

Beloved, today we speak of the Third of the Seven Churches of Revelation. The Book of Revelation was written to these churches and speaks of things that John had seen, things which are [presumable what he hadn't seen], and things that would be. Christ walks among the churches and holds their messengers in His hand. They are His messengers and the churches are His.

Pergamos is now known as Bergama in Turkey and is situated about fifty miles north of where Smyrna was located. It is a very popular archaeological site, contained extensive Roman and Greek ruins. There is a museum there with a great collection of artifacts that date from before the Greek and Roman era. Parchment supposedly was invented there; the Greeks called it pergamene. There was a huge library that Anthony gave to Cleopatra and transported it to Alexandria where it was destroyed by Muslims, and a huge intellectual treasure was lost to the world.

They grow cotton, tobacco, grapes and export Islamic/Marxist revolution. The population is about fifty thousand, with a tiny minority of those who are called Christians, presumable of the Eastern Orthodox church.

A Tour Guide to Turkey has this paragraph: ‘The religious life of Pergamum has been the subject of much research by scholars and historians. Three specific “threads” appear to be visible. First, the association with the worship of snakes and the handling of reptiles in antiquity appears valid. Other early signs of the worship of Dionysus, the god of vegetation also appears to be well accepted. Later, worship of Asklepios (Roman Aesculapius) the god of healing emerged. The serpent became the emblem of Asklepios. “A Pergamene coin shows the emperor Caracalla standing spear in hand before a great serpent twined around a bending sapling.... Christians must thus have found the cult of the god of healing, and his serpent – infested temple, peculiarly revolting” (Blaklock, Ibid.). The altar of Zeus built by Eumenes II to commemorate the victory of Attalus I over the Gallic invaders had striking pagan scenes on the frieze. The gods of Olympus were represented as giants with serpent – like tails. Zeus was called “savior”.’ Tour Guide to Turkey.

Just outside Bergama is Asklepiion. It is believed that Asklepiion, built in the name of Aesculapius, the god of Health and Medicine, has existed since the 4th century BC. It contains premises such as a small theater with a capacity of 3,500 people, rooms where the patients were cured by the sound of water and music, the temple of Asclepius and the library. Here, the dreams of the patients were analyzed by their doctors (priests) 2000 years before Sigmund Freud did. One of the important personalities associated with the Asklepiion was Galen from the 2nd c. AD

But let us read from the Holy Scriptures;

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;
13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 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 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. Revelation 2:12-17

Introduction. As I said last week, Revelation can be a difficult book for it is a book of prophecy and the figures are often obscure. But a blessing has been promised to those who read and hear. I briefly described the various schools of interpretation. If you are interested you can find the first two sermons on sermonaudio. That link is at the bottom of the bulletin. Type it into your browser window and the window will open to our church site with a list of recent sermons displayed.

Revelation is not written for curiosity, but for faith. It speaks of real things as seen from heaven. Things are going on all the time that we know nothing about, but this book tells us about them, and that they are all directed from Heaven.

We recognize in these churches good things, some of them bad things just as there are today. There are warnings and instructions and promises, for Christ is Lord of the churches.

The messages are to the “angels” or messengers, the pastors and overseers of the churches. The seven lamps would represent the perfection of the work of the Spirit in the world, Who has honored the church by naming her the pillar and ground of the truth.

But let us look at the message to the church at Pergamos, which we read a moment ago. I would note several things this morning: I. The Troubles and Sins of the Church at Pergamos II. The Virtues of the Church at Pergamos III. The Warnings and Promises to the Church at Pergamos

I. The Troubles and Sins of the Church at Pergamos

- A. The description of the Lord Jesus: He bears a sharp sword with two edges. It is the “sword of His mouth” both the Scripture and the Decree, for man lives not only by bread, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.
- B. Just because a church rejects the rule of Christ, does not mean that Christ ceases to be their Lord. Israel rejected God from being their king, but God did not resign the position, and continued to send His prophets and chastened them sorely before rejecting them, and then not forever, as far as a remnant was concerned.
- C. They dwelt where Satan’s seat was. Great institutions of Idolatry, witchcraft, and wickedness were found at Pergamos, as I mentioned in the introduction [see above]. One of the church’s members, a martyr names Antipas, is mentioned, evidently slain at one of these temples. What a great name is given to him, “My faithful martyr” and that name is preserved for all the ages of the church.
- D. They followed the doctrine of Balaam,
 1. Balaam was a false prophet, who was hired by the Moabites to curse the children of Israel.

2. When God would not allow him to curse, Balaam advised Moab to send idolatrous women into the camp of Israel, seduce the men into fornication and idolatry, and bring the wrath of God upon them.
 3. This was the sin at Baal-Peor and brought plague upon Israel and thousands died in the plague.
 4. Fornication and other sexual sin is always associated with idolatry and adultery and fornication are often used as synonyms for idolatry in Scripture; for they can hardly be separated.
- E. They followed the sins of the Nicolaitanes, which was also present at Ephesus, but there was more acceptance of the Nicolaitanes than there was at Ephesus. The ancients said these were people who wanted to combine emperor worship with the Gospel. This cult was very strong at Pergamos, and would be a temptation to give the glory of God to the emperor. This spirit, if not the name, is very much around today, and is manifest by those who look to the state as the source of every need. God is a jealous God and hates these workers of iniquity.

II. The Virtues of the Church at Pergamos

- A. God is not unrighteous to forget the good things that He finds in His people. He warned the Hebrews against being an unfruitful field, but adds: “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” Heb. 6:10
- B. They had not denied the Lord’s faith. They confessed the truth concerning Christ.
 1. It is true that there were works in Pergamos that were contrary to the faith.
 2. This is not uncommon, and is revealed in all of Paul’s letters to the churches, in which He shows those things that are contrary to faith and urges them to bring their behavior into line with their confession. Christians always confess better than they do. This ought not to be, but is the reality. The disconnect is because of ignorance, weakness, discontent, and the sinful nature.
 3. But confession is important, and Satan must gain the advantage over you by accusing you of inconsistency; Christ calls you to put off the old and put on the new. In the meantime you and I “hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering,” confessing both the perfections of Christ, and the imperfections of our present state.
 4. We believe in perfection, but the perfection is in Christ, not in any of us.
 5. It was good that Pergamos had not denied the Lord’s faith.
- C. They had held fast the Name of Christ. They were not ashamed to be called Christians.
 1. The name of Christ was an offense to the ancient world, just as it is to the modern world.
 2. Some use the name which are unworthy of the name—that is granted. There are churches called Christian who are unworthy of the name. The name is good, and adds to the condemnation of those that do not hold to His faith. “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?” Why indeed: because the name is good, and even pharisees recognize the goodness of the name. So Satan comes as an Angel of Light, because light is good. His ministers are ministers of righteousness, because righteousness is good.

3. Hypocrisy is the compliment that wickedness pays to virtue.
4. The very name of Christ, put them in opposition to the wickedness of idolatry of the pagan temples in Pergamos, and that was good. But it brings warnings and rebukes:

III. The Warnings and Promises to the Church at Pergamos

A. Warnings:

1. Repent, or I will come quickly [not the second coming] but providential coming. Christ would come in the events. Balaam was slain by the sword in the conquest of Canaan, by the providence of God. This is dire warning to the church against those who were seduced by the idolatry of Pergamos.
2. The judgment may very well come quickly [not right away necessarily, but quickly when it did come.]”

B. Promises to those that overcome by faith:

1. Hidden manna: the bread of life. We begin in this life to partake of the marriage supper of the lamb as we feed on the Lord Jesus as His sheep.
2. White stone:
 - a. the lot: innocent. Or a monument in front of the dwelling. Or representing the white garments of those called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Signifies justification and exoneration in the presence of the heathen.
 - b. Balaam: “I have not beheld iniquity in Israel, saith the Lord.” Numbers 23:21. God gave Israel a white stone; despite Balaam’s wickedness.
3. A new name:
 - a. The name Christian, the name of a son of God; the city of God; God Himself; Invitation to the Marriage Feast: the mark of ownership: the witness of the Spirit, which only is known by the recipient.
 - b. We have received the earnest of the Spirit, that mark of God in the forehead and the hand, the gift of justification by faith, the white stone. The stone carries the name.
 - c. We call Him our Father, because He calls us His sons. The most blessed of all names: not a son of Adam, but a son of God by faith in Christ. Amen and Amen.

Applications:

1. Hold fast the profession of His faith; not your faith, but HIS.
2. Labor to bring your action into conformity to the faith: put off the old, and put on the new.
3. Hold fast the name of Christian. Do not be ashamed of Christ; one of Satan’s most deadly attacks is right here, for he is the accuser of the brothers.
4. Overcome by faith, for this is the victory that overcomes the world: faith in the promises of God so that we do not turn aside from the way of truth and holiness.
5. Bring every thought into captivity to Jesus Christ As Jesus prayed for His disciples, let us pray for one another: Lu 21:36 “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

Amen and Amen: God bless you all.