

Pergamum: The Church of Subtle Compromise

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: 25 June 2023

Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[0 : 00] As I've noted each week, the literary structure of the seven sermons in these two chapters creates what we call a chiasm.

Chiasm, meaning that the content of each sermon, it narrows in its scope and focus and then broadens back out again. In fact, we may, do I have this, Becky, on the screen? Does it look like it has an X and maybe the different names of the churches?

There you go, there, now you can see it again. You can see kind of the, so chiasm, as we talked about in that first message, chiasm comes from the Greek letter chi, which looks like an X.

And so it narrows in its scope of content and then it broadens back out again. That's what's happening with these seven sermons and the way that they are organized for us. And that's helpful to our understanding.

As we thought about Ephesus just a couple of weeks ago, the parallel to Ephesus would be Laodicea, which has very similar issues. Last week we considered Smyrna, which has a parallel of the church in Philadelphia, which are the only two churches that do not have complaints from Jesus or corrections.

[1 : 09] They're the only two healthy churches, we would assume, among the seven. And now we get this morning to Pergamum, which initiates a section in the center of this chiasm that groups three churches together.

And these three churches, what we find as we read through them, are all at various stages of decline. And their order seems to present a progression that moves from bad to worse to worst. You can consider, you can read through the whole thing later this afternoon if you want, but let me just summarize it for you. Pergamum has adopted a subtle or infant form of compromise. It did not fully embrace error. It did not fully embrace false teaching or immorality, but it was tolerating members in the church that did.

And what we find as we move through these three churches, the common sin is this sin of compromise. So what we find in Pergamum is kind of this subtle infant compromise. Then as we move to Thyatira, we find that they were much more blatant and open in their compromise.

[2 : 24] So that the church as a whole generally was embracing false teaching and ungodliness. Then we move to the third church in the grouping, that's Sardis.

And the condition of Sardis' compromise is such that Jesus just simply says that they are dead. They're dead. With the exception of just a few faithful members in the church who are remaining faithful to the Lord and to the gospel, the church ultimately was full of unbelievers.

And we see this progression. We're going to focus in on this thought and this progression over the next three weeks. The commonality is compromised, but there's different levels of compromise in each church.

And what we find is that if in Pergamum, if we are a Pergamene type church and we don't repent of that and we don't move away from that subtle compromise, ultimately we become a Thyatira church, which eventually is going to lead to a Sardis church, a dead church, an unbelieving church. And so a Pergamene spirit will set a church very quickly on the trajectory of spiritual death. And that's the warning that we heed as we come here.

[3 : 39] Now, the sermon to Pergamum has an overall tone of judgment. Jesus is the righteous judge here, and he is warning them that compromising truth and godliness under pressure from the world or as a result of our sinful flesh will incur his righteous judgment.

So not only are we to remain faithful in belief in behavior, but we must lovingly correct and discipline those who are not.

And so there's a very specific instruction that we begin to see unfold in this sermon to this church. And as with every church, Jesus provides a promise so that the overall tone may be judgment, but it's not all judgment.

He provides in the conclusion a really wonderful promise here that we will get to, that the benefits of being faithful to Christ far exceed anything that this world has to offer.

So then we are to be motivated then, not only by the reality of Christ's judgment as the righteous judge, that great eschatological judge and king who will return to judge the world, but we are to be motivated by the glorious promise that he gives to all who conquer, to all who conquer in his name.

[5 : 10] And just as a side, this should be the nature of our tone in evangelism. Julie and I were, I don't know if it was, I don't know where she found it, but she was watching this video of someone the other day that essentially, I know what they were trying to say, but essentially they were condemning those who would come to Christ merely out of a fear of going to hell.

Hell. And I hate that. And I hate it for this reason. Because Jesus talks about hell so much. He talks about judgment so much.

And the reason is because the judgment that is to come for unbelievers is to motivate their repentance and their turning to Christ. Now in our evangelism, if all we ever talk about is hell, and we never talk about the goodness of God and the graciousness of Jesus and the prize and the treasure that Jesus is, there's a problem in that.

But if we're always only emphasizing the treasure that is Jesus and we never warn of hell, there's a problem in that as well. There's a balance to it, isn't there? We are motivated not only by the judgment of Christ, we are motivated by the promise of Christ.

That's the full gospel. And as we come to this particular sermon to the church at Pergamum, we find this balance in the words of Jesus. He is the righteous judge who will come and he threatens judgment for all who do not follow him.

[6 : 31] But he is also a gracious savior who promises the hidden manna, eternal life and salvation for all who do conquer through him.

And that's the balance of the sermon as we go. Let's consider first the church identity and Christ title. Look with me at verse 12. To the angel of the church in Pergamum write, the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

Many cities have a unique identity in the world. If I were to mention your first thoughts that maybe come to mind when I say Las Vegas, Nevada, probably the first thing that comes to your mind is not its proximity to the Grand Canyon or the Hoover Dam.

That might be in the mix, but it's probably not your first thought. Well, it comes to your mind. Well, it's known as Sin City. It's the place where many people go to live out some sort of debauchery that they hope doesn't follow them home.

And that's what we think about. It's known for being an adult playground, so to speak. Paris is the city of love. Los Angeles is the entertainment capital of the world.

[7 : 44] Salt Lake City would be the heart of Mormonism. Many big cities like this, they have a personality. They have an identity that people generally know them by. Pergamum had such an identity.

In the Roman province of Asia, at this time in its history, Pergamum was known for its pluralistic religion. It was the religious capital of the region.

And if you lived there, in Asia that is, during the first century, you would have most likely thought of Pergamum as a melting pot of religion.

That was what its identity was. It contained a plethora of religious landmarks. Civil life in the city was permeated by pagan ritualism.

And what I mean by that is that it would be impossible to go about the routine task of life in Pergamum without witnessing or engaging with pagan ritualism, pagan forms of worship.

[8 : 47] It really was constraining in their culture. It went so deeply in their culture that it touched everything that they did. And so we're going to come back to that in just a moment.

So let's just move on to the Christ title now. Jesus refers to himself here as the one who has the sharp two-edged sword. The sharp two-edged sword.

Now remember, this is not John's estimation of who Jesus is. This is Jesus' self-revelation. He tells John, write this to the pastor of the church in Pergamum. Here's who I am to this church.

Here's how they should think of me at this point. I am the one with the sharp two-edged sword. The sword in that culture symbolized authority, power, especially as it relates to punishment.

And the New Testament uses this imagery as a result. Romans chapter 13, you'll remember Paul writing about the Christian relationship to government. He says, would you have no fear of the one who is in authority?

[9 : 50] Then do what's good, and you will receive his approval. For he's God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain.

So when this type of language was used, it was automatically going to be associated with power, authority, and pending punishment from that authority.

And that the sword is sharp and two-edged means that it is effective, fully capable of inflicting swift and total punishment by whoever it is that wields it.

And Jesus says, the way that I want Pergamum to think of me is as the one who wields the sharp two-edged sword. And early readers would have immediately recognized this as a contrast to Rome.

And it's really what sets the tone for the rest of the sermon. Rome carried a tremendous sort of power. But in Jesus' words here, it was nothing compared to the authority of Christ.

[11 : 03] Rome threatened a harsh judgment in this life, but Jesus is that eschatological judge before whom every man and woman and boy and girl will have to stand in judgment.

And the fact that Jesus uses this title here and in the consequence formula of verse 16 shows how serious of a matter this issue of subtle compromise truly is.

This is the sin in the church. And he says, now I want you to think of me as the one with the sword. And the question we are forced to ask at this point is, which sword do we respect most?

The sword of Rome or the sword of Christ? Either our fear of persecution will weaken our faith and diminish our fear of God, or our fear of God will strengthen our faith and cause us to stand boldly in the face of hardship for the name of Christ.

That's what's at play here. This was a very serious issue. This was confronting the church in Pergamum every single day of their lives. Will we fear most the sword of Rome or the sword of God, the sword of Christ?

[12 : 24] Of course, Jesus tells us in Matthew 10, do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

So Jesus very clearly tells us what it is, is the right decision in those moments. And that's what he's gonna begin to work through here in this sermon to Pergamum. Well, that's the identity in Christ's title.

Let's consider now the commendation from Christ in verse 13. The commendation. Read it with me. 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.

I know where you dwell, Jesus says. I know, I know. And this is in the context of commendation. Have you ever suffered through a season of life and felt the comfort of someone who just simply acknowledged your struggle?

[13 : 32] There was nothing really that they could offer you. They couldn't really change your circumstance. But just in the way that they approached you or talked with you or prayed with you or whatever it may have been, you just kind of felt seen and a little bit understood.

And that was enough to kind of give you a comforting pick-me-up to continue on in your perseverance. I hope you've experienced that before. And can you imagine if that's the experience we have when there is a human comfort in our lives that God sends?

What kind of comfort must this be to the church in Pergamon when they hear from their Lord and Savior? When he just says and he makes this statement, I know, I know. I've talked with Terry about this a number of times in different circumstances that we face in life, how comforting it is just sometimes to know that Jesus knows.

He is aware of what we're facing. He's aware of our struggle. There's a sense of comfort that comes just from those words. And surely the church in Pergamon felt that comfort from the Lord.

He was well aware of how difficult it was to be a Christian in that city. And he commended them on being faithful to the gospel, even when facing extreme persecution.

[14 : 49] The church had, as a whole, held fast to the name of Jesus, he says, and they refused to abandon the faith. They are confronted day by day with that question of the sword.

Will we follow Rome or will we follow Christ when those two things conflict together? And over and over, this church in Pergamon had said, no, we will follow Christ.

We will not abandon the name of Christ. We will be faithful. And Jesus commends them. Let's consider for just a moment the magnitude of this perseverance in Pergamon.

The fact that Pergamon is the religious capital or was the religious capital of Asia is what merits this description that it is the place where Satan's throne is.

Do you see it there in verse 13? Again, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. I

mentioned there were a number of religious landmarks in the city. It was the home to the Asclepius Healing Center, named after the Greek god of healing, Asclepius.

[15 : 56] Mythology portrayed this god as a snake. You will be familiar with his symbol because it's still the symbol used in the medical world today. It's a staff with a serpent intertwined around it.

The heart of this type of mythological religion was in Pergamon. There was a healing center there. People would travel from all over to come and pray to this god.

They would go into this temple scenario where snakes were kept and they would lay and snakes would come along them and they would hope that that some type of healing would be transferred to them through their worship to this god as he passed on this healing property through the elements connected to this temple.

Now, I don't care how sick I am. I'm never gonna lay down and let snakes crawl all over me. I'd just rather die, I think. But this is in Pergamon. This place is right in the...

But it's not the only thing that's in Pergamon. Also in Pergamon is an enormous altar to Zeus, that great Greek god of gods. It was massive.

[17 : 01] It was known as the Zeus savior. It was a place of pagan religion and worship and everything that comes along with that right there in the heart of Pergamon.

But perhaps the most important religious site at the time was this temple to the imperial cult of Rome, the place where Romans would go to actually worship their Caesars.

Now, we talked about last week in Smyrna, Smyrna's loyalty to Rome had actually granted it the possibility of a temple of its own to the imperial cult, but it was the second temple in the area.

The primary one was in Pergamon. Why? Because this is the religious capital. If you were gonna set up a temple somewhere for your religion in that day and age, it would have been Pergamon.

So Pergamon, the city, is somewhat of a microcosm of the pluralistic ideas of Roman religion. But there is a tremendous irony in all of this because what Jesus goes on to say is that in the midst of this pluralism, this tolerance for multiple religions, there is this intolerance for Christianity.

[18 : 11] That's the irony, isn't it? Romans didn't care who you worshiped. They didn't care if you worship Jesus. Their problem was the exclusivity claims of Christianity.

They didn't mind adding more and more gods to their set of religions. What they didn't tolerate was to take away any gods from their set of religions. And then Jesus and Christianity comes on the scene and Christians begin to preach the gospel that says there is only one God and there is only one Lord and it's not Caesar.

It's Jesus. And unless you repent and believe in him, you're gonna be judged by him and you're gonna spend eternity in hell. That was the message.

That was the intolerance. So this ultimately religious tolerant society is intolerant of intolerance.

Remember also that Roman religion was not based in doctrine, but ritual.

That's really what they cared about. It wasn't so much what you believed. They didn't care so much about your religious position. They cared about your religious participation.

[19 : 22] Participation. That's what they really, really mattered to them because to them, the culture and the way that the city and the culture would worship had something to do with how the God would treat the city as a whole.

Participation in their forms of worship was important culturally for them. And as I said earlier, daily life in a place like Pergamum was saturated with pagan practices.

A faithful Christian would stick out like a sore thumb in that city. It would not take very long for you to draw attention. Maybe not even necessarily because of what you're doing or what you're saying, but because of what you're not doing and what you're not saying.

And the context led to this devastating moment in the church's history. Jesus talks about Antipas, the faithful witness. We don't know much about him.

Tradition says that he was a faithful Christian leader in Pergamum who suffered an excruciatingly torturous death because of his faith. Like extremely torturous.

[20 : 27] You can look it up on your own later. And as we read in verse 13, we get this idea that Antipas' death was not only shocking, but it was perhaps sudden.

Maybe this was the first real martyrdom that this church had experienced. That he was killed, as Jesus says, among them where Satan dwells indicates that perhaps some of the people in the church were present at one of the specific religious landmarks in the city.

And that's where Antipas suddenly was taken and executed before them. Now, can you imagine having to be a witness to the torture and execution of a beloved brother or sister in Christ, knowing that all eyes are now set on you.

And that if you refuse to do what they want, as far as their pagan practices are concerned, you're the one that's going to have to face that type of death next.

That's what Pergamum was up against. That's what they're dealing with. And Jesus commends them. He says, but you've held fast to the name of Jesus. You have not abandoned my faith.

[21 : 46] He says, and he commends them greatly on this. Of course, the religious irony of Pergamum is just as prevalent today. We live in a deeply pluralistic, albeit secular, culture that is tolerant of every possible belief and behavior except the one that isn't tolerant.

And if you're going to live as a faithful Christian in this world and if you're going to live as a faithful Christian in this city, you're going to have to remain steadfast in the faith and there's no way you're going to be able to hide that.

You won't be able to hide it. At some point, you'll have to face the same question that the Pergamum people faced. Will we care more about the sword of Christ or the sword of Rome?

Let's consider the complaint here. Verse 14, I have a few things against you, Jesus says. 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 may eat food, sacrifice to idols, and practice sexual immorality.

So also, you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. So despite the commendation, a serious problem is developing in Pergamum here.

[23 : 11] Though they had been faithful before, they were beginning to cultivate a subtle, doctrinal, and moral compromise. Now the church as a whole is not embracing idolatry and immorality.

That's not at all the indication that we get here. It's not that they're all participating in these things, but they weren't shutting the door to it either. That was the problem. They'd let their guard down, and they'd let their guard down by allowing some people in the church to adopt these sinful practices and beliefs without consequence.

So the issue, the compromise there, is not that the whole church is erring, it's that they are tolerating error without confronting it in the church itself.

Now we first hear about the Nicolaitans in Jesus' sermon to the church in Ephesus. There's not a lot that we know about this group either, but essentially, their teaching was seducing Christians to participate in idolatry and in sexual immorality while also trying to maintain a Christian identity.

Okay? Now you can put two and two together as to how we face this even still today. Here there's teaching that's creeping its way into the church, into the Christian circles, and it's saying you can still be a Christian and do this and think this and tolerate this.

[24 : 36] That's the teaching of the Nicolaitans essentially. And there were some people in Pergamum who are beginning to adopt this teaching. They're beginning to hold to it. They're participating in idolatry and in sexual immorality and they think it's fine.

And in the midst of all of that, they're trying to still maintain a Christian identity. And Jesus comes in and he confronts this and he says, no, this isn't actually possible. This is a sin. This is a problem. And this Old Testament illustration that Jesus uses for the Nicolaitans is helpful to us. You can read all about Balaam and Balak in the book of Numbers this afternoon. And I would encourage you actually to do it.

It's a fascinating story. Balaam was known for being a pagan prophet. People believe that he had this ability to speak to them on behalf of the gods.

But he was a mercenary prophet. He would speak on behalf of whatever God's people were paying him at the precise moment. You will recognize Balaam probably not so much for anything that a god

said through him, but for what the god, the one true god, said through his donkey.

[25 : 43] Remember Balaam's donkey. And what's the point of that? Well, the point of it, what it tells us, is that God can speak through anybody. He doesn't only speak through believers. He speaks through unbelievers.

He speaks through animals, apparently. He can speak through anything that he wants to speak. And then this story begins to unfold with Balaam and Balak, who was the king of Moab.

Now, he's the king of Moab during the wilderness wandering years of Israel. And Balak hired Balaam specifically to pronounce a curse on the nation of Israel.

He was terrified of them, as everybody was. And he promises Balaam an exorbitant amount of money and pleasure if he would pronounce this curse. And as the story unfolds, it just doesn't work. Every time Balaam tries to pronounce a curse, God changes it to a blessing. And so Balak and Balaam get frustrated. They go to multiple places and it doesn't work. And so that's the end of the story there until Balaam comes up with a different solution.

[26 : 44] And he tells Balak, here's what you need to do. You need to get the most beautiful women in Moab and you need to put them out front and you need to send them into the camp of Israel to seduce the young men of Israel.

And if they'll seduce the young men, they'll end up marrying these women and you will be able to assimilate Israel into your nation and you will be king over both.

You see, it's not so much a blatant form of compromise as it is a subtle one in Balaam's plan here. And it worked. They put the most beautiful Moabite women out there.

Many young men go, according to the scripture, using language of the scripture, go whoring after them and after their idols. They begin to participate in the sexual immorality that comes along with pagan worship of idols.

And as a result, God judges the nation and 24,000 men in Israel are killed by a plague that God sends. It's a massive statement.

[27 : 50] It's the same statement that Jesus is making to Pergamum because the Nicolaitans are doing the same thing Balaam was doing. They were seducing with their teaching Christians to try to maintain a Christian identity while participating in sexual immorality and idolatry in cultural worship.

And what Jesus is saying, and we'll get to this again in just a moment, but what Jesus is saying is I'm going to come and those who are doing this are going to be destroyed. Just like the 24,000 in Israel were destroyed, so will these people be destroyed.

Jesus highlighted two specific sins that came from this teaching. Eating food sacrificed to idols was a willing participation in celebrations and feasts and family parties that would take place in these temple locations.

And these rituals, these worship rituals, even if it was just for a birthday party, there's plenty of historical documentation that these places would, these things would take place in the context of a religious building or in a religious worship, and what would inevitably unfold is all sorts of sexual sin. And some elements of the Nicolaitan teaching were justifying Christian participation in these things. Now, whether it was to avoid persecution like Antipas, or whether it was just to satisfy their own lustful desire, some of these Christians were beginning to capitulate to these things.

[29 : 30] And the problem for the church in Pergamum was that they were allowing it to happen. They were allowing it to happen. They agreed to disagree on things that we have no business agreeing to disagree on.

They were compromising, and Jesus was prepared to judge the church for the compromise. Now, finding the modern parallel to this is not hard.

Our culture worships at the altar of expressive individualism. That, essentially, I am my own God. I determine my own identity.

I determine who I am, what I'll worship, what I'll do, and how I'll live. That is our cultural, secular form of worship. And it is always bound up in some type of sexual sin.

And in our day, it's bound up in this sexual revolution that is embodied most notably in the LGBTQ plus movement. There's no denying that.

[30 : 44] And to live in the United States today, in the month of June, in Pride Month, in the midst of Pride Week, is really no different than living in Pergamum.

They don't care if you worship Jesus. So long as your version of Christianity accommodates practices that the Bible condemns. They're fine with a church that's Christian.

Just make sure you put that rainbow flag out front. It's really no different than what's happening in Pergamum. But here's the thing about this. This compromise is not just about homosexual ideas and activities.

And we are being foolish and deceiving ourselves when we mercilessly make homosexuals public enemy number one. Because here's the problem of compromising the Christian church in the United States today.

We have been compromising on sexual sin long before the LGBTQ plus movement became a thing. What we see now is the fruit of the church tolerating sex outside of marriage for years.

[31 : 58] Tolerating drunkenness. Tolerating errant views of divorce and remarriage. tolerating pornographic media. Not even in some type of pornographic subscription.

But simply in thinking that it's okay to entertain ourselves night by night by watching explicit nudity and sex unfold on the TV in front of us. We have compromised in this far, far longer before any type of homosexual activity became prevalent in our churches or in our society.

And that's certainly a part of it. And it's the major note of our day in the cultural movement that is before us. But it is not just about the major cultural notes. There are serious problems of compromise that are much different than the homosexual agenda in Christian churches today.

And there are plenty of churches in our area and around and around our world who are not participating in things but they're beginning to tolerate it in the church.

They're agreeing to disagree on things that we have no business agreeing to disagree on. We are blatantly compromising the truth that Jesus has made abundantly clear.

[33 : 09] That's what Pergamum is beginning to do. And Jesus says because of this toleration not because of what you're doing but because of your toleration you need to see me now as the one with the sharp two-edged sword that is going to come and is going to judge all of those who are against me.

And when we begin to tolerate these ideas and practices in our church even if we aren't ourselves embracing them we forsake the truth we abandon the lordship of Jesus and we invite the judgment of God.

It doesn't mean that we don't show kindness and love and even welcoming to our events and to our services to people who disagree with us. But there is a difference between doing that and pretending as if this is not an issue at all and welcoming into membership anybody who just simply says that they want to be a Christian despite whatever their life may say.

That's what Jesus is confronting here in Pergamum. Now let's look at his correction and his consequence verse 16. What's the solution? Not culture war.

That's not the solution. The solution therefore repent if not I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

[34 : 32] Now remember at this point Jesus' complaint is that they are tolerating people in the congregation that are participating in idolatry and immorality. The repentance then that Jesus is calling the church to is to discipline those in the church who are holding Nicolaitan teaching.

This is so very important because this dynamic of church discipline is so absent in churches today. Jesus commanded it in part because sin will spread like gangrene through a church without it.

If we become tolerant of ideas in the church eventually it's going to take over. Within a generation or less a passive congregation that is generally faithful will totally abandon the gospel itself.

And the progression of these three churches is what proves it. A Pergamum-like church that doesn't repent and discipline wayward members will inevitably become a lifeless dead Sardis gospel-less church.

Why should we care about this kind of discipline? Because if we don't we lose the purity of the church and if we lose the purity of the church we lose the church. The second thing though Jesus commands church discipline as a means of pursuing and loving wayward Christians or even the culture at large.

[36 : 08] When he taught that process of discipline in Matthew chapter 18 Jesus links it with that famous story of the shepherd who leaves the 99 and goes to the 100. what is that story about?

It's about the pursuit of a sinner. It's the pursuit lovingly to restore someone who has left the fold.

Church discipline is an act of love and verse 16 shows that very clearly. Look at the difference in the pronouns used here. Jesus says he will come to you the church that second second person plural he will come to you the church but he will war against them he will war against them he'll come to

you but he'll war against them those who are holding the Nicolaitan teaching and it's in this context that he says that they are to repent what is it exactly that Jesus wants them to do?

Well Jesus doesn't war against his own people that's one of the promises we have he doesn't have to but the one with the two-edged sword will indeed judge those who are not his true people and discipline is an attempt to restore someone to faithfulness so that when Jesus returns they will not be his enemy he will not be at war with them that's really that's the spirit of discipline it's not to take this posture of superiority over someone or to lord over someone else's life true church discipline and the way that we confront people that we love is an act of love it is a pursuing of them so that when the lord does come he will not be at war with them that's the point of it and what's Jesus telling the program church to do repent by dealing with the people in the congregation confront them in their sin confront them so that when I come to you I will not be at war with!

Jim Hamilton says the process of discipline is motivated by a desire to keep Jesus from making war on those who are holding to false teaching we call people to repent because we love them and we want to keep them from judgment and if they do not repent we're to follow the steps prescribed in Matthew 18 because we love them and want to keep them from judgment that we need to be careful that in the way that we deal with the people that we love inside and outside of the church that our love is expressed in loving discipline not in subtle compromise we don't call people to repent because we hate them and if your overall attitude is arrogant and hateful almost you know the people that they're almost happy to tell someone they almost take joy in the fact that someone is lost and is facing

[39 : 16] God's wrath I was talking to a man several years ago he's actually dead now but this man several years ago he's talking about going soul winning and he was offended that a person on a doorstep wasn't very kind to him and his response to the man was fine go to hell then so that that's the kind of discipline that Jesus is not encouraging here that's actually if that's your spirit when it comes to our world and it comes to discipline in the church you're actually the one that needs to be disciplined that's not what Jesus is dealing with here he's talking about a loving pursuit we discipline because we love them and to tolerate idolatrous and immoral ideas will be a death sentence for our church and the people who have turned away from the truth because the fact is Jesus is coming and he is coming soon and I don't want him to be at war with me and I don't want him to be at war with you either so what do we do we preach the gospel we bring it back to the word we love people through that let's finish with the call and conquer verse 17 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 I will give him a white stone with a new name written on that stone no one knows except the one who receives it unfortunately Jesus never ends these messages with a threat he always concludes with a promise a promise for the one who conquers to conquer is to persevere in faith not because you're just so strong you persevere in faith through the ultimate conqueror Jesus he conquers on your behalf that's what he does that's the measure of his grace and in the context of Pergamum conquering involves holding fast to the name of Jesus and not abandoning the gospel despite being immersed in a culture that is completely opposed to him it's to remain faithful to the

Lord remain faithful to our Savior rather than finding easy forms of compromise now let's look at the blessing two things they're kind of enigmatic aren't they he says that to the one who conquers they will receive the hidden manna manna of course was the food God supernaturally sustained Israel with during the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness what does that mean for us God's not dropping honey flakes from the sky today what does that mean well Jesus tells us what it means in John chapter 6 Jesus says to them truly truly I say to you it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven but my father gives you the true bread from heaven for the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world and they said sir give us this bread always and Jesus said I am the bread of life whoever comes to me shall not hunger whoever believes in me shall not thirst what does

Jesus mean when he says to the one who conquers I will give the hidden manna he means he gives himself to those who come to him he is the bread of life you will never thirst!

again this promise is far superior to even the threat of the sword of judgment it is wonderfully promising to whoever will come to Jesus no matter what their perspective has been up to this point no matter what their sin is at this point he will receive them and he will give them the bread of life he is the hidden manna that will sustain his people for all of eternity not for 40 years in a desert place

but forever and ever what about this white stone then well this one's harder a white stone with a new name most likely refers to a cultural practice that would award athletes or maybe important people for different gatherings and celebrations with a token and the token was a small white stone and it would have the inscription of a winning athlete's name on it which meant that no one could have access to this banquet unless their name matched the token that they had only that person could use it it was their access that's most likely what this white stone is a reference to and the name here is not some secret code it's not that when you get to heaven if you're a believer you're going to have like this super funky name that you could never imagine and that only you're going to know what it truly is that's not what this is the name here is the name of

[44 : 19] Christ the true victor who is only truly known by those who believe and follow him because it is upon his victory through the cross and the resurrection that we gain access to this heavenly banquet that is the marriage supper of the lamb do you see that that token you receive comes from Jesus and it doesn't have your banquet and only those who present the token of Christ's name are the ones who will have access to the banquet to that great heavenly banquet that John's going to go further in the book of revelation to unfold before us a wonderful promise what is this all about what is this promise the bottom line is this the world may offer you comfort now it may offer you significant pleasure now because sin is always pleasurable for a season it will offer you access to its feast and to its celebrations here but Jesus the great and righteous judge offers you something far greater than that the hard thing is what

Jesus offers will cost you everything it'll cost you everything it's not that you have to pay him or it's not that you have to fulfill!

a list of things to do but in that favorite parable of mine Jesus says that his gospel the kingdom he himself is like that treasure hidden in a field and the person stumbles upon the treasure and immediately they see such value in it that they sell everything that they have in order to buy that field and he's like the merchant who comes and upon finding a pearl of great price pearl and Jesus says I'm the treasure I'm the pearl and to conquer what Jesus is saying here and this dynamic of what the world offers versus what Jesus offers to embrace the gospel is the same as abandoning everything else in heart in order to follow Jesus supremely it will cost you everything it may cost you your life it certainly going to cost you the sinful pleasure of this world because Jesus calls us to faith and repentance it will cost you everything but look what is gained not a temporary satisfaction an immeasurable blessing of eternity trust in

Christ he is the hidden manor he is the white stone and he will be yours if you will just turn repent and follow him he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches