

Revelation 2:12-17

Questions From Jesus To Faith Community Church
How Are You Holding Out?

In 1933, Adolf Hitler gave the order to Ferdinand Porsche to develop a basic vehicle capable of transporting two adults and three children at 100 km/h (62 mph).

The "People's Car," or the Volkswagen, would be available to citizens of the Third Reich for 990 Reichsmark, which would be about the price of a small motorcycle. The average German citizen's income was around 32RM a week.

To help families buy a KdF Wagen the Nazi's issued a saver's booklet to all those who applied and met the criteria. Each week the saver could purchase a 5 Reichsmark stamp to put in their book.

For those of you who remember the S & H Green Stamps you got at the grocery store, this was the same principle. After 41/2 years you'd have your book filled and you could go down to the KdF factory and pick up your new car.

About 700,000 Germans enrolled in the program and 336,000 actually completed the savings program. There was only one little problem. Not a single saver got his car.

All in all, the factory produced 630 cars which all went to government officials so they could drive them around to encourage German workers to sign up.

Needless to say, there were a whole lot of unhappy campers in Germany who were riding bicycles instead of cruising the highway in their KdF Wagens. By the way, KdF came from the initials of the phrase "power by joy."

So here were hundreds of thousands of people who were promised something very desirable. They had their hopes up. They had expectations. But those expectations were never met.

Over the years I've had the opportunity to interact with a lot of people who's expectations weren't met. They're people who have a skewed understanding of life because they have a distorted perspective of God.

For whatever reason, they've assumed that they've put all the right stamps in their cosmic book of God's requirements. They studied hard, didn't give their parents too much trouble. They got married, pay their bills, and make sure the kids are well taken

care of. They pay their taxes, cut their grass, they treat people right. Why, they're just as good or better than the next guy.

Some of them even go to church and believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

They put all their stamps in the book. They expected God to make life go their way. But God didn't come through.

They had a child killed in an accident, or couldn't have children to start with. They lost their business. Their mom died. For some, their health went south. For others, people they trusted abused that trust and failed them. You get the idea.

Maybe you're one of those people this morning. You're here because of your responsibility to someone else. Maybe you're here out of a sense of duty. Maybe you're here because you're trying to find the answer to why it seems like God has let you down.

What is it that drives us to perform? Why is it that we have these expectations? Where do we come up with the idea that God owes us anything?

I. Unrealistic Spiritual Expectations Come From A Misinterpretation Of What's Going On In Our Own Hearts

In his book *Majestic Destiny*, Curtis Tucker opens the door and shines the light on a topic we often neglect; the kingdom of God.

We talk a lot about heaven, and that's good. But as Tucker points out we kind of pass by the kingdom when it's actually a major theme in the Bible.

Adam and Eve were co-regents in God's kingdom paradise. They disobeyed God and the kingdom fell under the power of the curse of God. There is biblical promise after biblical promise of the restoration of that kingdom.

God's kingdom, when the world will be out from under the curse, is what we all want. We crave a time when there is no fighting and wars, no sickness and death, no heartache and tears. That's what we were made for.

We long for that experience because it's been planted in our hearts by our Creator.

Jesus even told us to pray, *Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* (Matthew 6:10)

I believe that natural longing for the kingdom is what ultimately drives our unreal expectations. We want what should be, and we think that since what should be isn't what's now, God's failed us.

So then what do we do? We come up with substitute kingdoms. The French Revolution, Communism, Woodstock.

Crosby, Still, and Nash sang, "We got to get ourselves back to the Garden." Back in the 60's while most of my friends were listening to Otis Redding singing, "Sittin' On The Dock of the Bay" I'm listening to Velvet Underground singing "Heroin, it's my wife and it's my life."

And in that song Lou Reed sings, "I'm gonna try for the kingdom if I can."

That's what I'm looking for. The peace of the kingdom while my world's falling apart.

We create our little anemic, substitute kingdoms. It could be a political utopian society, it could be a social movement, it could be our own kingdom of power and control, of wealth and success, of drugs and alcohol. But into all of this chaos and confusion, God is speaking to us.

This is week 3 of a series we're calling *Questions From Jesus To Faith Community Church*. We're using Jesus' messages to the 7 churches in Revelation 2 and 3 as our jumping off point.

Today we're going to look at Jesus' message to the church at Pergamos.

Open Bibles to Revelation 1 page 1203

The book we call Revelation is actually called *the Revelation of Jesus Christ*. (Revelation 1:1) The word that's translated "revelation" is the word *apokalupsis* in Greek, which means "an unveiling" or "an uncovering."

When you hear people talk about the apocalypse, it comes from this word. We often look at the book of Revelation as all about the end of the age, and it in a lot of ways it is.

But its main purpose is to reveal, or display, Jesus Christ in all of His glory.

In the book of the Revelation we get a much different picture of Jesus than we do in the Gospels. In the Gospels Jesus lives in the frailty of flesh and suffers tremendous humiliation. In Revelation the apostle John sees Jesus as He is now.

The whole frailty, incarnation, suffering-servant thing was for a season. It was limited in its time frame. It was for the purpose of bringing forgiveness of sin for us as Jesus became the perfect sacrifice, but it was also to pave the way for God's kingdom.

Everything in the book of Revelation is about Jesus exalted, but the reason that He is now exalted is because He first came as redeemer.

So what does the exalted Son of God look like?

Read verses 12- 16

Jesus says, "Hey John, I want you to write down what I have to say to the 7 churches." John turns around to see who's talking to him and he ends up flat on his face. Jesus didn't look anything like this the last time John saw Him!

And look how John responds... **Read 17a**

I hear people say strange things like, "When I get to heaven I've got some questions for God," or "So and so must be up in heaven telling Jesus this or that."

Here's what happens when you stand toe to toe with the exalted Christ. You're on your face. John said, "I didn't even have time to put out my hands to break my fall. I was like a dead man."

So what we have is, Jesus Christ in all His authority, glory, and radiance giving a message through John to 7 churches in Asia Minor. These are real churches, in real cities so the messages are tailored to them, but at the end of each one Jesus adds these words...

Look at 2:7 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Look at 2:11 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

The same for 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13 & 3:22.

There are messages here for these churches, but God has messages that extend way beyond Asia Minor and the first century. If we'll listen, these are messages to us. These are questions and challenges to Faith Community Church.

The “take away” we got from the first church, the church of Ephesus, was *Have You Lost Your Passion For God?*

The question we extracted from church two, the church of Smyrna, was *What Are You Really Living For?*

Today as we examine the message to the church of Pergamos the question is *How Are You Holding Out?*

The kingdom in all its fullness isn't here yet.

Spiritually we're there. Colossians 1 explains that God *rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* (Colossians 1:13, 14 NASB)

The forgiveness of God can only come through the Savior. That's why Jesus humbled Himself and died. But the kingdom of God is when the externals change too. It's when what we're longing for comes to pass.

It's when Miss America contestants will no longer answer “world peace” to the interview question of what would you like to see most. World peace will be here.

But the question is, how are you doing in the mean time? How are you holding out?

I. Unrealistic Spiritual Expectations Come From A Misinterpretation Of What's Going On In Our Own Hearts

II. Like The Church At Pergamos, We Live In Satan's Realm

Read Revelation 2 verses 12, 13

Out of 7 churches, Satan is mention in 3 of them, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Philadelphia. In Smyrna and Philadelphia Jesus refers to the “synagogue of Satan” and those who call themselves Jews but really aren't. There He's identifying some kind of intense corruption of Judaism.

But Pergamos is different. He says, “Satan’s throne is there.” It’s like the Lord saying, “You’re living in the satanic capital of Asia Minor.” That’s quite a distinction!

Pergamos was called “The most illustrious city of Asia” by the Roman author Pliny. That wasn’t because it was on the coast or in a strategic trading area. It was because Pergamos was the capital of Asia. This is what we call Asia Minor. It’s the country of Turkey today.

By the time John wrote the Revelation, Pergamos had been capital of the region for 300 years.

Pergamos had one of the most famous libraries in the world at that time. It boasted over 200,000 books which might not seem like a lot in our day. The Library of Congress has 18 million! But remember, this was 1400 years before Gutenberg.

In the first century every volume had to be hand copied so Pergamos had a huge library.

In fact the word “parchment” is actually derived from the name Pergamos. So Pergamos was big on learning. But what’s with Satan’s seat?

Commentators have come up with 3 possibilities. As we’ve gone through each church we’ve tried to stress how absolutely outnumbered the Christians were in the face of Greek and Roman idol worship. Every city had its temples, had its gods and goddesses.

Everything you did in life would have been interwoven with pagan worship. Your civic duties, your family get-togethers, your responsibilities at work, even the food you ate was offered to idols before it was sold in the market.

So once again, here’s this congregation at Pergamos that was like a tiny island surrounded by a vast ocean of paganism.

So here’s the 3 “Satan’s seat” possibilities.

1.) The god Asclepius was called the Pergamene god. There were other temples to Asclepius, like the one in Smyrna, but the big one was in Pergamos.

Asclepius was the god of medicine. He was called *Asklepios Soter*, “Asclepius the savior.” His symbol, that’s been carried over into modern medicine, was a snake

entwined around a staff. The symbols with 2 snakes come from Hermes, the symbols with 1 snake come from Asclepius.

The temple of Asclepius had live snakes which were considered incarnations of the god himself. Since the Devil is called “that old serpent” twice in the book of Revelation it would be possible that Asclepius’ temple would be considered Satan’s seat.

2.) Like Smyrna, Pergamos had it’s own version of temple row. There was a cone shaped hill at the edge of the city that was dotted with temples and shrines.

Jutting out 800 feet above the city was one of the most famous altars in the ancient world, the altar of Zeus. It was 90 feet square, 20 feet high, and to this day is considered one of the great masterpieces of sculpture in the world.

It dominated the city and the smoke of thousands of sacrifices rose from it continually. That’s another possible candidate.

3.) Pergamos was the center of Caesar worship for all Asia Minor. Rome ruled over a vast empire and needed a unifying connection. What developed was really the worship of the spirit of Rome, the goddess Roma. The spirit of Rome was personified by the Emperor.

Once a year everyone in the Empire had to appear before their local magistrates to burn a pinch of incense to the godhead of Caesar and to say: “Caesar is Lord.” After that you could go back to worshipping your own god.

William Barclay writes, “In Pergamos it was supremely perilous to be a Christian. There were other cities in which danger descended on Christians on the appointed day when a pinch of incense had to be burned. But in Pergamos a Christian was in jeopardy for his life 365 days a year.”

Whatever Jesus was referring to when He said “Satan’s throne” was there, I believe He was saying basically Satan ran the place.

Remember, Satan doesn’t rule hell. He’s called *the god of this age* and *the ruler of this world*.

But Jesus was able to say, *I know your works...and you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith...*

“Even though Satan’s throne is in your town you held on. Even when Antipas was martyred in your town you held on. Even when you longed for My kingdom and peace and freedom from the stuff you’re up against every day, you held on.”

How are you holding on today? How are you keeping your focus on Jesus Christ when the world around you seems so bent on mocking goodness and undermining truth?

How are you making sure your spiritual priorities are in line with God’s when the kingdom isn’t here yet. When the kingdom’s here *justice (will) run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream.* (Amos 5:24)

When the kingdom’s here *The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, The lion shall eat straw like the ox, And dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,” Says the LORD.* (Isaiah 65:25)

In J. Dwight Pentecost’s monumental book called *Things To Come* he lists these kingdom conditions with dozens of scripture references for each one: peace, joy, comfort, justice, removal of the curse, health, healing, protection, prosperity, and end of oppression.

Talk about something to look forward to!

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II. Like The Church At Pergamos, We Live In Satan’s Realm

III. If We’re Not Careful, We Can Settle For A Counterfeit Kingdom

Along with the praise, Jesus Christ had another message to the church at Pergamos...
read verses 14-16

When you get reminded twice about the sharp, double edged sword you know what’s coming is serious.

They’ve been holding on in the face of an overwhelmingly hostile culture but they’ve let some things slide too.

We’ve already seen the Nicolaitans earlier in the chapter.

They were the ones within the church who wanted to be religiously pluralistic. They wanted to compromise the faith and hook up with the surrounding paganism. They were the ones who compromised on sexual purity.

We quoted one of the early church fathers who lived about this time, Clement of Alexandria, who said the Nicolaitans “abandon themselves to pleasure like goats...leading a life of self indulgence.”

Along with that Christ says, *You have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.*

What’s that all about? You find the account of Balaam all the way back in the 4th book of the Bible, the book of Numbers.

Balak was king of the Moabites. The Moabites came from an incestuous relationship with Lot and his oldest daughter. Lot was the nephew of Abraham, who was like the founding father of the Jewish people.

So you had Abraham the righteous and Lot who was enticed by the bright lights of Sodom. Abraham learned what it meant to trust God with his life and Lot lost everything in the destruction of Sodom.

Out of Lot’s sordid experience comes the Moabite people who were a constant thorn in the flesh to Abraham’s descendants, Israel.

Balak king of the Moabites wanted to destroy Israel so he hired a traveling prophet named Balaam to curse them. The whole cursing thing didn’t work out so Balaam came up with plan “b.”

He told the king to send his most alluring Moabite women in to entice the Israelite men to marry them. The Moabites worshipped a whole gaggle of gods and goddesses so Balaam knew that eventually the Israelite men would follow in the footsteps of their Moabite wives. Especially since Moabite worship involved every kind of sexual perversion known to man.

You know what? It worked. Steve Austin, down at Chantilly Bible Church in Virginia is famous for saying, “When you rub a glove in the dirt, the dirt doesn’t get glovey but the glove gets dirty.”

We can show up here on Sundays and sing all the songs about how much we love God. We can pray, teach a Bible study, even preach sermons, but if we try to fulfill our lives by substituting counterfeit kingdoms for God's kingdom we'll always get pulled down a wrong path.

No wonder Jesus said, "Hey guys, this is so serious that I'm packaging my concern front and back with a reminder about the sword. This is so important that if you keep on your incremental journey away from Me I'm going to deal with it."

Why would Jesus fight against us? That's exactly what He says in verse 16. *He who has an ear, let him hear.* That's for you and me.

If He has to, Jesus Christ will fight against us to drive us back to the place of purity in our life. That's not because He wants to destroy us. Just the opposite. He wants to rescue us.

As long as we're distracted by some useless, impotent, futile kingdom of our own making we're no use for His kingdom. That ought to make us think twice. He's talking to a whole congregation here.

That means that there are some churches that are experiencing resistance from God.

We're coming up to the 33rd anniversary of the life of this church. That's a long time. That's plenty of time for us to get sidetracked by trying to build our kingdom rather than God's kingdom.

That's plenty of time for us to become discouraged because we didn't have our expectations met.

Instead, here's what the Bible says, *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.* (Hebrews 12:1-3)

We're not in a sprint, we're in a marathon, and marathons can wear us out if we don't keep our eye on the goal. Our goal is pleasing Jesus Christ. Our goal is to not let life wear us out but to expect that life will be full of hard stuff till we reach the kingdom.

Jesus endured hostility from sinners. In fact they were His created beings and He endured hostility from them. But He didn't give up.

Read Revelation 2:17

When Israel was wondering in the desert God sustained them with bread from heaven called manna. God has hidden manna for us. I take that to mean His strength right now.

And then there's a promise for the future. A white stone. The commentators have all kinds of interpretations of verse 17 and the white stone. I don't know all the details but I do know this, God rewards us in His kingdom for faithfulness here on earth.

How are you holding out? God's got the strength of hidden manna today, and the white stone rewards for the future.

C. S. Lewis the author wrote this about how quick we are to substitute lesser things for greater things. "We are half-hearted creatures...like an ignorant child making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday by the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

If you've been trying to fill your life by buying into an imitation kingdom, what does Jesus want you to do according to Revelation 2:16? Rather than having God fight against you, let Him strengthen you for your spiritual journey.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)