

Revelation 2:12-17

Study 8

Pergamos: The Church of Compromise

We move this morning to the 3<sup>rd</sup> church in the list of seven churches Jesus writes to here in the book of Revelation.

- So far, what we've seen, is that each church had serious issues at hand
  - And Jesus spoke to each church a specific message to address those particular issues
- And what we've discovered so far is that even though these letters were written to historical first century churches
  - The message contained within each letter is also a message for the church universal throughout the ages
    - That each letter and each message was given to "to him who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (plural)
      - And so if you are a Christian and you have an ear, the messages are for you as well
- That becomes even more apparent when we look at the issues Jesus addresses in each church
  - They are just as relevant and applicable today as they were then
    - And that's because the hearts of men, throughout the ages,
      - Have the same struggles today as men did them
        - And are in need of the same encouragement and admonitions that only Jesus can give

For example, each church, and really each individual Christian life, needs to be admonished to keep our priorities straight in our Christian lives.

- It's necessary to hear that, isn't it?
  - That we need be Biblically balanced in our love for Jesus – like Jesus tells the church in Ephesus – who left their first love
    - Each of us need to hear that having discernment and testing all teachings by the Word of God, that these are great and needed things in our fellowships
      - We need to hear that every church and every Christian should exercise discernment and have the ability to test all things
        - Holding fast to that which is good
  - But if these trump our love for God – loving the fight more than Jesus

- Then we are out of round. We are idolatrous and ultimately unpleasing to the Lord
- As well, it's good that the church realizes that suffering and persecution are companions of Christianity.
  - As Paul tells pastor Timothy in his second letter to him
    - "12 ...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Tim 3:12)
- But through our persecutions and sufferings
  - Like the Smyrna church, it brings us great comfort that Jesus has been there before and He knows what it's like
    - And that Jesus promises that even though we might suffer pain, even to the point of death here on earth
      - We "shall not be hurt by the second death"
        - We have the hope of eternal life which can never fade away or be taken from us

Our church that we will study this morning is no different. Its message is just as relevant today as it was in the first century.

- The third church in the list of 7 is the church in Pergamos;
  - Pergamos is usually referred to as the Church of Compromise
    - To compromise is to make concessions or accommodations for someone who does not agree with a prevalent set of standards or rules.
- Pergamos was a church that had compromised the integrity of the doctrine of Christ
  - They had adopted and incorporated the gospel and doctrine of the world
    - The church became a compromised amalgamation of Christian teachings and worldly/pagan teachings
      - And even worse, they didn't do anything about it
        - Maybe they had been in it for so long that they didn't realize
          - Or maybe they just didn't have the fortitude enough to purge the church from the sin – IDK
- But this particular letter strongly emphasizes the seriousness of allowing false doctrine into the church -
  - About mixing the essential and primary teachings of Christ, with the teachings of the world

- As Paul admonishes the believers in 2 Cor. 6: **14** “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? **15** And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? **16** And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?”
- In that same chapter, Paul goes on to say: “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.”
  - In the letter to the church in Pergamos, Jesus does the same.
    - He calls the church to come out from among them in their doctrine
      - To not compromise the integrity of His message and integrity of His nature
        - With that of the world

The Church in Pergamos had become inseparably connected to the world.

- They were in love with Jesus, yes,
  - But they added to the Gospel.
    - Tried to infuse with Jesus, the philosophies of the world and the philosophies of Satan
      - This was a church that had become comfortable wooing and courting and ultimately marrying the world.
- I think what will become quite apparent as we move through the study
  - Is that the church today has many familiarities with that of our predecessor - Pergamos
- We may also notice that maybe our own Christian lives have much in common with that of Pergamos
  - I only ask that you keep an open ear to the Spirit of the living God
    - And listen to Him
  - So let’s read through the letter and then take some time to go through verse by verse
    - **12** “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: **13** “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

**14** But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. **15** Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.[a] **16** Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. **17** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*.”

Jesus introduces Himself to this church as “He who has the sharp two-edged sword”

- If you were hear a few weeks ago, you may remember this description from chapter one,
  - Where verse 16 say that “out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword”
- This is not the two-edged sword we read from Hebrews 4 that says
  - “<sup>12</sup>For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword”
    - That word used for sword <machalra> is a small dagger used for precision fighting
- But by way of reminder, the word here in Revelation is <rhomphaia>,
  - It’s that heavy, long, broad sword that was used by barbaric people.
    - This is the sword that takes two hands to lift over head but when it came down,
      - It utterly destroyed its target with one blow.
  - This is the word used throughout Revelation with the ultimate illustration of its power in Chapter 19:<sup>15</sup>
    - “Now out of His mouth goes a sharp<sup>[g]</sup> sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

This introduction of Jesus is not like the others we’ve seen so far.

- This is the first negative introduction of Jesus because the church is facing imminent judgment
  - How significant is His title here in light of the theme of the letter?

- In light of the doctrinal error and the compromise of God's word and truth by some in the fellowship?
  - How significant is Jesus' introduction to them?

The introduction to Christ in this letter is not a happy one as Jesus introduces Himself as judge and executioner

- But there's no doubt the Christians were in a uniquely tough environment. And Jesus knows this
  - He says to them "**13** "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells"
- By any standard, this church was in the most hellish environment of all churches
  - Notice how Jesus describes their environment
    - It's "Satan's throne is" and then at the end of verse 13 "where Satan dwells"
      - What's interesting is that in Smyrna we had the synagogue of Satan (verse 9),
        - But Pergamos was where Satan dwelt. It's where his throne is!

What does that mean? Does that mean that Satan had his headquarters in Pergamos and lived there?

- That's a good question to ask.
  - Some think that because its citizens worshiped men and false gods,
    - That when Jesus referred to Pergamum as being, "where Satan lives."
      - That the statement is metaphorical, and not actual
        - And there may be good reason for this.
- Pergamos was home to much of the emperor worship of the day
  - And they had built temples to Athena, Dionysius on the acropolis adjacent to the city
    - On top of the acropolis – on top of the mountain –
      - Was built a giant altar to Zeus, 800 feet above ground, seen for miles - the altar was 100 feet square.
- Pergamos was also famous for their worship of the pagan god "Aesculapius" or "Asklepios"

- A pagan god known by it's very famous symbol of a serpent wrapped around a pole
  - We see it all the time as the symbol of the medical profession
    - And so there are good arguments for the throne of Satan being a symbolic reference to all the idol worshipping
- But here's what I think:
  - If we are to take use the basic rules of interpenetration – that the Bible is to be taken literally unless there is evidence to the contrary in the text
    - Then I think we should take this statement literally as well.
      - I see nothing in the text to indicate allegory or symbolic language.
        - Jesus plainly states Satan's throne is in Pergamum.
- It would be like Jesus writing CCM a letter and saying
  - "you live in the city where Satan has his throne and where he dwells"

Think about that statement for a moment. It's mind-blowing!

- Has it ever occurred to you that Satan doesn't live in hell?
  - We hear that all the time from some. That hell is where Satan is; that's where his headquarters are
    - I think that comes more from folklore and books
- It's a major misconception that Satan is in charge of hell and that he and his minions live there
  - Using their pitchforks to torment souls for eternity.
    - In truth, God is in charge of hell
      - Jesus says in Luke 12:4-5, "do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. <sup>5</sup> But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"
- In fact, I don't see anywhere in Scripture where Satan is in hell.
  - The closest Satan comes to hell is in Rev 20:<sup>10</sup> The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where <sup>[b]</sup>the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

- Verse 14 “Then Death and Hades [hell] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>15</sup> And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”
  - Satan does not reside in hell but will be tossed into the lake of fire along with hell and death

In reality Satan roams the earth, seeking people to tempt into sin and thus separate from God.

- 1 Peter 5:8 states, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”
  - In John 14:30, Jesus called Satan the “prince of this world,”
    - and the apostle Paul referred to him as the “ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” in (Ephesians 2:2).
      - Satan does not live in hell; he lives and works on the earth.
- We’d be good to remember that Satan is not ubiquitous; he is not omnipresent.
  - He can only be in one place at one time – though through his myriad of demons
    - It can seem like he can be

So when Jesus says here in Rev 2 that Pergamos is where Satan’s throne is – I take His words to mean just that.

- And how daunting that is?!?!
  - And Jesus is telling the church - I know! I know what place you live in!
    - And then commends them for their spiritual commitment in the midst of their environment
- Look at verse 13. He commends them for their personal loyalty and their public confession
  - Again in verse 13 “...And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you”
- Even in the face of such difficult circumstances, they held on to their personal loyalties to Jesus
  - They held fast to His name
    - And publically, they didn’t deny their faith
      - Even when Antipas was martyred among them

- Nothing is really known about this man Antipas, but tradition holds that he was the pastor of the church
  - It's interesting to note that his name means "against all"
    - As a good pastor, he stood against all opposition to Christ and was likely martyred for it

What's disconcerting to read here is that even though they held to the name of Jesus and to their public confession of faith,

- Jesus was not pleased with them.
  - You know, whenever we think we are doing well with the Lord,
    - It's always good to be evaluated by Jesus
      - And of course, for us, this evaluation comes by and through His word
- To the first church in Ephesus, Jesus says that He has **one** thing against that church - they lost their first love
  - But here in Pergamos, Jesus says that He has a **few things** against them
    - **14** But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. **15** Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. **16** Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."

What a mix of zeal and error at this church!

- Antipas had stood firm in faith to the point of death,
  - yet others within the same fellowship were promoting unscriptural teaching.
- Jesus points out two sources of the evil in the church
  - **First**, the church has those within that hold to the **doctrine of Balaam**
    - And **second**, there are also some in the church that hold the **doctrine of the Nicolaitans**.

Balaam, as many might remember, was the false prophet found in Numbers 22-25

- Probably best known for being rebuked by a donkey
  - Balaam was a gentile soothsayer – he was a sorcerer



- He was a pagan prophet for hire that was hired by the king of Moab to curse Israel to try to get rid of her
      - Three times Balaam tried to curse Israel, but every time he tried, the curse came out a blessing.
- So he got another plan. If he couldn't curse them, he'd earn his money another way, he'd corrupt them.
  - He would have the Moabite women move in among the Israelite men
    - and the Moabite women would then sexually seduce the Israelite men
      - and cause them to compromise God's command for Israel to not inter-marry
  - God knew that Intermarrying would cause the idolatry, and debauchery, and the prostitution of pagan ways...
    - To come into Israel and destroy their power. Destroy their testimony of God's righteousness

This is what Balaam taught Balak. He taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel.

- And ultimately, the stumbling block was connected with idolatry (to eat things sacrificed to idols) and sexual immorality.
  - When we talk about the doctrine of Balaam, it boils down to this:
    - ***Balaam taught the children of God doctrine that was contrary to the revealed Word of God.***
      - The doctrine of Balaam is the teaching that the church can adopt and intertwine the doctrines of the world with the doctrines of Christ
- The doctrine of the Nicolaitans, as we talked about a few weeks ago, is the doctrine of authoritative superiority.
  - From the word <nico> where we get our work Nike
    - And Layo – where “laity” comes from
- The word simply means, “to be victorious over the people,” or “to conquer the people.”
  - It's the teaching that within the church there is a hierarchy of separation
    - Nicolaitans would be identified as leaders in the Church who had subjugate Christians to their self-imposed authority —
      - it's the clergy over the laity that breaches the outlined Biblical authority of a servant leader

- Simply put: “Nicolaitanism” is a corruption of delegated authority within the church and exercising this authority after a forbidden pattern
  - after the pattern set forth by those in the world.

Does this any of this sound contemporary? The doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans?

- There are many churches today that hold to an authority over the people beyond the Biblical authority given.
  - And the church is full of compromised teachings that attempt to mix the world’s philosophies and dogma
    - with that of Christ’s teachings
- And I have to believe that since Jesus’ admonition here in verse 17 is to all the churches
  - That verse 16 applies to all those the churches today that hold to these abhorrent doctrines as well
    - 16 - “Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth”

Five of the 7 churches are told to repent.

- Many times, it is the unbeliever that is connected with the word repentance in the scriptures
  - But here the church is told to repent
    - Or else Jesus will come to them quickly and fight against them with the sword of His mouth
      - Again, here’s that broad destroying sword
- Distinction – There is a difference between Christians who fall into the trap of a false doctrine
  - And those that hold on to and teach these doctrines
    - A difference between a sheep still growing
      - and those that hold onto these errors, refusing to repent and teaching others the same
  - And it is the later that Jesus said He will come quickly against and fight them with the sword of His mouth

But some might ask the question – why, if Jesus promises quick destruction to these types of churches

- Why do we see them still running around the landscape today
  - Even prospering – in the eyes of the some
    - That doesn’t sound too quick.
- Ah, but remember, that not all quick means soon;

- but means once it starts how quickly the destruction will come upon them
  - Do not measure “quickly” by how soon
    - But rather how quickly the destruction will come upon them once God’s long-suffering has run its course.
      - ***I’m glad for this. It gives time for repentance and correction***

And we should all be glad for this, because even though this is a rebuke against the church

- Each of us struggles with some of these things too from time to time. Especially with tenet of the doctrine of Balaam
  - We are in a constant battle to not mix the world into our Christianity
    - How? Here’s some examples I came up with though I’m sure there are better ones that you might think of

How many Christians do you know that refuse to take God’s word literally when it comes to 6 days of creation?

- What is their reasoning?
  - Invariably it’s because science doesn’t line up with scripture so they take science OVER scripture
    - Or they try to mix it in by claiming to be “long day creationists”
      - Rather than just taking God at His word and trusting that He knows better than so-called science
        - When science doesn’t line up with the word of God
          - Science is either wrong, or slow to catch up to the truth
- Many today are accepting, and even capitulating, to the pressures of popular culture by allowing women pastors in the church
  - Can I just say on that point – just as women are not called to the role of a pastor
    - Neither are all men are allowed to be pastors or elders either
      - Just because you’re a man does not give automatic authority to become a pastor either
        - Anymore than signing up to be a pastor online makes you an actual pastor

- God is very specific. He **calls!** And He only calls **SOME** men to be pastors.
- A very big one in the church today is the marriage of psychology with biblical counseling
  - This is commonly referred to as Biblical Integration Counseling
    - It's the mixture of pop-psychology and the Bible
      - But again, what accord does light have with darkness
  - The world is under the sway of the wicked one and it's darkness
    - And we to be separate from that.
      - And if anyone begins their counseling eliminating sin as the primary reason behind behavior
        - Doesn't talk about repentance as key in the changing
          - And eliminating Jesus as the answer before the session starts –
            - It's darkness.
              - We are to be children of the light
                - No matter how pretty the packaging
- Even in our parenting the Bible has taken a back seat to so-called worldly experts
  - Even just lately the debate over spanking has come up again with the media labeling spanking as child abuse
    - Can I just say – child abuse is child abuse. Spanking is correction and properly chastising your child, as the Bible commands, is not child abuse.
      - To equate those child abuse to spanking is disingenuous
        - and a ploy of the Enemy to simply further God's people from God's principles.
- Bottom line – the world has crept into the church and we have allowed the world to influence our minds
  - But we are to cast "...down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5)

So, this church has been seduced by the world.

- Because of that, some in the church were integrating the doctrine of the world into the church
  - And no one was saying or doing a thing about it.
    - **So Jesus did.** He told them to repent – and He tells *us* to repent

And then...to those that overcome, He gives a wonderful encouragement:

- **17** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*.”
  - “To him who overcomes”...isn’t that wonderful.
    - To him who overcomes this spirit of false teaching. To him who overcomes this spirit of placing anything else on par with God’s holy word
      - To him who overcomes...
  - Aren’t you glad that in the midst of such heavy, difficult type talk
    - That there is a sweet word of encouragement?
      - Our hearts need it

But who are the overcomers in the church?

- Let me back up for a moment and say this:
  - When we talk about the church, we are talking only about individuals who know the Lord
    - If you don’t have a personal relationship with God
      - No matter what church roll your name is on, you are not in the true church
  - If you never put your name on anybody’s church roll but have come to know the Lord personally
    - You are already in the church!
      - Aren’t you glad about that?
        - And when God writes to the believers,
          - He writes to him that overcomes

You might say, well, What if I don’t overcome?

- All believers are overcomers!
  - No unbeliever is an overcomer
    - And no overcomer is an overcomer for a while
      - Overcomers are forever!

- 1 John 5: **4** For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. **5** Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”
- He who overcomes is he who has been born of God and believes that Jesus is the Son of God
  - How many overcomers are here this morning!!! Woop! 😊

To these overcomers, Jesus gives two promises:

- That He “will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*”
  - Hidden manna to eat and a white stone with a new name on it
- Just for fun, I took a second to Google hidden manna
  - You get everything from the Eucharist to the entire false signs and wonders teachings.
    - There’s a lot of misunderstanding about this

The hidden manna.

- Ex 16:15 “**4** And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, *as* fine as frost on the ground. **15** So when the children of Israel saw *it*, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it *was*”
  - The Hebrew word for “what is it” is manna
    - Manna means “what is it”
      - 40 years of “what is it”
        - What’s for breakfast? What is it?
          - This is what Jesus encouraged the overcomers with.
            - If they overcome they get manna
- And it’s even worse that this because the hidden manna is a reference to the little golden pot inside the Ark of the Covenant
  - How long do you think that manna has been in there? Ever since Aaron put it there!
    - It’s been a LONG TIME.
      - May need to gravy to dip it in
- But really, how can this be an encouragement to believers?
  - To feast on the manna that the Jews ate day and night for 40 years
    - That was tucked away in the Ark so many years ago?

- But of course there's more meaning to this than just this.

Turn to John 6. In Psalm 78:24, the manna is called "the corn of heaven"

- And in Psalms 105:40 it's called "the bread of heaven".
  - John 6: **26** Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. **27** Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." **28** Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" **29** Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."
    - **31** Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" **32** Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." **34** Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." **35** And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.
      - **47** Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. **48** I am the bread of life. **49** Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. **50** This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. **51** I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."
- These passages are not speaking of communion – John 6 says nothing about communion (which wasn't instituted until the night of His death incidentally)
  - It says nothing about the so called "Eucharist" of the Catholic faith
    - God is going to give us overcomers the hidden manna
      - In Deut. 8:3, we are told that God gave manna to His people to humble them and give them a carving for God Himself

- “So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord”
- The hidden manna is none other than Jesus Christ Himself
  - And when you have Him you have it all!
    - To every overcomer, I give you Jesus!!!!
      - He is the Shepherd that will cause you to say “I shall not want”
        - He the water that allows you to not thirst again.
          - He is the bread of life that you may never hunger for anything else
            - He is our all in all!

As if that were not enough encouragement for those who will overcome, He promises to give you a white stone with a new name on it

- Rev. 3: **12** He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name.
  - In the ancient world, the use of a **white stone** had many associations. A **white stone** could be a ticket to a banquet, a sign of friendship, evidence of having been counted, or as a sign of acquittal in a court of law. Jesus may have any one of these meanings in mind, but at the very least we know that it has the assurance of blessing.