

Preparing for his coming

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 December 2023

Preacher: James Biesiadecki

[0:00] Revelation chapter 2, we are continuing to prepare for his coming. It seems out of place, we're in Christmas time, and I'm teaching in Revelation, right?

But as I thought about it, I was thinking, you know, this is the mindset of those that were looking for Christ to come the first time. They were preparing their hearts for the coming of the Lord.

And I think we've got a second coming that's coming at some point. We need to prepare for it. Every Christmas ought to be a reminder. Just like Jesus came, he's coming.

And as he comes, it's a reminder to us that as he's coming, it's a reminder that we need to be ready for his coming. We need to be preparing for his coming.

It's a message throughout the book of Revelation. So as you find the final place there, let's stand as you come to Revelation chapter 2, verse 12.

[1:01] We're going to the third church in the seven churches, the church in Pergium. So let's read this together.

And to the angel of the church in Pergium write, The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.

Yet you hold fast to 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.

[2:23] He who has the ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden man, 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.

Father, may you bless the reading of your word today. May you encourage us, God. May you fill us with your Spirit for believers in Christ Jesus. As we prepare for your coming, I pray that you would stir our hearts, that you would help us to live a life of no compromise, that we would be the kind of people to stand fast under trial, and that we stand in consistency outside of trial.

Lord, I pray that you would just enable us with the power of your Holy Spirit to be a people that are ready when you come. May you use us in a mighty way between now and then.

May we sharpen each other. May we hold each other up. May we encourage one another even so much more as we see that day approaching. It's in Christ's name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. I was thinking of the words Bob. It's the Charles Dickens phrase, immortalized in the work about Ebenezer Scrooge.

[3:53] All of us see particular versions of it. You know, during Christmas holidays, you see the Muppets and the old black and white versions and different versions of it. There's a lot of contemporary versions of the story.

Some good, some bad. But in all of these, the same theme is carried out. This, this guy is really messed up.

And the way he looks at Christmas is, is from a very unholy perspective. This is the inspiration for the character of the Grinch, the Grinch that sold Christmas.

Even as you see the different versions of that story. You think of these characters and they're not just bad. It's not just that these are bad guys because they're selfish.

It's not that they're bad just because they're self-centered. It's not that they're not. It's not that they're not. It's not that they're not. It's not that they're treating something holy as if it's unholy.

[5:01] They're approaching something at Christmas time, a message that is so intense that ought to be focused on and remembered. They're not even dealing with the superficial in the message.

They're disregarding it altogether in Scrooge's words, in Victorian cuss words, bah humbo. Taking something that is absolutely sacred and holy, something that should be an intense spiritual focus, and treating it as if it's unholy.

Christmas is called a holiday, by many at least. We use that phrase because it has traditionally been seen as a holy day.

We treat it as something sacred from a Christian perspective. It's not just a time when businesses close. It's not just a time when employers let you go for a period.

It's not just a time when family gathers, or even just because churches are filled. It's not just a time when soldiers lay down their guns, and governments release all of their legislators to go home to be with their families.

[6:22] This is a sacred time. It is a holy time where we consider the gravity of what has been done in this moment. Christmas.

Christmas. Christmas. Christmas. Christmas. Christmas. Christmas. Christmas. Christmas.

Christmas. Christmas. And so we watch the Hallmark Channel, and Christmas is just about love. Sometimes between men and other men.

We watch the commercials, and sales tells us Christmas is about giving. Listen to your employers, and Christmas is about benefits.

And in this, I just think, especially as I'm thinking of the gravity of preparing our hearts for the coming of the Lord, I'm just thinking that at this time, we as believers cannot let our hearts drift.

And it is a danger. Or else we just treat Christmas and the birth of Christ as if it's just another federal holiday. When we come to Christmas, we're celebrating the miracle of the virgin birth.

[7:29] It is the centerpiece of our faith. We are celebrating the incarnation that God has become flesh and has dwelt among us.

The gravity of the situation. The gravity of Christmas. The holiness. The sacredness of the moment. It's celebrating the provision that has been made for us in the atonement.

That God has provided Christ for us to take away our sin so that you and I could have a relationship with him. And the sinfulness of our hearts is eradicated in the work of Christ.

So that when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, we become new creations in him. That is the celebration of Christmas. This ought to be the most celebrated moment.

Not that we don't celebrate every moment that's followed by Christ. But this ought to be a focal point for us to remember and think through. Otherwise, it wouldn't be one of the first narratives in the Gospels for us to look at.

[8:32] So that we'll remember that this is critical and important. So for us, I just think as we prepare our hearts, we want to be just like Israel who prepared for the Messiah in anticipation.

We want to be like Mary and Joseph. We want to be like Elizabeth. I mean, Zechariah. We want to be like Anna at the temple. We want to be like the Magi.

We want to be like the shepherds. And I'd say, even if there was some nest of the long-eared donkey, we want to be like him too. Okay? Not a biblical story, but, you know, people do it.

As we come to Revelation chapter 2, I just think this is the continuation for us as encouraging. John is exiled to Patmos, and God is giving a vision of what's to come so that God's people can prepare their hearts.

That they can prepare their lives. Revelation 22.7 reminded that this is a call to readiness for us.

[9:44] Look, Jesus said, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll. Blessed is the one who keeps these words.

He who has an ear, let him hear. He who has an ear, let him hear. Let him hear. Let him hear. And hearing is implying that you and I are supposed to be listening so that we can prepare our hearts in

readiness.

Because Jesus is coming. I'm coming quickly, he said. Amen. Amen. And then again, he said, look, I'm coming soon. My reward is with me.

And I'll give each person according to what they've done. And all that John is seeing, hearing in this moment, and hearing from Jesus is what Jesus said in Matthew 24, verse 42.

Therefore, keep watch. You believers in Christ. You followers. Keep watch. Because you do not know the day that the Lord will come.

[10:45] But understand this. If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch. He would not have let his house be broken into.

So also you must be ready. Because the Son of Man will come in an hour that you do not expect him. The message to John is for the churches.

The seven specific churches. As Ephesus was the closest. The Smyrna right next to it. And then down the Roman highway, all across that region, beginning with Pergamon, there are messages to the churches that in turn are messages to whoever has an ear.

So that you'll hear. How do we prepare in the message that he gave to the church? Pergamon. The message to Ephesus was return to your first love.

The message to Smyrna was live fearlessly and faithfully. The lesson to Pergamon or Pergamon is staying firm.

[12:03] Stand firm. How are you going to stand firm as you prepare yourself? So he gives some instruction here in this passage for the church. And I think for us, it's going to be great encouragement on ways to stand firm.

How do you stand firm? No matter, you're to stand firm no matter where you live, no matter what it costs, and no matter what anyone else tells you. You're to stand firm no matter where you live, no matter what it costs, and no matter what anyone else.

It tells you. This is a call for us to stand firm. So notice what he says in verse 13. Well, you can look back at verse 12, actually, as he describes the opening of this.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamon write, the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. So this is implication of the gravity of the message that he's given.

Where else can we hear about this two-edged sword as he describes it here? And then down again, as he says in verse 16, I'm coming and I'll war against it with the sword of my mouth.

[13:13] Right? Right? This two-edged sword. We hear implications about this two-edged sword elsewhere in Hebrews chapter 4 where it says, The word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.

The word of God. The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. To the angel of the church in Pergamon write the words of him who has the two-edged sword.

Who has the sharp two-edged sword. This is the scalpel of God. It is the offensive weapon, but it is the surgical tool that God is going to use to remove things in our life and in our church that need to be removed.

So that we'll be ready. And in this, this is the message to the church. I'm the one who has the sword. You also see implication about the sword when you see, in part, the role of the government. Where the scripture tells us that the government has been given a sword and they're able to execute the sword by God's direction. Punish those that do evil and reward those that do good.

[14:25] The sword is an instrument of justice. They are limited in what they can do in government. They don't have authority to tell you as a believer what to believe or how to worship God.

They do not have that authority. But they do have authority. And it is from God. And we do need to recognize those authorities for the place that they have given them. But what this word is reminding us is, is that ultimately, nobody else in this universe has authority but him.

Jesus said, all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. I am the authority. My word will stand when heaven and earth pass away.

Not one jot or tittle of my word is going to be forgotten. It's going to be misinterpreted. My word is going to stand for all eternity. So when I speak, tremble at my word.

When I say something, oh brothers and sisters, listen to what the Lord has to say. How are you going to stand firm? And so the encouragement to them begins in verse 13 where he says, I know where you dwell.

[15:44] And I just stopped there for a second when I read that. And I had to meditate on that for a minute before I went on. So at first I misinterpreted it just a little bit. Because you have to continue to read context.

But I thought, man, what a state, right? I know where you live. Right? I mean, you see somebody threaten somebody else.

And they might say, hey, I know where you live. I got in a fight on a school bus one time. It was actually my fault. I was running my house. Whatever.

That's the size of the point. But I told the kid, hey, I know where you live. I know where you get off the bus. I know where your house is. Right? And it was a threat.

And he beat me up after I got on the bus. Anyway, this is no empty threat. This is a legitimate word of gravity, if you will.

[16:43] I know where you live. But then it takes a slight turn here. But he is going to come back to that I know where you live thing. And you'll see it. But I know where you live.

He says it's where Satan's throne is. You are called by God to stand firm no matter where you live. And the message to Pergamum is to a particular people in the city of Pergamum, which is a place where Satan dwells, he says.

It's where Satan's throne is. The implication is there because of the historical evidence there in Pergamum, in the city's center point, there is a 150-foot statue of a throne for Zeus.

Right in the middle of the city. I know where you live. It's where Satan dwells. It's where Satan's throne is. And the implication for that is I understand the persecution that you're under in the place that you live.

[17:54] I understand how hard it is where you're at. Pergamum is an ungodly city. It's pagan worship.

It's not just of the pagan gods authorized by Rome, but it's also a place where Rome itself is worshiped. It's the capital city of the region and was so for 400 years, I think, at this point or shortly after.

And so this is the capital of the region of ungodliness. The pagan gods have a center point here where temples are, thus the erection of this giant throne for Zeus.

But also it is the picture of the center point for government for Rome. And the people, Pergamum, depending on the form of the word for the name, are worshipers of Rome.

They worship the government. For us, it's hard to cross that line because, especially as Baptists, we have always seen a separation between church and state.

[19:02] There is a hard line there. For other denominations, it's not so hard, especially when you think of Catholicism or something like that, where there's been a blurring of the lines of church and state, where church and state are almost one in many places in history.

This is a reference to the mystery cults that are there in Pergamum. Even on the coins that are minted there in the city, the coins are emblazoned with a serpent on it.

Because that's the main god that they worship there in the city. And so, thus, the idea of where the serpent is and how Satan is at work in the city. It's not just to say that his reference to Satan's throne and the devil in passages like this are just symbolic.

It is not just symbolic. But these are the manifestations of it in their city. Satan is at work in this city. He is at work in his government. He is at work in the persecution that's happening in this place.

So, it's a serious place to consider. The citizens are expected to participate in all of the civil religious activities.

[20:29] They mix together. You can only assume that there's probably very few groups of people that are going to resist that.

And you know which ones they're going to end up being. It'll typically be the Jews and then the Christians. And in every one of these cities, that is going to be the case.

As we go through history, they are typically the ones that are going to resist that kind of activity. And so, the assumption is if you're going to be a good citizen in Pergamum, then you're going to participate in this.

And this city is, I mean, it is an influential place. You've got to think of it being the center of government, capital. But later, it's going to be where Alexander the Great's empire is centered. At least that region of the empire that they divide. It's going to be the lead area for other kingdoms. And the message to them is, I know where you can live.

[21:38] This is encouraging. I know how bad it is where you are. I know how the persecution is going to come from all sides. It's going to come from the Jews who are going to persecute you.

But it's going to come from the government. It's going to come from city officials. It's going to come from your family. It's going to come on your job. It's going to come from all directions.

And I know, I know where you live. How do you encourage somebody who's living in a tough place like that to stand strong? I have to think about this a few years ago when I went on a mission trip to Shandong in China and brought some professors from one of our seminaries at that time to go and teach some brothers and sisters in Christ in a city here.

And when I got off the airplane and we met our brothers in Christ, our instructions were, we don't say anything. We don't talk about anything.

We meet them. And they know who we are. There's somebody with us that they know. They know who we are. We go with them. We'll get in a vehicle. And we did. We got in these vans.

[22:55] And the white leaders are all blacked out. And there's no seats in the back. And we sat in the cargo area of these vans and rode for three and a half hours to go to a place where we didn't know where it was.

We couldn't identify it. We pulled into a compound. And for three days or so, we sat and taught about 150 members of house churches from all over that area.

And what we were going to teach them was how to endure during persecution. We were going to teach it on the book of 1 and 2 Peter.

Now, can you imagine what the thoughts that are going through my head, as I'm sitting there thinking, what am I going to teach them? Right? I'm an American.

If I kill him, I pass for it. I'll send him home from here. I mean, those thoughts are flooding through my head as I'm sitting here looking at these brothers and sisters in Christ in the eyes and thinking, what am I going to say to them?

[24:06] And the answer to that, of course, is it's not my ideas that I'm going to share with them. I'm going to share with them the Word of God because the Word of God is going to be encouraged and they need to hear in those moments.

God is going to encourage them. And in the process, as I hear from them and as I share this with them, I'm telling you what, nobody went away more encouraged than I did.

Because I sat in this room of brothers and sisters in Christ who would have packed into a room, as many people as were in this room, they would have packed into that room. And every morning at sunup with one light bulb hanging down, shoulder to shoulder, I was awakened to the praises of Jesus.

Stand firm. It doesn't matter where you live. It doesn't matter what your circumstances are. They're going to be different. Your persecution may be at a different level.

It might be psychological. It might be emotional. It might be light persecution. It may be heavy persecution. It doesn't matter what variety it is. The point of the matter is, you have the Holy Spirit of God living inside of you.

[25:24] You have the Word of God in your hands. You are to proclaim God's Word and live in the power of the Holy Spirit and stand firm. Amen. And if you'll stand firm, the gospel will be preached to the ends of the earth and to the end of the age when Jesus comes.

Amen. And I'm coming quickly. I'm coming for life before. I'm coming. So stand firm. Amen. Isn't that good? Amen. I mean, this is the idea that even somebody like Daniel would have in Daniel chapter 3 as God's people are exiled under Babylonian rule and the government is oppressive.

Oppressive. And a monument was built and all the people, the scripture says, were bowing down to worship it. And they did. Except who? Except who? Except Daniel.

And a few good men. Maybe that's the beginning of the Marine Corps. Looking for a few good men. Not strong, not great men. Men will humble themselves before God, fear God more than fear Him. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[26:37] Amen. And even with threats of violence, the response of Daniel in his French was, throw us out. And God will deliver us.

But even if He doesn't, know this, O King, that we will not bow. It's the message. It's stand firm in the Lord.

He's coming for us. He will deliver us. If He chooses not to deliver us, that's His prerogative in the moment. But one day, ultimately, He is coming for His church. So stand firm.

Secondly, not only stand firm no matter where you live, stand firm no matter what it costs. I know where you live, where Satan's throne is, yet you hold fast to my hand.

You did not deny my faith, even in the days of Antibus, my faithful witness, who was killed among you, and where it's Satan, who was Antibus, faithful witness.

[27:45] And so in this, you notice that He is commanding them and that they are a confessing church. They are standing their ground, and they are standing firm.

It's not just condemnation that they're not standing firm. They are standing firm. So the encouragement is, continue to stand firm. And if you find yourself in the place where you're not standing firm, then it's encouragement to you to get it together and stand firm.

For them, in this moment, it says, I know where you go, Satan's throne is, you, yet you hold fast. You hold fast, my name.

You're holding firmly to my name. You're standing firm. That's why I said it. That's the focus of it. It's standing firm in Christ.

How do we stand firm? Well, you've got to think through. You've got to stand firm no matter where you live. You've got to stand firm no matter what it costs. You've got to stand firm no matter what anybody else tells you.

[28:48] You're holding on to Christ is what we're doing. Help you hold fast to my name. You didn't deny my faith, so this is a past tense situation where there was persecution.

You held fast through that trial, even though it meant the death of one of our dear brothers, our faithful brothers, Antipas, my faithful witness.

Faithful witness. Who's Antipas? We don't know, really. I mean, there's no other indication of who he is. The historian Tertullian tells us while Mero was emperor, Antipas was a physician in the city of Perth.

So, from history, we get, and if that's true, that's the truth of the account. We only put so much weight on history. We don't know if it's true or not. We know the scripture's true. It just gives us some indication to say, okay, maybe that's the way it was.

We don't know. Maybe some other history will uncover something else and disprove that. We don't know. But according to Tertullian, Antipas was a physician who wouldn't renounce his faith, and basically, he was sacrificed on a bull-shaped altar there in the city of Perth.

[30:08] You stood your ground, no matter what it cost. Hmm. We have to think this way.

Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Even in times of peace and in times of tranquility, we as believers in Christ have to think this way because things are not going to get better before they get worse. That's all the indication of scripture. Prepare to endure. There's going to be hardship. It's going to be difficult. I think the people in history that have given us encouragement like this, like somebody like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, when Nazism is on the rise in Germany and the confessing church, the church that's going to stand with Jesus and not bow to the state and not persecute the Jews, the real church is trying to stand up against all of that and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, man, he stands in the middle of all this, faces Adolf Hitler to his face at a table in a room full of other people at one point to try to negotiate something.

In the end, it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was in part involved with some assassination attempt of Hitler. The reality there was this was a grave time to be alive in Germany.

And if you were a believer in Christ, you were going to be persecuted just as bad as the Jews were being persecuted, especially if you supported them. And so when you met as the church this way, unsectioned by the state, well, you better be ready.

[31:52] Dietrich Bonhoeffer died as a political prisoner. He wrote a book called *The Cost of Discipleship*, which is a classic book that I think everybody will read.

I'm going to read just a little section of that one. Might be linked to that one. It was serious. He said it this way.

He said, Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like a cheap jack's wares. grace.

The sacraments, the sacraments, forgiveness of sin and the consolidation of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the church's inexhaustible treasury from which she showers blessings with generous hands without asking questions or fixing limits.

Grace without price, grace without cost, the essence of grace we suppose is that the account has been paid in advance and because it has been paid everything can be had for nothing.

[33:05] Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be for it's not cheap? Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance.

Baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods for.

It is the kingly rule of Christ for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows Jesus.

Costly grace, he said, is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gifts which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Surely grace is costly because it calls us to follow and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ himself.

[34:29] It is costly because it costs a man his life. It is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin.

It is grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it costs God the life of his son for you were bought at price.

What has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his son so dear in Christ to pay for our life but delivered him up for us all.

costly grace is the incarnation of God. Amen. Woo! Why don't we slightly talk like that?

Because we don't live like that. Jesus said, if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father or mother and wives and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

[35:48] Whoever does not bear his own cross come after him cannot be my disciple. He's not saying you can't be a missionary. He's not saying you can't be a pastor.

He's not saying you can't be some green parade kind of believer. He's saying if that's the way you live, you can't even be my disciple. You're not a follower of mine if that's not the mindset of your life.

So when we come to Revelation and the encouragement to God's people is that kind of encouragement that you stood your ground even though it cost you your life, he means it.

it. It's the picture in Revelation 12 that we're going to see one day in heaven that John saw as those passed before him and he asked who are these?

And the angel tells him these are they that have conquered by the blood of the Lamb by the word of their testimony for they loved not their lives even unto death.

[37:13] No matter what it costs you. So as you're thinking of your life right now and you're thinking of cost and preparing your heart and being ready to stand your ground what are you willing to pay?

your position on the ball team because they know you're a believer and they won't want you to be a captain and they won't want to elevate you somewhere and they won't throw the ball to you and won't drink with them and won't party with them and won't live like them.

What's it going to cost? What are you going to do? Persecution is in all kinds of levels. What are you going to do at work? Are you going to compromise? Are you going to be the one that won't stand your ground in those situations?

It's encouraging for us. No. Stand your ground. That's your moment to shine. That's your moment to show the love and the power of Christ, the transformation that's happened in your life.

No matter where you live, no matter what it costs, no matter what people tell you, number three, it's clear that they're a confessing church.

[38:37] That's not a question. They did stand around. Some of them are wavering at this point or wouldn't be saying this. But man, praise the Lord, they did. I think of some of you that have stood your ground in so many different situations.

I'm so proud to know you as a brother in Christ. Some of you have been passed by for promotions or you've been looked over in relationships in different ways. And I'm so proud.

God hasn't forgotten that. He sees it. Coming will stand for us. The city of Pergamos, the name, comes from a couple of Greek words.

One, the per, you'll hear in other words like perverted, something that is objectionable, something that's not been truly.

It was something, but now it's been twisted into something else. That per, and the Pergamos, the Pergamum translated in English, is coming from the word where we get words that refer to marriage, like polygamy, bigamy, those kinds of words, monogamy, that word Pergamos, that meaning in there is really referring to marriage.

[40:00] And so, what is this city? It is a city of a perverted marriage. You see it as he describes in the Doctrine of Balaam.

he says in verse 14, that I have a few things against you. It says he has other churches in this list. You have some there that hold to the teaching of Balaam, teaching Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might do two things, eat food and sacrifice to idols and practice sexual immorality.

Two things, idolatrous and immoral. And so, this teaching of Balaam, and so you have to go back to the Old Testament, think of who Balaam is.

Go back to Numbers chapter 22, you can read the account of Balaam. here, he says he has put a stumbling block. We're saying we need to hold firm, stand fast, and what's going to keep you from standing fast?

[41:14] Well, there's the stumbling blocks that are going to cause you not to stand firmly, they're going to cause you to trip up. There are things that are going to trip you up. This teaching of Balaam is one of them.

It's not the only thing, but it is a predominant thing in their life that is tripping them up, this teaching of Balaam. The idolatry that was taught and the sexual immorality.

And that is what happened back in the account in Numbers 22. As you read as Balaam went with Balak, his enemy of God, and he's come to Balaam, the prophet, and he's asking to curse God's people.

And God says, you're not cursing my people. And Balaam goes with him like three times and he can't curse him. He can't curse God's people and it's just causing trouble for this guy.

And it's really bad, but he ends up not cursing him, but he went with him. And somehow, according to Numbers 31, 16, when God's people strayed right after that and started marrying the Moabite women, the pagan women, this was under the advice of Balaam.

[42:29] Balaam told them something was okay that wasn't okay. God specifically told them not to marry the Moabite women.

And in chapters 31, verse 16, Moses said, behold, these on Balaam's advice caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the Lord.

In other words, the teaching of Balaam is to teach people to do something that God specifically condemned. The idolatry that was mentioned here was something that God told them not to do, and sexual immorality was something specifically that God told them not to do.

Anybody that teaches you something that's going to lead to idolatry, mark them as a false teaching. The teaching of Balaam. Anybody that is going to blur the lines on sexual morality that you clearly

see in the word of God, you go ahead and mark them as a false teacher.

They are a false teacher. And if you don't deal with false teachers, you will stumble. This is the reality of standing firm.

[43:45] If you're going to stand firm, you've got to be able to recognize the marks of false teaching. You've got to be able to recognize when a teacher is leading you in a direction that's going to take you away from the word of God.

They're going to teach you to do things against your reason and senses that you see clearly in the scripture and they're going to explain it into oblivion.

amen. Amen. An unholy marriage to Mary, spiritual things and orthodox truth to worldly things and false teaching.

And this is what they was teaching and it's okay. idolatry specifically a compromise of order in lines. You see this happen in Jude verse 11 where in describing the false teachers the letter to Jude says woe to them for they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to balance, error.

[44:58] And in this you see the idolatry which the scripture tells us clearly that covetousness is idolatry. It's idolatry. It's not just hey I'm big excited on making money that's my thing.

That's okay so long as that thing doesn't get in the way of serving Jesus. Right? Because then that thing becomes a competing God in the emotions and in the heart.

Can't serve two masters. not wrong to make money. But be aware there are dangers involved. It's something that affects people's spiritual life as Paul told Timothy in verse Timothy 6 when describing false teachers he said it's a constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth imagining somehow that godliness is a means of gain.

but those who desire to be rich fall into temptation into a snare he says into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction and for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced them through with many pains.

how many times have I seen that in ministry? People start off godly good teaching the word and what happens?

[46:38] out of the goodness of people's hearts they start giving generously to ministries like that. That's not a terrible thing. Giving is a good thing. Preaching the word is good.

People that preach the word should be able to live from it. The scripture is clear on that. Don't mussel an ox while he treads the grain. However, there is great danger in this. Seeing the ruin of good men.

Good men preaching the word. Preaching with fire from heaven. Standing in the pulpit and people getting saved. Lives being transformed. Maturity rising up in the church.

And before on, so much money is involved in their ministry that they can't see straight. And before long, decisions are being made because there are millions of dollars involved in ministry.

And all for the sake of ministry, they start making some very poor decisions. Look at our denomination and you can see the effects of it. There are some preachers that will not preach without a certain amount of money being given to them.

[47:43] They enter a pulpit. There are preachers that write tons of books and those books would stop tomorrow if they weren't paid. There's all kinds of money and million dollar book deals.

Philippians 3 18, Paul said, for many of whom I have told you often, not tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of Christ. Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and their glory is their shame.

With minds set on earthly things. I double treat. our denominations can become idolatrous. Our church can become idolatrous.

Our ministries, our effort, anything can turn into an idol. As a believer, God's called us, Colossians 3, 5, put to death, therefore what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

All of these things can be in that category of idolatry. Charles Wesley said you need to treat money a little differently.

[48:57] His phrase was, make all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.

money. And if you keep all three of those in check, then you'll have a balanced approach to your money. How many times do we come to a point of giving where we reason ourselves out of sacrifice?

Okay? Can I get any hands on that? Is it only me? No. When you think of giving, and there's some need to give to, or something you're going to give toward, and your thought is, well, I can't give that, I can't give too much to that, or it'll hurt all of these other things.

Right? And so you reason yourself down to what's not going to be a sacrifice. When, in actuality, when we give to the Lord, it's supposed to be a sacrifice.

It's actually supposed to hurt. Right? Something's supposed to die when you're sacrificing. An animal dies. And David was the perfect example of this, when an opportunity for free worship came up, and he said, somebody said, I'll give you an altar to sacrifice to the Lord, and I'll give you bulls for it.

[50:19] And he said, God forbid that I should give anything to the Lord that cost me nothing. Hmm. Ooh. That hurts.

It hurts my feelings when I think about it, right? I think of giving, I think of sacrificing my time, I think of giving my talents to the Lord, all those kinds of things.

What are you going to need to pack? All right. you? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. 2 Peter 2.1 is warning the false prophets. False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.

Many will follow their sexuality, and because of him, the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their grief, they will exploit you with false words.

[51:26] So you notice, both of those things, the idolatry, materialism, power, all those guys, anything that's going to take my affections off of God and the sexual immorality that's going to lead to our destruction ends the world.

These are marks of false teachers. It's marks of false teaching. He moves into verse 14 there, and he mentions the Nicolaitans. And again, another example, teaching of Balaam and like it, not a separate thing, but I think synonymous with that, is the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

And so he says, I have these two things against you, those who hold teaching of Balaam, who taught Balaam to put the stumbling block before the sons of Israel so that they might eat food, sacrifice idols, practice sexual immorality.

Verse 15, so also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. What is that? Man, the teaching of Balaam, I have to look that up.

The teaching of the Nicolaitans, I've never heard of that. What is that? And so you go through it, and again, it's another one of those issues where they have to help us in church history to even know who this is talking about.

[52:35] And then you make the connection to your Bible. Okay, that's plausible. I don't know that that's a case, but it is plausible.

Nicholas, not St. Nicholas, Nicholas here, according to Irenaeus, is referring to Acts chapter 6, verse 5, in the appointing of the deacons at Antioch.

And in this church, we have listed the names of the deacons there, one of which is named Nicholas. This is not referring to Nicholas specifically, but the followers of Nicholas, which means either Nicholas went astray at some point, or the followers of Nicholas went astray at some point.

So Nicholas, if you recall, in Acts chapter 6, it's going to talk about these men as being key men in the church.

These are men who are men of the Spirit and men of integrity, men who are filled with the Spirit and of good reputation. That's how it begins.

Just because you begin that way doesn't mean you end that way. If this Nicholas has fallen off, then he has departed from what he was.

[54:03] He was something. But he didn't stand firm. And he's been tripped up in something. And so he would be a great example of exactly what John is hearing in this account.

He was a proselyte of Antioch. The church in Jerusalem was a proselyte of Antioch. So you see here, someone that's converted as someone from Antioch as a pagan.

He comes from pagan roots. He's unlike the other six that are named there because this is mentioned about him in the list. which means that he was a proselyte to Judaism.

So he was a pagan, proselyted to Judaism, and then became a Christian. So you can sense that this guy has moved from one thing to another.

And it may be that he really got it and somehow got off track. Or he stayed fake or his followers somehow got off track. So I don't want to I don't want to align the guy I don't know. The constraints of pagan roots seems to change multiple times.

[55:21] And this would be a consistent change if he did. What's the issue?

He's living in the other world. What he says is the Nicolaitans verse 15 the teaching of the Nicolaitans therefore to him.

In the other passages it describes the Nicolaitans being engaged with that same sexual immorality that's mentioned here in the teaching of Bailey. I think back even in our church life in the last several years and we've seen such a pendulum swing.

After the death of George Floyd in 2018 there was a social justice statement written in Dallas a statement on social justice that gave the biblical perspective of this instead of what we're hearing everywhere else in the universe.

And what was interesting to see was the people who signed it and the people who didn't. People who signed it some of which were professors at Southern Baptist Seminary some of the professors at Southern Seminary as an example signed that statement to say this is the biblical position and we basically renounced the positions being held by the world at just black lives matter or one race is more important than the other et cetera et cetera those professors were fired from Southern Seminary for signing that doctrine for the people pendulous wing it's the same shift you see in the issue of homosexuality and some of the conferences have been held revoiced that involve other people from that same seminary and the reality of moving and shifting and following the teachings of the New Galatians and the teaching of Babylon you know

[57:32] God said this it's going to be explained in the oblivion and they're smarter than I am so they must be right they're teachers after all even though I see it clearly in the scripture the scripture says this is them they must be right Andy Stanley another great example his view on homosexuality and transgenderism he's in Alfreda Georgia Northmont Community Church where he's hosted the unconditional conference this conference was to help the church learn to accept the LGBTQ community it featured speakers of they were affirming same sex marriage and in his sermon following the conference at his own church he added concerning the LGBTQ community

LGBTQ plus whatever community that calling on him to live a chaste life chaste meaning pure calling on him to live a chaste life is not sustainable it's not sustainable he said Christians have a lot to learn from gay men and women who love Jesus and who want to worship with us Al Mohler was exactly right when he responded and said this is a major departure from biblical Christianity it is impossible to imagine the apostles conceding that obedience to God's word might be sustainable for some and unsustainable for others in this case we're talking about more than just unhinging the church from the old testament as impossible as that is we're actually talking about what has to be defined as a departure from the gospel altogether false teaching teaching of the Nicolaitans the only way you're going to stand firm is to know your bible to get in the word of God and hold firm to Jesus and it's not going to matter where you live and it's not going to matter what it's going to cost you it shouldn't matter who you have to listen to in this it's going to be the same battle that we fight in the church generation after generation after generation are we going to take God at his word or not Charles Spurgeon is addressing the great compromise in England in the 1800s in what he called the downgrade of the churches and here's what he said he said a chasm is opening between the men who believe their Bibles and those who are prepared for an advance on

the scripture the house is being robbed its very walls are being dug down but the good people who are in bed are too fond of the warmth to go downstairs and meet the burglars the reality is the church of the living God is called to be stewards of the truth we are called to preach God's word we are called to read God's word memorize it meditate it study it eat it let it be your life because one day itching ears are going to call for teachers to suit your own pleasures and it's going to take you away from the truth and not lead you to it I wrote you Paul said in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world or the greedy dealing with both categories there or swindlers or idolaters since you would need to go out of the world but now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of a brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greevers and idolater reveler drunkard or swindler not even to eat with such one but the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but will have itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their passions and they will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths what should we do for those of you that are standing in prayer keep standing keep standing don't you give up he's coming quickly hold on stand your ground no matter where you live no matter what it costs no matter who you have to listen to it is no matter what they have to say but if you find yourself in that compromising situation in any variation then the message to you is the same message to them as he says in verse 15 therefore repent verse 16 therefore repent if not what does he say I know where you live like it's say that it's kind of continuation it's even actually a verse to that if not I will come to you soon and war against them with the words of my mouth I don't know about you there's some bias that I don't want to have you know you run into people like this and you start and you think you'll fight like the one on the school bus for me you know the kid was younger than me he was shorter and he was scrappy I couldn't keep up with him he ripped my tail and there's humiliated there's some people right off the bat and say I'm not going to fight this isn't going to end well for me you know you're going to fight with God for those Nicolaitans teachers of Baal and the compromisers with them he's coming for you repent he's coming for you and he's going to come with the sword of his mouth and it is not going to be good when he speaks he speaks words of truth he speaks words of justice he speaks words that cannot be revoked and when he speaks to judge upon you in that it's not going to be good repent he who hasn't heard let him hear what the spirit says to the churches and the one who conquers

[64:31] I will give him some of the hidden manna and I will give him a white stone with a new name written on it that no one knows except the one who receives it and in this there's two things here that he gives don't over spiritualize this and think it's some mystical magic powers you give in this you're going to have hidden manna manna was how God fed his people and what Jesus said in the new testament is I am the bread that comes from heaven you're going to get more of me your strength that you're going to find in those moments when you need to stand firm is going to come because you've got more of me not more of you I'm the first and the last I'm the need you want strength to be able to stand to the end times you don't need more of other people you don't need a better accountability relationship what you need is more of Jesus in your life you need the Holy Spirit pouring into you through his word you need a repentant heart coming to the word of God and allowing

God to shape you mold you change you break the chains that Satan has put in your life change the attitude to transform you into the likeness of Jesus you're going to stand when you've got more of him he's going to be your manna if anyone obeys my commandments he it is who loves me Jesus said he'll be loved by my father and I will come and manifest myself to him hidden man internal secret strength Christ in you the hope of glory and a stone what in the world is a stone that may have been on it does that not this sent you back several weeks ago when we talked about the stones in the breast plate of the priest who's seeking God and when they're inquiring of the Lord are pulling out the secret stone to nobody knows what they're on and cast the lots to hear from God what's he saying not only am

I going to give you sustenance and strength I'm going to give you direction I'm going to guide you through these times if you'll listen to my word the short of my mouth then I'll guide you through these times so that you can stand firmly you won't be shaken by the enemy you won't be shaken by

the false teachers you'll stand firm in the word of God no matter what it costs you repent I'll sustain
you turn hold tight don't you let go no matter what you do no matter what you cost no matter what
anybody else says keep your eyes on Jesus who is the author and the finisher of your family get
ready he's coming bye