

To Pergamum

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[0 : 00] Well, a very good morning to you. I hope you are well. It's great to see you here. If this is your first time to Bruntsfield, then a special welcome to you. You join us in an exciting time over the summer. We're in this series in the book of Revelation called You've Got Mail. And we've been looking at the words of Jesus to the churches in what is now modern day Turkey. So can I invite you to turn to the book of Revelation? And our verses this morning are chapter 2, verses 12 to 17. We're looking at the city and the church of Pergamum.

And as well, this morning as having your Bibles, it's going to be fantastic if you have a really helpful sermon outline. You should have received one of them on your way in this morning. If you don't have one of them, then if you put up your hand and a couple of people have allocated to get them to you. And it's also going to be really helpful if you have a pen with you.

There's pens at the end of the pews if you don't have one of them. Get those things together and then we'll get stuck into Pergamum. So let's pray. Let's ask God would speak to us this morning as we turn to His Word. Let me pray.

Almighty God and our gracious Heavenly Father, speak to us now, Lord, as we turn to Your Word. may Your voice, may it penetrate deep into our lives. May Your light shine into every nook and cranny of our minds. May Your Word blow away every cobweb that's in our hearts. And may You thrill every part of our souls.

O Lord, would You move in on us this morning? Would You help us to grasp something more of the greatness of Your Son, Jesus Christ? So be with us now, gracious Father, we ask, because we ask in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

[1 : 59] Well, I had the real privilege of a month or so ago to be involved in a summer youth camp run by an organization called Christians in Sports. And while I was at this youth camp, I made a decision to make an investment at the tuck shop, which you'll see. So you agree, it's beautiful. It's lovely. It's a their new range. I am a sucker for merchandise. So as soon as I saw, I thought I've got to have that one.

And I wore it every day after I bought it at this camp, every day. And I proceeded to wear it every day when I came back from the camp because I'm Scottish and I like to get value for money out of my investments. I don't know if you're like that. So I wore it when I came back to my life in Edinburgh.

I wore it as I walked to the office every morning. I walked down Lothian Road wearing it. I went to Tesco to buy some milk wearing it. I hung out with my friends and my family wearing it. And all of a sudden, when I saw people looking at it, I suddenly became very conscious that I was wearing a badge that labeled me a follower of Jesus Christ. Now, how did I feel? Well, I felt very, very different.

I felt different. Have you ever felt different in our world because of your faith in Jesus Christ? Well, here was my thought process. I started thinking about how I felt massively outnumbered.

And then I started thinking about how the statistics would tell me that only two or three percent of people in this city would wear the same badge as the one that I was wearing. And then I started thinking about the words of my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would tell me the Great Commission to go into this world and to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to take the gospel to our world.

[3 : 56] I looked out and I thought to myself, how am I going to live my life in this city for the glory of Jesus Christ? Have you ever felt different as you've lived your life for Jesus in this city?

Well, we're turning this morning to the city of Pergamum. It's a city in what is now modern-day Turkey. And we're looking at the words of Jesus Christ to a group of Christians who, as they live

their lives in their city, are feeling very, very different. Because Pergamum, it's a city that commands worship. This is Pergamum. It commands worship. And it commands worship of two prominent things. Firstly, of pagan gods. So in Pergamum, you've got a massive altar to Zeus in the city. People flock to Zeus to bow before him and to worship him. You've also got, to give you a taste of this, a temple dedicated to Ascleopas, the pagan god of healing. And people flock from the surrounding world. They travel in to worship at his feet. Because if they worship at his feet, he will turn and heal them. Pergamum is a city that's full of pagan gods. It commands the worship of pagan gods, and it commands the worship of human gods. It's the center of emperor worship. There are temples all over the city dedicated to the glory of Caesar and to the glory of Rome.

So you can imagine, if you're a Christian living in this city, and a confession from your mouth is, no, Zeus isn't the all-powerful God. Jesus Christ is the all-powerful God. No, Caesar isn't the God who rules all things and has the final word on all things. Jesus Christ is the Lord of all things and has the final word. You can imagine, if that is your confession, that is going to make you very radically different and is going to cause you some serious problems. So what is the question of the Christians who are in this church in Pergamum? Well, the question is, how, as I look out in this world, how do I live my life for the glory of Jesus Christ in my city? Do you see it's the same question? The Pergamum might be a million miles different from Edinburgh, but the question of the Christian is still the same.

How do we live for him? How do we live for his glory? And that's why what we see this morning is so massively encouraging for us. It's challenging for us. And I hope it's going to equip us to live for him in our city, because Jesus says to this church, he says four things, four things that these Christians need to know about their savior, Jesus Christ. Four things they need to know. And friends, if we can get our heads even just a little bit more around any of these four things, oh, it would massively transform how we live for his glory in this city. So you ready for this, the four things? This has thrilled my heart this week. Here's the four things. Here's the first thing that they need to know as they live their lives in this city. Firstly, they need to know what Jesus is. They need to know what he is. And what is he? We'll check out verses 12 and 13. What is he? He is great. He's great.

[7 : 34] Why is he great, you ask? Well, two reasons. Firstly, because Jesus is the great king who rules over all things. See the second half of verse 12. Jesus, how does he introduce himself to this church? As the one with the sharp, double-edged sword. As if to remind them that he is the one who has defeated the grave.

He is the one who holds the keys of death and life in the palm of his hands. And his is a power that is greater than any earthly Caesar or any earthly pagan gods. And the word from his mouth, the word that is sharper than a two-edged sword, that word is the word that's going to have the last word in their city and in their world. King Jesus is the powerful, great king who rules over all things. Secondly, they need to know that King Jesus is the great king who knows all things. Look at verse 13. What does he say to this church? Incredible, encouraging words? I know where you live. Or you've got an ESV there. I know where you dwell. I know what life is like in Pergamum. I know what goes on in Pergamum. I know about the emperor and the pagan gods who you are being commanded to worship. Incidentally, presumably that's what the reference to Satan's throne means there. I know where you live, says Jesus Christ through his church.

Would you see this morning that Jesus is a great king who doesn't stand far back looking on at his people? Jesus is not a king who is unconcerned about how his people are dwelling in their lands. Jesus is a great king who knows every doubt, every fear, every niggles, every shun, every insult, every pressure that these people face in their city. What do they need to know? They need to know that Jesus Christ is great.

Rico Tice, the chap who wrote the Christianity Explored course, he writes this. He says this. There are lots of people in our world who have authority, but they have zero compassion.

[10 : 12] And there are many people in our world who have lots of compassion, but they have zero power to do anything about it. But Jesus Christ is a man who is absolute power and absolute compassion.

That is the king we need. And that is the king who Jesus is. He is one of absolute power and absolute compassion.

This is Jesus. He is great. Let me ask you this morning, is that how you understand him this morning? Friends, do you know that he knows where you dwell?

You'll see on the sermon outline, if you've got it there, just to help us think about this thing, you'll see six little circles. If you've got your sermon outline there, can I just invite you just to write in what goes on in your life in those circles?

What are your circles? Think about it. The things that go on in your life, the places that you dwell, your office. Just scribble it in.

[11 : 22] Jesus knows your office. Your family. Jesus knows your family. Your sports team. Friends, Jesus knows your sports team. He knows where you dwell.

I want to just allow that to sink in this morning and encourage you from God's word. What a difference that would make to our lives if we could just grasp the greatness of Jesus Christ a little bit more.

I mean, this is what I find. I wonder if you are like me. The problem with my evangelism is not that I haven't gone on a course to tell me how to do evangelism. Okay? The materials that we have, fantastic.

Christianity Explored. The Word 1 to 1. Guys, I've got it down. Right? I know how to do these things. The problem isn't the material. Why will I not tell my friends about the glory of Jesus Christ, my Savior?

Well, it's because in my head, my view of the greatness of Jesus is low. And the view that I have of the greatness of the world is high. Is that not it?

[12 : 27] That so often we are scared about telling people about the greatness of Jesus because we haven't fully grasped the greatness of Jesus. And as I've been challenged from this passage this week, my prayer has been, gracious Father, would you help me as I read my Bible every day and as your Spirit speaks to me through your word, would you fill my mind and captivate my heart with the greatness of Jesus?

Would it thrill me so that my opinion of the greatness of man, it drops? And my opinion of the greatness and love for Jesus Christ, it grows.

Oh, what a difference that would make if I could grasp just a little bit more of the greatness of Jesus Christ. I know we had a great home group on Wednesday night.

I love our home group. Absolutely love it. And we spent some time at the end of a meal just praying together. How can we be praying for one another? And somebody said, I won't embarrass them with it this morning.

They said, my prayer, what you could pray for me, is that I would be more bold in sharing my faith with my colleagues who don't believe in Jesus. What a great prayer. What a great prayer.

[13 : 35] It wouldn't be amazing if not only was that our prayer, but that's what we would be praying for one another, that we would grasp the greatness of Jesus and we would take the gospel to all nations, to our world.

Isn't it sobering to stop and think about the Great Commission? That the Great Commission is great not because I am great. The Great Commission is great not because we are great.

The Great Commission is great because Jesus is great. Oh, that we could grasp that just a little bit more. The greatness of Jesus Christ.

This is what this church need to know. They need to know and we need to know the greatness of who Jesus is. He is great. Secondly, they need to know what Jesus loves.

What does he love? Verse 13. Check it out. He loves courage. He loves courage. He loves that they are still standing strong in their faith, in their city.

[14 : 36] He loves it. Despite all the pressures in Pergamum to conform. Despite all the pressures, all the sneers, all the taunts, despite all the temptation, all the ridicule, these Christians are standing tall for their Savior Jesus Christ.

And he loves it. What does he say specifically? He says that they are not renouncing their faith and they are remaining true to Jesus' name. It's what he loves.

And just in case we thought he was being generic in his encouragement and compliment, would you see that Jesus mentions Antipas? Would you see how closely Jesus identifies himself with this man, Antipas?

Jesus knows his name. Jesus knows what went on. And what does Jesus call him? My faithful witness.

Do you see the ownership there that Jesus has to this man? My faithful witness. Now it says witness there in our English Bibles.

[15 : 45] The Greek word there is *marturas*, which is, we can understand, is where we get the word, our word martyr from. So this man, Antipas, who perhaps was maybe one of the church leaders in this church in Pergamon, we don't know.

Whoever he was, he refused to bow the knee to the world around him. And he walked the same road that his master walked before him. And it cost him his life.

And even when it all kicked off, the other people in this church, they stood right next to him. And they said, he's our brother. And Jesus says to the church of Pergamon, I love your courage.

I love your courage. Now we may be here this morning and we're thinking, well, we're not going to face death for our faith in Jesus in this city, we don't think.

But so many in this country down the years have faced death because of their faith in Jesus Christ. And so many Christians in our world face death as a daily prospect because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

[16 : 54] But let me ask you this morning, if that's not one for us, let me ask you, are you willing to take a hit because of your faith in Jesus Christ? When they have to work drinks, they go a little bit overboard and people say, go on, go on, just have another, don't be a killjoy.

Friends, do you have the boldness and the courage to stand and say, no, I'm not going to order another pint. It'll be a Coke for me this time. When jokes in a conversation, when they turn crude and when they turn slanderous, friends, do we have the courage to say, no, that is not my life in Jesus Christ.

That's not giving glory to him. When you know your loyalty and your faith in Jesus Christ will cost you and your friends and your family. Are you willing to take your stand?

The circles that you've just put on your sheet. Are we willing to take our stand for Jesus Christ in those circles? Now, I'll be honest, that kind of scares me at times.

Are you content to stay undercover and cozy? Well, so often I am. This morning we hit snooze about three times because I love my covers. I love staying cozy. But be encouraged if you find this scary.

[18 : 10] If you find standing for your faith in Jesus Christ scary because help is at hand. And this is where we need to get our thinking correct. Because these Christians are standing, not just because they are courageous and bold, although they absolutely are.

These Christians are standing strong because they are being sustained by the power, the supernatural power of the risen Jesus Christ.

He's sustaining them. We sang it earlier. I can't remember what the line was, but I remember thinking, yes, that's what that line is. The truth is that Jesus knows where they dwell. Jesus has placed them where they dwell.

And Jesus holds them where they dwell. By his spirit living in them, he is giving them the power to stand and say, yes, I follow this man, Jesus Christ.

Is that not such an encouragement this morning that when we take our stand in this city, that we're not standing on our own, but we stand in the power of our risen and victorious Lord?

[19 : 12] He gives power.

Well, here's the point where, as this letter is publicly read out to this church, here's the point where everything changes. Because here is the point where Jesus goes from encouraging them and telling them about the things that he loves, and he moves to a stinging critique of the way that they are behaving.

He moves on from what Jesus loves to what Jesus hates. This is what this church needs to know. What Jesus hates. And what does he hate? Verses 14 to 16.

He hates compromise. He hates compromise. Would you notice the severity of the language and the words that Jesus uses here?

He is against compromise. He is against compromise. And he is against them because of their compromise. And to illustrate how serious a problem this is in the life of this church, Jesus refers to Balaam.

[20 : 46] Now, it's a story that's told towards the end of the book of Numbers. And it's a story of how through the influence of Balaam, the prophet, the people of God are led towards spiritual and moral compromise.

Balaam entices them away from worshipping the God who had saved them from Egypt and who was leading them towards the promised land. And he entices them and moves them straight

towards sin and compromise, or in these verses, idolatry and sexual immorality.

How do God's people behave? They start flirting with the nations all around about them. They start bowing to the gods of the nations around about him.

They start adopting their practices instead of worshipping the true gods who has rescued them. In a nutshell, Balaam leads God's people away from God and straight towards sin.

And you, says Jesus, you in your church, you have characters like that in your church, who are not calling sin that which God has clearly called sin.

[22 : 00] And then you have others who are spreading false teaching around your church as well. You've got the Nicolaitans. Now, whatever the precise nature of that particular teaching was, we can be sure the reason that it displeases Jesus is because it's causing this church to lose their grip and love for the gospel and take their eyes off Jesus and go towards sin and the world.

That's what this teaching is doing. And Jesus says, All that stuff that's going on in your church, all of that stuff. I hate it. I hate it.

And I am against you because you've swallowed it hook, line and sinker. So you can imagine they've gone from fist pumping each other, congratulating each other to absolute silence.

You can hear a pin drop in this church at this point. It's a stinging criticism of how they are behaving. Compromise is a serious, serious thing in the eyes of our Lord.

Friends, let me ask you this morning, have you become all too pally with sin? Have you become comfortable with habits in your life that we should not be comfortable with?

[23 : 22] Maybe it's even the stuff that's specifically mentioned here. Maybe it is sexual immorality. Maybe you're flirting with somebody you should not be flirting with. Maybe you're looking at something you should not be looking at.

Friends, would you see how serious Jesus takes compromise? Are you trying to negotiate a living arrangement with your sin? Now, I wonder if you've ever heard the story of the bear and the hunter. One day, a hunter goes into the woods and after hours of searching, to his delight, he comes across a grizzly bear. And the bear takes one look at him and he says, why on earth are you so happy to see me?

Oh, says the hunter, I've looked long and far and wide to get a genuine fur coat. And the one that I see on you is the finest one, the finest one that I've ever seen.

That's funny, said the bear. You are desperate for my fur coat. And I'm desperate to eat. So how about you come here? Let's embrace, let's hug it out and we'll see if we can come to some kind of arrangement agreement.

[24 : 32] Now, you can imagine how the story ends. An hour or so later, the man gets his wish and the man is surrounded in the fur coat of the bear. But he's surrounded by the fur coat inside the stomach of the bear, not free on the outside.

Get the point, don't we? Friends, do not, we cannot, it's impossible to negotiate a living arrangement with our sin.

Do not be deceived into thinking that you can negotiate a living arrangement. Either you kill sin or sin kills you. It's really as simple as that. The false teaching doing the rounds in Pergamum, it's leading people into sin and to compromise.

What are people saying? They're saying that you can be friends with the world and friends with Jesus and they can live together like a horse and carriage in the throne of your heart. And Jesus says, no, no, it doesn't work like that.

That's not what has happened. Jesus hates that some of them have swallowed this. They've just swallowed it without thinking. Hook, line and sinker. And as I kind of pressed into this passage this week, I'll be honest, I found this so uncomfortable.

[25 : 43] So uncomfortable because I know my deceitful heart. I know what goes on inside of there. And I know my left of my own devices, my deceitful heart. If Christ is over here and sin is over here, okay, I'm not going that way.

Left of my own devices, I'm going that way. Right? So often tempted to compromise with the world, to love the things that the world loves, to adopt its practices and norms, to chase its dreams, to evaluate success and happiness by what it tells me.

To derive my purpose and my identity from what it tells me. How I look, what I earn, where I work, where our kids go to school, where we live. That's what I'm tempted to do.

And as a friend reminded me this week, that my heart is a great friend, but it's a terrible leader. It's a terrible leader. So how do I stop?

How do we stop our hearts being led into compromise? How am I able to discern truth from error as I live my life in this world? Well, it's when I become so familiar with my master's voice.

[26 : 58] As I let God's word inform my mind. As I allow the one who created me to guide my path. As I let the word of him whose word is sharper than a double-edged sword shape my understanding.

That's how I'm going to discern. Sinclair Ferguson, a great Scottish pastor, he writes this. How can we develop Jesus-like discernment?

Answer, by the spirit-aided digestion of the solid food of God's wisdom in his word. The world hits us with a lot of messages telling us how we should think.

We should learn from the church in Pergamum how to evaluate the world that we're living in through the lens of God's word. I'll give you an example of this this week.

In my life, I was walking down Lothian Road. Walked down Lothian Road to the office every day to our home. Walking down Lothian Road. And if you know the junction between Princess Street and Lothian Road, there's St. John's Church which sits right on that corner.

[28 : 08] I've never been in that church. I've never met anyone who works at that church. But what I do know about that church is outside they've got one of these big banners. And up there they put on their political art of the month.

I wonder if you've seen any of them as you've walked past. Well, as I walked past it five times this week, it grabbed me. If you look at it there, the things on the right, the things in the colors and balloons are the things that are to be rejoiced over in our city.

They're to be celebrated. And you read it and you read inclusion, diversity, openness, and you think, amen. Absolutely. Celebrate these things.

And on the left of this picture, symbolized by darkness and by a ball and chain, are the things that are wrong with our city and need to be stamped out. So you've got there exclusion and racism and prejudice.

And you think, absolutely. Absolutely. And all of a sudden, this next one caught my eye. I wonder if you can see it on the screen there.

[29 : 12] I just captured it on my mobile phone. The next one on the ball and chain says, certainty. Is that not interesting? Message to me and to the thousands of others who pass that billboard every day is that people in our city who claim to be certain about anything are one of the things that is wrong with our city.

Certainty is oppressive. If you find anyone who claims certainty, then that is a ball and chain for you. That's what I took from that picture. And as I got to the office, I got my Bible out, and I turned to John's Gospel, the words of Jesus, John 14, 6, where Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.

I thought to myself, that seems a pretty certain claim from our Lord. And I know that to be a liberating claim. I know that to be a life-giving claim.

I know that to be a claim that I can base my life upon. I know that to be that, not to be ball and chain. Do you see how we need to start thinking in our world, discerning what goes on here by what God has declared to be true and what Jesus Christ has said?

Friends, are you living your life in terms of what the world tells you to think and how to live instead of how Jesus Christ has told us how to live and to think? Because the truth is that truth matters.

[30 : 49] That was the problem in the church in Pergamum. They'd stop thinking. They'd stop discerning. And if that's you this morning, then you need to heed the seriousness of the words of Jesus Christ here.

And you need to see what you're doing is not right. And you need to repent. You see, the church at Pergamum, they need to know what Jesus hates.

And we need to know what Jesus hates. He hates compromise. And lastly and fourthly, this church needs to know what Jesus gives. And what does Jesus give?

Verse 17. He gives life. And in these verses, Jesus promises to give his people two things. If you notice it there.

Firstly, he promises to give them hidden manna. I think that's speaking of sustenance and life, that Jesus alone, the one who called himself the bread of life, can give his people.

[31 : 46] And secondly, and perhaps the more difficult of the two for us to immediately comprehend, is that Jesus gives his people a white stone. Now, if you're a Christian in Pergamum, if you're living in that culture, you're familiar with the use of a white stone.

And you're familiar with the use of it in particularly with two aspects. Firstly, a white stone was commonly used as an invitation to a special event, sometimes a royal event.

And without a white stone, you were not entitled to be at that special event. Now, you can imagine that, just think about it, in our city, where does Liz hang out sometimes?

She hangs out at a Holyrood house. She throws these garden parties, doesn't she? You can imagine trying to swagger up to one of these garden parties, trying to blag your way in. You're not getting past the guards, are you, without an invitation.

And the minute that you present that invitation, everything's going to change for you. Because you're entitled to be there. Well, that's what a white stone did in this culture. It spoke of access.

[32 : 50] And secondly, a white stone also was used by juries in a court of law. So when they are making a decision about whether to acquit or whether to condemn, they had two choices that they had to make.

The white stone meant acquittal. The black stone meant condemnation. That's what it meant. So you can understand in this culture, a white stone, it speaks of freedom, and it speaks of access. Friends, is that not the story of the gospel? Isn't it? That Jesus is the one who has taken our black stone of exclusion and condemnation that we deserve because of our sin, and through his death he is given as his white stone of inclusion and freedom.

It speaks of access. Inclusion to what? Well, to the very presence of God. To the family of God as well. That we are adopted as his children into his family.

The white stone, it speaks of access. And it also speaks of freedom. What does it speak of freedom for? In relation to the penalty that was ours because of our sin.

[34 : 00] It speaks of access and it speaks of freedom. And would you see as well that this stone has their name individually written on it? A new name is going to be theirs that Jesus is going to give them.

What an incredible promise. See, this is what the church in Pergamum need to know, that Jesus is the only one who gives life. And let me ask you this morning as we come to a close, do you know Jesus as the white stone life giver?

You know, maybe you're here and you've just walked in and you think, I have no idea what this Christianity thing is about. I don't know who this Jesus character is. Well, can I invite you this morning to come and let's talk it out.

Let's have a conversation. Here is one who is claiming to give life. This is who Jesus is. Here is one claiming to give forgiveness and to bestow grace. This is who Jesus is.

This is what the church in Pergamum need to know, that he is the one who gives life. And so let me ask you as we leave this church in Pergamum this morning, as we close our time together, let's come back to the start.

[35 : 10] Friends, are you willing, are we willing to wear the badge? Are we willing to stand up and say, yes, I follow this king. This king is king of my life.

Have you got your sermon outline there? Have you flipped to the back? Just to help us to think over these things, as we don't rush on from God's word this morning, and as we allow the challenge to hit us, just think through some of these questions.

Have we grasped, have you grasped, the greatness of Jesus Christ? Are you willing to be courageous for the sake of the salvation of many people in our city and for the glory of God in our city?

Are you willing to be resolute in the fact that you won't compromise on God's truth for the sake of his renown in our city?

And do you know the life that Jesus alone can give this morning? And before I pray and before we stand to sing our final song, let's just maybe take a minute, maybe just think through some of those questions in the back, maybe just think through and reread the passage this morning, and let's allow God's word to have the final say this morning.

[36 : 29] And then I'll pray. Amen. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Our Father, help us to be those who prize above all else the all-surpassing greatness of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to be those who live our lives for his glory and who stand for his truth and who treasure his renown in the midst of our city, Edinburgh.

Our Father, we thank you for the encouragement this morning that you know where we dwell. Thank you for your word.

And we thank you for our time this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. To be continued...