

The Overcomers of Pergamos

How It All Ends

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Bible Text: Revelation 2:17; 1 John 5:4

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You saw what we just read in chapter 1. Chapter 1 refers to what chapter in the Old Testament? Daniel 7:9. So, here are the statements from Revelation 1 and here is how Jesus introduces himself to these different churches.

Let's take our church, for instance, the church we're talking about today, Pergamos. Look at chapter 2:12, "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges." The sharp sword with two edges. We see, here, that in verse 16, Jesus introduces himself in chapter 1:16, he says, "I saw going out of his mouth a sharp twoedged sword." So, I need us to understand that Jesus, who is addressing these seven churches through John, is introducing himself, referring back to chapter 1 in ways in which he was described. Six of the seven churches, Jesus introduces himself to them in a way that refers back to the first chapter.

Now, having said that, we're going to keep re-emphasizing that. Having said that, I wonder if you will look, please, in verse 12 of chapter 2, "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges." So, the question is, really: why did Jesus introduce himself to the church of Pergamos in this way. First, we need to understand what does the sharp twoedged sword represent?

Here's what Warren Wiersbe says, he says that the sword was the symbol of the Roman Proconsul and so Jesus introduces himself in Revelation 1 as "the one who has the sharp twoedged sword proceeding out of his mouth. In other words, if you're John living in that day, what does that communicate? You already know that the symbol of the Roman Senate is a sword. What would you think if you turned around and saw the Son of Man that you know in Daniel 7 is promised, a Kingdom that does not end, and out of his mouth is coming a sharp twoedged sword, what would you be thinking? Authority. What else? Justice, judgment. How would you compare Jesus and with whom would you compare him or contrast? Right, the Roman Proconsul.

And who comes out on top in that little comparison and contrast? Jesus. Jesus says, "If you want to fear someone, fear me." And you say, "Well, wait a minute, he tells John not to fear him." Yes, but we looked last week at how we have two possibilities. When you are afraid of something, you just need to find something you fear more. So, don't be

afraid of the Roman government, fear the one with the sharp twoedged sword coming out of his mouth. Let me demonstrate this: I went to Airborne School as a reservist. I tried to go as active duty but my MOS (Military Occupation Specialty, I think that's what it stands for) does not go to Airborne School when I was an enlisted soldier and so, even though I was stationed at Fort Bragg, we did not drop semi-trailer sized generators out of airplanes and so I didn't get to jump. So, I'm a reservist; I'm here on staff at this church. The year is 2010 and I'm now getting my opportunity to go to Airborne School because I'm a reservist in an airborne unit. Now, imagine, I ask for 8 ½ years to go to Airborne School and, "Nope, can't go. You're not in the right job." Other than that, it was difficult.

Now, jump day, the first jump. Who here has been to Airborne School, let me see your hands? So, you see we're surrounded by people who have done the really ridiculous thing of jumping out of an aircraft. Now, here's the deal: I did not even fall right during landing week or ground week. You ride down this static line on this wheeled thing... anyone remember this? I couldn't land right the whole week and so I'm thinking, "How is this gonna go from say, 1,200 feet?" I couldn't land all week. I was hurting my neck, I was hitting my elbow, everything was going horribly. I was thinking, "This is not good. This is not good at all." And I thought, "This is going to hurt."

And so I was a little nervous. If it were not for being able to watch World Cup Soccer every day, I wouldn't have had anything to think about other than, "This is going to hurt." So, jump day: we get there and I remember it since I was an Alpha, everyone who has been to Airborne School understands what that means, it means you're at the back of the line. So, in a line of 15 jumpers, I'm number 16. So, they've got to throw me out the door, probably when the light is turning red. And so, my biggest concern was because I always mess simple things up, my biggest concern was how I'm going to hand off this static line without dropping it and shaving my arm from the shoulder to the wrist because they always tell you that that's how it rolls, or you're going to hurt someone behind you. So, I'm thinking, "Don't mess this up. Don't mess this up."

Well, it's July, it's Fort Benning. They cram us into the front of a plane and I'm talking about cramming. This is nothing special, you know this is ridiculously easy, you've got it, but I was not having a good time. It was hot; it's July; it's Georgia; I'm dying of heat. And we push to the front and, remember now, I haven't drank water most of the morning because once you are inspected, you touch anything, you're done, you're out of school. I'm thinking, "There's no way I'm gonna be able to sit still for five hours and not have to use the bathroom, so I'm not drinking anything." So, I'm dehydrated, I'm in the front of a hot plane in Georgia, in July, and I'm crammed in there and we have two passes before me because they've got to take one pass and let the VIP jumpers out first. They have to have their little fun time.

So, we circle around. The second pass: they're out the door and I'm getting really frightened at this point because there are static lines hanging out the door. I know none of you other guys were scared about this whole thing but I was a little nervous. I was quoting some Scripture, thinking to myself, "Come on, idiot. You're a pastor. You can't

worry.” So, I was sitting there quoting the Scripture, “I will keep them in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on me. I’m gonna die. No! Jesus! Jesus, I’m gonna die. Jesus!”

And so, there I am at the front of the plane and we stand up and I’m thinking, “There is no way out of this. If I don’t go out the door, everyone’s gonna talk about me for years and years and years. I’m gonna be the chaplain that didn’t jump and I got Court Martialed.” So, I’m thinking, “That can’t happen. Jesus!” And so, I’m standing up and by the third pass, that C130 pilot gave me something to fear more than jumping from the plane. The bobbing and the weaving, the knowledge that several of my co-jumpers were allowing the previous day’s dinner to come in this area right here and knowing that there was no way out except through an Article 15 at the very most, the bobbing and the weaving and the nausea and the panic that I was having, there was one thing that I feared more than jumping out of a plane: staying in it. You couldn’t get me out fast enough.

So, Jesus says, “Don’t fear the Romans.” “Oh God, how am I not to fear the Romans? I’m marooned on an island. How am I not going to fear the Romans?” “Because I’m going to give you something greater to fear. The one with the sharp twoedged sword coming out of his mouth.” The Bible says in 1 Peter 1, “pass the time of your sojourning here in fear,” like your Father, be holy for I am holy. How in the world can you argue with the one who has the sharp twoedged sword coming out of his mouth. You just say, “Yes, sir.” So, you’re going to find out in the church next week, with Thyatira, he explains himself in another way.

Now, we want to know the promises to the overcomer because listen to last week’s lesson if you want to hear everything between verses 12 and 17. So, the promises to the overcomer. Now, to the church at Ephesus, he says, “I’m going to give you a tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” To the church of Smyrna, you see in verse 11, “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” And now to the church of Pergamos and verse 17, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

So, my question is: what is the hidden manna? Let us do our very best not to guess. Let’s do our very best to let Scripture inform our answer. So, hold your place here and look at Hebrews 9, please. We did read this last week so this will look familiar to those who were here or those who listened to the lesson. We didn’t really get to the reason why we read it. Hebrews 9:1, “Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly,” or an earthly, “sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary.” Now, look here, “And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold.” Look what was in it, “wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant.” So, as someone would look for what was in the ark of the covenant, they would see something hidden: the two tablets with the commandments, Aaron’s rod that budded and a golden pot with manna.

So, back to Revelation chapter 2. I suppose the question that follows is: is this a literal promise that you get to, somehow, and every overcomer gets to share in this little golden jar in the ark of the covenant when we get to heaven? My answer is: no. Remember chapter 1:1 tells us what this is a book full of: he sent and did, what by his servant John? Please look. Revelation 1:1. What type of book are we dealing with here? With what type of book are we dealing? He tells us at the end of chapter 1:1: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ," end of chapter 1:1. How did he send it? "By his angel to his servant John." Signified it. What is the noun form of that? Assigned. This is a book of signs; this is not a book of literalness in its core.

So, the real problem with a lot of people who try and understand the book of Revelation is, that they are looking for literal, all the time literal fulfillment. Now, I'm going to show you in a couple of places where that won't quite work, but often people say, "We are literal Bible believers. We believe the Bible literally." And I do, too, but I want to ask you: are you sure that you believe that? In every situation? Because when we get to chapter 4, we have often had people say when John is caught up to heaven, he's a picture of the church. Really? Well, pray tell, how is that you're a literal Bible believer if John symbolizes the church? And then it really gets weird because when the 24 elders are casting their crowns at the feet of the one sitting on the throne, they say, "That's the church." Really? I thought John being caught up to heaven was the church and now you're saying that the 24 elders are the church. I thought you were a Bible believer who believes in the Bible literally. And the answer is really that many people are literal Bible believers until it becomes inconvenient for their doctrine. And at the end of chapter 1:1, it says, "this whole book pretty much is a sign." Symbols. Okay?

So, let's talk about that hidden manna. What is it? Well, if the hidden manna was in the ark of the covenant and the ark of the covenant was in the earthly tabernacle and the earthly tabernacle was a picture of what is in heaven, then we have to ask ourselves a question: what does it mean when he promises hidden manna to the overcomer? It's in heaven. The real ark of the covenant, Hebrews 9, the Bible says that everything that was in Moses' tabernacle was made after a pattern that he saw in heaven.

Well, let's compare it with the next one: what is the white stone? Now, I know you've heard it, I've heard it, there are like five different guesses here. But we are not necessarily interested in just saying, "Here's the five possibilities." We not only want to take the five possibilities, but we want to narrow them down to a probable answer because, remember, whether or not you or I are correct, we need to remember that God didn't mean five different things. Everyone with me? So, let's be honest enough to at least say that we might both be wrong but we can't be different and both be right. Post-modernism might say that we can be different and both be right, but that doesn't square with the idea of absolute truth. You can't say it's something and I say it's something else and both of us be right. It's possible that we're both wrong but we are not both right. So, let's get that figured out right away.

Do you have something to say? (...) When? You'd have to take into consideration a lot of specifics: when the book was written. What else? Who it was written to? What was the purpose? (And how the reader could relate.) How about where did they live?

So, it's probable that the answer, we're going to take these five possibilities and we're going to narrow them down to a probability. I'm going to take two of the most well-known possibilities of what "white stone" means. I've heard that it means a token of acquittal that you get in a court of law in the Roman government. I have a vote back there for that and many of us have heard it. It's in our favorite Study Bibles, it's in our favorite commentaries and, you know what? I respect a lot of those men.

However, there is another answer and the other answer comes to us from a guy by the name of Constable. He says that this white stone is tesseron in the Greek and it is an invitation to the inside of a temple in that day whereupon was written the secret name of the god in whose honor that temple was built. Let me say that again: in this day, a white stone was given to someone who was invited to worship at a temple and on that white stone was the secret name of the god in whose honor that temple was built. So, why would John take something that they understood in their day and flip the meaning on them for the reader? (...) I would say, yes, but my question is: why would he say, "Okay, they see it as an invite to a temple, but what it really is, is a stone of acquittal?" It wouldn't make any sense to the reader.

And, by the way, the Bible cannot mean what it never meant. It cannot mean what it never meant. You mark it down: if you're the first one to come up with something, you're a heretic. It cannot mean what it never meant. It can't mean to us in 2012, in Fayetteville, North Carolina, what it did not mean to the believer in Pergamos in AD 90. It simply cannot.

And so, since the believer at Pergamos would have seen, "I'm going up here to the temple of Zeus, Satan's seat, and they give me a white stone and on this white stone, while I'm in the temple worshipping, there is a secret name of this Zeus-god or of the goddess," the other alternative there for Satan's seat, "or the god of healing. Well, then, it must mean that I'm being promised that that's nothing. If I'm an overcomer with Christ, I get invited to his Temple and a secret name written which no man can know."

So, what does that mean? I guess what I'm trying to say is that when you're promised hidden manna and you know that that is an illustration of what is in heaven, that there is a real ark of the covenant in heaven and when you know that a white stone is an invitation to that same location, then you mark it down, these not only go together, but they're an invitation to the Temple of God which is in heaven. And since this is a book full of symbols, John is saying, "If you're an overcomer," and remember last week we looked at chapter 12:10, "you're an overcomer of the dragon," in chapter 15:2, "you're an overcomer of the beast." Context, folks, we don't have a right to say, "It means to overcome tattoos and smoking and drinking and gossiping." I know, we don't gossip in the South, we share prayer requests. I remember.

So, but it is overcoming in the context, the dragon and the beast and the false prophet. So, when you do that, you don't have to, "Oh, well, I hope I get invited to a place to worship." Oh, no, no, no, you're being invited far higher than that. You are, as an overcomer, you have a place reserved in the Temple of God which is in heaven where the hidden manna is.

I want you, please, to see in the minutes that I have remaining, I want you to see that Christ promises reward to all seven of these churches and that you see these promises realized at the end of the book because John is writing a story here with many themes. Remember, the theme is the Revelation of Jesus Christ but there are many supporting themes like overcomers. What do they get? Well, first they are not hurt of the second death says the church of Smyrna. Ephesus, what did they have to look forward to? The tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God. You see, these are all promises of the afterlife for the believer and overcomer.

Alright, let's talk about this for a minute. You might want to write down in the reference of your Bible, in the margin next to Revelation 2:17 this Scripture: 1 John 5:4. How do you become an overcomer? Here it is, are you read? "He that is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Those who are born-again by faith in Christ are overcomers and they get to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. They do not get hurt by the second death. They get a white stone with a name written no man can know and get to eat of the hidden manna. Having said that, we've looked here. Ah, there's so much cool stuff to talk about.

Look at Revelation 19. I'm sure glad that I'm not looking for a grade because I'd get a re-train at this station. Look at chapter 19 and I want us to remind ourselves who this person is. Who are we going to go see in this Temple in heaven? Revelation 19. Now, I have to be very selective on which Scriptures to share with you, I simply don't have the time to share them all. There are a plethora, a bevy of Scriptures. A load. Revelation 19:11, "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he," what? "He had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself."

So, for those of you wondering, back in chapter 2, on this white stone: is it a name for us that we've never heard before or is it a name for our God that we've never heard before? Here it is: first of all, historical context should narrow that down to the name of our God which we've never heard. Not a God we've never heard before but a name for that God we've never heard before because here in chapter 19:12, it talks about Jesus having a name which no man knows except he, himself. So, there is a name that Jesus has, it's going to be on this white stone which might be figurative. It might be figurative for an invitation to the Temple.

Let's have a discussion about that anyway. Let's have a discussion about heaven. Want to? Let's do it. So, the question is: the overcomer is that a story of getting invited to heaven or is it a story about getting invited to the New Jerusalem? You say, "Well, I

thought they were the same thing.” Well, let’s dispel that. Let’s look at chapter 21 of Revelation. We have all these invitations to temples or temple-type things. There is this Temple that Moses saw on the mountain. He made things on earth that resembled that. We’re getting these invitations to a Temple. Who knows? Let’s figure it out.

Look at chapter 21:1, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.” That’s the Genesis 1:1 heaven and earth, they passed away. They passed away back in chapter 20:11. Look there, “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.” Chapter 21:1, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.” Alright, the New Jerusalem is not the same as heaven. Everyone get that? It’s a place coming down from God out of heaven.

Now, let’s look at a contrast here so that we kind of get an idea. Look at chapter 21:22. He’s describing the New Jerusalem. I don’t know how anyone could not read these two chapters. I know all of you are probably planning on going home and watch the Packer game and I don’t blame you, but after you get started on it, maybe at commercials, read these two chapters. No “Amen’s” whatsoever. How sad. Verse 22, “And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.” So, there’s no structure in the New Jerusalem that came down from God out of heaven, there is no structure called the Temple, God and the Lamb are the Temple.

Let’s look at chapter 7 and let’s see a fun fact about heaven. Let’s look, please, at verse 14, “And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest.” I know we’re dropping right in the middle of a conversation, so let’s pick it up right here. “And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

So, we have heaven from which the New Jerusalem comes, heaven has a Temple. Moses made the tabernacle on earth based on the one he saw in the mountain, Mount Sinai, a Temple it says in the book of Hebrews. So, there is a Temple in heaven it says here right in chapter 7:15, but the New Jerusalem that comes from God out of heaven, no Temple. No Temple.

The question we have to ask ourselves is: that church at Pergamos, are they getting a symbolic invitation to a symbolic Temple in the New Jerusalem? And who is the symbolic Temple in the New Jerusalem? God and the Lamb. Or, are they getting a symbolic invitation to a literal Temple in heaven? Remember, we have an example of a Temple, we have an allusion to a Temple, in the New Jerusalem: it’s God and the Lamb. The New Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven. We have a literal Temple in

heaven out of which comes the New Jerusalem that does not have a Temple except for God and the Lamb.

Let's try to figure out here which one does John mean to the church of Pergamos. Let us look. Look at chapter 22:1. I keep switching it on you. And then I'm done. I really have to be done. So, Brother Dick will come and pray over our prayer requests and then we'll be done. Look at 22:1, "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." Remember, we're still talking about the New Jerusalem. "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life." Where is the tree of life? Is it in heaven or is it in the New Jerusalem that comes down from God out of heaven? The New Jerusalem, that's what we're describing here. So, there is a tree of life in the New Jerusalem that comes down from God out of heaven but is not, itself, heaven. The New Jerusalem is not heaven, it comes from heaven. In the New Jerusalem that comes from heaven, there is a tree of life.

Now, look back at chapter 2. Let's figure out: is John telling the church of Pergamos that they are invited to the literal Temple in heaven or the figurative Temple in the New Jerusalem that comes from God out of heaven? The figurative Temple in the New Jerusalem is: God and the Lamb, remember? Chapter 2 and we're talking about the church at Ephesus and look at verse 7, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Where is the tree of life? It's in the New Jerusalem. What else is there, based on this verse? The tree of life, which is where? In the midst of what? Paradise. So, we have the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God which is in, where? The New Jerusalem.

So, it seems like that all seven of these churches are getting invitations to the New Jerusalem. So, to the overcomer at Pergamos he offers the hidden manna and the white stone which are figurative invitations to a figurative Temple in the New Jerusalem. What is the figurative Temple in the New Jerusalem? God and the Lamb. So, these seven churches are being promised fellowship with God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem and we found it, with hardly ever leaving Revelation.