

No Compromises!

REVELATION 2:12-17

Notes for preachers

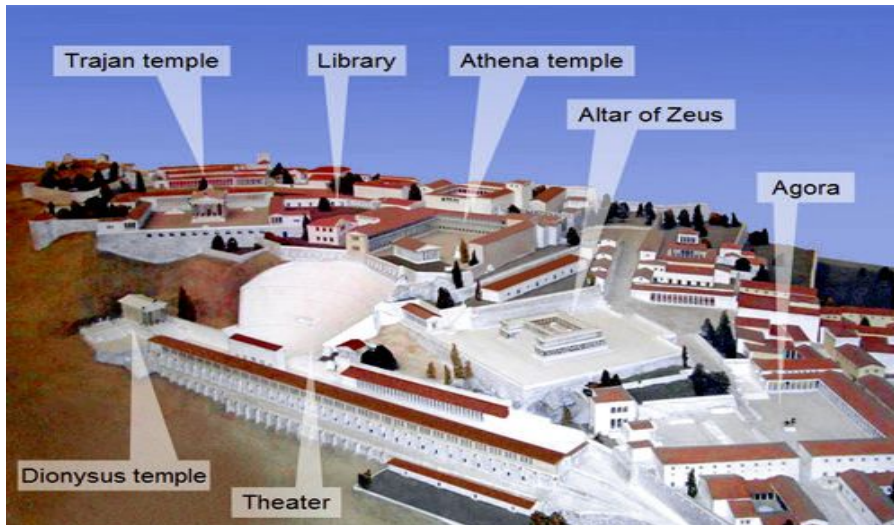
Intro.

In our message about Jesus' message to the church of Smyrna, we noted that in 600 B.C the Lydians destroyed the city and for 400 years Smyrna was dead. About 200 B.C. one of Alexander the Great's generals, Lysimachus rebuilt it. During the beatification process, the Jewish community contributed 10,000 denarii. This represented the amount of money that an average worker would make in 30 years. To say the least, this was a very large sum of money. Because of their influence then, in this resurrected town, Jewish leaders were able to make life miserable for Christians which Jesus acknowledges with his reference to the synagogue of Satan in v. 9.

Their 10,000 denarii gift for the beatification of the city provided them a bully pulpit to slander the church. The fact that the members of the church were financially poor compared to these representatives of the "synagogue of Satan" made them easy marks. So those who wished them harm accused them of cannibalism, presumably because they ate the flesh and blood of Jesus in their observance of the Eucharist. They were labeled "immoral," because their practice of greeting one another with a holy kiss and regularly boasting of their love for one another. Furthermore, they were called atheists. This seems to be quite curious until we learn that the basis of this claim is they did not support the worship of Caesar or the pagan gods.

It is this last charge that they were atheists that takes central stage in Jesus' message to the church at Pergamum. Pergamum was the capitol of the province of Asia Minor. Think Washington DC! It was the place where political decisions for the entire province were made. It also was a community that stressed tolerance for all religions. These political leaders established and enforced laws that demanded that polytheistic beliefs must be accepted by every inhabitant of the province. Any unwillingness to comply could be met with the death penalty! Since Christians claimed that salvation is through Christ alone, they put themselves in the position of denying the validity of all the other religious faith systems. That was unacceptable in Pergamum!

[Picture of the layout on the Acropolis in the ancient in Pergamum](#)



As the capitol of Asia Minor, Pergamum was the center of Emperor worship. In Pergamum once a year every citizen was expected to go to the temple and say, "Caesar is Lord." No one was required to give up their own religion, but they were compelled to "tolerate" emperor worship.

Get the picture? These early Christians lived under a political and social system that was tolerant of everything except intolerance! You could live any way you wished in Pergamum if you didn't say there is one and only one true God. His name is Jesus Christ! Say that and the thinkers of the day might say to you. "What is the big deal. We are not asking you to give up your beliefs about Jesus. Why can't you also say that 'Caesar is Lord?'"

The following paragraphs establish a felt need and introduces the subject of this message which is "what leads us to compromise our faith?"

Does this sound familiar? It should because there can be no question that the church in America is facing the same political and social pressure to conform. Our critics are saying virtually the same thing that the leaders of Pergamum said to the church in their day. Why are you Christians so narrow minded? You are being hateful! Why can't you just accept that there are many ways to God? There is no one right way to live. Why can't you agree with us that people have the freedom to live their lives any way they wish. How dare you Christians say there is anything wrong with the Emperor being in a sexual relationship with a young boy. What the emperor does behind closed doors is his business. Who are you to judge what is right or wrong?

Are you feeling the pressure to conform. We are engaged in a war today. It is a battle about ideas. The media and the government for the most part are using their bully pulpit to seek to convince us to accept their ideology. Like the political leaders at Pergamum, public schools and especially secular universities are appalled by the fact that some Christians are intolerant of their mainstream polytheistic views. Furthermore, these mainstream critics can't understand why Christians care at all about the sexual looseness that is accepted as normal and appropriate by so many Americans.

So, like the Christians at Pergamum, conservative Christians are urged to compromise. In some cases, it is compromise or else. The "or else" may be: or else you will lose your job; or else you will be fined, or else you will lose tax advantages, or

else we will make fun of you or ridicule you in the media or in the marketplace of ideas. So, what do we do? How do we survive this battle for the minds of our children? How do we fight for our convictions about Jesus when so many around us are insisting that we compromise?

Thankfully, Jesus knows about our struggle because in this letter he directed to the church at Pergamum he advises us about what we can do!

Turn in your Bibles or open your device to Revelation 2:12-17.

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. 13 I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. 15 Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. You could choose to preach this message as a “key” word message. Your “key” word would be “reasons.” Thus, you could say. “Jesus in his message to the church at Pergamum gives us three reasons why we may compromise our faith. 1. We forget who Jesus is. 2. We forget what Jesus has empowered us to do. 3. We don’t want to offend anyone.”

I. We Compromise When We Forget Who Jesus Is!

12 These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. 13 I know where you live—where Satan has his throne.

A. He has a sharp two-edged sword

The word that is translated as “sword” in 2:12 is the Greek word “romphaia.” It designates a body length sword that was used in judgment. This word appears 7 times in N.T. (Luke. 2:35; Rev. 1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15,21 and 6:8). Its significance in this verse comes from the fact that Roman governors were divided into 2 classes, those with “ius gladii” (the right or authority of the sword) and those without. The governor in Pergamum had right of sword. Thus, he could and did order Christians to be killed if they did not confess publicly that Caesar is Lord!

Over and against this picture of the power of the secular government, Jesus reminds this church that he has a sharp two-edged sword. John alluded to this earlier in his book in Revelation 1:16, “In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.”

Furthermore, in Hebrews 4:12, we read, “For the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (cf. Ephesians 6:17).

The ancient Romans employed the two-edged sword as a formidable offensive weapon, and a metaphorical sword is portrayed in both Hebrews and Revelation. This two-edged sword symbolizes Christ’s authority and judgment, holding humanity accountable, even delving into our thoughts.

Do we often imagine Jesus as a warrior wielding a two-edged sword? Unfortunately, no. Our tendency is to reshape Jesus into a less “threatening” figure, favoring a nonjudgmental being who will affirm all our actions.

As C. S. Lewis put it in his book *The Problem of Pain*, “We want, in fact, not so much a father in heaven as a grandfather in heaven: a senile benevolence who, as they say, ‘liked to see young people enjoying themselves’ and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, “a good time was had by all.””

However, such a god would lack attributes like goodness, holiness, justice, and love. Justice is a good thing, and we should expect a good God to give His creatures responsibility and to hold us accountable. God’s Word reveals His standard, our obligations, and our shortcomings. It cuts through our veneer of virtue, exposing us as the rebels we are, and promises that we will receive a just penalty. While we welcome the thought of God’s justice when envisioning folks like Hitler, we are slower to embrace the somber thought that we will be judged, too. Against the divine standard, we inevitably fall short (Romans 3:23). That’s why we need a Savior.

So why does Jesus describe himself as the one with the two-edged sword to the believers in Pergamum. The answer to that question appears in v. 16 where we read, *Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.* Notice that Jesus says, “I will come to **you** and fight against **them**.” Who are the “them” he will fight against. From vv. 14, 15, it is people in the church who have compromised their beliefs by following the teaching of Balaam, and the Nicolaitans. The clear implication here is “if you don’t repent and speak up against these false teachers in the church, I will!”

B. How does Jesus make war with the sword of his mouth?

So, what does Jesus expect us to do if we live in a city like Pergamum where there is enormous pressure to conform. As tempting as it is to keep our mouths shut and our heads down, Jesus says, “either you speak, or I will!” But isn’t it risky to speak against the reigning ideology of our day when we know we may be mocked or ridiculed if we do. Sure, it is risky, but we don’t fight in the marketplace of ideas alone. He who has the sharp two-edged sword goes with us.

I believe that Chuck Colson was one of the best examples of how to do what Jesus expects of us. Chuck understood all too well the power of Washington D. C. After all,

he was dubbed the “Hatchet Man” during the Nixon years. If he had lived in Pergamum in the 1st century, he would have been the officer who executed the order to put to death Christians who refused to comply with the directives of the state.

But after seven months in prison for crimes committed as a secular bully, he was a changed man. Perhaps Colson’s most notable post-conversion contribution to society was the founding of Prison Fellowship, a non-profit organization that supports incarcerated individuals and their families.

When he was released from prison, the former “Hatchet Man” felt God’s call to do something to help those left behind. One of the organization’s guiding Scripture passages is Matthew 25:34-36, in which Jesus describes God the Father blessing those who care for the hungry, the sick, and the imprisoned, among others.

The “bully” then advocated for justice reform. He brought positive change into prisons (most notably through Bible studies) but worked to strengthen the bond between incarcerated parents and their children.

From the 1980s to his death, Colson used various media channels to address legal issues such as LGBTQ issues, abortion, evolution, and more. He wrote articles, was interviewed on radio and TV, and debated people with opposing views. Colson eventually started The Colson Center to help Christians evangelize and engage thoughtfully and constructively with the culture. He also began Breakpoint to share articles and podcasts from The Colson Center.

He never belittled those who opposed his views, nor did he ever insist he was right, and they were wrong. Instead, he argued for the right to share his opinion in the marketplace in a respectful and intellectually sound way. In other words, he did what Jesus announced to the church of Pergamum he will do at the end of the age!

Thus, when we live in a place where there is political and social pressure to hide our ideas, we need to remember that Jesus has the two-edged sword!

If you choose to use the “key” word approach with this message, your transitional statement would be, “we have seen that the 1st reason we may compromise our faith is that forget who Jesus is. As we continue, the second reason we may compromise our faith is that we forget what Jesus has empowered us to do.”

II. We Compromise When We Forget What Jesus Has Empowered Us To Do

13 I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

In the second portion of his letter to the church of Pergamum, Jesus encourages the church to do what he has empowered them to do.

A. Be a witness where Satan's throne is.

Jesus begins by noting, "I know where you live...where Satan has his throne." You ask, "How was Pergamum Satan's throne?" About 240 B.C. Pergamum won a great victory vs. invading Gauls. In memory of that victory, an altar to Zeus was built. It stood 800' up on Pergamum's conical hill. It was 40' high and was on a projecting ledge of rock. It looked like a great seat or throne on the hillside. Was this Satan's seat?

Show picture from film: [Temple of Zeus at Pergamum](#)

In addition, Asclepius was the distinctive god of Pergamum. Asclepius was a god of healing. The task of healing was partly work of priests and partly work of doctors and partly miraculous intervention of Asclepius. The common title of Asclepius was Asclepius Soter (Savior). Since the temple of Asclepius was the closest thing to a hospital in ancient times, how much should Christians tolerate this false religion when Christians needed medical help?



Finally, as we have already noted Pergamum was the capitol of Asia Minor. Therefore, it was the center of Emperor worship. In Pergamum once a year every citizen was expected to go to the temple and say, "Caesar is Lord." They were not required to give up their own religion, but they were compelled to "tolerate" emperor worship.

Do we need any more convincing that if Pergamum was where Satan lives, what Christians face in modern day America is exactly the same? If you still doubt that, notice these alarming statistics:

A recent report on teenage America reveals these startling facts:

I found these statistics in 2023. If you are using these notes significantly after 2023, do a Google search to update these numbers.

30% are sexually active.

75% to 98% cheat on a regular basis, and feel it is OK.

1 in 11 Americans are shoplifters and 55% of that group began when they were teenagers.

33% of teenage pregnancies are aborted.

In 2021, 3.2 million youth ages 12 to 18 reported binge drinking at least once in the last month.

Around 3.2 million teens ages 12 to 17 had one major depressive episode in 2017.

So, what are we to do? First, Jesus expects that we will be a witness like Antipas who was martyred for his faith. What does that look like? It doesn't mean we get on a soap box and announce to all the passersby that they are going to hell.

How about we try witnessing the way Jesus did? By my count, Jesus had 31 recorded one on one encounters with seekers where he "proclaimed" something. Jesus speaks with two of the 31 in the synagogue (the religious institutional setting). The other 29 he meets in more public places. 20 of the 31 had a physical problem (2 of these had a demonic problem in addition); 3 of the 31 had primarily a demonic issue; 1 sinful woman came to anoint Jesus' feet; a teacher, a rich young ruler and Nicodemus had questions they wanted to ask Jesus; Jesus challenges Philip Matthew, a tax collector, to follow him; 2 women had sexual/moral issues; Zacchaeus wanted to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

Of the 20 that Jesus heals and the three that had demons, he asks nothing except that they tell no one of their miracle. His healing them is not predicated on their willingness to hear the gospel or anything else. He offers help and seems to ask for nothing in return. Note John 20:30, 31 tell us why Jesus did miracles, i.e. they were signs to bring seekers to the point where they would believe in Jesus and have life through his name. But as Jesus heals, he does not ask anyone that he heals to pray a "sinners'" prayer or fill out a commitment card. It is as if he believes that his act of love by itself will draw people to him.

Jesus challenges 8 of the 31 seekers to make a decision. 3 he asks "follow me" (Philip, Matthew and the teacher), 1 he asks to turn from sin, 1 he challenges to drink water that he provides, 1 he challenges to be "born again", 1 he asks to give away his fortune and "follow me" and 1 (Zacchaeus) he asks to stay in his house.

The 8 that Jesus challenges to make a decision were healthy. Those who received a miracle were not asked to make a decision. Could be that if you have been sitting by a pool for 38 years waiting for a miracle that you do not have to be asked to follow the one who heals you?

In summary, how did Jesus witness? His primary method was healing and helping! In 2/3 of his encounters that is all he did. To be sure, on eight occasions he asked for a decision of some kind. So, I am not saying that all Jesus did was heal and help seekers, but healing and helping was the accent of his effort. Can you do anything to heal or help someone at work or someone in your family? If you choose to look at them the way Jesus looked at his world, you can! Ask God to give you the heart of compassion for the lost that Jesus had and that is a good start. Remember Jesus loved everyone, even the ones who killed him. That kind of love was nearly irresistible when Jesus walked on this earth, and it still is today!

After suggesting to the believers at Pergamum that they should be witnesses like Antipas, Jesus encourage them to hold on.

B. Hold fast where Satan dwells.

The obvious intent of this charge is that Jesus knows how hard it is to stay the course when it seems that everyone around us is advising us to jump ship. I live in Minneapolis, the former home of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. On one occasion my mentor, Dr. Walter Kaiser and I were invited to advise the leaders at BGEA

about their transition from the leadership under Billy Graham to that of his son Franklin. During my days with them, I got my hands on a marketing study prepared by a secular advertising firm on how the Billy Graham Association could have a greater impact on 21st century America.

First these secular advisers commended Billy for his wonderful references to Jesus, heaven, and angels. They gushed, “oh Billy, what you do with those topics is fabulous! What’s more, Americans can’t get enough of TV shows like “Touched by an Angel,” or “Highway to Heaven” to name just a few. Furthermore, we love to think and talk about heaven and the Jesus who loves everyone unconditionally. But Billy you must stop talking about sin and hell. No one in America today wants to hear about either of those topics!”

I had to laugh when I read that. Not because I thought they were wrong about what the secular world wants to hear from the church. They were right about that. But can you imagine Billy Graham preaching and never mentioning sin or hell. He was one of the greatest evangelistic who ever lived. Only sinners have a felt need for a Savior. Billy had to talk about sin and hell because his life’s mission was to depopulate hell and fill heaven with repentant sinners who found new life through their Savior Jesus Christ.

So, Jesus says, “hold on!” Don’t soft sell the Gospel that Jesus died to save sinners. It is the only message that matters wherever you live!

If you choose to use the “key” word approach with this message your transitional statement would be, “we have seen we may compromise our faith because forget who Jesus is and Jesus has empowered us to do.” The third reason we may compromise our faith is that we would rather lower our standards than offend anyone.

III. We Compromise When We Lower Our Standards So We Don’t Offend The World

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. 15 Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

In this last section of Jesus’ message to the church at Pergamum, Jesus urges the church to resist the temptation to lower their standards about what constitutes sin and sexual immorality.

A. Why do we compromise in the church?

He begins by noting that some in this church tolerated the teaching of Balaam. Who was Balaam? He encouraged believers to become involved in sexually immoral relationships with nonbelievers (Num. 31:15,16; 25:1-3). In addition, he encouraged believers to tolerate worshipping Baal of Peor (25:3).

If that wasn't bad enough, some in the church followed the teaching of the Nicolaitans. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans appears to have been a form of antinomianism, which makes the fatal mistake that man can sin because the Law of God is no longer binding. They believed that you could live any way you want if you have an intellectual "belief" in the Gospel.

Thus, at this church, there was a significant interest in ignoring what the Bible calls "sin." In its place, these Bible teachers certainly would have emphasized what we hear today. "Preach love! That is what will attract the seeker. If we hope to draw unbelievers to the church, we must realize they don't want to hear negative messages." I have had some offer that advice to me on many occasions.

A new survey shows that most Americans are entrenched in the thinking of these questionable believers at the church of Pergamum.

As part of the ongoing release of the Arizona Christian University-based Cultural Research Center's American Worldview Inventory, the latest findings — exploring perceptions of sin and salvation — from George Barna, the group's director, show that nearly two-thirds of Americans believe that having some kind of faith is more important than the particular faith with which someone aligns.

78% who embrace that notion identify as Christians, including 56% of self-described evangelicals and 62% of those who identify as Pentecostals. 67% of mainline Protestants and 77% of Catholics also embraced that idea, the findings show.

Slightly over half of Christian respondents said they believe someone can attain salvation by "being or doing good," a figure that includes, 46% of Pentecostals, 44% of mainline Protestants, 41% of evangelicals, and 70% of Catholics.

In addition to the viewpoint that eternal salvation can be earned, survey results show that 58% of Americans believe that no absolute moral truth exists, and that the basis of truth are factors or sources other than God. 77% said that right and wrong is determined by factors other than the Bible. 59% said that the Bible is not God's authoritative and true Word and 69% said people are basically good.

Complicating the challenge for believers today is the fact that "Nones" — those with no religious preference — are more likely to say sin does not exist (32%). 10% of "nones" say they are fine with being sinners, while 27% say they work on overcoming their sin. 6% say they depend on Jesus to overcome sin.

Are you convinced that the American church today exists in modern day Pergamum?

The real question, however, is what do we do about it?

B. How do we avoid compromising in the church?

1. Repent v. 16

As Jesus offers his advice on how to avoid compromising our convictions, he repeats a very familiar word: “Repent!” We get it. We know with this word Jesus is calling for a change of mind. But how should change our minds.

Some time ago I used the ACTS method for journaling my daily prayers. With the ACTS method I prayed petitions based on the acronym. First, I prayed prayers of adoration. Then I followed with prayers of confession, prayers of thanksgiving and ended with prayers of supplication.

I soon discovered as I used this method every day by about the second week, I struggled knowing what to say especially when it came to prayers of confession. Often, I looked at my prayer journal and thought what can I say? I knew I was a sinner but when I was forced to name my sins specifically, I couldn’t think of anything. Can you relate at all?

As I have worked with so many families for about 40 years, I have learned that I am not alone. Most husbands and wives I have helped do not confess their sins to one another. They are great at confessing their spouses’ sins, but few have regularly asked their spouse to pray that God would give them victory over some temptation that they face. When I have successfully equipped families to confess their sins to one another and solicit the prayer support of their family, what happens is nothing short of amazing.

We shouldn’t be surprised because doesn’t James say, “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” James 5:16.

How might you do that in your family?

If you choose to use the following, display it on a screen or provide it as a handout. You probably do not want to read this word for word.

What I have found that works is to ask each family member to share at least **one item from each of the following categories**: You can do this live in a monthly family meeting or do it at distance with a family letter (Note if you are using the letter format: think of writing brief sentences not paragraphs. We don’t want the submitting of prayers and praises to become a time-consuming chore)

Category one: So we can praise God with you, share **one item from list**:

1. What specific Bible verses have helped you recently.
2. Why a particular worship service encouraged you.
3. How a friend or family member encouraged you.
4. How God used you in an act of service for a neighbor, friend, fellow worker, stranger, member of the community or church.

Category two: So we can pray for you, share **one item from list**:

1. How you may be struggling to find meaning in your devotional life. You are reading the Bible but not experiencing the presence of Jesus. You are praying but it feels legalistic. Or you are struggling to find consistent times to pray or read Scripture regularly.
2. You are struggling with someone at work or church or your neighborhood. Be specific!
3. You are struggling with some work issue. Your boss, a fellow employee, a project.
4. You are struggling with a health issue, with a consistent exercise routine, or with good sleep.
5. You are struggling with some emotional issue. You feel discouraged, lonely, stressed, and sad.

Category three: So we can rejoice that our prayers for one another are making a difference, share **one item from list:**

1. The progress achieved regarding something we prayed for you in the past.
2. Share how you are growing in your relationship with Jesus.
3. Share how you are growing in your appreciation of a family member.
4. Share how you have felt loved by a family member.
5. Share how God is teaching you to love a family member more effectively.

Before you dismiss this exercise as too much or too hard, let me ask you “how well is your family doing claiming the promise of healing that James offers to you and your family in James 5?”

Jesus says to you if you know you are living in a community where your government, the media and the secular educational system is demanding that you compromise, you should repent.

Secondly, Jesus advises that we desire *the hidden manna and the white stone*.

2. Desire the hidden manna and the white stone. v. 17

What is the hidden manna? In the Bible, the primary reference to manna is to the miraculous food that God gifted the Israelites with every day for 40 years as they wandered in the wilderness. After the sojourn in the desert, the author of Hebrews informs us that in the Temple,

Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Hebrews 9: 3,4.

We know that in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple in Jeremiah’s day. According to Jewish tradition, Jeremiah retrieved the manna jar before Nebuchadnezzar entered the city. He then hid it somewhere in the vicinity of Mt. Sinai where it would remain hidden until the day when the Messiah comes.

Do you like toast with honey on it? The manna we will receive at the second coming will taste something like that.

Even more exciting is that Jesus advises that each believer will receive “a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.” v. 17



On the surface this is a reference to the practice in Pergamum. It was common for pagans to have an amulet or charm, sometimes white stones with name of their god secretly written on it. It was thought that if a worshiper had his god's name on his stone, that empowered him to be able to summon his deity whenever he was in trouble. It was a lucky charm or Pergamum's version of a supernatural rabbit's foot.

Jesus is saying then, "I am offering you something better than that! You will receive a white stone with a new name known only to you!" How cool is that? What will be on your stone? Will it be a secret name of God known only to you? Or will it be a secret name God gives you to describe what he thinks about you? In either case, this demonstrates how special you are to Jesus? Can you wrap your head around this? Do you believe that because you are so special to Jesus, the government can't curb your commitment to Jesus? The media can't win in its battle to cause you to conform. Even Christians at your church who cave into the pressure to avoid addressing sin can't keep you from the victory that is yours through Jesus Christ!