



Text
Revelation 2:12-17

Topic
Jesus tells the believers in Pergamos that Satan has taken up residence in their city.

Title
"Please Don't You Be My Neighbor"

Which is harder: To live for Jesus or to die for Him?

Sadhu Sundar Singh is credited as the first missionary to cross the Himalayan Mountains to take the Gospel to Nepal and Tibet. It was no beginners loop. He was known as "the apostle with the bleeding feet."

At thirty-six years of age, he left for what would be his last trip. He never returned. Was he martyred? We'll find out in Heaven. We know that it was definitely on his mind. Found in his journal was this entry: "It is easy to die for Christ. It is hard to live for Him. Dying takes only a few minutes - or at worst an hour or two - but to live for Christ means to die daily to myself."

Some of your favorite Christian authors agree with Sadhu:

- Oswald Chambers - "It is easier to die than to lay down your life day after day."
- Charles Spurgeon - "To die daily is harder by far than to die once."
- Elisabeth Elliot - "It is far easier to die as a martyr than to live faithfully day after day."

➔ For the believers in first-century Pergamos, the real challenge wasn't *dying* for Jesus - it was *living* for Him day by day.

➔ For the believers in 21st-century America, the real challenge isn't *dying* for Jesus. It is *living* for Him day by day.

Rev 2:12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:'

John's Revelation was carried from church to church along a postal route in what is now Turkey. In each city it was read aloud by the church's "angel," a term *Strong's Concordance* imputes to the pastor.

Your Bible may call this city Pergamum, not Pergamos. You'll hear it both ways.

John described Jesus in chapter one with "a sharp two-edged sword" coming from His mouth. There are 5 biblical references to a sharp (two-edged) sword coming out of Jesus' mouth, all in the Revelation.

The *Revelation* draws on over 800 Old Testament references. Jewish readers would catch many allusions we often miss due to our limited familiarity with those Scriptures.

When the *Revelation* describes a sharp sword coming from the Lord's mouth, a Jew would recall Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah: "He has made His mouth like a sharp sword..." (Isaiah 49:2).

This sharp, two-edged sword imagery propels us forward to the Second Coming of Jesus. The Bible says the Messiah will "strike the nations" with this sword.

But not now. We live prior to the Second Coming and therefore we follow First Coming Jesus in our wielding of the Sword of the Spirit.

When Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away, He teaches that the Kingdom is advanced not by violence but by the sword of God's Word, wielded in love. This *weapon* doesn't strike down enemies - it calls them to repentance, even at the cost of our own suffering.

The early Church understood this well: Their victory came not through the sword in the hand, but through faithful witness, obedience, and - when necessary - martyrdom.

- It is an oversimplification, but First-Coming Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
- Second-Coming Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who is worthy to carry out the plan of redeeming and restoring mankind and creation.

Here are a few examples of how we are to wield the sword now. They are in no particular order:

- A Sword of the Spirit Christian settles with his brother on the way to court, allowing himself to be defrauded rather than risk hurting the testimony of Jesus Christ.
- He or she uses only spiritual weapons, never introducing the methods of the world.
- We can continue in the joy of the Lord and of His salvation no matter our circumstances. In fact, circumstances are understood to be able to work to our advantage.
- We pray without ceasing, do everything to the glory of God, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord.
- We delight in the practical application of the 'one-another' verses.

"A Christian does not use God's Word to go for the jugular. He goes for the conscience."

Rev 2:13 "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."

Before we talk about "Satan's throne," let's talk about his **Temple**. Archaeologists and historians don't have an exact count, but the Empire had hundreds of temples to Asclepius, the so-called 'god of medicine,' symbolized then - and weirdly still today - by a single serpent on a pole.

Asclepieia were healing temples and Pergamos featured one. Harmless live snakes were brought in to slither around. A snake's touch was seen as the god's healing, considered a blessing.

Jesus was developing a metaphor:

- The gathered Church is the Temple of God on Earth.
- Just like the snakes came into the Asclepieia, Satan, "that old serpent," had come into the Church.
- His false teachers were snakes, only in their case, they did not heal. They harmed.

Satan is the “god of this world” and “Prince of the Power of the Air.” He is still sitting on a Throne somewhere on Earth, or in the atmosphere. I’m the *Revelation* we learn that he will be thrown down.

Satan wasn’t only living in their city; he was attending their services.

“You hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Previously, we have known little about Antipas beyond his name and martyrdom. Thanks to the internet and AI chatbots, his life is now better known.

Turns out he was what we would call a chef. Sort of a celebrity chef. He was the first to suggest the custom that diners have an appetizer before their meal. It is named after him - *antipasto*.

We should take to heart these words of Abraham Lincoln: “The problem with information found on the Internet is that it is often not true.”

We know just what we need to know about Antipas - no more, no less. Faced with the pressure to deny Jesus or die a violent death, Antipas chose to die a martyr. The believers stood with him, willing to become martyrs themselves.

Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

Balaam was a pagan sorcerer hired by King Balak of Moab to curse Israel for money. God repeatedly overruled him and turned his curses into blessings. Unable to harm Israel directly, but still wanting to be paid, Balaam advised Balak to send the Moabite women into the encampment to entice and seduce.

Sure enough, “the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, [they went to, and participated in, the feasts] and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.”

As a believer who is in Christ, with the permanent in-dwelling of the third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, *I can walk in victory*. Why don’t I?

I defeat myself.

Listen as I string together a few verses that address my defeating myself. "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves... Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap... You are slaves of the one you obey.... Fleshly lusts wage war against the soul... Take care... that none of you has an evil, unbelieving heart... hardened by sin."

Balaam knew that as long as God was for them, who could be against them? The strategy was to get them to disobey. Then God must, as a good, good Father, pause to discipline them - often severely.

Pergamos had not yet surrendered to immorality, but they were allowing the serpent and the serpents to go unchecked, ignoring the danger.

Here are six of the false teachings trying to turn our temple into a Slytherin House.

1. The Health & Wealth Prosperity Gospel replaces the biblical Gospel with materialism, denies the reality of suffering, and treats God as a means to an earthly end.
2. Liberal Theology removes the inspiration and authority of Scripture, leading to a Jesus of one's own making.
3. Hyper-Grace misuses grace to imply that repentance, obedience, and sanctification are optional or unnecessary.
4. The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) promotes modern apostles and prophets with allegedly binding authority and new revelation that rivals Scripture.
5. Legalism, with its works-based righteousness, suggests that salvation or God's acceptance depends on performance, rule-keeping, or belonging to a particular group. It denies justification by faith alone.
6. Non-Trinitarian groups claim to be Christian while denying the Trinity, the deity of Christ, or salvation by grace (e.g., Oneness theology, Mormonism).

The false teachers pushed a hyper-grace that led believers to join temple feasts, eat idol meat, and ignore holiness, causing others to stumble.

Rev 2:15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

We don't find anything in the Bible that would tell us exactly what these guys were about. Knowing more would lead us to fixate on specifics. Instead, they represent any false teaching.

Not the Nicolaitans themselves did Jesus hate. He made it clear it was their "doctrine." It was harmful to individual believers and to the Church.

Rev 2:16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

This is, to me, a very difficult verse. Here is a conclusion from a commentary that shows the difficulty: "If the Church fails to repent, it will face the judgment itself for tolerating the false teachings, and Jesus will wage war against them with the sword of his mouth' to deal with the offenders."

I don't find that in these words; do you? The Lord tells the Church to repent. He lets them know that He is "coming quickly." In the Revelation, Jesus says six times that He "is coming quickly." It means that the events leading up to His Second Coming, once they begin, will rapidly unfold.

If Jesus is coming "quickly," I'd best be repenting in anticipation of His arrival. I'd best be living a transformed life.

As for the 'Balaam's' throughout Church history, they will experience the Lord's judgment.

This verse sounds like an altar call!

- Believers should get ready, stay ready, and keep looking up - because *repentant* or not, **Jesus is coming!**
- False teachers & the unsaved face judgment at the Second Coming. Eternal judgement. The Bible refers to it as the Second Death in the Lake of Fire.

Rev 2:17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it." '

Each of the seven letters is for every Church throughout history, and for every believer to *hear* & to *heed*.

“Him who overcomes” is not a super-saint. In one of his letters in the New Testament, John says a born-again believer in Jesus is an overcomer.

You can choose not to live as an overcomer. You can defeat yourself by choosing your own way instead of God’s.

“Manna” was the bread from Heaven that fed Israel for 40 years. The “hidden manna” was the manna stored in the Ark of the Covenant beneath the Mercy Seat in the Tabernacle.

To eat some of the hidden manna you would need to be in the Holy of Holies.

The Exodus Jews grew tired of eating manna every day. But think about what it stands for. It stands for total satisfaction with the Lord. We do not live by bread alone, but the bread God supplies is sufficient.

The apostle Paul wants us to receive the truth that the Lord “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ.” We must trust that spiritual blessings are more powerful than the weapons of the world.

In *Star Trek 6, The Undiscovered Country*, the Klingons used a cloaked Bird of Prey to fire upon one of their own vessels. They made it look as though Captain Kirk was to blame. Just as the Klingons were about to retaliate and ignite a war, Kirk said, “Signal our surrender. **We surrender.**”

Never in a million years had they factored in Kirk surrendering. His reaction blew their minds.

In this dispensation, the way you wield the Sword of the Spirit should leave people flabbergasted.

“And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.”’

Regarding the “white stone,” two famous exaggerations exist:

1. The first is that the white stone was similar to a gold medal and would be an athlete’s ticket to get into the feast celebrating the Olympic Games.
2. The second is that it would be a wedding invitation, and that you would have to bring it to gain entrance to the festivities.

It would be great if either one of these could be substantiated! They cannot. So let's look for something in the text itself. It's a good bet that it will have something to do with a temple.

When Solomon built the first Temple, he used massive white limestone blocks. The stones were reported to be so bright that the whole structure shimmered in the Middle Eastern sun. From a distance, it looked almost otherworldly, a reminder that God had placed His dwelling among His people.

Those white stones gave a visual representation of God's glory and of our purity in worshiping Him.

The apostle Peter writes, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house." The Temple that once stood in Jerusalem was made of radiant stone; the Temple Jesus Christ builds today shines even brighter.

- We each, individually, are a Temple of the Holy Spirit.
- When we gather, we are His spiritual Temple on Earth.

Yes, you'll receive a white stone with your new endearing, name on it. But it's symbolic, too. Those who were with us over 22 years ago may remember the YMCA's brick wall, each brick bearing a donor's name.

God is building us His spiritual Temple. Each of us is a stone He fits together. We are to be the light of the world, reflecting the glory of God.

As he lay pierced by many Orc arrows, Boromir asked Aragorn, "Have you seen the White Tower of Ecthelion - shining like pearl and silver, its banners in the morning breeze? Have you ever been called home by the sound of silver trumpets?"

Any moment now, the trumpet and the archangel's voice will call *us* home in the Resurrection and Rapture of the Church. Then the events foretold in Scripture, especially in this final book, will "quickly" unfold, leading to the return of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.