

I have now been here at All Saints for about 5 years, so as we are looking at the reflections of churches in Revelation, I thought I would share with you my reflection of Waitara. I would say that as a church we have kept true to Jesus. Even through hard times in the past the church has not given up its faith in Jesus. I think that All Saints is a loving church, a faithful church and very service focused. And I think that we as a church are now doing more ministry than ever before.

But I still have something against this church, this church has people amongst it that mislead the church to do immoral things and to eat food offered to idols. And you tolerate these people.

I hope you have guessed these aren't actually my thoughts and they are not even about Waitara. It is Jesus thoughts on Pergamum and Thyatira, the two churches we are looking at today. How did it feel to get such a good wrap only to have harsh words said against you, it would be hard wouldn't it?

Well, I would like to start my talk today by asking you a question. Are you a tolerant person? Are you compromising? Are you someone who thinks that its ok? You can think that, but I think this.

In some ways in today's world that is a loaded question. The media and society has now put such stress on the high value on tolerance that if we answered no to those questions we would be **shut down**. We are told that we should tolerate people of different nationalities, of different backgrounds, different ideas and different religions. That there is no absolute truth and that whatever differences there are between people we should just ignore it and move on, and if you are intolerant of anything you must be bad. Before you start thinking I am advocating some racist society or some neo-Nazi agenda let me say that I think that generally tolerance is a good thing, that we

definitely shouldn't hate other people because they are different, but that doesn't mean we should tolerate all ideas. I would like to put forward to you that the world doesn't tolerate everything despite what the media says and that there are some absolute truths. For example we don't tolerate pedophilia, we don't tolerate murder etc. So we can see that there are actually some right sorts of intolerance, even by societies views.

The letters to the two churches that we are looking at today, look at how they tolerate, how they allow false teachings. Jesus pointed out the same problem to both churches. They both allowed people with false teaching to live among them. Some of them even followed this false teaching.

So what are these false teachings that they are listening to? Both churches are allowing people who are sexually immoral and people who eat food dedicated to idols, and these people are leading the church away from the one and only truth.

As Bruce has said these letters can be applied to all churches, including our church here in Waitara, but each letter was written for a specific church as well, so let me go through with you the details of these two churches. Pergamum was a highly cultured city. It had theatres, beautiful public buildings, many temples; it boasted a huge library. As far as culture and entertainment were concerned, Pergamum was one of the best cities. Like most Roman/Greek cities they were generally polytheistic, that is they worshiped lots of gods. And in this city they had a number of very large temples to a few of these gods. It was amongst this culture that the Christians in Pergamum lived.

to be socially accepted in Pergamum the non-Christians expected you to worship many gods, and they did not understand why Christians only

worshipped one God, Jesus. Why did the Christians make it difficult for themselves? You can worship Jesus and all these other other gods. Any god can be worshipped here but you cannot tell me that there is only one true God. Does this sound familiar? Sounds like what people say here in Australia doesn't it? We accept all religions, and you can't tell me I'm wrong.

Now this is where the reference to Balaam and Balak from the letter comes in, we find them in the Old Testament, in the book of Numbers. Balak was a leader of a country that was an enemy of Israel. Balak asked Balaam, a prophet, to curse Israel. But Balaam couldn't curse Israel, because God only allowed him to bless Israel. But Balaam comes up with an idea to get the Israelites to go turn away from God. He gets foreign women to go in and live amongst the Israelites. This leads to the Israelites falling into sexual immorality and eating food that had been sacrificed to the foreign women's gods. Balaam knew that by putting the foreign women amongst the Israelites that they would be distracted from God, and that he could get them to disobey God. As it says in verse 14 Balaam enticed them to sin, not necessarily through directly rejecting God, but through accepting practices from other nations. And now there were people in Pergemum doing the same thing. They were eating food sacrificed to idols and were being sexually immoral and they were amongst the Church in Pergemum.

Thyatira was a small town, a town of workers, in which they had guilds, or what you may know of as federations. Guilds if you don't know are like older versions of unions. If you were a carpenter, you would be part of the carpenters guild. Or in today's terms, if you are a teacher, they you may be in the teacher's federation, or a plumber in the plumbers union. You would get the benefit of help from the other carpenters you would probably be on their equivalent of the Yellow pages so that you would always get the call

for your area. But as part of your work and being associated with your union, you would also have had to sacrifice to the god of your union. So Christians would have to ask themselves could they join a union? Could they join so that they would not be shut out economically and socially? This was a crucial question for the Christians in Thyatira. Just like it is today. How much of our faith do we sacrifice so that we can be a part of our workplace? And amongst these Christians in Thyatira was Jezebel. Jezebel taught that it was fine to be sexually immoral, to eat the food of idols, to be part of society. This reference of Jezebel may also be making the reader think back to OT times like Balaam. Where we see Jezebel lead astray many Israelites with idol worship. And now there were people in Thyatira doing the same thing. They were eating food sacrificed to idols and were being sexually immoral and they were amongst the Church in Thyatira.

So both cities were challenged. They had amongst them people who followed the mainstream practices of the gods. Even though the people that the letter was written to may not have even been following these practices, they are being warned. This may sound strange at first. After all if they are not doing it, why do they need to be warned? But think about the OT examples given. By having people amongst the Israelites who followed different religions it led the Israelites disobey God. By these 2 churches allowing, effectively different religions amongst them, they could easily turn away from God. They needed to realize that for them the Lordship of Jesus was at stake.

I don't think it was just about sexual immorality that the church is condemned for. Balaam especially tries to figure out what will lead the Israelites astray. So this letter warns them and us about the things which can lead us away from God. These false teachings, that some of them were

integrating from the religions around them, were added to the Christian faith. We can be challenged by this too.

Do we compromise with some incorrect Roman Catholic beliefs?

For example

do we put belief in purgatory or do we put too much weight on the symbols in the church. Or maybe we are like some faiths today that feel that Jesus is just one of the many ways to being saved, not the only way. That all religions pretty much lead to the same God. Or maybe you are a Christian who also believes in Karma. If you are in this situation I urge you to reconsider what you believe. Repent of the incorrect teaching and hold true to the real faith. OR

Maybe you are fine with those things I have just mentioned, other formal religions may be of no interest to you. What about the informal gods and religions of today's world. Sport, house, family, work, possessions. Each of these things can achieve what Balaam was trying to achieve with the Israelites. They can distract us from God, take away our focus from what truly is important in life. None of these are wrong in of themselves but if they take your time, your focus, your love away from Jesus then they are wrong.

The world doesn't mind if we give a part of our lives to Jesus, but you know as soon as we say it all belongs to Jesus, the world and society around us becomes very impatient with us. The message around us is that all the different religions are just different expressions of the same thing, and we ought not to focus on the differences. But that's not right, Jesus in both letters tells the churches not to tolerate false teachings. Do not tolerate being led astray.

Remember Satan is also very tolerant. He doesn't mind if you worship God, as long as you don't worship God exclusively. He's okay with your coming to church every Sunday, as long as you forget that Jesus is Lord the rest of the week, he doesn't mind if you give in the offering each week as long as you seek your fulfillment in the world from family, friends and possession.

It is here I think that is one of the greatest threats to Christianity today. I don't think the biggest threat to our church in Waitara are Muslims or JW's, or Mormons. I think one of the biggest threat facing the church today is the problem of Balaam and Jezebel. The biggest danger facing the church today is tolerance leading to compromise. Don't forget, it was servants of God in Thyatira who were misled by Jezebel into compromising their faith. These servants of the Lord had deeds, love, faith, service, and perseverance and were growing in these. What happened to them can too easily happen to us too. For all around us, both within and without the church, are those who urge us to compromise and accommodate ourselves to the world. And, it is so easy to listen to this false teaching.

I hope you don't view the problem faced by the Thyatiran or Pergemum church as having no concern for us or being irrelevant to our situation. As Christians we should answer the question, "How far should I accept and adopt the standards of the world?" On the one hand, a Christian must not deny their faith. On the other hand, they must not deny their membership in society either. Christians live in the same world as their unbelieving neighbors and face the same problems. But, as Christians, we must find Christian solutions to these problems, solutions that do not compromise any part of what they believe.

We need to follow Christ exclusively. We need to show with our lives that we do belong to Him, body and soul. We need to maintain the difference

between the world and the church. We should acknowledge and proclaim the exclusive demands of Jesus Christ, that He only is the Lord of our lives.

Maybe, at the end of it all, you say: It's too hard to maintain the difference. Living in the world with all the temptations the world throws at me-it's too hard. But listen to what Jesus says, he knows where you dwell. He knows where you work, your neighborhood. He knows that you live where Satan's throne is. He knows that you are surrounded by Satan's power. He knows how hard it is not to cave in to the temptations of the world. Remember that Jesus Christ was tempted in every way possible. There is no temptation with which you struggle that did not confront Jesus when He was on earth.

Also the imagery used for both churches of Jesus is one of a powerful King. For Pergemum there is the idea of sharp two edged sword, while for Thyatira there is the bronze feet and glowing eyes. He is powerful, more powerful than the world or satan. Jesus, the one who calls us to maintain the difference between the world and the church is none other than the one who makes it possible for us to do so. When Jesus died and was resurrected he became the eternal victor over Satan.

If you cling to Jesus, if you claim Jesus as your only comfort in life and death and you don't compromise, if you hold fast to Jesus until comes then he will give you his hidden manna. Then He will give you a white stone with a new secret name on it. The examples that Jesus gives, although they may sound foreign, basically are talking about God sustaining us, giving us eternal life.

So, Hold firm, watch out for compromises, be careful of tolerating false teaching, be faithful and he will give you the crown of life. Amen