**REPENT THEREFORE!**

 July 14, 2019

Revelation 2:12-29 Key verse 2:16, “Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”

Last week we studied Jesus’ personal letters toward the first two churches – Ephesus and Smyrna among the 7 churches in Asia minor. We learned that we should restore our first love to Jesus and be faithful to the point of death. Today we’re going to study about Jesus’ personal letters toward the next two churches; Pergamum and Thyatira. Pergamum is known as compromising church and Thyatira over-tolerant church. Through studying today’s passage, we want to think about what compromise is in a believer’s life and in a believing community and why Jesus is so serious about it. We want to think deep about Jesus’ warnings and promises and learn more about who he is. May God help us hear his voice with full attention and respond to his voice!

Among the 7 churches mentioned in Revelation 2 & 3, Pergamum is the furthest north, about 80 km north of Smyrna. Historically, Pergamum was a military city built on a citadel about 1300 feet high. In Pergamum there were several prominent pagan temples for pagan gods and goddesses. Most of all, Pergamum was the first city in Asia Minor to build a temple to a Roman Emperor, Augustus. So, Pergamum became the capital of Emperor worship in Asia Minor, where the Emperor Worship was so prevailing across the city.

Look at verse 12. Here Jesus introduces something special about himself to the church in Pergamum. He says, “These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.” Of all the things he could have said about himself, why this? At that time, the Roman sword was famous as a symbol for Roman justice, and especially of capital punishment. The Roman governor of any province was said to have the power of the sword to execute people (cf. Ro 13:4) People were scared of them. But Jesus says that he is the one who has the sharp, double-edged sword. What does this mean? This means Jesus is actually the one who is sovereign and has the power of life and death. In the Bible, according to Heb 4:12, the sharp, double-edged sword also refers to the word of God. Jesus is the one whose words have the power to penetrate deep within us to judge the thoughts, hidden motives, and attitudes of the heart. In our confusing world, Jesus’ words distinguish clearly who is right and who is wrong.

Look at verse 13. Jesus begins by praising the church in Pergamum. Twice in this verse he mentions Satan. Outwardly Pergamum seemed to be a glorious place with many gorgeous temple buildings and statues of gods and goddesses. But to Jesus, Pergamum is the place where Satan lives and has his throne. In Pergamum, Roman emperor worship was a big problem for the Christians because they lived under the intense pressure to join in this Emperor Worship and those who refused could be executed. Here Jesus mentions Antipas. This is the only place in the Bible that mentions him. Evidently, he was a sincere Christian in Pergamum who refused to participate in emperor worship and eventually was executed. Jesus calls him “my faithful witness.” It means he was faithful to Jesus even to the point of death (2:10b) just like Jesus himself who told the truth even at the cost of his life. In such environment in Pergamum it was hard to maintain a Christian identity. But Jesus praises the believers there who remained true to his name and refused to renounce their faith that he is the only one worthy of worship.

To us this may sound irrelevant because it is unlikely that any of us would ever get killed today for refusing to renounce our faith in Jesus. But it is not as irrelevant as it may seem. Jesus still wants us all as believers to live as his faithful witnesses in our day-to-day lives in this real world. How can we be faithful witnesses to Jesus and remain true to his name? We have to be active and bold in talking to others about our faith. We need to resist social pressures to worship things or people other than Jesus. In our society we don’t have all kinds of gods or goddesses represented by statues, temples and sacrifices. But we do have all kinds of invisible or visible idols that people are still worshipping in very real ways. An idol can be anything or anyone that takes our priority, that becomes most important. Even good things like a spouse (fiancée) or children or a pet or a house or a nice car or a vacation can become like idols to us. Today people spend so much time on sports, games, music, or entertainments until these things become like idols. Parting during the weekend became an idol for many young people. When we remain true to Jesus and don’t participate in popular forms of idolatry, when we give priority to worshiping God, studying the Bible or praying, people may think we’re strange. But regarding this, the Bible clearly says in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

After praising them, Jesus also calls them out. Let’s look at verses 14 &15. In the Old Testament Balaam was a false prophet who tempted the Israelites to commit idolatry and sexual immorality (Nu 25:1-3; 31:16). Jesus compares this to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, whom he mentioned earlier in his message to the Ephesian church (2:6). Nicolaitans are a group of people of heretical teaching in those times mainly characterized by idolatry and sexual immorality. The Ephesian believers hated the practices of the Nicolaitans, but those in Pergamum were quiet about it. So here, Jesus is rebuking them for compromising with believers who were living as if idolatry and sexual immorality are okay. In those days, their society was full of people for whom idolatry and sexual immorality were considered a normal way of life. But idolatry and immorality are never normal for Christians. In verses 14&15, Jesus says twice that some believers in Pergamum were holding to the teaching that idolatry and immorality were okay. How could anyone claiming to be a Christian teach that idolatry and immorality are okay? It is basically a wrong application of the Christian teaching of grace. God’s grace is never a license to commit sin. God gives us his grace in Jesus to set us free from our sins, not to indulge in them.

Then, what should the believers in Pergamum do about this problem in their church? Let’s read verse 16. Here notice that Jesus is warning to repent to those who were not teaching that idolatry and sexual immorality are not okay. Why do they have to repent? It is because they were negligent. They just ignored the people in their Christian community who were doing and teaching wrong things. They should have been praying for them and trying to help them, but they weren’t. In this case, repentance means to take responsibility for a problem and take action. Without taking responsibility and taking action, there is no real repentance. If they didn’t repent, Jesus said he himself would soon come and fight against these people with the sword of his word. Their sins would be exposed clearly and judged by the sword of his word.

Let’s look at verse 17 and read it. Here Jesus promises to the one who is victorious. The one who is victorious is the one who wins the victory over temptations both outside and within; the temptation to compromise with idolatry culture in their society and the temptation even within the fellowship. To the one who is victorious in Pergamum Jesus gave two intriguing promises. First is the hidden manna and second is a white stone with a new name written on it. Manna was a strange food provided by God to the Israelites every day during their wilderness life to keep them alive and teach them to depend on him alone daily. So hidden manna here probably means that if they refuse to compromise with idolatry for financial survival or success, God would provide for them miraculously. In their society stones were used as entrance tickets to the theater, celebrations or sports games. White stones were used by a jury to declare a person on trial innocent. So a white stone here probably means the believers, though condemned by the world, would be declared innocent by Jesus and admitted to the heavenly kingdom. The new name probably means the new identity given by Jesus with personal relationship with him (You are who Jesus says you are! A child of God). This would be their ticket into heaven. Here we learn that when we struggle sincerely against worldly compromise to win the victory, Jesus really cares for our practical needs and rewards us with everlasting blessing.

The next church Jesus addresses is the one at Thyatira (18a). Thyatira was about 56 km southeast of Pergamum. Of all the seven cities mentioned here in Revelation, Thyatira was the least of them all. It is interesting that among the seven churches Jesus spends the most time talking to this one, the smallest one. Thyatira was a working-class city located on a heavily used trade route and it was famous for producing swords, boots, and purple robes for the Roman army. In Acts 16, Lydia in Philippi who was a dealer in purple cloth was originally from Thyatira. It had a large number of trade guilds. To be a member of these guilds, employees had to attend banquets, worship the god of the guild and indulge in immorality at the party as part of the worship. So, Christians in Thyatira faced much of the same pressure as those in Pergamum. Look at verse 18. Jesus again introduces himself in the form of a judge. This time, he calls himself “the Son of God.” In Thyatira, Apollo, the son of Zeus, was their guardian god. But here Jesus introduces himself as the Son of God who is God and became a man. The description of Jesus here is similar to that in 1:14;15. “*His eyes are like blazing fire,” meaning he can see through everything*. He re-emphasizes this in verse 23 when he says, “I am he who searches hearts and minds.” We can’t hide anything from him. What does he say to them first? Look at verse 19. The description is a contrast with the church at Ephesus, the biggest church. That church was known for hard work but no love; less than what it was at first. But the church in Thyatira maintained its love and was doing better than it did at first. Jesus also praised their deeds of love and faith, service, and perseverance which all Christians should be known for and mentioned most in Revelation. So, in this respect, these believers were exemplary.

But then Jesus calls them out, too. Let’s look at verses 20-23a. They tolerated a wicked woman Jezebel who called herself a prophet. She was teaching a heresy of abusing God’s grace to indulge in sexual immorality and idolatry just like Jezebel who was a most wicked queen in the Old Testament by misleading all the Israelites to idolatry and immorality and even trying to kill God’s prophet Elijah. The Christians in Thyatira were praised by Jesus because their deeds of love and faith, service, and perseverance. But to them, there was a kind of same problem as those in Pergamum. It was over-tolerating the teaching of sexual immorality and idolatry. Unlike the Jewish society, to the Gentile society idolatry and sexual immorality were so much a part of their culture and business. So, in order to survive in their business and job in that society, they were pressed to compromise with their cultural demand. When they resisted such pressure, they could lose their job and business. This woman utilized this vulnerability of ordinary believers who must have been members of their local business guilds (organization). She was teaching believers that it was okay to do such things in the name of so-called “deep secrets”. Jesus mentions that he had already given her time to repent of her immorality but she was unwilling. So now Jesus rebukes the church for “over tolerating” her. And he says he’ll cast her on a bed of suffering, strike her children dead, and cause those who commit adultery with her to suffer intensely. But to the rest of the church members who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, Jesus encourages to hold on to what they already have (healthy gospel teachings) until he comes. Finally, Jesus gives them promises in verses 26-29. Let’s look at them. To the one who is victorious and does his will to the end, Jesus will give authority over the nations. *The one who is victorious will reign with Christ*. This is one of the main promises revealed in Revelation. Those who are victorious mean spiritual victors who overcame the temptation of compromising both outside and within the church through sincere repentance and holding on to pure gospel truth. Jesus also promises that he will give the victor the morning star who represents Jesus himself (Rev 22:16 or Nu 24:17). In the complete darkness, the morning star gives the brightest light so that people may see the world. Jesus is the light of the world; the morning star. Having Jesus and becoming like Jesus is the greatest blessing we can have. All other blessings are included in this blessing.

In conclusion, Today Jesus challenges us to repent of our negligence and of our compromise with idols and impurity. He also urges us to hold on to his promises and remain faithful to him. We also saw that Jesus is such good shepherd who is deeply concerned with the spiritual life of his people whether his church is big or small. Personally, concluding this message, I want to confess and share my repentance of compromise to impurity before Jesus and his church. During my missionary life, several times, I fell into pleasure seeking old habit which is unclean before the eyes of God and God’s holy community and my own godly family. By God’s grace I was able to repent of my sin and continue to move on holding on to my life of mission. I pray God may build up our St. George ministry more and more as loving and healthy community with his holy and abundant love so that through us more students can find true rest and life in Jesus Christ. Amen.