

Getting Our Perspective On Life Right

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I want to begin by talking about being home alone. Now, that might, the first time you are home alone might be a while ago for some of you, but I don't know whether you remember the first time your parents left you home alone.

Maybe they stocked the freezer full of meals or stocked the cupboard and put various notes around reminding you to water the plants and strictly cautioning you not to have any parties, or giving you the neighbour's phone number telling someone to check up on you.

And then your parents would go off for an anxious few days hoping that there would be no carnage when they returned. I think the wonderful invention of video calls, parents can now preempt that.

They can call up on their kids and ask them to show them around the house, check that nothing has gone wrong. They can give them maybe that extra warning or the encouragement to tidy up and to be ready for their return.

In one sense, Jesus' letters to all the churches in Revelation are a bit like that preemptive warning that the parents give ready for their return. Except for Jesus, he already knows what's going on.

[1 : 0 8] And so he's picking up the phone as it were to help them to stay on track or get back on track, as is the case for some of these churches. As we've seen, each of these letters in Revelation was written to a particular church at a particular time, but they were all intended to be read by every church.

Together they contain and address big topics, big challenges that are felt by churches in every age. And so all the letters, though, come in the context of Jesus' return.

If you were to flick to the end of Revelation and won't do it right now, one of Jesus, I think Jesus' final words are, Behold, I am coming soon. So all of Revelation is in that context of his return.

And the letter to Thyatira that we're looking at this morning has a particular emphasis on Christ's return. I don't know whether you noticed in verses 25 and 26, he says, Hold fast what you have until I come.

The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end. There's that emphasis on Christ's return. And one thing that is clear in here is that Jesus' return is much more serious than the return of parents coming back.

[2 : 2 6] There's much bigger issues than a house party to address if the church is going to be ready for his return. The stakes are much higher.

And it makes me actually think perhaps rather than parents return, Jesus' own metaphor that he uses in Matthew's Gospel is more appropriate when he describes himself as a king who's gone away and who's coming back to his subjects and he'll judge them when he returns.

He'll either reward those subjects who are faithful or he'll punish those who have been faithless. Jesus' return is much more sobering in that way than parents returning.

But hopefully we'll see how it's not just sobering but it's an encouragement. It's meant to hit both of those elements as he speaks to Thyatira.

And we've got four points. And the first one is that Jesus is the king and the judge as we look at his character. I don't know whether you've noticed this but as we've gone through each of these letters in Revelation, they begin by reminding the church about key truths about who Jesus is, about his identity.

[3 : 32] Kind of if you were to ask what is the very thing that this church needs to know about Jesus in order to stay faithful, that's the thing that Jesus tells them in the first few words of those little mini letters.

And just as an aside, do you see the depth of theology that we get in each of these verses? In each one, Jesus reveals so much about himself and we need to be able to understand these things.

We need to be able to meditate on these aspects of Jesus' character. If we're going to be able to be motivated to obey his commands. But anyway, the church in Thyatira needed to be reminded first that Jesus was God's anointed king.

So that verse in verse 18 where he calls himself the Son of God, that's really looking back probably to Psalm 2 where, I don't know whether you've read Psalm 2 before, where Jesus, but God says, off his son, he says, you are my son, today I have begotten you, ask of me, and I'll make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession, you shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

So when Jesus picks up the language of Psalm 2 and calling himself the Son, he's reminding the church in Thyatira that he's received all authority from the Father.

[4 : 54] He is the one who is the King. He's reminding that he has supreme authority. So in Psalm 2 you have this picture of all the nations of the world jostling and plotting to overthrow God's King.

But it's a reminder that against the Son of God they stand no chance. He reigns supreme. And I wonder if there was a reminder there for the church in Thyatira that when they're in this metropolitan city where there's all different gods that people are worshiping, there's a pantheon as it were of all different truths to choose.

Actually all these messages, the reminder then that Jesus is the Son of God is a reminder not to compromise, that there is only one God. There is only one truth. There's only one King on the throne.

And he's the Son of God. He's God's chosen King. It's not a pick and mix in terms of which truth claim you want to believe or which God you want to follow.

Jesus exclusively deserves the praise and demands his people's worship. He has the authority as the Son of God. He's also then the judge. That same language in Psalm 2 of him, of the Son of God breaking, sort of ruling over his people with a rod of iron and judging his enemies.

[6 : 11] Well, we see that same aspect at the end of this letter. I don't know whether you noticed, verses 27 and 28. When Jesus describes himself as ruling them with a rod of iron and when earthen pots are broken.

So the beginning and the end in this letter to the attire, he's reminding them of these truths, of how he rules as the Son and he judges as the Son of God.

And I think there's a similar element as well. When we think about Jesus' judge, when he describes that he has eyes of flames of fire and feet like burnish bronze.

If you were to look back in chapter one, you'll see that those titles that John talks about, those titles when he sees Jesus in his vision in chapter one. It's the eyes like flames of fire probably symbolizes that he's the judge who sees everything.

Feet of burnish bronze probably is symbolizing that he's holy. He's the holy judge who sees everything and that's confirmed if you look down at verse 23.

[7 : 18] When he says, I am he who searches mind and heart, I will give to you according to each of you, according to your works. What Jesus is saying is he's the judge who sees everything.

Before his eyes, everything is laid bare. And again, this is a quote from the Old Testament from Jeremiah 17, if you wanted to look it up.

Because here in Thyatira, just like in Jeremiah's day, there's lots of false teachers that are seducing people into living in a different way to compromising.

But the point is that just as when God says through Jeremiah to his people, he's the one that can see that what's going on. So he's also saying to the people in Thyatira, I'm the judge who can see.

There's nothing that's hidden from my sight. Everything is laid bare. So every, I mean, you might think about it in terms of, you know, what does God see? We can, we're quite good at masking our feelings from each other, but, you know, he sees every just little glance of our eyes, every thought of our minds when our jaw is clenched, when our thoughts churning in our minds, aggression against other people, every motivation, every action that we want to do, that we fantasize about getting revenge against someone.

[8 : 44] He sees all of those things. And it's a reminder that as the Son of God, he's also has the authority to punish it. It's a sobering reminder for a church that is compromising, I think.

He's the Son of God then who demands exclusive worship and the righteous judge who sees all. The question though is when he sees Thyatira, what does he see? How are they doing when the judge analyzes them?

And the first thing though is praise. We'll see that in our second point. Praise, you might think I've stuck mine how you've grown because in some ways that's the main praise for the church.

They are a church that have grown, not physically, but in their faith. So verse 19, if you look at that, he says, I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

If we think back in Ephesus, Ephesus was a church that looked impressive, but they had abandoned their first love. Well, his Thyatira, they're a church that have been growing.

[9 : 56] I don't know what they were like, first of all, but they have been growing. They have been growing in godliness, in love for one another, in service, in patient endurance. It's a church that's looking more and more like a family.

I'm trying to think, maybe they were looking more for ways in which to encourage one another. Maybe they were older Christians taking young ones under their arms and seeking to help them to grow in their discipleship.

Just helping to live life with them and think through big decisions and their priorities. Maybe there was that kind of thing going on. Maybe people were becoming more hospitable, having people over to their homes, visiting those who were lonely.

It was a church that's acting more and more like family. I think as well as that, we see that love and faith and service also we see pointed out patient endurance.

And that's probably pointing to a persevering witness. Every other time we see that phrase come up in Revelation, it's all about witness to the outside world. Maybe the teenagers in Thyatira were standing up for their faith, even when that meant being mocked at school.

[11 : 11] Maybe there was the men and women in the church who had an unbelieving spouse, or faithfully still serving them, trying to win them over with their words and their deeds.

I think probably one of the biggest ways in which we see that patient endurance, that persevering witness, is actually in prayer. It's long after people have stopped being willing to, or accepting an invitation to come to church.

There's still that need to keep praying for the lost. Persevering witnesses often seen in continuing to pray for those family members, those friends, who don't really want anything to do with Christ anymore, who don't really want to have any conversation, who don't want the slightest, their hackles will be raised if you touch the subject of Christianity.

But actually a persevering witness is continuing to pray for them, continuing to be calling out to God and asking him to save. And wonderfully, God does save through the persevering prayers of his people.

That's true. We can be reminded of that as just a little bit of an aside. So that's the first thing that Jesus sees when he looks at Thyatira. It's encouraging initially.

[12 : 27] It's wonderful to see the ways in which they've grown in. I've only been here for four weeks, but it's wonderful to see many of those things here as well. Just a few ways in which I've seen it. I have seen people caring for one another and building one another up in their faith.

So that encouragement that Jesus gives to Thyatira, that is an encouragement for us too in that way. I'm sure there's many, many things that I don't know about and I haven't seen.

But the other reminder here is that Jesus says, I do know your works. We might be tempted to immediately read that negatively, but that also means that Jesus sees people who are building one another up and he sees the invisible acts of service.

So that maybe none of us see. Jesus sees it. Jesus knows. And he cares. And he praises us for it. He encourages us even when it's not seen to keep loving one another.

So that's the first encouragement for us, like Thyatira, to keep going, keep growing. That's the first thing that Jesus sees, but that's not all. Because the second thing is not good news.

[13 : 41] Third point is peril, deadly compromise. Let me read verse 20 again. But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants the practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

When Jesus looks at the Thyatira, one of the major things he sees is just this deadly compromise. At its root was false teaching and false teaching is being tolerated and that's just filtering into how people are living.

It's seducing people into wrong living and the false teacher is referred to as this woman Jezebel, that woman Jezebel. It's probably not talking about an actual person, an actual lady, rather it's describing the character of this false teacher, whether male or female.

Because I mean Jezebel is not the name you would choose to name your baby. Because it becomes synonymous with that evil queen Jezebel in the Old Testament. She was the one who was married to King Ahab. You can read about it in one and two kings.

She basically promoted state sanctioned idolatry. We read that she had 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah eating at her table.

[15 : 04] She was the one that was hunting down and killing the Lord's prophets that Elijah had that face off with at Mount Carmel to show that God was the true God. If you hear Jezebel people would think idolatry and everything that goes against God.

So really by calling these false teachers that, that's just showing how bad they were. It's a damning description of the false teaching that is going on and is being tolerated as well.

We don't know exactly what's going on here but there seems to be something with sexual morality and eating food offered to idols. And probably in Thyatira like a lot of the other cities, the way that people did business was often in the idol temple.

So the temples were connected to marketplaces and so people would be eating food and doing their business. Maybe the trade guilds would offer some food to their patron deity and that's the way that people would be mixing and socializing.

And so that put Christians in a tough position because for the Christian it would be either, even it could be either eating food offered to an idol and being seen as going back to idolatry or leaving that.

[16 : 28] Even if the Christians knew that an idol wasn't a real God but their friends would see them do that and their friends would think that maybe they were compromising.

And they weren't going along with what they claimed. And it would have been costly then for their relationships, for their finances, for their jobs to be rejecting that, to not take part in those aspects of the sinful culture they lived in.

And the same way it would be costly for us to refuse various things that might happen in our society. So you can imagine how attractive it would have been if their false teachers came along and were saying things like, you don't have to fight that battle, you could still go along, you can still eat food offered to idols, it's not a real thing anyway.

And actually that would have really encouraged the people to just compromise. You can imagine the false teachers saying, God understands, just take the carrot, you can dodge the stick, it would be really easy.

And people were clearly compromising and it was becoming a terrible witness to those around them. And such compromise we see is deadly. If you look at the following verses, where is it?

[17 : 59] Jesus says, I gave her time to repent and she refuses to repent of her sexual morality. Behold, I'll throw her onto a sick bed and those who commit adultery with her, I'll throw them into a great tribulation unless they repent of their works.

Jesus is the judge who is patient with his justice, but he won't be patient forever. Part of Jesus loving his church is that he doesn't, he's not going to allow this kind of false teaching to destroy his church.

He's speaking out because he wants the church to be safe. He's speaking out because he wants to root out this false teaching that threatens the damage to the church, but he's not going to let it go forever.

Jesus will judge eventually. And it stands there as a warning both to those false teachers, but also those who follow her, those who commit adultery with her.

Jesus says unless they repent, their only hope is to turn away from sin. And that's true for everyone. Whether it's the first time we come to Christ or ongoingly in our Christian life, what we need to do is keep repenting and believing.

[19 : 10] It's a sobering warning for Thyatira, but also for us. Now I don't know your hearts. I think most of us don't know each other's hearts, do we? I don't know your thoughts, your daily battles where we've maybe stopped trying to fight sin.

Or maybe we've even started indulging in sin. But just like verse 23 was a warning for Thyatira, it's also a warning for us.

We have a God, we have a King Jesus who searches mind and heart and will give to each of you according to your works.

He's the one with eyes like flames of fire. He searches mind and heart. Nothing is hidden from his sight. He knows where we have normalized sin. He knows where we've compromised and we've just given up fighting.

He knows even when we're encouraging others to do the same if that even happens. He says repent, conquer by repenting. I mean that language of conquering might sound grand, but it's very simple here.

[20 : 18] Conquering for Thyatira is just repenting. Not everyone in Thyatira had compromised though. There were many who, even if they hadn't been compromising with idolatry, they had started to just tolerate this destructive living, to just stop saying no, to stop warning people to not do otherwise.

You know, when we think of tolerance, tolerance in our society is something that's held up. It's brilliant to be tolerant, but tolerance itself is neutral. Tolerance is only good if the thing you're tolerating is the right thing.

So it's right to tolerate other people's customs. It's right to be patient with each other because we're all in works of progress. Tolerance is good in that way, but we don't tolerate bad things.

You wouldn't tolerate someone waving a knife around when there's a baby nearby. You don't tolerate or affirm someone who's taking harmful drugs.

You don't tolerate someone if they're doing something dangerous. You step in, you try to help them, hopefully. Tolerating and affirming are also different things.

[21 : 33] That's one thing we need to be clear. It's very easy to think that you have to affirm everything that someone does. But we see here that it's very different.

We don't need to tolerate, we don't need to affirm everything. We must love people, though. We see that this church is reminded and encouraged for their love, but loving and affirming are different things.

Loving doesn't mean not challenging people in their sin. It certainly doesn't mean allowing people to teach what is false and lead others astray as what's happening here. We're probably seen, all of us have probably seen real harm when people don't speak out, when things are tolerated that shouldn't be.

That leads people astray. The things that might naturally come to our mind might be things like, I don't know, tolerating alcohol or drug abuse or pornography or adultery, that kind of thing.

But it's often not the kind of things that make the headlines, the big dramatic things that are the real, really dangerous ones. You know, it's often the more respectable sins that are actually more prevalent and more damaging.

[22 : 47] I was having a think and I jotted down a few. We're not tolerating gossip. It's something that's so easily we can sharing, just sharing information, that's not ours to share.

And we tolerate it because we want to take part. We don't want to be missing out on the news about what people are saying, but tolerating that can really hurt lots of people.

It can create a culture of distrust. It can stir up controversy. It can blow things out of proportion. It's something that sounds really small. If we tolerate it, it can have massive repercussions and really hurt people.

What about grumbling? Now, that's not saying that people have to agree with everyone and everything that happens, or whether that's in church or in life.

But grumbling is when we don't let things go and we don't use the right means to express our disagreement. It's when often we end up talking behind people's backs and stirring up bitterness.

[23 : 54] In Philippians 2 it says, do all things without grumbling and disputing. And we so often forget the damage that grumbling does. Remember Israel was wandering for 40 years in the wilderness because of their grumbling.

We need to be careful about our attitude and how we talk about things and think about things that we find difficult. Remember to take things to God and give thanks to Him often.

The health and helps when we're finding stuff difficult. And linked to that, maybe I put tolerating grumpiness. Now, I know the word grumpy isn't in the Bible.

It doesn't say, thou shall not be grumpy. But one thing the Bible does talk a lot about is our attitudes and being kind and gentle and considerate.

And we can maybe say, we can make excuses. And when grumpiness is none of those things, it's very often ungodly. It's very often selfish and self-centered.

[24 : 55] We can even make excuses about personality that we're entitled to be grumpy. I mean, I'm just taking something that's quite small. We might not think it's a big deal, but actually if we are tolerating that kind of thing, it makes a really bad atmosphere that isn't Christ-like.

That shouldn't, that's not what the family of God should be like. Link to that, a final little example I thought about was anger. And we might think again, anger is that kind of someone getting red-faced and shouting and making a big scene.

But it can just be losing a temper, frustration, impatience. And all those things again just create really challenges in relationships.

Dynamics where people don't want tiptoe around other people, like they're stepping on glass, afraid that someone's going to blow up suddenly. If we're tolerating all these things, little things, grumbling, gossip, grumpiness, anger, they might seem little, but they can cause a really toxic relationship and relationships and atmosphere.

They're actually sinful things that we shouldn't be tolerating. Jesus challenged Thyatira because he loved them. And sometimes loving one another will look like challenging one another when we see these kind of things.

[26 : 14] That's not easy. That doesn't mean it's our place to talk to everyone necessarily. That doesn't mean challenging every single person every time. Often these conversations happen best down lines of relationship.

You know, I don't have the right to talk to most people and probably challenge them. But many of you will have different relationships with people in which you can gently challenge each other.

And when we do this, when we do that, we need to remember that above all, when we challenge and encourage one another, we're doing it with the aim of restoring. That's why Jesus talks to Thyatira.

He wants to restore them lovingly and graciously. Remember, we're speaking to brothers and sisters in Christ. If Jesus could lovingly challenge a church that was this bad, I think we can lovingly seek to challenge one another and restore one another, I hope.

And when we're challenging one another, we can always remember that we are all sinners saved by grace. None of us, we don't speak to anyone as if we're higher up than them.

[27 : 20] But rather, we're putting an arm around the shoulder and helping one another to move forward in the Christian life. These can be hard conversations, I'm sure. And it's probably often helpful to talk to someone else for advice, not in gossiping this way, but talk to an elder, talk to a spouse, talk to someone that can help you to have a good, constructive conversation with people.

We can pray that God will guard us from compromise and tolerance in this way, just like with Thyatira. So that was parallel to our third point.

And finally, more briefly, the fourth point, promise. Jesus promises the church that if they conquer, they'll rule at his side. See, there was those in Thyatira, we see in verse 24, who did not hold to this teaching.

And to them, he says, I do not lay on you any other burden, only hold fast what you have until I come. And that's a wonderful command, isn't it? Just hold fast to what you have until I come.

There's nothing more that you need to know, nothing, you don't need to do anything to gain entry to the kingdom of God. No higher spiritual plane that you need to get to. You don't have to, there's no Christian levels of enlightenment, as it were.

[28 : 39] Just hold fast. Hold fast to Christ, hold fast to the gospel. And that language of holding fast, it can refer to holding close and restraining.

Think of a wrestler pinning his opponent. The one who conquers in Christ's strength, you could say, is the one who holds fast, who refuses to compromise. It's also the language of clinging to.

So I mean, I quite like my 18th century kind of novels about Napoleonic warfare and the big ships there. And one thing you learn is that they often used to lash the helmsman to the wheel to help them to hold fast.

This kind of holding fast reminds me of that kind of image. Someone lashed to the wheel wrestling with it, holding fast to maintain their course. The ship rides up and down the crests of each wave, but the helmsman holds on fast to maintain their course.

And that's what we're to be. If we're going to be holding fast, you might say, we're a lash to the wheel. We're holding fast. You know, in the beginning of Revelation, it reminds us of the Christ who died for us, who's the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of earth.

[29 : 52] We hold fast to the truth of who Christ is, that he is the Son of God, that he is the one who has eyes of flames of fire, feet like burnish bronze. He is our King and our judge.

We hold fast to that truth, remind ourselves of those truths, so that we can maintain a steady course in this life. We cling to Christ, wonderfully even as we lash ourselves to him as it were, he lashes himself to us.

We don't hold, he's the safety line, you might say, he clips into us. It's not by our strength that we hold on and hold fast. And we conquer side by side. We're not holding fast alone.

We're helping one another, holding up one another's weary arms as we seek to maintain that course. We hold fast side by side by his strength as the people of Christ together in the church.

And to those who hold fast, Jesus says, I will reward you. I love that verses 27 and 28, again, that's lifting language from Psalm 2, speaking about Christ's rule over the nations, except he says that the reward for those who hold fast is ruling with him.

[31 : 05] He's saying, the reward for holding fast is ruling with me. And then he says that strange language of verse 28, and I'll give him the morning star. And we might think, what on earth does that mean? Actually, if you'd afflict the last chapter in Revelation, Jesus calls himself the morning star.

So just to summarize, Jesus says the reward is rule and relationship with him. And I don't know if those words sound familiar. In some ways they should, because that's what Adam and Eve had in Eden.

Rule, dominion, God says have dominion over the sheep and not the sheep, the birds of the air, the animals, and relationship. They have relationship with God. What Jesus is promising is Eden restored for all those who hold fast.

He'll reward them with rule, with relationship. It's Eden restored. That's our heading. That's where we're set to. I think, I mean, doesn't that inspire you to hold fast?

Jesus is saying, hold fast. There's the new creation. There's Eden restored. That's what's on the horizon. Hold fast. It's time to draw to a close now, as we do.

- [32 : 24] We began by thinking that this is a letter written with the central idea that Christ is returning as king and judge. And that He'll give to each according to their works.
- But He promises that all who hold fast, who keep following Him by strength, in His strength to the end, He'll give Eden restored.
- And in the Bible, in these letters, you might say in a sense we have Jesus giving that phone call before He comes back. Like the parents calling on Skype or Zoom or whatever saying, I'm coming soon. Get ready for my return.
- That's all we have in these letters. There should be a reminder to us to make sure we don't compromise, that we don't tolerate, but we hold fast, that we get ready for His return.
- Because Jesus could return at any time. So just as we close, my closing question then is when Christ returns, what will He find? What will He find in Carlyway?
- [33 : 25] In our homes, in each one of us. Will He find us holding fast? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You.
- Thank You that You speak to us in Your Word. Thank You that You don't leave us to live the Christian life on our own. That You don't leave us trying to work out on our own how to live to please You.
- Thank You that You give us Your Word to guide us. That You give us Your Word so that we can have a perspective on life and know what we're living for, why we're living.
- And Lord, so often our perspective drifts away from Christ's return. So often we're living for the here and now. Lord, we pray that You'd lift our eyes up to the horizon of Christ's return.
- You'd help us to hold fast to the end. You'd help us to be a people who are humble and who don't tolerate sin like You don't.
- [34 : 31] But are able and willing and teachable and ready to have gently and lovingly help restore one another. Lord, help us to be walking faithfully with You.
- We pray this all in Jesus' name and in Christ's strength who has loved us and given his life for us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.