

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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Look! Listen! – And Overcome!

"Holding Fast in Satan's Territory – The Church in the World"

Lord's Day Morning

October 14, 2007

Pastor Jeff Crippen

Sermon Text: Revelation 2:12-17

"There is no surer evidence of an unconverted state than to have the things of the world uppermost in our aim, love and estimation." Joseph Alleine

"If we loved the world the way God loves it, we would not love it the way we should not love it." Anon

"The Christian must live in the world, but he must not let the world live in him." Anon

"Jesus did not pray that his Father would take Christians out of the world, but that he would take the world out of Christians." John Blanchard

"I looked for the church and I found it in the world; I looked for the world and I found it in the church." Horatius Bonar

"We are of the world, and until Christ rescues us from it, the world reigns in us and we live unto it." John Calvin

"Nothing is more contrary to a heavenly hope than an earthly heart." William Gurnall

"Worldliness is rampant in the church. The devil is not fighting churches, he is joining them! He isn't persecuting Christianity, he is professing it." Vance Havner

"God lays down one program of life for his children; the world proposes another and totally incompatible program for its servants. So love for the one excludes love for the other." Robert Law

"The legitimate courtesies of life become positively sinful when they take priority over the interests of the Lord Jesus." William MacDonald

"Depend upon it, as long as the church is living so much like the world, we cannot expect our children to be brought into the fold." D.L. Moody

"Today, we do not see people sacrificing their children to Baal – literally – but we do commonly see the grievous scene of professing Christians sacrificing their children's souls on the altars of the world. What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world, yet lose the souls of his children?"

Introduction – Review

In preparation for our understanding of the text before us this morning, we have already read aloud Numbers chapters 22-25, the account of Balak and Balaam – the latter character being mentioned here in the letter to Pergamum. [If you are reading this sermon or listening to it at sermonaudio.com then you need to stop and take the time to read those chapters right now for yourself before proceeding].

This morning, as we continue with our study of this third epistle of Christ to the churches in the Roman province of Asia, we come to a topic so vast in its scope and so wide in its implications FOR US, that I hardly know how to begin. It is this –

The Christian in the world – The Christian AND the world

The church *in the world*. In the world, as you have heard it said so often, *but never of the world*. The church is in the world as a ship is in the sea – but the sea must never enter the ship or all will be lost.

Is there ANY more pertinent and relevant message for Christ's church today than this? I can hardly think of one.

Well, let's begin – we must begin somewhere – with a review of the cultural situation of the Christian church in Pergamum in the first century. Here is Dennis Johnson's description of the setting that we heard last time -

"Pergamum had once been the capital of the Roman province of Asia, but Caesar Augustus had made Ephesus the center of the financial and administrative functions for the province. The city had a temple dedicated 'to the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma' (built in 29 BC). Another temple and related medical college dedicated to Asklepios the Savior (patron god of healing, symbolized by a serpent) – i.e., the modern symbol of the American Medical Association – and an

enormous altar to Zeus the Savior on the city's highest point. Any of these idolatrous monuments – certainly the three in combination – would justify Jesus' pronouncement that this church dwells 'where Satan's throne is...where Satan dwells.'" [Triumph of the Lamb, Dennis Johnson]

Remember then? *Where Satan's throne is. Where Satan dwells.* That was Pergamum. That is where these Christians lived. Antipas had already been martyred but these faithful believers had not denied Christ and the Lord Jesus commends them for it. We are not dealing with lukewarm, half-hearted Christians here. These people had gone full-out for Christ and were paying a price.

"When it came to external attacks, assaults from outside the church – from pagans, from Caesar, from the Jewish synagogue of Satan – the church had done well. But as to attacks from within the ranks of the church, well, that was another matter."

Christ calls these attacks from within the church –

THE TEACHING OF BALAAM.

Listen to the verses once more –

NKJ 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. 15 "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

We will meet the very same problem in the letter to Thyatira, though Balaam is not specifically mentioned there –

NKJ Revelation 2:20 "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

The doctrine of Balaam is also identified by Peter –

NKJ 2 Peter 2:15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; 16 but

he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

And by Jude –

NKJ Jude 1:10 But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. 11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. 12 These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots;

Do you see the importance of the doctrine before us then? *If the early churches so commonly faced this type of internal attack from the enemy, surely Christ is warning us that the same devilish scheme should be expected by us today – and repented of*

NKJ 2 Corinthians 2:11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

NKJ 2 Corinthians 11:13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

Remember carefully – mark it down well. In these letters to the seven churches, Christ makes direct reference repeatedly to *Satan* as the one lying behind the attacks upon the church – both external and internal.

"If there is any lesson for us in the account of Balaam that is foremost, it is this – that if the devil cannot destroy the church by external opposition (i.e., persecution, a full frontal assault), he will be just as pleased to 'flank' the church, come in from behind her, infiltrate her with impostors, and lead her into sin by his deceptions. He WILL do the one or the other, or both. He IS doing this to and within the church today."

These letters then are Christ's warning to us against what the Bible calls *the way of Balaam* or *the doctrine of Balaam*. It behooves us to find out just what this way/doctrine is.

Let me summarize the events of Numbers 22-25, then specifically identify the doctrine of Balaam –

1. The events concerning Israel in the wilderness and Balaam occur against the backdrop of recent glorious victories by Israel against Sihon, King of the Amorites (21:21-32), and Og, King of Bashan (21:33-35). These victories are recounted elsewhere in the Scriptures as being particularly wonderful. For example (and there are many others) -

NKJ Psalm 135:10 He defeated many nations and slew mighty kings -- 11 Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan -- 12 and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to Israel His people.

NKJ Psalm 136:17 To Him who struck down great kings, for His mercy *endures* forever; 18 and slew famous kings, for His mercy *endures* forever -- 19 Sihon king of the Amorites, for His mercy *endures* forever; 20 And Og king of Bashan, for His mercy *endures* forever -- 21 and gave their land as a heritage, for His mercy *endures* forever;

Guard your hearts, people. Guard your hearts!! We are in a state of peace and unity right now – battles

having been fought and the Lord preserving this church through them. Watch out! The enemy will try to make us prideful against one another. Envious. Jealous. Careless – compromising, worldly. Leaders must take special care that we guard ourselves in these areas because the devil particularly likes to focus on the pastors and elders of the church. Pride, envy, selfish-ambition, a party spirit – *look out!* Anytime Christ's church is advancing the enemy will renew his efforts.

There is the setting for Balaam to come on the scene. Right after some great and notable victories.

2. Balak was a Moabite king who saw how Israel had wiped out the Amorites, and he was afraid.

3. Knowing that a frontal assault would not be successful, Balak launches another scheme involving one *Balaam, the son of Beor*.

4. Balak asks Balaam to place a curse upon Israel. Balaam was some kind of prophet of whom Balak said –

"For I know that he whom you bless is blessed and he whom you curse is cursed."

5. Balak sent fees for divination, hiring Balaam with wages. But after

being commanded by God, Balaam refuses Balak's request and his money.

6. Upon a second request, Balaam is told by the Lord to go with Balak's representatives, but he is only permitted to speak what God would have him speak. This was against the will of the Lord. Balaam's heart is not right at this point. God had originally said "no," but Balaam went back to the Lord with a second request. WHEN THE LORD SAYS "NO," IN HIS WORD, DO NOT KEEP ASKING HIM FOR PERMISSION! HE JUST MIGHT SAY, "GO AHEAD, THEN." At such a point the Lord will not be for us, but against us.

"Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to Me." (22:32b)

7. The Lord is now opposing Balaam - thus the account of the angel and Balaam's donkey.

8. Balak takes Balaam to the high places of Baal where Israel could be seen. Balaam commands that seven altars be built, he offers sacrifices on them, and then the Lord makes him speak a *blessing* upon Israel. This is repeated a second time from another high place. Balaam then – apparently in disobedience to the Lord – issues his own blessing upon Israel.

NKJ Deuteronomy 23:3 " An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his *descendants* shall enter the assembly of the LORD forever, 4 "because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. 5 "Nevertheless the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you.

9. In the course of giving a fourth blessing, Balaam – and how amazing this is – gives a Messianic prophecy!

NKJ Numbers 24:17 "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult. 18 "And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession, while Israel does valiantly. 19 Out of Jacob One shall have dominion, and destroy the remains of the city."

9. Balaam then pronounces judgment upon several other pagan nations, then returns to his home.

10. At chapter 25, we read that Israel then "joined themselves to Baal of Peor" –

"While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor."

The Lord commanded Moses to execute all of the leaders of the people.

There is no statement here that Balaam was behind this, but later in Num 31:7-16 we read –

NKJ Numbers 31:7 And they warred against the Midianites, just as the LORD commanded Moses, and they killed all the males. 8 They killed the kings of Midian with *the rest of those who were killed -- Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.* 9 And the children of Israel took the women of Midian captive, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and all their goods. 10 They

also burned with fire all the cities where they dwelt, and all their forts. 11 And they took all the spoil and all the booty -- of man and beast. 12 Then they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from Jericho.* 13 And Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation, went to meet them outside the camp. 14 But Moses was angry with the officers of the army, *with the captains over thousands and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle.* 15 And Moses said to them: "Have you kept all the women alive? 16 "Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

And so, it becomes quite clear. Balaam's motivation was the wages of unrighteousness. This is why he did not make a complete break with Balak. In his heart, *he wanted the money and rewards that Balak was offering him and he maneuvered and plotted until he thought he found a way to be God's prophet AND get Balak's money.* Peter nails it for us -

NKJ 2 Peter 2:15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

The clearest picture of what made Balaam "tick" is to imagine him up there on the idolatrous high-places of Moab *building altars and sacrificing to Yahweh!!* Like Israel would do shortly then, Balaam joined himself to Baal. Balaam, a prophet of God, *was of the world*.

Now, how did Balaam "counsel" Israel? -

NKJ Numbers 31:16 "Look, these *women* caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

We are not told. Was it directly? Did he actually tell them that it was fine with the Lord if they "played the harlot with the daughters of Moab" and participated in the idolatrous feasts of Moab? Or did they do so simply by watching Balaam's example in his dealings with Balak? Whichever it was, the Lord says that Balaam

counseled the people of God to commit these sins.

Let's see then if we can now state what the Lord Jesus calls *the doctrine of Balaam* -

"The way/doctrine of Balaam is the teaching that endorses a Christian's participation in the practices, philosophies, and religions of the world. It maintains that doing so is perfectly fine with the Lord - that the Christian can be at peace with Balak AND with the Lord."

See it summarized once more in the letter to Pergamum -

NKJ 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.

Remember the culture and setting there in Pergamos? It was infested with Satanic idolatry. Temples. Pagan sacrifices all wrapped up with cult prostitution. This kind of thing was characteristic of the Graeco-Roman world. You see the same struggles in the letters to the church at Corinth -

NKJ 1 Corinthians 8:10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?

NKJ 1 Corinthians 10:21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

Understand? The doctrine of Balaam is the teaching that it is immaterial to the Lord if His people compromise with the world and participate in the practices, religions, and philosophies of the world.

But it is a wicked lie. It is a scheme of the devil. It is the means by which Balaam succeeded in getting Israel struck down. And it is a doctrine that will surely bring judgment to the church from the One who walks among the lampstands. The Christian who compromises with the world is, Paul says, *provoking the Lord to jealousy*.

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

Listen to Dennis Johnson –

"Not all of the promises and threats of Jesus' coming in The Revelation refer to His second coming. Here Jesus is not saying that His bodily return to earth will come soon if the Nicolaitans fail to repent but will be postponed if they turn around. Rather, since He already walks among the lampstands, he will 'come quickly' by intervening in the church's life through His providential control of events and the work of His Spirit to call the Nicolaitans to account. When the Corinthian church abused the Lord's supper, the result was illness and death in the congregation. Those providential instruments of discipline were motivated by Christ's love and directed to their good, 'so that we may not be condemned with the world' (1 Cor 11:30-32). Some similar visitation of purifying judgment would sweep through the church at Pergamum, unless church discipline and repentance ensued." [Triumph of the Lamb]

Flee From Idolatry

What is God's truth in respect to the Christian and the world? The Bible plainly answers the question –

NKJ 1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If

anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that *is* in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world.

NKJ 1 John 4:4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

NKJ John 15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

NKJ Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 5:11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a

reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner -- not even to eat with such a person.

NKJ 2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 and what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among *them*. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

NKJ James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

NKJ Psalm 106:34 They did not destroy the peoples, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them, 35 but they mingled with the

Gentiles and learned their works; 36 They served their idols, which became a snare to them. 37 They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, 38 and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. 39 Thus they were defiled by their own works, and played the harlot by their own deeds. 40 Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, so that He abhorred His own inheritance.

Conclusion/Application

We have still not completely finished with this letter to Pergamos – we must not neglect the great promises given by Christ to all who overcome (vs 17). For now, we leave off with a challenge to each one of us to *carefully think about this whole matter of the Christian in the world – living where Satan's throne is.*

In fact, I would like to leave us all with an important assignment for this week. Sit down with your families or with yourself and identify various ways that Christians today can compromise or are compromising with the world and thereby go the way of Balaam.

- How do people today "worship Christ" from the high places of Baal?
- How might we be tempted to "love the wages of unrighteousness" as Balaam did?
- In what ways can a Christian find himself committing spiritual adultery with the world?
- Just what is *worldliness*?
- What might a church look like that has gone the way of Balaam?
- While worldliness is fundamentally a mindset, can you think of some outward, visible signs that a Christian has one foot in the church and one foot in the world?

And then I would like you to email your ideas to me this week (swordtrowel@gmail.com). I will compile them and include them in the sermon manuscript next week for all of our benefit.

This is *the doctrine of Balaam* then. It is this matter of being the friend of the world, of loving the world, of wanting what the world offers and yet wanting what Christ offers at the same time. Of maintaining that our liberty in Christ means that God doesn't really care that much about holiness of life.

Where might it be knocking at your door or at mine? These are things we

dare not neglect to ask ourselves. This is how we overcome, even while we live where Satan's throne is.