

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 25 February 2018
Services: 730, 930 Tewantin, 930 Peregian
Series: 7 searching letters
Passage: Revelation 2:12-17
Title: To the church in Pergamum
Outline: Authority
What's good
What's not
Action
Encouragement

I don't know about you, but I have loads of questions about this letter (hope you'll have it open in front of you)

1. Why does Jesus have a "*sharp double-edged sword*"?
2. What does Jesus mean that the Christians at Pergamum live *where Satan has his throne*?
3. What does he mean when he says *you have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam*?
4. *And those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans*?
5. What is the *hidden manna*?
6. And the *white stone with a new name*?

And I have another question?

What on **earth** does all this have to do with **me** in 2018 on the **Sunshine Coast**?

What link does this have for **me** with my family struggles and other daily challenges... what difference will it make when I wake up tomorrow morning and go into a new week? – it seems such a **long** way away from our reality!

Well – let's see how we go... I hope that in 20 minutes – we'll not only have some insight into these issues – but also see where this connects with our lives here and now!

We'll follow the outline we've established over the last couple of weeks... where we see that Jesus has

1. **authority** to speak

he sees:

2. what's **good** that he sees in their life as church...
3. What's **not** – which requires rebuke or admonition....

We see a call to

4. **action**

And finally a word of

5. **encouragement**...

so let's dive straight in:

1. AUTHORITY

Have a look with me at v12 *To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.*

Jesus has authority... because of the sword – a sword we were told back in ch 1, which he holds in

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his mouth....

This sword he holds... not a **literal** sword, but is his all-powerful **word** by which he rules...

Ultimately it refers to what you now hold in your hand – our **Bibles**...

You'll remember that Ephesians 6:17 speaks clearly of *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*.

And you'll also remember Hebrews 4:12-13 (on the screen) - *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

The **sword** is the **Word** of God – and the **Word** of God friends, penetrates to our very **heart**... showing us what is inappropriate in our thoughts... and then going to work on us by his word as if a surgeon's knife, to cut away all that is inappropriate as a child of God and remake is in his image – to transform us into the likeness of Jesus!

Well – here is an **instant** connection with us right now – right today... which impacts **Monday morning**...!

...are we allowing God to work on his by his **word**...?

will we wake up tomorrow and reach for the Bible so that by His **word**, Jesus will cut away, **exposing** what needs **surgery** within us... and by that **word**... **transform** us!?? //

Jesus has **authority** to speak to **Pergamum** and **Peregian** – because he **rules** by His **word**... and we need to ensure that we are opening ourselves up to the **rule** of his **word**! //

Well – Jesus has a great **commendation** for the believers there – so let's see...

2. WHAT'S GOOD

Have a look with me – v13 *I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name.*

Why 'where Satan has his throne'?

Because Pergamum was the centre of **emperor worship**! – in fact – it is probably where it **began**!

The city became the capital of Asia, and it's most **famous** city, becoming the seat of the **Roman governor** and therefore the **most important religious** and **cultic centre** of the **province**.

Zeus, Athena, Dionysus and Asclepius – all had temples there which were the focus points for worship around the whole region.

In 29BC, Augustus permitted a temple for himself to be built in Pergamum.

So you have to understand: the **Roman emperor** was worshipped as a **living God**...!

Later – not long after Jesus had been around - there was a test of **loyalty** for the citizens of Rome which any true believer could not pass...

they had to recite a prayer to the gods,

they had to pray with incense and wine to the emperor's statue and

they had to **curse Christ**! //

No wonder Jesus said that this was where **Satan has his throne**! /

And yet – the **Christians** there had been **resisting** all that – they remained **true** to **Jesus** – even

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when one of their own – a man named Anitpas - was put to **death!** //

What has this to do with us?

I'm not going to say that here – where **we** live – is where Satan has his throne...

But I would say that Satan has a significant **hold** on our **nation**.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:4 describes Satan as the 'god of this age' – not because he's in **control** – but because he is the god, the people of this age, **serve!**

Now we don't have massive temples built to **Turnbull** (can you imagine!) – or to other so called "**gods....**"

...but people's lives **are** full of idols - idols they serve sometimes will **full** devotion – some of which they are enslaved to **unwittingly**... //

There's the cult of **sport**, of **materialism**... of **career** - the cult of the **child** where children actually **run** the home and **rule** the parents... the cult of the **great outdoors** – where **Nippers** takes precedence over **everything**...

Our life is full of **distractions** and **temptations**... **Satan** has his influence here in **all sorts** of **ways**...

But brothers and sisters – **YOU** are those who remain **true** to the name of **Jesus**... **against all odds**...!!

...**in spite of challenges**...

...**in the face of temptations**...

...**despite the distractions**...

...**YOU** remain **true** to **Jesus**... and I'm **so thankful** to God for **you** today... for your **strength** – your **determination** – your **steadfastness**...!! your **example**... ////

And yet for all that was **good** in Pergamum, Jesus has to raise a few issues with them... so we see:

3. **WHAT'S NOT** (so good)

Have a look with me at v14 – *nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.*

I think there are two rebukes here – one to the people who **hold** to the *teaching of Balaam* – and one for the rest of the people who **tolerate the presence** in the **church**, of those who **hold to the teaching of Balaam**.

I wonder if you remember **Balaam**? Balaam was a free-lance prophet in the Old Testament, when the Israelites were on their wilderness wanderings on the way to the Promised Land.

The King of **Moab** – was scared **stiff** by the sheer **size** of Israel...

So he hired **Balaam** to come and **curse** Israel for him... thinking that would deal with the problem.

But every time he went to **curse** Israel, God put words of **blessing** in his mouth and he came out with a **blessing** every time!

Balak just didn't get the message that Balaam could only say what God wanted him to! In fact **4 times** it **happened**...!

But!! // after the **failure** of Balaam to deliver the curses Balak required, the men of Israel indulged in sexual immorality with the Moabite women.

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How did that come about?

I'm abbreviating here... but -

It was something like this... Balaam said - look Balak I can't curse Israel for you ... God won't let me - but here's an idea...! Get your women to seduce them... and they'll soon **lose** their faithfulness to God and no longer be a **threat**!! // problem **solved**! /

And of course there is nothing like **idolatry** and sexual **immorality** to lead people away from God...
... a little bit of **Christianity**... all that's **good** about it... as long as you don't take it too **seriously**... and a little bit of **sport-ism** and **careerism** and **ME-ism**... fantastic!- especially if it involved **sexual freedom** and **guilt-free promiscuity** as **part and parcel**!!! // /

Let me ask you - are **you** trying to have a bet each way? - enough of Christianity to keep in **good** with God and make you look decent - but enough of everything **else** to give you the freedom you want to do your own **thing**...?? //

That's what happened with those who followed Balaam's teaching.

And it is **dangerous**, it is an **insult** to God, and **it is not to be tolerated**. //

There are plenty of churches today who not only **tolerate** idolatry and sexual **perversion** and **promiscuity**, but **encourage** it - **welcome** it - **embrace** it. "Oh - we're so **progressive**!"

...they'll go to any extent to be **welcoming, friendly, attractive**... and yet they have **compromised** their **message**... **watered** down the **gospel**... /

And Jesus says, *I have this against you*... // /

But even in churches which **hold** to the Bible today - It amazes me that the whole **sexual ethic** in our churches has changed so **rapidly**... we have so **readily** adopted the ways of the **world**... so some Christians sleep with their partners **before** marriage... and don't think anything of it...!

Friends the Bible is **clear** - sexual union has its place **ONLY** - and **joyfully** and **wonderfully** - but **ONLY** - within marriage between a **man** and a **woman**!

It's God's **brilliant** and **beautiful gift** to us - and if we take matters into our own hands as if we know better - then - we **break God's heart**... and rob **ourselves** and our **partner** of his **best**... ! /

Please raise your children to be committed to remaining **virgins** until **marriage**... because that's God **will** - and his **best**! // /

Jesus also says - *Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans*... We're not sure who the Nicolaitans were - they were mentioned in the letter to Ephesus where Jesus **commended** the Ephesians for **not** tolerating them... but we might deduce that the Nicolaitans issue is **also** to do with **idolatry** and **sexual immorality**. //

Well - what's the call to action here?

4. ACTION

Have a look with me at v16 - *Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

Notice first, that there is an **invitation** to **repent**. To **change** their **mind** - and therefore reverse their **behaviour**.

To **stop** mixing their religions and indulging in sexual immorality. Here we see the grace of God. For with **repentance**, there is **forgiveness**; with **forgiveness**, there is **restoration**. /

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Here is an open **invitation**.... an **amnesty** if you like – all you have to do is **stop** living the way you have been...

How **foolish** are people with **that** invitation on the table; to **refuse** it and continue living **half-heartedly** for God and in sexual immorality! ///

But if the invitation is refused... **he will come with the sword of his mouth.**

Here is a reminder, that even though the Roman proconsul had “**THE RIGHT OF THE SWORD**” – the right to **execute anyone** – as was the case in Pergamum – that **ultimate** power lies with **Jesus!**

Jesus will fight **against** them – **contend** with them – by his **powerful word**, as it does its work of rebuking and training in righteousness. //

Perhaps Jesus is even doing that as I **speak** this morning! – challenging some here to leave behind their half-hearted attitude to him, leave behind idolatry – anything else that would come before God – leave their sexual immorality - and join those who are remaining **true** to him no matter what!

Allow the Lord this morning to work on you by his **word**... that’s his **grace**... his **gift** to you this morning – he **disciplines** those whom he **loves!** ///

Finally the

5. ENCOURAGEMENT

You’ll recall that the end of each of these letters there is tremendous promise to those who continue doing what is **commended** in the letter... and to those who heed the **warning** of the letter...

There is an encouragement to **listen** – v12 *whoever has an ear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches...*

Then the promise – *to him who overcomes (PEREGIAN – to the one who is victorious)* – overcomes **what?** (PEREGIAN – Is victorious over what?)

Overcomes (is victorious over) those who hold to the teaching of **Balaam** – overcomes the temptation to **compromise**... allowing other things in 21st century Sunny Coast life to take **precedence** over God – to **compromise** in the area of sexual morality...

To him who overcomes... (to the one who is victorious)... he promises two things – **hidden manna** and a **white stone** with a **new hidden name** on it. //

Israel in the desert, were supplied by God with **manna** from **heaven** – all the food they needed for their nourishment.

Jesus **himself** promises that he is the **bread of life** and when we **spiritually** feed on him we are **spiritually nourished** and **nurtured**.

Here is a promise from Jesus himself that he will supply **all our needs**. When we **push away** all the other **distractions** and **idols** and **gods** and **Balaam’s teaching** of **mixed religion** and **immorality**, then we find **all** we **need**, / given by Jesus **himself**. //

And the **white stone** with a new **name** on it?

We are not really **sure**... except to say two things... stones of some description were used in the 1st century as **tickets** of **admission**, and in **Isaiah 62**, it is promised that Israel’s name will no longer be called *Deserted* – the nations taunting nick-name for Israel, but that the Lord will give them a **new** name – names like – **Hephzibah** which means *my delight is in her*.

To the **believer** who **overcomes** – is promised entry into the **very kingdom of God**, with a name of **intimacy** and **delight**, a name which reflects **who** they have **become** in **Christ**. //

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These promises are for **you** and **me** brothers and sisters... **spiritual satisfaction** which meets **all** our **desires**... and a relationship of **intimacy** with God for all **eternity**. //

Let's wrap up:

We live here on the Sunshine Coast - with many '**religions**' and attractive **idols**.

where Christians can be **rubbished, dismissed, ridiculed**...

For remaining **loyal** to **Jesus** in such a situation.. we are **commended** by Him... it is a **good** thing to stay true to him - even though it may be **hard**... it is to **that** loyalty we are called.

And if you need to **repent** of doing anything **other** than that this morning... then - please - **repent!!**
//

Finally - **rejoice** in the **promises** to those who **overcome**... (are victorious)... **spiritual food** that will **satisfy completely**, and **entrance** to the **kingdom**... **intimacy** with **God**... for **we are his delight**. ///

Whoever has an ear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.... Amen.