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Series: For the Time is Near  
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**What Happens in Pergamum, Stays in Pergamum**  
**Revelation 2: 12-17**

We are in Revelation, chapter 2, covering verses 12-17. We are now at the church of Pergamum. We're taking a little trip. We've gone from Ephesus, last week, about 35 miles north along the coast to Smyrna, and now we're going about 15 miles northeast inland to the city of Pergamum. The title of this morning's message is: *What Happens in Pergamum, Stays in Pergamum*. Let's read:

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

***<sup>13</sup> "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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> 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.'***

[Prayer] *Father, we come at this moment thankful for Your truth, and hopeful that You will speak to us this morning. Lord, whatever is taking place in our lives that we're finding difficulty overcoming, You will help us understand that running away is no answer. Sweeping it under the rug, isn't either. Nor is turning a blind eye to it. I pray that You would help us understand that You require of us the dealing of such things, and the repentance from them, and a turning to You. Your promise to us is that we will be with You, and that You have a special name for us, and that serves as a ticket for entrance into Your presence for eternity. So Father, we come to You this morning with hope, and expectancy that You will speak to us this morning and help us to look to You, the Author and Perfector of our faith, to walk us through difficult times. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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So, *What Happens in Pergamum, Stays in Pergamum*. Now, some things that I want to go over prior before going into our text, which will kind of set it up. There are a few things as we read there that come to mind, and that is the spirit of giving up. I believe that that needs to be addressed today and be done with. Too many people find it too easy to leave when the going gets tough, or simply because they don't like something. It's not because they've found offense, but it's because simply, "I don't like it, so I'm walking away." You don't have to look too far for examples. You can look at marriages, families breaking up due to divorce, employers who find loyalty and longevity in employees as something of the past. It's no longer just about, "You know what? This is about as far as I can go here." (I'm talking about employment) Now, it's, "I just don't like *you*. I just don't like *this*. I don't like the fact that I don't have the liberty to \_\_\_\_\_." And then you're out the door, giving up.

Compromise. On the other hand, there are too many people who believe, "If you can't beat them, then join them!" And that's to one degree or another, true. Unfortunately, we see that within the church. That's something that is addressed here to the church in Pergamum.

We also see the spirit of just, "I'm going to ignore, and turn a blind eye to all that is going on and allow compromises to happen all around me, and say that it's for the sake of happiness and for the sake of keeping the peace." We find that happening all too often, as well. That was addressed here by Jesus Christ, Himself. All of this was happening, and then Jesus sent this letter to Pergamum to warn the church of the dangers of not dealing with serious sins that were happening there. It wasn't just, "Hey, listen, you might want to take care of this because it's really going to affect your fellowship." No! Remember that Jesus can extinguish the lampstand, the light. He can do that and we learned that as we went through chapter one. It wasn't just a gentle warning that spoke of the fact that, "Yeah, you can continue to go on with this, but it could *kind of* mess you up as a church." No, no, no. Listen, this is a stern warning to the church. They were not to give up. They were not to compromise. They were not to ignore the sins, but deal with them. Jesus considered those people who *do* deal with the sin regardless of the persecution that they were experiencing and enduring. He considered them "conquerors" and for them He has this beautiful promise that we just read in this section.

Now, this city is 15 miles northeast of Smyrna. It didn't have the commercial trade power of Smyrna, or Ephesus. but what it lacked in that, it made up in historical greatness. It was considered the greatest city of Asia Minor. In fact, it was the capital city of Asia Minor and it enjoyed this title for over three hundred years at the time that John wrote Revelation.

Pergamum had certain claims to fame, and all the world knew that very well. It housed one of the most famous libraries having over 200,000 books. This was before the printing press was invented. When every single book had to be written out, copied by hand.

Pergamum was a city that was noted for it's culture and education, but it was also a city that was known to be extremely religious. In fact, it had numerous temples to Greek and Roman gods. This is all to put this in context. We need to learn a little bit more about Pergamum in order to understand this letter that Jesus wrote to this church. The church was in the midst of this with numerous temples to Athena, Demeter, Dionysus, and Zeus, as well as having three temples dedicated to the worship of the Roman emperor, or as we noted last week, Caesar worship. It was here that the temple that worshiped Caesar Augustus was erected. So Smyrna may have had the first one to the worship of Caesar, but this one was specific to Caesar Augustus.

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And then there was the worship of Asklepios, who was the god of healing. Maybe some of you are familiar with and have read about this god of healing. People from all over the ancient world would make this pilgrimage to Pergamum and specifically to the center of worship where there were medical wards and medical schools. It had its priests, and devoted followers.

Jesus identified this city as the city "where Satan's throne is." I believe it's because this city was holding the attention and distracting the people away from the one true God. You see, all this was a distraction. There were multiple gods throughout the city, and you could worship any one of them, or all of them. You definitely had to worship Caesar. Remember that pinch of incense that you were to burn at the altar? It was a requirement once a year. It was all a distraction to get people's attention away from the one true God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now, this Asklepios was known as Asklepios Soter, or Asklepios the Savior. The title of "*Savior*", uniquely and exclusively, we would all agree, belongs to Jesus Christ. And the application of this title to this god was basically a perversion, a satanic perversion of the truth. You might be familiar with the emblem of Asklepios. It was the serpent on the pole. In fact, that is still the medical emblem today. But let me give you a little background with this one here. We know that the serpent, or the snake, is intimately connected with one of the ways that cures were effected in that time, if you read through and understand the history and worship of Asklepios.

Do any of you really hate snakes? I know my wife does. This will really freak you out if you don't like snakes. The Asklepeion was the temple of Asklepios and it was in this temple that people who were suffering would come and would be allowed to spend the night in the darkness of the temple. As they were going to sleep, a bunch of slithering snakes would be let out into the temple. It was believed that if you were just touched by one of these snakes, then you were touched by god and it would bring health and healing. Now these snakes were supposedly tame, harmless snakes. I know a lot of people would say, "There's no such thing! Just get them away from me!"

For anyone who had any knowledge of the Old Testament, the serpent was an emblem of Satan himself. All you have to do is go back to Genesis and the sin in the Garden of Eden with Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. And in so many ways this city could be considered the place where Satan's throne is, and also this is where there was a church. God didn't remove this church from being in the midst of all of this that was going on. It remained right there! This was the church that Jesus wrote to.

I say all of this, because I sincerely believe that we are in that place. Not specifically Riverside. I believe the United States and the international community has shrunk in size because of the technology that we have. So now we have knowledge and know about so many things that are going on throughout the world. We can even participate in what's going on across the world through technology in real time.

The need to worship and be healed is still going on today. It may not be sleeping in a temple and hoping that a snake would touch us and that the healing touch of God would bring healing and health, but there are still today books, programs, and potions that are selling very well. Temples of various gods are going up all over the world.

I've heard it said, and this is true to a certain extent, that there are these temples that are found in different major cities throughout the United States. You might be familiar with them. They cost millions of dollars. There

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are people who invest their lives, their blood, and their sweat to making sure that they go up. There are these small groups that call on the masses to be devoted followers of them. They are assigned specific colors, and specific chants, and even names. We're in the football season so we could be talking about football, or it could be baseball, it could be soccer.

In fact, soccer is the biggest international sport. You think that Angel or Dodger Stadium is packed out, you should see these soccer stadiums! I could say that there are hundreds of thousands in the stadium, as well as outside. They're crazy fans!

But to some people, that's their worship. They know more about baseball, football, soccer, or anything else, than they do about the apostles of the Bible, than God Himself, than Jesus Christ who offers salvation. They know more about the stats of their beloved players than they do about creation and the beginning, or of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Elijah. I'm not poking fun at just that. There could be so many different ways, and different things that we could be worshiping all over the world today.

Jesus said, "***I know where you dwell...***". Now I want to just briefly talk about this word *dwell* because it's important for us to understand the difference in Jesus' use of the word here, as opposed to how it applies to believers in other parts of the Bible. Normally the word *dwell* is addressed to the Christian in the Bible meaning "strangerous, or sojourner, a pilgrim." You're just coming through, your final destination is not here but you have a different home. We can refer to 1 Peter 1:17 or Hebrews 11:9, and it means to have a temporary residence. But the word that's used here is not, (and I'll say it in the Greek) *peroikein*, but *katoikein*, which is used to mean "residence in a permanent and settled place." "What does that mean, Pastor?" Here's what it means: Jesus was basically saying to the church in Pergamum, "I know that you're living in a place where the influence and power of Satan is thick and exists in every corner, but you are not to leave. You are to continue living there. You cannot run to a place where it's easier to live as a Christian. *You* are what happens in Pergamum, and *you* stay in Pergamum." Remember the spirit of running away, of giving up so easily, of going where it's easier? "I find it difficult here in Riverside. I find it difficult here, where ever it is. God is saying to these people in Pergamum, "Stay. This is where you're going to stay."

I love the story that William Barkley writes and yet it is not his story.

*"Kipling has a poem entitled, "Mulholland's Contract". Mulholland was a cattleman on a cattle boat. His place was in the great hold where the cattle were carried. There came a terrific storm at sea; the cattle broke loose; in their terror they were stampeding and trampling everywhere; and it seemed certain that Mulholland would be killed beneath their flailing hooves. So Mulholland made a contract with God:*

*An' by the terms of the Contract, as I have read the same,  
If He got me to port alive I would exalt His Name,  
An' praise His Holy Majesty til further order came.*

*Miraculously Mulholland was preserved. When he reached shore alive, he was prepared to fulfill his part of the contract. His idea was to quit the cattle boats and to preach religion "handsome an' out of the wet." But God's word came to him:*

*I never puts on My ministers no more than they can bear.*

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*So back you to the cattle-boats and preach My gospel there.*

*It was Mulholland's duty, not to seek an easier sphere to be Christian, but to be a Christian exactly where God had set him."*

I love that story! He was ready to fulfil his contract, to quit and go be a minister. But God says, "We'll have none of that. You minister. You do the work that you need to do right there in that cattle boat."

And it's in this place and with this perspective that Jesus has this message for the church in Pergamum. It's with this that He gives his affirmation. But with that affirmation, He also gives an accusation. And it was with that accusation, He very gracefully and mercifully, gives an admonition.

### An Unyielding Faith – Affirmation (v. 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.*** In the midst of this spiritual tension and personal physical danger that they were in on a regular basis, the brothers and sisters in Pergamum were holding fast to their faith. They're proclamation of Jesus Christ was still at that point, loud and clear. So Jesus praises these Christians, these brothers and sisters for not going soft in worshiping Him.

I thought about how perhaps the church is going soft. Oh, we are true to God within the walls of the church, and we sometimes (I pray we always do, and it really doesn't matter if you're off key) sing loud to the Lord. It's just between you and Him. Don't worry about the person in front of you. We can do that here but are we doing that outside of this place, of this building, of this gathering? They were, and for that they were being encouraged. They were being affirmed.

Jesus makes reference to this one man, Antipas. He called him, titled him with "my faithful witness". By the way, this is the same reference that Jesus was given in Revelation 1:5. Outside of this mention Antipas was not known. He was an obscure figure in the history of humanity, but not in the realm of eternity. These are the ones overlooked by man but not overlooked by the Lord. It really doesn't matter if you're known or not known. Are you faithful to proclaiming, not shying back or withdrawing from being a faithful witness to Jesus Christ outside and in the world, in your neighborhood, in your workplace, in your home? Antipas was martyred and he was considered to be faithful. In fact he fulfilled the meaning of his name, which means "against all". Against all that is not of God. Against all that is not in line with the truth. Against all that is an offense to the Creator. He fulfilled the meaning of his name.

Matthew 12:30, Jesus speaking, says, ***"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."*** It is certainly true of the person who does not abide in Christ at some point or another, they scatter. You cannot be lukewarm or sitting on the fence for very long because at some point you will be tested, and you will scatter if you are not truly with the Lord. Jesus spoke of that: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." These Christians were receiving this commendation from Jesus for gathering with Him, remaining faithful and loyal to Him in their worship in the midst of such a spiritually turbulent city.

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Do you feel like your living in spiritually turbulent times? I do! Just look around you and think about what's going on. Maybe the thought that you have are, "I'm a Christian, I'm a faithful Christian who proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ and I get so much opposition." But that's ok! Because Jesus said and warned that that would indeed be the case with those who are His children.

Now here's a few questions for you. These need to be honest questions. Would you be commended for your faith? Is it loud and clear in it's life and proclamation? Or is it tucked away and dormant, saved for Sunday worship only? Those are questions that we need to be asking because God calls us to live out in the open and that we would proclaim Him to anyone who's willing to hear and see us be a witness.

### A Compromised Church – Accusation (vv 14-15)

Secondly, He doesn't just leave us with just a word of encouragement. He goes to a word of accusation. A compromised church is what we see here in verses 14 and 15: ***"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. <sup>15</sup> So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans."***

They may have been faithful, but these Christians in Pergamum were not faultless. Maybe Satan thought that he could destroy them by coming in as the roaring lion through persecution, but instead he realized that they were staying faithful and he came in as the slithering serpent to destroy them from within. He was the deceiving serpent who infiltrated the sacred ranks of the church to destroy them from the inside out. Jesus warned them. The apostle Paul, as he would leave the churches, would also warn of these truths; that this was going to happen. He still warns us today.

We learned about the Nicolaitans as we went through the letter to the church of Ephesus. These who were a people who "lorded it over the people". In fact *Balaam* means the same thing, which is interesting. This is what they were doing as this group was leading some astray, but they were not being dealt with.

This reference to holding the teaching of Balaam is referring to Numbers, chapters 22-25. Balaam was a prophet who prostituted his gifts for money from King Balak. King Balak had hired the prophet Balaam to cast curses upon the Israelites. God prevented that from happening and instead of casting these curses upon the Israelites he [Balaam] actually spoke blessings upon them. So this upset King Balak and yet there was this one thing that Balaam had told King Balak, which he took to heart and actually followed through with this. He actually suggested that King Balak and his people befriend the Israelites. He did that and infiltrated their ranks. They were friends with them. The Israelites fell right into the trap. In time, the Israelites joined in pagan worship eating food sacrificed to idols and practicing sexual immorality. It was due to this disobedient compromise that 24,000 Israelites died in judgment in Numbers 25:1-9.

The same things were happening to the church of Pergamum. This was the teaching and these things were being allowed, unfortunately, *within* the church as they were ignored and not dealt with. They were being, you could say, swept under the rug, turning a blind eye to these things and God was saying that it was not good to that and allow it to continue. Remember "the words of Him who has a sharp two-edged sword." Remember

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how it is that Jesus identified Himself, and introduced Himself to you because that would come up again. If there is sin within the church, the church is required to deal with sin. Sometimes it just is not received very well.

1 Peter 4:17: **"For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"** He's saying there, "Hey, listen. Judgment has to start here because the church has to be purified. It has to be holy. But if judgment starts here at the church, what about those who are not Christians? Oh, how severe the judgment will be! And we know that the judgment is eternal. Eternal separation from the Lord.

### The Path to Victory – Admonition (vv 16-17)

Thirdly, we have this admonition and this is the path to victory. In verse 16-17: **"Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> 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."** What Jesus is giving them is: "Listen, Yes, I understand this is how you are faithful, and I want to encourage you in that, but I have these few things against you." He lists them out and they are specific. They know exactly what it is that they are being accused of, the things that they are guilty of. They know very well what's going on. But He doesn't leave them there. He says, "But this is the answer to it all." He doesn't say much. "Here's what you do: repent."

"We are living in Sin City, what can You expect? Especially, I have this nature about me, God, You know from 'The Fall', and now we live in this and it's just bombarding my thoughts, and therefore..." No! Jesus said one thing, one word, and He still speaks to us today in the same way. Repent! What does it mean? *Repent*. It means turn from your sins! That's it. Period.

Sometimes we sound like these whiny kids that simply in the end just want their own way. "Oh, just five more minutes. Just ten more minutes. Just until..." We sound the same way. I say that from experience because we have boys! "When I was a child I felt like a child, I acted like a child." [paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13:11] But church, it's time to grow up, isn't it? Time to grow up! And grownups in the Lord will listen to Jesus.

Those who are abiding in Christ will look at this and say, "What does He say to me here? I'm faithful in these things, but I'm guilty of these. So what am I to do. Five more mins...ten more minutes? Or am I to just simply say, 'This is what's required of me: Forgive me, Lord. I am guilty of those things. I ask for Your grace to come upon me and I ask that You would help me as I turn from those things that offend You.'" That's the path to victory, quite simply put. He desires that we walk in victory with Him.

He says, "Repent! If not, here's the consequence." He will come in judgment according to His word. The church is to repent of the sin of compromise of not doing anything about the sin in the church. "There's sin. I know it's in the church and they're turning a blind eye. They're sweeping it under the rug." Jesus was saying, "Repent of that! You need to deal with these situations! And if you don't take care of this then I'm going to come and I will bring judgment."

Now the appeal is not necessarily just to the church corporately, but we need to break it down a bit further. Because notice that he says, **"<sup>17</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the**

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**one who conquers...**" He's speaking to individual because the church will not be standing with you on the day that you face the Lord. It's going to be you answering for yourself. "But the church...but we...but pastor..." No! It's not going to be like that. It's your responsibility. Once you're taught, once you know the Word, once you understand, once you've seen what the Lord requires of you, it is *you* who will be held accountable, not anyone else. So repent! Turn and in this manner, conquer!

This "**hidden manna**" is a beautiful reference to the bread of life. Would you like to partake of the bread of life? This bread of life, this manna, was held in the ark of covenant that was also known to be the throne of God. It's in direct contrast to eating the things sacrificed to idols, and the perverted location where they lived physically; where Satan's throne was. It's in direct contrast so He's laying it out for us, right before us, in this section to the church in Pergamum; but also to us, to this church today, this morning, in this moment. As Christians, we are to partake of the bread of life and be in the presence of the throne of God.

Warren Wiersbe said of this "**white stone**": "*In those days, a white stone was put into a vessel by a judge to vote for acquittal for a person on trial. It was also used like a ticket to gain admission to a feast.*" So you can see spiritually, it was fitting in both of these senses.

First, we have this white stone that will be given to us and the only one that will know the name of that stone is the one who receives it. What is this name? It's not going to be *Raul*, it's not going to be *Betina*. It's going to be this name that the Lord is giving to us. Not from our earthly parents, but from our heavenly Father. We will know.

Second, with this stone and with our name written in the Book, comes our entrance; our ticket, to enter into the Lord's presence. I'm reminded of the story of the one who did not have wedding clothes on that was found within the gathering and was cast out [Matthew 22:1-14]. That reference in that story is actually a story of heaven. The wedding clothes is the blood of Christ covering us. Those are our wedding clothes.

There is this path to victory and it's found in one word: repent. So *what happens in Pergamum, stays in Pergamum*. It does in so many different ways. You see, while on earth we are not to have that spirit of running away, of giving up, of turning a blind eye, of sweeping things under the rug. That is not an adult way to take care of things. It just isn't. When we were kids that's what we used to do—ignore, not deal with it; maybe it will go away. As adults we know very well that it never goes away, does it? No! It just complicates things. It comes back! "Man! Now I need to deal with it and it is so much heavier than it was before! It is so much more difficult to deal with!" And for that, God tells us, "This is how you conquer: You repent!" That is how we conquer eternal condemnation! It's just one word! And yet, it is so difficult. Repent. Repent. Turn from your sins, ask for forgiveness. That's it.

Sin existed in the city but Jesus did not want for sin to exist in the church. The white stone of acquittal, forgiveness and God's grace, of payment paid in full by Jesus Christ. And so, although, we are to live lives that are courageous before the King, lives that are completely devoted and committed to the Lord, we are also to recognize that we are to live repentant lives each and every day. Noting that although we may be faithful to the Lord in many areas, there still remains many areas that we are not faultless in, but we are guilty of and so we need to listen. We need to be humbled before the Lord and ask for His forgiveness.



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I ask you church, is there anything in your lives that you can apply this one word to? Something that you shouldn't be sweeping under the rug, you shouldn't be ignoring, you shouldn't be turning a blind eye to. Is there one thing that you could say, "That is an offense to God and I'm going to apply that one word: repent."? Because remember, I'm speaking to the church corporately, but God is speaking to *you* individually.

He offers salvation through His Son. How do you know salvation? Repent. He is offering to you individually, forgiveness of sins. The Bible says that **"if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** (1 John 1:9) Would we be humble enough this morning to say, "Lord, I confess. I have fallen short in *this* area specifically." Remember, we're mature adults here. Children will say, "Yes, I'm sorry for everything. Now can I get that?" We need to be mature and we need to say, "Lord, in this area, I am falling short and I want to be a conqueror." If so, I would encourage you to confess that to the Lord this morning, ask for His forgiveness, and remain in that repentant position. Don't go back to the other way. Continue going in the direction of the Lord. Know that salvation comes through turning away from your sin, asking God for forgiveness, and continuing to walk toward Him. If you have any other questions in regards to salvation, I would love to talk to you. If we can pray for you, we'd love to do that. We're here for you. Let's stand up and pray.

[Prayer] *Father, it is a blessing to be encouraged by You, to be really stirred up in our faith, to know that there are some things that we are doing well in. Lord, it is also a blessing to hear those areas that we're not doing so well in. In fact, it's just a complete offense toward You. You call on us to deal with those things. I pray that this morning You would hear our confessions, that they would be genuine before You, that You would meet us right where we are, but not allow us to continue in the way we are in those sins. May we be humbled before You and would trust You to give us strength more than ever before. I pray that we would not justify or attempt to excuse anything because of the world that we live in, or the things that we are exposed to, but that You would help us to take responsibility for our own actions. I pray that we would find great joy in knowing that to him who repents You have this white stone reserved, this beautiful name for each and everyone of us, and that You desire to give us the bread of life and with it to be satisfied. One day we will feast at your table together. We look forward to that day. We thank You for Your grace. We thank You for Your faithfulness. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.*