

Covid Church: Steadfastness over Compromise Revelation 2:12-17

++The theme of Revelation in two words: Jesus Wins

++In 1980, the underdog US Men's Hockey team was playing Russia in the semi-final game--we may know the rest. If not, watch the movie. In the locker room before the game, Coach Herb Brooks said to his boys, ""You are born to be a player. You are meant to be here at this time. This is your moment."

++This is the message of Jesus to these churches: "You were born to be my church. You are meant to be here at this time. This is your moment!"

++Consider some points about the societies in which Christians living in Pergamum, or any of the other cities addressed in these letters, were part of:

++1) Christians encountered persecution on two fronts: the Romans who were trying to root out any religion that wouldn't worship the Emperor/deities; and the Jews who saw Christianity as a "scandalous splinter group" needing to be removed (Pharisees, scribes, rabbis, Saul)

2) Society wasn't under the separation of church/state - it was almost the opposite of our life today. Work, celebrations, politics, entertainment, eating was tied to the local deity.

3) To become a Christian (a member of the Way) was to have your life completely flipped on its head. It wasn't something that occupied a twenty minute period in the morning or a two-hour block on Sunday. It meant giving up family, job, security, and sometimes life.

4) To become a Christian usually meant turning your back on your family. The father was the center of the family, and as he worshipped, so did the family. To abandon your father's religion, was to abandon your entire family. It brings us much more context when we hear Jesus' words, "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison,

hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:26.

++Life was not easy for 1st century Christians, Jesus knew this, and He sent each of these churches personal letters reminding them that He sees it all - the suffering, the persecution, the good, the bad, and that He isn't content to let the churches continue in their ways - for they have victory in Him!

++Today, the message for the church worldwide is that Jesus sees our plight, but He also has a message for us.

++In Ephesus, rekindle your zeal, Devotion over Duty.

++In Smyrna, in the midst of suffering--He's giving us Life over Death

++Today, we visit Pergamum

++12 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Pergamum. This is the message from the one with the sharp two-edged sword: 13 "I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me. You refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you there in Satan's city. 14 "But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. 15 In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching. 16 Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it.

++Pergamum was the city in Asia Minor that was

literally the capital of pagan worship. Around 200 years before Christ, a giant Altar of Zeus was built - also called the Great Altar.

++It boasted the 2nd largest library in the ancient world, second only to Alexandria's in Egypt.

++12 "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Pergamum. This is the message from the one with the sharp two-edged sword:

++Where else have we heard this phrase, "sharp two-edged sword?"

++12 For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God.

Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

++Jesus, as the living & powerful Word of God, wants this church to know that truth is about to hit them smack in the face. There is nothing hidden, and He is ready to bring all to light- the good and the bad.

++This two-edged sword, and the use of the word, was a symbol of dominance and conquest through judgment.

++In essence, we have Jesus saying, "This message is from the Righteous Judge who has already achieved total victory." - Game Over!

++13 "I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne, yet you have remained loyal to me. You refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you there in Satan's city.

++Again, Pergamum was known for its cultural infiltration of pagan practices and worship. Some ancient travelers have mentioned the eerie feeling that one would get when traveling to this city. Jesus even refers to this city as "Satan's throne" - where he is king, hence, "Satan's city." This could be an allusion to the Altar of Zeus as well.

++We also have mention of Antipas, who is held in church tradition to be the leader of the church at Pergamum until his martyrdom for resisting

emperor worship.

++In spite of all this persecution and these horrific practices, this church has remained loyal.

++This world is not our home-but it is Pergamum. However, Satan is not king, this is not Satan's city---Jesus Christ has won the victory, our goal as His children is to live in that truth! - and proclaim it!

++14 "But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel. He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin.

15 In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching. 16 Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

++This church is being called to Steadfastness over Compromise.

++The culture around them was wicked and evil, and they are being duped by some in the church to allow these immoral practices to come into the church. The church was compromising, "How can we remain His and the world's?"

++Balaam (you remember him because of his donkey) was spoken ill of in Jude and II Peter for helping Balak trick the Israelites into worshipping foreign gods and taking foreign wives against God's will to incur the judgment of Yahweh.

++While we thankfully wouldn't allow that kind of practice to infiltrate our church today, do we allow it to infiltrate our lives in other, more deceptive ways? Do we compromise what we know to be true in order to stay relevant?

++Do we spread the gossip? Do we watch the movie?

++17 "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it.

++Again, we have more symbols and imagery.

++In ancient Greece and Rome, trials were held with very large juries. When juries, sometimes including entire cities, were asked to render a verdict, each person would pick up one of two stones and place them in an amphora (jar)- one black, one white. As the people left the trial, they were asked to deposit a black stone for guilt or a white stone for innocence AND free of condemnation from the people.

++Jesus is calling upon that practice when He declares that those who remain steadfast, who don't compromise, will be given a verdict of "innocent! And free of condemnation" - beyond that they will be given the stone as proof of it with a new name, a signpost of new creation!

++In Christ, we are given innocence - not

innocence that must be reclaimed over and over again, but one etched in eternity, written on our hearts - forever, with a new name - because we are new creatures with new identities.

++Our steadfastness comes only from Him. He's not calling us to an impossible task.

++Peter says this in his first letter: **I Peter 1:13-16 (MSG) So roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear, be totally ready to receive the gift that's coming when Jesus arrives. Don't lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what you feel like doing. You didn't know any better then; you do now. As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness. God said, "I am holy; you be holy."**