

Revelation 2:12-17

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[0 : 00] But if you are physically able and desire to do so, I'm going to ask you to join with me as we stand together and we read the Word of God found in Revelation chapter 2, starting in verse 12 and going down to verse 17.

Revelation 2, verses 12 through 17 says, And to the angel of the church in Pergamum writes, The one who has the sharp two-edged sword says this, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is, and you hold fast my name and did not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas, my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you where Satan dwells.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.

So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent, or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows, but he who receives it.

[1 : 18] Let's pray. Lord, we thank you so much for this day. God, we rejoice in what a divine privilege you've given us to read your word, that we have the opportunity to see it, to hear it, and to proclaim it.

Lord, we pray now that your word would do its work and its power and its purposes in our lives. Lord, that it would mold and shape us and conform us, not to the world's standards, but by your standards and more to your image.

We pray that you would be glorified through the things which take place. We pray that your name would be magnified, and we ask it all in the great, sweet name of Jesus. Amen.

You may be seated. Every week I am reminded of the privilege we have of reading through the book of Revelation together. You may remember that Revelations is a book that is so unique in all of Scripture.

It is the only book in Scripture which has attached to it both a blessing and a cursing. And the blessing for the book of Revelation is attached to those who read it in public setting, for those who read it, those who hear it, and then those who live by it.

[2 : 24] It is so unique in that it says that you will be blessed even if you read it. Now, that reading in the original language does not mean to sit at one's house and one's room and read it, though I encourage you to do that.

But rather, that reading is the public reading of Scripture. Because the Word of God was written and sent to churches, especially through the New Testament, for the intended purpose of being read in those churches.

It was not that each one had the opportunity to go home and to take out their copy of God's Word and to read it and to think on it, and we have a great, great privilege in doing that. But rather, the body came together to hear what it is God was saying to them.

And the way they heard it was with the public reading of the Word of God. And John writes in the book of Revelation that Jesus said, you will be blessed if that happens. And those who hear it, and then those who live accordingly.

We also know that it says you will be cursed if you take away or add to this book. So we see that it is a book of unique standing. And we have been going, starting in Revelation 2, and it will follow into Revelation 3, through the letters to the seven churches.

[3 : 30] These seven churches would have been the original recipients of the book of Revelation. These are the churches that John, being moved by the Spirit of God to pen the Word of God, was sending these to.

He was sending this letter to these churches. Each church would have received the news of the other church. It would have been just like going to Bellbuckle and talking about what's going on in War Trace, or coming to War Trace and talking about what's going on in Bellbuckle.

That seems to be no different than what happens today, right? I mean, let's just be honest. But other than it was coming with the stamp of this is what God says is happening in that church, not what man says is happening in that church.

And we have looked at the various techniques and the various ways of interpreting and even applying these scriptures. And we have seen that it could apply to church ages. We have seen that it could apply to different seasons throughout the church's life.

But we have taken in our approach to the letters to the seven churches that each of these letters represent a different characteristic in which Christ desires to see lived out in His church.

[4 : 36] These would be the seven healthy characteristics of a proper church. We saw in Revelation 1 Christ standing in heaven amongst the seven candlesticks, which were the seven churches, and holding in His hand seven stars, which were the angels to the seven churches.

So in Revelation 1, we have Christ standing in the presence of and in control of His church. In Revelation 2 and 3, we see what the church on earth looks like when Christ is present and in control of His church.

So this is a mirror image of this is Christ in heaven in the presence of and in control of, and this is what the church on earth looks like when Christ is present and in control of.

Because we need to understand that just because of people gathered together and put the name church across the door of their building, it does not mean that Christ is there and it does not mean that He's in control there.

And what we find in the letters to the seven churches is what Jesus Himself tells us His church on earth will look like when He is there and when He's in control. We see this lived out for us.

[5 : 40] We have seen it in the first two letters. We've seen it into the church of Ephesus and we've seen it to the church at Smyrna. Now we're to the church at Pergamum. And each of these churches represent a different character trait that Christ is calling His church to.

I'll be honest with you. As I was studying and praying and thinking through Revelation 2, verses 12 through 17, I really wanted to focus on a church of sincere doctrine, that the church would be a place of sincere doctrine.

But after further study and after further looking and further really just praying and meditation on the Scripture, the title that would be this morning is that the church would be a church of suffering, or surrender, not suffering, a church of surrendered devotion.

The church would be a place of surrendered devotion. And you will see that as we go through it because they had doctrine correct, but where they were failing was in devotion.

The church can be a place of right doctrine. It can be a place of right teaching and be a place of completely wrong application or wrong living. So we see here at the church of Pergamum that Christ calls His church to be a place of surrendered devotion.

[6 : 53] Four things I want you to see from this passage, and it will help us to understand what it takes for the church at Pergamum to be that and what it would take for us as a church to be that. What does it look like when His church truly is a place of surrendered devotion?

Something that is committed to being what Christ has called it to be. Committed to being not as an organization, not as some body of believers, but as individual believers in the part of a local body. What does it look like when we say we're going to live surrendered lives of devotion to Jesus Christ and Christ alone? Because, by the way, the Scripture makes it very clear, you cannot be devoted to more than one at a time.

No matter how much you try, no matter how much effort you put forth, your devotion will either be to yourself, to the world, to Satan, to Christ. You can only choose one.

The Bible says only one can be your master. What is my favorite verse? Deuteronomy 4, 24. A unique verse, an odd verse for a guy to have is a favorite verse, right? For the Lord our God is a jealous God.

[7 : 59] He is a consuming fire. Why is that my favorite verse? Because it reminds me that God will not share my devotion to Him with anything. I will either be fully devoted to Him, or I am not at all devoted to Him.

I believe it was William Law who wrote many, many, many years ago that we will have as much of God as He has of us. It's not that He is limited.

It's that we limit how much of Him we experience because we limit how much He has of us. So we see what it looks like for the church to be a place of surrendered devotion.

Number one, we see the culture that opposes us. Because devotion is a very hard thing. It is. It is hard in marriage.

It is hard in relationships. It is hard in family ties. It is especially hard in church. It is hard in workplaces. I mean, you understand in today's time, people aren't committed to their place of employment the way they used to be, right?

[9 : 04] Even in the ways of my dad. You went to go to work somewhere, and you were going to work there until you retired. Hey, my generation came along, and we worked there until we found somewhere better to work. And now the generation that's coming behind me says, I'm going to work at home where I want to work, or I'm going to work in a coffee shop where I don't have to work.

It amazes me when I ride around places like Murfreesboro. I was like, surely there are not this many pastors or this many people who don't have jobs, especially driving better vehicles than me. And I look around.

Where do these people work? I know they don't work nights because I'm there if I'm there doing hospital visitation or any other errands or if I'm just doing something, then they're there at odd hours of the day. And I worked nights before.

During the day, I slept, right? That's what I did. And I understand that. What you find is people aren't as devoted to anything anymore because of the culture around us.

We understand this. Devotion, not only in our personal lives, not only in our occupational lives, not only in our individual lives, but friend, listen to me, especially in our spiritual life, is challenged and opposed by the culture around us.

[10 : 12] But I've got good news for you, my friend. There is nothing new under the sun. The things that we are facing are not unique to us. Look at what Christ says to the church. And to the angel of the church at Pergamum, right?

Now that's to the pastor, the leaders of the church at Pergamum, right? The one who has a sharp two-edged sword says this. We'll come back to that in just a minute. I know where you dwell.

This is good news. This is great news. Jesus is calling the church to surrender devotion. He is calling his people to live a life of absolute devotion. He is calling his people to live a life of full commitment to him.

And he starts with this. I know where you live. Don't tell me I can't do it. Don't tell me it's going to be hard. It is going to be hard. Don't tell me it's impossible. Don't tell me, God, you don't know this place I'm living at.

He says, I know where you live. And each of these letters were written to a specific church in a specific context. So we need to understand this. Take the letter in context so that we can understand.

[11 : 11] This is not just some book of antiquities that we can look back and go, Oh, yeah, if I was a member of the church at Pergamum, I would be devoted to. But what about being a member of a church in America today?

Friend, listen to what he says. I know where you live, where Satan's throne is, and you hold fast my name and did not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas, my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you where Satan dwells.

Two times in this passage, Jesus himself says, You're living at Satan's throne. Now there's this great theme we see throughout Scripture. And this great thing that we understand, and we talked about it, I believe it was Wednesday night, that Satan is neither omnipotent, he's not omniscient, he's not all-powerful, and he's not all-present, which means Satan cannot have his throne set up in every city.

Satan can only have his particular throne set up in one place. He is a limited, created being. He is something that is limited to time and space, just like us. More powerful than us, absolutely, because he's created to be in the courts of heaven.

He is one who does not have the ability to have a throne over here, and a throne over here, and a throne over there. So Jesus himself says, Where you live is an extremely difficult place to live, because you're living in the city that Satan has determined to set up his throne.

[12 : 25] Now, let's go to Pergamum for just a minute in history. We don't exactly know what this means, but we do know a lot about the city of Pergamum. The name Pergamum literally means a citadel or a fortress, and it was that.

It was a city of great power, and it was a city of great influence. As a matter of fact, when you had clan cities or regional cities, it was one of the strongest ruling cities of that ancient Asia province. It would be one who controlled its territory well, but it was also one who understood its times, because when the Greek Empire fell and you began to have the rise of the Roman Empire, they saw the writing on the wall and knew that Rome was going to be powerful.

So they pledged their allegiance to Rome, the Roman Empire, very early in the days of the Roman Empire. And because of that, they began to be very loyal to the Roman cause and to the Roman state.

They became the leading capital city in the Asian province of the Roman Empire. They were the chief city. It was written by historians of that time that they had over 200,000 books in their library.

[13 : 30] The only library in the known world to have more books than them was located in Rome. It was a place of great influence. It was a place of great prosperity. It was a place of great wealth, and it was a place of great ease and comfort.

It was a place of significance in a land of many significant cities. It was somewhere that had something to boast about. It was well known. It was well understood, and it was well versed in its culture.

But it also was one of the leading cities in emperor worship. Because they adhered so well to the Roman thing, they began to be very loving towards the Roman Empire.

So much so that they surpassed devotion and went into idolatry. They began to worship Caesar as Lord. In Pergamum, by the time Christ was born, there had been already three temples built to Caesars of Rome.

They were the first city to build a temple to worship a living Roman Caesar or Roman emperor. And they erected a temple to an emperor while he was still alive so that you could go burn incense.

[14 : 35] And with that pinch of incense, you would declare Caesar is Lord. It would be very easy to do, and you would go before it. And this, you would profess and proclaim your devotion not only to Pergamum, but to the Roman Empire.

You went from not only being a loyal citizen to being a worship and adoring citizen. Friend, we need to be careful here because we tread on dangerous ground, right? How easy it is to love one's country and how easy it is to fall from loving one's country to worshipping one's country.

Because our allegiance only lies. And friend, I don't want to be misunderstood here. I love my country. I would die for my country. I would pay an ultimate price for my country if God had called me to it.

I have great dear friends that have done it. I have great dear friends who have served and continue to serve. I have people that I have reached out to that are doing it. And I understand that, but there is but one Lord and Master of my life.

We know these things. We understand these things. Pergamum was a place of great emperor worship. But Pergamum was not only a place of great emperor worship. Because during the late 1800s, when the Ottoman Empire was beginning to expand their road and railway system, they had an engineer who was going through and was doing some survey work.

[15 : 49] And he made this great discovery in Pergamum. Pergamum is one of the greatest excavated cities of ancient times. And they found in Pergamum a temple that was built for Zeus.

And this temple that was built looked like the reigning seat of Zeus. And along this temple, if you want to see it, you can Google it. You can look it up. Because they took this and put it in the East Berlin Museum in Germany.

And it built, actually, they built a museum in Germany just to house the temple of Zeus that they found in Pergamum. I think that museum is called Pergamos.

And it was just to house this. And this thing is huge. And if you look around it and you see the carving of all of the Greek gods around the bottom of this temple.

And each one of them has a serpent's tail. So you had Zeus worship. You had emperor worship. And you also had cultic worship of various other gods in that city.

[16 : 47] And you had a church there. Friend, listen to me. If you think you live in a place where culture opposes you, put yourself in Pergamum.

Where Jesus says, I know your faith. I know you kept my name. I know you have not denied me. Even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed because of his devotion. These were people of utmost surrendered devotion to the point that it cost them something. Why? Because the culture opposed them.

During this time, if you did not profess Caesar as Lord, you were counted heretic and often killed. We don't know much about Antipas. But we do know of a man in history, Antipater, which many people believe is Antipas, who was put into a brazen bull, a bronze bull, and burned by heating up that bull.

He was put inside the belly of this bull. And that bull was put into a fire until he literally burned to death from the heat of that bull. Why? Because he would not burn the pinch of incense and say, Caesar is Lord.

[18:05] Devotion. Friend, listen to me. Daniel Akin correctly said, Daniel Akin is the president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

And he correctly said, the greatest enemy and threat to the church is not that which opposes it from the outside. But rather, the greatest threat to any church is the Trojan horse which comes in and begins to oppose it from the inside.

And he has this quote, nothing will poison the body of Christ like the poison called compromise. So not only do you see the culture that opposes it, number two, you see the compromise that tempts us.

The compromise that tempts us. Because they were living in a culture that did not agree with Christianity. They were living in a culture that had all these other things that were opposite Christianity.

That were calling you to great devotion to your country. That were calling you to great devotion to these gods. That were calling you to great devotion to all this cultic worship. And by the way, let's just be honest, each one of these temptations appealed to the flesh.

[19:09] I don't know how much study you've done over, you know, idolatry and false gods and all those things, mythology. Most of what you find, when man creates a god, he creates a god that appeals what?

To his flesh. It feels good, right? He creates a god that is pleasant, not one that is really mortifying. He creates a god that leads one to have pleasure.

And all these things were going on in a rapid fashion around this prominent city. It wasn't like they were living in a city that people were doing this and they were suffering. No, they were living in a city that people were doing that and they were prospering.

They were being influenced. They were influential people. And all around them we see the compromise that tempts us. But we see here in verse 14, But I have a few things against you. Christ now brings his judgment to the church. He says, I have a few things against you that is to the church body. Now stay with me on this. That is to every one of you because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam.

[20:10] He says, I am opposing you as a church because you are allowing some to compromise. Wait a minute. You say, what do I have to do with that?

That's their problem. That's their fault. That's their judgment. Jesus says, I have something against my church because my church has some within it who compromise.

Oh, now we've reached a whole other level of uncomfortableness inside of World Trade Baptist Church where you begin to hold one another accountable, right? Because if your compromise leads me to having something against me because of what Christ sees as a body, all of a sudden we begin to travel on dangerous ground.

He says, but I have a few things against you because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things, sacrifice the idols, and to commit acts of immorality.

Christ points back to an Old Testament story, and we could go back and read it if we wanted to through the book of Numbers, but we're not going to. But one thing we understand here is that Balaam is one of those kind of prophets of the Old Testament that makes you scratch your head.

[21:16] If you remember, Balak was hiring Balaam to bring a cursing on the nation of Israel because the nation of Israel was in their wilderness sojourns, and they were going through the regions that Balak ruled. And Balak saw them and the multitude of the people of Israel, and everybody around them was afraid of Israel because God had led them victorious through their

wilderness wandering.

So he wanted to hire this prophet, Balaam. And he said, Balaam, come and pronounce a cursing on the nation of Israel. Balaam makes me scratch my head because Balaam said, I'm not going to come, I'm not going to come.

And finally they persuade him by amount of money to come. So number one, he was a prophet for hire. That all of a sudden should make us see he is not a true prophet. But when he decided to come, he said, I will only say whatever it is the true God of heaven tells me to say.

So he had right doctrine. This is why I knew it wasn't a doctrinal issue in the church, right? I'm not very smart, but I can follow some of these things. He had right doctrine. You remember Balaam, his donkey talked to him on the way.

Remember that? Running along with his donkey, and his donkey kept messing up, and he kept getting mad at his donkey, kept cursing his donkey. And his donkey turned around and said, Why are you kicking me? There's somebody standing in the way. And then Balaam's eyes were opened, and he was met with an angel of the Lord.

[22 : 24] Should be a capital A right there. So not only was Balaam a prophet who acknowledged the true God, Balaam was a prophet who saw the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, which I understand to be a Christophany.

That is, Jesus himself manifest in his presence in the Old Testament. So he had an encounter with Christ. And then he goes, and Balak says, All right, I want you to pronounce a cursing.

He says, I told you, I can only say what God tells me to say. So they make the sacrifice. They make an offering. Balaam pronounces a blessing over them rather than a cursing.

Balak gets mad. Three times they do this, to the point that the last time, all Balaam can see is the tail end of the camp. Because Balak says, Maybe if you can't see all the camp, you can just curse some of it. But the third time, even Balaam says, No, God says this nation is blessed.

By the way, it is Balaam's prophecy that we get. What I believe is the prophecy that leads the wise men to find Jesus in Bethlehem. Because it is Balaam who prophesied in Numbers 24, 17, I see him, but not yet.

[23 : 24] A star shall arise out of Judah, and he shall reign his people on high. And that is a prophecy that I believe the wise men saw and read because they were astrologers and looked for it. Big, really cool story.

We see throughout Scripture this false prophet who was proclaiming truth, and all of a sudden it was used through history to lead people to him. But what we see is Balaam had true doctrine.

He had the truth right. Balaam said, I can only say whatever it is God wants me to say. I know the truth, and the truth is they are blessed. The truth is they will reign.

The truth is, Balak, they're going to conquer you. The truth is that the one who is coming will reign forever, and there will be no end to his reign. This is the truth. But then Balaam said, But, while that is the truth, Balak, I can teach you what you can do with them in the meantime.

Since I can't curse them, because I know the truth, then let's see if we can cause them to stumble. Balak, go down and intermarry with them.

[24 : 25] Invite them to your feast. Get them to eat things they're not supposed to eat. Roast a pig or something. You'll make it smell good. Have your daughters and your ladies walk around in front of them.

Tempt them to live by a standard that God has called them not to live by. So what is it that Balaam had? Balaam had correct doctrine, but false practice.

Here, all of a sudden, we begin to see the compromise that tempts us. Friend, we can know the truth all day long. We can know it mentally.

We can even know it in our heart. But unless we put it to our feet, to our hands, and to our life, it means nothing. It is absolutely possible to have true doctrine and false practice.

And that's exactly what Balaam had. And Jesus says, You've allowed some to come in who know the truth. They understand the truth. They even acknowledge the truth. But they also like to do things that worry the world, does it?

[25 : 30] They like to eat what the world eats. They like to drink what the world drinks. They like to live the way the world lives. They want to do what the world wants to do. Oh, they had things that would appeal to the flesh in Pergamum.

And Jesus said, They know the truth, but they also know the world. He says, And not only that, but you have some, verse 15, So you also have some who hold in the same way, in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Historians really don't know what the teaching of the Nicolaitans were. Nicolaitans were really only mentioned in Revelation. They were mentioned twice in the book of Revelation.

The first church opposed the teaching of the Nicolaitans, which Jesus says also opposed. The church at Pergamum welcomed the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Some think, because of the root word, this means a hierarchy establishment inside the church, that they had appointed rulers that they should not have had.

And I'm not so sure that others see it as being a practice in which the Nicolaitans taught that you can believe in your mind and in your heart the truth, but your flesh is condemned, so do whatever you want to do.

[26 : 35] It's also referred to as Gnosticism. That in the end, it is our spirit who goes to heaven, and the flesh is desperately wicked anyway, so go ahead and live out in your flesh whatever you want to live out in your flesh. And in the end, your spirit will be called to heaven because you've been forgiven.

See how that's appealing? You can go do whatever you want to do, live however you want to live, fulfill your flesh, meet every one of your desires. If it feels good, do it, because in the end, it doesn't matter. It's your spirit who's going to heaven.

And all of a sudden, that begins to find a temptation inside the church. And this is the compromise that tempts us. To know the truth, but to live differently than what the truth calls us to.

By the way, the scripture does say that our flesh is desperately wicked, but it also says that we will inherit eternity in the flesh, right? We will stand before him and see him as he is. So that leads us to the third thing.

Not only is there the culture that opposes us, the compromise that tempts us, there is the Christ that judges us. There is the Christ that judges us. Now, this is something that we don't talk about a whole lot in church, but we need to.

[27 : 36] We need to understand this, that we will all stand before Jesus Christ as judge, even the church. That does not mean that we will all stand before the great white throne of judgment.

That is at the end of the book of Revelation. The Bema seat, the great white throne of judgment, is reserved for those who do not know Christ. But it is very clear in scripture that we will all stand before the judgment of Christ.

This is where we have the giving of rewards. This is where we have, you know, the talents, the ones who were entrusted with talents. This is the picture that Christ was referring to. His people that he had entrusted with, he was going to judge them someday.

And we see this over and over again. That in scripture shows us that his people, God's people, understand we do have a judge. You say, no, I'm not judged. I'm forgiven. I'm completely forgiven. Right. You're not judged because of your sins, which you have not.

You are forgiven. You are free. But you are going to be judged by what you have done since he has redeemed you and saved you. It is not a judgment to destruction.

[28 : 43] It is not a judgment to cast out eternity. It is a judgment to enter as you enter into glory. It is a judgment of rewards. It is a judgment of reconciling the deeds and the works we have done since he redeemed us.

Because redemption comes with a price. He paid his life for us. We belong to him. He is our Lord, Master, and Savior. And he will hold us accountable.

And it is the Christ who judges us. Look at what Jesus says. We first see how John introduces him to the church. The one who has the sharp two-edged sword says this.

In each church in the letter of seven churches, there is a attribute of Christ that is revealed in Revelation 1 that is specific to that church. The one to the church at Pergamum is the one who has the sharp two-edged sword says this.

It is not a literal sword coming out of his mouth. Sword is representation. It is a representative of power and authority and ruling ability. This is to say that he is the judge. He is the one who has the power to kill and the power to heal.

[29 : 46] He has the power to slice and he has the power to mend. This is this great picture that we see even in the Old Testament. Wounding, striking, but healing. It says in Scripture that God strikes us, but he heals us with that striking.

It is a picture of his judgment. And he says in verse 16, Therefore, therefore, because of the temptation to compromise, and because there are some in the body that are compromising, therefore repent, or else I am coming to you quickly.

And I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth. We understand this. This is a great separation here. I want you to see this, that while Christ is holding his whole church accountable for some that are in it, the war he wages is only with those who are not truly his.

Okay? I understand this. I know it seems kind of confusing, but scratch your head. He says, Therefore repent, or else I am coming to you corporately, quickly. Now that's going to shake every one of us in our boots.

I know we're saying, Well, come, Lord Jesus, come. Yes, and when he comes with that sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth, we're not really as excited as we would like to be, I think, at times. He says, I'm coming quickly, which means it could happen at any moment.

[30 : 52] Because of the compromise, because of the settling of convictions, because of the lack of devotion, I could come at any minute, and I'm going to wage war with those that are compromising.

His war is not with his entire church, because there are within the church the faithful. He says, I will wage war with them. That is, those who are holding to the teachings of Balaam, those who are holding to the teachings of the Nicolaitans, those who are taking the truth and twisting it to appeal to the flesh, I'm waging war with them.

It's probably, it has been said, there is no scarier passage in all of Scripture than Jesus Christ showing up at his church and starting a battle. Just about every one of us, or many of us, has seen individuals walking to the church and want to start a war, but what if it is Jesus who comes into the church and says, I am starting a war?

Now look at this, this Christ who judges us. It is the Christ who has the sharp two-edged sword, and he says, and I will wage war against them with the sword of my mouth.

What is that? That is the word of God. Jesus says this. Now, friend, listen to me. I know it seems a little legalistic, and it seems a little narrow, and it seems a little kind of small-mindedness and all these judgments that you can cast at us, but Jesus himself says, Do not think that it is I who judges you.

[32 : 12] It is the very words that I speak that will judge you in the end. When Christ judges his people, his people, the great white Bema seat, the great white throne, that is, the judgment to eternal destruction, there's going to be but one question asked.

Do I know you? Am I your Lord, and am I your Master? For the lost, who have never professed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, Jesus will say, I do not know you.

I do not know you. I do not know you. I know it seems a little harsh. It seems a little hard, but that is the absolute emphatic truth in Scripture because Paul says in the book of Romans, and we find it later, that God has made himself known to all men, and man decided to follow after their own lusts. And at the great white Bema throne, there will be this one question, do you know me, and do I know you? If the answer to that is no, then it is depart from me into the everlasting darkness. At the judgment of the believers, friend, listen to me, it is the very word of God that we are held accountable to.

It is the sword that comes out of his mouth. And this is the standard. You say, oh, pastor, that's a hard standard. I never said it was easy. I didn't say we wouldn't mess up.

[33 : 28] We will suffer loss. I know that on that day, there will be something stripped away from me. Purified, Scripture says, as if by fire. There will be the dross, the wood, hay, and the stubble will be burned up.

And the reason it will be burned up is because there are things in my life that do not line up with Scripture. I'll be the first to admit it. And on that day of judgment, those things will be consumed. They will not follow me into eternity. Praise be to God.

He'll take care of them. But the hope is that those precious stones, those rocks, those emeralds, those things we have laid up, according to Scripture, they will endure.

And they'll be put around that crown that we'll cast at his feet. And we'll see this. It is the Christ who judges us. And he is a fair judge. Because he says, this is what I expect.

And if we're not in it, how do we know? How do we know? We're going to be surprised, I think, some of us.

[34 : 27] So I didn't know that. Oh, it's there. I'm one of those weird guys that when I coach a sport, every time you coach a sport, even at the youth level, they give you a rule book, right?

They give you a rule book. I'm one of those weird guys that when I get the rule book, I read it. I'm that guy. Because I also know that sometimes those interpreting the rules haven't read the rule book.

Especially when you get into youth sports and you have kids who are calling games. And there's been times, multiple times in baseball games that I've had to explain the rules to those who were to be officiating the rules.

And I always do it in a loving manner. I always correct them. But there's one thing that I always have with me at every game I ever coach. And it's a rule book. And when I know a call has been made wrong, and my wife, she had to step out and just mangle, she's not in her brain, she would testify to this.

I will tell her, honey, get that book out and she'll find it for me. So by the time I go talk to the official or the umpire, whoever it is, I can very clearly point out to them the rule which I was correct and they were wrong on.

[35 : 36] And that's not being mean. That's just wanting to play the game according to the standards which had already been dictated by the governing authority, right? This is how we can do it and this is how we will do it and this is how it will be done.

And what I have found is that every time when I know the rules and I can point out the rules, I never have a problem. Ever. It's only when they don't know the rules and I don't know the rules then all of a sudden we have a problem.

Christ has been very generous to us. He's given us this rule book and he's told us exactly what he expects of us and that is his word. And he has told us I'm going to hold you accountable by this word. I am the Christ who judges you and the sword that is coming out of my mouth that will judge you it is the very word of God.

And if you ever want to see how you're living up to that standard it's not just your interpretation.

Friend, listen to me there are people that will help you with interpretation but I have found this that if you open up the rule book God will make it clear how your life should look.

And as long as you're living life committed to that rule book it's freeing. As Tony Evans says you don't have the freedom on the football field to do whatever you want.

[36 : 43] You only have the freedom to do what they have told you you can do within boundaries. Super Bowl game coming on tonight, right? If during that Super Bowl game the running back takes the ball and he runs up into the stands and he runs out of the stadium and runs back through another corridor comes out the tunnel and runs into the end zone and says touchdown he's wrong he's broke the rules he's out of bounds.

Only within the boundaries of the rule book can you operate freely. Freedom is found inside the boundaries of that which will judge us. Anything other than that is compromise.

Now friend, listen one more thing and I'll be done. Not only do we see the culture that opposes us not only do we see the compromise that tempts us we see the Christ that judges us. It's the good news because each one of these comes with good news, right?

The communion that awaits us. The communion that awaits us. He says here therefore repent or else I am coming to you quickly and I will make my war against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. What does that say? This is for all of us that isn't saying yeah I wish so and so would hear that. It says if you have an ear and you can hear then listen. Right?

[37 : 54] So it's for me to lean in and listen. Okay, he who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes. I love the fact that each one of these seven letters have that phrase in it. To him who overcomes.

This shows us that these seven character traits of a healthy church will not come easy. Listen, surrender devotion is hard. Surrender devotion calls Antipas his life. Surrender devotion is a struggle and Jesus acknowledges that struggle.

I know where you live but if you overcome let me give you the good news he says. If you can do it and you can through the presence of him who lives inside of you to him I will give some of the hidden manna and I will give him a white stone and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.

I'll just go ahead and be honest with you. Bible scholars are out the window. They have no idea what all of that means. Okay? The hidden manna many refer to back when Abraham when Moses and them were in the wilderness and they built the Ark of the Covenant and they took some of that

manna and put it in a jar and they put it in the Ark of the Covenant and it went into the tabernacle and no one knows where it is that's the hidden manna.

We don't know but that's just kind of a picture that ties it back to the Jewish thought. The white stones some people say that it signifies purity other people say that you were given a white stone by way of invitation that if you were invited someone someone gave you a white stone the name written on it that no one knows but he who is revealed is the name that we find later in the book of Revelations the name of God that is so intimate known but what we do know is that each three of these point to a very intimate special time of communion.

[39 : 24] You eat the angel's food you're invited through the white stone and you have a name that no one knows but only those who are welcome and those who have been given it. This speaks to a time of fellowship of nearness to the Savior and this is the promise that Jesus says and I'm closing in this stay with me if you don't hear anything else hear this Jesus says if you can overcome every obstacle in the way if you can overcome even the desires of the flesh if you can overcome all that opposes you through culture if you can overcome all this temptation to compromise the truth if you can live a life of surrendered devotion to me there is a day coming where I'm going to welcome you in to a time of communion with me like none other.

You'll be in my presence I'll be there we'll eat together you'll know names that not everyone else knows we'll be intimate we'll be sweet and if you say well I don't know if I want that then you don't know the Jesus that I know you don't you don't know the Jesus I know I've told you this before he's not here this morning but one of my dearest friends growing up was usually here on Sunday mornings and on Sunday mornings many of you walk out that door and you say a name you call me something some of you pastor some of you Billy Joe some of you may say some other names I don't hear and that's fine but there's only one boy and I hesitate to say this because people you've heard it before there's only one man that could ever walk out of this church and say fat boy it's good to see you this morning and I'd be happy because that's what he called me when he was growing up he's my very dearest friend time of communion we were close we were tight and we were okay and I know that when he's saying it's just it signifies something a nearness that I had never had with anybody else until the time

I was married and that transition and now I have it with my wife but there are things in that communion that nearness and what Jesus is saying listen you be devoted to me now and you overcome all this and I'll tell you we'll have communion together we'll be tight we'll be close you endure for a season and we'll commune for eternity that's a good promise and that's a great trade off if you ask me let's pray Lord I know it's so hard to live lives of faithful surrender devotion God there's so much that comes against us so much that tempts us and pulls us away Lord I pray right now that you would lead us to that as a church as individuals oh God that we would see the joy and the freedom in it we would rejoice in who you are we would rejoice in the fellowship and the communion you extend and Lord that each one of us would know where we stand before you according to your word we ask it all in Christ's name

Amen daddy Thank you.

Thank you.