

Letters from Jesus: Pergamum!

Revelation 2:12-17

Jesus loves the church! I'm always confused by those who claim they don't need church to be connected to God. Really? The church is the bride of Christ, so how connected to the church do you think we should be if it is the bride?

Jesus' love for the church is the reason He wrote the 7 letters of Revelation.

In His letter to the church in Ephesus He reminded them to hold onto their first love.

In His letter to the church in Smyrna He warned them that holding onto Himself would result in suffering and persecution, but He told them to hold tight, and they would receive the crown as a reward.

Today we look at the third letter, the letter to the church in Pergamum.

I. Correspondent, Church & City

Revelation 2:12, "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword."

So, the author of the letter is the one who has the double-edged sword. We learn more about what this is from:

Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

The sword is the Word of God. It isn't just any sword; it is a double-edged sword. This shows us that it is powerful and full of potency.

In the book, "Pastor, Jesus is Enough", the author Jeremy Writebol, writes this about the importance of the ministry of the Word:

"By pastoring with the Word, you equip and enable your people to keep the faith. The regular and consistent preaching of the Word of God is a call into the shaken and stirred lives of God's people to believe the truth and abandon the lies of where our security ultimately is found. Those who uphold and give high esteem to the Word of God over the church

equip God's people to endure suffering, calamity, and all sorts of pressures that would cause our brothers and sisters to shipwreck their faith."

Later in Revelation 19 we are told that when Jesus returns that out of Jesus' mouth comes a sword. This is when Jesus comes as a judge and executioner.

Pergamum is only mentioned here in the Bible. It was the capital of Asia. The modern Turkish city of Bergama now sits in its place.

Pliny describes Pergamum as "by far the most distinguished city of Asia." It is located about 100 miles north of Ephesus. And what made it unique was that it was built on a conical hill which rose 1000 feet above the surrounding plain which gave the city a very royal appearance.

Pergamum also had a library which contained 200,000 volumes. Only the library in Alexandria was larger.

Pergamum was also the center for worship of 4 of the Greco-Roman gods. It had temples for Athena, Asklepios, Dionysos and Zeus. Also, in the year 29 BC they built the first temple for emperor worship.

II. Commendation

Revelation 2:13, "I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives."

The church in Pergamum held fast to the name of Jesus and they did not deny him in spite of heavy persecution. Antipas, who was most likely a leader in the church was killed for his faith and still the church stood strong.

The reference to Satan's throne may have referred to the temple to Zeus which was in this city.

III. Concern

Revelation 2:14-15, "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. 15 Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans."

So, here is the problem. Despite holding firm to Christ and Biblical truth, they allowed people who held to false teaching to remain in the body. These false teachings had roots in the Old and New Testaments.

First, Balaam was a teaching we saw in the Old Testament. Balaam led to all types of immoral practices including idol worship.

Next, the Nicolaitans which we first saw in the letter to the Ephesian church, taught that our liberty in Christ permitted all types of sexual acts as being admissible. Sound familiar?

Paul asked the question regarding Christian liberty, “What then, should we sin that grace may abound?” His response was the strongest form of the word “no” found in Greek.

The failure of the church in Pergamum was that they tolerated false teachers even though they didn’t accept their false teachings themselves. We will see a church in one of the upcoming letters that not only tolerated the false teachers, but they accepted the false teachings.

Even though most in the church remained loyal to Biblical truth this acceptance was rebuked by Jesus. He draws a clear line.

Titus 2:11-12, “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. 12 It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,”

The church in America today is struggling just like the church in Pergamum. In the name of acceptance and tolerance we are allowing beliefs counter to Scripture a place among us. What do you think Jesus would tell us in light of His instruction to the church in Pergamum?

1 John 2:15-17, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”

John says in his gospel that we were chosen out of the world. Paul in Romans says we are not to be conformed to this world.

James 4:4, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

Now, it doesn’t say we are to be mean to those outside of Christ. No, a matter of fact we are to love them, but that doesn’t mean accepting the sin in which the world is enslaved.

In Matthew 18 we are given a process to deal with those who want to hold to sin and if they fail to repent, to change their ways it results in being put out of the fellowship. Sin is serious my friends.

IV. Command

Revelation 2:16, “Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Catch this, repentance is the only remedy! Paul told the church in Corinth the same thing. We must turn away from sin. We must turn away from false

teaching because it leads people away from Jesus, not to Him.

This is the greatest tragedy connected to false teaching, it leads people away from God, away from truth.

V. Counsel

Revelation 2:17, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.”

In this verse, in this counsel, Jesus makes 3 promises.

1. “The hidden manna”

This hidden manna is Jesus, the bread of life. Manna was basically honey flavored bread as best we can tell.

This manna, being Jesus, is all the blessings of knowing Christ. What would you say are the blessings of knowing Christ?

Salvation, forgiveness, adoption, peace & joy, renewed mind, purpose, hope, intimacy, healing just to name a few.

2. "A white stone"

Within Roman culture the victor would receive a stone with their name written on it. This stone would give them access to banquets.

The white stone here symbolizes our entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven.

3. "A new name"

This name, written on the stone, serves as our admission pass into eternal glory.

This name is personal and it reflects God's love and adoption of us as His true child. This concept is reflective of our names being written in the Lamb's book of life. Is your name in that book?