

"The Letters to the 7 Churches"

Part 3

Revelation 2:1-3:22

Introduction: Today we return to our study of revelation and as we do we are returning stepping back into the 7 letters to the 7 churches recorded in Revelation 2 and 3. So far we have looked at 2 of the letters. We have looked at the letter to the church at Ephesus and the letter to the church at Smyrna.

This morning we have come to the next church which Jesus addresses.

The Church at Pergamos

Revelation 2:12-17

Notice Revelation 2:12a

Background:

The church at Pergamos most likely was started from the spread of the Gospel from the church at Ephesus.

Acts 19:1, 8, 10

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

⁸ And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

¹⁰ And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

The city of Pergamos was very dark, spiritually speaking. It was a city which was full of idolatry and many false religions. Then on top of all of that there were several other things which contributed to the darkness.

1. **It was the center for Emperor Worship. There was a temple built within the city which was built for the worship of the Caesars.**

Listen to the words of Mills:

"The major threat to Christians in Pergamum came from its role as a center of emperor worship in Asia, a function that went with it being the capital city. Caesar worship required each citizen, once a year, to offer a pinch of incense to Caesar on his altar and profess him as Lord. The citizen was then given a certificate valid for one year which allowed him to worship whatever god or gods he preferred with impunity. "

Whoever refused to worship was arrested and then imprisoned.

2. **There was another temple there which was for the worship of the god of healing and his name was Aesculapius.**

There was also a medical school attached to the worship of this false god. The symbol for this false god was a snake. Back in Numbers 21 God had Moses place a brazen serpent upon a pole and there people who were bitten by the snakes in Numbers 21 were to look to the pole serpent on the pole for healing. This serpent on the pole became the symbol for this false god Aesculapius. This is the very sign we see on the side of medical vehicles today.

But there was more to this. When someone was sick back then they would go to the temple of Aesculapius and they would spend the night or several nights sleeping in the temple which was full of snakes. As these snakes crawled all over you it was believed they were empowered by the Aesculapius and they had the power to heal.

3. **There was also in the city an altar dedicated to the chief Greek savior god, Zeus.**

This false god was believed to lord over all the other false gods.

This was the city which the little church of Pergamos was set into. This will help us to better appreciate the first point in our study.

There was also a university and a library there which had over 200,000 volumes. That by the way was before the days of printing. They were all hand written.

I. **The Commendation**

Notice Revelation 2:12

Here in verse 12 we see that Jesus introduces Himself as He which has the sharp two edged sword. This was a warning for the sword speaks of judgment. There was a major problem within this church and Jesus would not allow it to exist. He promised He would

build His church and with that promise was the idea of protection. Here in Pergamos the church was in danger and for that reason they needed to be warned.

Notice Revelation 2:13

Here is the commendation. In this verse we see a very interesting statement. Satan's throne existed within the city of Pergamos. We must understand that Satan is not like God who is omnipresent. God is everywhere but Satan can only be one place at a time. At the time this letter was written his throne was set up in this city of Pergamos.

This helps us to understand just how spiritually dark this city was. Satan may have set up his throne here because of all the idolatry which existed combined with the temples to the false gods. Whatever the reason Satan's throne was set up here we can be sure that it was for the reason that he was comfortable.

All of this tells us how difficult it would have been for the church within that city. But it also tells us of the potential within the city for the church to shine brightly. The church was to be a light in the darkness and this church truly was in the darkness.

Notice Revelation 2:13 again.

There are 2 points of commendation here:

1. **They held fast the name of Jesus Christ.**

This means there was a remnant in the church who surrendered to Jesus as the Lord of their lives. They lived in obedience to Jesus no matter the cost.

2. **They had not denied the faith.**

This means that when they were pressured about their faith they would not back down. Remember I told you that if someone did not worship the Emperor they were arrested and they were imprisoned.

These believers were in a furnace of affliction and their faith was truly tried. They were living proof that TRUE FAITH CANNOT BE DESTROYED!

1 Peter 1:7

⁷ That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

James 1:1-3

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

² *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

³ *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

Let me show you just how strong their faith was.

Notice Revelation 2:13 again.

Notice the word "even". We do not know anything about Antipas but from this verse we can understand that his death was used as a deterrent to stop the spread of Christianity. It was great that these believers were true to the name and the faith of Jesus Christ but to magnify their stand even more we are told that they stood EVEN after they watched Antipas the martyr die.

As I said we do not know how he died but TRADITION says he died in a brass bowl. It is believed a brass bowl was hollowed out and Antipas was placed in the bowl and they then built a fire under the bowl. He was literally cooked to death. If this is the case and the other believers were made to watch then we can truly understand how strong the faith of the believers was at Pergamos.

II. **The Condemnation**

Notice Revelation 2:14

Here we see that there were those mixed in with the believers who held to the doctrine of Balaam. Let me explain who Balaam was. He was a gifted prophet of the Old Testament who used what God had given to him for personal profit, personal gain, and personal satisfaction. He was hired by Balak, the king of Moab to curse Israel. Balaam desired to do as he was hired to do but God stopped him 3 times. Let me show you some verses that will help.

Numbers 22:4-7

⁴ *And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.*

⁵ *He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people*

come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:

⁶ *Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.*

⁷ *And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak.*

Balaam tried 3 times to curse Israel but God stepped in every time. At the close of Numbers 24 it looks like he was unable to do anything to collect the rewards.

Numbers 24:25

²⁵ *And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way.*

Then we read these words in Numbers 25.

Numbers 25:1-2

And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.

² *And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.*

Now let me show you Numbers 31.

Numbers 31:15-16

¹⁵ *And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive?*

¹⁶ *Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.*

Here we see that Balaam could not curse Israel so he gave counsel to Balak to send the Moabite women in to Israel's camp to defile the men which would lead to Israel worshipping their false gods. This was all of Satan to destroy Israel so as to destroy the promise of Jesus Christ. Now back to Revelation.

The doctrine of Balaam was the teaching that it was within the bounds of GRACE to practice sexual immorality and to partake of the feasts in the temples of the false gods where the meat was offered to idols. Satan was attempting to do 3 things here:

1. He was trying to use the holiness of God against the church. You see he knew that if the church could be corrupted then God would need to chasten the people which meant their numbers would be decreased.
2. He attempted to get them involved in idolatry so that the idol would come between them and God. Thus their allegiance would be divided.
3. He attempted to get them to see GRACE as a license to sin. He tried to get them involved in sexual immorality.

Here is the point we need to grasp: There were people in the church who were teaching it was ok for the church to be married to the world. These people were planted by Satan to lead the church into a life of corruption and Jesus would not permit it to happen.

Notice Revelation 2:15

The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes many believe was a teaching very similar to Balaam's doctrine. They believe it was the teaching that says there is no need for the church to live separated from the world. They see the teaching as a license to indulge in the lusts of the flesh.

This church permitted this teaching to exist within the church. They were guilty of compromise.

III. The Cure and the Warning

Notice Revelation 2:16

They were to repent. This means to turn around and do what was right. If not Jesus would come and He would not tolerate a teaching that would corrupt the church.

Conclusion:

There is so much to learn here:

1. **We are not to tolerate false teaching.**
2. **We are to live separated lives.**

James 4:4

⁴ Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

1 John 2:15-16

¹⁵ *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

¹⁶ *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*

2 Corinthians 6:

¹⁴ *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*

¹⁵ *And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*

¹⁶ *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

¹⁷ *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*