

The Summit Church
“Hold Fast to the Truth”
Revelation 2:12-17
September 15-16, 2018

Introduction:

Well, I'm glad to see as many of you make it out today. Through the course of the week we weren't sure that we were going to be able to meet, so I'm thankful we're able to gather together as a family this weekend. Obviously there are many feeling the devastating effects of the hurricane so many we're going to pray for together for them in just a moment.

In addition to praying we want to encourage you to do a couple of other things. First,

- Give: Because of your generosity the Summit has given \$500K this year to the Southern Baptist convention, a portion of which supports SendRelief- the SBC's disaster relief arm.
 - If you'd like to financially support even further you can go to summitrdu.com/florence for a link to give towards relief efforts.
- Go: Our valued partner in Disaster Relief with Baptists on Mission.
 - There will be stages of Disaster Relief associated with Florence so we will need volunteers for weeks and months to come. Trained assessors will be deployed immediately and let our teams know when/where/how we can be most useful.
 - Encourage you to become a trained disaster relief volunteer. There are a wide range of opportunities for you to be the hands and feet of Jesus to those impacted by natural disasters. You can go here for more information.

PRAYER IN GROUPS

If you have your Bible you can turn to Revelation 2:12-17.

As we study our text this weekend, there is one central challenge that I want to build on throughout this message and that is this: **Faithfulness to Christ demands we embrace every aspect of His truth.** In other words, we have to be willing to embrace the parts of God's word that to **us may not make much sense**, that **go against cultural norms**, the parts that **don't make us feel good**, and at times **probably even scare us because we know what obedience will cost us!**

Most of us here this weekend would likely acknowledge that we believe Jesus has done everything necessary to save us.

Yet, I would also think (if we're honest) that we likely all struggle with the implications of that message. It can be a struggle to daily live that out in your **work, your sexuality, relationships, w/ your family, your kids**, and on and on. But **faithfulness to Christ demands that we**

do!...this is the central issue that Jesus is addressing with the church at Pergamum, the third of seven churches addressed in Revelation 2-3.

Now, before we read the text together, let me give you some background on the city of Pergamum:

- At the time John penned Revelation, Pergamum had been the **region's capital for almost 250 years** and was by many considered the **most distinguished city** in the region.
- But what distinguished the city more than anything were its centers for worship.
 - Centers for worship of the 4 main gods in the Greco-Roman world: Athena, Asklepios, Dionysos, and Zeus
 - Beyond that, and more importantly, was Pergamum's devotion to emperor worship.
 - In fact, Pergamum built the first temple dedicated to emperor worship in the region, around 29 BC and over time became the center for emperor worship in Asia..
- This is the cultural context in which we find the church...

So, let's look at the text together.

Revelation 2:12-17

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: "The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword." (That is a picture of Jesus)

"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Prayer of Illumination

This weekend I want to follow the basic outline of the text and as we do we're going to hear Jesus say three things to the church: **Well done!** (commendation), **turn around** (rebukes them for where you've drifted), and **lift your eyes** (going to remind them with three promises that help

them see that the way to stay faithful and embrace every aspect of His truth is going to be by keeping God's future victory ever in the forefront of their minds)!

Well Done! (vs. 13): The church was faithful in the face of persecution

- Vs. 13, *"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you where Satan dwells."*
- Make a few observations about this verse:
 - What is meant by 'Satan's throne' and 'where Satan dwells'?
 - Pergamum was known for its centers of worship, so...
 - Some thought it was a reference to the altar of Zeus (stood high above the city)
 - Some thought it was a reference to the cult of Asklepios whose symbol was a serpent.
 - Could have been a reference to emperor worship that was taking place
 - What you need to know when you look at the cultural landscape you see the foothold that the enemy has, whether Zeus, emperor worship...this was the context...most of the people were worshipping false God.
 - It was during that time period that John penned this letter.
 - Antipas
 - It's also important to note that during this same time period the Roman emperor Domitian was in power. He was a harsh and wicked man.
 - In fact, while studying this passage I learned of an account of Domitian that described a Gladiator competition that he attended.
 - The team of gladiators that he was cheering for lost the competition. But there were others in one of the sections of the stadium that were cheering for the others. Domitian had them arrested and killed.
 - The church at Pergamum was right in the center of this. Everyday they were faced with the pressure of proclaiming Caesar is Lord and faced the very real consequence of being put to death.
 - Which is exactly what happened to Antipas who was a martyr for the Christian faith... *"yet you did not deny my faith in the days of Antipas my faithful witness."*
 - We don't know much about Antipas, but there is some speculation that Antipas may have been pastor/leader within the church and tradition holds that he was burned alive for his deeply held conviction.
- It's in this context that Jesus says 'WELL DONE' for their faithfulness in the midst of extreme persecution.
 - Note: We should not be surprised or caught off guard by the persecution and trials we're going to face as believers.

- *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as if though something strange were happening to you.”*¹
- **“80% of all religious discrimination worldwide is against Christians.”**²
 - Violence, death...90% of all people killed on the basis of religious beliefs in the world today are Christians...100,000 to 150,000 new Christian martyrs every year.
 - Now we know that most of this is outside of the US and many are experiencing this type of persecution right now. And although most of us won't face the threat of death, many of you have suffered as a result of your faith...
 - **Societal discrimination, Institutional discrimination, employment discrimination, rejection, etc.**
- Some of you have experienced that firsthand but don't miss what Jesus says to the church in the midst of all they are experiencing:
 - *“I know where you dwell,”*
 - In the midst of your suffering and persecution He's saying He's there!
 - He's present and He's keenly aware of all that you're going through. - NO EMERGENCY PLANNING SESSIONS IN HEAVEN
 - I hope this will be of comfort to you, but Satan can do nothing without the permission of God.
 - Do I always know and understand why God allows suffering and persecution to happen...I most assuredly do not.
DEUTERONOMY 29:29
 - When persecution happens there are times I'm like “God why would you do that?”
 - Here's what I do know however...Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected...and if this is the extent to which He would love me and satisfy the wrath of God toward me then He can be trusted with whatever situation I may face in my life.
 - This is why I can claim the promise that He will work all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.
 - I CAN SAY LIKE PAUL: “TO LIVE IS CHRIST / TO DIE IS GAIN”
- **So, if you suffer IN Christ, be strengthened by remembering that you also suffer WITH Christ!**
- But there is also a warning. He says to the church...You need to turn around!

Turn around (vs. 14-16): The church wasn't embracing every aspect of His truth.

¹ 1 Peter 4:12

² John Allen, [The Global War on Christians](#)

But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Okay, so many of you right now are thinking, ‘*This is exactly why I don’t read the book of Revelation! What in the world is all of that about?*’ And I’m with you. This is a strange text, and at times it’s downright confusing. But let’s not miss the good stuff here just because there are a few names we don’t recognize.

Jesus is saying to them, “**On one hand you are being faithful in the midst of suffering, and some of you like Antipas are even willing to die for it.**” Yet on the other hand **you’re compromising aspects of the truth that are negatively impacting your testimony and witness.**

It would be like me coming to you and telling you how much I love my kids (and I have 4 great kids: Abby (sophomore at Univ. of SC), Jackson (16), Blake (12), and Alex (10)...pray for us!)...but it would be like me walking around talking about how great my kids were and how much I loved them but when I was at home I treated them terribly. IT’S A COMPLETE CONTRADICTION! (By the way, I can just hear my kids talking under their breath...but you do treat us terrible...no oreos for dinner, no Fortnite after school...). Kids that’s not treatment I’m talking about!

Jesus rebukes them by telling them that they had compromised the truth in one very profound way: **They had bought into the lie that they could simultaneously worship God while also engaging in aspects of the pagan worship that was all around them.**

In order to make his point Jesus is going to give them both an Old Testament example (in Balaam and Balak), and New Testament example (in the Nicolaitans) of the same type of false teaching and its damning effects. So, let’s look at those two for just a minute.

Example of Balaam and Balak (vs. 14):

Let me unpack this just a bit and give some context. Jesus is referencing the encounter between Balaam, Balak, and the people of Israel in Numbers 22-25. The story goes like this:

- God has delivered the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and they are making their way, slowly but surely, to the promised land God has for them. He’s giving the people great favor and they’ve just experienced a **massive victory over the Amorites.**
- **Balak, who is king of Moab (one of the bad guys),** has heard of the great works God has done for the people of Israel and has witnessed Israel destroying the Amorites.
- Out of fear, he summoned a false prophet by the name of Balaam. **Balaam is a prophet for hire. He doesn’t care who the good guys or the bad guys are. He’s a mercenary prophet who follows the money.**

- Balak offers to pay him in order to put a curse on the people of Israel. **Yet on three different occasions when Balaam sought out to curse Israel, God spoke to him and gave him a blessing instead, which as you can imagine infuriated Balak.**
- So, when the curses that Balak had hoped for weren't allowed, Balaam took another course of action.
- In Numbers 25 Balaam taught Balak to tempt the people of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality by using the Moabite women to lure the Israelites into illicit sexual behavior and idolatry.
- Balaam couldn't SPEAK the curse over Israel, so he SHOWED them the curse by putting it right in front of them. And they went for it.
- Some leaders in Pergamum were doing and teaching the same thing, and I'll tell you how in just a moment, but before that let's look at the other example He gives and that's of the Nicolaitans who were in essence teaching the same thing.

Example of Nicolaitans:

- The Nicolaitans essentially taught that you could follow Christ and take complete liberty as it related to your sexuality. This is the exact same issue with Balaam and Balak.
- They did not take issue with any Christian who participated in the pagan sexual practices of the day.

So, Jesus gives two examples to help shine light on what was actually happening in the church at Pergamum.

Pergamum: Here's how it was likely playing out in Pergamum:

- As I've already shared with you pagan worship was all around them: Athena, Asklepios, Dionysos, and Zeus...not to mention the Roman emperor worship that was taking place.
- In addition, most scholars believed that in Pergamum there were specific trade guilds (exclusive closed societies around a common vocation: bakers, musicians, blacksmiths, etc.). **General belief was that for every guild and for every vocation there was patron God or deity, specifically devoted to that trade.** There were **trade guild festivals** that involved the celebration and worship of these patron deities. At these feasts:
 - **Food sacrificed to these deities and then eaten. Revelry leading to...**
 - Sexual immorality would take place.
- There was a **ton of societal pressure to compromise and engage in the worship.** To not do so **carried serious societal and economic consequences.**
 - If you didn't participate you would be an outcast!
- So, teachers in the church were condoning these practices and as a result they were diluting the exclusive claims of the Christ and diluting their witness to the world.
- The reality is that at times we are not that different. **Now we don't call it 'pagan worship,'** but it's obvious that the way we treat sex, money, and power is a kind of worship. We'll do absolutely anything for them. It doesn't matter who we hurt, as long as we get the relationship we think we need, the paycheck we think we need and the

respect we think we deserve. What I want you to see is that the attitude isn't just foolish. It's just wrong. Jesus would call that Satanic.

- God has called us to be distinct so that we can show to the world that Christ is better.
 - ~~When you look back at the massive growth of the church in the early centuries it was due to their unwavering commitment to proclaim the excellencies of Christ and to live it out. They were passionate about evangelism but their lives reflected the Kingdom of God and not the world. For example:~~
 - ~~They were known for their care of the poor.~~
 - ~~They were known for their care of the sick and infirm.~~
 - ~~When most fled plague ridden cities, it was the Christians who were known for staying behind and caring not only for their own families but of those who had been abandoned and left behind...even at times to their own demise.~~
 - ~~They had a robust view of marriage and fidelity and sought to honor women.~~
 - ~~They regarded all human life as sacred and took as their own children who were abandoned and left for dead.~~
 - ~~The early Christians were open to people of all ethnicities.~~
 - They had experienced the grace of God in their lives and it led them to radical obedience and to extend that same grace to others.
 - **DON'T MISS THIS: When we compromise the truth...we lose this witness in our culture! We fail to show that Christ is better and we begin to look like the world with no distinction.**

GREAT, BUT WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH WHERE I AM? HERE IN 2018 IN RDU?

Our Cultural Challenges:

Of course, we don't live in a culture where we are face to face with the visible idols that the church at Pergamum was...but there are cultural pressures that if we compromise on will cause us to lose our distinctiveness as Christians and thus lose our witness which is why we are here. For example:

- **We cannot compromise in the area of sexual ethics**
 - The world's screaming at us saying...do whatever feels good - PORN AND NOT JUST FOR WOMEN
 - College students - females addicted to pornography
 - The Scripture reminds us that God has a plan for our sexuality and it is for your good and for my glory so be Holy as I am Holy
- **We cannot compromise in the area of marriage**
 - The world is saying that **marriage should be loosely defined**, that it's not really **any different than living together**. Or honestly, **that lifelong commitment isn't even something we should strive for**.
 - The Scripture reminds us that marriage is **not a social construct**, it was created by God to be a picture of the union that exists between Christ and His church

- **We cannot compromise in the way we view power**
 - The world is saying use your power to control others and demand your way...that no one is going to look out for you, so you had better do it!
 - The Scripture reminds us that we are to use our power and influence to serve and put the needs of others above our own. **PHILIPPIANS 2**
- We cannot compromise the way we view our resources
 - The world is saying your resources are there for your own pleasure and fulfillment
 - The Scripture teaches us that God **has given us resources to be a blessing to others**
- We cannot compromise in the area of diversity
 - So many in the world are promoting racial views that will divide and destroy
 - Jesus reminds us that in Christ **we are new race that can come together and celebrate the uniqueness of our ethnicities and cultural backgrounds**

DON'T MISS THIS: Satan wants to destroy the church by infiltrating the church with the world's values.

- Listen...sit under the weight of this...
 - Partial obedience is disobedience
 - Partial faithfulness is unfaithfulness. And I want you to hear this as a word of Jesus TO THE CHURCH! He's not scolding the world for being worldly. Jesus expects that. He's pointing the finger at you and me for casually accepting it.

This is what Jesus is rebuking in Pergamum and this is what He is rebuking in us!

Response: Turn around...Repent

Vs. 16, **"Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth."** (The sword of his mouth is his words: cf. Matthew 7:24-25)

- Repent: A change in the way you view sin that results in a change of behavior
- (VS. 12 - "THE ONE WHO HAS THE TWO-EDGED SWORD")
- If not, God will judge!
 - Right now this sword is like a scalpel. Like a surgeon God is graciously **GETTING RID OF THE CANCER THAT WILL DESTROY YOU**
 - God is convicting you of things right now that aren't consistent. Repent and see that as a grace of God in your life. Because...
 - There is coming a day when He doesn't come with a scalpel, but a sword of WRATH and JUDGEMENT.

Let me close by sharing the final words to the church at Pergamum...**Lift up Your eyes. (going to give them three things that remind them of three promises** that help them see that the way to stay faithful and embrace every aspect of His truth is going to be by keeping the gospel in the forefront of their minds). Look with me at vs. 17:

In verse 17 we read, **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."**

Three things that Jesus promises to give them:

1. 'Hidden manna' - Jesus will be ALL SATISFYING

- a. A promise that Jesus will be all satisfying...
- b. Remember manna was given to the people of Israel to nourish and sustain them as they made their way to the promised land following their exodus in Egypt.
- c. **Jesus is saying to us...if you will trust in me alone and cling to me, I will nourish, sustain, and satisfy you. Nothing else will, but I can.**
- d. But what about that strange modifier 'hidden'? What does he mean though by 'hidden manna'?
 - i. To be honest, I'm not entirely sure...there's lots of conjecture here.
 - ii. Before manna can satisfy you...you have to do one thing...**you have to eat it!**
 - iii. I was intrigued by what Scott Sauls had to say:
 1. **Obedience will never make sense until after you've obeyed**
 2. **Faith will never make sense until after you believe to the point of living what you believe**
 3. **You have to taste before you experience...you have to obey before you feel it.**
 - a. Understand what he's saying: You have to eat it...be nourished by it...trust it...believe in it.
 - b. This will change your heart which will change your behaviors...
 4. **Until then the goodness of the manna remains hidden to you!**
 5. **BEFORE MANNA CAN BE SATISFYING YOU HAVE TO EAT IT!**
 - iv. Don't compromise your beliefs and taste and see just how all satisfying Jesus really is.
 - v. I love how Pastor JD says this: "In Christ I can let go of all I have because in Christ I have all that I need."
 - vi. Second thing He gives them...

2. "White stone": Jesus grants you FULL ACCEPTANCE (A promise that He will fully accept you!)

- a. *"And I will give him a white stone..."*
- b. What does this mean? In that culture when people were accused of a crime they could be brought before a jury. Jurists were given two stones: a white stone and a black stone.
 - i. Jurors given a white stone and a black stone

1. White stone if innocent
2. Black stone if guilty
- ii. When you come to Jesus, He gives us the white stone and declares us innocent.
- iii. Here's why He can do that: He can declare you innocent because he took your black stone so he could give you His white stone.
 1. He no longer sees our filthy rags, but the righteousness of Christ.
 2. This is good news that stirs my soul and leads me to want to worship my Savior.
 3. Third thing he give you...

3. **"New name": Jesus gives you a NEW IDENTITY** (A promise that He will give you a new identity)

- a. Jesus: "I have a stone for you and it is white and it has a new name on it."
 - i. A person's name was inextricably attached to their identity
- b. A lot of people, I would imagine many gathered here, have an identity--a name--that they wish they could get rid of. You don't want to be defined by your past, but you don't feel like you can shake it. This is Jesus' promise that our past doesn't define us. Our future does.

The only way we will remain faithful and embrace every single aspect of His truth...even the parts that scare us and don't make any sense to us...is if we keep going back to the gospel. Keep going back to the truth that Jesus has done everything necessary to save me and let that capture my heart over and over and over again.

When my affections change...so will my behaviors. God will be glorified and His Kingdom will advance...Amen!