

To the Church in Pergamum

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[0:00] It's really good to have it. Can you believe it's only week four that we're here? It feels like a lifetime ago, but God is doing something.

! If you've been with us on this journey, we've been going through, we decided just to kick the stabilizers off and start with the end in mind. So we're starting this thing and we're going to start in Revelation.

So that's what we did. We just went straight to Revelation just to figure out what it is that Jesus talks about. When he's talking to the church, I can see Danny. I always like seeing Danny. Fresh trim, bro. Nice. Look at that. Nice. Are you going to get it finished later today?

Oh, no. Sorry. I too had a fresh trim last night. I do. Thank you, Joe, for the bold jokes. Every week, every week. So creative. So creative.

Revelation. We're going through the seven churches. Actually, the experts say if you want people to remember something, you need to say it seven times. Only then will they remember it. Only then will they log it in and remember what you're actually saying.

[1:07] So each of these seven letters, I'm going to keep recapping bits just to help us remember. If you've been here from weeks one to seven, then I'm sorry. But for the rest of us, and some of us are new here, and that's completely okay.

We're talking about Jesus talking to the church. He's talking to the seven churches, and he's saying, listen up. I see you. I know you. I walk among you.

And this is what I have to say. Church, don't we want to know what Jesus has to say to his church? And I keep saying, hey, this isn't a memorial service. So often when we go to church, it's almost like we're walking into a memorial service about a guy called Jesus.

We're acting as though he's not alive anymore. We're acting as though he existed 2,000 years ago, that he was a good, nice guy, that he had great testimonies. And there's people who come up and share different things. And there's a photo collage video to show how good he was.

But it's not the case. Jesus is alive and walking right now. Do you believe that, though? That's the question. Do you believe that? That's what we're trying to remind ourselves here.

[2:14] And then so he writes and he speaks. John writes on behalf of Jesus and talks to us. Talks to the church. And he introduces this Jesus, which is nothing like the one we see in Sunday school.

He's not blonde like Grace. He's not got blue eyes like the ones we see. This is a terrifying image of Jesus. And it challenged me. It's like, actually, the Jesus that I think I know.

That Jesus that bobbles his head saying yes to things when we ask him, hey, can you help us get better? Can you help? Can you protect us from COVID? Can you help us get that deal at work?

And then Jesus is like, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That's not Jesus. I just got dizzy doing that. Jesus is different. Jesus will blow your mind if we care to know who he actually is.

And that's what we've been challenging ourselves to go through. Quick quiz for those who have been here. So Jesus speaks to the churches. He speaks to seven. We've done two. Who remembers the first one? Ephesus.

[3:12] Ephesus, great church, a star church, does everything right. He says, I know your works. I know your toil. I know your patient endurance. I know how you are enduring patiently. But, but, but I have this against you.

What does he have against the church in Ephesus? Lost their first love. That means you're an eight star pupil, but you've forgotten the name of the class. You're great at doing what you do, but you're doing it for all the wrong reasons.

And what's the, what's the threat? What's, what's the, what's the consequence of that? He said, I'll come to you and I'll remove your lampstand from his place. He said, I will shut you down. I don't

need you. If there's ever a reminder that God doesn't need the church to do stuff, that is it. He doesn't need the church's actions. He needs the church's heart. And then we move on. He goes 30, 40 miles up. The messenger goes from Ephesus and goes up to the next place, which was last week.

What was that place? Smyrna. Smyrna is an interesting one because it gets away with any kind of criticism, nothing. And so he's just like, Hey, here are the words of those who, the one who is the first and the last, the one who died and is now alive.

[4:24] And he's saying, I know the stuff that you're going through. You're being thrown into prison. And Jesus here introduces the main villain of the history of mankind, who is Satan, the devil.

He said, behold, the devil's about to throw some of you into prison. And for 10 days, you will have tribulation, but that you may be tested. They're getting their faith tested. This was a group that was getting constantly, they were poor as well.

So they had, they were running businesses, but the Christians in Smyrna were poor because everyone else was discriminating against them. And Jesus says, I know, but then he doesn't give relief.

He says, be faithful unto death and I'll give you the crown of life. So the one who conquers, they will not be hurt by the second death. He's saying, Hey, I know things are tough.

I know you want me to relieve you of this, but it's not happening right now. I want you to be faithful unto death. And when we say, we finished with, why does he have the authority to say that? It's because he was faithful unto death, even than death on the cross.

[5:24] And then when he rose again, all our authority was given to him. And so he can say that I'll give you the crown of life. And so now we reached letter three. Now imagine this messenger, he's going up and he's reading this letter to the different churches.

And now you're the next churches. This is the church of Pergamum. So actually likely you would have probably heard the other two. You're like, Oh, Ephesus. Oh, you've lost your first love. Oh, you guys sucks to be you.

You might get shut down. And then you go to, and then you hear about the Smyrna one. Oh, those guys are getting thrown into prison. That's bad. Oh, you're going to stick it out. Even if you die. Oh, but there's a second death.

Oh, that's interesting. That's cool. You won't be hurt by the second death. That's the one that we should be scared of. We're all going to have the first death, but the second one, how do we conquer so that we don't get hurt by the second one?

The one that separates us from God eternally. And now he reaches Pergamum. And as we read this, I'm going to ask Gabriel to come up to read this for us.

[6:21] Again, the same thing. I want you just to imagine that you are the church in Pergamum. That you're sat there and you're hearing these words from Jesus himself. And I want you to feel what they feel.

And that's what we're going to unpack today. So can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? And to the angel of the church in Pergamum, right?

The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. 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.

But I have 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.

[7:35] 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 and 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Praise be to God. Thank you, Gabriel. Please take a seat. Thank you. Thank you. So the angel of the church in Pergamum writes the words of he who holds the sharp two-edged sword.

Okay. So Ephesus gets a different thing. He gets, they get the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

He's saying, I am the one who is with you. I'm walking among you. That's what, that's Ephesus. That's how he introduces himself to Ephesus. To Smyrna, he says the words of the first and the last, the one who died and came to life.

Remember I told you Smyrna was a city that died, was destroyed and then came to life. They were, they were very fascinated with games, athletic games. And so they first, and they proud, proud, pride in themselves as the first city of Asia.

[8:46] So Jesus introduces himself like that. Imagine if someone introduces himself to you and say, Hey, the words of him who holds the sharp two-edged sword. That should freak you out a little bit.

That means Jesus has changed his tone a little bit with this church. They were just about to get, Oh, the, the God who, the God who is going to come and come for you. No, no, no. I am the words of him who holds a sharp two-edged sword.

If you're the church in Pergamum, you're like, uh-oh. Interestingly about Pergamum, it's a, it's a, it's a city again. Actually, it was the official capital of Asia Minor at the time.

And the symbol of the city was a sword because in this city, they were allowed to, uh, deliver capital punishment. So if someone had done a crime that was deserving of this, they could actually kill someone.

So the logo, the symbol of the city was the sword. Jesus knows this. And he says, the words of him who holds the sharp two-edged sword. And then he says, in the words of kind of like Liam Neeson in Taken, I know where you live.

[9:53] Just stop there for a second. Let's just pause. This guy, Jesus introduces himself as the words of him who holds the sharp two-edged sword. I know where you dwell. That should strike the fear of God into your heart.

The question is why? The question is why? What is it about this city? What is about this church that's interesting? I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. The enemy is now introduced again to this church.

This is where Satan rules. Jesus acknowledges and concedes that in this place, Satan is having his way. That's scary.

And I'll tell you a little bit more about why that is. Not only was it political capital, it was also the capital of emperor worship. They had so many temples in Pergamum. So many.

Pergamum was on the top of the hill.

[10:57] And on the top of the hill, there were all these other temples. And Zeus was a main one. There was another one called Asclepius, which is actually the god of healing. The people who worshiped this one, it's fascinating and terrifying at the same time.

So they believed this god would heal people. And so there would be a temple where there would actually be tame, harmless snakes inside the temple. And inside this temple, people from all over the world who had different kinds of sickness.

Imagine you have a sickness that you can't heal, that your doctor can't heal. So you go to this temple. And what you do is you spend the night there. And you spend the night in the complete darkness with all these tame snakes around you.

And you would wait and hope for a snake to touch you. In the hope that if the snake touched you, you would get healed. Isn't that fascinating? Isn't that terrifying?

If you look, if you look at the, who's heard of the World Health Organization? WHO. We used to get lots of memos from them during COVID times, right? And now we don't care who they are. WHO. Look at their logo.

[11:58] Their logo is a staff. And what's around it? Snakes. Where Satan's throne is. People would pursue healing. Would pursue the touch of the serpent.

To be healed. Where Satan's throne is. But, Church of Pergamum, you hold fast my name.

You did not deny my faith. In this city with all these other gods, this pluralistic society, you did not deny my name. When everyone is collecting gods like they collect Pokemon cards right now, you are holding fast to my name.

That's like, that's good. The man with the sharp two-edged sword is not angry yet. He said, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, you stuck to it.

Who's Antipas? Tradition says Antipas is probably one of the leaders of the church. Probably the pastor of this church in Pergamum. And he was killed. And he said, and he was killed among you.

Can you imagine just where this congregation is right now?

[13:03] You're in a city that's filled with all these other gods. Your own pastor gets dragged away and gets killed. Historians tell us Antipas got killed by being boiled alive in a big bronze kettle.

I don't know, guys. I was thinking about this yesterday. There's a few of us who pray here. I was like, what if I died? What if I got hit by a bus? I mean, I'd prefer not to be bored in a kettle. But what if I was dragged away and I was killed?

How would it make you feel now? Some of you are visitors here. You're like, I don't know you, James. So I guess I don't know how I'd feel. Francis is just like, oh, who's going to get your shoes? Imagine that. Your leader's gone. Dragged away. In public. Persecuted. Killed. The fear that you would have at that moment. And Jesus says, I know that you hold fast my name, that you did not deny my faith.

Even in the days of Antipas, you held on. That's good. And then he says, yet I have a few things against you.

[14:10] Ephesus has only got one. Now it was a big one. It was a major in the driving test failure. It's a major. He says, I have a few things against you, Pergamum. What are those few things?

Let me read it to you. If you're taking notes or you're following, we are now on verse 14. But I have 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, you hold some, some of you hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans and actually both groups here for all intents and purposes, they did the same thing. This church is living against a lot of persecution, a lot of pressure, and it's deciding I'm going to trust in Jesus and nothing else. So I'm not going to worship all these other gods. But whilst they were keeping look on the outside, they'd let something in through the back door. Have you watched Troy, the Brad Pitt movie?

Who's watched Troy, the Brad Pitt movie? Who's old enough to watch Troy? Well, actually, there's probably one even older than that, but the Brad Pitt one is the one that I grew up with. The Trojan horse is how it gets in right.

[15:22] And so basically he's saying this church has let in a Trojan horse. You've been so busy fighting the enemy on their front, you've let something in through the back door. So whilst you're holding fast my name, even if your pastor is getting killed through the back door, there are some of you here.

There are some of you, maybe it's this couch here. Maybe it's that back row over there. Some of you here hold to the teaching that isn't of me.

Now, what is that? Now, those of you who are well-versed in the Old Testament, specifically in the book of Numbers, who's well-versed in the book of Numbers here? Yeah, hands going up everywhere.

Numbers 22 to 24 is where this happens. There's a king of the Moabites, he's called Balak, and he's hearing about the Israelites. He's hearing about what they're doing. They're conquering city by city, and he's getting a little bit freaked out.

So he hires a sorcerer. Hey, can you put a curse on these Israelites? But the sorcerer Balak can't do it. He's stopped from doing it. And read the story.

[16:26] It's fascinating. He's stopped from doing it, and he's stopped in the most hilarious of ways. A donkey is involved. I'm just going to leave it there. A donkey is involved. A talking donkey is involved. And it's not Shrek, okay?

And so Balak doesn't know what to do. He says, King, I can't put a curse on these people. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll tell you what you should do. Instead of conquering over them, you should just corrupt them.

Instead of conquering over them, you should corrupt them from within. Get them to start practicing sexual immorality. Get them to start compromising on some of their beliefs. Get them to compromise on some of the things that they had to hold to, to remain a holy people.

You can't beat them, but you can corrupt them from within. That's what he's saying. He's saying, some of you have held to that teaching. And what were they doing? Two things. It says two things here.

They're practicing sexual immorality, and they're eating food sacrificed to idols. Okay, we know those are bad things. But I want to tell you how bad they were. Now, you see, Paul talks about this.

[17:29] He's talked about it. He's saying, hey, if there's food that you're picking in the supermarket, you're buying it from there, don't worry too much about everything that's happened before. It's okay. But that wasn't what they were doing.

They weren't accidentally buying food sacrificed to idols at the supermarket in Welcome or Infusion. They weren't doing that. What they were doing were attending banquets in the temples of these other gods and eating food there in the temples.

So it wasn't just innocently eating food that was sacrificed to idols. They were doing it as an act of worship or at least joining in with the crowd to do it. Can you imagine a city where there's so many different gods and so many different celebrations?

I mean, we've had loads of fundraising dinners in Hong Kong right now, so they're not quite the same. But imagine all these banquets and dinners and gatherings organized by all these different people who are worshipping all these different gods. And so the Christians are starting to think, oh, well, I'm getting invited to these things.

Hey, actually, I know I shouldn't go to that because I follow Jesus. But there's some people there I really need to get to know. Because if I get to know them, then they'll help me with my business and then I'll be okay.

[18:31] And actually, that person's okay. He's like a worship follower of Zeus, but not really. He's not really a devout one. So I'm just going to go and hang out and eat and it's going to be okay. That's what's happening here. And there's people who are starting to say, you know what?

We are followers of Jesus. We are free. We don't have all the laws that the Jews had. We can do whatever we want to and we'll still be okay. Because our spirit, our soul is safe. Which means that whatever we do with our bodies is fair game.

It doesn't matter anymore. So in a church like this where there's lots of persecution happening outside, where to even get to church, they probably have to lose their trail to make sure that no one's following them.

Within, there was a couch of people that were starting to follow different ways. But even though they were turning up on Sunday, Saturday night, they were somewhere very, very different. And Jesus was talking to them. He's saying, you've been guarding the front door, but the back door and a little bit of yeast spread through bread can be disastrous.

[19:37] He's saying, you've got to sort that out. And again, practicing sexual immorality, again, this is not good anyway. But they were doing it in the temples as an act of worship with prostitutes.

So this wasn't just something that you were just doing with your body. Your soul was getting involved. Now, Jesus then comes out with a pretty harsh thing. This is literally like a, why so serious, Jesus?

Like, why so serious? Actually, the stuff that we're doing, we're not worshipping them. We're not harming anyone else. It's all consensual. We're not going out to hurt people.

We're not murdering any people. We're not stealing from other people. We're just attending a couple banquets. We're just hanging out. And maybe those people are doing bad stuff, but I'm not. Have we been there?

Have we had those kinds of things? We should have friends. So going in university in England, there's a huge culture of clubbing. Do you guys call it clubbing here? Is that a thing?

[20:37] It was partying, whatever it would be, clubbing. And personally, I didn't go because I can't dance. Well, I can dance, just no one likes the way I dance. Show us.

You really don't want to. But usually people pay for that kind of stuff. So I never went. And then, of course, as a warm-blooded young male, I'm like, actually, I know that place isn't really good for me. And so I don't go. But then I had my bros, my friends, who are Christians, who are Christ followers. Oh, that's cool. That's cool. We go. It's completely okay. We're not doing any of the bad stuff. Or my favorite one, we're here to really share the gospel and help those who are drunk to look after them. That's a cool story, bro. That's a really cool story. How did it go? Oh, I don't remember. I don't remember. But we all made it happen. Oh, okay. Wow. Jesus was really glorified in you doing that. Really, really cool. Compromises. Compromises. Boyfriend, girlfriend who just meet each other and then suddenly engage in relations that they're not really supposed to.

[21:40] That's something that's just preserved, reserved for two people who are fully committed to each other. Oh, we both agreed it's okay. Just try it's not hurting anyone else. But you're separating the body from the soul again.

There's something about it that's together. Don't compromise on those things. And people have said, oh, Christianity. Christianity has such a strict, low view of sex in the sense that you're not allowed to enjoy it or anything.

No, no, no. Here's the thing. Christianity actually has a very, very, very, very high view of sex, of how beautiful it can be. There's a high bar, not a low floor that we're trying to avoid.

But so often we minimize it to sin management. We minimize it to, oh, what can I not do? When it's, what could it be? There's a difference there.

And so you don't compromise. And Jesus is so serious. Why so serious, Jesus? Why are you coming to us with your sharp two-edged sword and telling us you know where we live? It's because Jesus hates one thing and he hates slavery.

[22:49] He hates his children being in slavery. It's not the sin necessarily, but he knows what you're doing right now is keeping you locked in a cage and he hates that.

But then we now live in a society where, and I'm praying for the grace of God to cover us here as I share this. We're living in a society where we have to be tolerant about anything and everything. But did you notice that the fruits of the Spirit, you don't see the word tolerance? You see understanding, you see grace, you see patience in the Bible. You see love, you see truth. You don't see tolerance because tolerance is different. When you tolerate something that keeps someone in captivity, that's not good.

That's why Jesus is so serious. That's why he's, and he's saying, I will come to you. I mean, I think the NIV is quickly, ESV is, I will come to you soon. This needs to be addressed right now.

[23:51] And I'll come to you and I'll war against them. Now, interesting here, when he's talking to the church, he's not talking to everyone. He's saying, he's not saying, I'm going to come to you and I'm going to tear you apart with my sharp two-edged sword. He said, I will come to you soon and I will war against them.

He knows it's a small group that's doing this. And he's saying, I'm going to come to that and I'm going to war against them with the sword in my mouth because they've compromised.

But the only problem is they think they're not hurting anyone else. But by doing so, they've compromised the whole thing. Because you let, Pergamon was a fascinating place.

This capital, it had a library, a huge library that had 200,000 parchments. It was a, do you know when you walk into a library or a bookstore? I like walking, I'm not a very learned kind of person. I'm not a really educated, smart kind of person. But when I walk into a bookstore or a library, I feel more educated. Do you? Because you're just like, if you just walk into ES Light, I walk through ES Light because there's a bubble tea inside in Causeway Bay.

[24:54] But even as I walk through, I'm like, oh, there is, there is intellect surrounding me. And by osmosis, it's going to diffuse into my mind.

Simply by me being here, sipping this bubble tea, I will get more smart. Can you imagine just walking into these libraries? I mean, maybe my favorite one is probably the New York one, right? The New York one is just majestic and it's just huge. And you walk in, you're like, there is something here that is just bigger than me. That's what that does to me. So this city was a city filled with these ideas.

And what we see here, why Jesus is being so serious, why he's warring here is because he knows the battle is in the mind. He knows if you solve this, if you take this captive, then a lot of problems will be solved.

You will then no longer compromise. So that's why he's so serious. His problem wasn't the fact that this church was in Pergamum.

[25:58] Because we're called to be in this world, but not of this world. His problem was the fact that there was too much Pergamum in the church. Let me translate that for us here in Hong Kong. Have you ever wondered, we talked about last week about the pressures of Hong Kong.

Some of the things that aren't really of God that we've let seep into our, the way we do church, the way we do life. Jesus is saying, the problem isn't that this church is in Hong Kong.

The problem isn't that this church is in Anmolte. The problem is there is too much of Hong Kong in this church. That you've let society dictate how you live for me.

That's what he's saying. I mean, what are the things, if you can think, what are the things that you've observed? There are many of us here, many of us who have been in church for many, many years. What are some of the things that you think that you see so much of in the world that seep

into the way we do church?

Do you have any ideas? Have a think. I might put some people on the spot. What do you see that there is too much of the world in the church sometimes? Maybe you don't have to say specifically this one, but just the church in general.

[27:03] What do you see in the church that actually shouldn't be there, but is actually of the world? Consumerism. Consumerism. Joe mentioned what I said about, hey, so often we come to church, we attend a service, and we are the spectators.

We are the fans. But that's not the case. If you come thinking that you're just a fan just to watch this service, then you've got it the wrong way around. I'm not the player here.

You guys are the players. My job is to help coach you so you actually recognize and acknowledge and realize that you are the players, that you are the ones that must scatter. Because if you come here and you're just here just to watch a show, then we've got it all the wrong way around.

But consumerism, huge one. And especially when you're in a place like Hong Kong where there are so many churches on every MTR line, the moment you don't like one or the moment your schedule doesn't fit one, you're like, okay, it's okay.

I'm just going to go to the other one. And then you just keep hopping around because you're just going to watch games. You're just a spectator. You're just a fan. So absolutely, consumerism.

[28:12] What are the other ones? Entitlement. Entitlement. That's a huge one. What can your pastor, what can my pastor do for me?

What can church do for me? What can Jesus do for me? I'm going to come in here. Jesus, I need you to help me fix this. I need a boyfriend fast.

I need a job fast. I need a way of life. Now, Jesus, can you, what? You're not doing this for me?

You're not helping me deal with this anger and this hurt?

Oh, I'm leaving. Find somewhere else. I'm entitled to all this. I deserve all this. You see, that's the problem. The gospel is that we all fall short of the glory of God.

That we don't deserve anything. That while we were sinners, he loved us. Entitlement. We've let it seep in. That we walk in, we're like, oh, what can this church do for me? Entitlement, huge.

[29:11] Consumerism, entitlement. One more, maybe? Anything? Gossip. I don't come to church because you Christians are just as bad, if not worse, than those of us outside.

Have you heard that before? I don't believe in God because, man, you guys gossip so much. Paul has really harsh words to say about this.

But we let it seep in. We let it seep in. We whisper. We talk. Compromise.

Jesus says to the church in Pergamum, don't compromise. Otherwise, I'm coming to you soon.

Quickly. And I'm going to war against you. What have we compromised?

What have we let seep into? Well, let's zoom back in, away from church and just you. What have you compromised? You're placed in this world, but not out of this world. You're placed in this city, but not out of this city.

[30:13] But what of the city is in you? And the city is saturated with everything. We were praying there just earlier before service and you were saying, we want to just be desperate for God.

We want to be hungry for God. And I've shared this a lot of times with the people I'm around. I'm rarely ever hungry in Hong Kong. Full stop. Are you?

Like every meeting we have is we're going to go eat something and drink something. My doctor says my cholesterol is high, by the way. That's a confession. And my blood sugar.

So my ■■■■ is now ■■■, not ■■■. That sucks. Right? It sucks. I'm never hungry in Hong Kong because all the people I meet, I'm eating something. There's like five meals, five legitimate meals a day that you can justify.

And I realize that's the same with God. I'm so saturated with everything. I'm so saturated with all the adverts I see on the MTR. I'm not hungry for the only thing that will satisfy me.

[31:18] You know what Jesus is saying here? Jesus is saying here, you guys are snacking so much on the side. You are not ready for the big banquet. You're snacking.

My daughter has this problem. My daughter loves snacking. I'm saying it quietly because I'm quite scared of her. All the time she's snacking. We have a rule. After 4 p.m., no snacks.

Why? Because it ruins your appetite for dinner. That's exactly what Jesus is saying. You guys have compromised and you're constantly snacking. All this junk food that isn't good for you, you think it's good for you. And now you're not even ready for the big banquet.

Now you're not even invited. You have to be hungry for this banquet in order to come in. That's what Jesus is saying. Who's snacking here?

Who's snacking here in the things of this world, in the things of this city here? John, are you snacking? Sorry, I always pick on John.

[32:15] He's literally just come out. John, so good to have Tobes back, right? Tobes, he's done such a great job. Without, seriously, seriously. But it's really good to have you back. He's much better with you around.

What are we snacking? And then he says, he who, I mean, he says this in everyone. So he who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Here he turns to us.

Like, yeah, he's writing to the church in Pergamum. And now he's saying, anyone who hears these words, anyone who hears these words, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. That, brothers and sisters, is us.

That's why I actually deliberately go out of my way and not putting slides up so you can just kind of like, feed me. Let me, no, we need to actively listen out for God. So he says, he who has ears.

So whoever, whichever of you here heard what Gabriel was reading, let him hear, let her hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Let him hear, her hear what the Spirit is saying to each of us.

[33:17] What have we compromised on? He who has ears, let him hear. Now, to the one who conquers. He always finishes with an encouragement. I mean, this, Jesus does something that's very good in terms of constructive feedback.

It's called a certain sandwich in certain quarters. But it's called a poop sandwich, right? You've got the good stuff, and then you've got the bad stuff, and then you've got the good stuff at the end. So this is, so he always finishes off with this, and he says, to the one who conquers.

Like, yeah, I might come to you soon and war against you, but to the one who is able to overcome this, this time he gives them two promises. He says, I have a few things against you, but now I have two promises to give you.

And so that's cool. And that's nice. So this is how he finishes well. And so he said, to the one who conquers, I will give him some of the hidden manna. They will have known what this is. We know what this is, because in the Old Testament, you see the Israelites in the desert.

In the desert with no food. Hungry. And then what happens? Honeybread falls from the sky. I don't want us just to kind of gloss it over.

[34:24] Oh, yes. Yeah, I've heard that in a movie somewhere. No, this is the word of God, and this is what happened. Imagine you were there. You are starving. You have children. You don't know where the children are going to eat.

You're beloved. You don't know whether they're going to survive tomorrow. And boom, there's honey bread that falls from the sky. What does that tell you about God in that moment? That he breaks through the natural, and he can feed you if he wants to.

He's saying, to the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna, the secret bread of life. What he's saying is here is, you don't have to go to these banquets anymore.

You don't have to attend these celebrations that your friends invite you to, because you think you need to do this in order to climb up in society. You don't have to do all those things. You don't have to compromise, because I am all you need.

I am all you need. So stop compromising. If you eat of my bread, you will truly be satisfied.

[35:27] And then he says, and I will also give him a white stone with your name written on it.

Now, there's about nine interpretations of what this is. But let me just sum them up into what I think it symbolizes at the least.

It symbolizes access and intimacy. He's saying, hey, I will give you a white stone with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.

Now, in those days, in these ancient games, if there was a winner, if you were a medalist in the 100-meter race, or whatever it is, a little shot put. You just look like a shot put guy. Yes, shot put guy. Or just, you know, whatever ballerina stuff that Joe does.

If you win, then you often get a little stone. Like a medal. And what's special about this medal is that you get invited to big banquets.

And you can show that medal and go, hey, I'm a gold medal winner. And with your name written on it, you can actually gain access to some of these special dinners. So there's an access element to this.

[36 : 32] If you conquer this, I will give you access to everything that you need. You don't need to go to the things that you think you're going to get the access into society that you think you need. I will give it to you.

I have the ultimate coupon. Another interpretation is one of intimacy. I mean, we've seen this maybe growing up. You have two friends who want to commit to each other and you buy each other a bracelet.

Or you have a stone that's kind of like the half-half and you write a name on each side. And you give it to each other. Oh, I remember that. You're like, there's an intimacy there. And it's a name that only the one who perceives it knows.

He's saying, I'll give you access. And I'll give you intimacy. The intimacy that you so crave. Why are you bowing down to all these idols anyways? Because you want intimacy.

Because you're looking for a place to feel truly satisfied. To be accepted and loved. Let me tell you, I'm going to give you a stone that only you and I will know. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna.

[37 : 35] I'll give him a white stone with a new name written on it. That's what Jesus promises. Access and intimacy. Why? Because he's saying, I'm the door.

I am the door. I am the way. I am the destination. I am what you need. I am the bread of life. I laid my life down so you could have this way in here.

So that you would be invited to the great banquet. Do not, do not snack. Not because I hate snacks. I created the snacks. The pleasure that you get from eating those things comes from me.

What you don't realize is that you will be so much more satisfied when you eat those snacks. I mean, I used to work in McDonald's, so I feel as though I'm entitled to say this. I mean, my joke is always, I worked in McDonald's and now I work in KFC.

No, dad jokes. Yeah. Thank you, everyone. I'm here all week. I used to work in McDonald's, so I still love McDonald's. Though now my doctor's report tells me that I shouldn't eat as much McDonald's.

[38 : 42] But you eat McDonald's and that first 10 minutes is so satisfying. But do you realize you just get hungry so quickly afterwards when you eat McDonald's? And you just get so thirsty because that's when you drink more Coca-Cola or milk tea in my case.

And it just keeps going. So, then now I kind of want McDonald's for lunch. But anyway, that's what he's saying. You're so busy snacking on these things that in that one moment it's satisfying.

But you know in two minutes time it's not good. You'll never be satisfied by this. Come to the banquet. There is surf and turf. There are nine rounds of all this kind of food.

And you will be truly satisfied. And it is never ending. Don't ruin it. You're fighting so hard. You're fighting so hard. Don't let the other stuff creep in through the back door.

That's what he's saying. Don't compromise. Don't settle. He offers freedom from slavery. Do you recognize that? Do you believe that? Do you believe that this God that we worship, that we serve, that we've come to see and meet can give you that?

[39 : 51] I hope so. I hope I do. And it's a reminder every day that I need to do that. I'm going to invite the worship team up now.

And if you're new to church, this is something that we do. I don't want you to listen. I don't want you to listen and be filled with this. Oh, that's kind of good or kind of boring and I'm a little bit sleepy or a little bit hungry. I want you to respond.

I invite you to go, actually, God, I heard your message. Was that for me? Which part of it was for me? What do I have to surrender?

What did I let through the back door? What thought, what mind am I holding when I'm doing certain things, when I'm chasing certain things?

What of the city have I let into my church? What of the world have I let into my own life? I think it's a valid message for us as followers of Christ. Let's not let that Trojan horse in.

[40 : 54] And let's respond and let us humble ourselves before him. I'll tell you one last thing, though. If you're holding something that you know that you've compromised on and you're like, man, this one hurts.

This is warm in here. If you're that, I only want to tell you one thing. But Jesus is a God and King of truth.

He hates slavery. But he's also filled with grace and mercy. In the book of Hebrews, it says, let us approach his throne with confidence. With confidence.

This throne, this Jesus that we see that introduces himself here, who's far and above. This throne he's on, we can approach knowing that grace and mercy awaits us. You know what that means? Grace and mercy are Christian-y kind of words. Grace and mercy simply means you can come as you are. You can come as you are. You don't deserve it and that's completely okay.

[41:55] That is the point. So would you come? And would you ask him to take what you've held on to? That snack that you've held on to for so long.

And give it to him. And let him give you some hidden manna. And the white stone that will give you the access and intimacy that you truly need. Can I pray for you? Lord, as we respond.

Holy Spirit, I know that you can speak far, far, far better than anything that I can say. So we give this space for you now just to speak to each of us.

We know that you walk among us. We don't take that for granted. We don't treat that lightly in any way. And that profound tension of being filled with fear of you.

Reverent awe of you. And also just knowing that you scoop down to our level. And you approach us with grace and mercy.

[43:08] This may be something that we'll never truly understand. But we lean into it this morning.