

Revelation 2: 16 and 17; "The Hidden Manna and the White Stone,"
Sermon # 19 in the series - "The Faithful and True Witness," Delivered
by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 4th, 2011,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.

The last time that I spoke to you I attempted to open up the meaning of the two-edged sword that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not a literal physical sword but rather a spiritual sword that the Lord Jesus Himself wields to wage spiritual warfare against unrighteousness and evil within His church. He uses this sword in relation to the advance of His own kingdom, in truth and righteousness. It is a sword to be used against His spiritual enemies; to free and defend His own precious people when they are in danger of compromising and succumbing to the strategies and temptations of the evil one. This is a sword which our Lord also uses, to discern what is in the hearts of His people; what He uses to cut away error, and what He uses to fight against those who will not repent of their grievous sins of tolerating such errors in the church. The church at Pergamos was a church which was located in a city where Satan had successfully established a "seat", a stronghold for his base of operations. It was a place where evil and false doctrine had reigned over the hearts of many, perhaps for generations. The pastors and people of the church there had in general been faithful to hold fast the truth of Jesus Christ being the only Savior from sin and the only Lord to be obeyed. The church had held fast the truth of the gospel even when one of their pastors was martyred. But the Lord Jesus did have a few things against them. Although they were faithful to hold fast the gospel, they had come to tolerate doctrinal error and evil in their midst. This was something that the Lord Jesus was intending to deal with them about, very decisively. And so this afternoon we want to learn more about how the Lord comes to deal very decisively in 3 ways with each and every local church. 1st – He fights against unrepentant sinners with the sword of His mouth. 2^{ndly} – He rewards the one who overcomes with the hidden manna. And thirdly – He bestows upon the one who overcomes; a white stone. Let us consider that even as our Christ has done these things in past generations; He will do them in church as well.

1st – Our Christ will come decisively to all of His local churches, and if necessary, He will fight against unrepentant sinners with the sword of His mouth. (Verse 16)

“Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.” “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Notice the way that the text is worded. “I will come to you”, that is to the local church in general; but He will only come to fight against “them”; that is, those who continue to hold to their sins and errors. If you will recall from our study of last week, there were some in this church who "held the doctrine of

Balaam." When we looked back at Numbers chapters 25 and 31 we saw what this doctrine was. It was the counsel of Balaam to Balak and the Midianites to send sensual and seductive women into the camp of Israel; to invite them to their pagan feasts. Once the men of Israel were there at the feast, the seducers to idolatry would offer sexual favors to the men of Israel if they would renounce the idea that the true God was the only God. And then they would eventually go on to confess that Baal was God as well as the only true and living God. This kind of teaching was a fatal compromise with idolatry to all who engaged in it. Our God is a jealous God. And we are to have no other Gods before Him. Therefore, God sent a plague among the people and 24,000 men of Israel died as a result. The Lord Jesus, in His message to the church at Pergamos used this incident from Old Testament history, to show the church at Pergamos that they had some people in their midst who were doing a similar thing. The name of their sect was called the Nicolaitans. The Lord hated this doctrine because it did the same thing as the counsel of Balaam had done before. It put a stumbling block before the people who attended that local church; people who were supposed to be pursuing holiness. They had, after all, made profession of Jesus Christ as their only Savior and Lord. They had supposedly come to know the only True and Living God. And yet there were some among them, who were saying to them, that it was not wrong to go the pagan festivals and feasts and eat meat sacrificed to idols. They supposedly did not have to participate in any false worship if they went to these community social events and productions. And if they witnessed immorality, there at those feasts, it was not wrong. They were asked by the seducers to idolatry, "Who was it harming?" "No one," they were told. And so the true believers in the church of Pergamos were in great spiritual danger, not only of compromising with the world and the flesh, but of becoming idolaters. This is what the Lord Jesus comes to them to fight against; with the sword of His mouth. The sword of His mouth is His chosen instruments; the preachers and elders of the church there, who would confront this terrible compromise with their instructions which they would deliver by the power of the Holy Spirit, both in their preaching and in their private instruction. The leaders of the church, speaking to all those who were attending, and all those who were members of the church; they would come to confront those in error, and cut away what was false, so that the rest of the church who were trying to be holy, would truly be able to go on to pursue and find greater holiness.

Now the terrible truth was, that the leadership of the church of Pergamos had not taken the necessary and holy action of confronting the people who were teaching these things to others in the congregation. I am not sure whether they thought that they would possibly lose many people from their congregation if they did so or whether they falsely believed that these were matters of conscience and opinion rather than sin. But for whatever reason, the leadership of the church had taken no action against these members. This is why the Lord Jesus commands them to repent; both pastors and people. If the leaders and the godly people

among them did not confront this great toleration of wickedness, error, and evil, Christ would come and providentially fight against the church itself. This would not be fighting against the true believers themselves, but it would be a disciplinary action against them, and a true fighting against the church continuing in that state. As John Gill says in his commentary, "It is observable, that Christ does not say, 'I will fight against thee', the true members of his mystical body, though lax and supine, for Christ does not fight against His people, but for them; but he says, 'and will fight against them::; the Balaamites and Nicolaitans, for their idolatry and uncleanness.'" It is because our Lord Jesus Christ knows how difficult it is for a pastor and the congregation of a church to confront error and evil and repent of its toleration of it, that He promises certain rewards to those pastors and people who overcome; rewards which will sustain them in this painful trial and confirm them in holiness when they overcome the evil.

So 2ndly we see – That Christ is decisive about His giving the reward of the Hidden Manna to those who overcome.

This is of course a picture word meant to lead our minds back to time of Israel's wilderness wanderings and how God provided for them during that time. For 40 years they were forced to wander in the wilderness because they had complained about the report that the spies brought back of the good land that the Lord was bringing them into. So the Lord says to them in Numbers 14: 34, "According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection." But still the Lord was compassionate to His ancient people even during this time. It says in Psalm 78: 17 and following, "But they sinned even more against Him by rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness." "And they tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy." "Yes, they spoke against God: They said, 'Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?'" "Behold, He struck the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed." "Can He give bread also?" "Can he provide meat for His people?" "Therefore the Lord heard this and was furious; so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation." "Yet He had commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven, had rained down manna on them to eat, and given them of the bread of heaven." "Men ate angels' food; He sent them food to the full."

This is how New Testament Christians can sometimes be as well. We do not understand how we can be sustained and provided for when we take our stand against error and evil. We do not see how the Lord can provide a table in the wilderness for us or how he can undermine the schemes of wicked men. God became angry with Israel because they did not trust Him in this matter. Here in Revelation 2, the Lord Jesus says that He would come and fight against some in His own church if they would not repent. But he gives the encouragement that if

they do "have ears to hear" this reproof and if they do repent that he would give them the hidden manna. The manna was a delicious and nourishing and strengthening food which is described for us in Exodus 16: 31. "And the house of Israel called its name Manna. And it was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey." I would imagine that it was quite a bit better than toast and honey. It was a food of substance to sustain Israel, more than a million people, without any other foods being added to it during that whole time. Even so, the special grace of the hidden manna which Christ gives to those who would repent of their toleration of evil doctrines and sins of the flesh would be everything that these believers would need in order to face their own fears and the disapproval of those who would oppose them.

This is a truth that the world knows nothing about; the hidden way that Jesus sustains the strength, the willingness, and the efforts made by believers who desire to make progress against error and evil; their struggling to move toward greater holiness. You remember the time in John 4 when Jesus came to the well of Samaria and was wearied from His journey; he sat down by a well. The disciples had gone into the city to buy food. He got into a conversation with a Samaritan woman there which led to her conversion. When the disciples came back they urged Him to eat. And Jesus said something which ties in with what we are thinking about this afternoon. He said, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." His disciples say to Him, 'Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?'" "But He said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.'" Jesus was feeding upon doing God's will. God's law, His nourishing Word, was His delight, it was His greatest love, it was His joy and strengthening every day. When he was tempted by Satan to command the stones to become bread, He said, "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God." This is how Jesus found nourishment and strength spiritually. And it is through our feeding upon Christ and His faithfulness that you and I will overcome our temptations to compromise with false doctrine and fleshly lusts. This is how we will find strength to repent of our compromising ways.

In our Savior we find the hidden manna. Listen to John 6: 32 and 33. "Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.'" "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Then they said to Him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.'" "And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life.'" "He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." In other words, Jesus is saying that the one who believes in Him shall never go without the means to be satisfied and sustained in his attempts to pursue holiness and to oppose evil and error. That is what He is saying. And even in this situation in the church of Pergamos, Jesus is saying that

He will give some of this hidden manna of his satisfying and sustaining grace to the believers who will overcome.

And then Finally – Christ will be decisive to give a white stone to every believer who overcomes these temptations to tolerate error and engage in sin.

White is the symbol of purity and holiness in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 19, verse 14, it says, "And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses." It is the picture of confirmed holiness in Christ's saints who have died and gone to heaven, who are now following their King as He goes forth to destroy the spiritual armies of the beast and the false prophet with the sharp two-edged sword that proceeds from His mouth. Here is confirmed purity and holiness. Here the power of Christ's grace has triumphed. They are all clothed in white. They have overcome in life by their repentance, their obedience and their laying down their lives for the truth. The white stone of our text is a trophy, a token of special appreciation which is given by Christ as a reward to the believer for his having overcome the temptation to compromise with the world or the flesh or with false doctrine. It is an emblem of commendation for fighting valiantly in the battle for truth and righteousness.

I wonder if you have ever seen the movie Treasure Island, based on the book by Robert Lewis Stevenson. If you have, you remember that at the beginning of the movie that there is a old sea captain named Billy Bones who is suffering from old age and distress who is in a tavern. He is running away from some pirates who have been chasing him trying to get a hold of a treasure map that he has that had belonged to the pirate Flint. In order to try to scare him into giving it to them they give him a piece of paper with a black spot on it. This was a sign to the person to whom it was given that they had all resolved on and cast their vote for it, that he would surely die. Well the white stone, given by our Lord Jesus, is just the opposite of this. It meant that the believing saint had been confirmed in his holiness, that he had fought valiantly in the spiritual battle and the Lord would give him great assurance of his salvation and future blessedness. He would surely live forever, and be rewarded according to his work.

This was a very special reward; to be sure, for the stone had a new name written on it, given by the Lord Himself. It will be a new name which represents the good and righteous words and actions which were done by the courageous believer, who by grace and for the sake of Christ's kingdom and its furtherance in the church and in the world, did valiantly. You see a new name given to Peter when he confesses Jesus to be the Christ the Son of the living God. He is called Cephas; a rock. You see a new name given to Jacob when he wrestled with the angel to receive his blessing. He was re-named Israel, a prince with God. But the name that is given to the one who overcomes the temptation to compromise with error and evil will have on his stone a new name written on it which no one knows expect he himself. The reason for this should be apparent to us by now. The

greatest blessing that any Christian can have in the spiritual warfare that he is engaged in is to realize that Christ Himself is giving him the assurance that what he has done, and what he is doing, has been the righteous thing; the thing that Christ would be pleased with; the thing that would honor His Lord the most, in accordance with His word. He will speak peace to his repentant soul and this new name which has been written on the white stone of his assurance; he will hear from His Lord's lips when he sees his Lord along with the words, "Well done thou good and faithful servant."