

The Church in Pergamum
Sermon February 2, 2019

Pergamum was one of the cultural and religious centers of the world. At that time, it had been a capital city for 400 years. It sat on top of a mountain that rose up out of the beautiful valley, close to the Mediterranean Sea.

Pergamum had the second biggest library after the library in Alexandria, Egypt. Temple after temple had been built to all types of pagan gods. It was the first city in Asia to openly worship the state and its leaders.

On a certain day in the year, every Roman citizen had to come to the Temple of Caesar and had to burn a pinch of incense there, and say: "Caesar is God." When he had done that, he was given a certificate to guarantee that he had done so. After a man had burned his pinch of incense and had acknowledged Caesar as Lord, he could go away and worship any god he liked. This, of course, was a great problem for the Christians, who believed that only Jesus is God. This led Christians to great psychological pressure to compromise. The Christians were martyred when they refused to bow and worship Caesar. This is why Jesus said that they lived where the Satan's throne was placed.

The Christians in Pergamum took great confidence in the fact that Christ knew where they lived. The message to us today is that Jesus knows about our situations and our personal challenges, and He is always here to guide us.

He knows that despite many challenges in the church, in families, and at work, you are here to worship Christ because you love God, and God loves you. Jesus knows that they did not deny His name and their faith.

Were you in a situation where your Christian faith was challenged and you were hesitating what to say or what to do?

Were you in a situation where you were hiding that you love Jesus Christ, knowing that in that case you would not be harmed???

In Revelation 2:13, we see that the church at Pergamum is commended for three things.

1. The church was loyal to Christ's name despite their circumstances.

This means to us today that no matter how hectic, how desperate, or how tragic things seem to happen to us sometimes, we always have to remain faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ no matter what.

Have you ever wanted to give up on God?

2. Although the Christians from Pergamum were constantly under a huge pressure to be persecuted, they had not renounced their faith in Christ.

So the Word of God was still strong in their heart and in their church. Their strength was the WORD OF GOD.

We need to keep in mind that the Word of God should always remain our strongest defense. We repeat our golden verses so those could come into our mind in time of need. If you memorize them, you will remember them later or the Holy Spirit will remind you and those verses will give you strength.

3. The church stood fast in persecution.

We know that Antipas had been martyred. He may have been martyred for his refusal to say “Lord Caesar” instead of “Lord Christ,” as the citizens of Roman lands were required to do. Tradition says that he was placed inside a brass bull and slowly roasted to death. But this did not break the faith in Christians. They still remained faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is sort of rebuking us today.

This church at Pergamum suffered all this and still stayed true to Christ. Today, people stub their toe and get mad at the minister, some members get mad at God and stop coming to church. No matter how much they got from this congregation in the past, it is so easy for them to turn their back and leave. How strong is our faith, our love and our commitment, really?

But Christ has a complaint against this Church.

Jesus said that, in the Christian Church of Pergamum, there were some people who were destroying the church by spreading false news or false teachings. The leadership of the church tolerated them and did not raise their words against their behaviour. They were tolerating those who had false teachings about God. For this, they were called **corrupt**. The church’s tolerance of the false teaching resulted in the extreme danger. A church that is corrupted by false teaching is committing a very serious crime against Christ.

How many times can hear some church-going people say: “I have a hard time to believe this from the Bible – about resurrection and the life ...”? God does not give us an opportunity to compromise. Please take it as it is written

Christ is calling us to “repent” and to **put His word first, and not what our minds could believe, and to follow Christ’s commandments in every situation.**

Christ describes Himself as the One who has the **double-edged sword** in His mouth. This means two things:

The sword of His mouth means His Word.

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Hebrews 4:12-16

The Word of God is sharp. It will cut through the most worldly and hardened heart.

The Word of God is double-edged. The Word of God it proclaims the law of God and the necessity of living a righteous life. On the other hand, it proclaims the love and grace of God to those who follow Christ. There is an edge to make a wound, and an edge to open an infected wound in order to heal the body. His Word is able, also, to guide us and to strengthen us.

Do you find strength in God’s Word?

Could you please give me an example when you got guidance or encouragement from reading the Bible?

Our problem today is that we always want to be nice and kind and gentle with everybody. We don’t stand up for the truth, because we don’t want conflicts for ourselves.

If we won’t follow His commandments faithfully, Christ will come quickly and will make war against those who cannot be disciplined by the leaders. Note that He is not going to punish the faithful believers. He is going to punish only those who refuse to repent of their actions. This is how God will protect His church, because this is His church.

There are two awesome promises for faithful followers

1. The overcomer is given the right to eat the manna or bread of heaven.

The point is pretty clear. Jesus said that those who conquer will eat with Him in heaven. He said about Himself that He is the bread of Life, and He will Himself provide for those who will be in heaven with Him.

2. Then, the overcomer is given a white stone with a new name written on it.

At that time, when a person won in a game, the person received a white stone, which allowed the person to participate in a banquet prepared just for the winners. The white stone for us is the means of being admitted into heaven, into God's presence. The overcomer is allowed into God's presence because of the white stone. Note that there is a new name written on the stone. This is the name of Jesus Christ. The believer is given a white stone as his/her ticket into heaven.

As the letter is closed, we have to note that the church member who has an ear must hear this message. Amen

Questions for discussion and reflection:

1. What are some idols that are worshipped in our contemporary culture?
2. As you read the account of the church in Pergamum, what do you sense the Holy Spirit might be saying to your church?