

**SEVEN 4 - A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**  
**REVELATION 2:18-29**  
**May 28, 2017**

Do you have a recurring dream? I have had a couple different ones in my life that I clearly remember, and I'll share them with you now. It's a dream I've had since I was 18. In some form or another, I have had this dream dozens and dozens of times. For half of my life, basically my whole adult life, I have had this dream at least a few times a year. The dream is that I am waiting tables, which is a job I had from age 18-22. While the scenarios vary, the thrust of it is quite simple, four or five tables have all sat down at once, and I am running ragged from one table to the next. The hardest part is getting the order started, you have to welcome, get drink orders, come back with drink orders, bring hot bread, deliver the specials for the evening, then take orders and input the food order. From then on, its just maintenance, but the beginning is chaos, especially if you have four or five tables sit at once.

I have this perfect image in my head of running feverishly between tables at this restaurant. After quitting that job, the dream didn't end. I had it in seminary. I had it in my first job. I had it when I was preparing for a sermon. I had it after having kids. I still have it now. The last time I waited tables was 14 years ago, yet I still have that dream. Wait, check that, with three small kids, I still actually wait tables, but that's not the point. The question of course is why that dream? Why that symbol of the restaurant some 14 years after the fact?

I came across an interesting concept last week, condensation. Not the gathering of water on surfaces, but the psychological idea of condensation specifically pertaining to dreams. Condensation is the compacting or condensing of several concerns, fears and worries into a singular image.

It doesn't take too much to figure out that my restaurant dream is a consolidation of fears and stress, of feeling lost, behind or with too much to manage. It represents the feeling of work, school, family or pastoral work being more than I can handle. That's why I have it on a regular basis. It took me awhile to figure that out.

I want to take you to one of the most notable condensations in the book of Revelation. This is wholly appropriate because the whole book of Revelation comes across like a dream. A revelation given to John that is full of images to be unpacked and understood. The condensation is the character of Jezebel. In our passage today, she is offered up as a false teacher who is leading Christians astray, and she is an amalgamation of sex, idolatry and power, but that is just the condensation. That is seeing just the restaurant and missing the deeper point. It's taking the dream at face value and missing the real message for the church. What message can we understand for the church when it comes to this character who is leading the church astray?

### *Revelation 2: 18-29*

If you are new with us or haven't been here in a while, we are at the mid-point of our series learning about the seven churches in the book of Revelation. John, one of the disciples, is writing around 90 AD while he is in exile on the island of Patmos. John is the last living disciple, and he is a well-respected church father. John writes the words of Christ concerning Christians living in an age of persecution and chaos. He starts by addressing the seven churches in Asia Minor. In week one, we called these words to the churches, course corrections. It's easy to get off track, if only by a little bit, but a little bit off track for a long time can leave you way off course. Even the best trekkers and navigators succumb to something called lateral drift. Lateral drift happens even to the best scouts and outdoorsmen. It means they can go anywhere from 3-5 degrees off course even while doing almost everything right. This means, while traveling ten miles, you could end up half a mile off course. To put this in perspective, this means you could leave SFC to head towards Santana Row and with some lateral drift you could find yourself at Valley Medical. Instead of restaurants and shopping, you could find yourself in the ER.

The church always tends to drift because it is led by and filled with fallible people, so these letters to the churches are course corrections. We are undertaking this series because we are asking ourselves at SFC, what kind of church do we want to be? More specifically, what kind of church does God want us to be? How can we fulfill God's mission to help seek and save the lost in the Bay Area? For all the people drowning in work, busyness, sin, addiction and toxic relationships, how can we help point them to the one who gives peace and offers hope and healing?

Each week, we are looking for vision and course corrections. This week, we come to Jezebel, a woman of power and idolatry and sexual immorality. The warning is simple, stand up to this woman who is leading the church into such errors and sinfulness, but as always with scripture and especially with Revelation, we have to look a bit closer.

First of all, there is probably not a woman in Thyatira named Jezebel who is leading the people astray. In the message two weeks ago in the church of Pergamum, it was not an issue with an actual prophet named Balaam. Jezebel, like Balaam was an Old Testament character who represents something more, and for today, Jezebel is a condensation of issues, but not like you might think.

You've probably heard of the character Jezebel. She was a Sidonian princess and she married King Ahab. You probably remember Jezebel and Ahab as the ones who led Israel to worship Baal and Asherah. This of course leads to the confrontation you may remember with Elijah and the prophets of Baal. The drought in the land, which led to the showdown on Mount Carmel. You might also remember that Ahab dies and Jezebel eventually gets killed, but not before the Bible takes special note of her putting on makeup and nice clothes to greet the new king. Many people take this to mean that she planned to seduce the new king.

Now then, that story paired with today's passage of Jezebel leading the church into sexual immorality has painted a pretty clear condensation for most people. The term Jezebel today

can be used for an evil, usually promiscuous, adulterous woman. It has been used dozens of times in pop culture to illustrate a promiscuous and controlling evil woman.

For many that is where this passage begins and ends. The sins of the church in Thyatira were sexual promiscuity and meat sacrificed to idols. So much is made of the sexual immorality and adultery that people can't see what is really going on here.

While sexual immorality is an important issue that is not what is really of concern in this passage. Let me tell you how I know this. 1) Two weeks ago, we studied the church in Pergamum and they had the same exact two issues, sexual immorality and meat sacrificed to idols. As I told you then, these were two practices associated with idolatrous worship. Temples often held festivals, like a modern potluck, and meat would be sacrificed to the idols and then served for the festival. Additionally, temples often had temple prostitutes who were employed to help people worship. Because these are the same two issues in Pergamum, why didn't he just say again that this church was succumbing to the sins of Balaam instead of Jezebel? 2) I know this because sexual language is often used to describe spiritual infidelity of the church to God, like a husband/wife relationship, Israel's wanderings were often described as idolatrous/adulterous.

Yet the condensation persists. Jezebel is a promiscuous/controlling woman and this is a problem of extreme importance for the church to ward off today. A lot of churches have taken this to heart. They are obsessed with sex either by never talking about it or always talking about it. It is the greatest sin and the greatest temptation and the sexual purity of the people in the church is more important than anything else.

I don't know if you saw this but a senior at a Christian High School in Maryland will not be able to walk on her graduation day because she is pregnant out of wedlock. She was suspended for two days, removed from student council and not allowed to participate in graduation ceremonies as a punishment. Now I get the idea of a private school with Christian standards but this bothers me for a few reasons. This seems above and beyond when it comes to punishment. I don't know what other sexual activities they are policing or

punishing for. This just feels like the Scarlet Letter to me. It's one more missed opportunity wherein love/support could have been shown and they went the other direction. They made it publicly and they made it messy.

I want to introduce you to another psychology term that is closely connected to condensation. It's displacement. Displacement is "an unconscious defense mechanism whereby the mind substitutes either a new aim or a new object for goals felt in their original form to be dangerous or unacceptable." (Eric Berne, *A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* (1976) p. 399). Put another way, a person defends themselves by shifting their wrath onto a vicarious substitute. Usually this substitute is a less threatening or less costly way to address your problem. For an example, a father had a bad day at work, so instead of resolving his work problems, he chews out his wife. The other spouse, instead of working out their relationship problems chews out the child. The child then chews out the dog and the dog completes the cycle and chews up the father's shoes. Did I mention displacement is unhealthy?

When displacement is detected, like condensation, you have to ask, what's beneath the surface? What does this really mean? Why are we willing to dog pile onto a pregnant teenager and let her be publicly humiliated with a Scarlet Letter? Why is punishment preferable to grace? Let's dig a bit deeper and I'll show you why displacement is preferable for many including myself.

Here is the real issue in Thyatira, the issue beneath the issue. Thyatira was the craftsmen capital of the area. According to existing records<sup>1</sup>, Thyatira had more trade guilds than any city in Asia Minor even though it was one of the smaller cities. This was a trade town and textile town. This is what it was known for almost exclusively, making, selling, buying, trading, and with those trade guilds came a conundrum for every Christian in the town. Trade guild meetings often had patron idols and those idols were honored by, you guessed

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<sup>1</sup> William Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 324.

it, meat sacrificed to idols and temple prostitution. The bigger issue is that these tradesmen were being forced to decide between their livelihood and their faith.

This brings us back to Jezebel. For some reason, Jezebel has been condensed into sexuality and control, but really she was more about money and power. When Ahab and Jezebel married, it was a business partnership. King's often intermarried their families for trade and military reasons. With that, Jezebel brought her god, Baal, not because she was so enamored with this god but what he represented, rain, which was quite important for an agrarian culture. Jezebel wasn't a nympho she was greedy for power and money.

The best illustration and the clearest snapshot of Jezebel's character is found in 1 Kings 21. Ahab wanted the vineyard of a man named Naboth. Never mind that Ahab was immensely wealthy and had plenty of vineyards, he wanted Naboth's. This is tricky for a couple of reasons, but the main one, land was not just a commodity in Israel. Land was a part of the Promised Land, so it was given by God and was representative of the relationship to God and birthright and heritage. Naboth said no. Like a petulant child, Ahab sulked because he couldn't have what he wanted; never mind how much he already had, so his wife, Jezebel sprung into action. She framed Naboth, had him killed and took his vineyard. In my mind, this is the primary sin of Jezebel, greed. Taking what you want at all costs. More concerned with the bottom line than people.

So we come back to Thyatira. They had a conundrum; blend in and make the sacrifices so they can stay in the trade guilds or take a stand. Be countercultural and stand apart. These were good Christians; it says in the beginning they are excelling good works. They have done more than they did in the beginning, but they have gotten swept up in the sin of Jezebel and missing what matters most for some coin.

Back to displacement, it is much easier to suspend a pregnant teenager than to explain grace to some donors who might pull their contributions. It is much easier to humiliate a teenage girl than absorb the blow yourself by giving grace and being known as the school that allows teenagers to supposedly run wild. Bottom line, it's much easier to keep a girl

out of graduation than to explain why the one girl's cap and gown has a big bump underneath it to prospective new students and the tuition money they bring with them.

Sadly, I think many Christians and churches do this today. Dog piling on those who get caught in sexual sin is much easier than confronting some of the financial improprieties of congregants or greedy tendencies of some churches or pastors. While we are far from perfect at SFC, I think we take great efforts to show transparency and generosity in our budget. I try my best to not shy away from talking about money because displacement would be easier. It's easier to talk about shame and sinfulness in regards to sexuality than it is the slippery slope of greed or potential idolatry of conspicuous consumption.

Displacement gives us a vicarious substitute, something to divert our attention. Something that is easy to pile on and forget about the bigger lingering issue. We can forget about the hard sayings of Jesus regarding greed and generosity, and we can focus on trivial matters instead. As a church, I hope we will be known as a people who focus on what really matters. I want to be really transparent with you about this. We do Serve Sundays three times a year and consistently our offerings on Serve Sundays are about 25% of regular giving. When you look at a trend like that, you can make a Thyatira decision. This is affecting our bottom line, giving isn't as good, we might not make budget. How about only one Serve Sunday a year? How about Serve Sunday on Saturdays instead so we can have regular church and give regular offerings.

But that won't happen because Serve Sundays are leading to life changes for people inside and outside of the church. People in our neighborhoods are seeing us do something costly, something that we spend money, sweat and time on and they are feeling the love of Jesus. To trade that for our bottom line would be Jezebel and Thyatira-esque. Next week is Serve Sunday. I encourage you to join us for one of my favorite events. We love in Jesus' name. We serve in Jesus' name. We bless in Jesus' name.

We do all of this because of the displacement that Jesus allowed. Jesus on the cross took our anger and violence. He allowed himself to be killed. Jesus represented all that was good and selfless and divine in the world, and he was killed for it and he allowed it. There was no retribution. God took our punches and our violence and our sinfulness and did not return evil for evil. In that moment, Jesus was showing a new way of living through his death, a way of surrender and love. He took what we deserved and loves us anyway.

VIDEO- George and Donna Lee