

St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church, Modesto, California  
Midweek Advent Service  
December 8, 2004

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Micheel

Revelation 2:18-29

***“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. <sup>19</sup> I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.***

***<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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): <sup>25</sup> Only hold on to what you have until I come.***

***<sup>26</sup> To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—<sup>27</sup> '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. <sup>28</sup> I will also give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*** NIV

***Blazing Eyes and Brazen Feet***

Jesus uses them...

...in terrifying judgment  
...in forceful conquest

What if, about 2000 years from now (if the world is still here then), some archaeologists found coins from the United States of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century? What would they be able to learn about us? They would notice, wouldn't they, the pictures of our nation's famous leaders: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln. They might think we were really fascinated by eagles like the one on the back of a quarter. Or not. They would likely figure out that we like eagles because of what they represent: power and keen vision.

Did you know that archeologists have discovered coins from Thyatira, the ancient city in Asia Minor? They have. Thyatira is the location of the Christian congregation to

whom this letter was addressed—this letter sent by Jesus that we’re listening to tonight. Archaeologists have found coins from Thyatira that give us just a few clues about what that city and its people were like. Many of the coins feature the local “god” of Thyatira. His name is Tyrimnos. He’s got ripped muscles, and he’s always carrying a battle-axe, a fierce weapon of war. On one coin he’s riding into battle on a stately horse. On another he’s shaking hands with the Roman Emperor over a symbol for the Pythian Games—games like the Olympics, we guess. This coin was probably minted when Thyatira hosted these games.

On another coin we see a craftsman. This tells us something about the city that other history confirms: Thyatira was bustling with many guilds of skilled tradesmen. In the book of Acts in the Bible, we meet a woman named Lydia. She was from Thyatira, a dealer in purple cloth and clothing. We think that a particular kind of purple or deep red dye was made in Thyatira. But back to the craftsman on the coin. He’s not a clothing maker, but a smith. He works in bronze, that hard metal alloy that was used for weapons. On the coin this tradesman is selling a bronze war helmet to a soldier.

What do these coins tell us? I think they tell us that the people of Thyatira liked to think of themselves as strong. They had to—know why? Thyatira was a town located on a major highway. A strategic highway—if an army wanted to attack the bigger cities on either side of Thyatira, it had to pass through there first. The people of this city, then, got used to armies trying to march through them. They learned over the centuries to train themselves well and develop a positive self-image: “We’re no doormats! You wanna come through Thyatira, you’ll have to fight us first!”

The people in the Christian church there might have developed similar attitudes—some of the people, at least. We get the impression, though, that this wasn’t a good thing. Some of the people there, it seems, thought that they were pretty smart and pretty strong. They thought that they had deep knowledge and were able to see things that ordinary church members weren’t. And these same people were brazen in the way they flaunted their so-called “deep knowledge”.

But Jesus was not intimidated. Listen to how he begins this letter: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. Let’s look at the rest of the letter and see how Christ’s blazing eyes and brazen feet were bad news to some and good news to others in Thyatira—and how they still are bad news and good news today.

### **Blazing eyes and brazen feet: Jesus uses them in terrifying judgment**

Jesus begins this letter to the pastor and people of the Thyatiran church like this: I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Wonderfully reassuring to be complimented by your Savior, wouldn’t it be? Jesus knew about the steadiness and the maturing of many of these Christians. They believed in him and they put their faith into practice. They were even surviving amid—it sounds like—some persecution of the sort we’ve been hearing about in some of the previous letters.

But the compliments don’t last long. 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. I’ve been reading baby name books recently, and I’ve noticed that “Jezebel” has never been a very popular name. If you know the Bible you know why. Jezebel was the wife of

one of Israel's kings, King Ahab. Jezebel brought with her into Israel the worship of Baal, a fertility god. The worship of Baal evidently involved people having sex as part of their worship. God sent Elijah the prophet to call Jezebel to repent. She didn't. Instead, she put a hit out on Elijah and continued flagrantly doing her thing. But the Lord had the last laugh. He foretold through Elijah that dogs would devour Jezebel, and later, after she was thrown out of a window and killed, that's just what happened. See why Jezebel isn't a popular name?

There was someone in the church in Thyatira just like Jezebel. That could have been her name, or maybe it's just what Jesus calls her to let us know what he thought of her. She was a prominent member of the church. She was claiming for herself the title "prophetess". And she was evidently encouraging people to have sex—with her and each other—as part of their worship of God. More than that, she was probably telling people that this was a more advanced form of Christianity, that her supposed knowledge of how to be a Christian was a deeper sort of knowledge than the regular Christians had—you know, the ones who didn't think it was right to include ritual promiscuous sex in your worship. What this woman was doing was essentially what Jezebel of old had done: she was importing crass, pagan religious practices and mixing them with the worship of the true God.

Jesus could see right through her and her followers. His blazing eyes saw that she was sinning in a flagrant way and that she was deceiving people into following her. Now, Jesus had given her time to change. But, like Jezebel of old, she had not. So Jesus was going to do something to address the problem: I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 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. This Jezebel and those who listened to her had committed a lot of their sins on a bed. "You're going to be in bed again," said Jesus. But this time it wouldn't be pleasurable, but painful. Maybe Jesus would let the thinly veiled sex parties take their toll by letting these people get sexually transmitted diseases. Maybe some other punishment that fit the crime was coming. In addition, Jesus says, I will strike her children dead. This could be referring to her actual children, or maybe just to those who followed her.

We get the picture. So did everyone who heard about what happened at Thyatira: 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. Jesus knows everything. And he acts with force when people refuse to turn from their ways.

I ran across a comment about this that is right on target: "Jezebel typifies church members who want the blessings they see in the church without renouncing the sins they enjoy outside of it." (Wayne Mueller, *People's Bible: Revelation*, Northwestern Publishing House 1996) As outrageous as this woman's actions may seem, they're probably a lot closer to home than we would like. It could be loose attitudes toward sex like in Thyatira. It could be self-pride, thinking that we're good enough and strong enough to get along without God. It could be devoting too much time and energy to buying and having more and more stuff (a danger especially at this time of year). It could be any of the many things that a lot of people in our culture think and do. Whatever runs contrary to what God wants—Jesus wants us to get rid of those things. But instead, many times we make compromises. We tolerate things God tells us not to tolerate. And Jesus sees. His blazing eyes see our tolerance of unchristian things in our

own lives. And he tells us that if we allow such things to continue unabated, he will bring terrifying consequences.

But still he holds out hope. There's that little phrase in this announcement of judgment: "Unless they repent." What Jesus wants is for people to see how much he sees, to know how much he knows, to sense his wrath over their sin and to repent—to change the way they think and act.

### **Blazing eyes and brazen feet: Jesus uses them in forceful conquest**

Jesus wants to do more than just scare people, though. He wants to do more than judge them. The evidence for that? Look at the lengths he went to to make sure that we wouldn't be overwhelmed and destroyed by those sins of accommodation and compromise. He died for those sins, too. His blood pays for the times you and I have tried to hold onto something that Jesus has told us to let go of. He went to the cross and rose from the grave so that those sins of tolerating evil would not destroy us.

That truth is something Jesus wants us to hang onto. Here's what he said to the struggling Christians of Thyatira: 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): Only hold on to what you have until I come. "Hold on to what you have. Hold on to your knowledge of who I am. Hold on to your faith in what I have done. Hold on to your dependence on my promises. Don't let any deceptive teaching make you lost your grip on me. I won't let you down."

You know, these people who were letting Jezebel do her thing in their congregation—I don't think they were tolerating her to thumb their noses at God. I think they were just weak. I think that the people in their church who were doing what was wrong just kind of bowled them over. I think they lacked the courage to stand up to what they knew was wrong. I bet that they knew what should have been done, but they felt powerless to do it. What they needed was someone who would go into battle for them, someone dressed in burnished bronze battle gear. What they needed was reinforcement from Jesus.

That's what they got. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—'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. "To him who overcomes"—we're getting used to that phrase. We've heard it in the last three letters. But this time something is added: To him who overcomes and does my will to the end. Jesus is telling these people to hold onto their faith and knowledge of him, but then also to put that faith into practice. "Believe what's right and then do what's right," he says. "It's tough, but I'll give you what you need to do it. You'll stumble sometimes. But the strength of my mercy will be with you."

Jesus quotes a verse from Psalm 2. That's a psalm that pictures the strongest people in the world opposing God the Father and God the Son. But you know how the psalm ends: "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath..." And the Father says to his Christ, "You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." No sin and no sinner who continually opposes God will ever win. God will. Jesus will.

That means your sins and mine cannot overpower us. Jesus conquers them all. He overpowers and crushes the punishment that should have been ours. He kills the death that should have consumed us. More than that, he promises to keep coming to us in the Lord's Supper and in the Bible to give us strength to battle against the controlling power

that sin seems to have over us. Blazing eyes and brazen feet: Jesus uses them in forceful conquest of his enemies and ours.

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. “Eyes like blazing fire”—that tells us that Jesus sees all and knows all. No one can fool him or pull the wool over his eyes. He’ll see what you’re doing. “Feet like burnished bronze”—the craftsmen of Thyatira got the point: Jesus is a strong warrior who forcefully conquers those who go against him and his people.

These images in the letter to Thyatira teach us some critical things. What Jesus is after is this: he wants us to see clearly what’s right and wrong according to his Word. Then, when we see things clearly in that light, he wants us to be bold to address problems and sins—especially when the sins we see are our own.

Blazing eyes and brazen feet—that’s what Jesus has, and that’s what Jesus gives.  
Amen.