

Revelation 2:12-17 "Faithful to his truth"

Read Revelation 2:12-17

1. Jesus opens this letter by telling this community that he knows where they live. He knows details about the situation they are facing. From the text what details does Jesus know about their particular situation? What comfort do you think Jesus' knowledge of their circumstances would bring this church community?

Satan's throne – where Satan lives: Pergamum was built surrounding a large rock throne like structure where built on top and into the sides were a multitude of temples to pagan deities.

There were no less than three temples to the worship of Caesar. Each year the citizens of the empire would have to go to one of these temples and burn a pinch of incense and declare "Caesar is Lord".

Antipas their bishop refused to burn incense and declare and is killed for it.

Balaam and Nicolaitans – groups that are called "destroyers of the people" – inviting the community back to the feasts that were central to the business and social life of the city but were held in the temples – also going back to the cultural sex ethic.

I think the comfort would come in knowing that Jesus grieves with them. That Jesus knows the situation, so would know the pressures they were under to accommodate to conform to compromise.

2. What are the unique challenges of being a follower of Jesus in our current cultural climate? How does it make you feel, change how you face those realities, to know that Jesus sees and knows these challenges?

Misunderstanding. I think in particular the media has given a picture of Christians as those who have backed a trump administration in the states. Christians as those who are holding back our progression as a society.

Although there is tolerance of many different truth claims it would seem that it is fair game to critique Christians openly without fear of being labeled intolerant.

The question of how does it make you feel or change how you face those realities is a subjective question that will depend on how people answer the first part of the question.

3. The tallest buildings in a city often speak to the cultural idolatries of that city. This was certainly the case with Pergamum as was revealed in the sermon. What do the tallest buildings in our city tell us about what we worship / pursue as a culture and what would it look like to be faithful to Jesus in the midst of those cultural idolatries?

In the sermon Tim addressed the reality that our tallest buildings are graced with the logos of our banks. This could be an indication that we worship money, wealth, the bottom line.

In Michael Schluters critique of capitalism in its current form he speaks of the increasing size and globalization of companies which distances decision makers from their employees, the communities their products are made in, the environment, and consumers. It has now become common practice that decision makers can make short term decisions to maximize share price – sell off – and leave everything and everyone else diminished.

We are employees, employers, consumers, investors in such a system – what would it look like to keep the values of the kingdom – of justice, equality, people, communities, front and center in the way we influence our work places, make our consumer and investment decisions?

4. Jesus critiques this community for tolerating the teachings of Balaam. A group within the church was, couched in Christian language, encouraging people to continue to go to the feasts in the temples, and continue in the prevailing sex ethic. This is the teaching of compromise, of accommodation. Where might we find similar teaching in the modern church? (That is the accommodation of cultural idolatries couched in Christian language)

As the matter of sexuality in the church is a very polarizing issue and perhaps will be the first thing that comes up... You may not want to navigate it unless you have a group that can handle opposing ideas with grace and understanding.

I suspect that what is more damaging in our current climate is our accommodation of the cultural idolatries of individualism, wealth, success, romantic love. It may be wise to raise these matters as a leader to steer the conversation into areas that you may have more productive and less divisive conversation.

5. Jesus command to the entire church is to repent. It is the Balaamites that are causing the problem and yet all of them are called to repent. This tells us that compromise and accommodation of the prevailing cultural idolatries is all of our responsibility. How might we practice addressing such accommodation and compromise in our midst?

Jesus response will be to bring the power of his word to bear. His word being likened to a sharp two-edged sword. A sword that cuts both ways – it both wounds and it heals. As a surgeon cut out a cancerous tumour in order that we might have life, God's word is to cut out what is destroying us so that we might have life. It has often been said that the word of God is to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable. A conversation about the place of the read and preached word of God in the community would be fruitful.

I think there is also a place here for us to speak with one another and invite faithfulness to Jesus, for we have a mutual accountability to one another to remain faithful. The question is how can we do that gently, lovingly, humbly, in a way that it can be heard and responded to. Discussion toward this end could prove fruitful.

6. The promise to those who listen to the words of Jesus is two-fold. They will receive hidden manna (the promise of a heavenly feast), and a white stone with a new name (the promise of being completely remade in Jesus' image so that a new name would be required). How do these promises enable us to remain faithful in the midst of the cultural idolatries of our day?

I think one of the primary reasons we compromise and accommodate is that we believe if we don't we will miss out on the fullness of life. These promises point to the reality that we are actually not missing out on anything of lasting value.

In his sermon this coming week Orvin will be touching on this a little more fully.

A discussion on where we feel we might be missing out, and that fear being addressed with the promises of the gospel would be time well spent.