



KIAMA ANGLICAN
CHURCHES

To the church at Pergamum

Revelation 2:12-17

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The big idea is that living for the true King is far more 'soul' satisfying than any compromise that the world or the church throws at us. This satisfaction comes through a personal relationship with the risen, victorious and loving Christ, who alone is worthy and who gives us the power to overcome. (Jude 23, 24) Amen!

When I was 18 and very early in my Christian life, a song written by Keith Green meant a lot to me. It started this way

'Make my life a prayer to you

I wanna do what you want me to

No empty words and no white lies

No token prayers, no compromise!

As a teenager I felt the pull of the world, the attraction of things I could see and touch and experience. Even though following Jesus didn't include prison or death, the prospect of losing friends, of being ridiculed and left out made the cost of commitment very real to me.

Sometimes compromise looks very attractive. Can you be a Christian and totally fit in with the world around you? Isn't it about just getting to heaven by believing?

Perhaps, if it's religion that comes first - just show up and do the ritual, then back to a life that sits easy with you on the boss's chair - then maybe compromise works.

But not if Jesus is king of your life, if he's number 1, if all your hope and faith and trust are in him. It's hard. There's a cost. I've learned that, and so have followers of Jesus through the years, and so had the faithful church in Pergamum.

So...No compromise.

No empty words.

No half-hearted, 'only when I need something' prayers.

Our life is on the line, in this world and the next.

Jesus' letter to the church at Pergamum gives us reason to hope and reason to fear.

Hope, because living for the true King is far more 'soul' satisfying than any compromise that the world or religion throws at us.

There's a reward, better than life itself.

Fear, because the true King will judge the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. And if our worship is given to substitutes, then we have no place in the King's company. Not now; not when we die.

So, "Repent!" says Jesus. Turn away from corrupt ideas and stand up to false teachers.

John writes the words of Jesus to the church in Pergamum, a city in the north west of ancient Turkey. This is no easy time to be a Christian in Pergamum. There's a very real chance you could be thrown in prison, tried as an enemy of the emperor, then killed.

Verse 13 in chapter 2 gives us a clue as to what was happening. Peel away the apocalyptic language that John uses to hide the message of encouragement to the church during persecution and we read...

"I know where you live," says King Jesus.

There's Emperor worship everywhere! Pour an offering to Domitian and life is uncomplicated. Everyone's doing it! What's the big deal?

Everywhere you turn there are temples to gods like Zeus, Athena, Dionysus. There are offerings, sacrifices and pleasures. The whole city is advertising the party line – pick a god, try your luck and make a show of fitting in. The Emperor is divine? No big deal. As long as I keep my job and live a quiet life then I'll do what it takes.

Unless you are a Christian. Then persecution is on the street corner, up the hill, at your house. There's a cosmic battle and Satan wants you to give in. He thinks Pergamum is easy territory.

If you claim that Jesus Christ is your king, then Domitian cannot be. If Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth, his title in chapter 1v5, then the Emperor cannot have your worship. So you stand out, you act differently, you speak of a different kingdom.

And that will get you killed. Like Antipas, the first martyr in the city, roasted alive for the entertainment of the crowd. That's the story from the early church.

The word 'witness' in Greek reads 'martyr'.

All through the church when faithful Christians have stood out and stayed true, the cost could very well be their own death – like Jesus, 'who is the faithful witness' from chapter 1.

Today there is more persecution than at any other time. To witness to Jesus as King can cost your job, your family, your home, your citizenship, your life. The Voice of the Martyrs is one organisation that helps us to pray and support believers in countries that are like Pergamum. Open Doors serves persecuted Christians worldwide.

How much would you like to have Jesus say, "You have remained true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me."?

Would your greatest joy be wanting to live and speak the gospel, the good news of King Jesus, forgiveness for sin, and satisfaction for the soul?

This my hope and prayer for us all in God's church at Kiama.

Well it seems that God's church at Pergamum stays true. They were commended for their faithful witness in the face of severe persecution. As with the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 12 verse 2, they would have said to one another...

'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you won't grow weary or lose heart.'

But there was a problem in Pergamum.

Insiders were pushing a different agenda.

“Compromise is not only acceptable, it’s better! It’s easier, more fun, less risky and because God is forgiving you can let your morals slip and still be in the club.” Why miss out? Why take the heat? And the church was putting up with them.

In chapter 2 verse 14 we get a lesson from Jesus on a classic Old Testament story from Numbers 25. Balaam gets a mention seven more times in the Bible: Deuteronomy 23:3-6, Joshua 13:22, 24:9.10, Nehemiah 13:1-3, Micah 6:5, 2 Peter 2:15,16 and Jude 11 - and it’s never pretty.

He’s the pin up boy of compromise. He’s the antagonist to holiness, he’s the example of seduction.

What happened way back then that would give Jesus the example to pack such a punch to the Pergamum church?

In Numbers 25 the wilderness wandering Israelites are on the verge of entering the promised land. 40 years of lessons, of faith, of God’s total provision in the manna and quail...in the water from the rock.

Their God - Yahweh. Creator, covenant maker.

Cloud and fire. Desert and dust. A God they could not see but who spoke the words of blessing and curse, love and life, rescue and rest.

Balak king of Moab did not like the idea of fighting this people and their god. So he hired a professional prophet to curse the Israelites and turn them away from his kingdom.

Balaam found out that God is bigger than the going wage for a good curse.

God can use a donkey to teach a lesson to an arrogant man.

So Balaam’s curses turned to blessings and God’s plan for his chosen people would not be undone.

But Balaam found another way, and that was through the women of Moab and the worship of Baal. Numbers 25 describes this low point in the journey. I'm left wondering...

Why would the men give up their marriage vows to sleep with foreigners? Why would the people turn so easily to a local weather god, eat the sacrificed food and bow to the idols? Why would worship for Yahweh be so easily forgotten, his laws, his blessings, his judgment, his care? The Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey, just across the Jordan River, and here they are giving their worship to adultery and idolatry.

John writes in his first letter chapter 2 verses 15 to 17:

'Do not love the world, or anything in the world...for anything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has or does, comes not from the Father but from the world.'

What is it that turns the heart of man away from the Lord?

I think I know the answer and I see the problem in myself, in us, if I'm honest.

For the Israelites, it was the lure of pleasure, of desire, of the security of a god who could set them up with a good harvest. They thought satisfaction could come with an easy compromise.

Too much of the wilderness...

too big a task ahead to take the promised land...

why not take the pleasure in the moment!

It had deadly consequences. God judged and 24,000 died in the plague. He was jealous for his name, righteous in his punishment of sin.

We don't have temples around us here at Kiama, or obligations to sacrifice to our divine leaders. We don't have persecution that kills, or the temple prostitution of ancient Pergamum.

But can you see the modern alternatives that promise to satisfy?

Security

Comfort

Pleasure without consequence

Wealth

Things

Image

Popularity

When these take the place of God, they become what we worship...and ultimately what we give our lives to. We have no place in the King's company. Not now; not when we die. The King has been replaced with things of the world that do not last.

So, "Repent!" says Jesus to the church. Turn away from corrupt ideas and stand up to false teachers. Use the living Word to discern and divide like a double-edged sword.

When we see the blessings of life as a gift from God, they stay in their right place, under his rule, for us to bless others with.

And, ultimately, we don't need them for our souls to be satisfied. We just need Jesus. And then obedience comes from love, not duty.

We see this obedience in Joseph, who resisted the sin of taking Potiphar's wife for himself. We see no compromise in Daniel, who refused to bow down to the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar. We see Stephen, who prayed for his attackers as they stoned him. They all knew the promise of something better.

What did Jesus promise the church in Pergamum? What is our promise?

The two images in verse 17 of Revelation 2 are loaded with encouragement and hope.

The manna for 40 years was a pure gift to the Israelite people in their Exodus from Egypt...there each morning, not earned or made. God saying, "I know you and I've got you."

Jesus said, "I am the bread, the manna of life." God incarnate, the living Word.

Your soul will never be hungry again. The hidden manna is the day to day filling up of food for our souls, of the Holy Spirit in us.

Better than any compromise, any cheap imitation or any food sacrificed to an idol. It's the daily moment by moment life with Jesus.

The White Stone is our ticket to the banquet of the King. Antipas is there. Faithful witnesses across the centuries are there. Anyone who is born again, who bears the new name of Jesus, is there. The faithful saints of Kiama are there. You will be there if you have Jesus as your king, your Lord, your life.

Where does the strength come from to overcome, to stay true to King Jesus, to resist compromise? Not us, but him!

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.

