

Alan Zana: Pergamum (3/8/19)

Scripture Reading: Revelation 2:13

Introduction:

When you read Revelation 1:1 you realise that this message was apocalyptic. It is an apocalyptic message to the churches, and it is an apocalyptic message to us.

Revelation 1:3 says that this message is prophetic. It concerns both what is happening now and what is to come. In Revelation 19:10 it says that the Spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. If a prophecy that comes to us is not compatible with Jesus' testimony it is not prophecy of a biblical nature.

Hollywood has distorted our understanding of what is an apocalyptic message, but what John has shared in this apocalyptic, prophetic letter is a gospel message. So let's explore that gospel message as it appears to the church in Pergamum.

Context:

Of the twelve apostles, John was that last one standing. Upon writing this letter, he was an old man and had been exiled to the little island of Patmos - just off the coast in Asia Minor. Jesus came to him and delivered a message to him that he was to communicate by writing to the seven churches in Asia Minor.

The first message went to the mother church in Ephesus, encouraging them to reignite their first love. The second message went to the suffering church in Smyrna, encouraging them to hold on through persecution.

The book of Revelation is one continuous letter. In order to truly understand the message to the churches we need to understand its context. In chapter one, John describes to us the beautiful message of the gospel by telling us that Jesus - the mighty, overcoming Jesus - stands in the midst of these churches.

To the church at Pergamum the introduction of Jesus having a double-edged sword is directly from John's vision of Revelation 1:16.

Correspondence:

In the correspondence that follows chapter one we see a message of salvation for each individual church. In each message He gives a commendation and/or a condemnation, a command and then asks for a commitment.

Revelation 1:5B,6 - The first introduction that is given in the book, before any of these messages, is an announcement of the gospel.

City:

Revelation 2:12 - "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword.'"

Why does Jesus begin His message to the church in Pergamum with a judgment?

Pergamum was settled by one of Alexander the greats generals. It was a trading city, but was also especially known for it being a centre of arts. They had some grand theatres carved into natural amphitheatres. Pergamum, as well as its spectacles in the arts, had an extensive library for which it was renowned. They also had temple's dedicated to pagan gods such as Zeus, Dionysus, Demeter, Athens and Asclepius. It was a place of partying, revelry and the

'anything goes' philosophy. Their parties were so hardcore that if someone did not die during the celebration it was considered a failure.

Commendation:

Revelation 2:13 - "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

Amidst this melting pot of Pagan worship and indulgence, Christianity had its faithful few. Antipas was one of these faithful ones. Because of his fidelity, he was tortured upon a brazen torture bull - an ancient torture device.

There were some who were faithful, even to death, in spite of the widespread degradation.

Condemnation:

Revelation 2:14 - "But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality."

Yet, among the church in Pergamum, there were clearly those who were compromisers. These who were Christians by name only, were like the prophet Baalam who had not been willing to do the hard work that was required for faithfulness.

Jude 1:11 - It seems that in Baalam's mentality there was a desire to gain profit. Jude says people had been "rushed for profit into Baalam's error."

Numbers 25:1-3 - This is the kind of creeping compromise that John is referring to. And it is this that God hates.

2 Peter 2:15 - Compromise, according to Peter, was participated in because of the love of its wages.

Revelation 2:15 - "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."

The root word that is behind both the Nicolaitans and those who followed after the ways of Baalam indicate that these two groups are of the same nature - they are 'conquerers of people.' They lead people to compromise by conquering their principles.

Romans 1:32 - God's people have often been guilty, not only of the doing of this kind of compromise, but of approving it in others.

Galatians 5:9 - Faithfulness in the little things really matters.

Jude 1:4 - This kind of compromise comes from within the church.

1 John 4:5 - Yet, though they may be a part of the church by name, John says that in their hearts they are of the world.

Isaiah 8:20 - The ultimate test of fidelity is to compare ourselves and the messages of those who come to us with the law and the testimony.

Command:

Revelation 2:16 - "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."

1 Peter 4:17 - There is a responsibility associated with being a follower of Jesus. Judgment begins in God's household.

We must repent and be faithful to Him who has proved Himself faithful to us, getting our house in order so that we may comfort others.

Revelation 19:15 - Again, the judgment comes by way of the double-edged sword.

If we can respond now to the command that was given to the church in Pergamum, we too can be saved from this latter judgment.

Commitment:

Revelation 2:17 - "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

The first time God gave manna to the children of Israel it was in the wilderness when they had no food. John's message to the church in Pergamum is that those who are faithful - those who are 'victorious' - will also be fed by the provision of God (spiritually) when all around them is compromise.

The white stone was a Roman trophy that was awarded to those who won a contest. God promises to give those who are victorious a white stone to mark that victory. Upon that white stone will be a new name, a name whose significance is known only to the victor.

To this church, God calls for faithfulness in the midst of unfaithfulness. He calls for a steadfastness that will bring the light of the gospel to those who are around them.

This challenge is not just relevant to them, it is also relevant to us! We need to be preserve in faithfulness in order that we may render an accurate picture of the character of our awesome God. He has promised us that He will feed us with the hidden manna of His word and will present us with this special name as a token of the victory that has been gained through His grace.

Hold on to Him! He will hold onto you!!