

Rev05 – Married to The World Revelation 2:12-17

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message, “Married to The World.” It’s Revelation 2:12-17. We go to our third church as we continue our look at the seven letters to the seven churches that were initially written to seven actual churches in the Book of Revelation. But these seven letters are also addressing seven historical periods of church history. We are really going to see that this message. And also, and most importantly, especially addressing critical needs in the church as well as critical needs in your life and my life specifically.

That’s why we are studying the seven churches so closely. If you remember, as a bit of review, the first church was the church of Ephesus. They had good church but they had abandoned the love they had at first. They had abandoned the love of Christ. They were doing church well, but they had abandoned love. And it represented that first period, the Apostolic period to the end of the Apostolic period.

The second church we looked at last time was the church of Smyrna, the persecuted church. And we saw under incredible persecution for a two hundred year period in church history that the church got stronger and stronger. And it grew deeper and deeper under persecution.

This message we look at our third church Pergamum. And Pergamum, like a whiplash. We go from a strong deep church under persecution to a compromising church that has married the world. Haven’t you ever heard of that pendulum movement, where maybe you’ve seen it in some Christians lives where they start out zealous for Christ? They are all in for Christ. And you see them a year later, and they have swung the opposite way on the pendulum.

Well, the church does that. And under persecution in the church of Smyrna the church grew strong. And we are going to see today in the church of Pergamum that under compromise that the church ends up marrying the world. They tried to stay married to Christ and they also tried to marry the world. We are going to see in this message the beginning of spiritual polygamy. And I want you to know it means a lot for us. It is applicable to us. And we are going to see spiritual polygamy today in the history of the church and the church of Pergamum and we are going to be warned by Jesus Christ that he has no desire to be a polygamist bridegroom. He will allow you to marry either him or the world. You get to choose. But he won’t be one of two bridegrooms in your life. And he is going to come with a sword of judgment to this church. I pray that we will have ears to hear what the spirit says.

Let’s pray. Heavenly Father, please, by your Spirit. Holy Spirit please open our ears to what you would have us to hear individually and as a church, Lord. Show us where we need to be warned, where our eyes need to be opened, where we need to repent and

where we need to return to a single love. Lord, we need to return to you. Show us as we look at the church of Pergamum and their slip away into compromise, show us the areas of our lives that are under the same risk and draw us back to you. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Pergamum (in the NKJ it reads Pergamos, it's the same place) was the capitol of Asia. It was the home of the regional Roman ruler, the Proconsul. And it was the beginning of live emperor worship. Not live as in live concerts, but the worship of emperors who were living. Rome had a tendency to worship their dead emperors. Well, in Pergamum they began worshipping the current emperor while he was still alive.

It was the grand cultural center. It was known for making its own books. It started producing so many books that Egypt refused to send it papyrus. And so Pergamum made its own parchment. In fact, our word "parchment" comes from a word that means "*of Pergamum.*" They were big in their cultural arts and in their education and in their higher learning. Their library boasted two hundred thousand plus parchment rolls. *Two hundred thousand.* And guys they aren't going down to Berean Bookstores and buying every book on the shelf. These are all hand written or hand copied on parchment that they made themselves. Two hundred thousand rolls.

That library eventually ended up in Alexandria with the great Egyptian library when Marc Antony took the city and gave that library as a gift to his lover Cleopatra. But the important thing for us today is that this city was all about culture and higher learning and higher education and knowledge.

It was also the home to the god of healing, Asclepius. We get our word scalpel from this god of healing that was centered in Pergamum. So they were very into the medical sciences but it was all pagan god worshipping medicine. And so Asclepius and his temple was really kind of the hospital of the area. And so all the sick would come there. And the symbol of Asclepius, the god of healing, was a coiled snake. Eventually the snake was coiled around a staff. And today we still use that same insignia for the medical profession; the coiled snake around the staff, the sign of the pagan god Asclepius based here in Pergamum.

And so his snakes, real snakes, were the healing snakes. And so to be healed by the god of Asclepius you would come to the temple and lie on the floor and not move, and allow the snakes to crawl over you. So some of you might have had a hard time getting healed back in that day, if you have a problem with snakes.

Finally, let me just say, if you have ever – and if you haven't I'm going to encourage you to think about it – said "Why does this occur in the church when I can't find it in the Bible? Why do certain churches do certain things that I can't find in the Bible?" As we look at the city of Pergamum in this period of history, I'll shed some light on that for you.

Guys, we are in a life and death battle. You know that, right? We are in an eternal life and death battle. We have a very real enemy. His only goal is to rob, steal, kill, and destroy. His only goal is to remove your witness and your impact. And if you are already going to heaven he wants to make sure you don't get someone else to go with you. His only job is to destroy you and your life. He is the prince of this world, and you are at war with him. And listen, he learns from his mistakes (unlike many of us.)

So let's get an example of how our enemy learned from his mistakes. In Smyrna, the previous church, for a two hundred year period, our enemy tried persecution from the outside to stomp out the church. And he learned from that. If you've ever had a fire, say if you've ever been ten or twelve and started the field across the street on fire. What I learned from this, and this is what the enemy learned. You start the field on fire, if you stomp on it what happens? Poof! It gets bigger. And every time you stomp on the fire it gets bigger. So what do you do? You water down the fire.

So for two hundred years our enemy tried to stomp out the cause of Christ and the church. And he found out that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. And so he learned from that. And he said this, please hear me. In Pergamum he said, if I can't beat them, I'll join them. That's what the enemy did in Pergamum. It's an approach that was very effective. "If I can't stomp them out with persecution, I'll water them down with compromise. If I can't get the world to crush them, I'll get them to marry the world."

Do you see it? That is what the enemy did in the 300's A.D. I believe with everything I've got he is still utilizing that approach and it is still working well. And Jesus is going to say, "Wake up, church! Because I am coming with the sword of judgment."

In Revelation 2:12 Jesus says,

Revelation 2:12 (esv)

12 "And to the angel (messenger) of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.'

And to the angel, that's the messenger, the leader, the pastor, possibly spiritual messenger, possibly physical leader of the church.

'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. And you may immediately think of Hebrews 4:12. The Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. It kind of applies, but it is a different word. That living sword, that sharp two-edged sword is a close in sword. It's a sword for close hand-to-hand combat. It's a sword like we would call something like a scalpel. This sword being referred to is the long sword. Every time this sword is used it's used all but once in Revelation, and every time it is used it is used of judgment. It's a sword that looks like a spear. It's a long sword. This is the sword that Jesus is saying "I'm coming."

‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. It is speaking of judgment. It is the same sword that I promise you we will eventually see Jesus use in Revelation 19 to conquer the Antichrist and his armies, when Jesus really returns to this earth. This is the same sword that comes from his mouth. It’s the sword of judgment.

And so the description that Jesus chooses to introduce the letter to the church of Pergamum is Jesus saying he is coming as a judge. And so Pergamum is not getting off to a great start as far as their letter goes.

Listen you know how some of those people that don’t get it say, “Oh Jesus was a good teacher. He had some good things to say.” Yeah that’s true but he also happens to be the King of Glory and the Lord of Lords, and the King of Kings and the Judge of all Creation. But he also had some nice things to say.

But then Jesus begins his encouragement. And so when you look at the way Jesus does this, he’s bringing judgment, but he is starting with encouragement. Learn a lesson, especially with your children.

Revelation 2:13(a) (esv)

13 “I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is . . .

Every single letter Jesus starts by saying “I know.” “I know.” And in most letters and if you’re looking in your NKJ it says “I know your works.” But here it says ***‘I know where you dwell*** I know what circumstances you are living in. I know you are under it. To me it would be like if Jesus wrote a letter to the church in Las Vegas. He would say, listen. I understand where you live. I get it. Even more so, how about the Christians in Washington, D.C. Listen, I know where you live. I get it. I understand the environment that you are serving me in, where Satan’s throne is.

Now, there are a couple of things that Satan’s throne could mean here. Number one, the world famous altar to Zeus, who was kind of the god of gods, the king of the gods, was here at Pergamum on the Acropolis (which means “*the high place.*”) From the valley below, the altar to Zeus looks like a throne. It was built to look like a throne. And it is magnificent. And you can see the remains of it there today. Jesus may have been referring to that.

However, the governing seat of Rome was also in Pergamum. The regional governing seat was also in Pergamum. Jesus could have been speaking about that when he said ***you dwell where Satan’s throne is***

Plus, the center of worship of the emperor, they call it emperor worship, but the current emperor worship – the seat – where that began was also in Pergamum. So three options at least, if not more of what Jesus is referring to.

What we know for sure is that Jesus is saying, “Listen. I understand that you dwell in a place where Satan has authority. Satan’s throne is there. I know that you dwell in a difficult place.”

It’s really hard in Pergamum. Satan’s throne is there. As we continue in verse 13 of Revelation 2 Jesus says,

Revelation 2:13(b) (esv)

13 . . . Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Yet you hold fast my name Do you see it? He is saying I know where you are at, yet you hold fast my name.

Again Jesus refers to I understand you are in a tough city where Satan has authority, where he dwells. And we don’t really know who Antipas was, but we know his name means “*against all*.” So it was probably not his given name, it was probably a taken name, a Christian name. It means “*against all*.” Church tradition says that Antipas was slow roasted in a cauldron of brass or copper shaped like a bull.

Now, I don’t usually watch scary movies. I can’t handle it. But there was this movie out recently called Red Riding Hood. They roasted a guy in a cauldron shaped like a bull in that movie. And when I read the scholars that said this I said “Wow, that is where they got that idea for that movie.” Big cauldron shaped like a bull, put a guy in there, put it over the fire and it’s a pretty rough way to die. So that is Antipas.

There was a time when Antipas stood strong against the world, even unto death. There was a time when the church stood with Antipas. But listen, it seems to me to be a connection to the past. It seems to be to be kind of a transition from Smyrna, the suffering church, into Pergamum, the church that married the world. And it seems to me that Jesus is saying I know that you’ve had this faith. I know that you have done this. You didn’t deny the faith in the days when Antipas was killed, *BUT*... and Jesus is so kind, he starts with the good. But he has to get down to the problem. He has to bring the scalpel out. And so Jesus says you have held fast, but something is beginning to happen in your church that is causing me to have the sword of judgment at the ready.

In Revelation 2:14 Jesus says,

Revelation 2:14 (esv)

14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.

Critical, critical verse here. In fact this verse really starts our story in the church of Pergamum. We also have our first reference to the Old Testament in Revelation, and if I

haven't told you yet, let me tell you now. Without a real grasp of the Old Testament you can't understand the Book of Revelation. It is just replete with Old Testament information and illusions and inferences. And so as we go through the book we will learn much more about the Old Testament. Let's grasp this now.

In your Bible in the margin write Numbers 22 and following, and it goes through 25 and kind of comes up again later. Do you remember the talking donkey? The prophet that donkey was talking to was Balaam. That is this Balaam. The teaching of Balaam Jesus refers to in Revelation 2:14.

Here's the story. Balaam was a prophet for hire, meaning he would prophesy for money. So Balak was the enemy of Israel. And Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel. In comes the donkey and the sword of judgment from the Lord. Balaam is going to curse Israel because he has been paid by Balak to do it; the donkey tries to stop him and is a little successful for a moment. But eventually goes on. Balaam tries to curse Israel and he can't. He can't curse Israel. Every time he opens his mouth to curse Israel only blessings would come out. And it's really a cool story. And so he says I've been paid to curse Israel so I am going to go curse them, and then he opens his mouth to curse Israel and blessings come out from the Lord. And he does it over and over and over. And Balak gets mad.

Balak says, Listen. I paid you good money. Get on with the cursing and stop the blessing. And Balaam tells Balak, listen, I can't do it. I can't curse them. God won't let me curse them. So here's what I can do. It's just as good. It will destroy Israel just as much as if God cursed them himself.

And here's the story, you've got to hear this. Balaam says to Balak, who is the enemy of God's people, I can't curse them but you can. Here's what you do. Send the women of Moab into the camp of Israel and have them seduce the men. Have them seduce the men sexually and then use that to draw them into idol worship. And if you will use the women of Moab to seduce the men of God sexually, and draw them into idol worship, you will get as much destruction in the nation of Israel as if God himself cursed them. Read the story. It's a very big deal.

Jesus says here in Revelation 2:14 ***you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, , who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.***

Balak did that, it worked. And in the end 24,000 men of Israel were slain by the sword of the Lord as judgment for that. It worked.

So, listen carefully, the teaching of Balaam is the art of the enemy (listen carefully) of bringing compromise into the church. That is what Balaam did. And it worked like a curse. The teaching of Balaam is the enemy's art to sow compromise into the church. The enemy learned that bringing compromise in from the inside will do more damage to the

church than persecution from the outside. And so you may say “Oh we are so lucky to be in a church that is not persecuted.” Don’t count on it, because all three of my kids and I have spent time with the persecuted church in Sudan and in Kenya and every time we come back from being with the persecuted church we say why don’t we see more Christians in America with that commitment to Jesus Christ? Why is it that the Christians who are under such persecution love Jesus so much more than so many Christians in our country? The answer honestly is compromise, because they are in a battle. They are in a real battle. You’re in the same battle we just don’t know it here. But persecution causes us to cling to Christ. Compromise causes us to fall away.

The enemy has seduced so many Christians in our comfortable church culture. And you just think about this for a second. The enemy has seduced so many Christians into compromise that it is hard to tell the difference between a believer and a non-believer. It is hard in our culture to look at two people and their lifestyles and decide which one of them serves Christ. You have to ask them. And how often when someone says to you, yeah, I’m a Christ follower do you think, really?

You’ve heard me say so often the worse thing in the world that could happen to you is for someone to see you with your Bible and have them say, “Wow! I never knew you were a Christian!”

I mean that is when you just fall on your face and repent before God. I never knew you were a Christian. Compromise dismantles your faith. Persecution causes you to cling to Christ. Compromise dismantles your faith and it eliminates your witness. It waters down the fire that Jesus Christ wants to burn in you. He is a consuming fire. And he wants that fire to burn in us. But the water of compromise puts that fire out to where people around us can’t even tell that the Lord of Glory lives inside of us, and all of the power of creation we have in the Holy Spirit, because our lives have been watered down.

1 Peter 5:8 says,

1 Peter 5:8 (esv)

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

We need to understand in America that devouring is subtle and deceitful and it almost always involves compromise. “I’m not being devoured. I’m just messing around a little while no one is looking.”

That is what devouring looks like. That’s what it looks like here. You don’t really think a lion is actually going to jump on you and physically devour you, do you? The devouring happens in your heart. It happens in the secret places. As the enemy, that lion, sows compromise into your life. That is what is happening in Pergamum. That is what is happening still today.

Pergamum, some see it, it's a little tough entomology, but some see the root word for our word "polygamy." Not all the scholars agree, but some do. If it is true, it fits because the church in Pergamum was a faithful bride of Christ who decided to marry the world and still remain married to Jesus Christ.

Let me tell you how it happened. They began flirting with the world. Just playing around a little bit. And then, they committed spiritual adultery with the world. They became intimate with the world. It's loving the world on Friday night, and loving Jesus on Sunday morning. And then after a while, you decide you can marry both. I can marry the world and still remain married to Jesus. Now you're a spiritual polygamist. And I need you to understand polygamy didn't really work in Utah. And polygamy doesn't work with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is so graceful to you; he will allow you to choose your bridegroom. And if you say "Jesus I am going to forsake you and choose the world," he won't let you do it easily, but you have the choice. But I believe the choice he won't let you make is to say "Jesus can you just be one of my bridegrooms? Can I be married to you and the world, both please?"

I don't think so. Let me tell you why. 2 Corinthians 6:14 and following, write it down. I'm just going to read a portion.

Paul says *How can light live with darkness?* How can you be married to Christ and the world? Verse 15 says *what harmony can there be between Christ and the devil?* You know, right, that the prince of the power of the air is the prince of this world. Verse 15 goes on to say *how can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? And what union can there be between God's temple and idols?* And then Paul says at the end of verse 16 *For we are the temple of the living God.* How can you share that temple with the pagan worship of idols of the world? You can do it, but if you wonder why is my life so not used by Jesus Christ, why don't I experience the power? Why isn't the fire burning? Maybe it's because the water of compromise is flooding your life. If you're married to the world, recognize it. If you're flirting with the world be scared. If you are committing spiritual adultery, be afraid.

Pergamum is the church that became married to the world. The marriage created another problem. We are back in Revelation 2:15. Jesus says,

Revelation 2:15 (esv)

15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Man, it just gets worse. You might think, "Oh, the teaching of Balaam, the teaching of the Nicolaitans, maybe that is like denominational." No, it's not. This is like, really bad. This is really, really bad. I am about to deal with something very difficult, and I want to do it carefully.

The Nicolaitans were a group, a sect. Their name means “ruler over people.” Or “ruler over laity.” It was a group or a sect that wanted a two class structure in the church. And upper class of the priesthood and a lower class of everybody else. In Pergamum, the pagan temples had this clear two class system. In India they call it the “caste” system, where the priests live at this upper level, and the church lives at another level. And there was a group in the church at Pergamum who saw that and like it and said “We need that. We need a two level system and the priests need to be at this level and they need to rule over the people. That’s a good concept.”

And so as the church in Pergamum married the world, they brought this two class system into the church, the priesthood ruling over the laity, or the people. Even though in Matthew 23 in one of Jesus’ most scathing texts, as he is telling the disciples to not be as the Pharisees, he says in Matthew 23:8 and following,

Matthew 23:8–10 (NLT)

8 “ . . . and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters.

9 And don’t address anyone here on earth as ‘Father,’ for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father.

10 And don’t let anyone call you ‘Teacher,’ for you have only one teacher, the Messiah.

Jesus made it clear there is no difference between the leaders of the church and the church. In fact, as the New Testament was written, the only difference we see in the New Testament between the leaders and the laity, the rest of the church, is that the leaders will be held to a stricter judgment. That is it. But besides the fact that facing a stricter judgment there is no difference in the design of the New Testament church between the people who lead and the people who are following – not the leader – but Christ. We are all following Christ together. There is no two class system. We are all brothers and sisters. We are all following Christ together. There is no superiority, there is no ruling over. That’s nowhere in the Bible. There is never an elevation of the clergy over the people.

And so if you consider a church that has kind of that two class system of the priesthood over the church, I need to tell you right now it came from Pergamum. It came from the 300’s A.D.

So let me review a little church history. This is how church history played out in the 300’s. Carefully and in love I need to share this with you. Previously, for 200 years there was tremendous persecution under ten Roman emperors. The last of those Roman emperors was Diocletian. He persecuted the church heavily for ten years. When Diocletian died in the early 300’s there were two Roman generals who were fighting for the position of emperor. One of those Roman generals, his name was Constantine. This is an important name for you to know. History says that in one night before one of the final

battles before the throne of Rome that Constantine saw a vision in the sky before the battle. And the vision he saw was of a cross. And the inscription on the cross in Latin was “By This Sign Conquer.” Now one of two things happened that night, depending on who you talk to. Some people say Constantine became a Christian that night. Some people say Constantine bargained with the devil to bring the church into the state, to make the church the state religion of Rome.

I will tell you there is no historical evidence of any transformation in the life of Constantine. But one thing we do know is that Constantine won that battle and he made Christianity the state sponsored religion. Christianity was now the religion of Rome and the entire Roman army was forced to be baptized as Christians. And huge groups of people, hundreds of people at a time, were forced to be baptized at the point of a sword. And children were christened Christians without any choice of their own, because Christianity was the religion of Rome.

It was here in the mid 300's in Constantine's victory that the unholy alliance of church and state began. It's such a critical part of church history. The government that was killing Christians the year before when the church was so strong was now embracing Christians. And the church bought it. And the church traded persecution for popularity. And they traded suffering for silk. And suddenly instead of hiding in the catacombs and clinging to Jesus, they were lauded, they were paraded around and they were given positions of importance because all of a sudden Christianity was the state's religion.

Formerly, that is when the church was married to the state. So here is what happened, please follow me. And I say this with all the love I have.

At the point of the sword, which is how Rome did it, suddenly this is what occurred. Let me just run through a list.

#1) Pagan temples became Christian churches. Change the name. It's not a pagan temple any more it's a Christian church.

Pagan

#2) Pagan festivals became Christian festivals. Have you ever had someone say, “You know that Christmas is a pagan festival?” It was in the time of Pergamum, in the time of the 300's where that pagan festival became a Christian festival.

#3) The pagan priests were supported by Rome. Rome was now a Christian government, a Christian empire. And so if the pagan priests wanted to still get paid, they had to become Christian priests. Pretty motivating. And so all the pagan priests were immediately baptized as Christian priests so they could stay on Rome's payroll.

#4) The idols were left in the temples. But the temples had become churches. And the idols had to have new names. And so they were given the names of Saints. But the actual idol wasn't changed; just the name of it was changed.

#5) The days to honor pagan gods, were changed to honor Christian Saints. Same day,

same celebration, just the name changed. Listen carefully, please. The rituals that were applied to worship various goddesses of heaven, were all brought together to worship the one goddess of heaven, the mother of Jesus.

That is what happened in the 300's. Constantine took on the title "Pontifex Maximus" which means "*the greatest pontiff*." The church that began in the 300's under Constantine, the leader of that church still holds that title today. The same title. Constantine became the head of the church and the head of Rome. He was carried into church meetings on a golden throne, recognizing his headship over the church. And because of Rome's money and Rome's power, instantly and overnight there was a Christian empire and everything that was previously pagan was now Christian at the point of the sword.

I need to tell you, and I promise you I am being careful. This was the birth of the Roman Catholic Church right here in Pergamum in the 300's under Constantine. It was not under Peter. It was under Constantine. And the reason you can't find any Mary worship in the Bible is because it didn't begin until the 300's when the worship of the goddesses of heaven were changed to the worship of Mary.

Now listen, please. A charismatic Catholic led me to the Lord. Alright? I am here because a Catholic shared Jesus Christ with me. I am not "bagging" on the Catholic Church. That's not the point. But I need you to understand that when the world gets mixed in with the church this is what you have, this is what you end up with. The point here is us. It's us. It's not to point a finger at the Catholic Church or any other church that has brought pagan rituals or routines, even again the double layered ruling of priests over the people. It's all pagan.

And so the next time someone says to you, "You know those Christian celebrations of yours are all pagan," you can say "Yeah, they are. It's a shame. But let's talk about Jesus."

Let's talk about Jesus. If it's in the Bible, hold on to it. If it's not, don't fight for it. Don't fight for it because this is the history of the Christian church – it's not that great. The warning here is to us. It's to compromise in our lives. We're not better than anyone. We have as many pagan leanings, worldly leanings as any other church, as any other denomination. This is about you and Jesus Christ and your allegiance to him and him alone.

Please hear me when I say there is an answer. Is there an answer even for the Religions who have brought in these pagan rituals and approaches? Yes, there is an answer. It's the same answer for the churches as it is for you personally and it is in Revelation 2:16. Repent! Repent! Jesus says,

Revelation 2:16 (esv)

16 Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Man, repent! “Wait a minute, what I am doing here; I think that is the world, I think that is the influence of the world. I need to stop doing that!” That is what repent means. “I need to turn from that and I need to turn to Jesus. I need to run from the things of the world and run to Christ.”

That is repent. And Jesus gives you a little motivation about the long sword that comes from his mouth, his Word. Psalm 46 says ***when the voice of God thunders, the earth melts***. I want to be on the right side of that voice because one day the Word of the Lord is going to melt the heavens and the earth. I want to be on the right side of that. Today is the day to make that choice. Repent, therefore. Turn from the world, turn to Jesus Christ.

Can we? Yes we can. How? By having an ear to hear. By having a heart that receives what Jesus says. Receive, not audibly. Receive in your heart.

Revelation 2:17 says,

Revelation 2:17(a) (esv)

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, . . .

Now look we are out of the valley of this church and going up into the mountaintop experience and Jesus says “If you have an ear to hear, if you will conquer, if you will cling to Christ and not to the world, I will give some of the hidden manna.”

Now listen, have you ever seen that Christian who doesn’t need the world, who doesn’t need the things of the world? The one who doesn’t need notoriety of fame or popularity or power? They just need Jesus. They just need Jesus and sometimes you just see him sitting all alone with Jesus. And they glow; they just glow from the Holy Spirit. Listen, Jesus Christ is the manna that fell from heaven. He explains in John Chapter 6. He says that bread from heaven – that was me. I am the bread of life. And what you need is you need manna that is hidden from the world. And the world thinks that you are a loser and that you don’t have any of the things that it has, but they don’t know. You have the hidden manna. It’s the true life. It’s the abundant life. It’s the life that the world can’t take and it’s the life you won’t lose when this world is vaporized. ***To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, . . .*** It’s the true life, the abundant life. Your job is to conquer, to cling to Christ and to conquer.

Jesus isn’t finished. The second half of verse 17 is all about our freedom. Listen carefully please, because this is the pinnacle of the reward. It’s about our intimacy with Christ.

Revelation 2:17(b) (esv)

17 . . . and [to the one who conquers] I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'

Really this is kind of an unknown reward. The scholars don't really know exactly what Jesus is talking about. But we have some ideas. When there was a ruling court, what we call now a jury, they were given a black stone and a white stone in a quartz setting. And at the end of the trial they would put a stone in a basket. Then they would count up the stones. The black stones meant condemnation. The white stones meant acquittal. The white stone was the stone of freedom for those who had been accused. So there is a chance that this is the white stone. It's a stone of our acquittal, of our freedom.

But it's the new name I want you to hear about. Again verse 17 says there will be ***a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.*** Now please, just try to grasp this. Names mean a lot in the Bible. *Names mean a lot in the Bible.* And there are different names, even now today; there are different names for different levels of intimacy. If you don't know me you might make the mistake of calling me by my father's name – Mr. Shepardson. If you don't know me you might use my legal first name, you might call me David – that's my son's name. If you're my friend, you call me Dave. If you're my really close friend you'll call me Shep. But if you're my child, you'll call me daddy. And if you're my grandchild, you'll call me Pop Pop. And my wife might have a name for me that I can't even tell you. She might have a name for me that is so intimate that nobody knows it except me. And Jesus knows you way more intimate than that. *Jesus knows you way more intimate than that.*

And if you'll cling to him and conquer the temptation of this world, he will give you that stone of acquittal and he'll forgive you and free you from the consequences of your sin. And on that stone he will write a name that no one knows but you. This is a reward of intimacy, of intimacy with the Creator. Of intimacy with the Lord of all creation. You want that stone.

Guys we have got to stand firm in the face of compromise. We have got to cling to Christ to overcome the temptation of this world. We've got to. It's worth it. This is my job – to tell you it's worth it, hold on to Christ. Hold on to Christ. Do not be sucked into this world. Do not marry the world. Don't flirt with it. Don't commit spiritual adultery with the world, cling to Christ and be loyal and pure to him. And if we will, then not only will we receive that white stone, not only will we be acquitted, not only will we feed on the hidden manna, but we will have an intimacy with the Lord of Glory that no one else even knows about. It's worth it.

No matter where you are at, you can repent. If you can hear my voice, you can repent. Repent. Turn from the world that is the broad road to destruction and turn to Jesus Christ. If you are an unbeliever today living for the world, you are in deep trouble. Turn to Jesus.

If you are a believer playing in the world, you are in deep trouble, because the sword that is coming from Jesus' mouth is a sword of judgment. Turn, turn from your polygamy and be loyal to Jesus Christ. Repent. Choose one. Choose wisely because your eternity hangs in the balance.

You can choose the world but it will have eternal consequences for you. You can choose Jesus and it will have eternal consequences for you. I implore you with everything choose Christ.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, we choose you. We choose you. We live in a world that is tempting, it's subtle, it's deceitful, it's alluring and it is death. Open our eyes that we would see, Lord. We want to choose you Jesus. And as we do we know we can't do it in our own strength. We don't even have the power to choose you. And so we pray Holy Spirit you would come, that you would be our power to choose, to repent, to run to you and to cling to you. Come and speak to us now, Lord. May we have ears to hear what your Spirit says to the churches.*

Right now, if that's you, right now, repent. Right now, before Jesus. He will show you a picture in your mind of something that has got you entangled, that has you entrapped, that has you in a stranglehold in the world. He'll show you that picture right now; have the faith to repent, to turn from it. Right where you are, to turn from it and say,

Jesus, I turn from that right now. I turn from the world and from the deceitful allure of the world. And I turn to you. I choose eternity over the world. I choose you, Jesus over the pleasures of the world and my sin. Please give me the strength to choose you.

Just pray with me.

Lord Jesus, come into my life. Fill me with your Spirit. Forgive me of my sin and make me a disciple. I choose you and you alone, Jesus. It's in your name I pray, amen.