

# UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH

Then and Now  
in 30 Minutes



## Episode 47 - Centred

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## THE SETTING



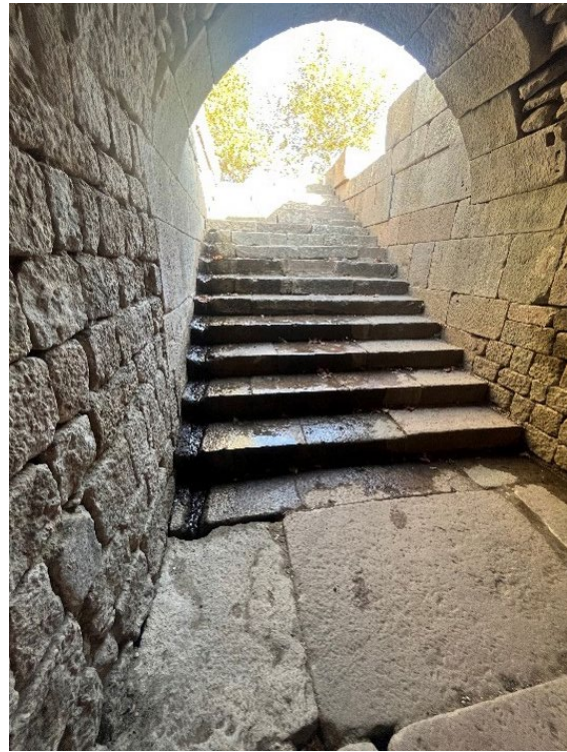
We've travelled to **Pergamum** (modern Bergama) in Turkey. It was the ancient capital of Asia, built on a hill overlooking the plain of the Caicus River, 70 miles (115 km) north of Smyrna. To its north lay a conical-shaped hill, rising 1000 feet above the city, with lots of temples and altars. But there were two main ones. The first was dedicated to Zeus and had a huge altar (120 feet by 112 feet - 36 m x 34 m) which sat on a ledge jutting out from the hill and dominating the city below. The other was dedicated to Asclepius, the god of healing, whose symbol (a serpent) was used on their coins. The sick would spend the night in this temple, full of tame snakes. If one touched you, it was believed you would receive health and wealth. Inevitably, people came from far and wide in hope of experiencing this.

Pergamum was an intellectual city, rivalling Athens and Alexandria, with a library of over 200,000 books. Why so many? Because it was here that parchment was popularised. 'Parchment' in Latin is pergamenus because King Eumenes II of Pergamum helped popularize the use of animal skins as a writing material and their collection into codices (*singular, codex*), the earliest form of book.



Remains of the Temple of Zeus  
on the Acropolis.

The hugely impressive altar was relocated  
to a museum in Germany in the 19th century



One of the treatment tunnels in the  
Askleion in the city below that was  
used to treat psychological problems.  
Patients walked through the tunnel  
listening to running water and voices  
whispering positive thoughts



[Revelation 2:12-17](#)



### ***Who holds the sword?***

Jesus begins by saying that “these are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword” (v12). As ever, his opening words are always so pertinent to each church situation; for the sword was Pergamum’s symbol, being one of the few cities given ‘the right of the sword’ (power to inflict capital punishment). So Jesus was saying: ‘Yes, I know that the authorities think they wield all the power and have the upper hand; but they don’t - I do! And so his call to this church is to keep centred on him.

### ***The good***

Despite being “where Satan has his throne” (v 13) - a reference to Zeus’ altar on the Acropolis where Emperor worship was focused, which all citizens were expected to participate in - Jesus commends the church for having remained “true to my name” (v 13) and for not renouncing him even when martyrdom faced them (v13). (History tells us that Antipas

was roasted alive in a bronze bull in AD 92.)

### **The bad**

Yet while they were successfully standing against pressure from without, they were failing to see and address pressure from within; for two dangerous teachings had infiltrated the church. The first was “the teaching of Balaam” (v 14), who had advised Midianite women how to lead Israel astray through sexual immorality and idolatry ([Num 25](#)); so this was clearly about accepting society’s standards on sexual morality rather than God’s, and as such was comprise. The second was “the teaching of the Nicolaitans” (v 15), who had worked out a theological rationale for compromising with secular society, and all that led to. The church might have thought it was being tolerant in accepting these ideas; but in reality, they were simply conforming to the world’s ideas and values rather than boldly living out Christ’s, come what may. That challenge remains just as strong today.

### **The challenge**

But Jesus will have nothing to do with compromise. He simply calls them to repent. And if they won’t, then the sword they will experience will not be Pergamum’s sword, but his (v 16).

### **The promise**

But it is never too late to change. If they will respond to his rebuke and keep centred on him, they will get to eat “hidden manna” (manna had been hidden in the Ark of the Covenant, symbolising God’s provision and presence); they will receive “a white stone”, used as a sign of acquittal in the courts and as an admission token to a banquet; and they will receive a new name, just like Isaiah prophesied, symbolising their new identity and status ([Isa 62:1-5](#)). It is never too late to turn back to Jesus, no matter how deep a mess or compromise we have got ourselves into.



1. What sort of things can help us keep centred on Christ, particularly in a world where there is so much pressure to align with its values rather than his?
2. Tolerance - perhaps the highest ethical quality in modern western society - is not a Biblical value; but things like understanding and kindness are. How do you find yourself reacting to that statement?
3. How can the Church today ensure it stays wholly centred on Christ and not be swayed by the latest cultural trends?



For a behind-the-scenes glimpse into what was involved to create this podcast series listen to Mike and David recounting their experiences!

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