



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

March 23, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

Lenten Midweek 4

First Lesson: [1 Kings 16:29-33](#)

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Revelation 2:18-29](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 25:31-46](#)

### **Thyatira: Immorality, Highway to the Grave**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

This first question I'm going to address to the adults because some of you kids have this person actually sitting here in church with you. I'm going to ask the adults that are here to think about and picture if one of your great-grandparents, who I am assuming is in heaven, were to come back and sit down with you and watch an evening of prime time television as you flick around from channel to channel and watch some of the topics that are described there, how do you think they would react? Do you think quite possibly they might be appalled at some of the stuff they might see? What do you think they'd say? We've kind of become desensitized to a lot of things God says are sin. We put our feet up in our recliner and watch it every night. It's our form of entertainment nowadays it seems like.

A better question—what would God say? What would Jesus say? I think when we read the letter to the church of Thyatira we hear what Jesus would say to those who are so used to sin and so used to seeing it regularly that they don't think of it as that bad and quite frankly, they are enticed to embrace a lot of it because it's just the norm. I think that's exactly what we hear in the letter to Thyatira today.

Thyatira was a town I think a lot of people here would be comfortable in. The letters to the seven churches started along the coastline and they moved their way north. Now they moved inland a little bit. It's about 10 miles southwest of where we were last Wednesday, in Pergamum. Pergamum was a big center for empire cult and all these other things that were going on, but Thyatira was more of a town made up of people with trades. Remember Lydia from Philippi? She was the seller of purple clothes. She dyed purple clothes. She actually came from Thyatira earlier on. It seems like they were

known for that kind of trade. They had other craftsmen. They were an area where there were a lot of good, hardworking people who devoted themselves to the trade and put their nose to the grindstone and just did the work. You can kind of hear that in what Jesus said to them. "I know your hard work, your love, your faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first." They were putting their faith into practice more than when they had first come to know Jesus. These were good, God-fearing people who worked hard and then wanted those who knew Jesus as the only one who could take away their sins, the only one who could open heaven to them, to live in response to Him. As they grew in their faith and knew more about Jesus, they wanted to do more.

But this is really one of the longest sections (it might be the longest) of "I have this against you..." You hear that in all these letters we've been looking at. Here is where Jesus is telling us "This is the kind of stuff I don't want to see in any of my local congregations, whether it's Thyatira in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Asia Minor or whether it's Morrison in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America." Here is what He said He had against them. ***"I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling."*** God is looking for congregations that don't tolerate what God calls sin. In Thyatira, I wonder if there was pressure from some of the guilds that they belonged to and some of the things they had become so accustomed to seeing over and over and over. If you were in these guilds, you would go to some of these pagan rituals, which involved ritual sex with the temple prostitutes, and that's what they were used to. That's what they had seen growing up. And now this person that He calls "Jezebel"—I doubt that was really her name. I think it's probably more of a reference to our First Lesson; Queen Jezebel, who led King Ahab away and led Israel away through the worship of Baal and sexual immorality. She calls herself a prophet is saying "This is what God wants you to do." It sounds like she was just taking the pagan teachings and saying "This is really what the Lord wants you to do." Even though they were hardworking Christian people, God has against them that they tolerated it.

When you tolerate that in your midst, it leads more and more people away from God and to these sinful activities that they had seen all their lives and they were used to. In their mind, they associated with worship of a god, so to them it was no small leap to say this is worship of "the Lord." It was a problem because God had given this person, that was leading people in the congregation astray, time to repent, but they didn't want to.

So then God says there are going to be consequences. He talks about physical consequences of putting them on a bed of suffering from their sexual sins. He talks about eternal consequences also. For those who do not turn back to God, those who do not repent (turn away from their sin and turn to Jesus as the answer to that sin), when that Last Judgment comes that we heard of in the Gospel, they will be lost eternally.

God says "I don't want that. I give people time to repent because I want them to be in heaven with me. I don't give them time to repent because I'm indifferent towards sin. No, I give people time to repent because I want everyone to turn back to me and find forgiveness for their sins in Christ." But if we are unwilling to acknowledge sin, if we are unwilling to admonish sin, we are saying "I don't care if those other people aren't going to be in heaven with me." God says "I don't want that in my local congregations."

It's pretty easy to see that God says tolerating sin is sin. That's what He is telling us today. So how do you go about not tolerating sin? I would say in the past Christians have made a mistake by driving in the ditch on one side of the road by saying those that tolerate sin are in the ditch on this side of the road. But I think some Christians have gone in the ditch on the other side of the road by saying "I'm not tolerating sin and I'm going to rebuke that sin. I'm going to point it out. I'm going to do it harshly and unlovingly" so that you put up a wall so the person you are trying to admonish and lead back to Christ doesn't even hear what you say. We are to not tolerate sin, but we are always to remain loving. We are always to remain cognoscente of how important it is that people hear that what they are doing is what God calls sin. Our job is not to be right about whether it's sin or not. Our job is to make sure we are heard so that person turns from that sin back to Jesus. Have Christians at times shouted so harshly and so loudly and so abusively against certain sins that anyone in the room who had committed that sin would think God would never love them? Absolutely! I've watched it happen. We can't do that.

We like to rank sins. I can guarantee you this is how every one of us is going to rank the sins. The sins I do aren't that bad. The sins you do, God really can't stand them. That's what our own sinful nature is going to do every time. I've heard people speak out harshly against abortion. One of my best friends in high school had an abortion. I've been in the room when she was hearing that, and it crushed her. Yes, we can say abortion is against God's will, most certainly, but we need to do it in a way that we can still communicate to those who have committed that sin that God still died for that sin! "Jesus was perfect in that place. Jesus died in that place so that you are forgiven. Come back to your Savior."

When Paul talks in this one letter about all these different sexual sins, he says "And that's what you were, but you were washed in the blood of the Lamb and you are now forgiven." We want to get people back to THAT point and not say "I don't tolerate sins so much that everyone who knows I'm against it won't talk to me anymore." That doesn't serve God.

So how do we go about not tolerating sin? We just kindly, patiently and as lovingly as we can say, "What you're doing is against the will of God and it can separate you from Him for all of eternity. I don't want that to happen because I love you and I want you in heaven with me." We can say that we don't tolerate sin and still admonish sin but the

question we have to ask ourselves is if that's what God wants among us here today, in Morrison Zion Lutheran Church, are we doing it? What are the sins that we are accustomed to seeing that we don't think twice about anymore, that maybe we think aren't that bad or are no big deal? They might be some of the same things that were in Thyatira.

I talked to some of our members who, when they had been struggling with certain sexual sins let's say, tell me "Well, you don't know how many people in the congregation are already doing this pastor." I'll say "You're probably right. But if you do, have you told them that it's wrong?" The answer is to change the subject because they're trying to defend the sexual sin by saying others are committing it. They don't want to talk about saying it is wrong. So could it be the same thing? Sure. But just because our society says it is okay it doesn't mean God says it's okay. Our chief concern always has to be what God says, not what society says. But we have to admonish it in love.

Here's a sin I think in our congregation we've gotten used to, that we see regularly and we don't think is that bad. ***"...let us... not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*** [\(Hebrews 10:24-25\)](#) "Do not despise preaching and His Word, but gladly hear and learn it" is how Luther put it from the Third Commandment. [\(Exodus 20:7\)](#) We have become accustomed to people despising God's Word and not thinking it's that big of a deal. It's not like they killed someone. But God says that is sin. He says it's immoral. Moral is what is right before God. Immoral is what is wrong before God.

Things that are immoral are not just the terrible, bad things as we would view them. God says they are all sins. "Whoever breaks the least of these commands is guilty of breaking them all." [\(Matthew 5:19\)](#) If you broke one you broke them all and you're immoral.

Our job is always to connect people back to Jesus, to rebuke sin, to admonish sin, and to lead people back to Jesus; not tolerate it, not say that it's okay. You heard what God said. Jesus goes at length about this. He says ***"I will repay each of you according to your deeds."*** He's not just talking to Jezebel there. He is talking to those who tolerate sin and don't admonish it. He's calling that sin.

So what does our God say to you? He says ***"Now I say to the rest of 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, except to hold on to what you have...'"*** Holding on to what you have is holding on to Jesus. These Satan so-called deep secrets—I think that is interesting. I've heard this same argument from people that profess Christ as Savior. "Well, pastor, you don't know what it's like because you haven't experienced any of these sins. You grew up in a bubble. You went to a Christian grade school. You went to a Christian high school. You went to a Christian college. You went to a Christian seminary. You married a Christian wife. You don't know what any of this

is like because you haven't done it." So, I can't rebuke murder unless I murder someone? I'm not going by whether I know it or have experienced it or not. I'm going by what God says. Isn't that what He has called us to do? If He says that it's sin, it is sin.

There were those teaching then just like that same person, that same thought process that led to that comment that you can't know what sin is unless you've really experienced it, so you really should go to the temple prostitutes because then you'll know and you can address it. I think God is talking with sarcasm there when He calls it ***"Satan's so-called deep secrets."*** I think He's saying it's a bunch of hooey.

So He says to hold on to what you have. Hold on to Jesus. Don't hold on to your opinion. Hold on to Jesus. Don't hold on to what you think is right or wrong; hold on to what Jesus says is right and wrong. Don't hold on to what you think takes away sin; hold on to Jesus only because He is the only one who takes away your sins. "And to those who overcome, I will give the morning star." Jesus Christ is the morning star. The blessings He won for us are forgiveness, life and eternal salvation with Him forever in heaven. That's what God says awaits us. Not because we're so good or we've done so much.

Did you notice the believers in the Matthew passage in the Gospel today? "When was I doing what you called me to do, God? I wasn't keeping track of it by checking off all that stuff." You just lived naturally to God. It isn't what you do, it's what God did for you and that naturally leads you to serve Jesus. So what still saves you is Jesus, not anything you do. Hold on to Jesus. Keep Him close in your heart. Grow in your knowledge of Him and live what He has taught you. That's what God is looking for in us. When we fail, and we will, hold on to Jesus and know that your God still loves you and has taken away your sins through His life and His death. That's what moves us to want to do better tomorrow than we did today. Amen.

**And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.