

Pergamum (The White Stone and Our New Name)

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[0 : 00] All right, well, what in the world is Revelation for? You read one to twenty with me, and then we read the other passage.

This is a strange book. The date is 95 AD. John is on an island called Patmos. He's probably been exiled there because he refused to worship in the Emperor cult of Caesar in eastern Turkey in Asia Minor.

And he's riding to a church in Asia Minor and things aren't great. The cities that they're in remain almost entirely pagan.

So ministry is just not going that well. Some are dying. The one we read about, we read about one martyr in our passage. The church is marginalized, to be sure.

And John has a vision on this island of Jesus Christ. Did you see that? It's the revelation of Jesus Christ. And at the backside of chapter one, we saw a vision of Jesus.

[1 : 15] And he says, write this for the churches who are in a time of pain. Unsure of their future. When will this God man return?

And this book is what pops out. To people that are hurting, to people that are suffering, to people that are feeling pain. This is the revelation. This is the book that comes out.

Now, I don't know about you, but when things in my life don't make sense, and when I'm asking questions like what in the world? Why are people who do pastoral ministry getting brain hemorrhages?

Why are things the way they are? Why me? The question that comes up in our lives. Or if I have a friend who's going through any type of struggling and pain, look, you probably like me, don't go to them and go, hey, let me read the book of Revelation to you out loud.

It'll really make you feel better. We don't do that. Revelation, I mean, for most of us, probably, like if Revelation was just cut off at the end, we'd be okay.

[2 : 25] Because we got the Gospels, right? But look, here's the thing. This book is not here to trick you. It's not here to make you confused.

John's saying that he's writing this book specifically to people in Turkey that are suffering. Churches that just simply need encouragement.

So that's the thing to keep in mind. That's what this book is about. That's what this book is for. Now, we need to just...this is probably good.

I don't know how many times you guys have ventured down the road of reading through Revelation and trying to just wrestle with what's going on. But there's all sorts of readings out there of Revelation, as you well know.

Most of the really bad ones are in America, so you can maybe rest a bit more assured. Like you've seen the charts, right? You've seen the crazy charts.

[3 : 24] Yeah. Look, what's going on in Revelation? Let me just give you a simple kind of way of interpreting and reading the whole book through just two verses, okay? If you come with me to 1-1 before we get to the letter of Pergamon, it says this, The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants, the things that must soon take place, he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.

Now, come down with me back to the first sentence where it says, God gave him to show. See that? That verb, to show. Now, that's a verb that does not appear very many times in the Bible. It appears twice in the Old Testament, in the Greek Old Testament, and a couple times in the book of John and in Revelation. So John's the only writer that uses it.

And the thing about Revelation is, if you want to interpret it, you don't look at what's... You don't read the newspaper. That's not the way you interpret the book of Revelation. You actually go

backwards and you read the Old Testament.

Almost everything that's in the book of Revelation is unveiled before us through close examination of its relationship to the Old Testament. Now, this is the clue, this verb, to show.

[4 : 38] In Daniel chapter 2, the first place that this verb ever appears in the Bible, it means something very specific, and John always uses it this way. In Daniel chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar has had his dreams, and he calls Daniel in and says, and Daniel says, I can semino, which is what this verb is, to you, everything that God was telling you in your dream.

It's a semino. A symbol, you see. The revelation that God gave Nebuchadnezzar about cows and wheat, and you remember all that stuff in the book of Daniel, it was a semino, it was a symbol. It was to show you something symbolic. John comes out right away from the beginning of the book, is I'm giving you images to wake you up to reality, and they're not to just be taken straight up literal. The first thing we see is that this book is not to just be read literally. We're not to map it out onto modern-day warfare, helicopters. What's happening in 1948 in Israel, what's happening between Russia and Ukraine.

This is all out there, and it's just wrong. The second thing that we see about how to read it is, a lot of times we think about the book of Revelation as an entirely future.

[6 : 02] Everything in the book of Revelation is going to happen. It's all in the future, but he makes it really clear in 1.19. So if you look at verse 19, right there for the things that you have seen, those that are, and those that will take place, or are to take place after this.

And so the two things to kind of remember when you're reading the book of Revelation on your own is this. The images are not to be taken literally most of the time, and the book is not entirely about the future.

It's about the past, the present, and the future. If you want to know what it means, you've got to go to the Old Testament, you've got to go to the Gospels, and you've got to think about the Second Coming.

And all three of those together form a picture. Now, why does Jesus give this to us?

It's not the book I would write, you know, if I was trying to help suffering Christians. But I think just one thing is this. The images that we see in this book are meant to shock us back to reality.

[7 : 11] And when I say back to reality, you need to think about something that we've lost in the modern world, especially in the late modernity ever since about the 18th century.

And that's the fact that in the modern, late modern world we live in, everybody thinks that everything we see is just self-evident. It is what you see.

If you want to know something, you use your senses. That's the primary way. That's science, right? And what Jesus is coming to say to you in this book is, look, the world isn't exactly like you see it.

He's pulling back the curtain, you see, and he's saying, there is something more real than this. And that's the world of the Spirit, the world of the spiritual.

When you ask questions like, why me? Why Katrina? Why are you doing this at this time in my life, in this world?

[8 : 16] How is this suffering working for the good that you say? Revelation is exactly the book you go to. He pulls back the curtain, you see, and says, look, you can't see what's happening.

Big things. Big things behind the curtain. This is what's most real. So what is Jesus trying to reveal to us tonight, I think, in this passage?

I think he's trying to reveal two things, the same two things, that he's revealing throughout the whole book of Revelation. The first thing is that he's trying to reveal a person, and he's trying to reveal a perspective.

So first, he's trying to reveal a person. Who is Jesus? Who is the Jesus you know?

The second mild, lowly, gentle, the Jesus who washes the disciples' feet, the Jesus who eats with sinners, the Jesus who lays down his rights, Philipians 2, as the eternal Son to become the dead man on the cross.

[9 : 26] He's the resurrected Lord who gives Mary Magdalene a big bear hug in the garden after the resurrection. The Jesus who eats breakfast with Peter in John 21.

Like, this is the Jesus we know. This is the Jesus of the Gospels, and this is true. This is the Jesus we all know. This is our Christ. This is our Lord, right?

But in Pergamum, Jesus was not Lord Caesar was. Look down at our passage. It says in verse 13, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is.

Where Satan's throne is. Jesus was not the Lord in Pergamum and the public sphere. If you walked into Pergamum, you would see something.

First, you would walk to the city center, but from a long time before you got there, you would see an 800-foot beam. A wonder.

[10:35] And at the top of that beam was an altar to Zeus, a table, an altar. This altar was known commonly as the throne of Satan by the Christians.

And so when John writes, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is, he's making a very literal reference right there. It's the tower of Zeus, the tower at the city center.

Pergamum was widely known for two things. Pergamum was the place where four major temples, for the biggest temples in the Roman Empire were dedicated to four different gods.

Zeus, Dionysius, Alcepius, who was Apollo's son. I can't remember the fourth. The second thing Pergamum was known for was that this was the first city that was built as a city for the sake of the Emperor Colt.

So Caesar Augustus built Pergamum during his reign, and he built this city entirely for one purpose. This was to be a center in Asia Minor for emperor worship.

[11:44] Kaiser Curios, Caesar is Lord. In this city Caesar is Lord, and Zeus is God, and this is where Satan dwells.

You see? Now, this tells us something. It tells us that John wants us, and Jesus wants us to see Jesus in a certain type of light in this context.

This is the city where Satan dwells. Now look at verse 12. To the angel of the church in Pergamum, write, The words of him who has the sharp to edged sword.

The Pergamum church lives in a world of alternative claims to deity. You see? So many others.

There are at least four major gods plus the emperor that are vying for claims at deity in the city.

They're surrounded by alternative deities. The image of Jesus Christ that these people need is the one that he gives him.

[12:47] The words of him who has the sharp to edged sword. Now if you call the image of Jesus in chapter one, you saw that the two edged sword is a sword that comes out of the mouth of Christ in the revelation.

The image we're not getting here is Jesus meek and mild. It's not Jesus washing the feet. It's the sword of judgment pouring forth out of the mouth of God.

The point is, he's saying, I know where you dwell. You live in a city of a bunch of other deities and I will not compete. You see?

Jesus Christ will not have it so. And so he gives him the image. He's shocking them into a new reality. You're suffering because you're surrounded by false claims.

People are pressing in on you. They're persecuting you. We see it very in just a moment. You hold fast my name. You did not deny my faith.

[13:50] Even in the days of Antipas, my faithful servant who was killed. Somebody's been murdered. And more is coming. More is coming. The Trajan persecution is not far away from this event.

Jesus says, you need to see me, the judge. You need to wake up to something a little bit uncomfortable. Jesus Christ the judge.

Jesus doesn't compete. And so when he says, I know where you dwell. I know what's happening. Look, he's saying, look, I see you.

He's pulling back the curtain and reminding them, I'm invisible. That's what makes life so hard. You can't see God, but I see you.

I know where you dwell. I know what Pergamum's like. I know what your workplace is like. I know what Edinburgh's like. I know what Scotland's like.

[14:54] I know that you're living in a world that's competing, alternate deities all around you. I know this. I see you. He presents himself as the judge and as the omniscient omnipresent one.

He sees all. He knows all. Look, we need to see Jesus the judge tonight. Maybe because that's an image of Jesus you haven't seen in a long time.

An image of Jesus that you haven't thought about. I think maybe for two reasons. We need to see Jesus the judge because some of us are discouraged. By circumstances, you need to see the judge of all the earth is in control of all the earth.

You need to see that he doesn't compete. That he's the only king. The only judge.

You need to see and know that the enemies of God will be cast down. God is making all the evils into goods.

[16:06] By judging them. And some of us secondly need to see Jesus the judge tonight because we're a bit apathetic.

We're a bit bored with Christianity. And we've been sitting around the truth claims of the gospel for a long time. John writes it this way because Jesus revealed it this way.

And Jesus revealed it this way because he's meant to awaken you to a picture. Do you see Jesus the judge? This is what's out in front of us.

Revelation is simply saying look at Jesus all over the place. Look at Jesus. I know what you are. Jesus says I know what makes you. I see where you dwell.

I know what makes you feel dirty. I know it makes you feel guilty. I know your skepticism. I know your apathy. You need to see behind the curtain. You need to see behind the curtain.

[17:09] The story of history is a story we don't maybe say enough. People will believe. Or they will see Jesus the judge. The question is simple.

Do you believe? Do you believe that you truly live in a city under his control? Isaiah 11.4 predicts this moment in a really beautiful way.

Jesus, he shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide to spew by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge. And he will decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth. And with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Now look, Jesus the judge, this isn't new.

Jesus has been the judge before this moment. At the moment of incarnation, Jesus Christ judged the world. Okay?

[18:09] When Jesus, God became man, all of us stood condemned in that moment. Jesus became incarnate. Look, because you're not what you're supposed to be.

And I'm not what I'm supposed to be. The first great judgment of humanity was the incarnation. And the incarnation of Jesus comes to say things just aren't okay.

But look, at the cross, the judge becomes the judged. At the cross the judge became the judged. So that we who ought to have been judged might not be judged by the final judge of Revelation 2.

You see? If you would just believe, he says.

Secondly and finally, the book of Revelation comes to us, and this chapter comes to us to reveal a perspective. To reveal Jesus Christ, a particular image of Jesus Christ, and to reveal a perspective.

[19:16] He pulls back the curtain. He said, that things are not as they seem. Don't forget about the world behind the world.

Revelation isn't here so much as to push info down our throats as much as it is to paint a picture before us, to move us, to affect us.

To have affections for Jesus in a new way. It's a book that artists absolutely love and accountants hate for that reason.

It's a book of art in many ways. It's a painting that is offering you a story that says things aren't falling apart even though they look like it.

Now to us, things do look like they're falling apart. Not to mention the suffering that we experience, but look, things literally are falling apart. Any decent scientist will tell you that the world is undergoing something called entropy.

[20:13] You remember this from Newton's Laws. Entropy means that molecules in their natural state tend toward chaos, not organization. They tend toward breaking apart.

This is entropy. Things are falling apart, literally. Jesus is saying, pull behind the curtain and see that they're not.

They're not. He wants to show you something. And I think the two perspectives he wants us to have is first to take a warning. To take a warning. The warning is this, take the perspective of Jesus as judge seriously.

Now if you come with me to the text, he goes on, you've been faithful in the midst of these alternate deities, he says in verse 13. But in verse 14, I have a few things against you.

You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balaam to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.

[21 : 18] So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolations. Some in Pergamum have compromised. You remember the story of Balaam in the Old Testament in Numbers 22 to 25?

Balaam, just to cut to the end of the story because it's really long. Balaam was kind of coerced by Belech, the king of the Moabites, to coerce Israel to basically be seduced by women, Moabite women to enter into probably was something like a cult worship ritual.

And that cult worship ritual would have involved eating food sacrificed to idols on the one hand and some type of temple prostitution on the other. So the reference here to eating food sacrificed to idols in the practice of sexual immorality is literally a reference to what the Israelite men did after being coerced by Balaam to go to the Moabite temple.

That's the sins that they engaged in. The reference to the Nicolations, I mean we don't know a ton about who they are, but the Nicolations are basically a first century mirror of what Balaam had done.

The Nicolations probably were coercing people in the church at Pergamum to synthesize with the Emperor cult or the Zeus cult or whatever was there.

[22 : 46] So it was a synthesized type of religion. Look, the point that he's making, and it's very simple, he says therefore, repent.

The point that he's making is he's giving a warning and saying, look, you need to see behind the curtain so that you're enabled to persevere with relentless conviction.

John Stop commenting on this passage says this, note well in Revelation 2 a central truth to which we must devote ourselves is that the revelation of Christ's name, his character, his person, his work, on that there can be no compromise.

Not even in the name of love. These fundamental truths cannot be compromised. The New Testament apostles make this absolutely clear. We cannot have Christian fellowship with those who actively deny the divinity of Christ's persons or the satisfactoriness, sufficiency of his work on the cross for our salvation if there to remain in the church.

These are defense positions we cannot yield. There is no room for negotiation or appeasement here to deny that Jesus of Nazareth was both human and divine.

[24 : 01] The Christ come in the flesh. This is anti-Christ John wrote. In which any other gospel than the gospel of Christ's saving grace is to deserve Paul's anathema.

So the first thing he's doing is again a bit abrasive but it's very simple. Repent and persevere in ruthless conviction of the gospel.

The second thing he's doing here is he's giving us a perspective of seeing the danger. We've been talking in Ephesians chapter 3 on Sunday mornings and Paul's exhortation to us is don't lose heart. Don't lose heart people in the midst of something. Persevere. Keep going. I'm bound in chains. I'm on death row. I know what's coming and I know what you're thinking. This Paul who came and preached to the Gentiles.

He's about to get killed. And where is this God man you've told us is coming back? The message here is don't lose heart. Don't lose heart.

[25 : 03] Finally, three images. He gives us three images at the very end. Not to lose heart. He who has an ear verse 17. Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who conquers. Now this is where it gets a bit metaphorical and very imagery. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna.

There's the first image. I will give him a white stone. There's a second image and I will write a new name. There will be a new name written on the stone. The third image that no one knows except the one who receives it.

What in the world is going on there? The hidden manna. The hidden manna he's saying this. I know things are hard in Pergamum.

I know things are hard in Edinburgh in 2016. People want to quit this race. But you can't see the sustenance that is out in front of you.

[26 : 05] He's pulling back the curtain on a hidden manna, a hidden bread, a hidden sustenance. Now he's directly connecting this I think to the Balaam story in Numbers.

In the Balaam story, Israel at one point denies bread, heavenly food. And instead takes the food from the idols at the temple when they go in the prostitution cult.

John chapter 6. Jesus comes and says to us, you need not the bread of idols. I am the bread of life.

The hidden manna is a metaphorical portrayal of the manna that is Jesus Christ. The manna that's in direct antithesis to the manna that Balaam offered, the manna that Zeus offers, the manna that the Emperor cult offers.

This is food sacrificed to idols. Jesus Christ is the bread. He is the hidden manna. Not only is it a direct reference to him being the bread of life, but it's also a direct reference I think to the marriage supper of the Lamb where the word manna is repeated.

[27 : 20] And the end of this book, Revelation 19. Look, this is the shepherd who feeds his sheep. The second image is the white stone.

What's going on with the white stone? Well, in Pergamum, like in any other ancient Near Eastern first century city that had any Jewish influence, the way that they would run the legal courts in the synagogues or the temples, and this kind of just spread all over, and you've heard of this.

We did this, well, I was about to say we did this in my fraternity as well, but you don't want to hear about that. The idea was they would do this. They would vote through turning over stones of various colors.

So like if there was a prisoner there or someone that was supposed to be disciplined right, the verdict would be offered by turning over a stone.

If the stone was black, guilty. If the stone was white, acquitted. Well, you get the picture.

[28 : 31] To the one who conquers, I will give him a white stone. Persevere, he said. Keep running the race, because on the day when you would have seen the Jesus with the sword coming out of his mouth as judge, instead he's going to be the shepherd that turns over for you a white stone.

Your name will be not guilty, you see. You will be judged in him. That's the point. Stick hold to the gospel, the true gospel.

You will not see the sword, you will see the white stone. That's the point. And then finally, the new name. I will give him a new white stone, and on that stone there will be a new name written on the stone, and no one knows except the one who receives it.

Now you know from all across the scriptures that God gives people new names. This is an important thing in the ancient Near East. The name of the new Jerusalem becomes Abraham, Saul becomes Paul.

This is all over the place. In the very next chapter he explains this. 3 verse 12. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and never shall he go out of it.

[29 : 50] And I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven in my own new name. If you want to know what he conquers, he says in 3 verse 12, what name is it that he's going to write on you?

I will literally write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city, the holy city of my God, the new Jerusalem. Your name is your identity.

If you persevere in the faith, he's saying, I will put the name of God on you. I will put the name of the holy city, Jerusalem, on you. In 1 chapter 20, Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead.

This is the last thing we'll be doing. Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead, and Mary stands there weeping. She talks to the angels, they tell her what's up.

Then she talks to the gardener. And she says, where have you taken him? She thinks that grave robbers had stolen the body, and perhaps this gardener is the one who stole Jesus.

[31 : 01] And Jesus does one simple thing. He just says, Mary. He just says her name.

That's all he has to do. That's all he does. He had said in John chapter 10, my sheep know my voice. And when they hear their shepherds speak to them, they come to them.

Look, Jesus simply speaks her name. And that's it. Boom, unbelief gone. Renewal, regeneration, new birth, new life, hope.

The stone is turned over and on that stone in place of your name, in place of Mary, in place of whatever your name is, is written, the holy city. He's yours, the new Jerusalem.

God, he's yours. You will not see that Jesus Christ with the sword coming out of his mouth. You will see the Jesus Christ that holds the shepherd's crook leading you into the eternal city.

[32 : 06] If you would just believe, we need to see Jesus the judge. We need to, so that we can know that Jesus the judge is a judge for us, if we would just believe on his gospel.

In the Chronicles of Narnia, I can't leave a sermon on Sunday night. I think I'm pretty consistent getting in a C.S. Lewis reference on Sunday nights. Jill in Narnia, you know, the littlest girl.

She comes to a pool up spring when she first comes into Narnia and she's desperately thirsty. I mean, she's just dying of thirst, Lewis tells us.

And she gets there and she wants to drink, but she sees the lion, Aslan. And you all know, hopefully, I hope, if not, then we need to have a talk afterwards, that Aslan is, of course, the representation of Christ in the Chronicles of Narnia.

And she's scared and he says to her, are you thirsty? And she says, yes, I'm desperately thirsty. And he says, come, take a drink.

[33 : 20] But she can't do it because of him, you know. And so she asked him to leave. Will you just leave so that I can take a drink without you seeing me?

And what she realizes is that he's silent and that she's asked a question that's like asking Mount Everest to get up and move. You know, it's not going to happen.

This is Aslan. And so she says to him, okay, do you eat girls? And he says, wait for it.

Lewis is onto something here. I've eaten many boys and girls. And that's when Lewis says she realized at that moment that he was not safe, but he was good.

He offered of the water of life. We are to be moved by these images, you see, to see the judge and the judge that was judged for us so that we might not be judged.

[34 : 33] This is the mercy of Christ. This is the gospel. Let's pray. Our Lord and God, we ask that we would see the judge and seeing him. We would worship and we would fall down on our face like John did and know that the eschatological, the end time judge of history is the judge for us.

He judges us in him because of the cross and the resurrection. He will give us faith so that that can be ours, that holy city, the new Jerusalem, the white stone, the manna we want it.

We want to taste it. We want to see it. We want it to be our name. And so we ask that you would make it so. In Jesus name, in the name of Jesus.