

## **The Progress of the Redeemed!**

Suraya Brown is a gorgeous little baby girl. Suraya and her older sister Akilah, who is two and a half, live in England with their mom, whose name is Atlanta. Suraya weighs just over seven pounds and is 19 inches long. To see a picture of Suraya is to see a beautiful child who looks like a doll.

But Suraya has a problem. She can't sit, talk or crawl yet, and has to be fed through a tube. You would expect that to be the case if seven pound 19 inch long Suraya was a newborn, but the brown eyed beauty is now 14 months old.

By now Suraya should weigh at least 20 pounds, sit, crawl, talk, and be off the feeding tube. But for some reason Suraya is just not growing. Her mum Atlanta is baffled, as are London physicians and international experts who have included pediatricians, nutritionists, geneticists and hormone experts. So far there has been no explanation for dear little Suraya not growing.

As I read about Suraya and prayed for her this week, I couldn't help but think about how uncommon her case is. We expect a baby, once born, to make progress in many different areas that we can chart on a graph. Suraya's doctors are baffled because in every area they measure, they can't even put her on the chart of where children her age would be.

But you know what I also thought about? I thought about how many professing Christians are like this dear little girl, not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual sense! They have trusted Christ alone for salvation, but since they prayed to receive Christ there is little if any measurable progress in their Christian life. They still look and act much as they did when they were first introduced to Jesus!

Now I want to be clear here!

**There are many times I lament that I am not yet all I should be in Christ, or all that I am guaranteed to be in Heaven! But praise God, I am definitely not what I was before Christ! This pilgrim has made progress, as all true Christians do!**

**"I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." -Philippians 1:6**

As we look at this fourth of the seven letters of Revelation today, and the longest of the seven letters, we will see that despite their very real challenges they needed to address, Jesus commend them for the progress they were making in their faith.

And this goes nicely with the progression of things the Spirit is saying to us today.

Read Revelation 2:18-29      PRAY!

### **Things we know about Thyatira:**

- It was 40 miles southeast of Pergamum
- It had been established by Alexander the Great 300 years before Christ
- In contrast to the first three cities mentioned, it was a smaller, more obscure city
- But God works in smaller cities in out of the way places also, doesn't He?!
- Thyatira was known for being a home to lots of industries
- It did commerce in wool, leather, linen, dyed stuff, pottery, bronze works, and unfortunately, slaves
- Among these, it was somewhat famous for its purple dye
- Do you remember at Philippi, the first convert was Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from Thyatira?
- Perhaps it was Lydia the businesswoman and her family that brought the gospel back to Thyatira
- Now each of those industries had a trade guild or union that you just about had to belong to
- Each guild had associated itself with a particular god that was supposed to be worshipped
- Every so often each guild would share a common meal at a feast
- Members of the guild were supposed to bring their own sacrifices to these feasts
- You were to bring your sacrifice to the altar to be blessed and burnt by the priest of the trade guilds god
- The priest would keep a little bit there, and the rest was returned to you to be eaten at this feast
- There was a lot of drunkenness at these feasts, and they also often included sexual activity
- Prominent gods worshipped in Thyatira were Diana, and Apollo, the sun god
- Thyatira's name means "continual sacrifice."

As in the other cities of the Roman Empire, Thyatira was a difficult place for Christians to be faithful to Jesus!

Now we have learned that in each of these letters Jesus introduces Himself in a way that was particularly meaningful to the ones He was addressing!

So far we have learned that Jesus is with His church, Jesus puts death in perspective, and Jesus is the ultimate judge of our behavior. Today we see...

### **V. 18 Jesus is the all powerful God who sees all!**

Verse 18 tells us Jesus is the Son of God, the One whose eyes are like a fiery flame, and whose feet are like fine bronze...

This is the only place in Revelation Jesus is called the Son of God. Emperor worshippers would call Caesar the "Son of God." But Jesus is the real Son of God, God the Son! Turn back to 1:13-15.

Jesus is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. 100% God, 100% Man!  
 He Himself is the mediator between God the Father and sinners like you and me!  
 The blazing eyes of the Son of God are brighter than the Sun God, Apollo!  
 The shining radiance of His feet is blinding in its beauty, something the bronze workers of Thyatira would have appreciated!

With His eyes He could see and examine exactly what they were thinking and doing! With His powerful feet He is able to crush what should not be happening!

### **V. 19 Jesus commends the church at Thyatira for love and progress!**

Jesus says, “I know your works, church!” He knew what was happening in Thyatira! And folks: Jesus knows what’s going on at Wayne Hills Baptist Church!

And even though He has a stiff rebuke for them in a moment, He first commends them heartily!

The most remarkable thing Jesus says here is “I know your love!”

Now before you speed on by this you should note this: of the seven letters in Revelation this is the only church specifically commended for its love!

**Jesus’ words to the church at Thyatira are a lot like what He said to the church in Ephesus, except it appears that they had the reverse situation. Ephesus excelled at correct Bible teaching but had lost its first love; Thyatira excelled at loving God but tolerated false teaching.**

Isn’t that interesting?

That remains a constant challenge for churches today as well!

“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” -John 4:24

To worship God in biblical truth without a loving spirit leads to legalism and dries up your faith; to worship God with a loving spirit without biblical truth leads to liberalism, that eventually sees an idolatrous version of the faith develop. True worshippers worship in BOTH spirit and truth!

Before we leave verse nineteen, though, we have to look at that last part:

**Jesus says in verse 19, “Your last works are greater than the first.”  
Wouldn’t you like to hear that from Jesus?**

Scotti Troxell, what you and the Aerobics ministry are doing this year for Jesus is greater than anything you’ve done for Jesus so far! Rick Stewart, what you and the Upward ministry is doing this year for Jesus is greater than anything you’ve done for Jesus so far! Shirlene Charbenueau, what you and the Food Pantry are doing for Jesus this year is greater than anything you’ve done for Jesus so far! What a great testimony to the progress they were making!

## **V. 20-21     What can mess up a church known for love and progress?**

**We read here that false teaching that leads to immorality and idolatry can mess up an otherwise wonderful church!**

Does that sound familiar?

It should, because that is precisely what the church in Pergamum was dealing with! This must be very important for Jesus to tell us this twice in a row!

Now what's up with Jezebel?

Jezebel was a self proclaimed prophetess in Thyatira. Now, Jezebel was probably not her real name, but Jesus calls her that to expose her deception.

**Jezebel is a reference from the Old Testament to Queen Jezebel of Israel, who not only led her husband King Ahab to worship Baal but through Ahab had promulgated her teachings of idolatry and immorality throughout Israel.**

Now I can just about guarantee you that the Jezebel in Thyatira was a lot more subtle than the Queen of Israel had been. She had developed a following among some in the church of Thyatira, and used it to teach error.

Verse twenty says she “deceives my slaves to commit sexual immorality and to eat meat sacrificed to idols.”

Now we already learned that for most people, to have a job in the city of Thyatira meant belonging to a trade guild. And going to your trade guild's feast meant participating at the banquet in eating meat sacrificed to idols, which was in essence an act of worship of the trade union god, and often also included sex acts.

Now some of you may be thinking, didn't Paul say it's a matter of individual conscience to eat meat sacrificed to idols?

In I Corinthians 10:14-33, Paul answered a question about eating meat sacrificed to idols at pagan altars. He said that those who ate meat sacrificed to idols at pagan altars are worshipping demons. But it appears someone else had asked Paul, “what about the meat itself, sold at the market- can we eat it in our homes when it is not being used as part of a pagan feast. That's where Paul answered that two rules apply: not violating your own conscience and not making another believer stumble.”

**Jezebel had twisted I Corinthians and was teaching people what they wanted to hear: “to keep your job you have to do what you have to do. If that means compromises with idol worship and immorality, God will forgive you.”**

Now verse 21 is very disturbing. It appears that somehow, through the elders of the church or some other way, Jezebel had actually been confronted about this, but had refused to repent.

Jesus says, “I gave her time to repent, but she doesn’t want to repent of her sexual immorality.”        **WHOA!**

With Jezebel it was not just innocent misreading of the Bible, it had developed into willful rebellion. She was personally involved in sexual sin and would not repent.

In the early 1900’s there was a flamboyant woman preacher in California. She had developed a huge following. One day she turned up missing and everyone was very concerned. Law enforcement officers found her a short while later, and discovered she had run off with one of the men in the church. She came back telling a story that she had been kidnapped, and the faithful believed her despite the plain evidence of her sinful conduct. And the number of her followers grew.

Similar things have happened with many other teachers and preachers over the years. No real repentance, a slap on the hand from a church or denomination, and back into the ministry. Unfortunately, the loving church of Thyatira, which probably was torn over what to do, tolerated it.

But Jesus didn’t! Look at verses 22-23.

#### **V. 22-23a    Jesus will deal with false teachers and their followers**

Jesus is very strong in His words here! He speaks of sickness, death, and great tribulation for false teachers and their followers.

Now it’s possible some of the teachers and their followers are real Christians. For them it’s probably sickness and death coming.

But for the ones who really aren’t Christians, they very well might have to through the great tribulation.

**This is the first mention of the time that is coming in Revelation 6-19, the seven years of Great Tribulation.**

Do you see it on our chart? Now Jesus told us in the world you will have tribulation, so for 2,000 years Christians have faced lots of troubles. But...

**The Great Tribulation will be a time of difficulty unlike the world has ever seen. In Mark 13:19 Jesus told us those days of tribulation will be the kind that hasn't been from the beginning of the world until now and never will be again!**

Verse 22 says false Christians will have to go through that time of great tribulation.

But look at what Revelation 3:10-11 says:

“Because you have kept my command to endure, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come over the whole earth to test those who live on the earth. I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown.”  
-Revelation 3:10-11

**V. 23b-25 Jesus will reward true believers for their progress when He comes**

As Christ Himself warns us of what He will do to the Jezebel's and the Balaam's, he says in verse 23 “all the churches will know that I examine minds and hearts, and I will give back to each of you according to your works.”

**What is Jesus trying to impress on the rest of us?**

**As His return nears, He wants us to get serious about first love, faithfulness until death, having a good testimony and continuing to make progress!**

In verse 24 he commends the rest, the faithful ones, for not holding Jezebel's teaching. Now what's this about the “deep things” of Satan in verse 24?

We aren't really sure! But here's my guess.

In I Cor. 2:10, Paul had spoken of the “deep things” of God. My guess is that Jezebel had borrowed from that phrase and spoke of the “deep things” of Satan. You can almost see her arguing that those who had experienced sin could be better servants of God than those who had not.

**In verse 24 Jesus commends true believers for not being duped by the “deep things of Satan” argument. He commends them for holding on to their purity rather than committing spiritual and physical adultery. Jesus makes clear: His true followers don't need to experience sin to appreciate salvation!**

Instead of buying Jezebel's arguments in favor of spiritual compromise, Jesus says in verse 25 – Hold on until I come!

There it is – the first of several references in these seven letters to His return!

### **V. 26-28    Overcomers will rule the nations with Jesus**

The reference to Christ reigning is from Psalm 2, the very important Messianic Psalm that is quoted here, and in 11:18; 12:5; 19:15.

Look at your chart: Revelation 20 speaks of a literal thousand year reign of Christ on earth; there are many passages that speak of this coming time.

As we continue on in Revelation we'll see that there are many things that distinguish the millennium on earth from the eternal new earth which follows in Revelation 21-22. One of the main differences seems to be that there will be people to rule who conform to Christ's law on the outside but inwardly live in rebellion.

So I believe the time we will have this authority over the nations will be during that 1,000 year reign!

**Note the reversal of fortunes for the redeemed: Now we are oppressed, persecuted, and suffering, but the reversal of our present experiences is coming! That's what I call progress!**

Hold on to what you have, church, until Jesus comes!

Let's Pray!