

I have always been moved and inspired by the stories of Christian Martyrs. Those people who are willing to give everything even their lives for Jesus. From stories like students at Columbine to Jim Elliot. I had a book called Jesus Freaks growing up that told stories from all the world and history of these Christians who made the ultimate sacrifice for their faith. This is a part of what fuels my love for the early church fathers as well. Because so many of them died for Jesus.

And the stories of the martyrs are meant to inspire us. They're also meant to make us want to be like them. We talked about Polycarp just last week. It was a murder and gave his life for Jesus. His story shouldn't just encourage us. It should make us want to emulate his life. And one of the things that we are going to see this week as we continue reading the book of revelation is the Jesus has some words for how we can be there.

This isn't a step-by-step sermon on how to be a martyr. But the instructions Jesus give us here are telling us how we can live the life of someone who could give their life to Jesus in that way. Because martyrs don't just appear out of nowhere. They are formed through a life of following Jesus that ends up at the end when it counts most they stay faithful. So how can we live that kind of life? That's what we're gonna say is we continue studying the book of revelation.

Turn with me to Revelation 2:12-17

### **I. Don't deny Christ's name (v. 12-13)**

This seems fairly self evident, but it needs to be stated.

If you wanna have faith like a martyr, if you want to live in the way that they did then you cannot deny the name of Jesus.

When someone ask you are you a Christian are you a follower of Jesus your answer should always be yes.

This is at the heart of what Jesus encourages the church.

He tells them they are doing this part well.

Verse 12, **"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.'"**

This is the vision of Jesus they are reminded of.

He is the one who carries a sharp two-edged sword.

Now, why does it mention Jesus's sword?

Because this sword is not just any sword.

This is describing a 3 foot sword that Roman soldiers would carry.

It is the same sword that Roman emperors would carry around as a symbol of their might and their power.

It is particularly a symbol of their ability to execute judgment and to execute you if they wanted to.

The church is being threatened by the sword of Rome.

They see the Roman soldiers in the streets, carrying the swords.

And they know that those swords are hanging over the heads of Christians.

Christians are being dragged before the authorities.

They are being asked to deny Christ and worship Caesar as Lord.

And yet they are holding fast to the name of Jesus.

They are not denying the faith.

So, this reference to the sword of Christ, is a reminder of who really has authority.

It is a reminder that Christ is the judge.

The Romans do not have authority.

They do not have the true sword, Jesus does.

They do not need to fear those who can kill the body, but they need to fear the one who can kill the soul.

Verse 13, **"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."**

Antipas was a faithful witness who was killed for refusing to denounce the name of Jesus.

The Greek word for witness, *martus*, here would be familiar to you because this is where we get the word martyr from.

Ultimately a martyr is someone who is a faithful witness even to death.

This is not theoretical to them.  
People in their own church have died for Christ.  
And they will not deny the faith either.

And the context they live in is difficult.  
It's not just because they're in the Roman empire, but it seems as if this city is an especially evil place.  
Pergamum is twice described as the place where Satan dwells and where his throne is.

There's a couple different reasons it would be called that.  
This city has many temples.  
They were actually the first city in Rome to have a temple to worship the emperor.  
A temple there was built to honor to worship Ceasar Augustus.  
But they have other temples of well, a temple to Zeus, a temple to Athena and the temple to the gods of healing and those are just the temples that we know about and that we know survived.  
There probably would've been many others.  
So the pressure to worship the emperor and false gods would've been higher here than other places.  
Some try to say this is really just saying Satan's throne is here because there's so much evil and so much idolatry and false worship here.

That is certainly true.  
I think it's also just literally true.  
I think that at the moment this is where Satan's headquarters is.  
Satan is a real spiritual being who exists.  
He is at work in the world, trying to kill, steal, and destroy human beings made in the image of God, and especially those who worship the Lamb of God.  
He is not omnipresent or divine.  
He can't be everywhere. so  
There's one place in the world where he is right now at this moment.

I don't think it's out of the question to believe that there would be times where he would set up and stay in one place for some time. At this moment, in time it appears, and I believe that he has set up his throne and headquarters in the city.

But the main point is that this city is especially difficult and evil. The reality is there some places where it is harder to worship and be faithful to Jesus than others. It is pretty easy to be faithful and to worship Jesus and the United States of America in 2025. It is much more evil, and it is much harder to worship Jesus and Russia or in North Korea or in Iran, or in Syria or in India or any number of other places where there is real persecution in the threat of death for those who worship Jesus. Where people are daily pressured to deny Christ. That doesn't diminish that it can be very hard to worship Jesus here too, but we do have to acknowledge that there are some places where it's even harder. Pergamum is one of those hard places.

But even here in what must be the hardest place in the world there are ordinary Christians, whose names we do not know, who are being faithful and are refusing to deny the name of Jesus. This should inspire us because these aren't super Christians. These aren't the apostles. These aren't people who are had extra doses of the Holy Spirit were baptized seven times. These are ordinary Christians, who gave their life to Jesus. They are refusing to give up.

And if they can be faithful in that place, and surely we can be faithful. That we too, cannot deny the name of Jesus.

## II. Don't deny Christ's name in how you live (v. 14-16).

Usually, when we think about denying the name of Jesus, we think about the ultimate scenarios.

We think about the martyrs having to stand before a Roman governor with a sword over their head saying are you a Christian?

We wonder what we would do in that moment.

Would we have the strength to not deny Jesus in the ultimate moment?

But the problem is so many of us deny Jesus's name in how we live.

We might not deny Christ in the extraordinary moments, but we do in the ordinary daily moments.

This happens when someone claims to be a Christian, but then they don't live like it.

They go to church Sunday, then never think about God the rest of the week.

The way they act at work is unchristian.

They talk in ways that are unChristian.

They carry themselves, give money, and overall live just like people who are not Christians.

And if we want to be faithful to Jesus, and if we wanna have faith like we don't just need to have faith one day, we need to have faith every day all the time in every way.

We need to be follow Jesus and not deny Him in how we live.

In the small things.

Because the small ordinary moments are what make up our lives.

And this is what Jesus confronts the church on

They are doing a big good job in the big picture

They haven't denied that they are Christians and yet they are stumbling.

Verse 14, **"But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed**

**to idols and practice sexual immorality. 15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans."**

This one can be strange because it references Old Testament figures.

Balaam was a false prophet.

Balak was an enemy of Israel and hired him to come curse Israel.

But Balaam's donkey spoke to rebuke him, and God actually used Balaam to bless Israel.

But then Balaam misled Israel.

The important thing is at the end of verse 14

Because that's what Balaam taught Israel to do and that's what's happening in the midst of the church there is sexual immorality and idolatry.

He led them astray by making them think they could obey God in the big things but ignore Him in the small things.

That they could worship YWH and follow the law, but they could also worship Baal too.

And they can follow most of God's word about sexuality, but maybe it isn't a huge deal if they break them a little bit.

We find out later in verse 15 that they're also holding the teachings of other false teachers who want them to do this

Some of the false teachings that were being resisted in Ephesus, they have embraced.

They hold these teachings.

They believe these things are fine.

And this is a problem.

Because they might not be denying Jesus before the emperor, but they are denying Jesus in their bedrooms.

They are denying Jesus in their sexuality.

They are denying Jesus in their worship and in their lives.

They seem to think that they can do that.

They seem to think that they can claim the name of Jesus and then do whatever they want sexually.

They seem to think that they can claim the name of Jesus and then they can do whatever they want with idols.

And we might have a question about how come there it's wrong for them to be eating meat sacrificed idol when Paul said it was OK?

That's a great question and that's the same question that I have had.

I think part of what is happening is that these are totally different context and totally different circumstances.

Because there is meat that sacrificed idols that you might buy at the marketplace because it would be cheaper and on clearance.

So if you are a Jew, you went to someone's house Paul was saying you don't need to ask and make sure that they didn't buy that kind of meat just eat and don't worry about it.

But if they tell you it is, then don't eat it.

There's another kind of meat that sacrifice to idols and that's the meat that they are eating in the temple as they are committing, usually sexual immorality.

So I think part of which is talking about is he not talking about meat that you got on sale in the clearance section but he's talking about eating meat in the temple while committing these sinful acts.

So the church seems to think that it's OK as long as they don't deny Jesus in the big things, but they can kind of fudge on the small things.

I think that well it's actually fine if we sacrificed or if we sin sexually.

There would've been a lot of pressure for them to participate in these ceremonies.

They would've needed to come into these feast and to celebrate into worship these guys and eat their food in order to advance society.

And so it seems like they are teachers and people in the church who are telling them to compromise.

They are saying that we won't compromise and we won't deny Jesus when they ask for Christians but if they ask us to worship other gods, then it's OK if we need to for a few minutes

That's not OK they're denying Jesus's name.

But there's a judgment that will come for us in 16

Verse 16, **"Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth."**

Jesus says He's gonna come to war with a sword that he has.

The sword mentioned earlier is meant to be a comfort, but if they don't repent, it will be a judgment

And the judgment won't be falling against the Romans it'll be falling against them

Jesus is calling them to repent.

It does not count for much if you don't deny Christ in the big things if you are constantly denying him in how you live every day.

We need to obey in everything to not deny Christ.

Then we need to honor Jesus with every part of our lives.

And if there is a part of our life that we are honoring Jesus with whether it's big or whether it's small, we need to repent

Some of us, I think you can kinda have attitude like this.

We can think that we're doing really good.

We're obeying Jesus, we're reading our Bible, we're in the church

We are not committing any of those big sins like other people.

We are like Peter telling Jesus we would die before denouncing Him.

And Jesus looks to Peter and says you're gonna do it three times tonight .

That is like us who would want to say we would be willing to die for Christ.



We would be a martyr and a witness.

I would never deny Jesus and yet if I followed you around all week, how many times would you deny Jesus and you talked?

How many times would you deny Jesus and the way you speak about your enemies?

How many times would you deny Jesus in the lack patience of gentleness and love that you have for others?

How many times would you deny Jesus when you have an opportunity to share the gospel and you decide not to?

How many times would you deny Jesus and how you act when no one is looking in the dark?

How many times would you deny Jesus you see the weak and you turn your head and ignore them?

I remember in high school sitting in Spanish class a guy turned to me and made a really inappropriate comment about another girl in our class.

And he said "don't you agree?"

And I was nervous and didn't know what to say, so I just kind of mumbled and nodded my head.

That might not have been making a sacrifice to Caesar or idols.

But that was denying Christ.

Even though it was small.

I think we need to not be too quick to point fingers at other people and see how they are the ones who deny Jesus.

We need to look at ourselves.

That is not to diminish the very real reality that there are many who deny Jesus

There are plenty of people who claim to be Christians and then use the scriptures to justify every kind of sin and deny the foundations of our faith.

I don't want to downplay that there are those who deny Christ in large ways and it is serious.

But I don't think that is our problem in our church.  
We need to be careful, like Pergamum.  
They were not denying Christ's name, but they did deny it in how they lived.  
And that is the same trap we can fall into.  
We deny Christ in other ways.  
In the small ways of how we live.

We that vengeance is in the hands of God when we take it ourselves.  
We deny that Jesus tells us to sell everything we have and give it to the poor because we don't like that  
We deny Jesus tells us to go and share the gospel with all that we see that's hard.  
We deny that God wants only wholesome talk that is good for edification to come out of our mouths when we curse, badmouth other people and tear down those we disagree with because we think it is funny.  
We deny Christ in lots of ways each day.

Here's the reality if you deny Christ in lots of small ways, we will deny him the big one  
And indeed, you are denying His name.  
We need to examine our hearts.  
We need to heed the warning of Jesus.  
He is coming to judge those who refuse to repent.  
And those who deny His name.  
Now, I don't say all this to make us all worry about our salvation.  
Although, some of us might need to be convicted and confronted.  
Because maybe you should worry.

But the reality is all of us deny Christ with how we live each day.  
The difference between someone who is a true believer who has failed momentarily and someone who is constantly denying Christ and is unsaved is repentance.

Repentance was the difference between David and Saul even though both were great and horrible sinners.

If you refuse to repeat, then you were denying Jesus.

But if when you sin you acknowledge Jesus told me not to do that God's word is asked to not do and I did it anyway so I'm sorry that's not denying him.

What makes it complete denial is when we refuse to repent.

Our goal is perfection our goal is holiness. Our goal is to never deny Jesus even for a moment.

Now we need to be honest and acknowledge we will fail.

We won't kick people out of the church when they fall short.

But we do not lower God's standard.

Each time, we repent.

We get back up and we keep trying to be faithful to God.

### **III. Don't deny Christ's (name) in how you (live) and receive a new (name) (v. 17).**

This is one of my favorite scriptures in the entire Bible

Because those who are faithful will receive a new name.

Those who repent and continue to daily affirm Christ's name.

Those who conquer are renamed.

Verse 17, **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."**

First before we talk about the name, let's talk about the manna.

I believe this is literally true that those who are faithful and put their faith in Jesus will one day be able to eat from the same heavenly manna that Israel ate in the wilderness.

And this is in contrast to the food that they are eating that sacrifice to idols

Instead of eating the food the world and its idols offer.

Why don't you eat food that Jesus offers?

The food and drink that can satisfy.

And for now it's hidden.

Each time we come to the Lord's table for communion we get a foretaste.

But one day we will get to eat the manna.

Just as some of the manna was saved in the Ark of the Covenant for future generations.

There is now manna from heaven hidden with Christ.

One day it will be your daily bread, if you remain faithful.

The other reward is a new name written on the white stone.

I remember when I was younger and I really wanted a nickname.

I was homeschooled then I moved into a neighborhood with all these kids and they have known each other for what felt like forever and had all these fun names for each other and I just wanted one.

I desperately wanted to be included and renamed.

Although I was too young to really recognize it at the time, they really did not like me very much.

So they finally gave in and gave me a nickname but it was just something mean.

Even decades later, that name still hurts.

Because there is a power in renaming.

There is a sense in which this new name that no one knows is Jesus giving you a name or a nickname.

A name that is just for you and Him.

A name that He knows you by.

It's a trend in our culture to try and come up with unique names.

And so people do all sorts of just ridiculous things.

Name children after television characters or kids normal names that are spelled in the most bizarre ways that no one could possibly guess how we are supposed to pronounce it.

Because we want something unique that nobody else has and we're desperately searching for it.

And that desire I think it was out of a good place, but it can't be found in name on our kids something crazy it can only be found in Jesus.

One day, if you are faithful and put your faith in Jesus, there is a new name.

And there's a lot of meaning behind the white stone itself.

In ancient Greece, the jury would vote on guilty or innocent with stones.

A white stone signified not guilty.

This could be a symbol of Jesus wiping away our sins on the cross.

It could be a reference to the stones the high priest would wear with the names of the tribes written on it.

And it is symbolic of our righteous standing before God because of Jesus.

The likeliest is the winner of Roman games would at times be awarded a white stone with their name on it.

And it would be a ticket into a special banquet only those with a stone could attend.

And so this stone is symbolic of our entrance to the great banquet feast.

When Christ returns and has a feast, we will be welcomed.

I think in some sense all of these are true.

Maybe John was pulling from all of them.

But the most important part is the renaming.

This is something that pops up in scripture repeatedly where people are named again.

Abram is renamed Abraham.

Sarai is renamed Sarah

And now he will be the father of many nations

Jacob is renamed Israel to be the nation that God chooses to bless the world through.

Moses gains his name after he is taken up through the waters like baptism to Moses.

Peter, after professing faith in Jesus, is renamed from Simon to Peter meaning the rock.

In these moments God is doing something spiritually when he renames people.

They were something but because of their encounter with God, they are now something much more.

So Jesus is saying he will do the same with us and give us our new name.

For those of us who have struggled with our names, this will be a wonderful day.

I think my name is OK, but I've always kind of struggled with my name.

There were far too many David's in seminary.

A lot of my name reminds me of the shame and failure of King David my namesake

And I don't just think about his failures I think about my own.

But to be renamed.

To no longer bear the scars and shame.

To be renamed is to be declared by God and Jesus that you are someone more.

That in Jesus, in the gospel, this is who God declares you to be.

This is part of the heart at the author of the gospel in Jesus offered himself to us. He offers us a new name.

No longer are we sinners as now we can saints.

No longer are we named enemies of God now we can be named friends.

No longer where we lost sheep, but now we are named and adopted into the kingdom of Jesus as his sons and his daughters

Often in tradition after baptism, Christians would be renamed.  
I am not saying we should reclaim that.  
But there is something to that idea.  
Because those who have been received by Jesus.  
Those who have been faithful and accepted the gospel.  
They will receive a new name.  
Not a name your parents gave you.  
Not a nickname from close friends.  
Not a name or reputation you earned in your past.  
A name given to you by the God who loves you and fashioned you in your mother's womb.

Your new name is waiting for you.  
If you will follow Jesus.  
If you will be faithful and not deny His name in the small things.  
Then you can join the great cloud of witnesses and martyrs who have gone before us, with your new name on the white stone.