

## **An open letter: Revelation 2.12-end**

As a culture we are not unfamiliar with open letters. There have been many open letters in the media over the past few months addressed to the government on how to deal with Covid, how to manage education and how to boost the economy. And many of these letters written by specialists are often good and have helpful things to say. Well in today's passage it is a letter from Jesus to Pergamum and Thyatira.

Pergamum is a large city of 120,000 people, a place of learning with a library and a medical school. Idol worship and emperor worship were both strong in the city; and it was the centre of worship of Asklepios (the saviour god). It is a powerful city, exercising authority over other cities, including Smyrna.

In spite of these influences the church of Pergamum had not been destroyed. And so Jesus was able to write to the church and congratulate them for their faithfulness. "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" (v13). It is encouraging to see that Jesus gives Antipas the very title "faithful witness" which has earlier been given to him (1:5).

But Jesus also made a complaint that although Pergamum has remain loyal to him; at the same time it tolerated the fellowship of false teachers who hold the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of Nicolaitans (verse 14-15). And so it is important that the church must always remain to the truth of the gospel and renouncing all the falsehood.

Thyatira, on the other hand, was noted for its commercial rather than

political importance. It was a prosperous trading centre and was well known for different trades. For example, it had associations for bakers and bronze workers, for clothes and cobblers, for weavers, tanners, dyers and potters. It is interesting to note that it was from Thyatira that Lydia one of Philippi's notable converts had come. She traded in material treated with Thyatira's purple dye and is described by Luke as 'a dealer in purple cloth' (Acts 16:14). It is possible that Lydia, new born in Christ, on returning to Thyatira had been the means of planting the Christian church there.

In Jesus' letter to Thyatira, he emphasizes holiness as the next essential mark of a model church. He begins his letter in commending the church in Thyatira for their love and faith, their service and perseverance. Pointing out the four virtues that a church must have which include the triad of faith, hope and love. And therefore Thyatira has excelled in their growth. But they are not free from problems: they still have their share of challenges.

There is a picture of a poisonous weed growing in their fields, because they are guilty of moral compromising. The church has tolerated a self-styled prophetess, symbolically named Jezebel after king Ahab's wicked queen. She was leading some of Thyatira's church members astray, pursuing them that Christian freedom gave Christians licence to engage immorality. And so Jesus called on her to repent but she had been unwilling. And so his judgment will inevitably fall on her and also on her followers unless they repented of her ways. It is important to note that Jesus is asking the church to holiness, self-control and Christ-likeness as essential characteristics of a model church. Tolerance is not a virtue if it is evil that is being tolerated. God still says to his people, "Be holy because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16; Lev. 19.2)

And so in these two letters we are reminded to be faithful to the truth of the gospel and live the life of holiness.

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