

## Revelation Unraveled Part 5 – Smyrna & Pergamos

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. Berean Sunday School Class 2/19/2017

We left off last Sunday covering the first Church in the list of Churches, Ephesus. We talked about how it was considered the “chief” Church of the 7 Churches of Asia. This morning we will attempt to cover the next two Churches, Smyrna and Pergamos, Lord willing.

### +Revelation 2:8-17

**8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;**

This letter written to the pastor of the church in Smyrna. Smyrna was about 40 miles north of Ephesus. It was a city founded by Alexander the Great. The Church most likely was founded by followers of Paul.

**These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;**

The first and the last again, referring to the Lord, the Alpha and Omega. Jesus the one who once was dead but no is alive. This of course referring to his death burial and resurrection (The Gospel).

**9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.**

One thing we all need to be aware of is that the Lord **knows our works**. You can pretend to be something and say you are something and you may be able to fool most of the people but you will never fool the Lord. He knows our works and he knows our lack of works. Some people go around saying, “well I’m saved and that’s all that matters.” Oh no my friend, that’s not all that matters. If you are saved, you were saved unto good works. God didn’t save you just for you to become a bench warmer. He saved you with full expectation that you would do good works. The Lord says he knows the works of this Church at Smyrna.

He also says that he knows about the **tribulation** they are under. Remember they are under the rule of a wicked Roman Emperor named Domitian who was notorious for persecuting Christians. A little bit of interesting trivia about Domitian; he was the only Emperor who demanded to be addressed as **dominus et deus** “Master and God.” He believed and practiced early Roman religion who’s chief deity was the God Jupiter. He also worshiped Minerva, the patron goddess of wisdom. He had a private shrine built for her in his bedroom and had coins printed with her picture on them. He was murdered by members of his own cabinet including his wife.

**And poverty**. For some reason, unknown to us, this church was particularly poor. It was enough so that the Lord would mention their poverty. It could be that because of the tribulation and persecution they were suffering that they had been robbed and made poor by their persecutors.

**But thou art rich**. So which is it, poor or rich? He isn’t talking about money riches here, he means they are rich in grace and favor of God. Unless you missed it, our Lord lived here on this earth as a very poor man. No house, no bed, no place to lay his head. He borrowed everything that he had from the stable he was born in to the tomb he was buried in, nothing belonged to him. Don’t ever try to align wealth with

faith. These hucksters on TV try to make you believe that if the Lord is blessing you then you will be wealthy. That is completely opposite of what Jesus taught.

**And I know the blasphemy**. He isn’t talking about blasphemy against God here, he is meaning that this church has been blasphemed against by their persecutors. By using the word blasphemy it apparently is because of their religion.

**of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.**

This is a very difficult statement to try and understand. I want to read you what Matthew Henry says about this: *that is, of those who pretend to be the only peculiar covenant-people of God, as the Jews boasted themselves to be, even after God had rejected them; or of those who would be setting up the Jewish rites and ceremonies, which were now not only antiquated, but abrogated; these may say that they only are the church of God in the world, when indeed they are the synagogue of Satan.*

Friends, we’ve got people like that today. There are literally thousands of people right here in Knoxville, TN that claim the title of being a Christian but they really belong to the synagogue of Satan. I’m so sick of seeing pretend Christians that it makes me want to vomit. There are people running around here today that claim their saved out of one side of their mouth and are cussin like a sailor out of the other side. They’ve got one foot in the church house and the other in the smut house. Holding a Bible in their right hand and in their left hand their holding a smart phone that they just surfed pornography with on the internet. I’m telling you friends, they are sick, they are an abomination, God hates it and he says they are from the synagogue of Satan! We’ve got limp-wristed, panty waste so-called preachers in churches today that say they are gay and a man of God. Friend that is a lie, you can’t be a man of God and be a sodomite too. Light and darkness don’t mix, there ain’t no such thing!

Honey, it’s time that men of God grow a backbone and preach against this stuff. We’re gonna answer to a real God one day and he’s gonna call out every one of us preachers and say “Why didn’t you preach against sin? Why didn’t you throw those sodomites out from behind those pulpits and run them outta of my church?” What are we going to say? What can we say? “Well Lord, I didn’t want to upset anybody. We just want to love everybody. Didn’t want to make anybody mad.” And the Lord’s gonna say “well you’ve made me mad, you’ve invoked my wrath and fury. I hate that abomination. I called you to sound the alarm and you didn’t do it, their blood is on your head.”

**10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.**

Notice that the Lord never promises that we will not suffer persecution. In fact, he flat out tells us that we will suffer. Did you notice at whose hands they are going to suffer? The devils. Now, you thought I went into that tirade while ago about sodomites because I was just being belligerent, didn’t you? Well, let’s look at this.

**First** he told them that there were those that said they were Jews but they were really of the synagogue of Satan. I said there are those that say they are sodomite Christians, but they are really of Satan.

**Now** he tells them that they are going to suffer because of the devil, that they would be cast into prison to be tried. So, let's say one of these so-called Christian sodomites just happens to tune into my sermon and hears me standing up for the truth and he decides that he'll just work and push to make a law to make it illegal for any preacher or pastor to preach against sodomites. The next thing you know Pastor Byron is being cast into prison to be tried.

The fact is, this church did suffer a lot because of Satan. It's leader, whom history tells us was a man named Polycarp, a disciple of John the Apostle's and the bishop of the church at Smyrna. Fox's Book of Martyrs gives us this account of Polycarp:

**Polycarp**, the venerable bishop of Smyrna, hearing that persons were seeking for him, escaped, but was discovered by a child. After feasting the guards who apprehended him, he desired an hour in prayer, which being allowed, he prayed with such fervency, that his guards repented that they had been instrumental in taking him. He was, however, carried before the proconsul, condemned, and burnt in the market place.

The proconsul then urged him, saying, "Swear, and I will release thee;--reproach Christ."

**Polycarp** answered, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?" At the stake to which he was only tied, but not nailed as usual, as he assured them he should stand immovable, the flames, on their kindling the fagots, encircled his body, like an arch, without touching him; and the executioner, on seeing this, was ordered to pierce him with a sword, when so great a quantity of blood flowed out as extinguished the fire. But his body, at the instigation of the enemies of the Gospel, especially Jews, was ordered to be consumed in the pile, and the request of his friends, who wished to give it Christian burial, rejected. They nevertheless collected his bones and as much of his remains as possible, and caused them to be decently interred.

**11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.**

Then he ends the letter to the Church of Smyrna and he had nothing bad to say about them. Smyrna and Philidelphia are the only 2 of the 7 Churches nothing bad was said about. "He that overcometh," as we talked about before, the one that overcometh is the one that is truly saved.

**1 John 5:4-5: For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. 5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?** -- Who are those that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? Those are the saved.

**12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;**

The church in Pergamos is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Church on the postal route of the 7 Churches of Asia. There isn't much information about this church; in fact, it is only mentioned 2 times in the entire Bible, here, and in our introduction in Revelation 1:11 where the list of the 7 churches is given.

History tells us that the people of Pergamos were inventors and innovators. They perfected a parchment made out of calfskin and built the world's first psychiatric hospital. -- Pergamos was also a well-known center for the arts. The city's theater seated ten thousand people. They say that the acoustics were so good that you could whisper something from the stage and be heard all through the theater. Their library was the second largest in the ancient world. Its collection was so great that the Roman general Marc Antony presented it as a wedding gift to Cleopatra.

The Lord refers to Himself as "**he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.**" My friend, God's Word is powerful. **Hebrews 4:12** the Bible says: *12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

Many times, before I stand and preach I will pray and ask the Lord to slice and dice and do a mighty work within us. I am referring to His Word, which is quick, powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It is my desire that God's Word penetrate your heart when you are in one of our Church services. If you don't listen to anything that I say other than the reading of the Scriptures, that's all that matters, as long as God's Word does a work within you.

**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.**

Again, the Lord tells them that He knows their works. Like we mentioned last time, we should all be aware and tremble at the fact that He knows our works or better yet, our lack of them. **Titus 3:8** says: *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.*

"**and where thou dwellest.**" A man's dwelling place can make a huge difference in his life. I'm reminded of Abraham and his nephew, Lot. Abraham let Lot choose wherever he wanted to dwell and raise his flocks and his family. **Genesis 13:12-13** *Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. 13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.* Then in **2 Peter 2:8** *(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)*

Because of the place that Lot dwelled, he lost everything he ever had, including his reputation. Don't think that God don't see where you dwell. I'm not necessarily meaning Knoxville, or Corryton, but I mean what you surround yourself with where you dwell.

**even where Satan's seat is:** Friends, this was a bad place they were in. It was so bad that the Lord called it the place where Satan's seat is. That word seat comes from the Greek word "Thrah-Nahs" which we get our English word "Throne" from. So, in other words "Satan's Throne." **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.** The Lord is commending them for holding fast His name and never denying the faith even under such persecution. It

had gotten so bad that the Bishop of Pergamos, Antipas, was martyred. According to history, in A.D. 92, Antipas was baked alive inside a huge bronze bull and while he was dying he was praying for his church. **A description of the death method is:** "They would take the victim, place him inside the bull, and they would tie him in such a way that his head would go into the head of the bull. Then they would light a huge fire under the bull, and as the fire heated the bronze, the person inside of the bull would slowly begin to roast to death. As the victim would begin to moan and to cry out in pain, his cries would echo through the pipes in the head of the bull so it seemed to make the bull come alive."

**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.

And now, the bad news... "but I have a few things against thee." Apparently, there were a group of people at the church that were holding to the doctrine of Balaam. Now, to understand what this means, you would need to study your Old Testament and go way back to the Book of Kings. You will remember that Balaam was the prophet and he was being bribed by Balak to curse the Children of Israel. Since Balaam couldn't curse God's people, because they were blessed, he found a way to curse them by getting them to commit acts of sexual immorality. This "doctrine of the **Nicolaitans**, we talked about in the first church at Ephesus. They are only mentioned 2 times in all the Bible and both times the Bible says that the Lord hates them. They are obviously bad people; most likely sexually immoral.

**16** Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. -- Again, the Lord tells them that they better repent, and if they don't, he is going to wipe them out. They better get those sorry Nicolaitans out of the church.

The Lord has to be sick of some of the stuff that goes on in churches today. Some of the most awful and ungodly stuff going on disguised as religion. Churches dancing and playing and singing rap and rock music. Friends, if it looks like the world, sounds like the world, acts like the world... IT'S OF THE WORLD. It ain't of God! Don't you try to blame God for some of the sorry messes that are going on these days. The church cannot use the world's ways to try and point people to God. We must use Bible means, and Godly means to attract people to the Gospel.

**and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth** If that doesn't put a scare into you then nothing will. Friend, the last person you want fighting against you is the Lord. If the Lord fights against you, you ain't got a chance. He's going to win every time. He's defeated death, hell, and the grave. What makes you think you have a chance against Him?

**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.

Then he ends it like he does every time by saying "he that hath an ear, let him hear." Then he mentions **hidden manna**. We all know that manna was food that God

provided for the Children of Israel while they were wandering around in the desert for 40-years. This hidden manna is spiritual food which can only come from the Lord Jesus Christ. He will fill our hungry souls. He will sustain us with his power and strength.

**and will give him a white stone**, In the ancient days of judges, if a person was found guilty, the judge would give them a black stone. If the person was found innocent the judge would give them a white stone for approval. This saying most likely means that the Lord will approve of them that overcometh. Not only will they get a white stone but there will be **a new name written on it**.

**Isaiah 56:5** *Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.*

We sing that song, "There's a new name written down in glory, and its mine, oh yes it mine." Friends, for the Christian there is a new name written down. That new name is REDEEMED! Only those that are saved will be called redeemed.

#### **Psalm 107:1-9:**

- (1) O give thanks unto the LORD, for *he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.*
- (2) Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;
- (3) And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.
- (4) They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.
- (5) Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.
- (6) Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, *and he delivered them out of their distresses.*
- (7) And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.
- (8) Oh that *men* would praise the LORD *for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*
- (9) For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

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\* All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version