

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

What a hair-raising chapter! Jesus, the Great Judge, speaks from heaven, directly addressing four churches in modern Turkey. Did you ever wonder what Jesus would say to your church? Pondering that some years ago changed the entire direction of my life and ministry and marked the beginning of Heaven's Family.

Jesus had commendation, correction and encouragement for all four of the churches we read about today. His example is a good one to follow. Every correction should be preceded by a compliment and followed with encouragement. A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down. Another spoonful of sugar washes away any aftertaste!

Jesus promised rewards to those in every church who would "overcome." They would, for example, "eat of the tree of life" and would not "be hurt by the second death" (2:7, 11). Obviously, those who don't overcome will not eat of the tree of life, which is something mentioned near the end of Revelation as being the privilege of all saved persons (22:14, 19). Moreover, those who don't overcome will be hurt by the second death, something mentioned near the end of the book of Revelation as being the fate of all unbelievers (21:8). Thus, to "overcome" is to continue in obedient faith until the end so that one is ultimately saved. Jesus' promises to overcomers are one more indication that unconditional eternal security is a myth.

Just because one is currently a believer does not mean that in the end one will be considered an overcomer. One must "keep Christ's deeds until the end" (2:26). Indeed, Jesus warned the entire church at Ephesus that if they did not repent and do the deeds that they did at first, returning to their first love, He would remove their lampstand out of its place, which doesn't sound like a good thing. We must "hold fast" (2:25) until Jesus comes.

Some of Jesus' other promises to overcomers seem somewhat cryptic, such as His promises of "hidden manna" and "a new name" written on a "white stone" and "the morning star" (2:17, 27-28). Whatever those things signify, you can be sure they are good!

The church in Smyrna could have benefitted by a visit from some modern prosperity preachers since Jesus said they were impoverished, but rich (2:9). Obviously Jesus meant that they were materially poor but spiritually rich. If they could have only learned "their right to wealth as King's kids" and "activated prosperity principles" they could have become materially rich and spiritually poor, just like modern prosperity preachers. Too bad they lived before the time Jesus revealed those "prosperity principles" to the church. Worse, Jesus told them they were about to suffer tribulation for 10 days (2:10). If only they had known how to "exercise their authority in Christ," they could have experienced victory and blessing and avoided all that suffering! What a shame.

False teaching had infiltrated the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira, and it was as if they were being influenced by Balaam and Jezebel of Old Testament fame. Jesus was greatly concerned because His people were being led astray to "commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (2:20; see also 2:14). We know that sexual immorality is a sin which excludes one from heaven (1 Cor. 6:9-10), yet Paul taught that there was nothing wrong with eating meats sacrificed to idols. Perhaps "eating things sacrificed to idols" was simply a reference to idolatry. We know that Paul equated immorality and greed to idolatry (Col. 3:5).

Regardless, Jesus promised to judge a certain woman whom He referred to as Jezebel, who was posing as a prophetess in Thyatira and leading the saints astray. He had mercifully given her time to repent, but she would soon find herself "on a bed of sickness" (2:22). Those who committed adultery with her would also suffer tribulation and Jesus would "kill her children with pestilence" (2:23). I assume that He was referring to her spiritual children, her disciples. His judgment upon them would serve as an object lesson to the churches that God repays everyone according to their deeds (2:23). Sobering stuff! We're certainly not reading about American Jesus today!