

# Revelation: A Message to Pergamum

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay. How are you guys doing? Is that amazing? Amazing sharing time, amazing what God is doing. If you are with us for the first time, we are working our way through the last book of your Bible.

It's called the Revelation of John. Some people call it the Apocalypse of Jesus. And we're working our way through some letters that were written to seven churches. Jesus told John to write to these seven churches that were alive and thriving, sometimes well, sometimes not so well, in what is modern-day Turkey.

Remember the first church we talked about? The first church was Ephesus. We said that was a church that, though they did everything right, they thought everything right, they did everything right, everything was perfect, Jesus comes to them and says they have one thing wrong.

They lost their first love. They lost their love for Christ. Their Christian life had become dull. It just became mechanical. They just did, did, did, but they didn't realize why they were doing it.

They didn't love Christ. And we talked about how you can know if your Christian life is becoming dull. We said sometimes the first indication is that we lose joy.

[ 1 : 14 ] We lose joy of what God's done in our life. We lose joy of looking at the cross. We lose joy of thinking about what we were and what we are now. We said another way you could tell if you're losing perspective in your life is that you see people differently.

I mean, you see people more as a burden. You see people more as a hassle. You see people more as an inconvenience. You're just so busy. You need to be doing things. And they come up and they want to talk and they're going to take your time.

And, you know, it's just such an inconvenience. You know, you always hear the pastors or people in the church sometimes say, you know, the church would be great if it weren't for the people. And that's one of those symbols that you're losing your joy.

You're losing your perspective. Another thing might be that you have this better view of yourself than you really are. You start to think of yourself as more important than you really are. I remember the very first church that I served in, we were talking about serving and giving and tithing and how we can serve as a body.

And at the end of this time, one of the older members came up and he said, you know, I'm a chief executive of this huge company.

[ 2 : 25 ] And nothing that you're showing me on this list of how I can serve, nothing here is worthy of my time. Nothing is worthy of my time. My time is so important. There's nothing I can do for your church that's even worthy of that.

I just can't do anything. And as a young guy, I looked at him and I didn't know what to say, right? Right? Because I didn't know all the game rules and how you acted and what you did in this church because I was new to this church. And all I could say was, well, I'll pray for you.

But what I wanted to say was I'm so glad that Jesus doesn't say that about us. You know, I'm so busy. I'm in heaven.

I'm controlling everything. And I just got to do all these things. And it's just really inconvenient for me to come down and put myself on a cross. Because anyway, you're going to forget about me next week and you're going to do something wrong. I mean, that's what I wanted to say.

But I didn't say that. And in this message, Jesus says to the church of Ephesus, come back. Remember what it was like when I first loved you.

[ 3 : 23 ] Remember what your relationship was like. Come back. The next church we talked about was last week. We talked about the church of Smyrna. And we said the church of Smyrna is a church of bitterness. It's a church that was being crushed. And all this persecution happened into it.

And Jesus just comes to this church and he just encourages them to hang in there. He just says, hang in there. I'm with you. Hang in there. It's okay. Hang in there. No matter what happens, it's not going to even compare to what you're going to receive when you get in heaven and glory.

People were being martyred for their faith. It was interesting. Last week after this sermon, I got this email from a church that we work with in America. And this is the email.

Hey, we'd like for you to prayer request for Dan and Marilyn. They're missionaries. They're working in the areas that have been taken over by ISIS. And they're asking that we shower them in prayer.

ISIS has taken over the town they're in today. And he said that ISIS is systematically going house to house to all the Christians and asking the children to denounce Jesus. He said so far no child has.

[ 4 : 29 ] And so far all of them have been killed. But not the parents. They want the parents to watch. The UN has withdrawn and the missionaries are on their own.

And the Western missionaries are determined to stick it out for the sake of the families that they have been ministering to, even if it means their own death. They're very afraid now. They have no idea how to begin ministering to those families who've lost their children.

Yet they ask us to pray that God would give them a voice and hands to serve and help. Even so, they're begging for courage to live out their life in such dire circumstances.

And like the children, accept martyrdom if that is what they're called to do. These brave parents have told their children, they went to each of their children and said, Do you think we should stay?

And all the children said, Yes, we have to stay. We have to take care of these people. What if that means you being killed? And all the children said, We're willing to do that. So please surround us in your prayers and hope and perseverance.

[ 5 : 36 ] The next day, a message came. We lost the city of Karakush. It fell to ISIS, and now they are beheading children systematically. This is a city we've been smuggling food to.

ISIS pushed back the Pursh Megha, and they are within 10 minutes of our outpost. And our team is working diligently. Thousands are flooding into the city to escape.

The UN has evacuated the site. Our team is unmoved, and we'll stay. Will you pray for us? Smyrna was a church that was being crushed.

You know that there are more people who are going to be killed for their faith these 100 years than all the other 100 years put together in the life of the church. And we as God's people, we need to be praying for them.

He encourages Smyrna to hang in there, even amongst the bitterness, because at the end you're going to receive the crown of life. You'll meet Christ. Today we come to the church of Pergamum, however you want to say it.

[ 6 : 49 ] It's the church, most people would say, of worldliness. It's the church of compromise. It's the church of struggle. The word actually means to be thoroughly married.

And the idea is that the church was so thoroughly integrated to the community and to the culture that sometimes people didn't know what was Christian and what was Pergamum. Pergamum was this amazing city.

It was an ancient city. It was built on this massive mountain. It was a strategic city. It had great military value. Alexander the Great took over the city, and he stored all his riches in there.

The historians told us that he put billions and billions of dollars of gold from all the countries and nations that he conquered. Pergamum was a royal city, and it was loyal to Rome. It was one of the few cities that Rome had given the right to capital punishment.

Most of the time, if you wanted to practice capital punishment, you had to send the person to Rome to be killed, especially if they were a Roman citizen. But in Pergamum, that wasn't true. They were so loyal that the Romans gave them the right to kill whoever they wanted.

[ 7 : 49 ] The symbol of this power was a sword. It was a two-edged sword. It was used in Calvary. It was very sharp. Pergamum became this amazing center for intellectual discussion.

Eumenes, he's an inventor. He probably invented parchment, or he perfected it. And so he got this idea of how to write on animal skins. And so Pergamum had this library.

It was the largest library in the world. There were over 200,000 volumes in it. It was so significant throughout history that when Anthony wanted to marry Cleopatra, he took the library and he gave it to her as a wedding gift, and she took it down to Alexandria.

It was a center of politics and religion. On its hill behind the city as you walked into it, on its hill there were 50 different temples to different gods. There were 50 different gods you could worship in Pergamum.

There was Zeus and Dionysus and Venus and Esclepuos. And almost every week, we're told in the calendar, almost every week there were two or three days of holidays.

[ 8 : 51 ] I mean, if you think Hong Kong has a lot of holidays, Pergamum had holidays after holidays after holidays. In the ancient world, you could choose whatever god you wanted to serve.

Did you know that? If you wanted to follow a god, you basically chose the god you wanted to follow based on your preferences, based on your ambitions, based on your desires, based on what kind of life you wanted to live.

I mean, if you wanted pleasure, you served the god of Dionysus. If you wanted power, you served Zeus. If you wanted money, you served Morgan Stanley or J.P. Morgan. If you wanted wealth or health, you served another god.

But here, you could serve almost any god you wanted, and it was amazing. And what worship usually looked like was this, because we talk about it a lot in Scripture. You would walk into the temple. You would pay your money.

You would bow before the idols. They would give you an animal. You would kill the animal. You would give the animal to the priest. The priest would take the animal, and he would cook it, and you would have this massive meal.

[ 9 : 54 ] And after this massive meal was cooked, everybody would eat. You'd have this massive meal, and then the temple prostitutes would come out, and you would just have sex with as many temple prostitutes as you could. So you paid.

You bowed. You killed. You ate. And you had sex. And that's how you communed with God. And over and over and over this happened, and often these celebrations spread out from the temple, and they took over the whole city.

Pergamum was also this medical center. It was this amazing place where people would go, because the spas and the baths, everybody believed, had this healing power, and so people went there. It was the home of Galen.

Galen, if you know anything about medicine, Galen is probably the second most famous medical person in history. The first one is Hippocrates. You take the Hippocratic Oath. But the second one is Galen, and Galen grew up there, and he ended up being the physician for all of these Caesars afterwards.

Galen is the father of anatomy and physiology and pharmacology and pathology and neurology. He created all these things and thought through all these things. So it was this amazing intellectual place. In this place, there was this temple.

[10:57] It was to the God of healing. His name was Asclepius, A-S-C-L-E-P-I-E-U-S. Say that fast, really quick times. Asclepius. He was a snake. He was a snake.

So today, when you go in the hospital and you see a pole and you see a snake on it, that's Asclepius. He's the God of healing. So last night, we were driving home after Eric's party, and we drove beside an ambulance.

And on the back door of the ambulance, what do you have? You have Asclepius. There's a little rod there with a little snake there. So doesn't that make you feel good when you get in the ambulance? You're in a car with a pagan god symbol on the back of it, right?

He's the God of healing. And he was a snake. And it's interesting, his history behind him, because a lot of people said that he came from the Bible. In Numbers chapter 21, there's a story.

And the people of God are going through the desert and through the wilderness, and they're complaining about, God, we have to eat this manna again. We have to hit the rocks and get the water, and it's so bad. Why don't we just go back to Egypt? And God just says, okay.

[11:55] And God causes all these snakes to come out of the ground. And so all these snakes in Numbers 21 are biting the people, and the people are dying. And they start, oh, God, we're so sorry. Please forgive us. We're sorry for complaining.

And they go to Moses and say, Moses, please help us. We're perishing. And so Moses goes to God, and he intercedes for God, to the people. And God says, okay, this is what I want you to do. I want to make a serpent, a bronze serpent, and stick it on a pole.

And lift it up high. There's some foreshadowing here. Who else was lifted up high? And so whenever somebody's bit by a snake, you lift it up high, and they look up, and they see that they're healed. And so he did that, and the people were healed, and God relented on the snakes.

Well, a little later on in 2 Kings, I think, chapter 16, you go into the temple of God, and you see this pole on the snake there. And now the people aren't worshiping as a symbol of healing.

They're worshiping it as a God. And as an example, what we do as people, God gives us these great things that we enjoy, and we use, and they're for our benefits.

[12:55] But all of a sudden, we start worshiping him, and they become gods in our life. And so this was Asclepius. He was a very interesting person. This is what you did when you went into his temple. You went into his temple, and the temple floor was covered with snakes.

So you're sick. You want to be healed. You go into the temple, and you lay down. You lay down, and you go to sleep. And as you go to sleep, all the snakes are just kind of crawling all over you. And then when you wake up, you feel better, or you have this dream, and they tell you how to get healed.

So I don't know how many of us could last that long, but if you wanted to get healed, you went into this temple, and you had all the snakes crawl all over you. And this is what Pergamum was like. Can you imagine living there?

It was a center, again, of emperor worship. It was the first place where Caesar, who was alive, Dominion was the Caesar, and he was the first Caesar who said, I'm not dead yet.

I'm still alive, but I still want you to call me God. And I still want you to call me king. And so wherever you walk in the houses, you know, we had these little Buddha shrines where we go into people's houses and buildings and like that.

[ 14 : 00 ] They had little altars to Caesar, and you'd walk by, and you'd pick up a little incense, and you'd go, Caesar is Lord. But he changed it. He said he didn't want you to say Caesar is Lord. He says he wants you to say Caesar is Lord and Savior.

And so everybody did that. And so you just walked into buildings, and you'd pick that up, and you'd go, Kyrie, Caesar, Caesar is Lord, Caesar is Savior. And that's what you did wherever you went. And if you wanted to survive in that culture, that's what you did.

And so we get to this story, and now God has planted this little church, Pergamum. And it's in the center of all of those things. I mean, life is difficult. It's pressure.

It's intense outward persecution, and all of these things going on in them. And he starts off in this verse, and if you look in your Bible, or if you look in your bulletin, he says in verse 12, this is what he says. To the angel of the church of Pergamum, write, the one who has the sharp two-edged sword say this.

Now make a note to yourself. Whenever God starts a letter off this way, it's not a good thing. It's not a good thing, because a sharp two-edged sword was a symbol of authority, and it was a symbol of judgment.

[ 15 : 14 ] And what it meant was that judgment was coming to them. And everybody who read this letter would have been feared. They would have been afraid. They would have been scared.

They'd go, okay, what's going on here? Something bad is going to happen. It'd be like, so in college, I had this roommate who was not very sharp. And so he drove a car around, and it was his dad's car, and he figured that if he didn't register it with the campus police, that he could just get as many tickets as he wanted, and no one would ever know whose car it was.

And so he got about 55 tickets. And one day, I wake up Saturday in the morning, I get a phone call from his dad. And his dad says, tell my son I'm coming.

The dad. The one who owns the car. Well, you know right away what's going to happen, right? He says, I'm the one who's coming. I'm the one who owns the car. And what happened was that his car was taken away because the dad removed it.

And in that same way, Jesus is telling the church that I'm coming, and I'm bringing judgment. What we're going to learn is that this church struggled with this idea of judgment.

[ 16 : 24 ] They struggled with it in their culture. They didn't want to be judged by their peers. They didn't want to be judged by their work. They didn't want to be judged by the culture. They didn't want to be judged by Rome. And so they basically just didn't say anything.

And what Jesus says here is by choosing to live like the world, you choose to receive my judgment.

It's very interesting. I mean, we live in a culture here, right, in Hong Kong, where outward perception is everything. Perception is everything. Truth means nothing.

It's only how you perceive. If you perceived okay, that's okay. But what's really going on in your life or in your heart means nothing. And that's the same with the church of Pergamum. They were struggling with things going on inside of them.

Now, Smyrna, they were struggling with pressure and things hitting them from outside. But Pergamum is struggling with things going on inside of them. They're struggling with pressure and people making poor choices and not walking with God and not fearing the Lord, but they're fearing Caesar and fearing their peers and fearing their friends.

[ 17 : 32 ] And Jesus says that if we do this, we risk everything. We risk judgment from Him. So I want to start off our time by asking you a question.

Who do you fear? Who do you worry about being judged by? Whose judgment concerns you?

I mean, is there anything in your life right now that if God were to look into it, He wouldn't be pleased? Is there anything in your life right now that you would be afraid of showing your community group?

The people in Pergamum were. And Jesus says, I know what's going on in your life. I know what's going on in your hearts.

I know that you struggle with being judged by your family and your work and your peers and your spouse and your society and your culture and everything is slamming you. But what He says is, what you should worry about more is being judged by me.

[ 18 : 52 ] I think we forget that sometimes, don't we? I mean, often we forget that we serve a holy God who's righteous and who holds the sword. And we live lives that are worried about outward perception and how people see us.

And what He says to the church of Pergamum, what He says to us is, be careful. Be careful. Verse 13, He goes on and He gives this huge commendation to them.

He says, I know where you live. I know that you live in the middle of Satan's throne. I mean, they lived in the worst place in the world. I mean, it was terrible. And I know that you're there and I know that you're facing these persecutions and I know that outwardly things are hitting you and I know that you're holding to my name.

And when He says that, it means you're holding to God's character. You're holding to His values. You're holding to who He is. The whole to His name. The name was everything. That's why we pray and we say, in the name of Jesus. It means God's will be done.

And He says, I know you're doing all these things. You're holding up under the persecution. You're holding on to my name. Even in the midst of Antipas being killed. Antipas is a really interesting story.

[ 19 : 58 ] You don't read a lot about him in Scripture. You see some inferences to him. But he was a doctor. And we're told that he was a doctor and he had been sharing his faith with people illegally and people were coming to Christ.

And all of a sudden, the authorities came on him and said, we want you to stop this. And if you don't stop this and if you don't burn the incense and praise Caesar, you're going to be killed. And Antipas said, okay.

And so what they did was they had this big cow made out of bronze and they stuck him inside of it and they started a fire underneath it and they cooked him alive for the sake of Jesus.

And Jesus says, I see these things. I see your faith. I know you're hanging in there. You're doing all these things. You're holding on to my name.

My reputation is important to you. You're not allowing it to be soiled or hurt or damaged. You're walking with me. You're not giving up. That's amazing.

[ 21 : 07 ] One of the early church fathers said this. He said, deny the faith is saying that we believe that life here, life now, is greater than what God has to offer me.

He said, to deny Christ is to say that the world can offer you something better than Jesus. So maybe that's a question we need to ask ourselves starting off.

Who can offer us the best thing? Who's it worth serving? The people of Pergamum held strong with the outside pressure.

They held strong with the persecution. They kept to God's name. They held on to him. But in verse 14, Jesus says something very hard to them. He says, but I have these things against you and these things, there are some of you who are teaching of Balaam and there are some of you who are teaching of Nicholas.

And Balaam told Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel to eat the things sacrificed to idols and commit acts of immorality. Now there's a lot of history here but I'm just going to fly through it and what I'm going to say, this is what happened.

[ 22 : 25 ] The people of God were going through Israel. They're going through the promised land to Israel and they were just this locust and the king of Moab, Balaam, comes to this prophet Balaam who is well known. I mean, God actually spoke to him.

You read in passages, go back tonight and read Numbers 21, 22, 23, 24, 25. Fascinating passages. And so he comes to Balaam and he says, I want you to curse God's people.

And God speaks to Balaam. He said, what does that guy want? There's some people coming in, they're tearing up everything, I want you to curse them. And God says, no, they're my people. Don't curse them.

If you curse them, you're in trouble. And so Balaam goes and he says, you know, I can't do it, I'm sorry, and the people leave and they come back and we'll give you even more money. And Balaam goes this, even if you were to give me like, oh, 10 million dollars, I still couldn't do it.

You know what he's asking there. He's asking for 10 million dollars because that's his price. That's where he wants to get bought out on. And so they bring Balaam in and Balaam tries to curse God's people and he can't. And so what you see after four times is Balaam comes to Balak and he says, I can't curse God's people, but I tell you what I can do.

[ 23 : 35 ] If you want to make God's people stumble, this is what you do. You go hire those Moabite girls, they're really hot, they're really good looking. Hire them and they're going to come into the guys and spend time with them and hang out with them and flirt with them.

And then after a while, they're going to take into a ceremony. And in this ceremony, they're going to bow a little and eat some food and then they're going to have something that's going to be amazing. They're going to have all these relationships.

And if you do this, God's people's hearts are going to fall away from him. And you know what happens? It works. Balak hires the prostitutes, the women come in and they basically take the people of God's hearts away from God and the people start to serve other gods.

and what you see there is that God's people make this choice and they make a choice of saying, I can serve God but I can also serve whoever.

I can do this for Friday through Monday but on Sunday, I'm going to do this. And so what you see is that there's people in the church who basically have hearts that are divided.

[ 24 : 43 ] And the problem that you see in the church of Pergamum is that when John comes and he writes to him is this, the problem is is the leaders say nothing.

The leaders say nothing. The leaders are so fearful of what people are going to say. They're so fearful of what people are going to think.

They're so fearful of looking bad and seeming bad and narrow-minded and against the culture. They say nothing. And Jesus says, you know, that's really interesting because if you don't say something, I'm going to have to say something.

And I'm going to have to come in amidst the church and remove all those people who are serving two gods. You see what that says? Leaders had a choice and they chose not to follow God because they wanted to serve other things and other idols in their life.

In the church, we call that church discipline. There's sometimes things happen amongst the people of God and the leaders and the elders are called to come in and say, hey, you know, this isn't right.

[ 26 : 04 ] This isn't good. This isn't the way we honor the Lord. This isn't the way we make God's name great. This isn't the way we do things. But the people in the church of Pergamum, they didn't understand that because they were so caught up in living like the world around them that their lives looked no different than the people who were in the temple burning the incense.

And Jesus says, you can't do that. I was a young pastor. Someone came to me and said, hey, you know, your music leader, he's incredibly gifted, but he's in this bar and it's an alternative lifestyle bar and he's drinking and he's getting drunk and he's talking about all these other things and this person wasn't even in the church.

And they said to me, you know, is that way the church is supposed to act? And I went to all the other elders and teachers. I said, so what do we do about this? And they said, you know, that's just a really hard call.

Maybe we shouldn't do anything. But I kept thinking about this church. I kept thinking about God's honor and God's grace. And I'm not saying this because I'm so great because I've had people do these same things to me.

People loved me so much when they saw that I was wandering, they came and they grabbed me and said, what are you doing? And so I went there and I talked to that brother and he talked about what was going on in his life and I'll never forget his words.

[ 27 : 43 ] He said, you know, everyone knew this was happening but you're the only person who ever loved me enough to come and ask me what's going on in my life. The church of Pergamum was conflicted and John is saying don't be that way.

Serve the Lord. Trust Him. Love Him. Take care of Him. He ends the passage in verse 17 with this promise.

This promise is if you will do these things, if you'll honor me, if you'll walk with me, if you'll serve me, I'll give you secret hidden manna and I'll give you white stone.

All these things mean, all they are is their symbolism and what the symbolism is is their symbolism for intimacy with God. A relationship with God.

You know, I think the problem with us and with Tobin, I think the problem with the church of Smyrna, of Pergamum, I think maybe the problem with some of us in Watermark is this.

[ 28 : 54 ] We come to Christ, we're walking with the Lord, but in the back of our mind we wonder, is God really good? Is God really going to take care of me?

Does God really know my name? Does He really have a relationship with me? And because we wonder and we fear, we gather things around us.

We gather stuff. We gather money. We gather resources. All of these things we do, just like the church of Pergamum, because we worried if God was good enough, was He really going to take care of us?

And the way the story ends, Jesus says, if you have any doubt about that, all you have to do is look at the cross and realize what I've done for you.



Do I love you? You bet I do. Do I care for you? You bet I do. Am I going to feed you? You bet I am.

[ 30 : 02 ] Am I going to have a relationship with you? You know I will. And John is speaking to this church and He's speaking to us and He's asking us to examine our hearts and to see who we're serving.

He's asking us to know people well enough around us so that when they are falling away and they're doing things that they shouldn't do, that we can grab John and say, hey brother, what are you doing about this?

He's asking us to care about His name more than our name because the passage says that the world is looking at us and they want to see is our God really God?

Is He really good? Can we trust Him? Can we trust Him? The church of Pergamum.

It was a church that struggled with worldliness. It was a church that struggled with different things they wanted to have. It was a church that struggled with compromise. Ultimately, it was a church that struggled with love because they didn't know God loved them as much as He does.

[ 31 : 27 ] Father, we thank You for this day. We thank You for Your goodness and Your faithfulness in our life. We thank You for Your Word that never changes. We thank You for these stories of these churches, some of them long dead, not existing.

If we were to go back to Turkey today, there are 74 million people and only 2,400 Christians. And we wonder, we wonder why.

Father, I pray for our church. I pray that we would be a church that wouldn't love the world more than we love You. I pray that we would be a church that understands Your goodness, that we can look at the cross whenever we have doubt and confusion and realize that You're there, You care, You're involved, You know us, You're walking with us.

Father, I pray for those in our church right now who don't know You. I pray as they hear these words and they take part in this community and they listen to the music that they would ask questions.

I pray that You would open their eyes to Your Son, Christ, and they would realize that out of all the gods, He is the only true one. He is the only one that will sustain us. He's the only one that will know us and be involved in our lives.

[ 32 : 53 ] He's the only one that goes through the hard times and the persecution and the pain and the suffering. He's the only one worthy of our praise. Father, I pray for us as a church as we sit here on the western side of Hong Kong Island.

I pray that we would not fear our bosses and our jobs and our work and we wouldn't worry about the judgment that's the past more than we worry about Your judgment. I pray for our hearts.

I pray for my heart. I pray that You would speak to us of areas that we need to be concerned of I pray that we would come before You as Your people and as You encourage them in verse 16 repent.

Repent. Turn away. Confess. Confess that Jesus is Lord. So Lord, we come before You and we just worship You.

We thank You for Your Son. We pray all these things in His holy name. Amen. Amen. Amen.