

Introduction

If you have your Bible, I'm glad that you're here today. I want to ask you to take it out, open it up... Revelation chapter 2, starting in verse 12 is where we are going to be today. I'm excited to continue on in this series. As you're headed over there, a couple of things that I want to just share with you. First of all, if you're our guest, we are really glad that you're here. We would love it if you would let us know. We're not looking to spam you; we are looking to help you become more like Jesus. We believe that Houston looks more like heaven when Houstonians look more like Jesus. We want to help you look more like Jesus. If you'll just let us know, then we can help you get on that journey. There's a couple of ways you can do that. One way: Take your phone out, scan the QR code that's on the back of the chair there, and that will take you straight to a digital Connect Card. If you're analog and not digital, here's the Connect Card. It's in the seat pocket in front of you. If you're online, there ought to be a link right about now being dropped into the chat. You can click on that, and you can let us know that you are with us. We would really appreciate that. I'll be out on the Back Porch today after worship; I'd love to meet you and answer any questions that you may have. A couple of other things that are coming up. Number one: We have some theology classes that we offer from time to time here at HNW; we call it the HNW Institute. In the fall we offered "How To Read Your Bible." A fancy word for that is Hermeneutics. This spring we are going to offer "Soteriology" or "The Doctrine of Salvation." If you're saying, "What in the world is that?" Good question. The name of the class might best be understood as "How does God save people?" If that's something that you're interested in, you can sign up and be part of that. We are going to have two options: One is an all-day Saturday option... an all-day Saturday option. If you're the kind of person who wants to come in and just get all that information in one shot, you can do that. That's next Saturday... or you can sign up for four different classes that will meet on Wednesday nights across the spring. If either one of those works... it's the same material; it's just up to you. You can sign up at HNW.org/institute. Also... men, we are continuing on in our Ironmen study tonight. We are doing the Kingdom People curriculum that Galen has written. It is outstanding. Last week there was a little bit of confusion. The website said 6... the pastor said 7... so we had two services for the men's group last week, but we're all on the same page this week. It is 7 p.m. tonight over in the Student building. I hope that you will join us for that.

As you're headed over to Revelation chapter 2, let me give a brief introduction to the Bible. The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament gives us a record of God's chosen people Israel and tells us about... they are waiting for... a Rescuer/Redeemer. They used the word "Messiah." The Greek word for "Messiah" is "Christ." So, in the New Testament, we find out who the Christ... the Messiah... is; His name is Jesus. That's why He is known as Jesus the Christ or Jesus Christ. He is the Messiah. We discover that He is not just a teacher or a prophet, but He is, in fact, God in flesh. He is God's very Son, born of a virgin, lives a sinless human life, and then He goes about living this life to show us how to live, dies a salvific (saving) death on a cross, and then conquers the dead by coming back from the grave three days later. Now, when He came back from the dead, you can imagine that created a little bit of a stir, so His followers began telling everyone, "We found the Christ; we found the Messiah." This is the Good News... Jesus is the Chosen One. He is the Messiah... He is the Christ... so we preach that every week. And the way that He taught people to live, we call the "Kingdom"... that's the reality so we teach those same things in this church two thousand years later. One of Jesus' earliest followers was a man named John, and John started following Jesus when he was a kid... probably... and we think that he was writing this letter from which we are reading today... the Book of Revelation—a vision that Jesus gave John... somewhere around the time that John was about 90 years old. So John now is giving us a series of letters that Jesus spoke to him to the massive mega-churches in the mega-cities of his day. So to the

Church in Pergamum today we are going to read about, so let's jump into the Scripture, I'll pray over us, and then we will go to Revelation 2:12.

"God, we thank You for Your goodness, we thank You God for Your Word. Lord, we pray that today we would hear Your Word and then we would obey whatever You tell us. That's what disciples do: they hear and they obey. Lord, for those who are in this room who are not yet disciples, God, I pray You would speak to them and that they would move toward You. I pray this, Lord, in the name of Jesus. Amen."

Revelation 2, starting in verse 12: *"Write to the angel of the church in Pergamum, 'thus says the One who has the sharp double-edged sword. 'I know where you live—where Satan's throne is! Yet you are holding onto My name and did not deny your faith in Me, even in the days of Antipas, My faithful witness who was put to death 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. So repent! Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth. So, let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give 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.'"* This is the Word of the Lord.

Somewhere around 1999-2000, I was at one of my buddies' weddings. I was in the wedding, so I was in a hotel, probably in Dallas. Somewhere around that time, a movie came on that blew my mind... called "The Matrix." I don't know if you guys have ever seen that movie. But "The Matrix," the basic premise is that the reality that we are living in isn't any real at all. It's a construct... it's a shadow. And what's really real are these computer machines controlling things behind the scenes. I found out later that actually "The Matrix" is based on an allegory from Greek philosopher Plato known as "The Allegory of the Cave." I won't go into all of that, but basically, authors have been stealing this for a long time. They've been saying, "Oh no, no, no... this world isn't really real." So you can go all the way back to Alice going through the looking glass, or you could think about the film "Free Guy" that's out right now... when you put on the glasses you see things. But there have been all kinds of different authors and filmmakers over the years that have tapped into this concept that there is a reality that is not seen. Now, the Scripture tells us what that reality actually is. You see, the Bible tells us that it's not a cave, and it's not red pill-blue pill, but there's a spiritual reality around us right now that we cannot see but is, in fact, very real. And according to the Scripture, we do not war against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities of darkness... that there are very real forces against us that an enemy... a very real enemy... wants to steal, to kill, and to destroy. In this church, the church in Pergamum, allows us to take our cue and to see how we might stand and how we might fall as we come against these forces. So let's jump in and see what Jesus' encouragement was to this church as they attempted to hold fast to His name.

1. Fight The External. (v. 13)

So what do we do whenever we are in this reality? Number one: We fight the external. Look at verse 13... *"...yet you are holding onto My name and did not deny your faith in Me..."* Jim Denison has said that if Ephesus was the New York of the day and Smyrna was the San Francisco of the day, then Pergamum would be the Washington DC of the day. This is where the seat of government is. This is probably why Jesus says, "This is where Satan lives..." (Laughter) That's the earliest that I have ever gotten an "Amen" in a sermon right there. (Laughter) That was it. Now listen; think about it. We may have radical devotion to politics or politicians, but we certainly are not required to worship them. But in those days, they would bring

you in and they would say, "Take the incense and burn it... a little pinch of incense," and then in doing so, you would worship Caesar as god. The very first temple set up to the emperor in that area was in this city of Pergamum. I think that's why Jesus says, "That's where Satan is." There are other reasons we could probably say... there was a big temple to Zeus there. Zeus was sometimes known as the savior, in Greek mythology. Maybe it's because there was a temple to the Greek god of healing, Asclepius. You're familiar with this... sometimes the symbol of the staff with a snake wrapped around it is used as a symbol for healing. You've seen, probably, a more modern version of that. By the way, in the temple of Asclepius, if you wanted to go and get healing, you had to spend the night there on the floor, and they had snakes just running around free. And if the snake would just rub up against you, then you would get healing. Well... I guess I'd be dead. I ain't doing that. (Laughter) This is the kind of stuff that was happening here in Pergamum. So Jesus says, "This is where Satan lives." Now, I want to talk about this for just a minute because, to my opinion, it's not the false gods that are the big thing because there are false gods in every city in the ancient world, but I do think it is unique that He says, "Satan lives there." He is talking directly about the governmental powers.

I want us to just take a moment and think about the temptation of a church in the ancient world that is where the government holds sway. Some people say that Jesus refers to Himself as the One with the double-edged sword because He is referring to the fact that Pergamum is a place where capital punishment was allowed. So this is the place where, literally... quite literally... you could be killed for being a professing Christian. Now, I want you to think how you might be tempted to cozy up to the government officials. The church in Pergamum was growing, and certainly there were people who were in the government structure who were coming to faith. And you can imagine those things beginning to rub up against one another. I want you to envision and consider for a moment what it's like then and now for us to have to, as faithful Christians, speak the truth to those who are in power. This is not a Republican-Democrat thing... but in the 1st century and in the 21st century, there is a temptation to say, "If we can just get 'X' into office, then everything will be okay." There's also a temptation to say, "If so-and-so gets elected, we're going to hell in a handbasket." Right? And this sometimes leads people to place their faith in political power more than they ought.

I was always impressed with one of my mentors... he has met with multiple US presidents over the years. You've never seen a picture of him with a president. He says that his philosophy is, "Go in through the back door, speak the truth, pray, go out through the back door." He says, "My job is not to be in a photo op. My job is to give spiritual counsel and to tell the truth." If you're a politician in this room, I love you... (Laughter) You got that? No offense to politicians, but for most politicians, their goal is to stay in office. This means that, as the cultural winds shift, they may need to shift their positions. Has anybody here... I mean, I've heard rumors... ever seen a politician change their stance because suddenly it wasn't popular anymore? (Laughter) Anybody ever seen that? So what's the temptation? If you are a pastor or if you are a church who is close to that center of power, it's intoxicating. It feels good to be invited to the governor's mansion; it feels good to get invited to the White House. And if you're in that sphere, it's tempting... whenever they change their position... to say, "Well... you know. I can probably change mine too." Right? This is the thing that we have to be aware of... that it's easy, sometimes for us to justify changing our position because the person we prefer is in power. Proximity to power ought not to guide our theology because we ought to believe in what's really real. Back to that reality thing. What's really real? What's really real is Jesus is the King. And what's really real is no matter who is in whatever office, He continues to rule and to reign. Now, sadly, over the years I have known pastors and churches who would change their particular theological positions so they could keep getting invites to the positions of power. Historically, Baptists have been strong supporters of religious freedom for this very reason. Whenever we need to say

something that isn't necessarily popular, we want to be able to do so without worrying about the repercussions of having been cozied up to those who are in power. The job of the Church is not to hold influence in those places... it is to speak the truth. I think of pastors like Oscar Romero in Latin America who, when offering up the Lord's Supper, was shot by a sniper from the back of his church because he was speaking out for the poor in his country. I think of one of my personal heroes Dietrich Bonhoeffer who spoke out against the Nazis and lost his life for that. MLK famously said, "The Church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state but rather the conscience of the state." The point being, the Church needs to be separate. If you go back and study history, any time that the Church cozies up with the government, bad stuff happens. Do you know what happens whenever you mix faith and politics? You get politics.

So here, we're getting a very strong exhortation from Jesus. He is saying, "I am proud of you because you are standing firm against these external forces when political sway is coming up against you. The reality is, I am on the throne, and you can be assured that no matter who the emperor is, I am still ruling and reigning." Now, clearly, the Church was being faithful because they mentioned Antipas. And Antipas was taken, probably to the very place of the emperor's temple. And probably there was told, "Antipas, just take this incense and if you'll throw a little bit into the fire and say, 'Kaiser Kurios' (Caesar is Lord), then you'll be fine and we'll let you go." And Antipas took the incense, probably, threw it on the ground and said "Christos Kurios" (Christ is Lord) and they killed them. And Jesus says, "I'm proud of you because you're holding fast to My name; your politics are not defined by whatever is popular. Your politics are not defined by whatever way the cultural winds are blowing but instead, your politics are defined by Me. You know that I am the One who is in charge." Some of us are here and say, "Well, Steve... that's great, but I don't live in Washington DC. I'm not really in the political sphere." That's fine... but you probably know something about this. Anybody here got some people in your family or your business and they just kind of keep saying, "Do you have to follow Jesus so publicly? Do you have to be so up front and out there about it? It kind of just makes everybody uncomfortable because you're always talking about what God's teaching you and what you're reading in the Bible, and you've got that Jesus music on your radio. You're going to Church all the time. It's fine if you want to believe it; could you kind of just keep it to yourself?" Sometimes we know that whenever we follow after Jesus, that's going to rub up against reality and that we have to choose which reality means more to us. Don't feel like you have to go along to get along, necessarily. Hold fast to His name... hold fast to His name. And Jesus commends it here to the church at Pergamum.

2. Correct The Internal. (vv. 14-16)

Here's the thing that's interesting. He just doesn't talk about external forces. He then goes on to verses 14 through 16 and He says, "Now listen, sometimes there are going to be some external forces, but every now and then things are going to be smuggled in... trojan-horsed... into the Church, and you're going to have to look out for those too." So look at these verses... verses 14 through 16: *"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. So repent! Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of My mouth."* So it's not just always about fighting the external, it's also about correcting the internal. In other words, sometimes things can come into the Church that can change the nature of the Church in a way that will actually end up hurting the Church. While the church at Pergamum was doing a great job holding out against these external forces, they apparently were not doing a good job of resisting the internal forces. People were like, "Okay... I won't worship other gods; that's pretty obvious." But what are these other things He is talking about? You read in those verses, "I saw

Balaam and Balak and Nicolaitans... what is He saying?" In the Book of Numbers, there was a story where Balak, King of the Moabites, came to prophet named Balaam and said, "Balaam, curse the Israelites for me." And Balaam went to go curse the Israelites, but the Lord said, "You can't curse them." So Balak was angry and wanted to kill Balaam, but Balaam said, "Hey, look; I've got a plan that's even better than me cursing them. Here's my plan; are you ready? Just get the Israelite men to marry Moabite women, and when you do, they will start worshipping other gods." This is what Jesus is referring to. Now, we don't know exactly what the Nicolaitans taught, but we assume something similar to what is being referred to here between Balaam and Balak. And Jesus gives two specific things. Number one, He says, "Meat sacrificed to idols." What in the world is that? If you go back and read in 1 Corinthians chapter 8, Paul gives a little more of an explanation. This is basically what was happening. Folks would go to worship these other gods, and in doing so, they would take an animal as a sacrifice. The priest would offer up that animal as a sacrifice and would keep a portion and then would bless the other part of that animal in the name of this false god and would then give it over to the family or to the folks who brought it. They would then go prepare it and eat it... typically in the temple or near the temple... as a worship meal to the new god. Now, this was a little controversial in the early Church because the early Christians... they are converting out, they are becoming believers, and still they have family members who are part of these other cults... worshipping Zeus or whatever other gods. So they are saying, "Hey, come on over here and join us for our worship feast," and the Christians are like, "Well, these gods aren't real anyway... and hey... free food." So they are going over there. "Yah... I would love to have your free food." But, according to 1 Corinthians 8, it was tripping up some people who had weaker faith, and they were thinking, "Oh wait, we actually believe in those gods too. So we don't want confusion, people thinking we can worship more than one god."

The other thing that was causing a problem was sexual immorality. In the 21st century in the United States, we like to think of ourselves as very sexually advanced. I have a news flash for you: There is nothing we are doing sexually in the 21st century that they had not already thought of and were practicing in the first century. The Bible has a very straightforward sexual ethic, and this is what it is. There are two options for sex. Number one: Sex is reserved for a man and a woman in the covenantal relationship of marriage. Or number two: You abstain. Those are the two options given in the Scripture for sex. Both of them, according to Paul, are good. Both of them are holy, and both of them teach us about the nature of God. In this one, in marriage, a man and a woman reflect the mystery of the relationship between Christ and Church, according to Ephesians 5, and they show a faithfulness to one another. In doing so, what they do is they reflect the nature of God and unconditional love. So you love this person unconditionally for life. You find out all their problems, all their warts, and you stay with them. That's the love of God. Right? Because God sees all our flaws and He stays with us. Or you abstain and you use those energies instead to serve God fully and completely and you say, "I don't need a sexual relationship to give me identity or purpose; I find that in my relationship with Christ," and you give energy to serve that. In other words, we have option A and option B. Most of us would say, "I would like option C, D, E, F, or G." We come up with other ways that we would say that we want to celebrate things sexually.

The reason that I mention this is because both of these were common internal pressures in the Church. I just want you to think about this for a second. Can you imagine you grow up worshipping Zeus your entire life, and as you're worshipping Zeus, you hear the Gospel one day, you come to faith in Jesus? You've come to faith in Jesus and now that you have, you suddenly realize the rest of your family... mom, dad, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins... they're all still down there at the Zeus temple and they're saying, "Hey, are you going to be at the worship feast on Tuesday?" What are you going to say? It's going to be weird

when you say "No" isn't it? It's going to be weird. So you can see how people would start to go, "Well, maybe it's not that big of a deal."

At the same time, you can also think about sexual immorality... sexual behavior. These people were now... in about 90 AD... we're certainly in the second generation of believers. We've got people, at this point, who have been born into houses who believed in Jesus Christ. They are born into Christian families. We might, in some instances, have a third generation being born into Christian families. They've grown up in the Church, they've heard the teachings of Jesus and yet, at the same time, what they've said is, "I reject the Church's position on sexuality." Now this would be a very strong pull because, in these cities, places in the worship of Artemis, Venus, Aphrodite... do you know how you worshiped? You hired a prostitute. You can see why these were popular cults. There was such a laissez-faire attitude toward sexuality in the ancient world... so much so that Demosthenes wrote, "We have prostitutes for the sake of pleasure, we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation, we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and for having a faithful guardian of our household affairs." Can you hear the low view of women in the ancient world? And can you also hear how radical the sexual ethic of the early Christian Church would have been in the first century? The same way it's radical today. I mean, it would have just been plain odd.

Listen... our theology is odd... do you ever think about what we believe? Well, there was this middle-eastern guy... He was actually God... stay with me, okay? Then He never sinned... not once. Wait, it gets crazier. Then when He died, somehow His death paid my sin penalty, and He came back to life three days later... Oh, rose up to heaven, sits right now at the right hand of God, and one day He is going to come back and judge everything, but in the meantime, He is ruling over the universe. If you actually say that out loud, people would be, "Somebody call a psychologist, and then can we get someone over here?" That's crazy, right? That's odd. But most of the time, people are like, "Well, you know, Christians seem to be these good people... so you can believe what you want to believe. Just kind of keep it quiet." But the problem is, in the 1st century and in the 21st century, we keep having to live it out, and it doesn't really go well. What happens is you start to live this very different sexual ethic, or you start to live in these very different ways, and it begins to become a point of contention. In fact, this step is so old, whenever Gentiles... not Jews... were coming to faith, they said, "Now, do we have to do all the Jewish feasts like Passover and circumcision... all this kind of different stuff?" And they said, "No, no, no... we're going to write you a letter and tell you what you have to do." Listen to this... Acts 15:29, the first-ever church business meeting... they wrote a letter to these Gentiles coming to faith and they said, *"Abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. You will do well if you keep yourselves from these things."* From the very beginning, the Church has been saying, "You are going to live in such a way that people are going to think you're weird. You're going to be seen as weird, and if you can't handle that, you're going to struggle." That was radical then; it's radical now. Most of the time, in our culture... sexually speaking... most people think Christians are prudes... or old-fashioned or bigots or homophobes... and what I want you to hear is that's not the case. There is zero hatred in anything I'm saying. In a room this size, when I start talking about sex and I'm saying, "There's basically A or B in the Scripture"... and people start sweating. They're like, "I'm not doing that." Or they're thinking, "Someone in my family is not doing that." Here is what I want you to hear. There is zero hatred toward anybody in this room. There is zero fear toward anybody in this room. As Christians, what we believe is that this is God's created order, and the way that you best experience life is how God designed it. So, if you live in line with that, you will experience more joy, more freedom, more peace. You may think and you may even say, "Steve, that ain't going to be easy." Welcome to Christianity. My struggles may not be the same as yours. Guys... I have sexual desires. They're not always in line with the Scripture. What do I have to do with that? I have to squash those. I have desires also that are out of line with what the Scripture teaches

that have nothing to do with sex, but I have to still squash those too... because holiness is one of the things that God asks of us. Over the years, I have stood here in this pulpit, and I've said things like this... "Hey, look... if you're living together and you're not married... you're in a sexual relationship... I want to challenge you to do one of two things: either stop having sex or get married." I've said that before. And do you know what? We've had people who have said, "Okay, I'll get married." Over the years I've stood up here and I've said, "Hey, if you're in a same-sex sexual relationship... I'm not saying you can't still have that friendship... but I'm telling you that the Scripture says that's not the best sexual decision for you, so you should step out of that. Continue the friendship but step out of the sexual side of the relationship. I do these sorts of things, not because I'm looking to win a popularity contest. But culture tells us, over and over, that sexuality is the supreme expression of identity... "Who I have sex with, how I have sex... that's the ultimate expression of who I am." Now listen, with regard to human history, that idea has been around for about five minutes, but it has become so prevalent that we have begun to believe it. What I want you to hear today is that sexuality does not define you because you don't have sexual identity... you have identity in Christ. You are who God says that you are.

I've been listening to this album the last couple of days, and there's a song on it... this line that says, "I am who the I AM says I am. And I like that. You are not who culture says that you are. Now here's the thing... as you begin to practice this and think this, people may believe that you're being bigoted or hateful, but that's not the case at all. You're actually saying, "I'm wanting to live a life that's pleasing to God." I want you to be most alive in Jesus. Here's the thing that I'm realizing... Holiness is the highway on which God's Spirit moves. I want to say that again: Holiness is the highway on which God's Spirit moves. Many of us in this room believe in Jesus. So listen, you say, "Yah, I believe in Jesus; He is God's Son, etc., etc."... and then you live like hell. Then what happens? "Well, I never feel God move in my life." Well, of course not; you've quenched the Spirit because you're living a life of rebellion. The way that God's Spirit moves is when you surrender your life in holiness. By the way, this just isn't about sex, right? People say, "Well, I want God to move in my life." Well... you're greedy; start being generous. God can move then. "I want God to move in my life." Good; you're holding a grudge; be forgiving. "I want God to move in my life." Good; then you need to learn to be more loving. "I want God to move..." You can make the list go on and on. God uses holiness to craft a path into our heart, and as He cuts through our hard heart in holiness, the Spirit can move in after it. This is the truth. Listen... if you choose to rebel against God, you quench the Spirit in your life and in this church. Now, I want to see God move in my church... live a life of holiness. Disciples do two things: hear and obey. That's it. Many of us are not seeing God move because we won't obey. Listen... Jesus isn't just talking about sex here; He might be talking about sex to this church in this moment, but He is saying, "I want all of you. And as you surrender, then I can move." This is the way that it works.

So what does this mean for us? Listen, we have to maintain a separateness and a holiness, and it's not always easy. Some of you all know, it makes some of you uncomfortable. I am good friends with many Imams and Rabbis in the city. Did you know that Friday night I was asked to speak in a mosque? How many other pastors are saying that on Sunday? (Clapping) Yah; I'm excited about it. I didn't exactly preach like that; I want you to know that. I was only given five minutes, but what I told them was, in my mind, a very short easy-to-understand version of the Gospel. This is what I want you to hear. I don't compromise on my theology with them... but I also am not going to abandon them. I love them. If you're here today and you're saying, "I don't know if I can jump all the way in on this Jesus thing yet; some of these teachings are hard." Here's what I want you to hear. I will walk with Rabbis and Imams who do not believe what I believe, because God tells me to love my neighbor and I love them, no matter if they believe what I believe or not. If you're in this room, keep walking with us. There is no judgment; there's no hatred. We love you;

we want you to hear the Word of God and we believe, if you hear the Word of God over time and begin to live in holiness, God will move in you. We believe that... we truly believe it. And we would welcome you into the family of God. (Clapping)

So listen, it would be a lot easier if I stood up here and said, "God doesn't care who you sleep with." I'd be a lot more popular. But the Scripture says it over and over... says it in the same way... and I know it's hard for some of us to hear, but what I want us to understand is that God extends love... the Church extends love... because God wants us to have the best life possible. I'm going to say that again: God wants you to have the very best life possible. Many of us are convinced that God... if we follow Him... will make our life worse. Wrong. You'll have the best human life possible if you follow the teachings of Jesus... because that's how you've been created. So this is why Jesus says at the end... "Look, if this is you... repent." "Repent" is just a Greek word "metanoia" that means "change your mind." Stop thinking that way and start thinking the way of Jesus. Romans chapter 12... *"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Get your mind changed today. If you've walked in here thinking one thing; walk out of here thinking another thing. If you walked in here not following Jesus; walk out of here following Jesus. Change your mind today so you can have the best life because God made you for that life, but that life is a life of obedience to Him. That's how you get that kind of life. Change your mind.

3. Enjoy The Eternal (v. 17)

So now let's look at verse 17: *"Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna."* Why would we choose today to change our minds? I think God wants us to fight the external, correct the internal... but here's the big thing... Number 3: He wants us to enjoy the eternal... enjoy the eternal. Why would we today choose to change our minds? And this is the answer: Because there is a different reality. There is a different reality that we can't see.

Anybody here ever go to a nice steak house? Have you ever been to one of those? You go to the ones with the linen tablecloth... "Wow... I've got to save up my pennies to go to this place." A big deal... celebrate... kind of place. You sit down and the first thing they do is they always bring a basket of bread. We're in a safe place, guys. (Laughter) Would anybody confess that you know then in 18 minutes you're going to be eating a perfect medium-rare filet, and yet... you filled up on the bread before they brought out the steak. (Laughter) Anybody want to confess that in this safe space? There you are. We've all done it... right? We start getting the shakes... "There's the carbs... I feel them." Because they make you feel good in the moment, but you know that if you can hold out, the steak is always going to make you feel way more satisfied. Right? You know it. Here's the thing: The world is setting a basket of bread before you. Sexually, many of us have desires... we have desires... and the world says, "Just have some of this bread." And Jesus is saying, "If you'll hang on, I'll bring something way better." The world says, "Man, if you will just go ahead and chase after money, just enjoy this bread... or fame... just enjoy this bread." The world is setting up the basket of bread right now and saying, "Hey... just enjoy this... That other stuff, that's not really the big deal." And Jesus says, "No, no, no... if you will conquer, I'll give you hidden manna." Now manna, if you recall, is the bread that God gave the Israelites in the desert. It is bread from heaven. Jesus says, "I have hidden manna; I've got a secret stash that nobody knows about." How good is it if Jesus is hiding it and saving it? It's good. And He says, "I can satisfy your deepest longings; don't fall for the bread basket of the world." Scripture tells us that the Supper of the Lamb is coming. Let's give up on the bread of the world, and let's hold out for the Supper of the Lamb. Because God will satisfy your deepest longings in Him. Jesus Christ is our greatest and best and ultimate and supreme satisfaction. He doesn't want you to trick yourself into believing you're satisfied in the world because here's what you know. You eat the bread

and then you're so full you can't enjoy the steak. And what happens? You get in the car and you're hungry again. Now you've got to drive through Whataburger... (Laughter) ...when really, if you would have just exercised some self-restraint and had the steak in the first place, you'd be full all the way until the next morning. The truth is that God is saying, "I have supreme satisfaction if you'll just wait on Me. Do what I tell you." When you obey the Lord, you'll find satisfaction that you did not know you could have. That's the hidden manna.

Now look at that next part... that white stone. He says, *"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."* I read about this white stone a lot this week. I found a lot of different options. One of them was that it's a ticket to a banquet. I like that. But the one that just made my heart come alive was that, in the ancient world, there was a tradition called "tessera hospitalis"... the "stone of hospitality" in Latin. They would take a white stone and they would break it in half. You know those necklaces... the heart—people take one half, and the other half has an inscription on it. "You remember your BFF through it." Kay Jewelers did not invent that, you guys. (Laughter) The "tessera hospitalis"... the stone broken in half. You'd take a white stone so you could see writing on it, and they would write their name on it and then they would exchange it. Whenever I'm at my house, I would remember my friend's name. "You know what? I remember my friend, I can pray for my friend; I'm thankful for my friend. I'm going to see my friend again, hopefully; and when I do, we'll each have our rock and we'll bring it together." And Jesus says, "I'm going to give you a 'tessera hospitalis' but instead of writing your actual name on it... I'm going to write a new name on it that nobody knows." Now, I've stood in this pulpit enough; you might be able to guess what the name is that I want to see on my stone one day: The wounds I have in my life and my past... I would love to see one day the word "Adopted" on that stone. I would love to see the word "Loved" on that stone... "Accepted" on that stone. I don't know about for you. I'm sure when we're in this place talking about some difficult things: sexuality, heart kind of issues. Maybe you've been abused and I'm thinking "I have these desires in me that feel like they were put in me by outside forces... by people I didn't even want." And you'd want to see the word "Clean" on a stone one day. You would love to see the word "Redeemed" on your stone. You would love to see the word "Accepted" on your stone. You would love to see the word "Called." You would love to see the word "Forgiven." You would love to see the word "Son" or "Daughter." I don't know what's going to be on your stone, but I can't tell you this... It's going to address the deepest longing in your heart. And right now Jesus has it. He's got it up on the mantle, and He is looking at it... for every one of us. He says, "There's going to be a day when I'm going to come back and I'm going to hand it to you... and you're going to look at it and you'll say, 'How did You know what I needed to hear more than anything else?'" He knows. When you place your faith in Jesus Christ, the longings that you have to take to the breadbasket of the world... can I tell you something? Satan wants to fill you up on carbs, you guys... because he wants to distract you from what Jesus wants to give you which is a brand-new name and identity as a child of God. That's what He wants. Jesus wants to give you life and freedom and hope. Jesus wants to give you a life that means more than you have ever experienced. Jesus wants to give you all of these things, but you have to come to Him. He says, "Hey, if you'll conquer, I'll give you the hidden bread of heaven... and I'll give you a new name."

Friends, today my exhortation is that we walk away from the bread of the world, we hold onto and hold out for the Supper of the Lamb, that we choose life in Jesus Christ, and that we allow Him to be our reality. This world is a shadow, but the substance is Christ. Would you pray with me?

"Father, we thank You for this moment... thank You for those who are hearing Your Word today, and Lord we ask that You would speak to them right now... Father, that You would let them know that they are loved

and that they are pursued by You. Father, I want to pray for two groups of people. Number one: The people who have, for whatever reason, yet to say 'Yes' to You. Father, I pray if there's anybody in this room right now that needs to place their faith in Jesus, that they would say, 'I walked in this room, I didn't believe in Jesus; I'm walking out though, I'm now following Him.'" Nobody is looking around; if that's you, I want to pray for you. Would you just raise your hand right now so I can pray for you today? If you say, "Yep, I'm putting my faith in Jesus Christ today." We had one person in the earlier service. Would love to see another person today say "Yes" to Jesus Christ. Okay, I got you. Anybody else? Okay. We just had somebody say they are ready to follow Jesus. Thank you, Lord, for that. Number two: Some of us today, we've just confessed that we've been snacking at the bread basket, trying to fill up on things the world offers instead of holding out for the ultimate satisfaction in Jesus. If that's you, I want to pray for you. Nobody looking around... would you just raise your hand up so I can pray for you? Okay... anybody else? Okay... I got you. Anybody else?

"Lord, for these two groups of people... for the one who raised his hand and said 'I'm ready to follow You'... and maybe for some I didn't see... Lord, I pray You would give them new life... God, that they would pray right now that they give their heart to You, their life to You, and make You their Lord. And Father, for those who've said they have been snacking at the bread basket, Lord, I pray that You give them the reminder that ultimate satisfaction comes in You... that You are supreme... that You are worth it. And Lord, we pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen."

Here's what I want to do. If you've just said "Yes" to Jesus for the first time... you raised your hand or maybe you didn't raise your hand, but you were feeling it... would you just let us know? There are a couple of ways you can do that, but the easiest way is to take out your phone and just text the word "Jesus" to the number that's up on the screen. We're not going to pin you down; we're not going to hurt you. We want to help you because when you start following Jesus, there are some questions... How to read your Bible... What to do... Do you need to be baptized... getting whatever help you might need at church in whatever area. We want to help you with that. All you've got to do is text the word "Jesus." Now, you can text other things in: "I'm new" ... "Prayer request" ... "I want to be baptized" ... whatever. We're going to follow up with you. But if you just raised your hand, I want you to text the word "Jesus." You can also use this card if that's easier. Number two: If you said, "Hey... I'm struggling..." I just want you to know that I'm praying for you... I'm with you... and I'm going to praying for those who raised their hands this week, saying, "Lord, help them to find ultimate satisfaction."