

What Jesus Is Looking For In The Church – Part 2

Rich Nathan

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Revelation: Looking at Life From the Perspective of Heaven Series

Revelation 2:8-3:22

I don't know what word association or picture comes to your mind when you think of the word "church." Maybe you think of a building with stained glass windows, or you think of priests in robes. Maybe you think of Christian rituals like communion, or baptism. Perhaps when you hear the word "church" you think of religious people. Well, let me give you a different word picture that you can associate in your mind with the word "church." The church, almost any church, is a messy place. Think in your mind church and messy place.

Now, this is a major problem for people outside the church. They say: Look at you guys. You claim to be followers of Christ, yet some of you get divorced and some of you cheat in business. Some of you still hit the club scene. Some of you are addicts. I've met some of you so-called followers of Christ and you've got major emotional problems.

Listen to former attenders of church. The people who used to be associated with the church and are no longer associated. Listen to their complaints about the church:

- Yeah, I used to go to church, but the people there were [and then fill in the blank].
- I used to go to church, but the people there were hypocrites. (That is the typical accusation against the church.)
- The people in the church didn't seem to have a real faith. Of course, I did a scientific study of this and I certainly know what's going on in the heart of every human being, who goes to church. I know where they've come from, so I can tell with my God's-eye view that church really hasn't made a difference in any of these people's lives. I know every single person is a hypocrite.
- I used to go to church, but the people in the church didn't care about my needs.
- I used to go to church, but I didn't feel welcome.

Now, it shouldn't come as any surprise that we might associate church with messy place. After all, the church is most often described in the New Testament as the family of God. And if there is one general truth about large fully alive families it is that they are messy. Do any of you have toddlers, or teenagers, or

husbands? Have any of you ever been a toddler, a teenager? Do your kids have friends over? Healthy families make messes. There are also lots of messes in a hospital nursery. Babies constantly make messes. If you have a constant stream of new people coming to know Jesus, if you have lots and lots of spiritual babies in a church, there will be a mess.

I've always appreciated Proverbs 14:4, which reads:

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Pr 14:4 Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty,
but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest

The KJV puts it this way:

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Where no oxen, the crib is clean,
but much increases by the strength of the ox.

If you don't want a messy stall, get rid of all the animals. But then you will miss their strength and their contribution to your work. If God didn't want mess, he wouldn't have chosen us but then he wouldn't have our contribution to the building of the kingdom of God.

My wife Marlene had a relative who hated mess. This relative had plastic covers over all of her furniture. When Marlene was a child, she wasn't allowed to even sit on the plastic, which was over a slipcover. Marlene was required, whenever she went to this relative's house, to sit on the floor. This woman followed Marlene around with a spray bottle wiping off everything she touched, constantly complaining about the mess Marlene made. Marlene's relative, after she cleaned the dining room table, would go over it again with rubbing alcohol. Her house was cleaner than an operating room, and it was also utterly inhospitable to normal human beings. You couldn't function there. You couldn't grow there. You couldn't thrive there.

The lesson is: If you demand a church that is mess free, the only way to do that is to follow people around and control them at every turn. You need hyper-control. You need to make it unbearable for families, unbearable for new Christians.

People in the church even fall into the trap of demanding a mess-free church, especially older, very religious people, who don't remember what it is like to have to work through all the issues of your faith. People in the church often demand a mess-free church. Sometimes young people, who are loaded with idealism, struggle with the notion that church would be associated with a messy place.

Loving mature Christians know better. They know that the church is a family – we are the family of God; we are a hospital nursery; we are an army. These are all messy metaphors.

I often hear church people talk about the need for us to return to the New Testament church. Have you ever heard that? We just need to get back to being like the New Testament church, as if the New Testament church was the high watermark of church life in history. There was lots of good there, but when I hear this call to get back to the New Testament church – have you ever read the New Testament? Which church do you want to get back to? Do you want to return to the Corinthian church with its immorality and its divisions and lawsuits? Or how about the Colossian church with its heresies and legalism. Or maybe you want to get back to the church in Ephesus that Paul sent Timothy to to clean up the mess. Or maybe you want to get back to the church in Crete that the apostle Paul sent Titus to to straighten out. Do you want to get back to the New Testament church? Which church wasn't a messy place?

You know, I just don't look back for my model of church life. I look ahead with hope to the kingdom of God – what God's people will become – and I say: That's what I want more of. I want more of the life of the kingdom now. I look forward in hope. I want our church to be more like what we *will be* than what the church was in the past.

Jesus recognized that there is mess in the church and he is not shocked by it. He knows that the church is a living, breathing, messy family but Jesus doesn't fall off the tightrope in the other direction either with an easy-going tolerance. Jesus doesn't say: Well, what can you expect from these former pagans. As long as they invite me into their hearts and call themselves Christian, that is good enough for me. I'm not expecting life change. I'm not expecting growth in holiness, or growth in truthfulness.

Jesus, who knows the raw material that he has to work with, still demands certain things from every church. He doesn't expect the church to be a hospital operating room. He doesn't follow us around with rubbing alcohol spraying wherever we go.

Whatever denomination we are a part of, whatever our church tradition and church rituals, Jesus looks for certain things in the church. And in the midst of our messy lives, Jesus looks for certain things in us individually. I began this talk last week and I'm going to continue it today. I've called it very simply: What Jesus Is Looking For In The Church – Part 2. Let's pray.

Jesus is looking for a willingness to suffer in the church. There are a lot of churches that are outwardly successful but the church that Jesus commends without any correction at all is the church at Smyrna. Revelation 2:8-11,

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Rev 2:8 "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.

Rev 2:9 I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Rev 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Rev 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Apparently, the church in Smyrna was experiencing pressure from Romans on the one hand and the non-Christian Jewish community on the other. Now this is an intra-family dispute. When he talks about the synagogue of Satan, this is not an anti-Semitic statement. This is an intra-family dispute. Have you ever been in a family fight and said things to your sister or brother or parents or kids or spouse that you could not tolerate from others? There are a lot of intra-family disputes, things that you might say to one another within a family than seem quite harsh, but that you would totally reject if they came from the outside.

John, a Jewish believer in Jesus speaks about a synagogue of Satan because the word Satan means "slanderer". Apparently, the Jewish Christians that were part of the church were being slandered by non-Christian Jews to the Roman authorities.

Jewish Christians were accused of not being Jews by the rest of the Jewish community. The consequence of this accusation was that Jewish Christians were denied legally protected status in the eyes of the world. Judaism was a legally protected religion in Rome, but Jewish Christianity was not. As a result, Jewish Christians were subject to persecution – financial harassment, legal harassment, physical harassment.

I can identify, to a small degree, with what was happening to the Jewish Christians in Smyrna. As most of you know, I am a Jewish believer in Jesus. I have had to, on many occasions, deal with the slanderous accusation by other Jews that I was not a real Jew. Jesus, by the way, turns that on its head and says: No, who is the real Jew? The real Jew is the one who accepts the Jewish Messiah sent from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but, I've had rabbis and

family members and friend and letters to the editor naming me and specifically saying that I was not a Jew. I've been accused of not having a Jewish background, or a Jewish education.

It has always been an odd thing to me as one who was born to Jewish parents, raised in a Jewish family in a Jewish community, going to Jewish parochial school and Hebrew school and being bar mitzvah, going to Hebrew high school, that I could according to contemporary Jewish standards be an atheist and still be considered a Jew. I could be a Marxist, a communist, and still be considered a Jew. I could believe in reincarnation and practice Eastern Religion and still be considered a Jew. The one thing I am not permitted to do is believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sent the Jewish Messiah Jesus to rescue his people and to save the world. Because I believe this, it is said of me and other Jewish believers in Jesus that we are not Jews.

Jesus pays special attention to the suffering church. It has cost a great deal for people to follow Jesus at different times and different places. There is a report that just came out of Pakistan a month ago in March. Christians in Pakistan are particularly vulnerable and being persecuted now.

A woman named Hanifan Bibi is a Christian mother who worked as a domestic servant for a Muslim family. In January her employer's husband and several of his friends broke into the family's home and kidnapped Mrs. Hanifan along with her husband, son and nephew. Mrs. Hanifan was stripped, sexually humiliated and tortured in front of her family with the perpetrators filming the attack.

The kidnappers then turned Mrs. Hanifan over to the police and had her charged with theft. She was hospitalized for her injuries. The family believes the attack was revenge for Mrs. Hanifan's refusal to provide the Muslim men with Christian women for sex.

There was another report out of Pakistan this past year about a Christian man who was jailed for violating the anti-blasphemy laws because he was trying to make an area tidy. He allegedly placed some rubbish near a wall of a mosque. He was thrown in jail for a year and contracted tuberculosis. While he was sick in the jail, a police officer beat him to death. He said it was his Muslim duty. The moderator of the Presbyterian church of Pakistan said: "We are very sad about what has happened. I can only say we Christians are feeling helpless in Pakistan. Churches can do nothing."

The Catholic Archbishop said: "It is with sadness and sorrow that Catholic Christians in Pakistan have laid to rest another victim of fanatical hatred."

In Iraq, five churches last August were bombed in Baghdad, and four in Mosul. Within a single day's attack, they killed twelve people. In October five churches in Baghdad were hit on the first day of the Muslim celebration of Ramadan. In

November eight people were killed in two church bombings. It is considered in Iraq to be justifiable homicide to kill a Muslim convert to Christianity. This Christmas, Christian in Iraq celebrated Christmas in their homes because they feared attack. In fact, pastors and priests avoided the traditional midnight services and told parishioners to stay away out of concern for their safety.

In China, Christians, especially Christian pastors, are regularly persecuted and tortured. Pastor Gong was sentenced to life in prison in October 2002. This case involved the arrest and sentencing of many women in Pastor Gong's church. Many women were tortured until they signed an affidavit accusing Pastor Gong of rape. They later renounced their signed confessions and were all sentenced to prison.

You know, as we serve God, we will sometimes be called terrible names, even in America. When we tell people that Christ can set them free from bondage, we will be blasted for being intolerant. If you share the good news that Christ saves and that he desires to save everyone who turns to him in faith, you will be accused of hatred or religious bigotry.

Do you remember the controversy that occurred a few years ago when the Southern Baptists designed a program to share the Good News of the gospel with Hindus, Muslims, and Jews here in the US? Now, you can't be honest with the New Testament and fail to see that the sharing of the Good News, that salvation is found in Jesus Christ through his perfect life, through his sacrificial death, and through his glorious resurrection, that we can be saved through trusting in Jesus Christ, is a responsibility laid on every single Christian. But when the Baptists designed a program to share this Good News, one well-known politician from Washington accused the Southern Baptists of gross intolerance. He declared that he was opposed to the Southern Baptist attempts to perpetuate ancient religious hatred and divisions in America.

What does Jesus say to people who are potentially going to suffer as a result of following him? Revelation 2:10,

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Rev 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

I just want to underline in Revelation 2:10 one little phrase: Do not be afraid. Do you know that this is repeated several dozen times in the Bible to God's people. Do not be afraid. Do not fear. Isaiah is instructed in Isaiah 35:4,

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Isa 35:4 say to those with fearful hearts,

“Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you.”

In Isaiah 41:10, he says:

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Isa 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Likewise, the apostle Peter states in 1 Peter 3:14,

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1Pe 3:14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear ; do not be frightened.”

And Jesus says in Matthew 10:28-31,

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Mt 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Mt 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny ? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.

Mt 10:30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Mt 10:31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

The great issue that keeps us from being willing to suffer for Christ is simply fear. Or to put it in a slightly different way, there is one indispensable requirement that Jesus looks for in his church and that is courage. You don't hear a lot of talk about courage these days. It used to be a hugely prized virtue. Now what we prize is hard abs, firm arms and legs and buns.

But Jesus walks into the church, which is a messy place, a church that is under lots of pressure from the world, and he asks us the question: Are you a man or a woman of courage? We need to regain our esteem for courage. We need relational courage. The courage to look our spouse in the eye and say: Our marriage is in serious trouble. We need to do something about it. We've got to go in for counseling. We've got to go on this marriage retreat, the Begin Again weekend. I can't continue to sweep all the problems under the rug and pretend that everything is OK. We need relational courage even in our own marriages.

But a lot of people won't do this. We are cowards. We avoid confrontation. We won't put on the gloves and fight for our marriages. And so in utter cowardice, instead of fighting for our marriages, we have secret affairs. And in utter cowardice, we separate and run for our attorneys, because many of us won't do the hard work necessary to heal our marital messes.

It takes courage to discipline our children. It is so much easier to give in, to not hold our kids to account, to accommodate, rather than to suffer the little dictator's temper tantrum.

It takes courage to tell the truth in school regarding why we were late on an assignment. It is so much easier to lie about it.

It takes courage to look a client in the eye and say: There was a screw-up and I'm responsible. I'm not going to be able to deliver as I promised. Here is the truth.

It takes courage to share your Christian faith with your family and not blur the lines, or pretend that basically we all believe the same thing and we're all going to the same place.

It takes courage to announce that a relationship with Christ makes a radical difference in our lives.

It takes courage to tell your family that you are not going to the traditional church that they used to go to.

It takes courage to tell your parents that you are planning to be baptized even though you went through a church ritual of baptism as an infant.

Friends, be honest, is there a relationship or an area of life where you would have to say: My problem is that I am a coward. I am full of fear. I've been unwilling to suffer the consequences of following Jesus. I've been unwilling to pay the price of telling the truth, as I understand it. I've avoided suffering and have gone along with a lie. I've got to pray to become a more courageous person.

Jesus is looking for a willingness to suffer.

SLIDE – Revelation 2:12-17

Rev 2:12 "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

Rev 2:13 I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

Rev 2:14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

Rev 2:15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Rev 2:16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Rev 2:17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

Pergamum was the capital of the Roman Province of Asia. It was the center of Roman power. That is why it is called the “throne of Satan” in verse 13,

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Rev 2:13 I know where you live—where Satan has his throne.

Remember that the book of Revelation was written to 1st century Christians who had to deal with Roman power and Roman persecution. Pergamum was built on a hill that was a thousand feet in height. In fact, the name Pergamon in Greek literally means citadel. The city sat on this hill like a citadel, this impregnable Roman capital. The Romans expressed their rule in the ancient world in terms of the power of the sword. We have the power to put people to death. But Revelation is all about understanding life in this world from the viewpoint of heaven. Rather than the Romans having the ultimate power of the sword, we read in verse 12 these words:

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Rev 2:12 “To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

And Jesus reminds the church in Pergamum that he has the ultimate authority in verse 16 where he says:

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Rev 2:16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Now Jesus affirms several things about the church in Pergamum. They did good works in the community. They were willing to confess Christ even to the point of death and martyrdom. Verse 13,

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Rev 2:13 I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true

to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

But there was a mess in Pergamum. The mess had to do with false doctrine, or false teaching. Verses 14-15,

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Rev 2:14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

Rev 2:15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Here is Balaam. Some of you know that in the Old Testament as the Israelites were journeying from Egypt to the Promised Land, they encountered the pagan prophet Balaam. The pagan king Balak tried to bribe Balaam to call down a curse upon the Israelites but so long as Israel was faithful to the Lord, Balaam was unable to call down a curse against them. Balaam decided to compromise Israel's relationship with God by telling women from the nation of Moab to seduce Israelite men. We read in Numbers 25:1-3 the following:

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Nu 25:1 While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women,

Nu 25:2 who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods.

Nu 25:3 So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD'S anger burned against them.

In later Judaism and in the New Testament period, Balaam became a symbol of false prophets or a false teacher.

Now we don't know exactly what the teaching of the Nicolaitans was. It may have had to do with accommodation to Roman pagan festivals, which would have involved sexual immorality. We don't know. But the point is that the church of Pergamum was a mess because it regularly listened to bad teaching and bad counsel.

It is generally the case in the church today that teaching is undervalued. Churches are evaluated by their size, how many people attend, by their programs, is there a strong children's program, a strong singles' program. They are measured by their contribution to society, how many people did they feed? How many alcoholics did they rescue from the streets? It is incredibly rare for people today to value teaching and counsel to the extent that the New Testament values healthy teaching and life-giving counsel.

It is interesting that when Paul wanted to clean up the mess in the Ephesian church, he sends Timothy not with a new program or new vision statements, or new plans. He doesn't send Timothy down to the church in Ephesus with a new outreach program. Paul sends Timothy with one basic instruction: Give this messy church healthy teaching. Give them sound doctrine, sound words. Don't teach them a bunch of myths, or turn the Bible into some secret code book for especially anointed prophetically elite. Here is the way, Timothy that you clean up the mess in Ephesus: Week after week give them healthy teaching.

The writers of the New Testament know the healthy teaching, which applies God's Word to real life will result in healthy living. And they also know that bad teaching and bad counsel will result in bad living.

Let me ask you some questions. Do you really value healthy biblical teaching? Do you try to apply what you hear to your own life? Do you guard what you listen to? Do you weigh the counsel that you get about your marriage or your relationships with your boyfriends or girlfriends, or the counsel that you hear regarding your business or your finances? Do you weigh counsel that you receive against what God's Word says?

Words are hugely important. Listening to sound, healthy words will lead to God-honoring healthy lives and listening to false words will lead to sick living. Bad words are like viruses that will infect your soul with spiritual illness.

I love the Message version of the Bible and the way that Gene Peterson expresses 1 Timothy 6:3-5.

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These are the things I want you to teach and preach. If you have leaders there who teach otherwise, or refuse the solid words of our Master Jesus and his godly instruction, tag them for what they are: ignorant windbags who infect the air with germs of envy, controversy, bad-mouthing, and suspicious rumors. Eventually there is an epidemic of backstabbing, and truth is but a distant memory. They think religion is a way to make a fast buck.

What do you fill your soul with? Do you fill it with life-giving teaching from God's Word, or to quote the apostle Paul, are you listening to ignorant windbags, who will make your soul sick?

Look at what Jesus holds out as the answer to what the church in Pergamum needs. Verse 17

SLIDE

...To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna...

Manna was the life-giving food that God gave from heaven to sustain the Israelites as they journeyed through the desert. Jesus says in place of the spiritual junk food, in place of the TV talk show hosts, and radio windbags, and self-help books, and all the counsel that simply caters to what individuals want to hear, Jesus offers you food from heaven, food that will build you up, food that will make you healthy, food that will not only make you happy, but if you put it into practice it will make God happy.

If you want to grow, if you want to have a healthy relationship with God, if you desire a healthy relationship with other people, especially people you love, if you want to have a healthy, emotional life, if you want to have a healthy, well-ordered soul, then listen to healthy teaching. Take it in. Apply it to your life.

SLIDE – Revelation 2:18-29

Rev 2:18 “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

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

Rev 2:19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Rev 2:20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Rev 2:21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

Rev 2:22 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.

Rev 2:23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Rev 2:24 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):

Rev 2:25 Only hold on to what you have until I come.

Rev 2:26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—

Rev 2:27 ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter;
he will dash them to pieces like pottery’—

just as I have received authority from my Father.

Rev 2:28 I will also give him the morning star.

Rev 2:29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The city of Thyatira was a commercial center where weavers, leather workers, potters, and bronze workers lived. In fact in Acts 16 we read of the apostle

Paul's encounter with a woman named Lydia, who came from the city of Thyatira. She was a seller of purple goods. It was a commercial center.

William Ramsey, the great historian of the first century, said that there were more trade guilds in Thyatira than in any other city in the ancient world. These trade guilds operated like closed shops do today. Unless you belonged to the guild, you couldn't do business. Unfortunately, for Christians many of the guilds were interwoven with pagan religious practices. The guild would get together in a meeting hall and have a meal dedicated to some pagan god. Sometimes there would be pressure to worship at one of the city's temples, or to participate in the sexual immorality that was part of ancient pagan practice.

In the church there was apparently a very prominent woman who was urging compromise and accommodation with these practices. Verses 20-21

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Rev 2:20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Rev 2:21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

Jezebel was not the woman's name. This is a reference to the Old Testament Queen Jezebel who was the wife of the Israelite King Ahab. She worshipped the Canaanite God Baal and encouraged the Jewish king and the Jewish people to do the same.

So John is saying that in the church at Thyatira there was a prophetess who functioned like the Old Testament Queen Jezebel. She was seducing the church and saying to the church: Let's just go along with the rest of society. The mess here had to do with the temptation to compromise. Jesus is looking for an uncompromised church. This woman was saying: Being a Christian doesn't mean that you have to lose your shirt in business. Being a Christian doesn't mean you can't have sex, if you really love someone, even if you aren't married. Let's just go along and get along and not make waves.

Have you ever heard that voice, friend? The voice that urges you to compromise in business. Have you heard that voice that urges you to compromise in the area of your sexuality.

- Come on, this is a messy world.
- You can't be successful in this world without getting your hands dirty. That's just the reality.
- It's simply dog-eat-dog out there.
- If you want to play by the rules, you are going to lose.
- Look, you have a God-given duty to provide for your family. You can't draw the line so sharply.

- Other Christians don't have the problem you have going to that particular new training seminar.
- Other Christians don't have the problem you have enforcing the new policy. Just go along. Don't make waves. You don't want to be labeled a religious fanatic or troublemaker, do you? You've invested a lot in your career. You don't want to commit career suicide, do you?

Have you heard that voice? Have you heard the voice that says:

- Look, you are an adult. No one can expect you to be sexually abstinent.
- Sure, they talk about that at church, but your situation is different. It is not like you are a virgin anyway. After all, you are a divorced woman; you are a divorced man. You had a baby.
- Men need sex. That's just the way we're wired.
- Your boyfriend said "I love you." Isn't that enough?

Have you ever heard the voice that says:

- Don't draw the line so sharply. If you must draw the line, make it a dotted line, so you can move back and forth across the line.

What does Jesus say you need to do with this kind of pressure from society?
Verse 25,

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...hold on to what you have until I come.

In other words you need to take a stand.

Sometimes the issue is not how can we advance, how can we gain ground. Sometimes the issue is not how can we change the world, sometimes the issue is how can we not be changed by the world? Sometimes the issue is how you can not lose ground. How can you hold on and not lose what God has put in your life? How can you not move backwards? Are any of you in that position right now, where the issue for you is just holding on, just taking your stand for your marriage, or your stand for financial integrity, or your stand for sexual purity?

And you know, it is not true that everyone compromises or sells out for the almighty dollar. I think of courageous pharmacists around America right now who are unwilling to sell a morning after pill that will cause abortions. The press hates them. The press distorts their positions. These pharmacists are facing legal pressure. They may lose their licenses. The news is saying these so-called "Pharmacists for Life," come on, be reasonable, use a little common sense, lighten up, go along. It is only a pill. And then the voice comes and says: Come on, you didn't make it. You didn't manufacture it. You just work for a big company that sells it. And if you don't sell it, someone else will. Why put your

career on the line, something you've trained for for years to not do something that other people are going to do anyway?

But praise God not everyone compromises. Not everyone goes along. Some people take their stand.

I think of whistle blowers who report corruption in corporations. I think of whistle blowers who report corruption in the government, or people who blew the whistle on the torture in Abu Gharb. I think of people who simply will not work in an atmosphere of sexual harassment. I think of people who have stood historically against racial bigotry in their companies. I think of so many Christians who have paid a huge price career-wise because they took a stand.

Many of you are familiar with the name CS Lewis. Without a doubt, he is the most influential Christian writer of the past 100 years. Lewis was a great scholar at Oxford University. His students adored him. He was an incredibly hard worker and prolific writer. He wrote brilliant literary criticisms but he was never made a full professor at Oxford. He was forced to leave his beloved university after 30 years for Cambridge University for one simple reason: he was an outspoken Christian. As his biographer notes: CS Lewis committed the one unforgivable sin. He was a man who was serious about wanting to convert others.

Friend, is there some place in your work life where you are just going with the flow, rather than taking a stand? You are going along with a policy or training program, or a way of doing business simply because of financial pressure and your desire for career success? You've compromised.

And what about the other issue that Jesus spoke to the church at Thyatira about – the issue of compromising our sexual morality. People ask: Why do Christians make such a big deal about sex? Why this hard line that there is simply no room for sexual intimacy outside of heterosexual marriage? Why?

You know, I rarely hear people say: Thank you to Jesus for giving us clear instructions regarding our sexuality. Thank you for the wonderful boundaries that you gave me, Lord. Why are our lives such messes, especially our sexual lives?

Most often I hear people resenting Jesus' boundaries – whether it has to do with premarital sex, or extramarital sex, or homosexual sex. We resent Jesus' boundaries. We say: I'm going to live the way I please. I'll sleep with whomever I please. I don't have to listen to some outdated morality, a bunch of do's and don'ts. Love makes it right. It is OK for me to sleep with my girlfriend or boyfriend, so long as we're in love.

We deceive ourselves into thinking that our wisdom about life is greater than God's wisdom. You can't break God's law, any one of his laws, whether we are

talking about sexual commands or other commands without paying a price. There is a moral order to the universe. God has worked the world so that it runs in certain directions and when we rub our hand across the grain of God's moral order, we get splinters in our hand.

Brothers and sisters, be honest. What is the price that you have personally paid for going against God's wisdom in the area of your sexuality? Have you paid an emotional price? I've talked with lots of women and men over the years that have paid an incredible emotional price for violating God's sexual boundaries. I talked with a woman some time ago who said, "Rich, I met a man here at church. He was really nice. We started to date and I fell for him. We ended up sleeping together. I thought we were in love. A few weeks later he told me he wasn't interested in seeing me anymore and now he is pursuing women at other churches. It is destroying me."

I've had men say to me the thought of her making love to another man makes me physically nauseous. I can't take it.

There are huge emotional consequences to having sex. And if you say: Not for me. I'm able to do it without paying the big price. Then something inside of you, friend, has died. Congratulations. You've succeeded in killing your God-created capacity to feel and to be vulnerable and to be hurt.

But the spiritual consequences for having sex in violation of God's boundaries are even greater than the emotional consequences. Have you ever gone to church and just felt filthy? You couldn't really pray or sing because of the thing you did sexually? Have you ever taken communion and hardly be able to examine yourself without feeling like you needed to put the communion cup down? That there was no purity there because of what you did the night before? Some people live with spiritual guilt for so long that they don't remember what it feels like to experience God's joy or God's power, or just a sense of cleanness before the Lord. There are spiritual consequences.

I've watched men and women overthrow God's calling on their lives. They are in this dynamic ministry. God is blessing them. They are being used to extend the kingdom in a significant way. They hook up with someone; they sleep together; they are physically intimate and pretty soon, forget about the worship team, or missions, or small group leadership, or something that three months before was the will of God for them. We trade in our calling when we have sex outside of the boundaries.

There are relational consequences. I've watched men and women prematurely marry without really dealing with obvious issues because they feel that: Hey, we've jumped off the cliff already. What's the point in waiting? What's the point in delaying? We're already physically attached to each other, we might as well marry and then, of course, they have to deal with all the issues that were not

dealt with before their wedding day. Then this crop of weeds comes up and they have to pour on the weed killer.

Brothers and sisters, God wants to protect us. He doesn't want to rip you off. His wisdom about everything, including our sexuality, is greater than our wisdom. Do you believe that? Do you submit to the wisdom of God concerning your body? Do you submit to the wisdom of God concerning your work, your finances? Take your stand within the boundaries that God has drawn in business, in your sexuality, in your finances.

Jesus says hold on. Draw the line. Stay under God's protection in this messy world.

Let me just close with this. Where is the strength to do what Jesus is asking us to do? Where do we find the grace, the strength, the power to take a stand, to have courage, to go after truth? I want to close with Revelation 3:20. It is a verse that many of us memorized from the book of Revelation. It is a verse that applies to the beginning of the Christian life.

SLIDE

Rev 3:20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

All of us have to come to a place of need to acknowledge Jesus, to say I'm going to open the door of my life to you Lord. I need you. I want to give you a chance. Come in. Clean up the mess that my life is I can't do it alone. All of us need to do that, to take that step of faith.

But Revelation 3:20 is not just a salvation verse. Revelation 3:20 is a life verse.

- If you've been shutting the door on Jesus in your sex life, you need to let him in.
- If you've been closing the door to Jesus concerning anxieties, you need to let him in.
- If you've been closing the door to Jesus in the area of your job, you need to let him in.
- If you've been closing the door to Jesus in your entertainment choices, you need to let him in.

Let me close by asking you: Is there any place of need in your life that wouldn't be helped if you had more of Jesus in that area? You think your marriage would be better if you had more of Christ? Do you think you would live happier as a single if you had more of Christ in your singleness? Do you think if you had more of Christ you would be assisted in an area of temptation to compromise? When you go before God in prayer, you are simply saying: Lord, I'm throwing the door

open and I want to welcome Jesus Christ into this particular situation, into this need, into this weakness.

And that is what Jesus wants for the whole church – to throw the doors of the church open and to welcome him in. That is ultimately what he is looking for. Let's pray.

What Jesus Is Looking For In The Church – Part 2

Rich Nathan

April 23-24, 2005

Revelation: Looking at Life From the Perspective of Heaven Series

Revelation 2:8-3:22

- I. The Church Is A Messy Place.

- II. Jesus Looks For A Willingness To Suffer (Revelation 2:8-12) Therefore We Need Courage. (Revelation 2:10)

- III. Jesus Looks For Healthy Teaching (Revelation 2:12-18) Therefore We Need Food From Heaven. (Revelation 2:17)

- IV. Jesus Looks For An Uncompromising Church (Revelation 2:18-29) Therefore We Need To Take A Stand. (Revelation 2:25)

- V. Jesus Looks For A Spiritually Passionate Church (Revelation:14-22) Therefore We Need To Welcome Christ. (Revelation 3:20)