

Up to this point in the book of Revelation, the letters written to the various churches have shown us situations that are in many ways similar to our own. Like Ephesus, we have to deal with false teachers. Like Smyrna, we are pressured to conform to the world around us. And like Pergamum, we face that same pressure from our government and even from the society that is around us. And so in all of these ways, we see that they are very similar to our own and the troubles that we face. But Christians, while they're similar, they're not the same. There's a lot of things that are actually fairly different about them. We, for example, do not have to deal with emperors who call themselves gods, and our lives are not in immediate danger simply for being a Christian. Of course, we can still learn from these letters and learn from what Jesus says to them, but in the end they're really only similar. They are not the same.

But as we leave behind Pergamum to travel 40 miles to the southeast to Thyatira, we meet a situation there that is very similar to our own. Again, not the same. There are some things different. But the Christians in Thyatira were struggling with a question that many Christians struggle with today. Because in Thyatira we meet a church that was being pressured to conform for economic reasons. To put it differently, what do you do when you are forced to choose between making a living and between following Jesus? What do you do when the pressure to give in comes from your job?

Because Thyatira was not a large city by any means, but it was home to a number of trade guilds. And these trade guilds were not businesses in our sense, but rather something more like an association of workers. If you were a potter, for example, you'd belong to the potter's guild. If you were a baker, you'd belong to the baker's guild. If you were a bronzesmith, you'd belong to the bronzesmith's guild, and so forth. And these guilds existed for more than just business. They were also there to help their members. They would help make sure that their needs were taken care of, and above all, they would help to pay funeral expenses whenever somebody died, which could sometimes be a lot. So in some ways, these guilds were a lot more like our labor unions than a business. But on top of all of that, it was kind of impossible not to belong to one. You couldn't find work any other place. There was no such thing as competition in those days. If you wanted to work as a potter, you had to be a part of the potter's guild. That's all there was to it.

That might be fine for us. We could understand it, even if we think maybe competition would be a little bit better. But on top of all of it, the thing that made it difficult was these guilds were also religious in nature. Remember, religion is everywhere in the Roman Empire. You can't get away from it in anything. And so every single one of these guilds was dedicated to a patron god or goddess, and they would regularly hold feasts in honor of that god. And at these feasts, then, you would have to eat food which was sacrificed to an idol. And perhaps worse, these feasts often degenerated into drunkenness and even fornication. That's just the way that it was in those days. But before you say, "Well, I just wouldn't go! I wouldn't participate. I wouldn't have anything to do with it," remember, if you're not part of the guild, you're not going to find work. You're not going to be able to do anything. Not participating fully in the life of these guilds would hurt your career. You might even lose your job. So what do you do? What do you do when you are forced to choose between your job and Jesus?

"Well, it's different for us," we say. "Right? We have laws against this kind of thing. It's illegal to discriminate in this way. It's illegal to fire somebody just because they're Christian. That's the way it is in our country." And that's true, at least on paper. But there's a lot of times where we

may be forced to make the same kind of hard decisions. Take, for example, the case right now before the Supreme Court of a postal worker who was fired and is suing the Postal Service. He, as a Christian, believes that he was fired because he didn't want to work on Sundays, something that he considered to be wrong. And so the case is now before the Supreme Court. Or think back three years ago with the Covid vaccine. There were plenty of Christians who considered it to be morally wrong. They were morally opposed to receiving a vaccine. And there were a lot of people in those days who lost their job because they refused to take it. And I know there might be room for debate in those kinds of things. We might disagree on the details. But those are hardly the only examples, Christians. These days virtually every major corporation will make their employees go through orientation as part of the hiring process. And that orientation will include things that will be pro-sodomy, that will be pro-trans, that will be anti-white, you name it. It's a part of it. And if you want to be hired, you have to submit to these things. And these same businesses are openly and vocally supporting these things in public. Tomorrow, June 1, is the beginning of when almost every major corporation in this country is going to change their logos to include a rainbow in some way, because they are totally in support of these things. Target right now is under fire because of some of its merchandise. And you might even think back to the Bud Light controversy and everything that went on with that. These things are still around us, Christians. We still have to face this question. And we must ask ourselves: can we as Christians participate in such things? What should we do in this situation?

And of course, there can be an enormous pressure here to compromise, to give in, to do what you need to do in order to keep your job, even if that means going against what Jesus has clearly said. And the great problem in Thyatira was many of them had done just that. They had compromised. They had gone along with these things, especially under the influence of a woman that Jesus names Jezebel. Jesus says in verse 20 of our reading: "But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols." So this woman called herself a prophetess, then. She claimed to be speaking for God, and yet she was a false prophet. She was leading God's people astray. Because she was teaching them that it was okay for them to do this, that they could go along with everything in the guild, that they could participate in the feasts, that they could eat the food sacrificed to idols. She may have even been saying it was okay to indulge a little bit in the adultery. These things were okay, because what else are you going to do? Where else are you going to go? What else can you do? You've got to make the best of it. So you can still be a Christian and do these things, because, well, that's just life. What else are you going to do?

But Christians, that was not right. Like the Jezebel of old, she was leading God's people into sin. Because Jezebel in the Old Testament, king Ahab's wife, constantly tempted Israel to worship false gods. In fact, we're told in 1 Kings about Ahab that "there was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited." Ahab was not a good king by any means. He did a lot of bad things. But his wife Jezebel pushed him to do a lot worse things. It was Jezebel in those days who was causing Israel to stumble. And the new Jezebel was just like the old, teaching them to worship false gods, to participate in these things.

And Jesus makes it perfectly clear what would happen to Jezebel and those who followed after her. He says, beginning in verse 21: "I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with

her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works." Jezebel's children in this case would be those who were totally committed to her teaching, those who were a hundred percent on her side. The others, on the other hand, would be those just under her influence. They could still repent. They still had time to turn away, which was an opportunity that Jezebel and her children no longer had. Because there can be no compromise in these things, Christians. We must follow after Jesus in all things, including our jobs.

But not everybody in Thyatira had given into this. Jesus goes on to say, verse 24: "But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come." Jesus calls for them to hold fast, to be steadfast and to confess the truth, even in the face of what they must go through. Because Jesus knows perfectly well how hard it would be, Christians. Jesus knows how hard it can be to follow after him. Following him can be very much like a burden. It's not easy to follow Jesus when it means that you're going to be passed over for a promotion. It's not easy to follow Jesus when it means you're going to have to pay higher costs for things. It's not easy to follow Jesus when it means even that you have to change jobs because of it. How many times in the news do we see examples of people who speak up against these things, who speak out openly, only to crumble and apologize not even a day later? It is not easy to follow after Jesus. And there are situations where a person can't just quit. They have a family to support. Their money is tight. They can't afford to miss several months' pay while they're looking for another job. And so it may seem like they're trapped in that situation, like there's nothing that they can do. That is the brutal reality for many Christians these days. It may seem like there is nothing that they can do.

But Christians, Jesus says, hold on! Hold fast to what you have! Hold on. Do not compromise. Do not give in. Say no to those things which go against his Word. Remember who your heavenly Master is, who your true boss is: Jesus Christ the Lord. As Paul says in Colossians 3: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." He is the one who is your true boss, the one you must truly answer to. And so we must follow after him.

And for those of us who are not facing these things, who are not faced with the hard choice between our jobs and Jesus, we need to be prepared to help those who are. To even support them financially if need be in the event that they lose their job for refusing to follow with the world. They need to know that we're going to care for them. They need to know that we have their back. We need to form an association of our own so that no Christian will ever have to choose between their [job] and Jesus. No Christian should ever be forced to compromise because of what they believe.

But we can also hold fast in these things, Christians, knowing that this burden, as heavy as it may seem at times, will not go on forever. Jesus says, beginning in verse 26: "The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father." Jesus is pointing to Psalm 2 here, which we said earlier this evening. Though the nations rage against God, Christians, he has set his King on Mount Zion, his

holy hill. Jesus reigns as the King of Kings over the nations forever with a rod of iron in his hand! His authority is absolute. His kingdom will never come to an end. And no one will ever force him off the throne. He is the King. And Jesus promises that those who hold fast will share in his reign. Instead of being pushed around, they will share in his authority. Instead of being forced to choose, they will reign with him with that same rod of iron. No longer crushed underfoot, no longer lacking anything, no longer forced to choose, but instead victorious in Christ forever.

And the same is also true of what Jesus says in verse 28: "And I will give him the morning star." Jesus calls himself the morning star at the end of this book. In Revelation 22, he says: "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." And so giving the morning star to the one who holds fast is a way of saying that Jesus will give himself to them. He will be their possession. And Jesus says this for two reasons. First of all, because of the prophecy in the book of Numbers, which says: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." This star out of Jacob would conquer the enemies of God, and Jesus is that star. And the other reason he uses it is because the morning star was a symbol of Roman authority. Emperors liked to show themselves on coins holding stars in their hands, and the Roman armies had stars on their banners. So for these Christians, then, the morning star was a symbol of Roman oppression. It's like they were being crushed under the Roman star. But the Romans are not the real star. Jesus is the true morning star, and those who hold fast to him will have that morning star, something that is far greater than the Roman power which was trying to get them to compromise. No matter how great the burden may be, those who hold fast to Jesus will conquer with him in all things.

So Christians, hold fast. Hold fast what you have until Jesus comes. Though it may be hard, God will not fail to care for those who trust in him. Remember who you serve. Your Master is in heaven. Do what is right, even if it costs you. Care for those who have paid that cost. Because when this burden ends--and it will--the reward that Christ gives to those who hold fast will go on forever. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches!

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, ruler of the nations and the bright morning star, strengthen us to hold fast to you in all things and to serve you in all that we do, while we wait for your coming in glory; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.