

We generally read the scriptural text from the NIV translation; however, today, we will be using the NRSV translation, more specifically, the 1989 version of the NRSV. You may wonder what the deal is with all the different translations of the Bible, or which is the best one. To borrow a line from my beloved, good-old-boy Texan, Greek professor, Dr. Lauren Gigger: "The best translation is the one that translates into your life." I've always thought that was good.

As anyone who is bilingual can tell you, there is a spectrum between what we call formal and functional when translating something from one language to another. In layman's terms, this means that some translations are more word-for-word and some translations are more thought-for-thought in an effort to make something flow and read a little bit better in the second language.

So the text today is a good example of a functional translation in the NIV, but it slightly misses the mark. We are leaning into a more formal translation to reduce some of the ambiguity or confusion that might otherwise be there.

I want to start by asking a couple of questions. How many of you would say that you have enough? I'll let you define that however you will, whether that's money, possessions, time, or whatever. The second question, and this is the more telling one, is how many of you would say that you would love to have more?

The desire for more is one that captivates us sometimes, ensnares us even. Even the most well-intentioned of us, regardless of our background and regardless of our starting point, desire more. It fuels things like state lotteries, gambling, sports betting industries, hobbies, workaholism, consumerism, and so much more.

Throughout most of my life, I have thought about those who have had a lot, the wealthiest individuals in the world. It was common, even expected sometimes, that when an individual reached those levels of prosperity or wealth, they would lean heavily into philanthropic pursuits to contribute to society, to give a lot of it away. I think of people like Andrew Carnegie, for instance, who is credited with building and funding over 2,500 public libraries across our country, or John D. Rockefeller, who donated over 60 percent of his wealth to medical research, education, and humanitarian aid.

However, in recent years, those trends have shifted somewhat toward an unwavering belief that enough is never enough, that more is the name of the god that our culture loves, perhaps more than any other. So one cannot stop gathering more because what if someone else comes along who has more than they do? They cannot stop gathering more because they might miss the opportunity to be the world's first trillionaire.

So more is what it is all about. If we have a little, we want more, and if we have a lot, we want more. And while wealth and possessions are the low-hanging fruit in this example, they're certainly not the only things that we often want more of.

Just last week, in Kevin's message about the city of Pergamum, he noted that some of the idols of our day are things like sexuality, power, and materialism. All of these are great examples of areas of our lives that invite us to pursue more. So why settle for one woman or one man when I can have more? Or why settle for the authority I have when I can have more? Why settle for the stuff I have when I can have more?

Of course, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the voice that is often there whispering in our ears and in our hearts, saying, "But, if I had more, I could do more. I could give more. I could help more. I could feed more. I could house more." So, I say all of this to acknowledge that there is nuance and tension to manage in these pursuits. But it is a trap that ensnares many of us, perhaps all of us in some way, shape, or form. As we jump into the text, it is that conversation around more that I want you to file away in the back of your mind because we will be revisiting it as we get further into the text.

We are in a series on the seven letters to the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Currently, we are on the fourth letter. Today's message is the letter to the church in the city of Thyatira. It just so happens to be the longest of the seven letters, while also being the city that, historically and archeologically, we know the least about. In fact, the remains of Thyatira that we've uncovered archeologically are a little more than half a city block. We don't have a lot, but what we do have begins to corroborate and help us paint a picture of what life was like in this city as John sat down and penned Revelation.

For a point of reference, Thyatira was about 35 miles inland between Pergamum and Sardis. From a biblical perspective, it's most famously known as the hometown of a woman named Lydia, who is introduced in Acts 16. You may remember Lydia as a dealer in purple cloth, and we are told that when she heard Paul preach in the city of Philippi, she responded to his message and, along with her whole family, was baptized. She then welcomed them all, including Paul, into her home to stay for a while.

That might sound like a trivial fact, but it's more than that. It's a clue about what this city was known for, which was its textile industry and metalworking industry, more specifically, for its burnished bronze industry. There were no glass or silver mirrors 2000 years ago, so if you wanted to see a reflection, you went to a burnished bronze maker. If you think about cities of industry, particularly blue-collar cities, Thyatira might be like Pittsburgh or Detroit in its day. You'll see why all that's

important as we jump into the text. I want to remind you that this is Jesus speaking.

*“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.” (Revelation 2:18).* Now what you’ll begin to see here and throughout the text are all these hyperlinks and references along with key words that link to other parts of scripture. I won’t be able to touch on all of them, but there are a few things I want to note.

## Son of God

This is one of the few places in scripture where Jesus is speaking and refers to himself as the Son of God, which is not just trivia, it’s significant, because Thyatira was a city under Roman rule, where the language of the son of God was reserved only for Caesar. So Jesus was pushing back on that empirical language in the city, and he’s saying, “No, I am the Son of God.”

## Flame of Fire and Burnished Bronze

Flame of fire and burnished bronze are all hyperlinks that connect not only to Revelation 1, where John sees this vision of Jesus and these are some of the descriptions that he notes, but also to Daniel 7 and 10, and Ezekiel 1. Why is that noteworthy? Until one has a strong grasp of the Old Testament prophets, specifically Daniel and Ezekiel, reading Revelation, and all of its apocalyptic language, will go over just about any reader’s head. Revelation assumes a certain degree of competency in those texts. Without that competency, we may think that we’re tracking with what Revelation is saying, but in reality, we may be adrift at sea. It may go way over our heads.

## Cultural References

These are all cultural references to things you might commonly see if you were walking around Thyatira 2000 years ago. So you have the flame of a furnace that’s reflecting in the eye of the refiner and the burnished bronze that he is crafting. This is all industry language, cultural language of Thyatira.

*“I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first” (v. 19).* Remember what they are known for. They are a blue-collar working-class kind of city, and Jesus’ use of the word “works” is very intentional. They work hard in Thyatira. They’re proud of their work. Only in this case, Jesus speaks to the church, not about the textile industry and metal industry, but about the fruits of their faith in him. Their love, faith, and service, their patient endurance.

He looks at the fruits of their faith, and he sees growth. So, their most recent works are greater than their first, which is great. Who doesn’t want their boss to say they have seen you do a better job as of late? You’ve grown a lot since your first day. You’re doing a good job. We all want to hear that. But have you ever had a compliment sandwich before? Then comes the word that we all dread hearing after a compliment—but.

*“But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practice fornication*

*and to eat food sacrificed to idols” (v. 20).* This is one of the primary verses that prompted the switch in translations this morning, because some other translations took some liberties that really aren’t there in the Greek. I hope that’ll be more evident as we move forward.

So Jesus makes a curious reference to a woman named Jezebel. If you are not familiar with the Old Testament, you may think this is the name of some woman in Thyatira that Jesus is unhappy with, but that’s not the case. This is a reference to a woman who was married to King Ahab back in 1 Kings, many years preceding this.

King Ahab, we are told, was king over the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Israel was split into two. There was a northern half and a southern half, and Ahab was king over the northern half. He was a vile king who did countless evil in the eyes of God. You may remember that old movie, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, and the quote “The neck that turns the Head.” The neck that turned his head was his wife Jezebel. She was rotten to the core. Most notably as a worshiper of Baal, a false God, and together they set up altars and temples to Baal. The text says this, about them. In 1 Kings 21, it says

**(There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel.) 1 Kings 21:25–26 NIV**

Jesus is looking at Thyatira, and he’s saying that there is a “Jezebel” among them that they are tolerating. Literally, that they are letting it slide, just dismissing and tolerating it, they are not dealing with it in any way. That’s a problem because she’s teaching some things that are dangerous.

Now, the question that emerges naturally is who is this Jezebel person that Jesus is talking about? Is this a real person, or is this a personification where Jezebel maybe represents a cultural attitude more so than a specific woman? In either case, the message is the same: there are followers of Jesus who are being taught something that is additional, something that is more than the word that was given to them by the apostles, which has led them to “fornication” and eating food sacrificed to idols.

Now, the word fornication in the Greek is the word *pornē*, which is where we get the word pornography. This is why, if you read it in the NIV, you will see it translated as sexual immorality. You can see why they jumped to that. Let me be clear that it absolutely can be that, but it is much, much bigger, much more multifaceted than just that.

Contextually speaking, when the Book of Revelation uses variations of this word, which happens all throughout Revelation 14 through 19, it is always used in a metaphorical sense. It is only used in a literal sense when they’re mentioned as part of a list of vices. In other words, *pornē* here is metaphoric for Christians who are crawling into bed with other gods and idols and not being faithful to the one true God, Yahweh. Jesus’ rebuke is that Christians in Thyatira are cheating on Yahweh God with false gods, with lesser gods. What’s worse is that someone is teaching

them and deceiving them into thinking that there's nothing wrong with that, but Jesus says there is.

I want that adulterous metaphor, that adulterous imagery to stay at the top of your mind. If that's uncomfortable for you, just know that the Old Testament prophet Hosea also uses adultery as an image of faithlessness to God. So this is not new language, new imagery, but you'll need that imagery at the top of your mind to accurately understand what happens next.

**I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve. Revelation 2:21-23**

Now, there is a lot of strong language, perhaps even confusing language that Jesus is using here, and in case you ever thought Jesus was one to mince words, well, he's not. The reality is that in that adultery metaphor, the bed is often the domain of adultery. Some commentators note that this word is better understood as like a stretcher, a hospital bed, or a place where someone sick or suffering would lie. But in either case, Jesus places this personified Jezebel and the metaphoric adulterer on a bed along with all of those who chose to join her in her adultery, and he reminds the reader that the children or the offspring of their adultery will not endure, to put it mildly.

It's absolutely critical that we understand the type of literature that is Revelation. This is apocalyptic literature, which Kevin unpacked a couple of weeks ago, but this does not mean it is end-of-the-world literature. It means that it is highly symbolic and much of this is likely rooted in communicating with one Christian to another within a Roman empire, which did not and would not take kindly to a different kingdom and a different king other than Caesar. The language is intentionally written in a code of sorts. It's intentionally ambiguous. It's intentionally internal language to Christians.

Jesus is saying that those who run after other gods, who try the "both and" approach to following Jesus, will not inherit eternity. Those who follow them or are their disciples, which are the children in this metaphor, will also not inherit eternity. And just in case you think Jesus is only concerned about what is visible and what is seen, just in case the reader might be inclined to think that as long as I don't do idolatrous things, I'm good. Jesus says, "Well, wait one moment, I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve."

Jesus says that he knows the real us and the depths of our hearts. It's not just about what we show on the outside, it's about what we covet. It's about what our heart longs for. So if my heart is unfaithful, the actions aren't really what matters. Do you follow what I'm saying? Even if I didn't cheat on my wife, but I wanted deeply to cheat on my wife, do you think she might have a problem with that? Jesus does too.

Now Jesus turns his attention to the faithful, to those not swayed by Jezebel's deceit.

**But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call "the deep things of Satan," to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden; only hold fast to what you have until I come. vv. 24-25**

This term "the deep things of Satan" is likely a pejorative term. The Greek literally says, "the deep things of Satan." In other words, it's a reference to some phrasing or idiom of the day, and it is likely a bit of a sarcastic reference to some of the false teachings that people were hearing around in Thyatira. People would say, "Oh, these are the deep things of Jesus." And Jesus rephrases it to say these aren't the deep teachings of Jesus or God at all. These are the deep things of Satan.

Jesus has an encouragement. He has a positive request that he wants from them, which is to hold to what they have. I'm going to say that again. He wants them to hold to what they have, and this isn't just hold like the way I might hold a book or the way I might hold my phone. No, this is to hold in the way that I might hold onto my child, the way I might hold onto a cliff. This is a hold with all of your power, with all of your might, kind of hold. This is how you hold onto a loved one to keep them safe.

In a world and time when people were deceiving and misleading and teaching Christians and Thyatira with something more. Jesus says to hold on to what they already have. Then he continues in verse 26.

**To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered—even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. vv. 26-29**

### **Your Works, My Works**

So there are a few things I want you to note about these closing lines. Number one, I want you to notice how Jesus contrasts "your works" from verse 19 with "my works" from verse 26. In a city and culture that is passionate about the work that they do, Jesus reminds them that the real work is to do his work to the very end. Their work doesn't come first; his work comes first. His work is their work.

### **Iron Rod In A Clay Pot**

Number two, Jesus mentions an iron rod in a clay pot or a clay vessel that is shattered. This is undoubtedly a reference to Psalm 2.

**I will proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Psalm 2:7-9 (NIV)**

That language is all there. That's everything that is being referenced in Revelation to Thyatira. But I also think this has a double meaning that

with the rod of iron that might be forged in a place like Thyatira, Jesus will use it to shatter the pottery that is fired in a place like Thyatira. He will destroy their works from the inside out if they are not his works.

## The Morning Star

And finally, number three is the promise that he offers. It is the morning star. Traditionally, this would've been a reference to looking up in the sky at night and seeing Venus as the brightest light in the sky. Jesus was doing a [hyperlink here](#) as well. This time, looking ahead to some of the very final words ever spoken to Jesus in Revelation. This is the second to last thing Jesus ever says in your Bibles. *"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star"* (Rev. 22:16, NIV). So Jesus' promise to the faithful is himself.

I know that was a lot, and if you have hung with me through all of that, it's time to breathe. There's a lot going on here. But the question we are always confronted with in the text is the same. Now what? What do I do with all of that? Where does that fit into my life?

You see, the problems that faced the church in Thyatira were not problems that are altogether different than the ones that we face today. To live in a city or region known for its industry and trades. Do we know what that's like? Check. That's a little bit of this area. Be a people often consumed with our work. Do we know what that's like around here? Check. Face temptation to make small, seemingly insignificant compromises in the pursuit of gain, in the pursuit of more. Does that sound like something that happens around here? Check.

The issue facing Christians in Thyatira was not just that some wild promiscuous woman was inviting people into her bed and teaching them that it was okay. It was that an industrial city, full of people working in their trades and working in their crafts, just like in our world today, with labor unions, guilds, fraternities of people who were joined together by their crafts, with an intense economic pressure to play along, to compromise and join oneself with the prevailing culture or the guild around them.

Nobody wants to be the union guy or the iron worker who doesn't go have a beer with the boys. So you compromise and compromise. At first, they're little white lies. They feel harmless. What could it hurt? But sin has a bit of a snowball effect. So that what starts out small often grows and grows some more. I look back on my own life in seasons where I have walked in sin, and it always starts small.

You think of people in addiction. A drug user never sets out for a heroin addiction. A porn user never sets out for a sex addiction. A food consumer never sets out for a food addiction. It always starts small and is followed by progressively bigger compromises until the issue has grown out of control.

Here is Thyatira, with all of these trade guilds, and how do they spend their time? One commentator, Barclay, says that they held common meals. They would very often be held in a temple, and if not, they would begin and end with a formal sacrifice to the gods. The meat eaten would

be meat, which had already been offered to idols. He said, furthermore, it often happened that these communal meals were occasions of drunken revelry and lacked morality.

So you hear that, and it's obvious why a follower of Christ might want to avoid some of these kinds of gatherings, but here's the rub: doing so ostracizes you. Doing so ostracizes you not only from the event but from the industry, and from the economic prosperity that goes with it. If you were not in the union, if you're not in the guild, you had a much tougher road ahead of you to make it in your career.

So imagine that in the midst of your struggle, of trying to follow this Jesus, someone comes along and says that there is a better way. Well, your ears might perk up. Now someone tells you that you can do both. You can follow Christ and join that guild. Here's how they got your attention, but without ever realizing it or wanting to realize it, you stepped into a trap, and that's the reality that Jesus is addressing.

It's not so different a reality from what so many of us face. Everywhere we turn, we are bombarded with invitations to compromise, with invitations to get more and have more. Sometimes, depending on where we are in life, more is exactly what we want and what we need. So we get on LinkedIn and are confronted with the hustle culture that says if you do more, you'll get more. You have to get more efficient. You have to get smarter; you have to work faster. If you do all those things, you're going to get more.

Sometimes we get a referral for a role or a recruiter that comes into our inbox and reaches out to us and says, "You know, if you come over here and leave where you are, you can get a little bit more." We're constantly being invited to upskill, upskill, upskill. If you get that certificate, that certification, that degree, whatever it might be, you can get more.

In many cases, we are carrying out tasks at work that drive revenue, no matter the ethic, no matter the cost. All so somebody somewhere might get what? More of your time, more of your attention, and more of your heart. And with every small compromise, Jesus is crowded out of our lives inch by inch, in the pursuit of more.

So Jesus looks at the church in Thyatira, and he says to hold on with all their might to what they have until he comes. Because you see, some of us, myself included, have some repenting to do here. We have been so busy being formed by the world around us that we have lost sight of what we already have. It begs the question of how we can work for more if we already have it all? That's the question I want you to sit with and reflect on. That's the point I think Jesus is saying to his disciples in Thyatira. He's asking if they have forgotten who he is. "I am the son of God. Have you forgotten?"

**"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. Matthew 13:44-46 NIV**

Do you realize that's what we already have? If you're anything like me, you've been invited so consistently and so repeatedly to put on blinders to the wealth of riches that we have around us already as part of Jesus' kingdom, where Jesus is king.

In a constant pursuit of something else, in a constant pursuit of something more, it's never good enough to just be with Jesus and his kingdom, and so we haven't held tightly to Jesus. Instead, we've tolerated the Jezebel. How can I work for more if I already have it all? In an article called "The Psychology of Enough," psychiatrist Rebecca Bridger wrote,

**One of the reasons that "more" never feels like enough is a psychological phenomenon known as hedonic adaptation. Put simply, humans have a tendency to quickly return to a relatively stable level of happiness after both positive and negative life changes. Research shows that even major events—such as winning the lottery or experiencing disability—often have only a temporary effect on well-being before individuals return to their baseline emotional state. Bridger, Psy.D.**

One of the most effective tools that Satan has at his disposal is the stick and carrot that he holds out there, which teases us into believing that the next little bump will be the difference maker. And you know what? It never is. Before you know it, you'll be right back to square one, wanting just a little bit more.

So the message of this week isn't altogether different from last week in that we are facing a world and a reality all around us that we call syncretism. This is the slippery slope of compromise that says you can have "God and." It's no longer about "God or." It didn't work for Jesus in Thyatira, and it doesn't work for us today in Silicon Valley. We don't just have enough. We have Jesus. We have Jesus, and because of him, we have eternal life. We have the King of Kings. We have the Lord of Lords. Do you believe that?

The question that we're asking is, how can we look for more if we already have it all? You took math. Growing up, there was no such thing as infinity plus one. There's still no such thing as infinity plus one. There is Jesus. And Jesus is everything. So it is to him and to him alone that he invites us and that we invite you. I want to read Paul's words to a young Timothy in 1 Timothy 6. Just receive what Paul's saying because this applies to us all the same.

**These are the things you are to teach and insist on. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and**

**constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.**

**But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

**But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 1 Timothy 6:2b-12 NIV**

I want to ask you again. How can I work for more if I already have everything? I can't. Neither can you. So let's fix our eyes on the one who gives us everything.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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