

Text: Rev. 2:12-17

Title: "The Son of Man's Local Church at Pergamum"

Time: 3/26/2017 am

Place: NBBC

Intro – On October 28, 2009, CBS News published an article titled, "Evangelists Target Unreligious New England." I would like to begin this morning by sharing with you a small portion of that article:

"Dead churches are a familiar story in New England, which recent surveys indicate is now the least religious region in the country. But some see opportunity in a place where America's Christian faith laid its roots.

"'You look at this area and it's a great area of potential, it's a great area of need,' said Redeemer Fellowship pastor Chris Bass, a Houston native.

"Several Christian denominations see New England as a 'mission field' - a term often associated with unchurched, foreign lands. As they evangelize and work to plant new churches, they speak of possibility, but also frustration. The area's highly educated population is skeptical and often indifferent to their faith.

"'About once every hour, I give up. It's tough, man,' said a half-joking Joe Souza, a Southern Baptist missionary working north of Boston. 'It's like, you found a cure for cancer and you want to give it away and nobody wants it.'

"Trinity College's American Religious Identification Survey released this year showed New England overtaking the Pacific Northwest as the least religious region in the country. Twenty-two percent of respondents here said they have no religious faith of any kind, highest in the country.

"In a Gallup poll this year, all six New England states were in the Top 10 least religious in the country, with Vermont,

New Hampshire, Maine and Massachusetts claiming the top four spots.

“New England's religious apathy has developed over decades, but it's striking where the Pilgrims landed seeking religious freedom and the great 18th-century preacher Jonathan Edwards helped spark the First Great Awakening. Stately churches near town centers all over the region are reminders of the central importance religion once held.”

One of the encouraging truths about Revelation's seven local churches of the Son of Man is the truth that CBS News could have written an article like that about every one of these ancient cities where Jesus was building His church.

Pergamum was no different in that regard. One commentator tells us that this town was “richer in temples and cults than Ephesus.” That is a poor way to be richer. The city boasted a sprawling and massive Acropolis that was home to the temple of the Emperor Trajan, the great altar of Zeus Soter (Savior), the sanctuary and massive library of Athena Nikephoros (the one who brings victory), the temple of Dionysos, the god of wine, ecstatic revelry and the theatre, and a theatre that could seat 10,000 people. Down below stood the round temple of Asklepios, the Greek god of healing whose pole with a snake on it is the symbol of the American Medical Association.

In that context, the Son of Man has a local church, and He writes them a letter which we have to study together this morning as we minister in the pagan place called New England. Our outline for this letter will have its standard four points this morning: (1) the Son of Man's glory in the church; (2) the Son of Man's encouragement of the church; (3) the Son of Man's correction of the church; and (4) the Son of Man's reward for the church.

I. The Son of Man's glory in the church (v. 12).

Ill: Today, you can travel to Pergamum and see the ruins of their great acropolis. You can go to the Pergamum museum in Berlin, Germany, and look at the broken statues of the city's gods and try to remember their former glory. One gallery I looked at even had a picture of a couple of dung beetles hard at work among the ruins of Pergamum, which seemed to be a fitting metaphor for how the former glory of this pagan palace is now gone.

Appl: By way of contrast, all over the world today, local churches like our own are still reading the letter to the local church at Pergamum and still ministering the gospel to our dark pagan world. I have to spend time this morning explaining who these ancient gods are because nobody knows them anymore. They have been left to the beetles of that area along with the animal dung that can be found there.

How do we explain that? The explanation can be found in the glory of the Son of Man in the church. We are told that His glory includes a double-edged sharp sword. In Revelation this sword is used by the Son of Man to destroy His enemies (1:16, 2:12, 2:16, 19:15, 19:21).

I am sure that the glory of those pagan deities was impressive and intimidating to this local church, but today we can see who was truly glorious – the One with the double-edged sharp sword. He defeated His enemies then, and He will do so again today. We can minister and serve Him as a local church with great confidence in His glorious sword. We have a future that the pagan world that dominates everything now does not. Do we want to be a part of that future?

III: Martin Luther understood what this meant for his ministry for Christ. He wrote the song we sang this morning, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," which has been called "The Battle Hymn of the Reformation." Luther's original title for the hymn was "From the 46th Psalm: God Is Our Refuge and Strength." This October is the 50th anniversary of our local church and the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Both of those anniversaries can be celebrated only because the Son of Man's glory in the church includes a sharp double-edged sword. Luther put it this way in the third verse of his hymn:

"And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him."

That one little word is this sword. Verse 16 calls it the sword of the Son of Man's mouth. We can minister in our local church ministry with the glory of the Son of Man shining upon us, which includes the sword that defeats all His enemies.

II. The Son of Man's encouragement of the church (v. 13).

Appl: Once again the Son of Man's encouragement of His church begins with the phrase, "I know." He shepherds His churches as the one who knows them intimately and personally. He knew two things about the church in Pergamum that He wanted to encourage them in:

(1) I know where you dwell, even where Satan's throne is. Jesus knows the degree of difficulty in our place of ministry. He understands the hardness of the ground we are casting His seed on. He has called us to this section of the harvest field already accounting for this. He understands that ministry at our church may be more difficult for a family in your situation than it would be somewhere else. But still, He desires to have churches in places that can be described as Satan's throne.

(2) I know that you hold my name and did not deny my faith. Jesus sees His name and His faith as related in an important way. His name requires that we believe certain things are true about Him. We call upon His name while believing this truth. That is how the name and the faith of Jesus go together.

One of the names of Jesus is *Savior*, and the faith of Jesus says that He is the only one who can save the sinner from His sins by His atoning death on the cross and His bodily resurrection from the grave. *Savior* is a name that Pergamum gave to Zeus Soter, but this little church held Jesus's name and His faith.

One of the names of Jesus is *Lord*, and the faith of Jesus says that He is our sovereign king whom we must obey. Pergamum gave that name to Trajan and other emperors.

One of the names of Jesus is *Captain of the Hosts*, and the faith of Jesus says that the entire battle is His and for His purposes and glory. Pergamum gave that name to Athena Nikephoros (the one who brings victory).

One of the names of Jesus is *Bridegroom*, and the faith of Jesus confesses that the church is to be His pure bride. Pergamum worshipped Dionysus, the god of wine and revelry.

One of the names of Jesus is *Great Physician*, and the faith of Jesus confesses that He alone can heal the sin-sick soul. Pergamum was focused on healing the body at the temple of Asklepios.

Antipas is not known to us today. But he was certainly known to the Lord. The church is commended for holding the name and not denying the faith of Jesus even during the days in which this faithful servant of Christ gave his life for that name and that faith once delivered to the saints. Antipas was Jesus's witness and faithful one at great personal cost. This local church was that too. Are we?

III. The Son of Man's correction of the church (vv. 14-16).

Appl: We spent considerable time explaining the nature of this problem two weeks ago when we saw the church at Ephesus being commended for its hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which deeds Jesus also hates (2:6). This was basically the problem of compromise with paganism through the eating of meats sacrificed to idols, which compromise ultimately led to very loose morals and even the sin of fornication in the church.

What is remarkable about the church at Pergamum is not that they could do this, but that they could do this when so much else was right in the church. They held Jesus's name and had not denied the faith in a very difficult place, and yet they were being affected by a teaching that encouraged them to compromise with the paganism of the world.

Today, I think the paganism of the world's music and entertainment are especially influential on otherwise good and godly local churches. If we find that compromise in our heart, what must we do? Repent. Why? Because Christ will

have to treat all such compromise with the enemy as He does the enemy in the end (v. 16). The sword that destroys Christ's enemy can also chasten His church.

IV. The Son of Man's reward for the church (v. 17).

Appl: The reward to those who overcome by faith in Christ is here twofold: (1) hidden manna, and (2) a white stone personalized with a name of some kind. For most of Israel's history, manna was hidden in the temple in the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies (Heb. 9:4-8). In John 6:31, 49, Jesus claims to be the new manna, the Bread of Life who came down from heaven. Jesus is hidden from us now, behind the veil as it were, but soon we shall see Him as He is and be nourished by close communion with Him.

And He will give us a white stone. In first-century courtrooms in Asia, jury members would cast a vote on one charged with a crime, either innocent or guilty. They would present a white pebble if their vote was innocent, and a black one if it was guilty. Jesus says I am going to give you a white pebble. I will vote that you are innocent in the courtroom of God. That stone is going to have a new name on it that only you will know. That description indicates to me that I should not try to explain to you this morning what name is going to be on your white stone. What I do know is that it will be a keepsake for you, a precious and enduring reminder of all that Christ has done for you in voting your innocence.

Conclusion: All of us who have ears need to hear about the hidden manna and the white stone. They are for those who overcome.

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5).

Have you been born of God this morning? Have you overcome the world by faith? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching