**A Call to Repent**

Revelation 2

So there’s a social media tool now called **Be Real**. It pings you once every day, at random times, and you take a picture away from yourself to show what you’re doing and a selfie of yourself to show it’s really you. You have to do it within just a few seconds to prove that you’re being real, not creating some manicured, manufactured version of yourself.

Obviously, the claim of Be Real is that ***other social media tools are NOT quite as real*** and genuine and do invite people to create a public image that is so polished and dressed up that it isn’t even close to the actual person. And the cumulative effect of so much social media is a stressed-out population constantly trying to live up to impossible standards for our appearance, fitness and wealth. And the only way to do that is to Be Fake.

So, let’s create a ***new social media platform called Be Fake*** and the only rule will be nonsense and silliness. Pretty much just pictures of our dogs and cats, presented as ourselves. Here is our dog being completely real.



He is exactly that much of a diva. We actually got him a sweater for the cold winter and he loves it. 

Or there’s this one of our two dogs being completely not real; acting like they get along when they do not at all get along.

But wait, we don’t need a new social media platform in order to be fake. That’s what they’re all for! So, carry on then.

***But the call of this passage is to Be Real.*** To repent of being fake and inauthentic. To identify the ways we tend to present a false front to the world when inside we are really something else.

What we will experience in the letter to Pergamum is ***the word of Jesus as a sharp, two-edged sword***. It cuts through our pretenses and facades and exposes what is really there. The blazing eyes of King Jesus see the full reality. So let’s be real before Him and let Him use that sword to cut out what is fake, what is selfish, what is sinful inside us. Let’s cooperate with the Great Surgeon so we look more and more like Him and less and less like our selfish, sinful old selves.

The letter has **a threefold progression**: first it affirms the correct beliefs of the church, but then Jesus confronts the incorrect behavior of the church, finally shifting to a call to repent and align our behavior with our beliefs.

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* Confirm Correct **Beliefs**

“And to the angel of the church of Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.’” Revelation 2:12

Each of the seven letters begins with an introduction of the Lord Jesus, further clarifying our right beliefs. **Doctrine is essential**. If we construct a false idea of God, if we construct a God in our own image it is not the actual God and such an idol can do nothing for us. This is what Israel was constantly falling into - the worship of false gods, idols, the gods of other nations.

This book is filled with the words of God and specifically the words of Jesus. The whole Bible is called the Sword of the Spirit. It is living and active…

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* Confirm Correct **Beliefs** through **Scripture**

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12

***Scripture exposes what is really in our hearts.*** It cuts through our excuses and reveals our inner condition. How sharp of a blade do you need to separate soul from spirit? That’s quite a fine razor. How piercing do you have to be to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart? But that is what God’s Word does. It is what Jesus does. His blazing eyes see right through us.

And as we read God’s Word we feel it happening. ***Our eyes are opened to the truth*** about who God is and who we are. It’s like turning on a light.

On your own, you might think, or you may have been taught, ***that God is like Santa Claus***. He has a list and claims to check it but really he will look the other way and brings gifts to everyone regardless of how naughty they are.

***As soon as you start reading the Bible this myth is blown clean away.*** In the third chapter of the Bible, in Genesis 3, when God confronts the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden, he does not ignore it; he does not condone it; he does not gloss over it. He confronts them. He kicks them out of the garden. He pronounces the fact that now they will die and evil and corruption have entered the world because of them. Curses have been introduced. And yet God still gives hope for redemption through the offspring of the woman.

That’s on page 3 of the Bible. All the other pages also show ***God dealing with the sin*** of people, not looking the other way. When people think that everyone will go to heaven and that there is no hell, no final judgment, they just have not cracked the cover of the Bible.

This is true for how we understand God’s dealing with all people, and it’s also true for ***how you think God will deal with YOU personally***. As you read the Bible you find yourself grappling directly with the God of heaven. You see yourself in every character, the good ones and the bad ones. You relate to Abraham and Sarah’s lack of faith, taking matters into their own hands. You relate to Moses’ reluctance to speak in front of a crowd or to speak truth to power. You relate to David’s great victories and also his great failures. You relate to the prophets’ boldness to speak out for God and their despair when no one listens. You relate to the disciples as they tremble in fear and as they squabble amongst one another. You want to be like Peter stepping out of the boat onto the water, but secretly know you’re more like Thomas demanding concrete evidence in order to believe.

This is what Scripture does. It brings us face to face with the God who speaks and the God who sees. We feel the eyes of the Lord Jesus that blaze with perfect perception and absolute holiness. He who holds the sharp two edged sword said to Pergamum:

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* Confirm Correct **Beliefs** through **Scripture**

“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name…” Revelation 2:13

Clearly there were some **major issues in the region of Pergamum**. In a sense, the whole earth is where Satan’s throne is. But there are spiritual strongholds where demons have an especially controlling presence. Pergamum was one of those. It was the center for the worship of Greek gods for the whole broader region. There were temples to Zeus, Apollo, Athena, Dionysius and others. And it had this temple:



This picture is a reconstruction in Berlin. But the temple was built in the second century BC and it’s official name was Satan’s Throne. So Jesus addresses what was literally the case and also figuratively the case. The worship of idols and satan himself were rampant in Pergamum. But the believers there stood firm.

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* Confirm Correct **Beliefs** through **Scripture**

“Yet you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness.” Revelation 2:13

Antipas was the bishop of Pergamum. Tradition claims that John the apostle himself appointed Antipas as bishop there, during the time of Nero. ***Antipas was executed in a bronze bull*** that was heated to the point that he died. So he was another early martyr in the church. And the believer in Pergamum stood firm even when their bishop was killed before them.

***So, when bad things happen***; especially when bad things happen to good people, how do we hold fast to Jesus’ name and not deny the faith? **How do we confirm the truth about God’s character and goodness** when what we are experiencing is bad and terrible? When loved ones die. When justice fails. When our bodies break down. When, like Antipas, we are falsely accused of things and persecuted for our beliefs and convictions?

**The answer is Scripture.** God’s Word cuts through our false understanding and biases. It slices away our incorrect beliefs. We talked about the common belief today that everyone goes to heaven and God won’t judge anyone or send anyone to hell. What about the problem of evil itself? Based on all the evil and suffering in the world either there is no god or whatever deity there is is either not all-powerful or not all-good.

If you ever struggle with these questions or run into someone who is, ***direct them to the book of Job***. However righteous you think you are, Job was more so. However much suffering you have been through, Job had it worse. And for a while he struggled well with his pain. But eventually he crossed the line and began to question God, demanding his day in court. Then, suddenly, he got it.

In a hurricane, God swooped in to confront the man. He said, “***Brace yourself like a man.*** You have questions for me? Well, I have a few questions for you.”

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?” Job 38:4-5

Two chapters go on with question after question. Finally Job stands there stunned before God and says, “I had no idea what I was saying. I’m a complete moron.”

Another place to look with questions like these is Romans 1 or the book of Revelation, where God deals with the sins of mankind. ***People can try to question the goodness of God, but what the Bible does on page after page is expose the wickedness of man.***

And, what? We expect God to just sit back and do nothing in the face of our arrogance, defiance and evil? Not according to MY BIBLE.

That’s the first things the Words of Jesus do: they expose and divide, confirming correct beliefs and highlighting errors and false teachings. In the light of God’s glorious Word, cults like Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses are revealed for what they are; the confusions of the Catholic church regarding Mary and the saints and salvation by works are exposed as out of bounds. Second:

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* Correct Questionable **Behavior** through Repentance

“But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam.” Revelation 2:14

Now we shift from the affirmation part of the letter to the CONFRONTATION part. This letter has some bonus content in this section.

So, ***who was Balaam?*** This is one of those wild stories in the Old Testament that you read over and shake your head wondering what God was up to. Numbers 22 and on for 3 chapters. Balaam was not a Jew. Yet the God of Israel met with him and spoke through him. The king of Moab was afraid of the Jews and knew that Balaam was a powerful prophet and sorcerer who was able to bless and curse people. But Balaam didn’t just take the divination fee and run off to curse Israel. He followed the Biblical practice of the priests and kings of Israel and inquired of the Lord.

And, ***shockingly, God showed up.*** Of course, God refused to curse Israel so Balaam was not able to curse them, but instead three separate times spoke blessing over Israel, much to the annoyance of the king of Moab who was like, “Hey, if you can’t curse these guys at least do NOTHING. Don’t do the opposite of the thing I’m trying to pay you for!”

And Balaam was the one who was **riding his donkey** when an angel with a huge sword stood in the path and the sensible donkey screeched to a halt. Balaam was in a hurry and swatted the donkey, yelling at her to get up and go. But the donkey wouldn’t move. And finally, God enabled the donkey to SPEAK and question Balaam herself. You have to read this stuff for yourself to believe that it’s in the Bible. ***Talking donkey just like in Shrek.*** Not quite Eddie Murphy, but that voice would probably work in the Biblical account.

“Ain’t I your donkey, fool? Haven’t I carted you around day after day your whole life? What are you smacking me for? I should be the one smackin’ you, come around here I’ll show you what some smackin’ looks like…”

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* Correct Questionable **Behavior** through Repentance

“Who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before Israel so that they might… practice sexual immorality.” Revelation 2:14

Right after the Balaam account the Jews started worshiping Baal of peor, a local fertility deity. Jewish tradition connected that immorality with Balaam, even though nothing in the text states that. The Jewish Talmud, their traditions, have a lot to say about Balaam and it’s not good. And this passage confirms their tradition, that Balaam said something like this to Balak, the king of Moab: ***“You can’t get God to be unfaithful to his people, but here’s an idea – you can get Israel to be unfaithful to God.”***

The stumbling block was put in place – the temptation offered – and Israel took the bait, hook, line and sinker. They were like pig roast, idolatry and… late night partying behavior… Let’s go. It got so bad that God killed 24,000 Israelites with a plague that was only stopped when the son of the high priest impaled a young couple misbehaving in their tent.

In Pergamum similar things were going on, which isn’t surprising given the Greek influences there. Non-kosher food. Idols. Immorality. It was a common package deal back then. And that’s not all.

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* Correct Questionable **Behavior** through Repentance

“So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.” Revelation 2:15

Ephesus was also exposed to the Nicolaitans but resisted. Pergamum did not fully resist this false teaching that was also accompanied by sexual immorality.

God’s Word not only confronts our false beliefs, it confronts our wrong behaviors and calls us to repent.

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* Correct Questionable **Behavior** through Repentance

“Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.” Revelation 2:16

This is intense. In other letters Jesus is gentle and sensitive. Here He is powerful and threatening. It’s like Jesus’ ministry. With the weak and sick and poor Jesus was so compassionate and gentle. But with the hypocrites and the powerful and the arrogant and abusive he was ferocious – using a whip, flipping over tables, shouting prophetic “woes” upon people.

We are in danger in our culture of **remaking Jesus into our own image**, into a plush toy like Baby Yoda. Oh, Baby Jesus… so warm and cuddly. He won’t confront or condemn anyone… Coochie Coochie…

That is not the Jesus of the Bible. ***THIS Jesus is bold, powerful, authoritative.*** You don’t mess with this Jesus. The wind and the waves and the storms obey His command. Demons shudder and flee. This Jesus walks calmly on top of the water. He passes through an angry mob untouched. He silences a circle of judges about to throw stones at an adulterous woman, and they quietly walk away. He faces armed soldiers coming to arrest him and his followers and stands firm between them and his people, saying “I AM,” to identify himself and the whole brigade falls to the ground in response to those two words.

***Jesus is no pushover.*** He is no longer a lamb to be slain. He is the Lion of Judah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the victorious warrior, the judge of the living and the dead, the alpha and the omega whose eyes blaze with fire whose feet shine with power, whose voice is a sword that slices in two. That’s MY KING. I wonder, do you know him?

Trust me. You do not want to have a contest with Jesus and his sword. His sword is his WORD. His speech. And I’ll tell you exactly how it will go.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.” Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus will call up **scenes from YOUR LIFE**, where you judge another person either out loud or in your mind. You will know exactly what he’s talking about. And with the judgment you have used, Jesus will hold you accountable.

***Do you want to answer to that justice?*** Do you want to answer for all the times you wacked someone with the plank in your eye while trying to yell at them for the speck in their eye?

It is really hard to do eye surgery on someone while wearing a 2x4. Just very difficult. The final judgment is described in Revelation 20 as a great white throne. And the One on that throne is none other than Jesus.

“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened… And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.” Revelation 20:12

Jesus doesn’t need those books. Those books are a symbol of His perfect awareness and meticulous record-keeping ability. The trouble with being omniscient is you can’t miss a detail nor can you forget one.

Do you want the books marked with your name to be opened before that throne? How big is your set of books? Is it like an Encyclopedia set or like a whole library? Like the Smithsonian?

I tell you, I don’t want my books opened.

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* Correct Questionable **Behavior** through Repentance

“Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.” Revelation 2:16

When we read through the whole book of Revelation I was powerfully struck by two things. First, the severity of God’s judgment on this world. Judgment after judgment, one after another, seals, trumpets, bowls. Increasing intensity and devastation. Second, I was impacted by the repeated line: “Still, they did not repent.” Even with the whole world falling apart around them, people will not repent. They will curse God to His face.

***NOW is the time of God’s favor. NOW is the day of salvation.*** Jesus came to preach good news to the poor and announce the year of the Lord’s favor. When he comes back it will be to accomplish the day of vengeance of our God. That Day will be a day of blood, fire and billows of smoke of gloom and darkness and fear.

But now God commands all people everywhere to repent. Just as in the days of Noah, the door of the Ark stood open, and God’s servant called out to people to join him and his family on the Ark. But one day God closed that door and sealed him in and no one could enter after that point, while the rain fell and the floods rose.

That’s what it will be like in the end times. People will miss the boat.

Now is the time to get on board.

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* A Call to **Integrity** and Endurance

“He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 2:17

When a bone is dislocated or out of place, doctors have to set the bone. They have to get it back where it belongs, straighten it back out.

When our behavior does not line up with the righteousness of God, He has to reset us. He has to bring us back into alignment. ***Don’t try to straighten him out or bring God into alignment with you.*** Again, Job tried that and it just doesn’t end well.

Do you have ears to hear the call of Jesus?

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* A Call to **Integrity** and Endurance

“To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone…” Revelation 2:17

How do we prevail? We correct our false beliefs by studying and believing and obeying God’s Word. We invite God to confront our bad behavior and call us to repentance and alignment with His holiness, goodness and love. And we cry out to God to help us persevere and hold on to hope in His great and precious promises.

**Manna**. The provision of God for His people during those 40 years in the desert. Magical bread that appeared every morning and then melted away in the sun. And somehow the bread wasn’t sandy, and the sand wasn’t sticky. Miracles.

What will we eat in the new heaven and the new earth? Fruit, for sure from the twelve-fold tree of life. Vegetables, I suppose, are implied by the garden imagery. Not meat from animals, since there won’t be any death. But probably tofu will be improved to the point that it can actually taste like steak. And, of course, bread. Regular tasty bread. And the special, hidden manna.

Probably this is a reference to the ***jar of manna that was kept inside the ark of the covenant***. No one was allowed to touch the ark much less try to eat that special, hidden manna. The ark of the covenant was usually kept in the most holy place of the temple, and nobody was allowed in there.

So really this is a **promise of ACCESS**. Those who conquer the trials and tribulations of life through faith in Jesus will gain ACCESS to the most holy place – the very throne room of God Himself. And there, you will enjoy blessings from the Lord reserved for YOU and you alone.

**The Words of Jesus Expose and Divide:**

* A Call to **Integrity** and Endurance

“A white stone with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.” Revelation 2:17

Got Questions has a good article on the white stone here. Lots of possible meanings. The best one is probably related to the Greek olympics. Winners were given a white stone with their name inscribed on it. And that stone served as a ticket to a special celebration that was ONLY for the winners.

***Jesus has a banquet like that planned.*** For the winners. The victors. The ones who conquer. He has a white stone with your name on it, if you belong to Him. He has some special manna he is preparing just the way you like it. Extra honey for me, Lord. You know. No diabetes in heaven. Thank you Jesus!

As we close let’s turn again to Revelation 20 and the great white throne of judgment.

“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done…Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:12-15

There is one set of books detailing your life: everything you ever did or said or thought. It’s all in there. But there’s another book: **the Lamb’s book of life**. If your name is in THAT book, the other set of books with your name on it is already in the lake of fire. It was nailed to the cross with the Lord Jesus and every line in every book was consumed in the just wrath of God Jesus suffered for you on the cross.

Now, if your name is NOT in the Lamb’s book, then he will say to you on that day of judgment, “I never knew you.” And you’ll have to endure the judgment from the other books. You’ll answer for it all and you will have to pay for your sins for all of eternity in the same place of judgment prepared for the devil and his demonic hordes.

So. ***Is your name in Jesus’ book?*** Have you asked Jesus to forgive your sins and take over your life? You can’t have Jesus as Savior without committing to Him as Lord. The two things are inseparably bound together.

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Romans 10:9-10

You have to say out loud that Jesus is THE LORD, and that you want Him to become YOUR LORD. ***It’s a public vow. Just like a wedding.***

A lot of people know about Jesus. They even flirt with Jesus by coming to church, throwing some money in the plate. Saying a few prayers. But they’ve never made their VOW. They haven’t pledged their LIFE to Jesus as Lord.

You have to say, “JESUS IS LORD.” And you have to believe that he died for you and rose again. Trust Him as Savior. Commit to Him as Lord. THEN you will be saved. THEN your name will be written in His book. Only then.

Let’s pray.

Call for response.