

## Eastertide Revelation #4 **Letter to Thyatira**

Eric Cepin  
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First, some notes on **Reading the Book of Revelation**:

Some of you have heard a lot about the book of Revelation: you've seen the charts and graphs, etc. I am going to say that it doesn't matter about the rapture, the 1000-year rule, the mark of the beast: if you figure these things out, let me know! Revelation is about *Jesus being victorious* and it's about *empire*.

If you are going to read it, read Chapters 17 and 18 first. These will help you understand Babylon, which is shorthand for *empire*. For the 1st century church, *empire* meant ROME. For us, *empire* means the U.S. Wherever you are, your *empire* is the kingdom of the enemy (Babylon).

**Your assignment for next week:** read Revelation 17 and 18 and make a list of the characteristics of Babylon. What John is trying to do in the letters to the church is to say we cannot allow the *empire* to seep into the church. He begins by pointing out how the value systems of Rome have infiltrated the church.

To get you started, here are a few characteristics of Babylon that I (and others) see:

### The Marks of Babylon

1. The worship of a multiplicity of gods
2. Pursuit of wealth and renown to excess
3. Embracing the shadows of human nature
4. Focusing on appearances
5. Relying on force to control others
6. Taking advantage of others financially
7. Being overly confident and boastful

Explanation for number 3: In the women babylon, you see her taking what we do in secret (murder) and sexually (licentiousness) and pushing it into the forefront and celebrating it

4. The Roman empire was really big into image: study 1-3rd century and notice their statues everywhere!

These refer to Rome: but do you recognize your own country as well? The U.S. is Babylon; it's not the only Babylon but it is Babylon.

Today we will talk about the letter to Thyatira. (Too bad I have to say this word over and over!) Here is the message out of Revelation 18 that is to these churches:

**Rev 18: 4** Then I heard another voice from heaven say:

“‘Come out of her, my people,’  
so that you will not share in her sins,  
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

You and I as members of the Kingdom of God are called to be different and separate from the values and systems of the world. We are called to be different!

**Rev 14:4** These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for the remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.

All year, we’ve been talking about radical discipleship: this is when you follow the lamb, not Babylon, where He goes.

To some people, Revelation is about figuring out who the Antichrist is and where we are in the church age but we have lost the fact that this is all about discipleship and learning to be separate and not let the world take us over.

Let’s look at the map again and note its mail routes. When a governor wanted to send a message to another place, this maps the routes the message will go. In the 1st century, you would write a letter and then you would read the letter to a messenger and explain everything to them and then pay them and send them off to distribute your letter.



Remember, John is on Patmos.

Smyrna is the engineer town: big streets well laid out, high loyalty to the Roman empire. They have one goddess, Roma.

Pergamos is the diamond of Asia Minor with massive, beautiful architecture.

Thyatira is a blue collar, military town “nobody” town. You can

guess that invaders liked to attack the richest city (Pergamon) and Thyatira was an outpost that was supposed to defend or at least warn against invaders. It was rebuilt over and over because invaders march right through it. There was only one way to be employed here: in one of the guilds that support the military. These guilds do things that Christians shouldn’t do. If you cannot be a part of a guild, you cannot eat. Although it’s only 40 miles from Pergamum, it wasn’t not like today where you could just leave and go to another place. If you were poor, you were stuck in this place. You must rely on God completely.

The poor people who got this particular letter were struggling to stay alive.

## To the Church in Thyatira

**18** “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

Why were the angels in every letter? Did they each have an angel? It could be, but not likely...it's more likely that angel means the bishop or covering of the community.

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Remember from **Rev 1:12-16** this introduction to Jesus:

**12** I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, **13** and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man,<sup>[d]</sup> dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. **14** The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. **15** His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. **16** In his right hand he held seven stars

Each letter starts with a statement about who God is...the letter to Thyatira is very different from the last letter to Smyrna: THIS letter comes from the Son of God: The Messiah, God himself. It's an authoritative message, like a serious conversation a father would have with his family.

The eyes like blazing fire are reminding them that He can see them AND can purify them if they are will to submit.

The feet of bronze represent judgment: This is what will happen if you do not want to do what he says. “I’m dad and it’s time to expose who you are: there will be consequences for not being on the straight and narrow.

*If you must have this kind of conversation, start with something they are doing well:*

**19** I know your deeds

Deeds means “work,” the things you are laboring at.

your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Each one of these letters in the Greek indicates that these people have been working: working on their love, allegiance, serving, and building. They have matured.

**To the Village:** This is us! For 20+ years we also have been working on these things and we have matured. These are marks of the village: we work on love, service, faith and perseverance. This is who we are: I really think this letter applies to us more than maybe some of the others. I want to affirm that these are characteristics of our community! Ponder this and wrestle with it.

**20 Nevertheless, I have this against you:** (this literally means that this is the strike on your character)... **You tolerate that woman Jezebel,**

**Tolerance** is a big deal; we talk about this all the time. We love and serve and persevere yet we get taken advantage of. If that happens, you could go two ways: become judgmental and get made or you go the other way and become tolerant of things you shouldn't tolerate.

When the child wants to play in the street, we don't tolerate it and say "He'll learn." When a child wants to take a bath with a toaster, we don't stand by and watch. Tolerating can have a devastating impact. But too often in dire situations, we say "I don't want to hurt someone's feelings, I don't want to lose this friendship, I don't want them to reject me" Often, when we are intimately connected, we don't want to speak words of truth.

Jezebel might have been a real woman in the first century but not this is not likely. Mostly likely it refers to a woman in the Old Testament. There was a king named Ahab:

1. Jezebel's marriage (1 Kings 16:31): Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, marries King Ahab of Israel, becoming queen.
2. Idolatry and persecution (1 Kings 18:4, 13, 19): Jezebel promotes Baal worship, turns Israelites away from Yahweh, and persecutes His prophets.
3. Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21): Jezebel arranges for Naboth's execution to seize his vineyard for King Ahab, leading to a prophecy of doom.
4. Jezebel's death (1 Kings 21:23, 2 Kings 9:30-37): Jezebel is thrown from a window and eaten by dogs, fulfilling Elijah's prophecy.

Ahab is passive, Jezebel is a gressive.

The big story is about Naboth's vineyard which Ahab wanted. He couldn't buy it and was depressed. She takes it into her own hands and trumps up charges against Naboth and seizes the vineyard. She was eventually eaten by

dogs; a wicked woman gets her due in the end! It was a favorite of mine as a boy, full of revenge and death! Here is the power of that, though:

Here is what Jezebel stands for: You have tolerated some kind of witchcraft in your community. She calls herself a prophet but Jesus mocks this in a way. She is misleading people...how? In order to eat and make a living, you had to be in a guild. Remember Lydia in Acts from Thyatira was in a guild; she was a rich woman. Jezebel is asking them to go in and participate in the guilds and then they can eat and everything will be OK. There is a partnering with the world in order to survive. This should elicit our compassion: we are willing to compromise when we are desparate or when our children are suffering.

**By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.**

**22** So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. **23** I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that

A couple of things here: she says she is a prophet but in this letter there is a prophecy: There is sin and if you don't repent, here is what will happen. You are going to get sick if you don't repent and all the churches will know. I don't know if the children are her actual children or if it means her followers. It will be known that Jezebel of Thyratira lost her childre, lost the people following her, they died because they would not repent.

**I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.**

God says he is the one who can see all of who are: these guilds are not secret to God.

**24** Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, **25** except to hold on to what you have until I come.

I love this part: for so many who decide not to be a part of the guilds, survival is all they know. Jesus says he knows this, how rough it is for them, and He won't add any more for them. He just asks them to hold onto the faith, love, and perseverance. This applies to many of us: we are in emotional and spiritual poverty and we are tempted to give into the world and be done with it. But Jesus says **he is coming: hold on**. He won't burden you with more.

He also offers Jezebel and her followers the opportunity to repent: we can always turn around and take a step (as the song says). God will honor this.

His final encouragement:

**26 To the one who is victorious**

We are victorious in what Christ has done!

**and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— 27 that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father.**

Catch this even though it's confusing: you don't get to belong to any of these guilds filled with Satan's seekers but I have defeated them and I will give you the power as well: You will rule and crush the enemy so hold on.

**28** I will also give that one the morning star.

**29** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

**Jesus is the bright morning star; he says about himself:**

**Rev 22:16** “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you<sup>[a]</sup> this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”

When you join the guild of Jesus, two things happen:

1. Authority of Jesus over Satan
2. Jesus as the morning star

Venus is the first star of the morning! He will be present with you in every moment and he will give you authority and be present in every way to light the darkest spaces.

**Marks of Babylon:** We need to reckon with the idea that we live in Babylon with its values and rules and philosophies: The two things you find are

idolatry and  
the destruction of the body through sexuality

You might pull out other values but these are insidious values that we need to talk about. It's easy to say these things but we need to have a conversation about these. But if I don't have someone prodding in my life and helping me think through these things, we will miss this.

Let's think about having young children:

- These are very subtle?
- How have I bought into these things?

We need to process this. There is resistance in this. Let's talk about the pursuit of wealth: I would say everyone is guilty of this sin! For example, the shirts you wear are built by slave labor unless you are really disciplined...the toothpaste you use as well. These are insidious and we tend to tolerate them.

Instead of processing all the possibilities, let's decide where we want to stand from today on:  
Stand underneath Jesus's blazing eyes and be purified or  
Stand under his judgment?

Are we willing to submit this to Jesus? This is the invitation: Begin by asking what do I tolerate?

I want to be clear that this is not to build a fortress and hide sermon; we are called to be in the world as lights, the morning stars, and to speak with authority. We are not against flesh and blood but against principalities.