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Revelation

Chapter 2 - Revealing the Secrets to Overcoming Darkness

Feign Not the Flame (vs. 12-17)

Revelation 2:12-17: “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ‘But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. ‘So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ‘Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and

I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

"This little light of mine," where does that come from? Well, obviously it comes from Matthew 5, and in particular, you look at verses 14 through 16, and He tells the church, "You're light. You're to be a light of the world and you're not supposed to hide it. You're supposed to let it shine." That's in the very next verse.

So, then he goes on and says,

(Matthew 5:16) "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

It's a great picture. It is that picture that we see at the beginning of Revelation in Chapter 1, in which the

imagery that is drawn and once again, one of the purposes of the Book of Revelation, is to stir emotions. There's the commercial that comes on, wow, a lot, about dogs that need help, and they show them in the winter condition and they're showing them shivering. It's the picture that they're wanting to grab you with, and it's the reason why in the Book of Revelation, there's so many pictures. Because what is He wanting to do? He's wanting to stir your emotion. What is He wanting to stir your emotion to do? And at the very end of the book, He tells you, "I'm wanting to stir your emotions to say, 'Come. Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly.'" So, these interesting pictures are being given to us.

The wonderful pictures that we see at the very beginning in Revelation 1, of course, is the picture of Christ, and there He stands with the seven candlesticks, and He stands, the text says, among them. So, where is the focus of Christ, who is the ruler of all things? Where is His focus? Well, you would think it might be in the governments, you might think it might be where the aristocracy is, but it's not. His focus is with the church,

and there He stands, among the candlesticks, and He has in His right hand seven stars, lights to endow them with. Candlesticks are made to light, and it says that Christ Himself is standing there, and His face is like the sun. So, it's obvious that the Light of the world is what He's wanting to convey, and what is the light that He wants the churches to convey? Well, His light. His light that comes from His power. What is that? The gospel. What is the gospel? That God loves you. It is the great power, and this is why Romans 1 says, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God. It is the one thing that changes. "The love of Christ constrains me," Paul says. So, we begin to understand that the church is to proclaim the love of God, and as he begins by going through the seven churches, each one is going to show a different side of strength then each one is going to show a different side of clearly, weakness. All of them are going to be speaking to all of us because in some way or another, we have all struggled with many of the things that they are struggling with and will in our lifetime.

So, we come to the first, and we looked at it two weeks ago, the church at Ephesus, and in particular, if we could just emphasize the point of it, that you really can't have any light without the love of God. You could have the rules. You can have the regulations, you can have the doctrine, you can have all the things that are necessary to correct people, but unless the love of God is moving the hearts, there is no power. So, He literally is telling the church at Ephesus, "There is no light without love, and I'll remove your candlestick. You've left your first love." Once you and I start doing what we do, either out of regiment or force, or because we're embarrassed, or because we're trying to please somebody else, or once we start doing it in our own power and just sheer resolve of man, it ceases to become effective. I mean, people can tell if somebody actually loves them or if they're doing something because they have to. Once you put people in the realm of "want to," there's a pretty powerful force there. You take them out of that desire, and there's nothing that's effective. So, it is the love of Christ that the church has, and if I could put it this way, it's the greatest weapon because it is that which moves men's heart to come and follow Christ.

The Church of Smyrna, He turns, and He says this love really is displayed. As we go on, we'll see the love of God being displayed through all of them, because that's a part of the light, but the love of God is being displayed by the lack of fear. John will say in 1 John, "Perfect love casts out fear." And the fear that they're going to have to contend with, of course, is the fear of their own lives. There's a lot of threatening and intimidation, of course, with the government, and we're going to be talking a little bit more about emperor worship at this time, but it seems, as if most of the church, if not all the church, is going to go under persecution in Smyrna and all of them will die, and He says within 10 days. So, it's an interesting discussion, but more than that, He is stirring within their hearts, "Don't fear," and really, the command is that. The point of the of the text, and once again, the word that He uses, "*phobeō*" makes reference to not only the fact that you take flight, but more specifically in this context, that you would hesitate to suffer. There are going to be times where you and I are going to be called to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Sometimes, it's just somebody saying something bad about us, but to suffer, we should not

hesitate. We should not in any way throw the doctrine under the bus by virtue of, “Well, I'm afraid something's going to happen to me.” So, He turns to the Church of Smyrna and He says, “You're going to be attacked and they're going to come after you and you're going to die.” But the thing that will make us win and the thing that is literally unarguable and undebatable and undisputable about the power of God and you are that you don't back down.

One of the great passages, if you take a moment and look with me in Philippians 1. I'm trying not to get too sidetracked, but in Philippians 1, if you look with me towards the end of this particular chapter, it's a great passage because to you and me, we've been given the gospel, and it's one of the things that unite us together, right? That we get to proclaim the gospel.

(Philippians 1:27) “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

(Philippians 1:28) in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.”

In other words, they're going to come and kill you, and they're going to see you're not sweating, and they're going to go, “Whoops.” It's a very thing that happened with one of the soldiers by the cross and He looks up to Christ and He goes, “This was the Son of God. We made a mistake here.” The point is that the love of God is so powerful, we cannot forsake Him. So, as He would never leave us nor forsake us, according to 1 Corinthians 13, love never fails, and it's one of the strongest testimonials that the church can give. We do not shake when we are threatened. We grow stronger, and it is the wonderful picture of the Church of Smyrna. So, as you see at the very beginning, focus on the Light. If the church is focusing on the love of God, you'll stay on track. If you focus on the love of God, you'll be at the right place, and you'll have the power of God behind you; in fact you'll fear not the darkness, because what does light have to fear? Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of

death, we will fear no evil. Light is with us. It's a wonderful power that we have. So, we will not fear the darkness.

We're going to be looking at in particular today as we've looked at the church at Ephesus, the church of Ephesus, of course, just 40 miles to the north and about another 40 miles away is the city of Pergamum, and it is the church at Pergamum that we're to be looking at specifically and what we're going to see is the tendency, if I could put it this way, of the church to feign their loyalty to God.

There's a lot that could come in, and really there's a lot of different kinds of testing that begins to move into our lives to really maybe ask us whether or not what we have is genuine. If the pressures of this world cause you to acquiesce, if the pressure of this world causes you to back away, if it causes you to in some way compromise your life, the psalmist says that God declares, "Those who hate Me feign obedience." In other words, they're just pretending. It's not real. How do we know it's not real? Because over here they're doing something different, and on this side, they're doing something different. So, it's

that whole chameleon effect. It's one of the things that I struggle with, probably the most that you have to be careful; as a believer, you have to keep the focus to the love of God and before you, but how terrible to me that there are hypocritical people. Over here, you're nice to godly people, and over here, you're railing them and reviling them or you're doing something completely different and how destructive that is. It's basically the Judas effect. How Christ would wash his feet, I'll never know, but He does. But you see the clear distinction, and of course, the great treachery of it.

If you come into this particular passage, we're going to see that that Pergamum is going to be dealing with these things. Now, like in the other two churches, history has a lot to do with it. Why is that true? Because we're not only in the area of Asia Minor, which really kind of brings the conglomerate of the whole world; you have the eastern mysticism as well as the philosophical Greeks, as well as you have the Romans that are more law into it as well as the Jews. So, you have such a mixture. It's an interesting picture of the world; not only that, but the distinction of

each is being described and the fact that Christ is standing in their midst is letting us know that He's intimately acquainted with them. It's like the psalmist says, "He's intimately acquainted with all of our ways." So, as we come to the passage, He's going to be letting us know, "I know what's going on." And He's going to be letting us know what's going on, not only by saying, "I know what's going on," but how He begins to talk and the very descriptions of Himself in the midst of us is like, He has a piece of us on Him. If I can put it that way. So, in Revelation 1, you see the description of Christ; we were talking about the legs of bronze. Well, that's going to be more towards Thyatira, I think it is, and every part of Him is going to be kind of a focus of where He's now speaking. So, the historical setting is very much a part of all of this, and all this is God's way of saying, "Not only do I know where you are and what's happening, but I know how you got here" and He'll be dealing with each of those things. The comfort of this is that God in many respects is saying the same thing to you, "I know what your whole life has been about. I've been with you all along. I know what has influenced you to think this way." And then God begins to

Speak to us, and you begin to realize, “Ok, He's very acquainted with me.”

We come to the Church of Pergamum and not unlike the other churches and just by way of focus, when He comes to the Church of Ephesus, He says, “I know your deeds.” Now once again, I just want to emphasize, when He uses the word “know,” it's always in what is called the “perfect tense” of the Greek. So, that means that He's fully acquainted and comprehends every aspect of it. There is a perfect understanding. So, “I'm fully acquainted with everything that's going on” would be probably the best way to put that.

So, He's going to say to the Church of Ephesus, “I know your deeds.” He's going to say to the Church of Smyrna, “I know your tribulation,” and He's going to say to the Church of Pergamum, “I know where you live.”

So, as we come to the passage, we're going to pick up in verse 12, and as he writes, the messenger, more specifically, as the word is “angelos,” or within the context, probably the pastor of the Church of Pergamum. Pergamum is an interesting name that seems to make

reference to some kind of elevation, but the place is really known for its parchment and had one of the greatest libraries at that time, probably next to Alexandria, of the world.

(Revelation 2:12) “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:”

Now, why didn't He use that phrase to describe Himself when He was talking to the church at Ephesus? Why didn't He use that phrase when He's talking to the church at Smyrna? Well, there's a reason because He's going to emphasize really, the presence of the Roman government, in particular in Pergamum. It will become the greatest city in Asia Minor within a few short years. They are building quickly and they're rising to prominence. Within a few years they'll be greater than Ephesus, they'll bypass Smyrna and there's a reason why. The reason why is that the Roman Government is moving in very powerfully and very strongly. The picture of the Roman government at this juncture has always been the sword. So, Christ, obviously is going to say, “Ok, they may

look like they're holding the sword. I have it, and I'm really the power source because it's the sword that's really going to be threatening them and it's the sword that's really going to be causing them to make the decisions that they make within the context, and we'll see as we go on and understand a little bit better the history as well as the particular passage that we're looking at.

“... The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

(Revelation 2:13) ‘I know where you dwell...’

“I know where you are. I know where you're living. I know what's happening. I know the surrounding that you live in, and I know the influences that are coming upon you.”

“... ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is...’

Now, remember before this He talked about the synagogue of Satan, which was obviously “synagogue,” making reference to the influence of the Jews at that time. Now once again, just to remind you, the name, Satan has the connotation of adversary or to be an adversary against God. So, you can be in church and be

against God. You can be on the throne; you can be a government and be against God, and at this time, against God was very much what the throne was about.

About 2-3 hundred years before this, Attalus was the king. He was a Greek king of this particular city at this time, and it became fairly great under his rule. He began to take upon himself an interesting title and the title that he took upon himself was not only “King,” but it was “King and Soter”. “Soter” is where we actually get the word “savior”. So, he would declare himself savior within this particular city. That kind of began an interesting process within this particular city. They sort of got that sense of identity of savior. We're going to talk about this as we go. As time went on and we got closer to the time of Christ, the world government began to be the Romans, and Caesar Augustus, of course, came into power. It was under Caesar Augustus, interestingly enough, that the title “King and god” really began to take its focus. In fact, it was really Augustus, that first took upon himself, and of course, he says that the Senate kind of conferred upon him, but there wasn't really a close relationship there

with the Senate. Anyway, they conferred upon him the title of “Emperor god”. Caesar Augustus had his own title. Actually, Augustus means “illustrious one,” which kind of is a title of god. His favorite was “Victorious commander, divine illustrious one.” We'll just call him “Illustrious” for short, but it's like, can we think of another one?

Interestingly enough, of course it was in the time of Caesar Augustus that our Savior was born. Which is interesting because at that time Herod was made king and actually Caesar Augustus had put him as king in Judea, and it's an interesting point too. I don't know if you know this, but they had favors. So, if you paid enough money, they put you in office. So, the Herod of the region of Jerusalem, really an Edomite, here is made king. Now, what we know is that he wants to be the Messiah, that's why he wants to kill the Messiah. So, he wants to be the Messiah, and Augustus wants to be Lord at the time that Jesus is born. You can see it all converging, can't you? There's only one that remains that is called Lord. There's only one that comes out the winner of this, but it's an interesting picture. So, from the time of Augustus, this title began to be the title of the Caesars; Julius Caesar

before this and the whole ordeal with Marc Antony, and there were a lot of problems there with Augustus. Anyway, he finally comes out victor, and here he is, basically god. So, it was at this time that they began building temples of worship unto the emperor. Now, what's interesting is that emperor worship was never directly tied solely to the emperor, but he was identified with a particular god, and then they sort of pulled the two together. So, Jupiter or whatever, or Apollos or whatever; they were tied to a god, and therefore they became gods with them. I don't want to spend too much in history, but as time goes on, it goes through not only Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, you go all the way through Claudius and Nero, which is basically during the time of Paul, but it is not any of these that we want to focus on, even though they're all interesting studies in and of themselves, declaring themselves in some way as god, but we come towards the end, and the whole "god" thing began to wane until Domitian. Now, when Domitian comes in office, he elevates it again and his goal was to become like Augustus, and actually, it was during the reign of Domitian that he took on the title "Lord god." Pretty interesting. He is in control now, at this

time, of the Roman government, and in order to get in good with the Caesar, cities are building temples.

I was going through an interesting archaeological report that says in Asia Minor there were no less than 77 emperor temples. That's pretty interesting, isn't it? Which is causing us to ask the question, why are there so many temples to the emperor? There's only one answer, if you understand history, because it was seen as a patron-client relationship with the Caesar, where you would build a temple to honor him or to worship him, and this would bring in the money. This would bring in the government. They would come in. They would build big buildings so you can get a library. You could have all kinds of things that help. So, what happened is, you get rich people in your community, they would build the temple. Caesar wasn't building the temple. They would build the temple unto Caesar. They actually called it patron-client relationship with the Caesar. So, that's what Herod was involved with. So, lest you really think they actually worshipped him. So, they were used to feigning it. They were used to faking it. They were used to going, "We'll do

whatever is necessary. I mean, we're building buildings, but people are getting helped." Now, there's an interesting dynamic that's going on in here, and that's this: remember, earlier in life that the Greeks had their king, and he called himself "savior"; in this particular city, Pergamum, is a temple unto Asclepius. Now, for those of you who don't know personally who Asclepius is, he's one of the mythology gods that were involved and so there was a temple unto him. Now, I think the reason they call it mythology is because it's just a myth. So, it's not real, but hey, that's just me. But anyway, the god Asclepius has this temple. Well, it's called the "temple of healing," and Asclepius, that old booger, he's on the throne and he has this staff, and you know what the staff looks like? It has a serpent around the staff. Have you seen those before? Ok. So, he has his staff and a serpent, and as the story goes, in the myth, the serpent healed the ear of Asclepius and then whispered in that ear knowledge. Does that sound familiar? It seems like it goes all the way back to the garden. So, that's the myth, and that's why he has the staff. So, this guy has these daughters. I'm still in the myth, but the one daughter is named Hygiene. No, I'm

serious. He has 5 daughters. One daughter's named Hygiene. The other daughter is named Recuperation. Literally, the other daughter is named Healing Process. The other daughter's name is Good Health, and the other daughter's name is Remedy. 5 daughters. Sounds familiar? Ok, so we have this healing temple, and it was actually known for the healing. Actually, Galen, I think is one of the great physicians that came from this. He was known for dissecting monkeys. I don't know if you know that or not, but anyway, there was actually literally a great school of healing in this city. Actually, Asclepius was known as literally raising people from the dead by his medicine. So, the trust that's being put into these kinds of things, well, this is what kind of city it is, and those that are honored for doing great, benevolent charitable things are placed in a white stone. They have this backdrop of dark type of marble, and then they have a bright white marble, and then what they would do is, if you had an honorific title, they would inscribe your name on it, and you would be proclaimed as valuable and worth something. You're going to see that in the text. So, all these things are a part of what makes up the passage.

If you look with me,

(Revelation 2:13) “I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is...”

In other words, “I know the government is in charge, and they're wielding the sword.” And the interesting thing is, if you did something wrong and you went into the emperor's temple and you went to the feet of the statue of the emperor, they couldn't touch you because you were under his care. He was the savior. It's an interesting picture.

“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith...”

“You held to the convictions,” would probably be another way of putting it.

“... even in the days of Antipas...”

Which we understand according to tradition, Antipas was the pastor of the church. So, he ends up dying.

“... even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”

Why was he killed? Because he would not acquiesce to the worship of the emperor because it became very powerful. Once again, you have to remember that it wasn't as much the emperor that initiated it. It was the people with money, but they realized that they could somehow kiss up to the emperor. So, if you went against the emperor, you were hurting their pocketbook; they were going to kill you. Now, they would say you go against the emperor, but they're really saying you're messing with the pocketbook, because they know that everything they've done is to bring in the money for their benefit.

“You've remained true so far.”

But His point is,

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

This is where it gets very interesting, because Balaam as we know and as you look at the Book of Jude, which is right before the Book of Revelation, literally refers to him as a prophet for hire. So, what it's telling us is that there's

an interesting connection here. Of course, actually the story of Balaam, as you go back into Numbers 21 and 22 and you go into this, which there's a reason why I put 21 and 22 together, and I'll tell you why that is as we go on, if I have time. But as you look at this, you see Balaam being interjected and he somehow is teaching them the doctrine of Balaam. Well, the doctrine of Balaam is doing what you do for money. It's the one thing that Scripture warns us of as a church over and over again. Don't let money come into the church and make the decisions for the church. Do what you do because it's right, because it honors God. Take the money equation out of the church. Don't let it play a part because it'll come in and it'll begin to distort the truth, and it'll begin to twist doctrine.

If you look with me in Numbers 22, this particular incident of Balaam in the Old Testament, which really, I'm going to have to just give you a real synopsis of this, but the children of Israel go into the region of Moab, and Moab has a king by the name of Balak. Balak goes, "Wow, there's a lot of Jews. They're going to eat up all our food and they're going to take everything. We're going to have

to get these people out of here.” If you read in the Book of Jeremiah with me, you understand that the Moabites aren't real warriors, they like to talk big, but they're not really good at fighting. So, the only thing that they think of is “We need to get a prophet and we need to get prophet fast that can oust these people.” Now, I’m not exactly sure and there's a lot of debate whether Balaam was a Jew or not, but we do know he has a connection with God, and God does talk to him. What's interesting is he comes from Mesopotamia. He actually lives next to Euphrates. So, I personally think that he was a relative of Abraham because we know Abraham comes out of Ur of the Chaldeans. I believe he was a relative of Abraham and in that, he has some connection with God through that. But anyway, he sends for Balam. Balam comes, and he tells Balaam, “Look, we've got a real problem here. Finances are going to be messed up because we have all these people moving in that don't belong here. So, what I'd like for you to do, and I'll be glad to give you money for this, curse these people. So, talk to God. Get ‘er done. I’ll give you the money.” So, of course, he goes, “I'll give ‘er a try.” He does. Of course, what keeps coming back is God

blesses the people. Of course, the point of Genesis 12 is God says to Abraham, “Ok, I've called you out. I'm going to bless you and I'm going to make you a blessing and I'm going to curse those who curse you and I'm going to bless those who bless you.” So, He made it pretty clear in the time of Abraham, but now, “Maybe God has changed His mind.” That's a thought. So, you kind of get the idea of, “We're going to get God to do something different” and that really literally is basically the theme that “you can change truth, or you can change God's mind.” So, within the passage, God can be bought, truth can be changed, the promise can be broken, but God will literally say, if you look with me,

(Numbers 23:19) “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent...”

One of the big problems with churches is they put for sale doctrine, because times change; because they want to placate their audience or maybe feed into them.

Somehow, they begin to manipulate the text, and they do these magnificent gymnastics with hermeneutics, and they began to twist everything that God says, and finally,

it's saying, as Paul says to Timothy, "They're going to come in; they're going to want to have their ears tickled and they're going to accumulate for themselves teachers, in accordance with their own desires." And that's exactly what's happening. But the church can't do that. It's the teaching of Balaam, "If you put enough money in the offering plate, I'll change the truth." You can't. God doesn't change. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. That's what why we call Him immutable. He never changes and His truth never changes. How terrible it would be if His truth did change; if it was up for debate. Think about it. This whole city is thinking, "Wait a minute. Savior. King, savior. How do you get the king to save you? You slip him a \$20." You want to know how the church got into selling of indulgences? The Roman Catholic Church is basically the Roman government amalgamating into the church. So, how do you get the Caesar to save you? You send him money. "He hasn't saved me yet." "Send more." So, that's the solution.

What's interesting is, in Numbers 23:1, Balaam is actually talking with Balak, and he says, "I'll tell you what we'll do.

We'll use symbolism to bring God on our side." So, he builds 7 altars, prepares 7 bulls, takes 7 Rams. "7," let's see, whose number is that? You see, the point is and what we see religion doing is they take symbolism of God to bring about desired results. So, if you have a trinket, then, "Oh, God can buy me a car," or whatever, because it's just a matter of getting the symbolism attached to the desired results, and that's how you manipulate God. Well, that's what was coming into the Church of Pergamum.

What's ironic, of course, is Chapter 21 of Numbers, and I don't know if you remember reading it, but in Numbers 21, the people started rebelling, and the serpents started biting them. The serpents biting them is an interesting picture of what they were doing to God. Because you talk against God, it's like a viper attacking with painful words. I don't think there's anything more painful than somebody saying that somebody's untrustworthy. You can't believe them. I mean, this is God that they're talking about, and God says, "You're like serpents." And you can hear the serpents hissing. It's one of the reasons why they would bring serpents. They actually, believe it or not, in the

Temple of Asclepius, the Healing Temple, they literally let serpents loose as a symbol of healing. Now, isn't that just like man? Man comes up with the conclusion, "Ok. So, it's the serpents that heal." No. You know why God said, "I want you to get this staff, and I want you to put a serpent around and I want you to look on that"? You know why? It wasn't to save them. It was to get them to admit what was causing the pain, and that's literally the picture of the cross; that's what's causing the pain. Look at the cross. It's your sins that are causing the pain. Look at the sins. Because unless you repent, you can't come into the kingdom of God. But you have to see what your sin is doing. What is it that's causing you to be where you are? It's your own words. It's a destruction of your own words that is bringing you where you are. Now, what man does, is he goes, "Oh, I see. So, my horrible, terrible malevolent words are what heals. Ok, I'll wrap around the stick, and I'll make that." It's just like man to twist everything for his own favor.

An interesting passage and let me just say this one thing about it, and I may not have time to finish today, but I will

do this. There's a particular text here in this particular story that people have oftentimes asked me about, and I want to clarify it for them. It's found in Numbers 22, and if you drop on down where Balak keeps asking him, and of course, three times he's going to do this, "You need to curse the people," and he goes, "Ok, I'll try." So, he goes to God. So, this next time he goes before God and he's heading out, and God comes to him in a dream. If you look with me, of course, just to remind you,

(Numbers 22:15) "Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous..."

You know, if it didn't work the first time, send more leaders and send more money. So, he does that, and he says,

(Numbers 22:17) "for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, curse this people for me.'"

We drop on down,

(Numbers 22:19) ““Now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out what else the LORD will speak to me.””

Now, we know the Lord's already made it very clear, “I'm not going to curse My people,” but you know, it never hurts to ask again; especially where there's money involved.

(Numbers 22:20) “God came to Balaam at night...”

Ok. So, now God is going to talk to Balam.

“God came to Balaam at night and said to him, “If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do.”

(Numbers 22:21) So Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his donkey and went with the leaders of Moab.

(Numbers 22:22) But God was angry because he was going...”

A lot of people go, “Well, why is God angry? He said, ‘Go.’” No, no, you misunderstand the text. The text reads this way, literally, “If the men come and call you, go.” But the very next text is, “Balaam arose in the morning,” and

the text reads this way, “at the break of day.” What is that telling us? He wanted to go. He wasn't going to wait for the word. He wasn't going to wait for the sign. He was going to go. Why? He's got money waiting for him. That's why Jude said that the deepest part of Hell is reserved for the teachers that do it for money. See, that's why I keep telling people you don't want to do this for money. You want to do this for God because once you start doing it for money, you start telling people what they want to hear, and then you start compromising truth. Then you're just digging yourself a hole forever. “Let not many become teachers knowing that you'll incur a stricter judgment.” So, interesting passage as Jude will say, the deepest, darkest part of Hell is reserved for Balaam. So here he is, a prophet, and it is for money. So, the great warning of course obviously is “Don't go there.”

Now, what's interesting to me is the precursor is chapter 21 with the serpent. So, you see an interesting tie of the serpent and the staff in 21, and in 22, we go into Balaam; the same thing you're seeing with Asclepius in Pergamum. You have this place of worship of do-gooders, and they

basically say, "We're going to save you." And everybody that throws in the money to the pot and participates and becomes a part of that way of thinking, and basically says, "It's the money that's saving you." Because look, nobody built a temple unto the Caesar because they actually believe Caesar was God. They built the temple unto Caesar because they believed Caesar could do something for them. So, why do you serve God? Well, if you think that you can bribe Him, you think you can twist it, "Well, no. No, we don't think that. Actually, the bottom line is we don't think God exists. So, what we do is we live a life that literally bribes other people, and we twist and distort our faith to fit into our ability to somehow compromise into the realm of the world. If we can do it all, then hey, we can come off looking good. We can have our name engraved in these important stones as honorific people that save lives. "We're saviors." You're not saviors. "But we like those titles." And God says, "Why don't I give you the stone? Why don't I write your name? Why don't you fight for the name in heaven where your name is? And I'll remember you. Why don't you go for that one?" It's an interesting text. We're going to finish it next week.

We're not going to be able to finish it this week, but it's an interesting passage. It begins to stir in our hearts, "Don't let money come in the church."

Closing Prayer:

Father, I want to give you thanks for Your word, as You begin to take us on this journey of the churches that are wrestling through many things. Obviously, it's very easy for us to get so much into the whole right and wrong thing that we forget why we're doing it, as Paul will so clearly put, the goal of our instruction is love and we have to keep that focus. If we lose that focus, we cease to be lights. Father, You tell us that we have no reason to be afraid. No reason. Because You're with us, and if we look hesitant in any way to suffer for what is right, the flame begins to go out. Father, You have called us to be genuine, to be real. This is not about favors. This is not about client-patron relationship. It has nothing to do with that. This has to do with us loving You with all of our hearts. Lord, we just ask that You just don't ever allow

money to come into this church, to distort or twist or hurt in any way the wonderful words of life.

Your heads bowed and your eyes closed. The passage is introducing us to the possibility in our lives of compromising what we know to be true for the sake of recognition, affirmation, acceptance by others. We do things, we know they don't necessarily help, or our full confidence isn't in, but it has to do with the recognition and the advantage that it yields us. It's easy to get in your life and to work in a realm of great compromise, and before long, you're just feigning worship. You're not really loving God with all of your heart. You're just faking it. There's nothing real. There's nothing genuine. It's just about people looking at you and recognizing you and maybe someday you'll be called the "savior". Dearly beloved, we cannot be that church. The power of the church is in the power of the Savior, and our Savior saved. Our trust is in Him. He will never leave us or forsake us. He is the one that forgives us of all of our sins and gives us everlasting life. He won't just heal us. He'll give us new bodies. Our trust is in Him. Your heads bowed and your

eyes closed. I'm just asking you to get real with God. Just ask Him, "Lord, reveal any compromise in my life; any way that I've somehow caved to the pressures of the elite, of what the world is perceiving as grand and glorious. Lord, I just want to be with You. I just want to please You."