

Repent

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Preacher: Nigel Anderson

- [0 : 00] in the basis of the seven churches, the seven churches in Asia Minor that John had the vision of, visions of. And we've reached the third church, the church in Pergamum.
- And if you do your mathematics, your arithmetic rather, you realise I've only got three more weeks. So we're going to focus on these seven churches morning and evening for the next two weeks until my last week here on the 13th.
- But let's read from verse 12 down to verse 17 of Revelation 2. Verse 12. And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.
- And obviously as we're reading these words, some of it will become very strange or appear very strange. But, you know, we use Scripture to interpret Scripture and of course we'll seek to understand what's been said here.
- I know where you dwell, for 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, for Satan dwells.
- [1 : 16] There are 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. 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.
- And the God, bless that reading from his holy word as we read there just a moment ago, this command to the church in Pergamum, the same command given to the church today, to repent, to repent.
- And again, three headings, three very straightforward headings, I hope, where we read the words of commendation, the words that the Spirit of Jesus gives to the church.
- [2 : 29] They're commending it for particular, as we'll see, particular practices, particular aspects of the witness. But then there are words of condemnation, where God condemns particular practices within the church in Pergamum.
- And then the final words from verse, in verse 17, words of consolation, words again consoling the church there in Pergamum. As we see what was said 2,000 years ago, of course we bring that to ourselves today.
- This is Scripture, this is the word of God, this is the word that God breathed out to John, these many years ago, when John was in exile in Patmos. And they're not just words that are relevant for that particular church, at that particular time, they're relevant for the church today.
- because, well, we ask the question, how does a church, I mean, how does a congregation remain steadfast in the face and in the midst of a largely pagan environment?

You know, all around, you see it, when you're coming to church this evening. The constant reminders that the God of this world is there, safe and active.

[3 : 48] And so many being influenced and heading to a lost eternity. And do we simply commend ourselves and commend the church for, you know, holding services such as this in the midst of the sea of paganism?

Can you, you know, congratulate yourself for doing what we do each Lord's Day? And even as this, is seen as a, as a, in many ways, a defence against the, the onslaught of so much that's contrary to God's word.

Well, it's real for ourselves here. These issues are real for the church here in Scotland and elsewhere. Because we have to say yes, all around, the evidence would suggest that things aren't going to happen.

Good. Things aren't well. The Lord's people continually surrounded by a mindset and practices that have got absolutely nothing to do with worshipping the one true God.

It seems as if we're being marginalised in a little corner, a little corner of private belief, certainly as others see us. And whether it's the church in our own land or in so much of the world, it's what we've seen there in Pergamum, that city, in Turkey, modern day Turkey, western Turkey.

[5 : 09] Go home and look at the map. We were looking at Smyrna last week, Ephesus the first week, Smyrna second week, and Pergamum, the city about 40 miles away from Smyrna.

This time we're an inland city, we're not on the coast. And it was a very well-known city at the time, known for its pagan practices. In many ways, a city that tried to base itself in Athens.

You know, all the magnificent palaces, the magnificent temples, the shrines to the various pagan gods. And apparently, there's a very large library. Some of the most well-known Greek philosophers and teachers would come to Pergamum to study in this library.

Of course, at the time, this part of the world was under Roman rule. And people from all over the empire would come to Pergamum. Again, Pergamum was renowned for its so-called healing properties.

Sick people would come to Pergamum. So, it was a centre for healing. The city flourished as a result, economically flourishing.

[6 : 18] A very fertile place. A very popular place. But in the midst of that popular pagan place was a church.

It was a church. It was a persecuted church. It was a church that's commended and condemned, as we heard just a moment ago. A church commended for its faith and yet a church at the same time condemned for tolerating evil within its community.

It's a church like, I suppose, every other church that had its faults tolerated evil within. Unfortunately, so often can happen. But what we're going to read here about Pergamum are lessons for us today because, you know, there are two ways that a church can be viewed.

Two ways a church can be seen to be consistent with its profession. And I suppose one is those who look on from the outside and outside are seeing the witness of Christians in what we do and what we say.

Is this consistent with a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus? The fruit of the Spirit is it being seen by those who are outside the church, outside the congregation? Are we consistent in our practices as Christians according to God's Word?

[7 : 43] But then there's the other side as it were. Is the church consistent inside the community, inside the congregation? You know, within the body of Christ.

How do believers in a congregation, how do believers in a church, how do believers in a denomination, how do we relate one to another? Do we love one another? Do we care for one another? Do we show compassion one to another?

How do you deal with issues that arise even in a small community, a church community? How do we deal with even it happens from time to time the serious moral failures that happen in a church, the doctrinal errors that can creep into even a congregation?

How do we, does a church deal with these matters in relation to the Word of God? Even when, again, from time to time, then, you know, people are censured by the Word of God and take offence.

But, you know, the church has to maintain not just that, a witness outside, but maintain its witness inside. And we'll see that in the case of the church in Pergamum.

[8 : 56] So this third church that John's given a vision of, again, it's like a circuit. The emphasis first, then Smyrna, then Pergamum. It's doing so well, as it were, in its external profession. It's witnessing to the pagan environment around it. It's true in its faith in the Lord Jesus, showing it outside. You know, it's facing so much affliction, so much persecution.

But yet, inside the church, what's happening inside the church, that was failing to deal with the moral and doctrinal problems that were happening in that congregation.

And so much so that, as we read there, there's rebuke, there's condemnation, and there's strong condemnation. So when we're looking at this third letter to these seven churches, let's look at what's been said, particularly what's been said, and seek to apply what's been said in our own situation today.

So, what do we read first of all? Words of commendation. Words, if you like, of approval. Who's speaking here? It's Jesus.

[10 : 06] Jesus, verse 12, as we read there, Jesus, he calls himself, well, he says it, he who has the sharp two-edged sword. Again, let's look at the kind of language that Jesus is using here.

In other words, he's wielding the sword of truth. In other words, what's the sword of truth? Scripture, comparing Scripture, it's the word of God. Because he is the word. He's the word, he's the word of truth.

And as he's the word, the word of God, he speaks all truth, and he knows all things. He knows everything about that church in Pergamum. He knows everything about the church there.

He says in verse 13, I know where you dwell. I know where you dwell. You know, it's not the kind of aggressive way that some people might say, I know where you live. It's not like that at all, but it's actually words of deep affection.

You know, he's saying, I know your situation. I know you're a church that's alive, you know, in the sense that, well, you're witnessing to the truth of the gospel to those outside. speaking of that intimate knowledge that he's got, as he's already mentioned to the previous two churches when he says, I know, I know.

[11 : 21] So, there's encouragement given to the church in Pergamum that their saviour knows all about them. They're not forgotten. They're not forgotten. And if Jesus knew the church in Ephesus and the church in Smyrna and the church in Pergamum, he knows.

He knows the church in Livingston. He knows the church in Trotternich. He knows the church in Benin. He knows the church in every corner of the globe. He knows those who are his.

He knows you. He knows your heart. He knows your faith. He knows your home situation. He knows your family circumstances. He knows your life. He knows your lifestyle. He knows your witness. He knows your commitment. He knows your burdens.

And in his knowing, he cares. He cares. That's his love for the church. So don't ever, ever think that Jesus is somehow indifferent to your needs.

He knows. He's that infallible knowledge of who you are. Who you are as individuals. Who you are as a congregation. He's interceding for you.

[12 : 35] He's even interceding for you at the throne of grace. Jesus knows this church, all who are his, as he knew the church there in Pergamum. And as he's telling of his knowledge of that church there, he tells him something significant.

He says, I know, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. What have we heard earlier? We've heard that Pergamum was a great centre for for pagan worship, pagan practices, all the temples, all the shrines there.

False religion. You might say that false religion that's satanic in its origin. Opposed to the one true God. And even in Pergamum, the whole, the cult of the emperor was, was, was so central.

And that was a real problem in some ways anyway for the church in Pergamum. If you were a Christian in Pergamum, you couldn't profess Jesus as Lord and at the same time profess that Caesar was Lord.

And that's what it seems was the case there as we read in verse 13, this individual Antipas, this man who was a member in the church in Pergamum. And it would seem anyway when we look at the details here that he refused to bow the knee to the emperor and as a result put to death as a martyr.

[13 : 59] So the church in Pergamum is existing in this, in this very much in this place of satanic influence. A pagan environment is just so like the church today.

This is so much of our own land. Even in our own environment. But remember as we read there, the church in Pergamum that's witnessing to those outside, it's witnessing faithfully, hadn't renounced its faith in the Lord Jesus.

It's witness was a sure witness to the outside world. The church has been true to its profession. And the city, people in Pergamum, they would have noticed these believers there, that small group of Christians who are unashamed of the Lord and Saviour.

I mean, you know, that church there had never renounced its faith. Even though there were these incredible pressures to conform to the rest of society.

These Christians, they would have been noticed, not going to the temples, they didn't go to the shrines. They weren't taking part in the regular worship of the Roman Emperor. It was noticed.

[15 : 12] And if it was noticed, they did suffer. And did suffer. It was a church that knew persecution. It's been listed today.

The church of today. Isn't there these constant pressures to conform to the pattern of the world, to be conformed to the mould of the world? Pressures in Christians to go to certain places where God says no.

To take part in certain things that God says no. And when you don't take part in these things, it's noticed. God says to you, I know where you live. I know where you dwell.

I know you're standing for truth in a pagan world. I know when you're secretly being mocked for going in your car on a Sunday morning and going to church.

I know when you're slandered, insulted, when you take that stand for truth in social media. I know when you're swimming against the tide of socially accepted practices.

[16 : 16] I know when you're standing for truth and the rest of the world seeks to topple you. In Pergamum there, the pressures were intense. But the church didn't deny its Lord.

They were faithful in their consistent witness. And that has to be the case for the church today to maintain that sure, consistent testimony to your Lord and Saviour.

Remain true to your profession. Because the world does notice consistency. You might not agree with your stance, but it does notice consistency. In fact, we have to say this, I'm sad to say it, but the inconsistent Christian in so many ways is one of the biggest reasons why others will not turn to the Lord Jesus, why others will actually say, if that's Christianity, forget it.

Be consistent in your profession of faith. Because consistent profession brings glory to God. The church has been consistent. Of course, what's it doing?

It's reflecting the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus who was utterly consistent in his faith and his life on earth. Never once short from the work that his father had given him to do.

[17 : 35] Never once renounce the will of his father and what God had given him to do to save his people. And the church has to be consistent in the community where God sends you and places you.

The problem, however, for the church in Pergamum was that while externally things were good, internally the life as a church internally was a mess.

It may not have renounced its faith but within that church in Pergamum, within that community, what do we read there? There was decay. There was moral decay, there was spiritual decay.

You know, you have a piece of fruit that on the outside looks lovely and then you take away the skin and inside it's all rotten. In some ways that's what the church in Pergamum was like.

It appeared on the outside so utterly faithful and true but inside there was decay that Jesus knew all about. So we read there in the words of verse 14 and 16 but I have a few things against you.

[18 : 45] 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. Difficult words but let's see if we can understand them because these are words of condemnation and Jesus is pointing at two things two you notice two connected things that have to be addressed otherwise Jesus will come in judgment.

It was tolerance of false teaching in both cases in reference to the name there Balaam and in reference to the name there the Nicolaitans.

So what's been condemned? Well let's take it step by step here. We start with well the teaching of Balaam and the way that as we read there it's very similar to what was taught by these other people the Nicolaitans.

start with verse 15 you see so also likewise so there's something connected going on here so what's happening? Well we see this name Balaam Balaam who was Balaam?

[20 : 05] He was a prophet of a long long time before this vision was given to the church of the earth. He was a prophet at the time of the Israelites and when the Israelites were conquering the promised land and if you go to the book of Numbers you see Balaam mentioned there was a king of Moab called Balak and Balak had hired Balaam to curse the Israelites and at first things it seemed fine Balaam didn't curse the Israelites but soon we read of the Israelite men indulging in immorality with these Moabite women and it seems it was Balaam who was responsible for this.

Balaam was one of these mercenaries who hires himself out for the largest sum of money and well it seems he was responsible for arranging these Moabite women to meet the Israelite men and deliberately turn these Israelite men from truly following the Lord and Moses refers to that in Numbers 31 verse 16 Balaam responsible for luring men away from following the one true Lord and if that was the case these men would have been worshipping the pagan gods around them and so and then you've got this reference to the teaching the Nicolaitans again the reference would seem to be of sins of compromise and moral failing not just tolerating evil outside the church but there seems to be a tolerating evil within the church compromise in other words trying to be like everyone else bringing the world into the church just wanting to be like everybody else and I think we can glean from the passage here not everyone in Pergamum was holding to these false teachings but there was this tolerance of evil and it was enough to condemn that church there in Pergamum it was enough for Jesus to warn the church there so this church there in Pergamum was tolerating particular teaching that was leading

God's people to go astray in other words saying well you know you know that you've been saved Jesus is saved you just go and do what you like you're alright you've got your salvation do what you want it feels good do it God's forgiven you your sins just go and do what you want to do but you know that's the kind of thinking that's what takes the Lord's people away from following the one true Lord with anything that leads God's people astray it's got to be dealt with it's got to be dealt with in a congregation and any teaching any doctrine that poisons the minds of God's people again it's got to be dealt with it's got to be resisted it's got to be removed and when any church tolerates false teaching and false practice consequences will happen we're told that a house divided against itself will fall so what's the standard what's the standard that opposes false teaching that promotes true teaching the standard is God's word it's that sharp double edged sword that Jesus mentions in verse 16 and Jesus calling his church to repent as we said no doubt the vast majority of people in that church didn't hold on to

Balaam's teaching but they've been held responsible they're allowing these poisons as it were to infect the church they're all being called to repent change your mind get rid of those who are peddling these poisonous teachings because whenever we tolerate evil in the house of God we're all culpable and it's for each one of us to repent to repent particularly when we do nothing to combat that which is contrary to God's word but the great news is you know when we confess our sins whether it's as a church whether it's as individuals we're promised that God will forgive your sins and there's that true heart repentance God answers with forgiveness and he answers with restoration and that's when we come to the last section the words of consolation in verse 17 because Jesus had a few things to say against the church in

Pergamum but notice it was only a few things it wasn't many things few things so the church was given hope and we read there these familiar words he who has an ear to hear let them hear what the spirit says to the church in other words pay close attention and there are two things that are going to strengthen the church there in Pergamum two things that at first reading might seem very strange but again we can seek to interpret them certainly through God's word the giving of hidden manna and the giving of a white stone in which is written a new name again let's take this step by step as we read there in verse 17 to the one who conquers I will give so Jesus the giver he's the giver of some particular blessings given to his people and his people alone those who overcome those who by God's strength overcome sin overcome

[25 : 52] Satan overcome spiritual death who are in Christ and Jesus is going to give this hidden manna well what do we understand by this remember the first manna came down from heaven when the Israelites were going through the desert the Israelites nourished by this food manna in Hebrew means what is it what is it well we know what it is in the fullness of the Lord Jesus because Jesus is the true manna the bread the bread of life he came after the bread of heaven manna came from heaven Jesus came from heaven he's the bread of life he's the one who gives that true and full nourishment in your pilgrimage your wilderness journey he's the bread of life he's given himself and you're hidden in Christ one knows nothing of the new life in the Lord Jesus and there in Pergon amidst all that paganism these believers there these true believers were hidden in Christ that world out there in Pergon knew nothing of what it means to be in Christ but we're told that they'd be given that hidden manna great words of encouragement to the church there in the midst of their persecution the promise of eternal life the promise of fullness of life and glory itself then there's the giving of this white stone in which is written a new name now at that time a white stone had a general recognition of something that was given when somebody was declared not guilty in a court innocent white stone indicated innocence could also be given as a token to let you into a particular feast the believer in Christ knows innocence not innocence by himself but innocent because of the innocence of the

Lord Jesus as we're thinking this morning Jesus dying on the cross for sinners him taking your sins upon himself and crediting his righteousness to you and so that you're pronounced not guilty because Jesus our substitute paid that price that acquittal before God the judge and you have that favour that entrance into that great feast you have that promise of eternal life and you've got that promise of a new name you who are in Christ you know that new name because that new name speaks of a new character a new life a new life in the one whose name's above all names because remember what Jesus said be whole and make all things new the old afflictions there'll be no more the church that overcomes the church knows that newness newness of life in the

Lord Jesus Christ and the church the church saved the church redeemed in glory knows that blessedness of not enduring in that sea of godlessness but the promise to the church in Pergum is the same promise given to the church even today the promise of the glory of heaven and the glory of the new heavens and earth that glory for the Lord's people will know that freedom that newness forever and ever that blessing or these blessings gifted given to it by the Lord Jesus Jesus who is our overcomer who overcame sin who overcame Satan who overcame death itself so that you can be an overcomer so that you can know that triumph over sin Satan and eternal death and for the believer for the Christian it's your hope it's your hope but if you're not a Christian where is your hope do you have any thought of eternity of newness of life so won't you hear what's been read here this evening what the spirit of

Jesus has said to the church the church of 2000 years ago to the church today listen to these words and turn to the Saviour know him the one who knows you turn to him be saved and in that new relationship with the Lord Jesus you'll have a new walk with the Saviour a new relationship with your eternal Saviour and you'll know that relationship intimate secure relationship both now and forever more Amen let us pray Lord God our heavenly Father you who have given to us your word of truth Lord teach us to be faithful to you faithful according to our living by your word teach us Lord to show forth the Lord Jesus to others and at the same time to love one another to show forth the

Lord Jesus both outside the congregation and inside the congregation may you be glorified and you be praised in all things and we pray Lord these things in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Thank you.