

He Who Has an Ear Let Him Hear

by Pat Kenney

The sermon calls believers to rekindle their passion for Christ by reflecting on the messages to the seven churches in Revelation.

Duration: 1:05:16

Scripture: John 16:33, Revelation 2:1

Topics: "Spiritual Hearing"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the first four letters of the book of Revelation. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the strengths and weaknesses mentioned in these letters and how they apply to our own lives and church. The speaker also highlights the historical context of John the Apostle receiving a vision while in captivity on the Island of Patmos. He encourages the congregation to hold on to the hope of Christ's return and the ultimate justice that will be served. The sermon concludes with a prayer for those facing pain, heartache, and suffering in the world.

Transcript

Indeed, Lord, please have your way in each of us today, Lord. We give you our heart, Lord. And Lord, we lay it bare before you and ask you to search it, to know it.

Lord, we know you do. We just sometimes need to be reminded that you do. And Lord, as you do, you don't seek to smash us.

You seek to lift us. Yes, you want us to turn from our sin. And thank you, Lord, that you've made the way that we can turn.

There's not a one of us here this morning that are too far away from you to turn. We wouldn't even be here, Lord, if that was the case. So, God, give us ears to hear what you would say to us.

Lord, we pray for one another. We ask God that you would just keep each one, each of our brothers and sisters, each person that may be visiting here, maybe that don't even know you, Lord, that you would keep their hearts open to you, Lord, that they would receive you today. Lord, we're mindful of the great need in our community and in our nation and in our world today.

The great need to know you. Lord, there is such wickedness prevailing. Lord, there is such pain and heartache throughout this world, such disappointment and frustration and fear.

Lord, we think of those that are in bondage and in countries, Lord, that they're not free to express you. Lord, we think of those suffering through war and bloodshed, Lord. Lord, we think of those that are reeling from the catastrophic hurricanes in Florida, Lord, and who have lost all of their possessions.

Lord, there's a lot of hurt and pain in our world today. Lord, there's such need for you, for the peace that comes from you, that as you said, Lord, in this world, we will have tribulation, but don't be afraid because you have overcome this world. And so we ask, Lord, that beginning here, beginning right here in our own hearts, Lord, and in our own little community of Escondido, Lord, that you would light a fire again in us, God.

And Lord, that we would have a mind and a heart to serve you and a broken, yielded, intercessory heart for the needs of those around us, Lord, in our community and around the world. God, have your way in us, we pray, and use us for your glory in Jesus' name. We open your word now.

Teach us. Amen. Amen.

You can be seated. And if you would, open your Bibles to the book of Revelation. And this morning, we're going to begin a study of the seven letters to the churches that we have recorded for us from Jesus in chapters two and three.

At the end of chapter one, John the Beloved, John the Apostle, while in captivity under the Roman government on the Roman penal colony island of Patmos, received just a beautiful vision of things to come. And obedient to the Lord, he wrote it down, that churches, not only in his age, but down through the ages, would be encouraged and edified, comforted and strengthened by the fact that he is coming again, that heaven isn't that far away, that we have a perfect judge, and all evil and all wickedness will be dealt with in ultimate justice. We can hold on to that when we're going through tough times.

And as I look out across this congregation, I know many of your stories. I know where a lot of you are at even today. And you've either been in hard times, as we're going to talk about this when we get to one of the other letters, you're in hard times, or you will be in hard times.

It's just a fact of life. But in the midst of it, in the midst of it, our joy for the Lord, our love for the Lord can be the sweetest fragrance that not only fills our lives, but permeates those around us as well. This is a wonderful book.

So John's caught up, he's caught up in the heaven. He has these things beginning to unfold. He sees a vision of Jesus.

In verse 17, he says, When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said to me, Don't be afraid. I am the first and the last.

I am he who lives and who was dead and behold, I am alive forevermore. So be it. Amen.

Jesus is alive. He's not still hanging on a cross. He was taken down from that cross, laid in a grave, three days later rose victoriously over sin and death, the very first fruits of those who would also rise, of whom you and I are part of.

If you're born again, if you've given your life to Jesus Christ, we also will live forever with the Lord. And that should give us great joy and great, great passion. As we realize that life here is not all there is.

It's not like a couple of guys sitting on a boat on a lake with a can of beer going, It doesn't get any better than this. Maybe for them, that's as far as it goes, but that's not God's intent. It does get better and better and better.

And it'll keep getting better for all eternity. Hallelujah. As we as Christians, we know that this life is just a way station.

It's just a stop on the way to eternity. It's not the end in itself. It's a very important stop.

It's a very critical place because it is here where we choose which way we're going to go. God gives us that choice. Are we going to follow him? Or are we going to follow the lies of the world around us? It blesses my heart.

I'm so thankful that God intruded into my life so many years ago and got ahold of me. And I'm so thankful he upset your lives and got ahold of you. And now we're gathered together as a church family, just so grateful, so thankful for what he's done.

He is alive forevermore. He has the keys of Hades and of death. And so he says to John, write the things which you have seen, the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

The things which you have seen would be John's vision of the glorified Christ, which we saw in chapter one. The things which are would be the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor in chapters two and three, or to the church age as a whole. And then that which will take place after the church age, after the church is finished, when the time of the Gentiles is complete, when the last person to be saved is saved.

And then the church, the bride of Christ is taken up to be forever with the Lord. Verse 20, the mystery of the seven stars, which you saw on my right hand and the seven golden lampstands. Well, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands, which you saw are the seven churches.

So for the next two chapters, Jesus will be dictating seven letters to these seven churches. And each of these letters follows a structural pattern. Each letter has a to and from beginning.

It says to the angel of, and then that particular church. Now, what's does each church have its own angel? Maybe, but the aim, the word for angel and the Greek can also be messenger, which was the duty of the different pastors that were over those churches. They were churches like ours, gatherings of people who love Jesus, who were gathered together initially when they were planted around the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And they had leaders in those churches that had the responsibility of instructing and guiding and teaching and protecting. So I believe that John had in mind those churches that were within his sphere of immediate influence there in Asia minor. And he probably knew who each of the pastors of those churches were.

Jesus sure knew who they were and he had a word for them. How'd you like to get an email or a certified letter from Jesus? And it starts off. I know your works.

Now, how would we react? I think that was a nervous laugh, wasn't it? I know your works. I go busted. God, you know.

Yes, he does know. And the fact that he knows isn't there to destroy us. It's there to draw us to him, to turn from things that aren't pleasing him and to get right with him.

So it has a to and from. The to is to the church. The from is a self-description of Jesus.

Each one of them kind of, as you read through them, each description of Jesus kind of looks back to the vision that John had, a portion of the vision that John had in chapter one. Then he commends them for what they are doing good, except for the church at Sardis and the church of Laodicea. He also points out what they're doing bad, except for the church at Smyrna and the church at Philadelphia.

Then he makes a statement of exhortation or counsel, followed by a call to commitment. He who has an ear to hear and a promise to him who overcomes, I will give, I will make, he will be. So it's important to look at each of those.

And as we look at these letters, we're going to this morning look at the first four letters. I was going to try to do all seven of them, but I think that was ambitious. And I think we're going to look at the first four this morning.

How do we take these letters? Yes, we've already mentioned they were written to real historical churches that existed around 95 AD. And we're also to take them as a whole, because there are seven letters and seven in the scripture is a number of completion. The letters are applicable to the complete church.

In a sense, there are seven churches in existence today, just as there have been throughout history. And Jesus saw in these particular churches, a combination of the strengths and weaknesses that would be characteristic of all churches during the church age while he was absent from the earth. It would be characteristic of all churches.

So we would have to know that that would mean that even in Escondido, there are those seven churches, those the characteristics of these churches are right here. In fact, right within our own church, we could have those seven characteristics. Each letter applies to each individual church today.

Jesus says in each letter, he who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. And in this sense, each letter also applies to each of us as individuals, because the characteristics, both the good and the bad that are mentioned in these letters, we can have going on in our own lives at different times. How do we deal with that? How do we respond to that? And then fourthly, we can take these letters prophetically.

There's an interesting flow of the church through history, amazingly portrayed here. As the church has grown through the years, through the last 20 centuries, it's very parallel to the flow of issues from church to church as we read them here, starting with Ephesus in the apostolic age, going all the way through Laodicea in that final age of apostasy before the Lord comes back. It's interesting.

We're not going to take that view dogmatically because it's not really supported in detail in other sections of scripture. But God is a God of order. And even in the letters to the churches, there's kind of an orderly circular pattern starting with geographically Ephesus, and then Smyrna, and then Pergamos, and then Thyatira, and then Sardis, and then Philadelphia, and then Laodicea from where John was at.

It's like the Lord says, we're going to start here, and then there, there, there, there, and there. It would be just like the Lord to give a pattern, to give us history in advance, which is really what prophecy is. It's that

which has already happened.

God already knows what's going to happen, and he clues us in to what's going to happen. Thank you, Lord. That helps us to be more prepared and more ready.

And that's really why we study the word of God, not just the book of Revelation, but the entire counsel of scripture. That's to be ready because we know not the day or the hour when the Lord's going to come back. We don't know if today might be our last day here.

And I see a few of you going, oh, Maranatha. Come quickly, Lord. May today be that day.

Why is he waiting? There may be a few more that still need to be saved, but we don't know when that's going to take place. And so we need to be ready each and every day. Of course, none of us know when our own personal calling is going to be, amen? We don't know when it's going to be our time to go.

There have been millions of saints who have died before the rapture already. We don't know when our time is going to be up. So God, help us not to live brashly and ignorantly in these days.

As you have let us know you, may we live for you. Help us not to get distracted by the temptations of the pleasures of the world all around us. And so we have those different ways of looking at it.

For our study this week, I'd really like to focus on how these strengths or weaknesses show up in our own church and more specifically in our own lives. We'll look a little bit at the history, but I really want to focus on how how are we being dealt with? What is the Lord saying to us this morning? And what are we going to do about it? So we begin with Ephesus chapter two. Ephesus historically speaks of the zealous church of the first century AD.

Yet even in a church so close time-wise to the time of Jesus, a mere couple generations from the time of Jesus' physical presence on the earth, they were developing serious problems. They had some great ministry going in Ephesus, but had allowed their personal passion for Jesus to fade, to fade away. And the Lord warns them that they needed to repent.

And ignoring those problems would result in a removal of that church from the flow and purposes of God as a testimony for Jesus Christ. And Ephesus is in ruins today, didn't last much past the fifth century. So let's read from through verse seven.

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, these things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. Hey, isn't that, that's good to know that the Lord, the Lord's desire is to walk in the midst of the church. He said, lo, I will be with you always, even until the end of the ages.

He's here with us today. And I know your works. He says, I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil.

And you've tested those who say they are apostles and not, and have found them liars. And you have persevered and you have patience and you've labored for my name's sake, and you've not become weary. So you think, yeah, this church is pretty right on, isn't it? They're doing it.

They're doing the work. They're booming, man. They got ministries going and they're checking all the, all the charlatans, the wolves and sheep's clothing.

You know, they're, they're recognizing them. They're exposing them. They're holding on for the truth.

And then can you imagine the pastor reading this letter? He's going, yes, yes, yes, yes. And then verse four, nevertheless, oh, I have this against you. Gets his attention.

And here it is that you have left your first love. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, repent and do the first works or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent. But this you have that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

The Nicolaitans were, were thought to be a, a group that was infiltrating the churches, establishing themselves as the voice of God for the people. Kind of the beginning of the, the separation between clergy and laity, where there was elite group of so like priests that they would hear from God and then they would tell it all to the people. The people themselves couldn't hear.

And the Lord says, I hate that. I hate that because I've come to have relationship with each and every individual sheep that comes to know me, each and every person who comes to know the Lord God, who comes to Jesus by faith and his death and burial and resurrection. You have from that day forward through all eternity, intimate fellowship with the living God.

You don't need a human mediator. You don't need somebody else to go to God for you. You know him, you are already in him.

And oftentimes I know because of this separation, you often have people coming and say, well, you know, pastor, I, I really need you to pray because God hears your prayers. I hope he hears my prayers, but I don't have a red phone, you know, hotline to heaven that I, oh, okay, Pat, Pat knows the Lord. Yeah, I know the Lord, but so do you.

And you have just as much access to him as I do. There's no greater access for a pastor than there is for the person in the pew. We're just brothers and sisters in this.

God's blessed me with a gift, a gab and, and I love to shepherd and teach and, and God's allowed me to do that by his mercy. He's allowed me to do that, but that doesn't set me above you. Pastor Mark, pastor Richard, these other men that, that are, that are helping to, to nurture and care for you are not above you.

They are alongside you. They are there to lift you up. They are not here for you to serve them.

We're here to serve you. And the Lord said that when you get that mixed up, that totally misrepresents who he is and the relationship that he wants to have with us. So he who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches, to him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

God wants us to be eaten of him forever and ever and ever. And if you know him, if you know the truth, the truth will set you free forever and ever and ever, and you will be satisfied as you eat of him. So as we look at this letter as a whole, we see how important it is to stay close to and in love with our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we first met the Lord and gave our lives to him, a passion for Jesus burned in us. We wanted to follow and obey the Lord wherever he would lead, whatever the cost, every chance we get, we talk about him. And then we got busy, oftentimes busy with the work and with the service.

And we're warned here that if we're not careful, we can forget who it is we are laboring so hard for. We learned that labor is no substitute for love. You can be working real hard, but if you're not loving the Lord, if that, if the motivation to do that work is not your love and your passion for Jesus Christ, then it's not going to bear lasting fruit.

Ephesus depicts the careless church and warns us today not to let our love grow cold. You know, you'd look at them on the outside and you say, well, they do have attention to detail. What do you mean? They're careless.

They're doing it all and they're diligent at what they're doing. But the Lord says, I see their hearts and there's something not right with their heart. God always will expose our heart.

We're great actors. Amen. I mean, we are.

And we can put on a, I'm fine sort of front to people around us, but we can't do that to the Lord. He searches our hearts. And evidently there was something blocking that searching in these people.

They were more boasting perhaps in their works than they were in their relationship with Jesus. God help us to stay fixed on him. So what to do if we've left our first love? Maybe you found yourself in that place.

Yeah, I got saved back in the seventies or the eighties or the nineties, you know, and it was, I was just so on fire. And, and then we were singing, don't let my love grow cold. And I'm convicted because I'm not on fire anymore.

And I know sometimes people say, well, you've just matured. Be careful. Be careful.

There is something about true love that just blazes in one's heart. When you fall in love the first time, you can't hide that. Everybody knows something's wrong with you.

Isn't that the truth when we're truly in love? What was that Disney thing? We were Twitter painted, you know, just something in us. It's just, it's a passion. It's a burning.

It's, it's so real. You know, it's so alive in us. And when we first met Jesus, he, he filled us.

He forgave us. He changed us. We've for the first time in our lives, we had hope and real purpose and we were ready.

The Lord's coming back, you know, at any moment and Lord, I'm going to be going home with you. Can't wait. I want to tell everybody and I'm not, I'm not pointing fingers.

I'm, I'm, but I know in my own heart, in my own life, there've been those seasons where I've just gotten so into the work and so far away from, pardon me, from the intimacy of the relationship. You know, I can spend hours and hours on the technical things of pastoring and have days, months, even years sometimes go by without that fire. I've had that in my life.

Perhaps you've had that in yours as well, but the Lord wants to light the fire again and the Lord is able to light the fire again. Well, what do we have to do? Aren't you glad for the simplicity of the letter? He just, he tells us just point out. First of all, praise God.

There is something we can do. Amen. I'm so thankful that when, when we have, when we've grown cold, when we've slipped, when we've gotten so busy in the work that God doesn't leave us any option.

Oh, he does, but we've got to, here it is. We've got to remember, repent, return. We've got to remember from where we fall to correct any departure from God.

The first step is to go back to the place of departure. Remember the passion that once gripped your heart, the causes for it, the wonder of your newfound salvation and the joy and satisfaction that was yours in Christ. So often spiritual defection, whether of mind or heart comes from forgetting that which was once known.

Go back to your testimony. Remember, write it down again. Just go back to when the Lord started dealing with your heart.

I would dare say that some of us have forgotten what an amazing work that was that God had done. Let's not forget it. Let's go back to that.

Are we regressing? No, we're being obedient because the Lord doesn't want us to forget amazing grace. Amen. How sweet to sound that saved a wretch like me.

I don't want to forget how lost I was and how the Lord found me. Second thing we need to do is repent. They were to change their attitude and their actions in regard to Christ and his work.

When you discover where you went wrong, don't become bitter. Don't make excuses. Don't be resentful.

Don't grieve. Rather, make up your mind that you were wrong and that you'll do everything necessary to go back to that which is right. That's so important.

Repent. Have a change of heart and mind towards Jesus and who he is. And then return.

Do the first works. Start telling people about Jesus again. That's what you did when you first got saved.

Get back into the word of God. Be hungry for it. Lord, stir up a hunger in my heart for more of you.

Stir it up. Let me devour your word. Now, that might mean that you have to sacrifice some things.

Amen. Because a lot of times we've allowed our eyes and our minds to be filled with so many other interesting, there's a Jeff Jackson, interesting things, you know, but they're diversions. And if we don't learn to put down the book, turn off the TV, limit the frantic pace that we sometimes find ourselves in.

If your kids are in three sports, maybe they should be in one. It's okay to say, we don't have time for that, honey. Nowadays, kids go, oh, abuse.

You're not giving me everything I want. That's a whole nother sermon. I don't want to go there too much.

But I think sometimes even as parents, we just get so, so wrapped up, so frantic. And then we're so exhausted that we just sit there, return, return. You know, true repentance will never drive a Christian to despair, but it will lead him or her to cast themselves upon the grace and mercy of God.

And that in turn will bring them back to fellowship and to fruitfulness. Don't let my love grow cold, Lord. I'm calling out, light the fire again.

How many of you honestly need to have that fire lit again in you? You know what I'm talking about. I'm not talking to this church down the street. I'm talking to our church.

God, we need, you to light us up again, to refresh us. Some of you are so beautifully on fire. So much so that it's almost embarrassing being around you.

But that's an indication of how our love may have grown cold. Because we all should be so excited to be serving the Lord. We should all be so passionate to be serving the Lord.

Stir that up in us, Lord. The second church, Smyrna. Now, Smyrna fits the time of church history of the second to the fourth centuries, a time of great persecution by the Roman government.

Emperor after emperor came up with new and creative ways to kill Christians. It is thought that perhaps as many as six million Christians were martyred for their faith during the Roman government's attempt to wipe out Christianity. And it's interesting, the name Smyrna signifies myrrh.

Myrrh was one of the ingredients in the anointing oil of the high priests, as well as that used in the burial of dead bodies. Though its taste was bitter, it gave off a very fragrant smell. And even the way myrrh was made, it's an interesting picture of suffering.

There was a particular tree from which the sap of which the myrrh was made, and they'd slash the tree and the sap would pour out and it would sort of crystallize. And then they would smash the crystals and then they'd mix it with oil and it would bring this amazing sweet perfume that would come from it. And I think that's really depictive of persecution, of hard things.

It's bitter to us as we go through it. But to God, our sufferings that we go through in the name of Jesus, being persecuted for following after him, is a beautiful fragrance. And when you choose to endure sufferings for the sake of being a Christian, it is very, very precious to the Lord.

And I think that's a comforting word that we need to have. Smyrna is one of the two churches that there wasn't any rebuke given to. It was a church that was pure and straight and right on in the midst of such great suffering.

I've heard it said before that what the church needs for revival is persecution, because it's easy to slip into churchianity rather than a full-on, surrendered, sacrificial walk with the Lord. So let's read it. Verse 8, And to the angel of the church of Smyrna, in Smyrna, write this, These things says the first and the last, who was dead and came to life.

I know your works, your tribulation and poverty, but you are rich. And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.

Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested. You'll have tribulation ten days, but be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

And he who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. There are many in our church that are going through hard times, and those who aren't will someday. The encouragement to us is clear, be faithful because he is faithful.

There's no question in my mind that when you choose to follow Jesus Christ, that there are sacrifices that are made. Perhaps you are in a particular line of work, and in that particular line of work, you are used to being dishonest. You can't turn a profit unless you are a little dishonest.

And so you've developed this pattern, and then you get saved and you realize, I'm not being honest and truthful. But Lord, if I'm truthful, I'm going to lose a lot of business. What's more important, the gain you get from business or the gain you get from the Lord, that peace and that joy and that certainty that you're pleasing the Lord and you're going to be living with him forever? What's more important, forever or right now? Many people just live for right now, and they compromise.

The church at Smyrna wasn't compromising. When they committed their lives to Christ, like we mentioned last week, you may well put a target on them. It was a death sentence for many of them.

How many of you would say, I choose to follow Jesus, if you knew there was a firing squad out there waiting for you? If you knew that you'd lose your family and your job, or your job and your family. If you knew you'd lose your status in your community. And yet many who choose to follow the Lord, that exact thing happens, even in our culture.

And there's suffering as a result. There's hardship as a result. But what kind of attitude do we have? Oh, I knew I shouldn't have accepted Christ.

Is that the kind of attitude? No. Lord, I know who you are, and I know what you've done, and nothing that this world can offer can match that. I've got the best, and I'm going to reject the rest, and follow after you.

And though you may suffer, to the Lord, it is a sweet fragrance. And that's really what matters, isn't it? How the Lord sees it. In verse 8, we're reminded of the eternal nature of Jesus.

He existed before all else. He's the one who'll be there right up to the end and beyond. And that's comforting to those going through the hardest trials.

When we're under the worst times, we can tend to start thinking that maybe God has left us or doesn't care. Maybe God just isn't there anymore. But the fact that you're going through hard times doesn't mean that he doesn't care, or that somehow something got away from him.

He just sees things from a different perspective than you and I. So don't get discouraged by the hard times, beloved. God is at work in you. Philippians 1.6 says, being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

And in Ephesians 2.7, we read that in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. We only see what's right now, but he sees the whole picture. He sees the refining and the beauty that's going to come from that refining in our lives.

So take heart and press on. The Lord says, I know your difficult times. Everything may be going crazy around you, and you're tempted to think, I've got nothing, nothing stable.

Everything's hurting. I feel so alone. But what you're going through is not the whole picture.

The Smyrnians thought they were poor. But notice what the Lord says in this, you're rich. They thought they were poor, but the Lord saw a sweet richness in them.

And as we'll read in chapter 3, the Laodicean church thought they were rich, but the Lord saw their hearts. The Lord knew what was going on. He said, you're poor.

Most often a church has the wrong idea about itself. They think they're doing great when they're really doing poorly and vice versa. The only opinion of the church that really counts is the Lord's.

So Lord searched the church. And in the midst of trial and hardship and difficulty, trust in the Lord. Do not fear.

Be faithful. Matthew 10, 28 says, don't fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. That's the proper perspective we need to have.

John 16, 33, again, these things I've spoken to you that in me, you may have peace. Where is true peace? It's in relationship with him. I can't force peace to happen in this world.

I can try, but the only ultimate peace that's going to come in this world is when Jesus comes back. The United Nations is not going to bring peace. The armed forces are not going to bring peace.

God bless those that are sacrificing for our freedom. But the ultimate peace that we also crave for is only going to come when either A, each and every individual gets right with the Lord, or B, Jesus himself comes back and sets up his peace. Right now we live in the age of A, where each of us have that opportunity to choose to follow after him.

That's where the peace comes from. And therefore, in the midst of tribulation, we can be of good cheer. God can be working through us.

As Joyce and I have gone through this past year, there have been a lot of really low times. A lot of times of fear, of uncertainty, of despair. And then we'd run into somebody from the church who would say, we're so blessed on how strong you're doing.

You know, we'd kind of scratch our heads, where'd that come from? But as we were going through those things, as we'd hit that deep pit, the Lord would mercifully bring us up. We wouldn't stay there. And we'd realize that God's doing something.

And even though we don't understand it, the one solid thing we have is him. And we'd hold on to that. And I can tell you, night after night after night, we'd pray.

And we'd reaffirm that. And God would sustain. And we'd have strength for another day.

And to the Lord, that's sweet. That's precious. So dear Saint, whatever it is you might be suffering, whatever it is you might be going through, hold on.

Hold on to him. Fear not. Be faithful.

I think suffering brings out the true state of one's faith. When the pressure is on to give up, you hold on to the sweet comfort of Jesus, knowing that even if death takes you, you still win. And those are riches the world can never give.

At the end of the book of Revelation, chapter 20, verse 6, we read, blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection. Over these, the second death has no power. And at the end of verse 11, we

read, he who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

You know, everyone's going to go through one of two scenarios. Either you'll be born twice and die once, or you'll be born once and die twice. What? When you're born twice, you die once.

But if you're only born once, you're going to die two times. There'll be the death of your physical body, and then there will be that eternal separation, that second death at the great white throne judgment. Jesus said in John 3, 3, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Oh, give your life to Jesus today. Know the Lord today. And he will be your comfort.

And he will be your strength. The next church is Pergamos. And Pergamos comes from a word meaning mixed marriage.

And it has the idea of a church that had compromised or that was in compromise, that was married to the world, allowed the influences of the world to take over in the church. And it seems to parallel a period from around A.D. 300 to A.D. 600, excuse me, known as the imperial age, when the church came under the umbrella of protection from the Roman emperor Constantine in the first part of the 300s A.D. And pagan doctrines and practices began to creep into the church at that time. Constantine assumed headship of the church and repealed the persecution acts of the most recent, the last of the Roman emperors prior to him, Diocletian.

Constantine didn't command people to become Christians, but it became the popular thing to do, especially as he began to promote Christians to high state office. Eventually, he moved the center of Christianity from Rome to Constantinople, his new capital of the Roman empire. And later, when the church split into east and west, it was the Greek Orthodox church that stayed centered in Constantinople, modern Istanbul.

And the ones to the west moved to Rome, and that's where the papacy, the popery, you know, came from. So in a nutshell, what happened? I'm not being insulted, that's just what it's called theologically, popery. What happened at 300 A.D. and in the subsequent few centuries is that heathenism became Christianized.

Pagan temples became Christian churches. Pagan festivals became Christian holidays. Pagan priests slipped into office as Christian priests.

And most of these changes seem to be through name only, not true changes. And it's these changes that were brought to the church, the mixing of pagan rituals, changing them to Christianize them that is seen at this church of Pergamos. There's great pressure in this church to be open-minded, tolerant of sinful and immoral behavior.

In a word, Pergamos was a compromising church. Does that sound very familiar today? There's a lot of that going on in the church at large today, where the church is looking more like the world than the true church. And we're constantly bombarded by the world to be tolerant and accepting of that which God says is wicked.

Quickly, let's look at this church. And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, these things says he who has the sharp two-edged sword, I know your works, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to my name and did not deny my faith even in the days in which Antipas, my faithful

martyr who was killed among you where Satan dwells.

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. You can look at that story later on in Numbers chapter 23. Thus you also have those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

We spoke of that already. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. So he who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna to eat, and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it. So this council of Balaam, what was that? It was a mixing of pagan practices with true worship. Israeli men began to break God's commandment by sexual immorality and getting involved with the Moabite gods.

The Moabites wanted to conquer Israel, but Israel was too big and too strong. So they hired this prophet Balaam to come and curse them. And Balak, the king of the Moabites, takes Balaam up to the mount, says, curse these people.

Balaam says, okay, here's what you do. Bring the bulls, set up the altar, sacrifice the bulls, and he gets up there to speak, and instead he blesses the children of Israel. He says, excuse me, I'm sorry, I told you I could only speak what God puts in my mouth.

So the king says, well, let's go to another mountain, maybe a different angle, we'll change it. He did that three or four times. But finally, Balaam says to him, look, I can't curse these people, but here's how you can get to them.

Send the pretty girls into the camp. The guys will fall, the guys will fall from them, the little girls will bring their little Moabite idols, and it won't be too long before they begin worshiping your gods and you'll have them. And you know, when you read that story in Numbers 23, that's what happened.

God intervened. 23,000 Israelites lost their life because of it. The judgment of God was very serious.

But it's a warning to the church. Don't mix it. Be careful of mixing what's popular in the world today, what's accepted in the world today, and try to bring it into the church.

Try to Christianize it. Be careful of that. Because it happens.

In the early church, there were those who felt that since they weren't under the law of Moses, then they could live any way they pleased. You remember in the Corinthian church, they were rather proud of the fact that they were so tolerant with a man who was sleeping with his stepmother. The doctrine of Balaam is effectually any teaching that causes a Christian to compromise in God's standard for them.

It's teaching people that things that God forbids is okay. We've got to be on the guard to that. We see plenty of examples of this in the church at large today.

Gay rights, abortion rights, animal rights, all seem to be more important than what God says is right. And that's what the church as an institution battles. But what about the inside battles that confront us, that confront each of us daily? Satan wants to cloud and confuse your ability to choose the right way every day.

And we're told in 1 Thessalonians, test all things, hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil. So how do we hold fast to what is right? Feast on the bread of life, the word of God. He says to him who overcomes, I will give some of that hidden manna to eat.

In John 6, 32, Jesus said, 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. And they said to him, Lord, give us this bread always.

And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. And he who comes to me shall never hunger. And he who believes in me shall never thirst.

Jesus is the satisfying portion of his people and for his people. In the midst of this world's corruption, the child of God draws from that eternal source of sustenance and supply, which is hidden in the secret of God's presence. Know him and it's no longer hidden.

So in Pergamos, we have a vitally important lesson for the church today. Jesus calls upon his own to accept his principle of separation, thereby refusing to compromise with either moral evil or religious error. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.

Have you compromised? Has there been compromising in your heart, either to moral evil or to religious error? God calls you to repent, to turn from that and to turn to him. And when you do, he'll feed you the truth. He'll lead you in the right way.

But if you don't, he's coming with his sword. Are you in an immoral relationship today? Are you living in a relationship that you are justifying by convenience and you're going like this to the command of God to abstain from fornication, to flee it, to stay away from it, to give no appearance of evil. I just got to tell you honestly, if you keep coming to this church and you keep doing that, God's going to judge you.

God is going to deal with you. And out of a heart that is broken, I would plead for you and to you to turn from those things that God says are evil and walk his way. To him who follows, you're an overcomer and God will bless you and sustain you and hold you up.

Might there be a lot of rough things you have to go through in order to do what is right? So be it. That'll be a sweet savor to the Lord as well. And the testimony of your life will be established.

So we've got a couple of rebukes in these. We're not going to get the letter four. Okay.

We've got a couple of rebukes, a couple of strong rebukes and warnings in the first and third letter and sandwiched in between. We have a word of comfort that if you choose to follow the Lord and there's flack that comes because you made the right choice, that's a sweet savor to the Lord and God is honored and your life will be established as you make those right decisions. Today, God calls us to get right with him.

Return to your first love. Turn away from any mixed marriage sort of thing where you've allowed through either your own mind or the rationalization of modern society to justify ungodly behavior. Confess your sin and get right with him today and live as God has called you to live.

That's the charge from these first three books. Are you going to come back next week for the next ones? I pray so because we need this as a church. We need these things today.

May God just pour out his spirit upon us and stir us up and present us before his throne. A sweet sacrifice to him, a living sacrifice to him. God wants to do that in our lives.

Amen. Let's stand together. Okay.

I really do believe that today can be a day of brand new beginning for many of you, that you may have come here just out of religious duty. It's Sunday you came, but as we were talking about first love and the passion of God in your heart, you realize, you know, bottom line, the love's grown cold. And the Lord says, return.

Remember, repent, and return. And you go on. Thank you, Lord, for that.

I do want to remember. I do want to repent. I do want to turn and return to those things at the beginning.

Pastors will be up here after the service, and we'd love to pray for you. And it doesn't have to be, you know, a huge, long, loud prayer. It's simple.

That simple cry of your heart, Lord, I want to be right with you. And God will do that. Lord, I want to know that I'm going to be with you forever.

I want to be born again so that when I die, it's to live forevermore with you. And if you've allowed separation, if you've allowed compromise to come into your life, and that can happen in many ways, it can be sexual, it can be drugs, it can be any number of things. Maybe you're sneaking off to the casinos.

Never had to say that too much 10 years ago, but, you know, thinking, no, I'll just, if I hit this, I'll give half of it to the church. Repent and stay away from it. You are separate.

God has separated you from the world. Guard your heart. If you find yourself being entertained by things that are evil, get rid of it and get right.

Amen. Father, we praise you. And we thank you for this time this morning.

God, we know that there's a lot of work going on in each of our hearts and lives. And your word, we've asked you to search us, to know us, to try our ways, to see if there be any wicked way in us at all. And as you expose it, let us not make excuses.

Let us not run from it. Let us just come before your throne of grace and receive your mercy and renew our hearts and lives today to follow hard after you, Jesus. Light the fire again, Lord, we pray in your precious name, Jesus.

Amen. Amen. If you need to pray, if you need to confess, come on up, we'll pray with you after the service.

God bless you. You're dismissed.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/5/SID5367.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/pat-kenney/he-who-has-an-ear-let-him-hear/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net