

Revelation

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Date: 17 August 2014

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- [0 : 00] When we first became parents, Natalie and I were determined to be good parents. We'd worked out in advance of having kids. But it didn't take us long to realise that we were far better parents without kids than with kids.
- It's just a whole lot easier, I think, to think about and actually do it. There were a few things that we decided we weren't going to bend on. Sugar intake and TV time were the two things that we, amongst other things, were going to draw a line on.
- We were pretty strict with both. Poor little Izzy, for some time, thought that milk arrowroot was the best biscuit in the world. That's because that's what I consistently told her, it was the best biscuit in the world, until her little fingers wrapped for the first time around a Tim Tam.
- And she discovered that I was lying. I remember the first time that chocolate actually touched her lips. I forget how old she was. I don't think she was, she wouldn't have been a year old, I don't think.
- But we were on a ferry between Townsville and Magnetic Island. We were travelling with some friends and one of the lady had a, she was eating a Magnum ice cream.
- [1 : 09] Sitting, and she had Izzy on one lap, she's eating his Magnum ice cream. And without even thinking about it, she ripped off a whole chunk of the chocolate and shoved it in her mouth.
- And her eyes just lit up. And the world changed. It was all Technicolor and fireworks and fairies. And she just immediately, having tasted the chocolate, she just immediately grabbed the other hand and went, with the chocolate, with the ice cream and took a mouthful of it.
- But for me in that moment, I was like, oh, compromise. You know, and yet from that moment, how easy, it was all spoiled by that moment, so how easy it is from that moment to compromise from one thing to the next thing to the next thing.
- And now we go on holidays and I hear myself saying things like, it's holidays. Eat an ice cream every day if you like. How quickly it was that I bent. And that's to say nothing about TV.
- When your kids have been sick for a week, mum becomes a waitress and the TV's the nurse. I mean, which is what's been happening for the last 10 days. Our kids have just been, you know, one Peter Rabbit thing and Bob the Builder and all this other stuff that they watch.
- [2 : 21] One thing, Saddle Club, one after another after another. And one of the things that I used to think was a real shame was I'd drive past people, I'd take them on the highway and they'd see the TVs glowing in the back of the car.
- And I remember thinking, oh, I'd never do that. I've now worn out three sets of those dual screen TV things in the back of my car. I'm looking for the fourth one already.

Compromise, I think, is one thing when it's sugar and TV. It's another thing when it comes to sin and Jesus. After 20 years of ministry, I cannot count the number of people who I know in all sorts of various ways who have compromised with Jesus and walked away from faith in him.

I actually think, for me personally, it's one of the hardest things about ministry is people making those decisions which ultimately see them walking away from Jesus. Some of those people were more committed than me.

They were better taught. They were further down the track, being Christians a lot longer. People who were fervent for Christ. Some were kids in youth groups. Some were youth group leaders. Some were students with me at Moore College.

[3 : 33] Some of them were high-profile pastors and preachers. It's very sad when it happens. I remember specifically where I was when one of my best friends phoned me up and in the course of the conversation said to me, Steve, I'm just not convinced it's true anymore.

I remember pleading with another young lady not to marry a certain non-Christian guy they married and she is now finished with Jesus none of these people all circumstances are different but one of the things which is interesting is that none of them sought counsel earlier in making their decisions none of them shared their conflicts and their struggles of their hearts now let me say Jesus might not be finished with them but for the moment they are finished with Jesus and as Jesus addresses this church at Pergamon the believers there seem to be flirting with false teaching they are not openly embracing immorality and idolatry but what they haven't done is they haven't closed the door on it they are leaving the door open to it Jesus begins with a strong commendation of this church at Pergamon and this commendation is made even stronger because Jesus knows that they are living in a fairly bad neighbourhood verse 13

I know where you live where Satan has his throne that's Pergamon now so if Ephesus we have looked at Ephesus and Smyrna so far so if Ephesus is the sort of like business you know place of of Asia Minor sort of like your Sydney of Asia Minor Smyrna was more like the Melbourne cultural trendy kind of place of Asia Minor Pergamon was its Canberra poor Pergamon okay so you've got the picture right okay it was the seat of government in Asia Minor and as such it was the first place to have a temple which was authorised as a place of worship for the emperor and so Pergamon was the most important city in Asia Minor as far as the Roman imperial cult was concerned so Roman pagan idolatry quickly gained acceptance it amalgamated with a bunch of other religious practices of Pergamon so there was a nice official approved blend of religious practices and ideas and thoughts that's where Pergamon was that's the neighbourhood but in spite of the bad influence of the neighbourhood

Jesus says in verse 13 yet you remain true to my name you did not renounce your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness who was put to death in your city where Satan lives so in spite of their proximity to Satan's throne they remain true to the name of Jesus that means what they were actually living for the glory of Jesus we can see here that Jesus name his glory matters a lot to him by the way that he mentions it to these churches not just this one to the other churches so in chapter 2 verse 3 you have persevered and have endured hardship for my name verse 13 you remain true to my name verse 8 of chapter 3 you have kept my word and have not denied my name verse 12 of chapter 3 I will write on him the name of my God and my own new name Jesus cares about his name that is he cares about his reputation

I remember going to a restaurant with a member of my extended family when I was a teenager and as we sat down we had this sort of big table booked and we sat down and my grandfather the patriarch of the family said to us all at the table now listen up I'm well known in this place now the implication was that we had to behave ourselves and not do anything that would actually embarrass him in any way which as a teenager you're kind of tempted to once he says it and he was concerned for his reputation we took it as a bit of a joke and as him big noting himself which is what he tended to do but all these years later I mean we took a number of years later like 30 odd years later now it's still a joke in the family so as my brothers and my parents and the extended families went out to a restaurant last year sometime as we walked in the restaurant dad turned around and said now boys don't forget

[8 : 37] I'm well known in this place so behave yourselves and I think he'd had a coffee there once before or something like that and dad was up here visiting recently and he came to church with me on Sunday morning and I said to him now dad remember I'm well known in this place behave yourself now I suspect that most parents know that feeling that in some ways my kids are a reflection on me in some ways and here we see Jesus is saying I care about my name I care about my reputation and this church at Pergamum had held fast to the name of Jesus and by doing that by holding fast to the name of Jesus even to the point of death as in the case of Antipas they were declaring to the city of Pergamum that Jesus is better than life it's what we looked at last week they held up well in this satanic stronghold in which they lived but their faithfulness to Jesus name was under threat see it there in verse 14 nevertheless

I have a few things against you you have put up you have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans now this is a bit of a tricky bit but this point here is the heart of the issue for this church at Pergamum in the Old Testament there's this strange prophet named Balaam and there's another man with a similar sounding name called Balak now Balaam was a prophet for hire and Balak was the king of Moab and in Numbers 22 to 24 we read that Balak offered Balaam money to prophesy a curse upon God's people Israel you see Balak was worried because he had seen how numerous the people of Israel were they'd come out of Egypt and they were just growing in prominence and everywhere they went they just succeeded and he was kind of worried they're going to move into Moab they're going to destroy his kingdom depose him as a king and take over the place and so he pays

Balaam to curse God's people to send them off but every time Balaam tried to prophesy against God's people blessing came out rather than cursing it's fairly comical actually he'd stand up and go okay okay I'll do it this time and speak and blessing comes out rather than curses and Balaam desperately wanted to get paid he was a prophet for hire and Balak's pulling his hair out because he wants these people cursed he couldn't get God to curse his people and so he came up with another plan it's there in chapter 25 verses 1 to 3 the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods the people ate and they bowed down before these gods and so Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor and the Lord's anger burned against them see what happened the Israelite men were seduced into idolatrous worship which back in those days was nothing short of mass orgies and if you flick over to

Numbers 31 verses 15 to 16 it mentions these Moabite women again it says these were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the Lord in what happened at Peor so that a plague struck the Lord's people this whole plan was Balaam's idea and the plan worked a treat he could not get God to abandon his people so what he did was he came up with a scheme where God's people abandoned God and so God cursed his people for their compromise and their rebellion it seems here are similar things happening at Pergamon the people at Pergamon are offered one of two choices persecution like Antipas who will who remains steadfast in the name of Jesus or seduction a giving away a giving up this church had stood firm in the time at Antipas but now there's a threat of compromise not all of them there's a group there who are threatening to compromise they're being seduced by the city and by its culture and Jesus now says this church at Pergamon you've got some people in your midst the Nicolaitans who are teaching the same sort of thing that Balaam taught they're trying to encourage

Christians to compromise don't take it so seriously it doesn't matter that much these Nicolaitans were at Ephesus and it's quite possible that they're at Thyatira the church for next week their leader is possibly the woman that John calls Jezebel in chapter 2 verse 20 who calls herself a prophetess but we see in chapter 2 verse 6 that Jesus was pleased with the Ephesians because they rejected the Nicolaitans it says but you had this in your favour you hate the practices of the Nicolaitans which I also hate but Pergamon they left the door open to it and what was almost certainly taught was syncretism a combination of religions a combining a coming together a tolerance of ideas that led to a tolerance of all sorts of different expressions and lifestyles it was a drawing together ultimately it was a lessening of sin what the

[14 : 56] Bible calls sin and a minimisation of the importance of Jesus in a word what these people were doing was compromising the Roman imperial cult included worship of the emperor and of the gods that would be inescapably idolatrous nothing short of just pure idolatry and there is no shortage of evidence that as they participate in their idolatry everything just descended into drunkard orgies and the teaching of the Nicolaitans probably validated a certain level of participation in this kind of civic life the celebrations of the city of Pergamum which would have been idolatrous and immoral it was causing the teaching was opening the door for God's people to compromise the 1924 summer

Olympics were hosted by the city of Paris Eric Little was a devout Christian who refused to run his heat in the 100 metre race because it was held on a Sunday it was his best event the schedule had been published several months in advance his decision was made several months in advance that he would not compromise his conscience and his principles and run on a Sunday and he came under enormous amount of pressure he's running for his country so enormous amount of pressure for him to it doesn't matter that much compromise just a bit I mean the Olympics only come around once in four years go to church next Sunday his decision was final he trained instead for what is now the 400 metre race it wasn't his best race in fact far from it he was fairly mediocre at it and when the day of the

Olympic 400 metre race came Liddell went to the starting blocks and as he went there one of the American Olympic team masseurs came to him and gave him a piece of paper and on that piece of paper was written 1 Samuel 2 verse 30 those who honour me I will honour and that inspired him to run and to run hard you see he was prepared to give away a certain Olympic medal he was the favourite for the 100 metre gold medal he was prepared to give up an Olympic medal but he was not prepared to give up on his conscience he was not prepared to compromise and to sell out on Jesus and for him that was a drawing of the line as it turns out he ran hard and he won the gold medal for the 400 those who honour me

I will honour and Jesus says to this church at Pergamum I know where you live I know you're in Satan's domain I know where you live I know where I've put you the same evil one here at Pergamum is the ruler of the kingdom of the air he tried to tempt Jesus into compromising in Matthew chapter 4 he used Peter to try and dissuade Jesus from going to the cross and Jesus turns to his best mate and calls him by his worst enemy and says get behind me Satan this evil one masquerades as an angel of light forget all images of horns and tails and fire and all sorts of stuff like that he is a fast talking clean cut charming logical morally bankrupt con man he is the ruler of the kingdom of the air and he's at work in the world now and his desire if he cannot destroy you front up his desire will be to seduce you until you compromise until you compromise until you compromise and Jesus knows where you live he knows the pressure that you are under when you are confessing him at work he knows the pressure on the sporting field or university at home he knows it can mean loss and it can mean hardship and it can mean laughter and it can mean rejection exclusion he knows the pressure to sleep in on

Sunday instead I'm deeply encouraged by friends of mine who made a decision early in their marriage and even when they had kids is that we'll be at church every Sunday we are physically able to be regardless and I said why did you make that call they said we do not trust ourselves we open the door just a moment particularly for our kids just open the door for a moment and make one excuse we open up the floodgates to make all kinds of excuses Christians in the end are people who do say no there are things that we won't believe and there are things that we won't do and especially we say no if it means saying no to Jesus and frankly that is hard in our culture it is so ironic how a soft centered tolerant progressive open and permissive society can be curiously hard on those who refuse to go along with them they can be curiously hard and intolerant of those who say no who won't join with them and Jesus says I know where

[21 : 16] I have placed you I understand but take note Jesus takes compromise very seriously verse 16 he calls his church to repent he calls them to turn their back on compromise otherwise he says I will come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth the option is either be judged by the world or be judged by Jesus there is no possibility of laying low keeping your head down ducking for cover hoping the trouble sort of passes God has just as God struck down those who compromised in numbers 25 those who sin so Jesus threatens to come and fight against those holding to the teaching the Nicolaitans he will fight against them with the sword of his mouth is what it says which is what is announced there at the beginning of this section in verse 12 these are the words of him who has the sharp double-edged sword we read in chapter 19 verse 15 that when Jesus returns in glory from his mouth it says comes a sharp sword which to strike down the nations rather than I think imagining that Jesus has this sort of sword shaped tongue we should see here that what he means is that Jesus in the end will speak decisive words of judgment his words will be final his judgment is final and in Ephesians chapter 6 where Paul is encouraging Christians to stand firm stay strong with Jesus and to stay strong with Jesus against all the attacks of the evil one he encourages Christians to take on the armor of God and in verse 17 of Ephesians 6 it says the sword of the spirit is the word of God and in Hebrews chapter 4 the word of God is a living and active sharper than any double-edged sword it judges the thoughts and the attitudes of the heart ultimately everything will be judged according to its alignment with the word of

God with Jesus word and so we're called here to listen to the word of God and judge everything in accordance with it because ultimately everything will be judged by it means you judge all teaching all instruction by the word of God not by the word of Pergamum not what the culture is saying what does the word of God say that is my guide that is my rule that's what I obey let me say that every person that I have seen compromise with sin and eventually walk away from Jesus has cut themselves off from listening to the word of God they only listen to teaching that affirms their view they pull back from Bible reading and from Bible study and from other Christians particularly who challenge them they surround themselves with people who will not bring the scriptures to bear on their lives they pull away from church they reject the word of God now there is a promise here to those who overcome it's for those who repent and turn away from compromise in verse 16 he will come and fight with those who compromise and tarnish the name of Jesus but in verse 17 he will come and give manna and a white stone with a new name written on it known only to him who receives it now it's sort of difficult to know exactly what that means or both those things mean except to say it's it means good it's good stuff manna is that strange bread in that God gave to the people of Israel as they went in the wilderness he miraculously fed them day in day out and Jesus had in that that picture of God's miraculous provision of his people in the old testament when he said I am the bread of life all who come to me will never grow hungry and Jesus also said that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God and the word that brings judgment here is also the word that brings life forever and Jesus promises to be our feed to feed us for all of eternity to give us nourishing life and sustenance for all of eternity now the white stone with a name written on it is a little bit more confusing it was what they used to do to get access into the stadium we call it ticker tech nowadays they called it white stoner tech what they used to do is you get a white stone get your name on it that gave you entry into the stadium and what Jesus promised here is basically those who remain faithful to Jesus name will each be given a white stone by Jesus with a new name written on it and it will guarantee you access into his presence forever that's the promise because God honours those who honour him one final challenge from this letter what is interesting in this text is it flows from plural to singular singular to plural all the way through and only some of the people in this church at Pergamum hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans but the letter comes to the whole church the whole church and Jesus says I will come to you and deal with them and it points to the way that as members of the church we are both individually responsible for ourselves and corporate responsibility for other members of the body the whole church is being judged guilty because they aren't doing anything to discipline

those who are holding to the teaching of Nicolaitans which threatens to unravel the whole thing they are failing to rebuke their brothers and sisters and repentance here is to take the form of the church pursuing a process of discipline with those who are holding to the teaching of the Nicolaitans and this process of discipline is motivated by a desire to keep Jesus from coming and fighting against them to keep Jesus from coming and judging them here the minority are compromising and the majority aren't doing anything about it and the call to this church at Pergamum is dare to discipline because compromise kills and so it's not just good enough for me and it's not just good enough for you to hold to the Bible's truth we must watch out for each other's lives you must watch out for me and I must watch out for you you must watch out for each other do you love Jesus?

do you love the honour of his name and your brothers and sisters enough to speak the truth to them? to nip it in the bud early when things start to arise and say my brother, my sister you are in a dangerous place right now so much is at stake for you now I suspect there are those amongst us who have never done that and may have been potentially been Christians for years never in love pulled up another Christian brother and sister and actually raised privately with them raised an issue of wrong understanding wrong thinking or wrong living maybe we're being fed by our culture too much we go all that stuff's private you know you can't tell me how to live it's my own business I think the Bible calls us to it maybe we think it's the pastor's job to do it it's my job to do it it's interesting when I first came here I had two people separately pull me aside and ask me what I was going to do with so and so over there another person and I asked both of them who had known the person for decades what have you done so far?

[30 : 05] nothing nothing's been done and I've been here for months and you expect me to if something was done decades ago we might not have the same issue we've got right now let me say that I am incredibly grateful to the people in my life who have spoken who have had the courage to speak words of truth to me someone in love pulled me aside for my questionable humour in fact right now I'd say it's not questionable at all they were right I was wrong I'm glad they said it someone in love pulled me up this is just a few examples keep going really pulled me up for demeaning a young person once putting them down inappropriately with my humour and they were right I had a potential to crush someone who I ought not have been doing that to someone asked me once whether I whether I thought

I was spending too much time with a person of the opposite sex particular person they thought I was I'm really glad that they spoke to me I'm grateful because frankly my heart will do all sorts of back flips and gymnastic contortions to justify itself it will just do that I need to add here I don't want to be spoken to by people who are angry people who have got agendas to drive people who are whingers I don't need people to rebuke me who really enjoy rebuking I want people to come to me with tears with their heart being ripped out in love for me love for Christ and the glory of his name but I need them to do it anyway I need them to do that for the promise for those who overcome is so important that we need a church culture where we allow others to open the Bible and speak to us and where we will actually speak to them as well where we have the courage to speak to others because frankly

I want to be an overcomer I want to get that white stone whatever it is I just know it's good our core values of humble authenticity and treasuring Jesus reflects the sort of culture we need at St Paul's a culture where we communicate with honesty authenticity transparency with vulnerability of our imperfections a culture where we will covenant together make a commitment together to watch over each other's lives with vigilance and accountability we need to help each other to become overcomers and sometimes helping each other become overcomers means a difficult conversation may we have the humility to own it and accept it and hear it my brothers and sisters do you have ears to hear what the spirit says to this church St Paul's Amen