

Revelation 2:12-17 -Stretch!

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[0 : 00] No, no, no, no. So great to see you. Just an apology from me. But it's not my fault. I wanted you to know that.

I'm just apologizing on behalf of someone else, which is the best kind of apology. Don't know what's going on with the boxes at the back of the room. If you haven't noticed those, God bless you. But thanks to the setup team coming in earlier than normal and running around more frantically than normal to change our whole setup this morning.

So you came in and everything's like, this is not how we normally do church. Thanks for your patience. We normally face that way. And obviously with the boxes, we did think about making them into chairs, but, you know, but no.

So just thanks for those of you who sat up this morning extra early and thanks for your patience in maneuvering your way around. The couches at the back, by the way, aren't for sitting on, unfortunately.

They are comfortable. So Bill's already done that for you. Unless you're feeling really nappy and you want to go and have a quick nap at the back during the sermon, by all means, go and do that.

[1 : 09] Otherwise, yeah, so just an apology. You know, bank holiday weekend is always a little bit strange, isn't it? For churches where we have to do kind of mobile things and set up. And, you know, normally people obviously are away for the bank holiday weekend more than normal.

And then the school kind of does what schools do. Like we've had five weeks off. Let's panic. We're all coming back to school. And so there's less parking than normal.

There's less room in here than normal. And so hopefully by next week, we'll be back to normal. Which wasn't such a great thing anyway, but, you know, anyway, there you go.

All right, does that help? So apologies for that. If you've got a Bible, why don't you go ahead and turn to Revelation chapter two. So Revelation towards the end of your Bibles.

If you go to the back cover and the index, you've probably gone too far. So Revelation chapter two, you can scroll there if you have one of those fancy gadgets. And we are kind of going through this book.

[2 : 16] We're going through verse by verse, chapter by chapter. That's kind of our thing. So we go, we hit a verse and we read it. I'll talk a bit. We read it. I'll talk a bit. We read it. I'll talk a bit.

That's kind of like our thing. And then we're kind of going through the whole book that way.

So we intend to be in this book for about 18 months. All right. Which is great.

I know that some of you say, well, how are you going to get through in 18 months? I don't know yet because it hasn't happened. But this is just, it's just good to drill down, isn't it? To drill down on the Bible, drill down on what God has for us.

And we want to make this time not just kind of head knowledge, right? We want to know what God has to say to us today. And so that's why we're slowing down.

- [3 : 17] So we have come as far as verse 12 in chapter 2. Jesus is writing a bunch of letters to some churches. And this is what he opens with.
- In verse 12, he's writing to this church. He's already written to a couple of churches already that we've read. He says this, and to the angel. And remember, we talked about who or what that angel was.
- And we kind of concluded it was probably an apostolic messenger of some kind. So to the angel of the church of Pergamum, right? So look, quick word about this city of Pergamum. Or if you're using an older translation, it's Pergamus, right?
- So I kind of not grew up. I'm much more familiar with Pergamus than I am Pergamum. So if I kind of flip between the two, just thanks for your patience, all right?
- And your grace. But look, here's a map coming up on the screen of the seven letters to the seven churches. Brilliant. You can all make that out. So if you've got a snazzy Bible, you can turn it in your back.
- [4 : 14] And that comes with maps, right? So there's seven churches, and they're kind of in a ring. And this one is a little further on from Smyrna, up in the north.
- And today, Pergamum, you can go there actually, is this town called Bergama in Turkey. And it was founded as a city in 5 BC, or the 5th century BC, should I say.
- And in 130 BC, the king donated the city to the Roman Empire as a gift. And let's just do a quick flyby.
- I hope the lights work. But let's just do a quick flyby video of this city. So you can see everywhere you go, there is tributes to...
- You might want to hit some lights. That might help. There is tributes... Oh, got it. There is tributes to Caesar worship. Did I make it better? The guys on the podcast are going to be wondering what on earth is going on.
- [5 : 16] So everywhere you see is Caesar worship. And you can see that it's set 1,000 feet up on a hill. And it looks pretty ruinous at the moment, but there's an artistic impression coming up that you can see the city in full.
- This is an outdoor theater. Seats 15,000 people, right? So that's as much as, what, St. Mary's? Getting there? And it has the steepest seats of anywhere in the ancient world at that time.
- It also has the second largest library in the whole of the Roman Empire. That's going to be significant as we go through this letter. It was Pergamum where they moved away from using papyrus to write on, and they started using parchment.
- And they actually developed the use of parchment in this town. Later, the library was given to Cleopatra of Alexandria by Mark Antony as a wedding present. There's inscriptions all the way through that you can see where declaring Caesar to be Lord.
- So there's at least two major inscriptions where it talks about Caesar worship. And you can see that you've got temples littering. This is the Temple of Dionysus.
- [6 : 32] You've got temples littering this top of this big hill. That's the Temple of Trajan, who was, of course, the emperor when this Book of Revelation was being written.
- But you've also got what was known as the Altar of Zeus or the Seat of Satan. So right over on the right-hand side, you can see the Temple of Zeus, which is that kind of horseshoe figure.
- This is the Temple of Trajan. And then right in the middle, you've got the library. Underneath, you've got the amphitheater going down. And then you can see kind of the modern city there in the background.

And so the three kind of major things, we can probably go ahead and stick the lights on again if you can for me, Jeff. Thanks, mate. The three major things you see in the video are it was the center of religion for that day.

So whereas we saw kind of Ephesus and Smyrna, those cities were really kind of cultural, commercial cities, this is nowhere near the sea. It makes no sense.

[7 : 33] We saw that last week, actually, didn't we? It makes no sense to put a city away from the sea. And this has got some other reason. And the reason is that it was the center of religion. So you've got the Caesar worship that was going on.

The first city to have Caesar worship as an official religion. In 29 BC, they built a temple to Caesar Augustus and another one to Roma. And we saw on the video, just to the left of the amphitheater was the temple to Trajan, who was the emperor at the time that John was writing.

You've got the altar of Zeus, who was the god of heavens or the chief god. And I'll show you another video of that. Oh, there we go. So as if on cue, this is what remains of the temple of Zeus.

And this is just the front portion in Berlin. So if you've got a couple of hours to kill when you go to Berlin, the Berlin Museum, you can go there, check that out. That is there today.

And then you've also got the god of medicine. So if you've ever seen a staff with a snake on it, that's the image of the god of medicine.

[8 : 42] And that was really significant in this city. They had loads of underground areas, actually in the hill. And they would put people who were ill underground and release snakes, non-venomous snakes.

And I can't think of anything worse, to be honest. Like if you're sick, like I can't think of, oh, have a snake, because that's going to make me feel better. I'm going to lie and say I feel better just to leave.

But anyway, so that's, it was the center of kind of worship. I think we've probably got a couple more images, maybe. We'll get to that one.

That one's interesting. So that's the city that we're looking at. Bergamon, Bergamas, if you go there today in Turkey, or Pergamon, Pergamus, depending on your Bible translation.

So look at what Jesus then introduces himself, or how Jesus introduces himself in verse 12. So just imagine you've got a church, probably no bigger than we are, in a city like this, that is known throughout the empire for its religion.

[9 : 54] And he, Jesus is writing a letter to this church. And he says, the words of him, so Jesus, who has the two, the sharp two-edged sword.

And we'll come back to that. Because this is the prescription to the problem that Pergamus has. So Jesus always presents himself as the solution, as the prescription to the problem.

He doesn't say, go here and do that. He presents himself as the prescription. So Jesus is coming to this church, in authority, separating truth from error.

That's what he's going to be doing. And we'll get to that in a moment. Verse 13, this is what he says. He's going to say, three things I know. Jesus is going to know three things. And then he's going to promise three things.

So here's what he says, verse 13, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith. Even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

[10 : 56] So, if you haven't made note of it already, there it is again. In every letter, Jesus says, I know. And here he's going to give us three things that he knows. And, obviously, he knows more than this, but he's highlighting just three things.

Three things he specifically says that he knows. Number one, he says, I know where you live. So, he has your address. Like, don't overthink that Jesus doesn't know what you're going through.

He has your address. He knows where you live. Number two, he says, I know that you are in the same neighborhood as Satan's throne. So, he has his address too. Like, there's nothing out of God's control.

Like, you know, he knows. Right? And then thirdly, I know that that has made no difference to your devotion. Isn't that great? So, he says, I know where you're living.

I know where Satan is living. I know that you guys are in the same neighborhood. And I know that that has made no difference to your devotion to me. Good job. Would you like to get a ladder like that from Jesus?

[12:01] You've remained faithful, he says. And so, he says, and look, what is Satan's throne? Let's just stop there.

Let's just ask that question really quickly. What is Satan's throne? She says, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. So, you probably haven't ever wondered. I've wondered, but I don't know whether you've wondered.

Have you ever wondered where Satan is right now? Some of you are just kind of like, no, I never really thought about it. Where is Satan right now?

So, like, if you've ever wondered, because we know, here's some things we know about Satan. We know that he is not God. That's worth an amen right there. Right? So, he is not God.

Yeah? He is not the opposite of God. So, you don't have Satan and God as two competing equal forces. Correct? Good. Okay, good. So, he is not like God.

[12:59] He is not omnipresent. He is not everywhere all at the same time. Right? He's a created being. Like, if you want to do, like, match them up, you might want to go, Michael the Archangel, Satan.

Right? And God, like, way, way, way up there. Just completely different. Right? So, we know he's not omnipresent. He can't be everywhere at once.

He's a created being. So, where is he? Well, look, for the most part, he's in heaven. Okay? So, for the most part, Satan is in heaven.

We do know, however, that he's visited earth at least twice. So, and I say at least twice, there are a couple of other, places where he could have done, but at least twice.

First, when he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he was on earth, right? So, he was there with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Also, in Matthew chapter 4, he tempted Jesus.

[13:58] He was on earth. So, at least twice, we know that Satan was on earth and he tempted Adam and Eve. They fell. He tempted Jesus. He didn't. Right?

And this is where you get the whole kind of motif for you kind of like, you like to dig even deeper. The first Adam and the second Adam. You know, the first Adam was tempted, he fell. The second Adam was tempted, he didn't. Right? And so, Satan, at least twice we know, came to earth.

Job chapter 1 and 2 suggest that he appeared before God, but in heaven, so as to accuse Job. So, he was in heaven. In Luke 22, 31, Jesus said that Jesus had had a conversation with Satan about Peter, but we don't know where that was.

So, there was a conversation between Jesus and Satan at some point. The inference is that Jesus was on earth, so Satan must have been, but we don't know that. It doesn't tell us that. In Ephesians chapter 2, Paul calls Satan the prince of the power of the air.

In Ephesians 6, Paul says that our struggle is against the rulers, against powers, against forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces, of wickedness, where? In the heavenly places.

[15 : 12] So, our struggle isn't here, it's there. When we get to Revelation chapter 12, we see that John is speaking about the last days of human history, and we eventually see Satan thrown down from heaven to earth, seemingly banished from going back.

But what we, what he is described as doing whilst he is in heaven, is that he accuses Christians before God day and night. So, you kind of take all of that and you kind of go, where is Satan right now?

What is he doing? His main role right now is in heaven and he's bringing up you and he's bringing up me and he's going, oh yeah, but what about, what about Simon?

What about, what about John? What about, what about, what about, what about? He's accusing us before God in heaven. And what is, so what is Jesus doing? He's standing by God and going, no, it's covered, it's covered, it's covered.

You might be right, Simon might be pretty lousy, but it's been covered. Right? And so that's what Jesus is doing. And so, the only one place that we know that Satan isn't is hell.

[16 : 23] Isn't that interesting? We kind of go, oh, Satan, hell, Satan, hell. We make that, we make that connection all the time, all the time. But the one place we know that Satan isn't is in hell. Revelation 20 describes the day when Satan's power and influence will be put out of action and he will be thrown into hell, but that day hasn't come yet.

Right? So his influence is still very much alive in the world, isn't it? You turn on the news, what is happening in the world? Satan's influence is happening in the world. That's what's happening. Right?

And so some believe that while Satan is mostly in heaven, which I think is true, I think he's mostly in heaven, his followers, so the angels that were falling out, kicked out of heaven like, you know, before, during the rebellion, if you like, they are the ones that are working in the world right now.

Right? So, what Jesus isn't suggesting in our text, what he isn't suggesting is that Satan literally has a throne in Pergamum.

It's better to understand the word throne, and I wish we had time to kind of explore this, but we just don't because Linda's already said it's her 45-minute sermon, which is not going to happen.

[17 : 38] I'll change that to 60 for next week. But it won't be an hour and 20 like it was last week. Thanks, Jay. So anyway, let's not go there. it's better to understand the word throne as a motif that happens all the way through Revelation.

Right? So, and it's a motif of power and influence. And actually, what you see in the book of Revelation, 47 times this word throne is used. 47 times.

That's why we titled the whole series War of the Worlds. You could say War of the Thrones. Right? So you have you have God's throne and God's throne is mentioned countless times in the book of Revelation.

God's throne, God's power and influence is coming to bear on the world against the power and influence of Satan. That's what's happening in the book of Revelation as that motif.

And so Satan, wherever Satan goes, he is trying to exert his power and influence even in heaven before God. And it seems that the base of operation in John's day, the center for that power and influence was happening in Pergamum.

[18 : 54] We see in Revelation 13 that Satan's throne seems to move from Pergamum to Babylon. Whether Babylon is again an actual place or whether it's figurative at the center of again Satan's rule and reign, we don't know.

But it seems that this place, this town, this city is just simply the center of opposition to God's power and influence.

Alright? So don't get caught up with, oh, where is Satan's throne? Satan's throne is somewhere literal and it has to be. I wonder where that is today. Satan's power and influence, I'm not too sure, is confined to a place today.

So it's part of this great comparison that John is being shown between the rule of God and the rule of Satan. And listen, don't we feel that even today in our own hearts?

There is a struggle. What is causing that struggle in our hearts? Well, it's against the rule of Satan or the rule of God. You know, if you're a Christian, what you've done is saying, I'm pledging my allegiance to the rule of God in my life.

[20 : 04] And that's opened up a whole can of worms for you, hasn't it? Because what Satan is doing is, no, I'm going to assert my influence. I'm going to come against you. It's tremendously difficult to be godly, isn't it?

Isn't it? Or is that just me? It's like, am I the only one who struggled to be godly? But why do we struggle to be godly? Well, because there's a war going on. Someone is trying to exert their power and influence.

And so, there's this whole thing going on, not just in our own lives, but that is then extended to the whole world. And so, Jesus says, look, I know your address and I know Satan's address and I know that there is struggle going on.

I know there are problems going on. Yet, Jesus says, you hold fast to my name. and he says, you hold fast to my name. You did not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among you where Satan dwells.

Like, what does God want from us? He wants, he wants, when you and I, we said, I'm going to pledge my allegiance to God to continue doing that.

[21 : 18] That's it. I want you to be faithful. And the praise that Jesus comes with that. Don't, don't, don't miss this.

Because Jesus sees when we are faithful. Like, even when no one else does, Jesus knows. Jesus knows when you choose to be godly or you choose to be ungodly.

He knows when you choose to be godly and he praises you for it. He's like, well done, keep going, don't give up. I know it's difficult, but look where you're living.

You're doing a good job. And so he says, look, you hold fast to my name. You did not deny my faith. And then he gives this context about Antipas that is probably lost on us.

But he's talking about this, this event where this guy, Antipas, who actually John the Apostle probably knew, John the Apostle probably appointed Antipas into this church during the reign of Emperor Nero.

[22 : 25] And according to Tertullian, who was an early church father, like an early church author, he says that once a year they would throw a party in honor to the emperor and the whole city would come out in like festival and once a year they would choose someone to offer incense in the altar of Zeus.

and this one year Tertullian says Antipas was chosen but because he was a Christian he refused to give honor. And the proconsul of Pergamum would have been actually given a sword and we'll come to this in a moment, we were given a sword and the sword is then just the right to life and death and Antipas was executed for his I guess non-compliance.

So the point is that Jesus is commending them even when Antipas was called out and executed.

It would have been easy for them to have gone I don't want to lose my life. I'm going to run I'm going to hide I'm going to go somewhere else I'm going to flee the city. But Jesus says no you didn't deny my name you didn't deny my faith even when that happened.

And so even in the face of this kind of opposition they were able to remain true to God and they were able to stay true to God. Why? What gives them the ability to remain true to God even in that?

[23 : 58] Well look Matthew chapter 16 verse 18 is pretty simple. If you're a Christian you probably know this verse but this is what Jesus said. Jesus says I'm going to build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I take that to mean that Jesus will build his church and when he does not even the throne of Satan should it be located even in your own town not even the power and influence of Satan and all his followers combined will be able to do anything about it.

And so how do you remain faithful? Because this is not a church surviving under attack. this is the church on the move taking ground because the power and influence of Satan is nothing to that of God and the church that Jesus was building in Pergamum was testimony not to their faithfulness but to the faithfulness of Jesus to keep them.

But verse 14 there's always a but isn't there? None of us like that but here we go. But here comes the exhortation I have a few things against you a few things plural that's never good either is it?

If there's one thing you can improve we can kind of live with that here's a few things you can improve don't like that so much but here's a few things that you can improve you have some there and we think that's probably in the church you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam who told Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel so that they might eat food sacrifice to idols and practice sexual immorality and also verse 15 so look what this church had done is be super faithful in the clear and obvious problems in the city that they were living in right they put away idolatry they rejected pagan worship they had upheld Jesus Christ as Lord rather than Caesar as Lord they would do so many great things and yet they hadn't gone far enough because Jesus highlights two things that they need to repent of and that's the word in verse 16 he says therefore repent have a change of mind have a change of thinking turn 360 180 degrees not 360 because I'd be daft 180 degrees turn the other way and start walking make your practice difference so what are these two things that they are being rebuked for exhorted over and there's anything in our own hearts that we can say maybe maybe the

[26 : 45] Lord now it's important to understand that the grammar the Greek grammar is referring to how both of these things work together there's not one thing and then something different they are two things of the same problem so one is the doctrine of Balaam which is the teaching that encourages Christians to compromise to the point that they break with truth I'm going to see if I can unpack this as much as I can within the time that we've got and make it as clear as I can but I'm honestly I'm going to struggle to do that job so please let's have a conversation afterwards but the first is the doctrine of Balaam which is the teaching that encourages Christians to compromise to the point that they break with truth then the second was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans which is the teaching that encourages Christians to not the city of

Pergamum the city of Pergamum was well known for its parchment making but to make parchment you have to take an animal skin and stretch it in a wooden frame just like this right so this is the process of making parchment you can't just take animal skin clean it up and start writing you can but it's not going to end well for you right so to take parchment you have to take animal skin and stretch it in a wooden frame you have to stretch it but if you stretch it too far it becomes unusable if you don't stretch it enough it also becomes unusable so the story of Balaam is literally about stretching too far it's about taking the good principles of God and applying them in a bad way if you want to read the story this afternoon you can it's found in numbers 25 and numbers 31 and it's probably one of the most comical stories in the whole

Bible where Balaam gets chatting to his pet donkey and his pet donkey starts chatting back and no one thinks that's a problem and so read that this afternoon it's a little bit of comedy in there for you but listen the basic premise of the story is that Balaam is a prophet of God he's like a prophet of Israel right and he was approached by the Moabite king King Balak to curse Israel Balak was like there's no way I'm going to defeat Israel here's what I need to do obviously I need to pay some guy to curse Israel who can I find I'll find Balaam and Balaam was like no no no no I don't do that like I'm a good guy you can't be asking a good guy to do bad things and then Balak went I'll give you some money and Balaam like all right then so Balaam then went to the children of Israel climbed up this hill saw Israel in front of him and looked down and started to speak a curse over

Israel but what came out of his mouth was a blessing right I mean this goes way more than just kind of old age when he starts saying things and you're like how did I say that I didn't even mean to say that what am I talking about this is he's speaking a curse but out of his mouth is coming blessing and not only blessing I've got the verse actually for you it's one of the most amazing beautiful prophecies about the birth right so in the shape of a cross in the shape of a cross great good just make sure we've got that numbers 24 verse 17 this is what Balaam speaks as a curse over Israel he says I see him but not now I behold him but not near he's looking at a cross right and he's like I see

Jesus but he's not there yet he's! wait what's coming out of my mouth what what what what what and then he says a star shall come out of Jacob a scepter shall rise out of Israel and crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheath so instead of this curse he then speaks this blessing and not just a blessing he's saying guys Jesus is coming now of course that's a problem isn't it that's a problem for Balaam it's a problem for Balak and so Balak has already given him money so Balak says okay let's plan B plan B is rather than coming against Israel let's talk about how you can destroy the nation of Israel from the inside and he gets them to compromise on a good principle he gets them to compromise on how they interacted with non-Jews right now the background to that is

[32 : 03] Genesis chapter 12 God clearly says to Abraham I want you and the nation that comes from you to be a blessing to the nations around you right that was their mission in life I want you to be a blessing to the nations around you but what I don't want you to do is those nations I want you to stay and be a nation but I want you to bless those nations God says in effect I want you to stretch don't be insular don't keep all of the laws and the good things that God is giving to you to yourself I want you to bless the nations around you so Barak got the people to join with the nations which had been prohibited to do so they were compromising if you like on the things that they should not compromise on they were stretching to the point that they were splitting stretching to the point that they were breaking with truth and so the doctrine of

Balaam is teaching others to put a stumbling block in our way so that we take the prohibitions of the Bible and make these gray areas we start stretching today we might say it's okay for a Christian to drink alcohol we might say that I'm not saying that necessarily it's not a teaching I'm just saying you might come down on that side of the fence to say it's okay to have a glass of wine with dinner okay but to drink three bottles is a problem okay so you've stretched too far right to say I'm gonna I'm gonna I wanna be in the world but I don't wanna be of the world I wanna be in the world I'm gonna go out with my mates and actually I'm just gonna it's gonna be carnage stretch too far got it does that make sense and so the partner problem is the teaching of the Nicolaitans and we've seen these kind of guys before but teaching of the

Nicolaitans were basically the super strict guys and they said don't stretch at all they didn't allow any tension to be lived out now you finding out in your Christian life that the Christian life is a life of tension it's a life of living in tension I think Paul was a great example of this in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 he kind of gives us an indication of someone who was able to live within the prohibitions of the Bible yet remained flexible he was able to stretch without splitting that's what he says in 1 Corinthians 9 writing to the church in Corinth and go and do some research about Corinth that makes Pergamum look like nursery school with a whole bunch of really innocent kids Corinth was horrendous right so 1 Corinthians 9 he says to the Jews I became as a Jew in order to win Jews to those under the law I became as one under the law though not being myself under the law that

I might win those under the law to those under the law I became as one outside the law what is he saying well look he's saying that when I'm in Jewish circles I have to start stretching I have to start acting like a Jew and it almost seems like it's not his preference I have to seem like I'm a Jew I have to start stretching so when he goes up to Jerusalem remember in the book of Acts he goes up to Jerusalem he's telling his friends he's going up to Jerusalem and his friend says you should go go to Jerusalem that's great but you should offer a vow in the temple now quick Christian thing to do offer a vow in temple not really you wouldn't normally do that and Paul wouldn't normally do that but when he goes he goes okay I'll do that I'll stretch when he goes to Jewish towns with his Gentile friend his name was Timothy what does he do he takes

Timothy and circumcises him Christian thing to do not really like not really not at all but here's the thing if someone in Jerusalem let's call him a Balaamite says to Paul hey Paul your Gentile friend Timothy needs to be circumcised in order to become a Christian he would say absolutely no way that's a stretch too far that's outside the boundaries this is verse 21 of 1st Corinthians he says to those the law I became as one outside the law who's he talking about Gentiles so look when he's in Jewish company he's eating kosher food when he's in Gentile company he's got squid on the menu and pork chops he's stretching he's stretching he says in verse 22 to the week I became weak that I might win the week I have become all things to all people that

[37 : 20] I might win or I might save some he is a parchment in a wooden frame Paul will not be broken by over flexing he will not become useless by under flexing and so the problem in Pergamum was that they didn't know how to live in the tension of the wooden frame they were really good about identifying all of the stuff outside of the wooden frame all of the Zeus worship all of the Caesar worship all of the other kind of Dionysian worship all of that that's wrong don't go anywhere near that but it didn't know how to flex within the parameters that God had given them and because of that some some will encourage them to go beyond and others were saying don't stretch at all and so that's why we see the reason Jesus presents himself as he does in verse 12 go back there the words of him who has a sharp two edged sword sharp two edged sword can I just say that the sword isn't the important thing the one holding the sword is the important thing right so this is a romphaya sword having said that now

I'm going to tell you all about sword it's a romphaya sword which is a sword of judgment it's the same sword that the proconsul of Pergamum would have yielded in the days of Antipas it's mentioned seven times in the New Testament six times in the book of Revelation and it doesn't refer to the Bible that may surprise you but it doesn't all right there's another little sword that refers to you know this is symbolic of the Bible if you like this refers to judgment and again there would be a capital and the capital would be sat there would be a proconsul who would be employed by the Roman governor to deploy literally life or death has the power of life or death and that's the meaning of the two edges life or death it's not right or wrong it's life or death and so

Jesus is saying to them that it's not the proconsul who has power it's not Satan who has power it may look like that like you look around the world the world is in chaos isn't it like we think we've got problems because we have high inflation and high energy bills and I don't want to put those down but you got other places they have problems but Jesus is reminding us look there might be struggles there might be problems there might even be problems of life and death but it's not Satan who holds that it's Jesus Jesus is the one who decides between life and death he's the pro consul if you like of the entire world and it is allegiance and obedience to him that is counted in the end it's allegiance and obedience to Jesus that is counted in the end and so the promise comes next he says if you don't repent verse 16

I will come to you soon and wage war with them notice it's with them not with you it's with them those who have the teachings of Balak and the teachings of Nicolaitans it's with them I will soon come to you war against them with the sword of my mouth basically he's saying I'm going to kill them but it's much more poetic verse 17 he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches and so this is a call to be godly in an ungodly world is to be godly in an ungodly world it's it's it's to learn to flex it's learning to stretch appropriately within the boundaries that God has given us and you know the real problem about this inability to flex is that that we think that by partaking or refraining that there is something that we need that

God is going to supply to us and that's the thing called righteousness like we think that if we do this or not do this then we're more righteous but that's not the case remember back in first Corinthians Paul says that the purpose of me flexing is that I might win some to Christ now look at these promises that he then makes he makes three promises to this church he makes three promises to you and you can write these down and you can say these are promises to me from Jesus he who has an ear so whoever's listening today this is good for us so he says number one and you could just write these down I would have made a slide but I didn't there's no excuse Jesus will satisfy me that's number one that's the first promise Jesus will satisfy me number two Jesus will receive me and then number three

[42 : 49] Jesus will redeem me so Jesus will satisfy me Jesus will receive me and Jesus will redeem me so he says to the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manner this verse about hidden manner is fitting because look at verse 14 where Jesus says that the problem of the doctrine of Babylon is twofold it produces it is in itself but it produces idolatry and sexual immorality just think about it what drives those two things what drives in our day idolatry and sexual immorality well it's love isn't it right now you heard that correctly I said love often what is really at the root of idolatry so again idolatry is making something more than it is expecting the same return it's placing value on something because we think it can give it something when it's not designed to give us that right career jobs are good now

I know that some of us teachers don't think that right now with four days left counting down the minutes right jobs are good God God put Adam and Eve to work in the garden before the fall work is good right but when we think that work is going to give us different return than it's designed to we elevate it it becomes a god to us it becomes an idol but listen the root of idolatry is the mistaken idea that this thing is going to provide something for me it's going to give me something it's going to satisfy me in some way what might also be at the root of sex is the longing for what intimacy the longing to be known and known so these two things are love substitutes false thinking about what it will provide for us and what gives us the intimacy with desire leads us to seek those things in all the wrong places and so

Jesus promises the one who conquers supernatural food Jesus is saying I have what you crave I am what you crave got it John chapter six Jesus said to them I am the bread of life he doesn't just say I'm going to give you the bread of life he's gonna but he says I am that thing for you I am the bread of life whoever comes to me shall not hunger whoever believes in me shall never thirst he also said a few verses later he said I am the bread of life your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die I am the living bread that came down from heaven if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever!

And so the first promise that Jesus gives is that he promises to satisfy and don't you find that as a Christian like that there is nothing more satisfying than knowing Jesus second thing because time has already gone second thing I will give him a white stone and I know some of you are thinking whoopee like what is a what what's the deal with a white stone honestly well there are 12 different possibilities relax I'm not going to go through all 12 in fact I'm not even I'm not even convinced anyone knows the let me give you four you received a white stone in the first century and actually earlier than that when you were found innocent in court which I like that kind of plays on the whole being redeemed kind of idea right so get a white stone you're given a white stone as a ticket to a banquet so you know these day long banquets once a year festivals once a year your entry ticket was a white stone like

I don't know like you could just pick up a white stone tip exit and go I'm in right it's obviously symbolic right and perhaps it was to do with the stone and the breast plate on the high priest back in Exodus perhaps it's simply a symbol of victory that we have in Christ I think they're probably all right and probably none of them kind of really touch base entirely either way what we can say is that it's given to those who conquer in Jesus because that's the promise to those who conquer I'm going to give a white stone it is something that Jesus has and Jesus gives to us we know that too and so that's why I kind of thought about Jesus receives us he's giving us something that he possesses and whatever it is it's valuable right so

[49 : 03] I'm going to give you a white stone and then finally the final promise on the stone so it's not just a white stone there's something on that stone on that stone is a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it now quite honestly we don't know what that means in terms of we get this new name we have been redeemed absolutely we have become a new creation the bible says if you place your faith and trust in Jesus right he's made you new that's the definition of a Christian right you are a new creation the old has gone the new has come right and you've been born again and Jesus says unless you're born again you won't see the kingdom of heaven John chapter 3 so you've been in that way you've been given a new name and it's his name but he says no one knows except the one who receives it and so you know we we say well look

I don't know what that means but here's what I do know it means that a new name means I've received a new story my life is now no longer marked by the struggle that I once had my life is no longer marked by the identity that I once had it's no longer marked by sin it's no longer marked by struggle even though we still sin and we still struggle but it's marked by victory won on our behalf and attributed to us for those who conquer to be given a new name was an indication of new status and so this is God in effect saying you are now a member of the redeemed people of God to those who conquer to those who remain faithful to those who have pledged their allegiance to Christ and have stayed faithful you have an incredibly bright future and so can

I leave that with you and may the Lord help us to understand these things Father we thank you for your word Lord we thank you for your promises to those who conquer!

to who conquer! to conquer! to conquer! to conquer! to satisfy us that we may be that we may know and be known truly that we can come to you even as we are now when you receive!

us not because! of what we! done but! the victory that you have won for us thank you that you haven't left us on our own but you have placed us into a family the redeemed people of God thank you that none of that was our own doing thank you that you went before us to the cross and you died for us you sent your Holy Spirit to to rebirth us to make us new we want to thank you for that this morning thank you Lord that though we do sin and we do struggle we're called to live in that tension and sometimes that tension is a struggle Lord you've promised also to not leave us and Lord we do pray this morning Lord as we look at this letter we want to say that we receive these things for ourselves Lord these are not just for that church in

[52 : 40] Pergamum but they're for us too they're for me Lord would you help us to live lives that that stretch but don't go beyond the border of what is right Lord help us to be sensitive to the people around us to the culture around us to the context but also speak the truth Lord help us to shun those things Lord that would lead us into idolatry placing a value on things that can never give a return Lord we come to you Lord and we are thankful Lord that you satisfy us with good things your word says that you open your hand and out of your hand comes every good thing Lord why would we want to go anywhere else Lord would you help us in our own lives in our own hearts in the way that we voted to you Lord we want to thank you

Lord that you are not a God who could come in here this morning and you know where we live you know our address you know our hearts you know what we've been thinking you know the struggles that we have Lord and you don't judge us Lord we thank you Lord that you pour mercy on us and grace and compassion and you lead us and for those who will be led those who want to be led Lord you pour more grace and more mercy on Lord and would you create in our hearts just this attitude that that says Lord wherever you lead us wherever you go let us go with you Lord because we can't we can't think of any better place to go Peter says where would I go you have the words of eternal life Lord would that be our cry would that be our hearts cry today Lord that all of the things that vie for our worship the great power struggle that is going on in this world but also in our hearts

Lord we would stay true to you we would stay faithful to you and we may trip up every now and again we may fall down every now and again probably more often than we would like to you're a good God who comes and picks us up your word says that a broken reed you won't break smoke and flax you don't put out I think it's just a word for us today Lord that you are a God who restores psalm 23 talks about how you lead us into green pastures you restore our souls Lord why would we go anywhere else so Lord we just thank you for that Lord we thank you that you're a good God Lord we thank you Lord that you lead us in such a good way Lord would we be led today believe in that whatever you have for us!

Lord as we sing this next song Lord we don't want to just sing songs if they don't mean anything but we want to declare to our own hearts the truth we sang earlier be still my soul and it's a good thing soul be still stop being anxious about what's happening in the world Lord we want to sing out of the outflow of what you are doing in our hearts so would you help us to lift our voices to you lift our hearts to you and our minds focused on you now in Jesus name we pray Amen