.” Later on in Revelation 22 we learn that it is Jesus himself who is the morning star. We probably have another hint here about the level of intimacy he offers to his people. In those days, the morning star was a symbol of hope. Especially for those who are holding on when others around them seem to be compromising and under pressure. Jesus reminds them a new day is dawning, the light is coming. – Stay devoted just as the coming King is devoted to you. Live in the light, walk in the light and the light will shine on you.

**What does this image of Christ the morning star mean to you?
How is it a source of inspiration. Comfort or help?**

What is the Spirit saying?

As we take a pause from the seven letters for the next couple of weeks in church, you might want to pause and reflect together on **what has struck you so far from the letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and Thyatira?**

How does this letter speak to you?

What is the Spirit saying to the church right now?

As we reach the end of the first half of the series, I would welcome any reflections your group has on what the Spirit might be saying to us. Please do feel free to drop me an email. htjtim@gmail.com