



## river west church

Why Jezebel Went to Hell

Revelation 2:18-28

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### **A Memorable Image**

About 20 years ago I heard a sermon on the radio. It was delivered in a fiery voice by an African American pastor and I've never forgotten it (that's a good sermon!). The sermon was taken from Revelation 2 and it was titled, "Why Jezebel Went to Hell." The pastor kept asking the question over and over... "I want to know WHY Jezebel went to HELL!" Finally at the end of the whole sermon, after exploring all sorts of wrong answers to the question, he gave the real answer. It was startling and it was brilliant. It drew on one of the most memorable images in the whole Bible – Jezebel, evil wife of King Ahab in the Old Testament.

Jezebel was the daughter of EthBaal, priest-king of Tyre and Sidon. She had a strong, domineering character, and was self-willed and forceful. A fanatical devotee of Melqart, the Tyrian Baal, her staff numbered 450 of his prophets, and 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah, by the time Ahab was king (1 Kings 18:19). She clamored for her god to have at least equal rights with Yahweh, God of Israel. This brought her into conflict with the prophet Elijah. A battle between Yahweh and Baal was fought on Mt. Carmel, when Yahweh triumphed gloriously (1 Kings 18:17–40). Even so, this and the massacre of her prophets, instead of diminishing her zeal, augmented it. Jezebel was bad. Really bad.

This is the image given to us in Revelation 2, in the letter to the church at Thyatira. Jezebel is the "code-name" given to someone who was doing great harm to the church there. The name Jezebel is used to grab our attention and to give us a clue as to what the real problem was in the church at Thyatira. This is a message of profound importance for us as we work to live out our faith in the midst of a "fallen" culture. That is our battle.

Of course...we also want to know "WHY Jezebel went to HELL!" (well, actually, the passage doesn't exactly say she went to hell...but clearly, it didn't end well for her).

### **Culture, Commerce and Compromise**

How are you supposed to live out your Christian faith in a non-Christian culture? This is one of the most pressing questions of our time. It is widely acknowledged that we are living in a "post-Christian" culture. The world-view and values of the larger culture are clearly not Christ centered. So how are you supposed to live out your faith in this kind of world?

From the beginning, this has been a great struggle for followers of Christ. There are two responses, which are common, but each one is lacking. One response is to withdraw completely from the world around us into our own insulated Christian sub-culture. This is sometimes called "separatism." This is perhaps what the Christians in Ephesus did (Revelation 2:1-7). The other response is to just completely blend in with the world around us. This is sometimes called "accommodation." This is what Jezebel advocated. The truth is that both of these responses are deeply flawed.

Jesus calls us as Christians to be different. He calls us to be Holy. He actually does call us to be "separate" from the world in terms of our faith and our purity. But this doesn't mean that we can withdraw from the world into our own little sub-culture. We are to be "in" the world, but not "of" the world (John 17:15-16). Jesus calls us to a special relationship with Himself that gives us a new identity and shapes our faith, thinking and behavior in this world. But then He also sends us into the world to be salt and light – to be His kingdom representatives and ambassadors. The question

becomes, how do we live out both sides of our Christian identity? How do we interact with our world in love and real involvement, while at the same time not becoming just like the world in our thinking and our behavior? This was the issue at Thyatira. At Thyatira you had to be a part of the trade guilds to have any chance of making it financially. The trade guilds were the number one way to become involved in the culture around you. But to be a member you had to participate in the worship of idols and the sexual promiscuity that took place at the trade guild feasts (the equivalent of the weekly business member meeting).

Evidently, the woman labeled as “Jezebel” taught that as a Christian you didn’t need to draw a “Christian” line in your moral behavior or spiritual practices. She taught that Jesus didn’t care. In fact, she taught that Jesus wanted you to dive right in with the pagan practices of the culture – so you could prosper and have a voice (doesn’t Jesus want you to prosper?). These are issues that are still at the forefront of our lives as followers of Christ to this day.

In the message this week we will explore the heart and mind of Jesus on these issues. And of course we will also find out the real reason...“WHY Jezebel went to HELL”!