In college I remember being asked if I wanted a copy of a Spanish test in advance. The person invited me to come over and get the copy the night before the exam. I walked over to his dormitory and I walked around it once, and I walked around it twice, and I walked around a third time. I was contemplating whether it was worth compromising my integrity over a grade. As I walked I remembered the story of my grandfather who found a large sum of money at the depth of the Great Depression; his company was going bankrupt; the money could have sustained it for a while; but he chose to turn it in to the police. He walked around the police station three times before he turned it in. Seems it was the payroll for a job site and it would have meant the workers would not receive their pay if my grandfather didn’t turn the money in. I remembered that story and I knew what I must do. I turned away, walked back to my dorm room studied on my own, and got a B rather than an A. (Should have studied more and walked around that dormitory less!). Compromise is a slippery slope that leads to hell. It is the camel’s nose under the tent flap; the more you compromise, the more of the camel you get…and one day you have no integrity left and are no better than the world. Today’s sermon in the series, “Jesus’ Letters to the Church”, is His letter addressed to the church at Pergamum; it is a critical letter about compromising with the culture around you. This is a real letter written to a real church and it is a real letter written by Jesus to a real church, The Church of the Covenant, today.

Pergamum had a large temple dedicated to Zeus from the days when it was a Greek kingdom. The Romans then built a large temple dedicated to Emperor worship. In ancient Rome by the time of the Caesars they weren’t just despot s they considered themselves to be divine. There was a large temple dedicated to the worship of Augustus Caesar in Pergamum. The earliest Christian confession of faith is that, “JESUS is Lord.” Yes, HE is; HE is Lord and HE is Savior; HE is the only SON of the One True and Living God. But this spoken confession of faith was diametrically opposed to Emperor worship which demanded every person in the Empire confess that, “Caesar is Lord.” You can’t have JESUS as Lord and something else as LORD. You have to decide WHO is the Lord of your life? If not then you’re compromised and compromising. And Jesus either IS or is NOT the Lord of your life. Contemplate that today…

Jesus notes in His letter to the church at Pergamum: “But I have a few things against you; you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam…” (Revelation 2: 14) Balaam is the one referenced in the Old Testament book of Numbers (chapter 22) who induces the people of God to deal treacherously with the Lord, to “begin to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab.” (Numbers 25: 1) This harlotry is to go after other gods; to worship the One true and Living God of Israel but also to let other gods into one’s heart. Let us cover all the bases; let’s worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, but let us also worship the gods of Baal. ; we want to be syncretistic in our spirituality. We don’t want to have to pick and choose, we would rather compromise with the world. We don’t want to be narrow-minded; we want to be all-inclusive
of many gods. Broadminded; people well-thought of by the world. Because that’s who the world wants us to be –compromised and compromising. Worshiping the idols of this world instead of the One True and Living God. That’s what Jesus had against Pergamum and that’s what Jesus has against America today.

Did you know that they are setting up representations of the gate into the temple of Baal in places like New York City and Washington, D.C.? True. The Arch of Baal used to be in Palmyra, Syria. Baal is the Canaanite God of the Middle East who is the god of pleasure and success and who demands child sacrifice. The best depiction of Baal is rendered in the story of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in Israel as they fought against Elijah the prophet. (I Kings 17 ff.) When Israel began rejecting the God of Israel and running after other gods, the god they included in their Pantheon was Baal. His was the throne of satan. It was with Baal they played the harlot and turned step by step into idolatry and apostasy. It was the camel with its nose under the tent flap, a slippery slope eventually leading to the rejection of God. So Elijah the prophet confronts the 450 prophets of Baal. And in the confrontation between the God of Israel and Baal Elijah cries out: “Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that Thou, O Lord, art God, and that Thou hast turned their hearts back.” (I Kings 18: 37) Baal’s offering is rejected; Elijah’s offering is consumed by an all-consuming holy fire. The compromised and compromiser’s offerings were rejected; Elijah’s received. And when the people saw it they cried out, “The Lord, He is God. The Lord, He is God.” (v. 39) Jesus is Lord; Jesus is Lord!

Why can we set up an Arch to Baal on the Mall in Washington, D.C., surrounded by the sublime monuments of our nation, the Washington monument, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, but we cannot set up a cross there? Why are we setting up an Arch to Baal at the foot of the World Trade Center in New York City, at a place where we should be seeking to return to the One True and Living God who alone can save and protect us? Why are we taking down crosses while simultaneously setting up Arches to Baal? What does that show of our character? What does that reveal about the heart of our nation?

It may just be the nose of the camel, but soon we get the entire camel. It may well be the slippery slope that drops us into the abyss. Either Jesus is Lord. Or Baal is Lord. Or Caesar is Lord. Jesus writes to the church at Pergamum –“Repent then...He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...” (Revelation 2: 16-17) Jesus alone is LORD. Return to HIM as our first love. Compromise in the essentials of faith opens portals of evil into one’s life and into one’s church; it is like the Arch of Baal inviting God to leave and Baal to enter in. And there are many people today who would hate me and persecute me for daring to publicly state that Jesus alone is Lord. And with Him there is no compromise. It is Jesus afterall who would not compromise His truth and who went to the cross for us and for our salvation. He would not compromise with the world but by that act we have been saved! Jesus is Lord! And the Lord He is God! Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!