Mission Killers
Revelation 2:12-17 // Kip Nanninga
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Kip // All right, good morning. It's great to see everybody this morning. I got news that the Broncos are going to win because there are Bronco fans here, and it's kickoff right now. Any Michigan fans in the house? Our ushers need to escort you out the doors -- right now. As you know, I'm a big Huskers fan. The churches across Nebraska are packed this morning, licking our wounds.

Hey, welcome to Mission Hills. We are in a series called “Mission Killers.” It seems just about the time we are about to join Jesus on mission, the world does everything to counter that, to compromise, to create drift in our life, to indirectly or subtly pull us off mission, so the last couple of weeks we have been looking at Institutional Amnesia. Pastor Craig last week had the Intimidation Monster. This week we are talking about Counterfeit Authority.

In Revelations 2:12-17, we are looking at counterfeit authority. One thing that my family and I like doing in the evenings is we get together and I play basketball with my boys. If you haven't noticed, my boys are about my height, 6' 4" - 6' 5". So if we ever sit in front of you, we are sorry, if you can't see the screens up front. I know some of you probably thought, Kip probably was a jockey in his former days. No, I played ball. But one thing my boys recognize and I recognize in playing college ball is something happens in every basketball game. It's called the halftime locker room. Essentially, what happens is the team comes in at halftime and the coaches say three of kind of the same messages every time we would gather. First of all, team, here's what you are doing great. These are the things if we keep capitalizing on, we are going to win this game. Like, let's get the ball inside. Let's penetrate, let's capitalize on their weaknesses. If we keep doing this, we are going to win this game.

The second thing coaches would say, but guys, here's what's killing us, like our shooting percentage is down, or our turnover rate is really high. We made this commitment at the beginning of the season to keep our turnovers down to this percentage. These are the things if we keep doing, we are going to lose the game.

The third thing is, guys, remember what got us here. Remember all the hard work. Remember the victories we’ve had. Like, just remember that as a team and let's go out this second half and play that game. Inevitably, I would get upset or frustrated because one of the coaches would kick my backside during halftime and they would usually say one of two things, but they would usually say, Nanning, two words: game film. You see, when you are caught on video, when you watch yourself play, you can’t argue. You cannot argue. You look at your turnovers and the weaknesses you have in your game, and I can’t argue, because it’s right there.

Jesus, in Revelations 2:12-17 is laser focused in six verses, and he’s saying this to the church in Pergamum: I have seen your game film. I have watched your life, I see what you value. I see the actions that are coming out. I see the words that are coming out of your mouth. Listen, here's what you are doing really, really well as a church, but here's the things you are struggling in. Here are the things that if you don’t get this right, you could self-destruct. One of the big ones that the church of Pergamum was struggling with was counterfeit authority. Jesus just combats that in these six verses we are going to look at today.

Let's pray. Father, I thank you for how Your Word is our ultimate authority. Father, when we read Your Word, our life is centered again on what is most important, but it’s centered on absolute truth, every time we read Scripture, every time we come under Your authority, Father, we recognize, we experience, we see, we hear absolute truth. So bring that to us again today, right here at Mission Hills so when we leave this place we are changed because of Your Word. Amen.

Take your Bibles and turn to Revelation 2. If you don’t have a Bible, there is one right in front of you, or turn your smart phones on. We are going to look at just six verses. In the six verses, Jesus kind of takes the gloves off. Here's what I so appreciate about Jesus. Jesus is not politically correct in these verses. He's not being subtle. He's not kind of, you know, coming up and rubbing our backs this morning, but he’s going right at it today. He's saying this. He's saying in these six verses, here’s what he’s saying. In Revelations 2:12 he says to the angel in the church of Pergamum I write, these are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

And again, we learned from a couple of weeks ago that this angel, what's that a reference to? It’s the personification of the message the Church has for the world. So this angel is writing, and Jesus is saying these words. These are my words coming with full authority piercing right to the heart. I'm doing open-heart surgery today, church in Pergamum. You need to tune in. I'm going to tell you, here are the things you are doing really well as a church. Here are the things you are struggling in. And I want you to remember a couple of things. Hebrews 4:12 it says this, for
the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Jesus is saying to the church in Pergamum, I am coming with full authority of God’s word, judging your attitudes and your heart right now. In other words, Jesus says, I’m bringing light to the dark places, and I want to expose the things you are struggling in because if you don’t get this right, you could self-destruct. You see, if you want to become like Jesus and join him on mission, we must live a life of courageous followship. You are like, Kip just misspelled that last word, well I didn’t. It’s a new word kind of in the church age. What it means is, we follow Jesus. We follow the ways of Jesus that when we become like Jesus over time, we are transformed like the girl in that video this morning. Our lives are being transformed because we follow him. Our lives line up with him. The things that we do. The things that we speak. Our actions begin to conform to the image of becoming like Jesus.

But it also means we fall under the authority of Scripture. We fall under the authority of Jesus Christ. In our day and age, our pop culture age, we struggle with that one word “submission.” That is not a P.C. word. I have done several weddings. When we get to that part of the wedding ceremony, I’ll sit down and meet with couples and they are like, is there anyway we can take that word “submission” out? That just doesn’t feel right. The same applies to you and I today. I struggle with it. You struggle with it. Why do we struggle with it? Because it wages war against our pride, and Jesus is saying look, if you believe in me, if you trust me, if you follow me, then you fall under my authority. You fall under the authority of Scripture. That’s what is so powerful when we read God’s Word, that when we align our lives up with God’s Word, every single time our attitudes and actions fall under that absolute truth and we go that is true north.

That is the authority I need to line my life up with. So many times in the world we live we think we fall under the authority of the world in different areas of our life, and Jesus says, you’re compromising. There is drift happening in your life. You only fall under my authority and the authority of Scripture, and when you do that, guess what? Your life will get better. I cannot promise you that it will get happier, but your life will get better when we align our life up with Scripture and the authority of Jesus Christ. So here’s what he says in verse 2:13. He says I know where you live. I’ve watched the game film of your life. I know where you live. I know what’s going on in your city. I know what’s going on not only in your city, but I know what’s going on in your church in Pergamum.

He says, I know where you live, where Satan has his throne, yet you remain faithful to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was put to death in your city -- three words -- where Satan lives. Now imagine if we could go back 2,000 years ago, and we go, oh, you live in Pergamum. Yeah, that’s the pit of Hell. Oh, you live in that city. That’s where Satan lives. You would be like, yeah, we have great school spirit, right? That’s the throne of Satan, Jesus says. Why would he say that? Why would he say such a thing about Pergamum?

We have nicknames of our cities here in the United States, like Philadelphia is the city of – Brotherly Love, right? New York is the city that -- never sleeps. New Orleans is – The Big Easy. Las Vegas is – Sin City, right? But Pergamum, Pergamum, Jesus says, is the throne of Satan. That’s where Satan lives. We step back and we say, okay, we need to do a history lesson on Pergamum. Pergamum set a thousand feet above sea level on a high, kind of exalted mountain in the Middle East in Turkey, a fortified city with thick walls all around the city. They could see their enemies coming, so it was a safe place to live because we have a fortified city when our enemies come, we have the advantage because we are on high, and we can rain down on them.

The second thing about Pergamum that’s of notice, there was a library there of 200,000 volumes, second only to Alexandria in Egypt at that time. Pergamum was the first one to use parchment as a writing utensil, but not only was it a fortified city, a safe city, but it was a city of cultural health. It had 200,000 volumes, probably coffee houses all over Pergamum people sat pondering, and culturally, it was a great place to live. But Jesus says, that’s not concerning to me. Here is what differentiates this city from any other city in the Middle East at that time; it was a place of worship to idols. It was a place of worship to sexual immorality. It was a place of worship to idols. Listen to this, the city was distinguished more than anything because of its centers to the four main gods in the Greco Roman world: to Athena the Goddess of Love, Asclepius, Dionysus, and the big one was Zeus.

Centers built to worship however you wanted to worship. To sexually live your life any way you wanted however you wanted to live your life sexually. To give your life to idols and to worship different idols. It’s in comparison to almost the culture we live in today, isn’t it? Beyond that, and most importantly, Pergamum’s devotion to emperor worship. In fact, Pergamum built the first dedicated worship center to a living emperor in 29 B.C. They believed their living emperor was a god, and they should worship him. So Jesus is saying look, in Revelation 2:13, this is the thing you are doing really well. You are knocking it out of the park here because you live in this epicenter of worship and idols and this cultural place that’s safe, and you remain faithful. You are remaining faithful to my name, just like your brother Antipas.

Now imagine Antipas’ name is written in the Bible because he remained faithful, an individual man whose name was written in the history of our Bible because the Bible says he remained faithful. Antipas was a devoted follower of Jesus. He was known throughout the churches in Revelation and especially in Pergamum. Here is what happened to Antipas for standing strong, for remaining faithful, for not worshiping idols, for not worshiping the emperor. They bound his hands and feet, and they took him out in front of all of the worship centers out in the plaza, and there was a big, brass cauldron, and they told Antipas, if you denounce the name of Jesus Christ, you will live, and he said, I will remain faithful. And
they threw him in that cauldron and burned him alive in front of the entire city, and Jesus says the things that you are doing well is that you are remaining faithful just like your brother Antipas.

You see, to become like Jesus and join him on mission, we must have courage to trust the authority of Scripture, to truth the authority of Jesus because there’s all kinds of pressure to renounce God even today in 2018, all kinds of gods that we could worship, all kinds of things that we could live our life to, all kinds of ways that we can express ourselves sexually, right? But when we live a life of courageous authority under Jesus, we become more like him.

Revelations 2:14-16, this is the part of the locker room where Jesus says, okay, here’s what you are doing well, but nevertheless, here’s what you are struggling in. He says, I have a few things against you. There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore, otherwise I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. Jesus mentions Nicolas or the leader of the Nicolaitan movement. What that was, it was a very, very legalistic authoritative movement headed by this guy named Nicolas. He believed not only should you submit to the authority of Jesus, but you also should submit to these outside external forces called legalism, and what I say is almost in parallel to the authority of Jesus, and so you need to mix a little bit of Jesus theology and a little bit of Nicolas theology into your thinking, and the believers in Pergamum were compromising with the teachings of Nicolas at that day.

But the big one, Jesus says, is Balaam and Balak. You see, there is fascinating reading if you go to Numbers 22-25. It is about Balak the King of the Moabites. He basically feels like Israel is getting too close. They are empowered and he knows there is something anointed by God, so there is pressure for him to kind of resist that, so he hires this prophet named Balaam and Balak says to Balaam, listen, here’s what I want you to do. I want you to put a curse over the Israelite nation. If you put a curse over them, I will give you a lot of money. I will give you a new house, a nice new car, positions throughout the Middle East. Balaam says, you bet. I’m in. So he goes out and he begins to put this curse over Israel and God says hold on a minute. God speaks to Balaam through a donkey, kind of like Shrek, right? But just a little bit older.

So this donkey starts speaking and has this encounter with him, and God speaks and uses this donkey and He speaks to him and says, Balaam, listen, you only speak what I tell you to speak, and you don’t do anything more, and so Balaam does that, but in Numbers 31 something happens. Balaam compromises. He begins to twist some things. He becomes very deceptive. He’s spoken what God has said, but he deceives the Israelites into coming together with the Moabites. You see what Balaam says is, listen, you have this whole thing about following Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, but listen, there is nothing wrong with taking the gods of the Moabite nation and just compromising a little bit, and so sexual immorality with the Moabites began to creep into the Israelite camp.

The worship of other religions that the Moabites believed in began to creep into their camp. The idols that the Moabites believed in, that God detested began to creep into the Israelite camp, and one prophet had the ability through subtle means, indirect means, compromising, to send a thousand -- over thousands of Israelites to their death because they compromised the name and fame of Jesus. Satan’s number one mission is to get you to compromise just a little bit.

The Bible calls Satan a thief. Satan wants to leave the door open to your life so you begin to compromise just a little bit, and over the course of time as your life goes on, and you begin to compromise just a little bit, one inch at a time, you begin to see how far away from Jesus you live your life.

I have this good friend named Rock. Rock is a lead pastor at this big church in Pittsburgh, He’s a huge Steelers fan. You would think he and Terry Bradshaw are like this. You go into his office and it’s full of Steelers stuff. And Rock’s this great speaker, and a couple of years ago he told me this story, and he used it in a message he was preaching out there in Pittsburgh. He said, Kip, when we kind of had a new family. We had two girls and our youngest son. We were still pretty new moving into Pittsburgh. He said we had been out late one night with some friends, and our kids were already asleep in their car seats, and you know, as parents, the last thing you do is wake up your kids in car seats. So they pulled into the garage and the garage door came down, and ever so gently one at a time, they got their kids and put them on their shoulder and walked them in and put them in bed, and he said we kept the lights off in our house. We were exhausted, and then he said my wife and I went down the hallway to our bedroom and went to sleep.

He said about 2:00 in the morning, he’s hearing this racket and this cold air is just blowing through their house. He’s like what is going on? He wakes up with one eye open and he walks out of their master bedroom, and down the hallway past his kids’ room and his son’s room and all the while he’s like, my feet are getting wet, and I don’t understand it. I probably tracked snow in from when we walked the kids in. I get down to the kitchen. It’s a split-level house. I get down to the kitchen, turn the light on and realize the back door is just banging and banging. He walks over around the kitchen table and shuts that back door and locks the door and as he’s doing so he flips the back light on, and he cannot believe what he sees. Over the privacy fence, there is a set of footprints that lead to the back door. As he looks, he realizes that those footprints make their way up the steps, and they go into his daughters’ room.

Then those same footprints he begins to follow go into his son’s room, and then those footprints come back out the hallway into their master bedroom. A thief had been in their house while they were sleeping, had watched his daughters, had looked at his son, had watched his wife and him sleep in their master bedroom, all because they left the door open. Satan wants you to open that door, just a little bit, a subtle little opening
for him to get in and begin to destroy your life. So some of us today know exactly what I’m talking about. There are subtle compromises in your life right now that you are giving authority to, and Jesus says, you need to come back to my authority to align your life with Scripture and to get rid of those compromises in your life.

Chapter 2 goes on and he says this, he’s starting to get into the good news now and he says this in verse 17, whoever has ears let him hear what the spirit is saying to the churches. Jesus is saying, if you have ears, you need to tune into the Spirit of God in your life, and if you tune into the Spirit of God in your life, you are not going to compromise. You are going to listen to Him. You are not going to let these subtle things creep in and keep the back door of your life open just a little bit so Satan can get in. You need to listen to the Holy Spirit’s work in your life. If you do, what is the promise? You are going to be victorious. He says, I will give some of the hidden manna to you. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

We cannot follow Jesus’ authority in our lives without the work of the Holy Spirit. That’s how we resist temptation. That’s how we resist the things that creep into our life. We stay in tune. How do we do that? We read God’s Word. We stay connected to the vine by reading God’s Word. Listening and following the authority of Jesus, listen, will cost you something, but look at what it will gain in the end. That is Jesus’ voice to the church in Pergamum and I believe Jesus’ voice to the church in America. Listen, it will cost you something to come under the authority of Jesus Christ. It will cost you something today in 2018 if you listen to God’s Word and live your life on that absolute truth and standard of Jesus Christ. It will cost you relationships. It will cost you probably your position. It will cost you power at times. There are guys in my life that lost their jobs because they took a stand for what is right. They did not compromise.

There are students, high school students, and middle school students across our city taking a stand for Jesus Christ in their school, and they are getting persecuted for it. They are losing relationships. They might be losing a position on the team. They are looked down upon. Jesus says, when you turn your feet toward following Jesus, guess what? It will cost you something, but listen, the best is yet to come. You will get the hidden manna. You will get the white stone, and you will get a new name. What does that mean? First of all the hidden manna, the manna goes all the way back to Exodus. There is a story in Exodus where they are exiting Pharaoh in Egypt, and they are going to the Promised Land. As they are out there wandering in the wilderness because of Moses’ sin, they are wandering in the wilderness, and they begin to complain.

God, here we are. We are following what You told us to do, and yet You leave us out here in the wilderness with no food. Great. How does that mean You are going to provide for us? God creates bread and honey and allows it to fall from the sky, and that’s manna. They take some of that manna and hide that in the Ark of the Covenant as a remembrance of God’s provision. As a remembrance that God took care of us, out of remembrance that God will take care of us. So, Jesus is saying, for those that are victorious, for those that overcome, I am going to take care of you. You need to trust me. You need to believe in me. You need to follow my authority of Scripture, and when you do, there will be a day you pass from this life to the next, and you will be with me forever. You will see the true bread of life. I will stand with you. I will tell you, you have done a great job my faithful servant. You get to be ushered into heaven through the presence of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is saying, it’s hidden now, but someday soon you will see it fully on the other side. Then he talks about a white stone. What does a white stone mean? In the Roman Empire, they had these unbelievable races, and everyone would come out, kind of like a Broncos game on a Sunday. Everyone would tune in and watch. Thousands upon thousands of people would come out, and these athletes who would run these races were big celebrities in Rome at that time. They would run these races, and those that would overcome and become victorious and cross that finish line first, one of the officials in the king’s palace would hand them a white stone, and what that white stone meant was that was your invitation to come to an unbelievable feast in your honor, and so Jesus is saying this, when you accept Christ, when you begin to follow me, I give you a white stone.

You are invited to a feast someday in eternity that will be unlike any other, and nothing this world offers will come close to that celebration on the other side. When I lay out the feast for you, and we get to celebrate with brothers and sisters in Christ who have given their lives for the cause, for the name and fame of Jesus, guess what? I’m giving you a white stone and at that table there is a place marked for you, and it’s right there waiting, and Jesus gives us that invitation today.

And the third thing that he gives us is a new name, and this is perhaps the most intimate reward there is. It’s something just between you and Jesus. He gives you a new name. When you accept Christ into your life, guess what? You are given a new name. You don’t know what that is. You don’t know what that means, but Jesus does. You get a new identity that’s found in Jesus Christ, and so when I accepted Christ, Jesus gave me a new name, and when I get to heaven, Jesus is going to show me that name, and I’m going to go, that doesn’t -- I don’t know what that means, and when I stand before Jesus, it will all make sense. He’s going to show me that new name, and he’s going to say, here’s why I have given you that new name because your identity has changed. You are no longer -- your name is no longer found in the world. Your name is found in Jesus Christ.

Your new name is all together different. You are no longer defined by what you have done, by what you have tried to become. You are defined by what Jesus has done for you. You are cleaned. You are loved and most importantly, listen to this, you are forgiven because of the name Jesus places over each one of our lives. When we reject the world’s counterfeit authorities and trust Jesus’ authority, the best is yet to come. So I want to ask you today, if you have found and followed Jesus, you are a follower of Jesus Christ today and you are sitting here in this room, I want to ask you a couple of questions. You may say, Kip, I remember the name, and I understand that my name has been changed, but I’m just allowing subtle
drift to creep into my life.

I began to compromise my life in ways that seem small, but over the course of time, it feels like I’m a hundred miles away from hearing God’s voice. That may be bitterness and resentment toward a past relationship, or this, you may know that the Holy Spirit is speaking into your life about sharing the Gospel with someone, that neighbor that lives across the street that you watch college football with or do play dates with or hang out with your kids with. Like the Holy Spirit has been prompting you to share the Gospel with them, but you are so concerned about losing that relationship and the fear of what could become if you step into that, that you just don’t do it.

Or some of you today, there is just moral sin that is beginning to trap your life. Some of you are struggling with pornography or texting someone who you know is the beginning of destroying your marriage. You are caught in some type of sexual sin, and what started out just as a small little thing, now has brought guilt and shame and you feel like God is disappointed. Maybe some of you are remembering that you have been handed that white stone from Christ. You have been given a new name, and you know that your identity is found in Christ, but guess what? You feel like when you get to heaven you are not going to be invited to the party because your self worth is wrapped up in everything you do, or what you are trying to become, or that you owe Jesus something. That, that idea of forgiveness is so difficult to wrap your heart around because of something that was said to you when you were younger or something that happened to you, or something that you feel you have become and your identity is wrapped around in that, and you feel like, I’m not good enough to go to that party.

Others of you today are coming alive to the realization that you have never been given that white stone. You have known of Jesus as a historical figure. You like the idea and values of Jesus. And you have spent some of your life coming to church and been in and out of different things, and your life and your name is defined by brokenness and resentment and bitterness and so you have said, I have never been given that white stone, and I want you to know today that you can get that white stone given to you by Jesus today by placing your faith and trust in him alone for eternal life. That you pray and you say Jesus, I believe in you. I trust in you, and regardless of all of the baggage that I have come in here today with, I want that white stone. I want to accept you. I want to begin to follow you. I want to know that I’m forgiven. You can have that today. Would you pray with me?

If that’s you today and you are saying to Jesus, I want to know you. I want to begin a relationship with you. I want to have a place at the table and right now I don’t have that place, then you cry out to Jesus, and you say a prayer like this to him right now. Jesus, I believe in you. I believe that you died on the cross and you rose from the dead, and you offer the free gift of eternal life and forgiveness for my sin. Jesus, I turn from my sin. I begin to follow you, and I sign the title of my life over to you. If you said that prayer today, Jesus is handing you a white stone, and nothing that this world can offer you will come close to how Jesus will begin to transform your life and change it, and for those of you who have found and follow Jesus, Jesus is holding that white stone up in front of you today and saying, your identity is changed. You are not a child of this world anymore. You are a child of the King. You will sit at my right hand someday in eternity. Remember, do not give your life over to counterfeit authorities. Trust the one authority that will change your life and be with you for eternity. Amen.

If you have trusted Christ today for the first time, right in front of you, there is an “I Said Yes” card. Take that and fill it out and get it to our Guest Services or text in the number, but whatever you do, we would love to connect with you and give you next steps in how you can continue your relationship with Jesus Christ. I would just ask this, can we celebrate what Jesus has done today? Amen.