

# You've Got Mail - Pergamum

Scripture: Revelation 2: 12-17  
Date: October 4, 2020

## CONTEXT

### PERGAMUM

Pergamum is the closest geographically to Rome and therefore has strong ties to the Roman empire and the Emperor. It is prominent in the Roman world in that it is a government driven city. The central place where decisions are made.

Perhaps this is why the text speaks of it a Satan's city – not because it is so evil - although certainly there is much of that there as well – but because in the first century the life and faith of the Romans was completely contrary to Jesus Christ.

The prominence of Pergamum was reflected in a place of importance. But it was also a place of power and strength that showed victory, dominance. A power reflected in the image of the Roman broadsword. A sword that was sharp on two sides and pointed so that it was capable of doing damage in all sorts of ways.

For Pergamum – the latin phrase *ius gladii* means the right of the sword and it speaks of Pergamum's place in the world as Rome's judge and jury. This would have included the carrying out of all capital punishment executions.

Like other cities it revolved around the worship of the Emperor – and all things Roman. To the power of the Roman government required each citizen to annual make an oath that Caesar was their Lord – their God.

## CHALLENGES

### COMMENDATION

Yet in the midst to a calling to bend a knee to Caesar there were many who didn't. Christians who had now decided to make Jesus their Lord and could not declare some human governor – Lord. Jesus commends this remnant in the church for their faith, loyalty.

In particular He commends a particular individual – Antipas. He was martyred possibly during the persecutions of Nero. We don't know much about him – but clearly Jesus did as did the church in Pergamum to have him referenced.

### CONDEMNATION

But Jesus doesn't see all as good in Pergamum. There is a critique or condemnation to follow the affirmation. There are apparently within the church members who were following a focus that was false. A teaching from the Nicolaitans that the church in Ephesus had rejected as false – found greater acceptance in Pergamum church.

The text also references Balaam and Balak and how that teaching has lead the church members astray. The back story here is found in the book of Numbers where Israel was defeated by Moab. It was a victory not by war of the blade but by the war of the mind and the heart. Moabite women and men seduced the Israelites so that the Israelites were offering sacrifices to false gods and living lives of immorality.

In Pergamum food and drink that were offered to idols – often as part of cultural, vocational celebrations. These were then consumed by those in attendance – including the Christian community. If you were part of the Pergamum / Roman culture then you were expected to participate in the food and the frivolity.

### COMPROMISE

Christians in Pergamum were called to declare Jesus in their words – despite the pressure to put Caesar above Jesus. It was hard in the times of persecution – but many did. Yet the Christian community were also called to declare Jesus in how they lived their lives – and many didn't.

The church in Pergamum was not walking the edge of the sword choosing between one or the other but rather walking the broad side of the sword. Taking a bit of Christianity and a bit of culture creating a faith that they could live in – easier. A culture of compromise – neither the world – nor Christ.

### CALLING

#### WALK THE TALK

The church in Pergamum was called out by Jesus for saying one thing and living another. They had a good orthodoxy – a godly way of thinking – but they struggled with orthopraxy - a Godly way of living.

#### REJOICE - REPENT

Yet into this space of commendation and condemnation Jesus speaks truth and hope. He calls the church in Pergamum – and us – to repent. To turn around and walk in the way we were called to live and return to His calling of life and faith.

Life and faith

Faith and life

#### HIDDEN MANNA

For those in Pergamum – and today – who repent Jesus promises a victory if we are able to follow His lead. The text speaks of Hidden Manna which might refer to an older Israelite understanding of a pot of mana in the Ark of the Covenant which would be returned when God would make all things right. Jesus as the Bread of life would fulfill that hope. In Him there is a sustenance in life and in faith that removes the need to fit in with the eating and drinking at idolatry sacrifices.

**WHITE STONE**

Jesus also promises a white stone to those are victorious. This also has several possible interpretations. But seen from a distance they all remind us of the truths. That the whiteness of the stone is an image of forgiveness and purity. The white stone is also seen as a marker that allows one to enter – to enter into God’s presence here and in the world yet to come. The white stone is also a contrast to the black walls of the architecture of Pergamum – thus shining as an example for all to see.

**NEW NAME**

Jesus includes in this new white stone a reality of a new name. Again there is differing thoughts on what name is attached. On one hand it is the name of Jesus – putting us as the covenant people under His rule and authority. On the other hand it is our own individual and unique name held by God as who we were truly made to be.

**APPLICATION / CONCLUSION****SWORD OF DEATH**

The culture of the world – Pergamum in 90 AD and Calgary in 2020 AD – is rife with the opportunity to compromise. Culture sees the power of the sword where might makes right. If you choose badly you will die.

But God gives us our own sword. Ephesians 6 speaks of equipping ourselves with armour of God including the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. The sword which helps us determine what is right – in our thinking and in our living. Hebrews 4 reminds us that the word of God – which is sharper than any double edged sword – will be able to penetrate, clarify and judge in a true and most powerful way.

Because the sword of death by Caesar does not compare to sword of life by Jesus. In Matthew 10 we read that whoever acknowledges Jesus will be acknowledge by Jesus. Jesus came not to bring a peace (of compromise) but a sword of clarity – compassion – that reveals all power.

**REVELATION**

In pulling back the curtain we see that the lamp has been lit and the light reveals the truth within us. We have only to live according the love of God and the life He offers.

AMEN and AMEN