

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Behold I Am Coming Soon

The message today is from Revelation 2:12-17: The Church in Pergamum (Pergamos)

But first, I have few points to consider concerning the persecuted Church.

I have thought a lot about the Church in Smyrna. I feel for them. These believers were going to be assaulted by the devil himself, according to the Lord's own word. These believers would feel the pressure of resistance to the Gospel and hatred toward Christ.

But as history shows us, for at least the time during the ministry of Polycarp (72 years from the time John wrote down the words of the Lord Jesus to the church in Smyrna, to the time Polycarp was burned at the stake) the church in Smyrna endured much persecution, apparently giving much evidence to enduring persecution with stout-hearted faith.

Remember the Lord's counsel to them in Revelation 2:10b-10? It was precious.

His Counsel and Promise: Encouraging Counsel! "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear let Him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death."

1. Counsel and promise:

- a) Counsel: "Be faithful unto death"-- Jesus *strongly urges* them
 - (1) "Unto death" can mean literal death, but the meaning is to include the idea of enduring persecution to with feeling that death is next; and the idea of knowing that if we die, we die unto the Lord (see the faithfulness of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednigo in Daniel 3:8-18)..
- b) Promise: "Receive the crown of life" – eternal life! (see 2 Timothy 4:7-8)
- c) Counsel: to listen and understand what He's saying.
 - (1) "Ears to hear..." You and I have a responsibility to the Scripture; to read it, listen to it, and do what it says!
- d) Promise: "He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death."
 - (1) Overcomes: who is the overcomer? Born Again Believers!
 - (2) "The second death"--
 - (a) These believers may die a martyr's death but will NOT suffer the second death, or "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14)

The Lord's counsel is precious and powerful. Therefore, our faith can be set fully on the hope given to us in the Lord Jesus. This hope is grounded on the fact that He who is the "First and the Last, *became dead* (2:8) *became alive* (2:8). It is He whose promise to save them from the "second death" (2:11), is the same promise that gives suffering Christians today, both an enduring hope and the kind of *comfort that gives courage!*

It was this same kind of comfort that so emboldened the Apostle Paul to suffer the pressure of persecution (tribulation) and hardship, all the while giving courage to the believers to whom Paul ministered. Listen to how Paul explains it in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort."

Then, read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 for additional insight into the mental aspect of the suffering of Paul and his companions.

Throughout the world many Christians are suffering intensely today. They are to be remembered and prayed for daily. (This is why Jeff teaches us every third Sunday to remember the persecuted church just as Hebrews 13:3 tells us: "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you were suffering [with them].")

Remember the suffering saints in Nigeria, Africa for example. (Source: VOM August Issue)

Pastor Elijah Ogunyi and his wife and son minister in Gashua, in Yobe state, Nigeria. Gashua is a very poor and unhealthy town in northern Nigeria. Summer daytime temperatures of 120 degrees are common, along with clouds of disease-carrying mosquitoes and filthy drinking water make life oppressive.

Christians find it difficult to find employment and to purchase food as vendors charge double the price for goods compared to their non-christian neighbors. Making things worse is the militant Islamist group, Boko Haram. Christians are constantly threaten with kidnapping, torture and death if they do not curse Jesus Christ. What does Pastor Elijah and his wife say about their calling to minister in Yobe state after years of verbal threats, and serious health problems caused by the poor living conditions? "We have made up our minds that it is better to die in battle for God than to die as a coward." He goes on, "We will continue until we die."

Why do they do it? Could it be that the Spirit of Christ is assuring them, and other suffering saints with the words of Jesus to the church in Smyrna, "I Am the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I

know your afflictions and your poverty— yet you are rich...Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of Life. ...he who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.”

What will we do to aid and comfort the suffering Christians around the world? What will you pray for your *family in Christ* who is suffering in miserable living conditions, and who are shunned by their neighbors, and who risk kidnapping, sexual assault and even death because of “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ”?

Finally, do people know that you are a Christian? Let me ask you, if being a Christian was illegal in our country, if you were detained for any reason, would you be arrested and convicted for being a follower of Jesus Christ? And, if you were arrested, would the *counsel* and *promise* of the Lord Jesus spur you on to courage, endurance and a faithful testimony? Why, or why not?

The Church in Pergamum has been described as a very worldly Church. You see, the hardest thing to do when under the pressure of persecution is to stay put— to endure the pressure that the world, the flesh and the devil puts upon you, or whoever is suffering persecution. It would seem that the church in Pergamum was *not* staying put under pressure but had devised a plan to escape the torment of the pressure that faithfulness to the Christ brings. Let’s learn about the church in Pergamum.

To the Church in Pergamum (or Pergamos)

I. Background on the city of Pergamum (Pergamos)

A. Founding of the Church:

1. No one is certain who or when the Church in Pergamum was founded.
2. People speculate that the Church may have been founded by members of the Church in Ephesus.

B. Background:

1. Pergamum was the capital city in Asia since 133 B.C.
 - a) Located about 100 miles from Ephesus and 15 miles inland from the Aegean Sea.
2. A most beautiful and distinguished city
 - a) A city situated high above the lower plain, giving it an imposing sense of regal authority fitting the capital of Asia.
3. A city of stored knowledge second only to Alexandria, Egypt.
 - a) Over 200,000 books (remember all were handwritten)

- b) So desirable was this library that the famous Roman General Mark Antony, being in love with Cleopatra of Rome, gave Cleopatra the entire contents of the library in Pergamum.

4. Religion

- a) Emperor worship as was the case for Smyrna.

- (1) The first temple in Asia devoted to worship of the emperor was completed in 29 B.C. It took center stage in the religious life of the Pergamenes.

- (2) It was required that ALL citizens to offer sacrifices to the emperor every day. Thus Christians were in danger.

- b) "Satan's throne"

- (1) With Pergamum being the capital city the temples of their gods were huge.

- (a) The altar of sacrifice for Zeus was an imposing 120' by 112' and 40' tall.

- (i) Zeus: considered a savior

- (b) The imposing production of Emperor worship

- (i) The emperor was worshiped as the ultimate savior.

- (ii) To claim Christ as savior was blasphemy against the Caesars. Many Christians suffered

- (2) Satan's throne is an appropriate title given to Pergamum because of the false voices being raised in the church!.

- (a) **False Saviors** and a **False gospel!**

- 5. Application: Idol worship and worship of the emperor was of highest importance. To not worship these false gods would mean that you are *canceled* and *persecuted*. What do you think are some growing trends in our culture that make you think that claiming the exclusivity of Christ as Lord and Savior may lead to your *cancellation* or your *persecution*? How are you preparing yourself and your family to stand firm in the faith?

II. (2:12-17) The Letter to the Church in Pergamum

- A. To: the angel, or messenger of the church in Pergamum

1. "Words" to the messenger.
 - a) Important and precise words; words of counsel
- B. From: The Lord Jesus
 1. From "Him who has the sharp two-edged sword.
 - a) The Word of God
 - (1) Sharp. Precise. Powerful
 - (2) Exposes the innermost thoughts
 2. This "two-edged" sword is the *broadsword*, not the *scalpel* type of knife described in **Hebrews 4:12**.
 - a) This broadsword is for judgment and execution. It will still reveal every thought of the human heart, dividing Truth from the Lie.
 3. This a very ominous greeting to the church in Pergamum
 - a) Their backs are against the wall. Temptation to compromise with the world looms, and so does disaster from judgment of God.
 - b) As we will learn, this church was becoming worldly. This is an abomination against God Almighty and our Lord Jesus
 - c) We know the Lord is threatening some people in this church
 - (1) He is about to go to war against some in the church.
- C. (2:13a) He knows
 1. "...you dwell, where Satan's throne is."
 - a) Pergamum's idolatrous religions claimed to offer the ultimate *Savior*. Thus, "Satan's throne."
 - b) Each pagan deity was Satanic, truly a "blasphemous parody" of the Christian Gospel, which declares Christ as the Only Savior!
 - (1) Asklepios: was represented by a serpent twisted on a pole.
 - (a) Healing power.
 - (b) Evidently the word "scalpel" is a derivative.
 - (2) Zeus: was also considered a savior
 - (3) The Emperor was *The Ultimate Savior*
 - (a) The Roman emperor Domitian **required** that he be addressed as "**Lord and God**".
 - c) Satan's deepest desire has been the desire to be worshiped
 - (1) Christians were constantly under the pressure to bow down and worship these false gods or die.
 - (2) It was a terrible place for Christians to live. Not only because of the pressure from without but the **pressure from within church** as we will see.

D. (2:13b) Commendations

1. "...you hold fast to my Name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas..."
 - a) They have a history of standing firm in their faith in Jesus.
 - (1) A rich legacy of faithfulness should spur the current generation on to more faithfulness.
 - b) Antipas
 - (1) It is not known who this is. Probably a church leader whose testimony was well known among the believers.
 - (a) According to tradition, at the Emperor's command he was burned to death inside a bronze bull. The bronze bull was hollow, with enough room to stuff a man inside. Then, a fire was set underneath burning and baking the man.
 - (2) He is unknown in the history of men, "but not missed in the records of Christ." (Garland)
 - (a) "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His faithful servants." (Psalm 116:15)
 - c) They held fast to their faith under very difficult circumstances and the Lord noticed.
 - (1) We should face both temptations and trials with courage and resolve, being confident that the Lord sees and knows, and rewards our faithfulness!
 - (a) He promises, "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life." (Rev. 2:10)

E. (2:14-15) Concern

1. The doctrine of *Balaam* and of *the Nicolaitans* (greed and lust)
 - a) The Church that was *commended* was now subject to *compromise*.
 - (1) Some of them had compromised faithfulness to the doctrine of Christ, exchanging the Truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:24-25)
 - b) Balaam is found in the OT. He was hired by Balak to curse Israel so that Moab would prevail over Israel (see Numbers 22-25)
 - (1) He taught Balak how to make Israel stumble and fall before the Lord God.
 - (a) They had sexually immoral relations with the women of Moab who in turn led the Israelite men into the worship of the Moabite gods through sacrifice.

- (b) These sinful acts of disobedience brought God's wrath upon the people of Israel.
- c) The Nicolaitans.
 - (1) No specifics are known to us, but were familiar in those days.
 - (a) But, because Jesus says, "So, also you have..." leads us to think that the Nicolaitans taught similar doctrine.
 - (2) The Lord detests the practices of these wicked men and those who follow their teaching.
 - (a) These Balaamites meaning, "swallowers of the people," and the Nicolaitans meaning, "lovers of the people," were bent on leading a great rebellion within the church against the pure doctrine of Christ.
 - (3) It would appear that both the Balaamites and the Nicolaitans had concocted a supreme method of compromise which displeased the Lord!
 - (a) The Balaamites: filled with greed and lust. They loved sin and taught others to give their approval by sinning too!
 - (b) Nicolaitans: loved the approval of people.
 - (c) Both: hardened peoples hearts: **see Isaiah 30:10-11**
 - (4) APPLICATION: To **compromise** the truth by giving way to the lie causes the Christian to fail at least two points¹:
 - (a) First, the Christian erodes the foundation of their sanctification;
 - (b) Second, rather than holding to their Christian witness, they cause irrevocable harm to the witness of the church.

F. (2:16) Action

- 1. Repent! Or else!
 - a) Urgent. Repent now! Change your behavior immediately!
 - b) Pay attention! "While tolerance is celebrated in our culture, tolerating heretical teaching or sinful behavior in the church is **sin**." (MacArthur)
- 2. "I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth."
 - a) Not the second coming, but a personal, and quick involvement to judge and eradicate these very purveyors of this sinful teaching.

¹ I extracted these application points from a larger point made in Tony Garland's commentary on Revelation.

- b) Lord must have acted swiftly because church history has no mention of the Nicolaitans anywhere.
- 3. Application: The church must NOT tolerate or nurse the practice of evil
 - a) The church is not a place where sinners, or those who conduct themselves in sinful behaviors should feel comfortable!
 - b) The church is the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Therefore, it is a place where unbelievers come and hear the truth, become convicted of their sin, repent and believe the gospel and be saved!
 - c) Paul urges Timothy gently, and graciously, yet firmly confront unbelievers with the reality of their sin and God's gracious salvation in Jesus Christ! (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

G. (2:17) Counsel and Promise

- 1. "He who has an ear, let Him hear what the Spirit says to the churches
 - a) Each believer has a commanded responsibility to hear and understand and obey the Lord's words.
 - (1) It is essential to hear and obey what you already know.
"Therefore, consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more;" (Luke 8:18)
- 2. "To the one who conquers"
 - a) Once again, Jesus is addressing every born-again believer
 - (1) I John 5:4-5: "for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."
 - (2) Compromisers can have no assurance of being an overcomer.
- 3. Reward of the hidden manna.
 - a) Just as Israel was sustained by the manna from heaven, so to the believer who refuses compromise and daily trusts the Lord can be assured of daily spiritual nourishment—the Bread of heaven, even the Lord Jesus!
 - (1) Jesus is the Bread of Life who comes down from Heaven! (John 6:48-51)
 - (2) To know Him is to enjoy every spiritual blessing. (Ephesians 1:3)
- 4. Reward of the white stone, with a new name written on it that no one knows except the one who receives it."

- a) The white stone: No one knows with certainty, but it may be the “white stone of acquittal” awarded a person justified by a jury in a court of law, as opposed to “the black stone of condemnation. We are justified by God through faith in Jesus Christ. Overcomers have been justified!
- b) The “new name written on it is known only by him who receives it.”
 - (1) Personal relationship w/ Christ! New Creation. A new person!