

Sermon: No Compromise

Text: Revelation 2:12-17

Introduction:

So far in Revelation chapter 2, Jesus has instructed the Apostle John to write letters to churches that gathered in two very influential cities on the western coast of the country we now know of as Turkey. Ephesus (**Rev. 2:1-7**) was, in many ways, the “New York City” of the first century. It was a majestic harbor town, boasting a building called the Temple of Artemis. In much the same way as the Empire State Building was for many years the TALLEST building in the world—the Temple of Artemis was the LARGEST building in the world at the time (considered one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world). Jesus also inspired John to write a letter to the church that gathered in Smyrna (**Rev. 2:8-11**)—a city that didn’t quite have the same international acclaim, but a very prominent city nonetheless (think Boston).

The third letter is to the church of Pergamum (**Rev. 2:12-17**). A good comparison for this city would be Washington DC, as it was the seat of the Roman government in that part of the world. Pergamum was also known for learning, and boasted of the world’s second largest library (the largest was in Alexandria). The first words to this church were to remind them who hold the sword (God!...not Rome). The sword was considered a weapon of war, and those who had a sword had power. Pergamum was one of the first cities in Asia Minor to welcome in the Romans. They helped the Romans defeat the other cities in the area. For both believers and non-believers it was the Romans who held the sword. The Romans were the only ones who had the authority to put someone to death. They were in control. The church in Pergamum needed to be reminded that Jesus is ultimately in control.

You know you live in a pagan (extremely worldly!) city when it is referred to as the “throne of Satan.” There was so much idol worship in Pergamum that scholars can’t completely agree as to what the “throne of Satan” is referring to. Pergamum was home of the medicine god, Asclepius. The symbol for this god was a serpent intertwined staff, which might seem familiar since a serpent intertwined staff is still used today to represent medicine. Pergamum was also the home of the throne of Zeus. He was the chief god of the Greek pantheon. Needless to say there are plenty of options in Pergamum for the “throne of Satan.” No matter if it had a physical reference or not, the Christians there still lived in a predominately pagan society.

In the church at Pergamum some of the people there still held onto the teachings of Balaam. This is in reference to the Old Testament man who was known for divination. King Balak requested that Balaam curse the Israelites so he could defeat them in battle. God prohibited Balaam from cursing them. Balaam knew the only way to defeat Israel was to get them to sin against God (**Numbers 31:16**). The devil is still using this same trick today. He doesn’t need you to renounce your faith, just to compromise it.

The church at Pergamum was still trying to combine their old lifestyle with their Christian beliefs. They were making compromises. If you do a wrong activity long enough in the church it can become a tradition. These false teachings or activities can then be handed down to the next generation. The only way to fix this is to repent and go back to faithfully following Jesus.

Examination:

- Read **Revelation 1:12-18**

- The One who is speaking to John (vv. 12-13) is described as standing in the middle of seven gold lampstands. In Revelation 2:1, this same person (I'll give you a clue—it's Jesus!) is seen walking amidst these seven gold lampstands. It is clear that each of these seven lampstands is the "community church" that gathers in the seven cities that Jesus addresses these seven letters. Talk about the imagery of a church being described as a "lampstand." How is the church a lampstand in the community? Do you think Jesus views King Street Church as a lampstand here in Chambersburg? In what ways are we, as a lampstand, shining the light of Jesus in the midst of the darkness?
 - Based on the description of Jesus in verses 12-16, what are some good ways to summarize this description?
 - We often envision Jesus as being meek and mild, and walking with us as a friend. This passage definitely gives us a different view of Jesus. How important is it that we also understand that Jesus holds absolute authority?
 - In verse 16, we see a sharp two-edged sword coming out of Jesus' mouth. What do you think this means or indicates?
- Read **Revelation 2:12-17**
 - The message to the church in Pergamum is from the same person we saw described in Revelation 1:12-18. A specific attribute of Jesus is repeated in verse 12. What is that attribute?
 - In **Ephesians 6:17**, the Word of God (the Bible) is described in a certain way. How is it described—and how does that relate to what is said to be coming out of the mouth of Jesus?
 - Pergamum is described as the city where Satan has his throne. Wow! From a human perspective, you would never see with human eyes the hold that Satan might have over a city. But from a heavenly, upper story perspective, the people living in Pergamum were literally living in Satan's front yard. What are some cities here in the United States where you would think that Satan has a stronghold or a throne? How much control do you think he has in C'burg?
 - How impressive is it that the believers in Pergamum, living in a place where Satan has such power, remained loyal to Jesus?
 - What happened to Antipas, and why was he being singled out? (v. 13)
 - In verses 14-15, what are the things that Jesus "has against" the church in Pergamum? (for background on Balaam, go back and look at **Numbers 22-24; 31**)
 - What is the only way to avoid the judgement that is coming from the sword in Jesus' mouth? (v. 16)
 - What is given to the believers who remain faithful and are victorious? (v. 17)

Application:

There are many people on this earth who believe that they can use the name of Jesus in a cursing way—and could care less that they will have to stand before Him some day to give an account for their lives. What does this passage have to say about that? What should OUR response be to those who use the name of Jesus in a vain way while in our presence?