

Saints in Satan's City

Bob Lowman, Jr.

As we continue to ask the question Who is my neighbor? in 2018, this LeaderLesson reminds us where we live, and how Jesus expects us to respond to our environment and to those around us. In Revelation 2:12-17, Jesus speaks to the church at Pergamum. Consider this message, and all that it means as we look to live out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission in our daily walk.

Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum: "The One who has the sharp, double-edged sword says: I know where you live—where Satan's throne is! And you are holding on to My name and did not deny your faith in Me, even in the days of Antipas, My faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. But I have a few things against you. You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to place a stumbling block in front of the Israelites: to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. In the same way, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent! Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth. Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it. Revelation 2:12-17 HCSB

Who is speaking here? It is Jesus, the one with the sharp, double-edged sword. The sword is very significant here: the two-edged sword pictures the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Also, the sword was the symbol of the city of Pergamum. So the Christians in that place would have a double-connection with this imagery.

Pergamum was the capital of province and an impressive city from the world's perspective, including a library of 200,000 volumes, second only to the library at Alexandria. But, this was a very difficult place to be a Christian. Pergamum was the center for worship of pagan deities. It was also the location of the temple for the worship of Caesar.

Our office is in Charlotte: known as the Queen City. Chicago is known as the Windy City. San Francisco is the City by the Bay. Paris, the City of Lights. Las Vegas, Sin City. What's the point? From what Jesus said to the Church at Pergamum, it sounds like they lived in Satan's City (2:13).

To these believers immersed in a satanic atmosphere of idolatry and wickedness, Jesus says, "I know where you live." To people struggling by grace to remain faithful when those around them revel in faithlessness, Jesus says, "I know where you live." To a church that must have felt abandoned and alone and given over to the enemy, Jesus says, "I know where you live."

Jesus walks among the churches and knows them completely. John Stott, in considering the messages of Jesus in Revelation 2-3 said: "His intimate knowledge extends not only to the works His people do (Ephesus) and to the troubles they endure (Smyrna) but also to the environment in which they live (Pergamum). He knows that the Christian church is set in the non-Christian world, and that it feels on all sides the continuous pressure of evil influence." Jesus knew that Pergamum, of all the cities in Asia Minor, was the most seriously threatened by pagan influence. It was, in many ways, Satan's city.

In light of this, here is what you need to understand: Jesus also knows where **you** dwell – He knows where you live. It's not just a nice churchy thought – it's the truth. The oppressed believers at Pergamum did not dismiss this lightly – they laid hold of this glorious revelation and were supernaturally encouraged by it. No matter how hard life was, no matter how intense temptation grew, Jesus knew where they lived. He knew what they faced daily.

Jesus knows where you live. Meditate on it. Rejoice in it! Whether you live in the country or the city or somewhere in between, Jesus knows where you live. Whether you attend a church of 50, 500, or 5,000, Jesus knows where you live. He knows the temptations you face, He knows the pressures you feel, He knows the fear that maybe you've been lost in the shuffle of life. Fear not - Jesus knows where you live. You have not been abandoned, far less ignored. Your life and ministry are as important to Jesus as that of any Christian in any church in any country.

You may feel as if your community is a modern Pergamum, devoted to idol worship and immorality. But you can know for a certainty: Jesus has sovereignly and strategically placed you where you are as His witness, to hold forth His name and to display His glory. That's why, no matter what, contrary to what you might think, every city is Christ's city. Jesus knows where you live, and He is Lord!

This tremendous truth should cause two responses from us:

celebration	and	challenge
relief	and	repentance
"oh yes!"	and	"oh my!"

It should leave us thrilled that Jesus cares and trembling that Jesus knows. He cares for us completely and He knows everything about us. He knows if we are being saints in Satan's city.

Jesus commends the church in Pergamum for being true to His Name in the face of persecution and difficulty, especially since one of their number, Antipas, was martyred for his faith. Remember the sword? The reason it was the symbol of Pergamum is because it was the capital of the Roman province, and therefore was one of only a few cities where Rome allowed capital punishment. In spite of persecution, the church had remained true to their God. They had this to celebrate, but Jesus' challenge was about to come.

He said in verse 14: "But, I have few things against you." What were they? Some held to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Simply put: they taught that it was OK to compromise God's truth. Both of these teachings led to idolatry, immorality, and apathy.

Jesus is making sure they realize that some behavior is right and some is wrong. There were two problems concerning these folks at Pergamum:

1. Some were living a wicked lifestyle while claiming to be Christians;
2. The church was allowing sinful behavior by members to go unchallenged.

They resisted influence from without, and were very indifferent to influence from within. The church was practicing a careless tolerance. Does this sound familiar to the ears of people living in our times?

What did Jesus demand of them? In verse 16, He required that they all repent. If not, He warned that He would fight against those teaching and practicing such things with the sword of His mouth, which is the double-edged sword of the Word of God.

Saints in Satan's city faced persecution, but the church stood in faith. So, Satan attacked from within, leading believers into sin and compromise. When he cannot defeat church from the outside, Satan attacks from the inside. He did it then, and he does it now, succeeding all across our nation today.

Jesus then said, in verse 17: "Listen! To the victor, I will give a special blessing, hidden manna." What is that? He will give secret sustenance to those who are faithful to Him. He will take care of His own. And He said that He will also give a white stone with a new name. A stone like that in their day was like a ticket in our day: it is the promise of entry, entry into eternal blessings in God's presence forever.

So, what is Jesus saying to us in this message to the church at Pergamum? He is saying that He expects His people to respect His authority as Lord of Lords. He expects us to be saints in Satan's city, pursuing holiness and purity in His presence, sharing His truth with those who need to know. He expects those who have been given such grace to live lives of humble obedience to His Word. We must not compromise God's truth for peace with the world or comfort for ourselves.

The one who gains the victory is the one who has a personal relationship with Jesus that Satan and his forces cannot steal or destroy. The Lord Jesus Christ, with His double-edged sword, is perfectly capable of protecting us.

Yes, we live in a time when spiritual struggle and warfare will be more and more obvious to those who are paying attention. There is evil at work in the world. Satan and his forces are active and real - don't ever forget it. But remember more that Jesus is Lord, and as we trust and follow Him, He will give us the victory. He is the One who is worthy of worship and obedient love.

As Martin Luther wrote, "And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us." Amen!

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