

**"Hope in Thyatira"**

**Scripture Passages:** 1) **Matthew 10:5-15**  
2) **Acts 5:1-11**  
3) **Revelation 2:18-29**

**Review:** How is the health of your sense of hope? John wrote the Book of Revelation in response to the erosion of hope within the seven congregations he served. In Ephesus it was lack of love within the congregation. In Smyrna it was fear of death. In Pergamum it was accommodation to the ways of the culture. Each community had some situation that was eroding their sense of hope. How about for you and us? What erodes our hope? What would John write to us?

The first three churches were in large important cities within the Roman Empire. Today we turn to the country, to the small town of Thyatira. What was going on in that community and how might it relate to our life together here in Paw Paw?

**Read Revelation 2:18-29.**

**Background Information on Thyatira:** One commentator wrote, "The longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to the least known, least important, and least remarkable of the cities." Thyatira was a blip on the map. In describing the route to Thyatira, Mounce wrote, "Following the overland route from Pergamum to Sardis, the traveler would head eastward along the south bank of the Caicus River, turn southward over a low-lying range of hills, and descend into the broad and fertile valley of the Lycus. Thyatira lay on the south bank of the Lycus River about 40 miles from Pergamum." Sounds like a beautiful place to live, a fertile valley with a substantial river.

**Praise:** As we have noticed in his previous letters John usually begins with a word of praise. We all appreciate some positive feedback. He wrote, "I know your works – your love, faith, service and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first."

Wow! The congregation in Thyatira, unlike the congregation in Pergamum, had given themselves to transformation. Their love, faith, service and endurance had grown. What a beautiful tribute to make to anyone or any group. What a beautiful word of encouragement to share with the congregation. As followers of Jesus, I can't think of a more positive comment than to notice how a person or a group of people has given themselves to the process of transformation. We can only hope such is the case for us, that people are able to see our growth, how we have grown in our love, our faith, our service, our endurance. What a tremendous gift to give ourselves and the world, a commitment to transformation; after all that is how the world is transformed.

I watched the movie Invictus not to long ago. It is a story about Nelson Mandela and South Africa. There are some powerful scenes in the capital building on the day that Mandela takes office. The movie portrays the white workers packing everything up, anticipating that Mandela will simply replace them. That is not his plan, however. There is a powerful scene where Mandela speaks to all the workers encouraging them to stay on and become a part of the healing process. Throughout the movie we see powerful transformation as black and white work alongside each other, and play alongside each other, as the transformation of a nation begins to take place.

What a glorious word to share with the people of Thyatira, encouraging them to continue giving themselves to transformation. That is a critical Word for us to hear as well. Giving ourselves to transformation is essential for our life together and our ministry in the world.

**Jezebel:** John does have an issue to raise with the congregation in Thyatira, though. The issue is actually a person. John calls the person Jezebel. That is not actually the person's name, but obviously it is someone everyone knows, someone that John had confronted before. John used the name Jezebel to compare the situation in Thyatira to the Jezebel who caused so many problems for the Old Testament prophet Elijah.

In Pergamum the congregation was accommodating the culture around the areas of sexuality and diet. In Thyatira the congregation was accommodating a person who was also leading people astray in the areas of sexuality and diet. Most likely the Jezebel in this case was related to the trade guilds in Thyatira.

Thyatira was a blue collar, community. It was a working class neighborhood. Probably because of the river and the fertile soil Thyatira was a center for woolworkers, linen-workers, tanners, potters, bakers, slave-dealers, and bronze-smiths. To participate in these trades, however, you had to be a part of the trade guild including participation in that guild's traditions and gatherings. Often those traditions and gatherings involved worship of various Greek gods, for instance making food sacrifices to them or participating in fertility rites usually involving sexual encounters of some kind. The Jezebel in the congregation was encouraging people to stay committed to their trade guilds even when it meant going against their new faith in Yahweh, and their walk with Christ. John realized that this Jezebel could easily erode hope and dim the light of the congregation. John made it clear that it was time for the congregation to cut their ties with this Jezebel.

**Our Friends Matter:** Basically, what John was saying here was, "Your friends matter; who you hang with matters!" In the very tragic story we read in Acts we see, for instance, how critical our choice of a spouse can be. Our spouse can lead us astray, down a path of hopelessness and dim light. Two of our closest couple friends have experienced affairs in their marriage. Those choices have not brought hope and light to their relationship, to their families, to the communities they were serving.

These situations illustrate that even the closest people to us can lead us down an unhealthy path. Who we hang with matters! Do the people we spend time with encourage us on the journey of transformation? Do the people we spend time with help us grow in our love, our faith, our service, our endurance?

Have you surrounded yourself with people who are praying for you as you journey along on this path of transformation? Have you surrounded yourself with people who hold you accountable on this journey of transformation? Have you surrounded yourself with people who build up your hope, and strengthen your light? Or do you primarily have friends named Jezebel?

For those of us who are parents, we have all known the concern of a child hanging with friends we didn't particularly appreciate, or dating someone who we didn't think was a positive, hopeful person. We see this friend issue clearly for others, but do we see it for ourselves?

**The Church:** Of course this is supposed to be the very purpose of the church. This is why Jesus spent three years with his disciples, forming them into a group of supportive, prayerful friends. Jesus intended for the disciples to hold each other accountable as they journeyed together on the road of transformation. That was a primary purpose for the formation of the church, so that we had a built in support system to journey alongside of us.

Churches that live this out well will move through this critical moment of history that you and

I are living through right now, while those that don't won't survive.

**Conclusion:** John wants us to take seriously who we hang with. Our friends truly do matter, no matter our age, we need to surround ourselves with people who will hold us accountable on this journey of faith.

The great news is that as a church we can be these kinds of friends for each other. The question is will we?

Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs, so that they were never alone on the journey. Do we have someone in our life that we pray with regularly? Do we have someone who asks us, "How is God calling you to grow in faith at the moment?" Do we have someone who holds us accountable, asks us questions like, "What haven't you told me that you need to?" Or, "How did you experience God today? Do we have friends in our life who nurture hope and encourage the growth of our light? Or do we have Jezebels for friends?

The brightness of our lampstand will grow tremendously as we learn to live as friends who hold one another accountable on the journey. Will we risk living in such a bold fashion with one another? Will we risk inviting someone to live in such a bold fashion with us? These are the questions of Thyatira. Let us ponder them for own lives, then let us take action. Amen.