

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Lenten Letters*, No. 4

The Beauty of Purity

March 22, 2020 (video)

Well, good morning everyone. This is our second Sunday for a virtual message – and let me say, I know some of you are thinking, “All his messages are virtual.”

Still, let’s start by standing and greeting those around you in your house there – maybe introduce yourself to someone you don’t know. Use this time to reacquaint yourself with your family.

Speaking of reacquainting ourselves with family, one of the pastors from the conference sent me a funny thing – in light of the ending of sports and no sports on the TV. It said, “Day two without sports: Found a lady sitting on my couch yesterday. Apparently, she’s my wife. She seems nice.”

These are strange days, aren’t they? I’ve told my boys over and over, “Guys, you’re living through history in the making here. Write down some of the ways you’re thinking and feeling in these days. Your kids will want to know what it was like.”

You’ve heard, of course, that our governor has given the order for no public gatherings until further notice, so we may be doing this, or something like this, for a while.

In an effort to stay connected, let me remind you again that the church office is sending out the e-mail prayer chain almost every day, and I’m sending some news and updates just about every day. If you’d like to be on that e-mail list, shoot a note to the church office – office@wfmcc.net, and we’ll get you on that.

If you have prayer requests, send those to the church. If they’re just for the pastors, mark them that way and we’ll keep those to ourselves. If they’re not so marked, then we’ll share them via the e-chain.

Now, I’d encourage you...whether this video thing is your primary means of worship or not...and really, there are so many good options out there...you can listen to some really good preachers and teachers...but whatever you choose, please take some intentional time on the Lord’s Day to focus on Him. Lead your family in an intentional worship time. Don’t let worship become just the 15 minutes you listen to this or some other online preacher. Take the opportunity to pray with others and sing a song or two. Read from God’s word. Pray the Lord’s prayer. Recite a creed or some classic confession of faith. And take time to listen to what the Spirit wants to say to you.

Some of our Adult Bible Fellowship groups are going online through Zoom video meetings, and once they have the technology figured out, they’ll issue some invitations to the rest of us who’d care to join them, probably next week, so watch for that.

Yes, these are strange days, and they won’t last forever, but these could be great days, spiritually, for us all...for the whole American church.

God doesn’t waste situations like this...and we shouldn’t either. God has a word for us in all this!

To be honest, I wasn’t sure what to do for this “broadcast” this morning – whether to do something unique to the situation like I did last Sunday, or go back to the series I’d already planned for this season of Lent.

The more I worked on this though, the more I realized we can do both, based on the passage I was intending to speak on today which has to do with the fourth church written to in the book of Revelation – the church at Thyatira. That passage is in Revelation, chapter 2, verses 18 through 29, and I’ll begin by reading that. Revelation 2, starting at verse 18:

The apostle John is writing to us the words of Jesus, so this is Jesus speaking and saying, “*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. 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.

²⁰ *Nevertheless, 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. 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 I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.*

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.’*

²⁶ *To the one who is victorious 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. ²⁸ I will also give that one the morning star. ²⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

It’s interesting that the longest of the letters to these churches was written to the church in the most inconsequential of the cities. Of all the cities mentioned, Thyatira was the smallest. It was known for its trade and industry, and especially textiles. The woman Lydia, the dealer in purple cloth that we meet in Acts, Chapter 16, was from here.

But beyond that, it had no cultural or religious significance, other than being an outpost for the protection of Pergamum.

Since there was not a huge cult of idols at Thyatira, it doesn't seem that there was any real threat of persecution hanging over the Christians there, like there was in most of the other places.

So, what was the condition of the church? Well, it seems that there was good news – and there was bad news.

Jesus gives the good news first. There in verse 19 He says, *“I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.”*

There were good things going on at Thyatira – there was faith, there were deeds based in faith, and it seems that the conditions of faith and service were actually improving there. They were doing, Jesus said, more than they were at first.

So that is good.

But Jesus also says that He had something against them – specifically, verse 20 there, that they “tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet, but misleads my servants through her teaching into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.”

This church seems to have the opposite problem of the church at Ephesus, the first church we looked at.

Remember its problem? The church at Ephesus was doctrinally pure – they held all the right beliefs. But they had disconnected from their culture so much that they weren't making a difference in their city as they used to. They were pure, but ineffective as far as working any mission to transform their culture.

We said a couple weeks ago that Jesus had their heads, but no longer their hearts. The Ephesians had lost that passion that comes with first love.

Here though, in Thyatira, it seems the problem is reversed. The Christians in Thyatira were engaged with their community and culture, but their engagement was affecting their doctrine.

They were giving in to the temptations of sexual immorality – probably that associated with idol worship. And Jesus says, they were also eating food sacrificed to idols. That means that they were engaging too far into the lifestyle of idol worship – they were entering into the temples, eating at their feasts.

They'd become too comfortable with the secular culture around them. They'd melted right into the things they accepted as normal, so much so that they couldn't be seen as any different, or much different, than those around them who didn't know Jesus.

In the name of engaging with their culture, they'd lost what made them different – they'd lost that moral purity that Jesus brings to people. As Steven Tyler once said, “they'd become so open minded that their brains fell out.”

This is probably why Jesus introduces Himself to the believers there as the Son of God, “whose eyes are like blazing fire.”

Fire is the great purifier, of course, and in His introduction, Jesus wants them to remember, not only that He Himself is absolutely pure, but that He works to make pure all who follow Him.

After all, that's what holiness is: purity. God makes His people pure as He is pure, which is what makes us so different from the world around us. We are pure, like God, and we call people to that purity in heart and life and motive, because that's how God created us to be in the first place and that's God's best for us – to live as He made us to live ethically, morally, sexually, and in every other way.

No matter how engaged we are with the world around us, we'll never show them Jesus if we let the world dilute our own purity.

So, Jesus is calling His people to Himself for refinement: to be burned with His fire, not for destruction, but for purification; to be laid bare before Him – to have stripped away all that is unlike Him; and to be grown into an ever more complete likeness of Christ.

This is still Jesus' call for those who follow Him. And it's why, I believe Scripture teaches, He allows certain things to happen in our lives, and maybe this virus is an example of that.

Jesus brings things into our lives – or allows things in our lives – to test us, to refine us, and to bring us back to Himself for the purposes of purification.

And this virus is doing just that, and on a world-wide fashion. Look how it's stripping away all of the distractions we've surrounded ourselves with – all of our entertainment, all of our measures of success, all of our wealth – and it's causing those who will to face those things that are most important in life.

That's purification.

And that's a way I think we all could pray in these days.

There's no point being angry about all this – we can't do anything about it really.

No point moping about what's been cancelled. Or being sad.

What if we put our energy into praying, “Lord, how might you want to refine me through this?”

Not, “God refine him or her, because You know they need refining.”

Let's not pray God's fire onto others. Let's open ourselves to His purification.

“Lord, how have I become too much like the world? How has your purity been diluted in my life? Show me through this virus. Show me though this unexpected time we have. Use this experience to refine me, that I might show the world around me who You are – who You really are.”

I think that's at least one way we might respond to this circumstance – and I know it would please Jesus, because that's what He's asking for from His people at Thyatira.

How is Jesus calling us – calling me and you, as He called the believers at Thyatira – to a new place of purity?

God, help us to hear you – to hear the voice of your Spirit in these strange days, such that we come out of these days of testing looking and acting and being more like Jesus. Amen.

May the Lord give you a blessed week. With His Spirit as our helper, let's be Christ's presence in our world, OK?