

Rev04 – Faithful Until The End Revelation 2:8-11

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Open your Bibles. If you came in with a bit of a burden today, if you feel a little worn down and weary, a little pressed, I think God has a word for you today. Title of the message, “Faithful Until The End.” We are going back to Revelation. We are continuing the Lord’s seven letters to the seven churches. This message we do Smyrna, the suffering church.

I have to apologize right up front. Last message I was still doing introduction from Chapter 1, and so I didn’t get to do much of the history of Ephesus. I felt bad about it because it is such a cool history. And so I want to try to tell you a little bit more about the churches, as much as my short little time here will allow. In order to do that, I have to ask for your patience.

Here’s why. Some of you might be interested in getting to what you might call the “real” last day stuff. You know the stuff like in Chapter 4 where John gets raptured spiritually to heaven. But let me tell you up front today, this *is the real end times stuff*. The letters to the seven churches are the real end times stuff.

Let me tell you how. Whatever it is that all the imagery of Revelation means, it is already set. It is already set. The scroll. The bowls. The trumpets. The seals. It’s already set, what all that stuff means. But here is what it not set – you. The letters to the seven churches set you. And I don’t mean to say that your salvation is not secure, it is secure. Trust me. It’s secure. Jesus did it, he finished it, he didn’t leave it undone. But these letters are about preparing *you* for the last days. So you might be interested in knowing what all the specifics mean, but I am telling you for your own good, this is the stuff you really need to hear. So we will make a commitment to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, and then we will get to the “fun” stuff soon enough.

Let’s pray. *Heavenly Father, we pray Lord that you would speak to us today. We pray Lord that what is in your Word to the church would pierce our hearts and that we would have ears to hear what the Spirit says to us personally. That we would see Lord that you wrote to the church before the beginning of the specifics of the end times to prepare us so that we could first check our own heart. So that we could first know that we are in the right place. So that when these events begin to unfold, we will be where we need to be. I pray you would show us the priority that we need to make our own hearts right first and then we can study what you say is going to come to pass, soon and very soon. We give you our hearts today. Lord we recognize that there are areas in our hearts that need you. There are parts of our lives that you need to fill, that you need to transform that you need to strengthen and encourage. We pray that you would do that, in Jesus’ name, amen.*

So the suffering church in Smyrna. In the prophetic timeline, if you remember, we said that these seven churches kind of matched the prophetic timeline of the church age, the

period of Pentecost to the rapture. And this prophetically, the history of the church of Smyrna is the two hundred year period from 100 A.D. to 300 A.D. So the second and third centuries are where we are at prophetically.

Here's what we are going to see Jesus say to the churches. I want to tell you what Jesus is going to say to you today, and then I am going to allow him to say it. And then I am going to remind you at the end that he said it, and then I am going to ask you to receive it. Here's what he is going to say to the church.

I KNOW what you are going through.
DO NOT FEAR what is ahead of you.
BE FAITHFUL to the end.

I know, fear not, be faithful. Man, that would be a good tattoo! I know, fear not, be faithful. Be faithful until the end. And so if Jesus speaks to the church in tribulation in the first century and says these three things to them, then do you know that he is speaking to the church in this century and saying these same three things to us? Yes. He is speaking to us personally. I know. Fear not. Be faithful.

There are only two churches out of the seven that don't receive rebukes from Jesus Christ. This is one of them. And so this is a very, very special church. The church in Smyrna. No rebuke, no warning, no challenge. Why? Because they are being refined and purified in suffering. Now listen, suffering doesn't automatically refine and purify you, but if you cling to the Lord in suffering, if you walk in faith in suffering, if you trust Jesus Christ in your suffering it has a tendency to refine you and purify you. And so Jesus isn't coming with some type of an exhortation or a warning or a challenge. He is coming to support and encourage, to give assurance and a promise of an eternal reward. That's what we are going to see. If you are under pressure today, if you are in tribulation today, Jesus has a word for you

The church there in the city of Smyrna was called "the first city of Asia." I think they penned their own name, kind of like San Diego. What city just gets to say, "The finest city in America?" So kind of like San Diego says they are the finest city in America, Smyrna says they are the first city of Asia. Today there is a city called Izmir in Turkey on the beautiful spot, in this nice harbor on the coast of what then was called the Aegean Sea. Four million people in Izmir today. Less than one thousand Christians. .02% Christians. Only two Christian churches, in a city of four million people, with more than a hundred people there. Two churches, over a hundred people. So you might think the enemy has won, but he hasn't. Jesus Christ has won, even in Izmir in Turkey today.

It was a beautiful, opulent city. Just incredible. The history is a phenomenal read. But just underneath the beauty of the city lay one of the darkest, spiritual hearts in all of Asia Minor at the time. It was grotesque, the spiritual atmosphere. There were idols, of course, everywhere, and the smoke, they say, rose twenty-four hours a day from the sacrifices to

the pagan idols. But the worst of all the idols was the patron goddess of the city, Cybele. (Pronounced SIB-uh-lee.) Cybele was the mother goddess of the pagan gods. She seems to me, after reading about her, to kind of be a forerunner of “mother earth.” She was also a goddess of fertility, but a lot of the pagan goddesses were goddesses of fertility so that they could bring prostitution into the temple as an act of worship. I think the men were probably in charge of determining if the goddess was one of fertility. Listen; even to the pagans the worship of this goddess was almost disgusting. Because the worship to Cybele involved bloodshed, lots of it. It involved self mutilation, it involved self castration. It involved what’s called the “day of blood” where once a year worshippers would gather in the temple and slash themselves and then they would dance around and their blood would fly everywhere, all over the temple, all over each other, and all over the idols. Everywhere. She was a goddess of bloodshed.

And so, this laid the path, this opened the door to the mutilation and torture and murder of tens of thousands of Christians. An untold number of Christians died in Smyrna during this time, more than we could ever guess, because the city was already engrossed in this dark, evil, spiritual gross bloodshed worship. So the worship of Cybele set the stage. There was also a Jewish community. Jewish in name only, and they didn’t like the Christians. They incited riots; they stirred up with slander and malice. They stirred up the pagan culture and the government against Christians. And so eventually the Christians were regularly rounded up and brought into the great stadiums in groups. Whole families, children and all. And they would keep the wild animals in these dark halls, and they would not let them eat, and they would get them angry and hungry. And then they would bring a whole group of Christians in there, big, big groups, and then turn these wild animals loose on them and just have a great time watching them tear these Christians (including children) to shreds.

Or they would line the stadiums with Christians dipped in pitch, taken from Nero years earlier, and light them on fire around the stadium and sometimes they would do both. That was an incredibly ugly place to be as a Christian. It got to where the Christians couldn’t walk in the street because they would be mobbed by the people and beat, and murdered in the street.

This is what William Barclay, a respected commentator, says.

William Barclay *“Nowhere can life have been more dangerous for a Christian than in Smyrna . . . In Smyrna, above all places, for a man to enter the Christian Church was literally to take his life in his hands. In Smyrna the Church was a place for heroes.”*

The church was a place for heroes in Smyrna. There was no “what have you done for me lately.” It was “Am I going to be killed today for your name, Jesus?” So it was a different church. The church in Smyrna developed as this small, strong church. Because their devotion to Christ cost them everything and so their bond with Christ was unmatched.

Their devotion to Christ cost them everything and so their unity with Christ was unmatched. Because there was nothing to pull them away from their dependence on Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus doesn't have a rebuke. That is why he doesn't have a challenge or a warning. It's because these people are holding on to Christ for dear life. And in the midst of the pressure and the tribulation that they are clinging to Christ in, the enemy is using this tribulation to destroy them, but the Lord is using the tribulation to refine them, to purify them, to bring them out (as Peter says in 1Peter 1) as gold and as silver refined.

There is a lot we can learn from the suffering church. There's a lot we can learn from studying the suffering church in the first century and from studying the suffering church today.

Revelation 2:8 Jesus says,

Revelation 2:8 (esv)

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: . . .

With every letter, Jesus directs his letter to the angel of the church. Most of the scholars agree that he is referring to the messenger that he holds in his right hand from Chapter 1, most probably speaking of the pastor or leader of the church, though possibly we have dedicated angels much as we have dedicated demons. Because they are geographic in nature. We may very well have dedicated angels looking over us, but probably speaking to the messenger of the church.

This is just a good place to say that one of the most famous messengers in the church of Smyrna was one of our early church fathers named Polycarp. I had the pleasure of reading a letter about Polycarp written in the second century about his leadership and martyrdom in the city of Smyrna. It was an incredible read. Polycarp was a friend of the Apostle John in Ephesus. He was a disciple of the Apostle John, and eventually went to Smyrna which was thirty-five miles to the north of Ephesus. He became the pastor in Smyrna and eventually the bishop over those churches in the area.

And his martyrdom is one of the most famous martyrdoms in all of Smyrna in the second century. He was an incredibly godly man. They did hide him for quite some time from the Roman government. Eventually he was found and brought into the stadium to be martyred. He just stood and delivered. He just stood up to the Roman proconsul and said “Listen, there is nothing you can do to me. I have already won. My victory is assured.” The proconsul says “I will turn the wild animals loose on you.” And Polycarp says essentially, “Bring it on. There is nothing they can do to me, my Lord has already won.” The proconsul says “I will burn you then.” And Polycarp says to him “Your fire lasts but for a moment, but the eternal fire lasts for eternity and that is the fire I would be afraid of if I were you.” So the proconsul says “Light him up.” And in this letter, written in the late second century, it says “We saw the flames rise up like a sail in the wind (we would say

like a cylinder.)” The flames rose up and swirled around Polycarp and they wouldn’t burn him. And so they had a centurion come in with a sword and kill him through the flames, because the flames were just wrapped around him like bread in an oven. And the flames wouldn’t touch him. And so they had to kill him. And lastly it said that his blood actually put the flames out. It is just a phenomenal, miraculous story of the martyrdom of Polycarp.

That is the church Jesus is talking to. Can you relate? Listen you can. *You can*. There’s a pretty good chance you won’t be fed to the lions, at least for awhile in this country. There’s a pretty good chance you won’t be burned at the stake. But you can relate to the suffering church.

Again, Revelation 2:8.

Revelation 2:8 (esv)

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

Listen, the first thing Jesus does to this church is say, “I relate to you. I know what you are going through.” Here’s how he does it. First of all, he says I am the first and the last. These are words of control. It doesn’t mean Jesus had a beginning and will have an end. It’s definite. He is *THE* first. He is *THE* last. He is *THE* Alpha and *THE* Omega. The Beginning and the End, the All in All. He says I am in control.

And then look what he says there at the end of verse 8. He says, *I died and came to life*. Four Greek words make up that sentence. Listen carefully. They are “*became dead and lives*.” Became dead and lives. See Jesus is the first and the last. He didn’t have a beginning, he doesn’t have an ending. He always exists. But there was a time where he came to taste death on your behalf. There was a time when he came to experience death. And so he says I became dead but lives. Jesus Christ went to the grave for you so that you don’t have to go there. The Greek tense of the word “life” is continual. It’s present. Which means “*continual life*.” It is perpetual life. It is eternal life.

And so Jesus says listen. Number one. I am in control. I am the first and last. Number two, I became dead and I live. And the church knows what he is saying. He is saying, I did this for you. I’ve already been where some of you are going, maybe all of you. I’ve already been there, I’ve conquered it and I’m alive. And you need to hear that.

The suffering church needs to hear that Jesus Christ has already made a way. He has already made a way. Hebrews 2 says that he took on flesh so that he could die so that he could conquer the enemy of death for those of us who are slaves to death. Jesus Christ became dead so that you didn’t have to and he lives now so that you can live in him. And so when tribulation rises in your life, when the pressure gets great in your life, you can say Jesus knows. *Jesus knows*. Hebrews 4 says for we don’t have a high priest who can’t

relate, who can't understand what we are going through, but in all points has been tested – tempted, but not in the way that we think of temptation – it's tested. He's had trials, experienced everything we have experienced, yet without sin – meaning missing the mark, without failure. And so you can come to him boldly and say Jesus I know you've been there. Wherever I am at you have been there immeasurably more. I need the mercy and the grace that I can only get from you in my time of need. And he pours it out. That's what the suffering church needs to hear. They don't need to hear, "Well, you've just got to 'claim it' brother!"

Listen, you need to know Jesus is with you. You need to know Jesus has been there. And you need to know Jesus has already conquered what you face. And your only job is to cling to him in the midst of it. That's your job. It's to cling to him. To say Jesus, I know you. I know who you are; I know what you've done. I know you're the victor and my victory is in you and you alone. That is what the church in Smyrna needed to hear and that is what we need to hear. Jesus Christ identifies with your tribulation and he is there with you. He knows.

Revelation 2:9. We need to hear it so badly. Listen, haven't you ever been in that place of intense crisis with someone where you think, I don't know what to say? It's so bad. It's so bad. I've been there with some of you, and I've stood alongside of you and hopefully, prayerfully I have said to you, "Jesus knows. He knows. He is with you." That is what you need to hear and that is what you need to say to a fellow Christian. Jesus knows. He is with you. He is in the midst and he will bring you through, in this life or in the life to come.

Revelation 2:9 (esv)

9 “*I know . . .*

Seven letters, seven churches, seven times Jesus says “I know.” And to the suffering church this is the “I know” of comfort. To some of the other churches, not so much. So Jesus can either say, “I know.” Or he can say, “I know. I know what you are going through. I have been there, look. I've been there. I will carry you through it. This is not the end. This tribulation you are in, this pressure you are under, this is not the end.”

Jesus has already won the end. Your job is to stay in him until that point. Faithful until the end. If you're in tribulation today, and if you are standing firm in your tribulation, listen carefully because you do have a role in your pressure, in your tribulation. If you are standing firm in it Jesus says “I know, and I'm with you. And I'll be with you to the end.”

Jesus says, “I know.” What is it that Jesus knows? Again in Revelation 2:9 he says,

Revelation 2:9 (esv)

9 “*I know your tribulation and your poverty . . .*

If you're reading a NKJ or a King James you have two little words inserted in there after "I know" and the words are "your works." Without making a big deal of it, because it is not a big deal, it is probably best translated is without those two words. Jesus says, "I know. I know your tribulation. I know your poverty."

Jesus isn't evaluating the works of the Smyrna church. Why? Because the fires of persecution have already evaluated them. Because the pressure of tribulation is already refining them. They have nothing except Christ to hold on to. And so Jesus just comes to them and says, "I know. I know your tribulation. And I know your poverty."

That word "tribulation" here, listen this is very cool. That word "tribulation" means literally "*under pressure*." Here's where the word was first used. It was first used to describe a form of torture. Tie a person down on the ground, hands and feet to four stakes. And then you roll a huge boulder on his chest until the boulder crushes him. That's where the word originally was used. Tribulation. It means to be under extreme pressure. Jesus says, "I know the extreme pressure that you're under."

So many times Christians come to me and they say, "Yeah but does God not know? Does he not see?"

And what they really mean is "Why isn't he fixing it? Why doesn't he do what I want? Why doesn't he do what I'm telling him to do?" But what they say out of politeness is, "Does he not know? Why doesn't he hear? Why doesn't he answer?"

He knows. *He knows*. It's his character to know. He knows and he is there. He knows the pressure that you are under. That is incredibly important. "Jesus you know. You know what I am going through today. You know."

Jesus says "I know your tribulation. I know the crushing pressure that you are under."

Is it just for the believers in Smyrna? No. So many promises in the Bible, and here's one, that maybe you would rather not accept as a promise. It comes from Jesus' own lips. Two promises, actually. In John 16:33, write it down in your margin. There are two promises from the lips of Jesus himself.

John 16:33 (esv)

33 . . . In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

you will have tribulation That's a promise. That's the first promise. The second is as sure as the first, but, be of good cheer. Take heart, be strengthened. **I have overcome the world**. Jesus says, "Listen. In this world you will have tribulation. The good news is not that I will take the tribulation away, the good news is I have overcome the tribulation."

That's the really good news. It's that Jesus Christ has not come to fix your circumstances, one after another your entire life. That's not why he came. He came to overcome. He came to be victor eternally. And in him you overcome. In him, you conquer. Jesus says "**I have overcome the world.**"

And so there will be times when the situations and the circumstances feel like they are crushing you. For me it is a physical pressure. You can't catch your breath, right? And there's a knot in your stomach. And it feels like someone has rolled a big stone, a big boulder on you. It's at that time you cling to Jesus. You don't say "I know what I'm going to do. I am going to change this and change that. I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that."

No, man, just hold on. Just hold on to Jesus right there at that moment because he knows your tribulation and he has overcome it already. Do you want to know how to live in it? Here's how to live in it. Write it down. 1 John 5:4. Here's how to walk in the victory Jesus Christ has come to give you.

1 John 5:4 (esv)

4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

Our faith. It's our faith that overcomes. We don't say "Oh, I've got to fix this." Or "Oh, I've got to change this."

What you need is your faith. Your faith overcomes. Your faith in Christ overcomes. You may say, "What if I get torn to pieces by the lions?" That means you win. You win.

To walk in faith is to walk in victory. The faith is in Jesus Christ, as the Person. The Person of Jesus Christ. King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Author and Finisher of your life. The One Who is in Control. The One Who Always Exists. That's who your victory is in. Not in your circumstances. That what Jesus is saying to the church.

Now, do you want to see an apparent contradiction in the Bible? Have you ever known those smart people who say to you, "Well the Bible is full of contradictions?" And I always want to say, and I try to be polite, "Really? Show me one. Because I have twenty-five years in studying and teaching every week and I haven't found one. So if you know one, bring it on. Let's talk about it."

But next time someone says it to you, do it more politely than I would, and say, "Really? Could you show me one?"

This book is miraculous. This book has the same story from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. And there are no contradictions. There are apparent contradictions, but they are there to

make you dig in. And if you'll dig in what you'll find is a revelation and you may be astounded. Try it. It's the truth.

Here's an apparent contradiction and it's fun.

Revelation 2:9 (again) (esv)

9 [Jesus says] *'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) . . .*

Which is it? Am I in poverty or am I rich? This word is the lower of the two Greek words for poverty. It means "*abject poverty*." It's not what we think we live in, like paycheck to paycheck. This is poverty that we would apply to homeless, destitute, starving people. This is not just enough. This is not enough. The church in Smyrna because of their faith in Jesus Christ (listen carefully to me and just deal with whatever prosperity teaching you have been fed) but because of their faith in Jesus Christ they are under tremendous tribulation and they are impoverished to where they are huddled in the caverns, the catacombs. They are hiding for their lives; they can't go into the market. They can't work. And they can't go into the market to get food. And so they are just hiding. That is the church in Smyrna. That's actually the church for 200 hundred years.

Listen, this church is in abject poverty and Jesus says, (*but you are rich*) He adds a little clarifying parenthesis there. And we would say, "Hey Jesus. You must have entered the wrong Pay-Pal account number because I don't know whose account you are looking at, but I'm anything but rich."

What if Jesus has a different calculator? What if his calculator is upside down and it is opposite of this world's calculator. You know that it is. And you know that what Jesus is saying here is that you are in earthly poverty but you are eternally rich. Right? Just to see how opposite Jesus' calculator is, look at Revelation 3:17. Here's the other side of the coin. The lukewarm church, the last church, the church of the last days, that is the opposite of the persecuted church. And if you really study them you'll say, "Lord, I think I'd rather be in Smyrna, than in Laodicea. We'll get there in a few weeks. But look at this verse.

Revelation 3:17 (esv)

17 *For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.*

Jesus uses a different calculator. *He uses a different calculator.* Because we think this world is what it is about and Jesus knows better. He knows better. And he knows when it really matters that no riches in this world will count – whether you have them or don't have them – it doesn't matter because they don't count for your riches. They don't count. There is a time coming when your riches won't matter, where your circumstances on this earth won't matter. The only thing that will matter is are you rich in Christ? It's the only thing that will matter because it is the only thing that is eternal. It's the only thing you

take into eternity with you. And so Jesus looks at this persecuted church and says, “You’re rich! You’re rich because you are holding on to me. You’re holding on to me and you’ve let go the things of the world in order to gain Christ. You’re rich.”

Paul says the same thing in Philippians 3. I’ve suffered the loss. I’ve willingly thrown overboard all things that I may be found in Christ. We’re rich in Christ.

We’re wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked if all we have are the things of this world. Where you stand with Jesus Christ determines whether you are rich or wretched. *Where you stand with Jesus Christ determines whether you are rich or wretched. Be rich where it counts. Be rich where it counts.*

Jesus isn’t finished with the suffering church. Continuing in Revelation 2:9.

Revelation 2:9 (ESV)

9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

So strong Jewish community, but Jewish by name only. Do you see that? He says “They say they are Jews, but are not. Jews in name only.”

They’ve got real issues with Christians. And so they incite fear and anger and hate toward the Christians. Let me just apply this really quick.

Let’s just say that there was a group in a country that was previously Christian and let’s say they had unlimited funding from liberal celebrity stars. And let’s just say they wanted to change the culture at the very core of what that culture was. And let’s say the Christians were in the way. It is exactly what was happening in Smyrna. Exactly.

Now, in Smyrna (since it was a few years ago) the easiest way was to just kill them. And so they incited these riots and used this malicious slander to kill the Christians. What do they do today? They’re legislating Christianity out of our culture. That’s what they are doing today. Fortunately, they’re not killing us, and for that we are appreciative. But they are killing us as far as our impact on this culture. Trying to.

That’s what the Jews were doing in Smyrna. That’s exactly what is happening in our culture today. Except that they were inciting the people, the pagans, the government to actually kill the Christians. A

And so, not only being hunted by the people, but having this group that was imbedded in the trades. Some of the earliest trade unions are recorded in Smyrna, and in the Latin it is collegia. And it’s these groups of artisans. And they would worship the god of their trade. And so the Christians would come in and say they couldn’t worship the god of leather craft (for instance.) And so they would get really mad at them because they would think any misfortune was because the Christian is not making his offering to the pagan god.

And so they turned these trades groups (it's really about money) against the Christians which is why the Christians couldn't work and eventually couldn't even be in the marketplace because they would mob them, and beat them and kill them because they were afraid that the gods would be unhappy with them because they refused to make their offerings to the gods. And if I had five more minutes

I could tell you how that is exactly like this country. Listen, right now, I'm telling you the truth, I'm giving you the Reader's Digest version, this country is making it politically incorrect to believe in Jesus Christ. I told you about the athlete that was barred from a huge sports complex because he said he agreed with the Bible about marriage. They barred him. You can never come back here. We don't even want you here; you can never set foot here again. You can't come back here and compete. If you're going to agree with those Christians we can't have anything to do with you.

Listen, that is where this culture is going. "Oh, you're one of those narrow-minded racists. You're a Christian. Oh, I see. You know, we can't have you impacting our culture because you're just too narrow-minded. You won't worship the gods we worship. You won't live our lifestyle. We can't have you involved."

Do you see the connection? It is happening today in culture and media especially. Especially in media. Really? Oh, do you want to make something that has a Christian value? You'd better be a multi-million dollar church that can make your own great movie, like the Baptist church back there making those great movies. Because Hollywood is not going to make that movie. Because we can't have you pushing your godly influence on our pagan culture. We live there today!

So here's what you think now. You think, alright. Jesus is in control. He is the victor. The Christians are getting hammered in Smyrna. And if you have seen some movies you have said alright, he is going to ride in on his horse with his guns slinging. And he is going to knock out all the bad guys and he is going to save the good guys. No. No. That's not what he is going to do. Look at verse 10 of Revelation 2.

Revelation 2:10 (esv)

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation . . .

Jesus is telling the church that is already suffering, "Listen. I've got to break the news to you. The suffering and persecution is refining you and it's purifying you, but, it's not done. There's more to come." And Jesus says it's for ten days. And the simplest understanding there is it is for a short time. Jesus says I know what you are going through, do not fear what you are about to go through.

Let me ask you a question. Pick one of these two circumstances for your life. Easy circumstances. No Jesus. If you want easy circumstances with no Jesus or do you want

Jesus no matter what the circumstances are? We will have to choose. *We will have to choose.* There will be a time in our lives when we will choose. Jesus I'm standing with you no matter what my circumstances are. Or, "Jesus, really, honestly, can you just excuse me for a minute because I need to do this on my own. This thing right here I need to do without you. So if there is just any way you can just take a break for a minute, I'm going to choose easy circumstances instead of you."

That's as real as I can get, right there. Choose. Jesus says there's tribulation coming. There's a short time of tribulation coming. You want me, Jesus? Or do you want to fix your circumstances. Choose wisely and choose carefully. Only Jesus Christ will bring you true victory. Easy circumstances do not equal victory. Easy circumstances so often equal defeat because it is a broad road. Only Jesus Christ brings you true eternal riches. Why trade eternity for a measly one hundred years? If you live that long. Why trade it? Pick Jesus.

Jesus says for ten days. It may be a short time, but ironically, there were ten periods of persecution under the Roman government of the church from basically 100 to 300 A.D. There were ten periods. There were ten Roman emperors. And the last Roman emperor, the persecution under the last period, was ten years. And so there are all these tens in the two hundred year period of the persecution. But the point is that when Jesus wrote this letter, he says "You've got two hundred years of this. It's okay. It's okay. Because every time one of you leaves, you win."

At the end of that period, Constantine married the church and the state. Constantine made Christianity the state religion. Now if you think that is good, just read more history. It wasn't good. *It wasn't good.* The church was healthier under persecution than it was under state protection, by far.

But here in Revelation 2:10 Jesus says "Some of you have more tribulation to come."

He has already said two key things to these sufferers.

- 1) I know your tribulation and poverty
- 2) Do not fear what is ahead of you.

That is what he says to us today. I know what you are going through. Fear not. Don't get all worked up and start changing your own circumstances. I know. I'm with you. I've already brought the victory. And then he gives his third exhortation at the end of verse 10. He says,

Revelation 2:10(b) (esv)

10 . . . Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

I know what you are going through. Don't be afraid. Instead, be faithful. Be faithful until the end. Be faithful until death. Be faithful. Jesus says I know, don't fear, be faithful. *I know, don't fear, be faithful.*

Two things about that phrase *I will give you the crown of life*. First of all, the implication in the Greek there is that Jesus himself will give you the crown of life. "I will, I will personally place this crown upon you." The other thing that is interesting to note is it is not the crown of royalty but it is STEPHANOS, the crown of the victor. It's the victor's crown. Like running a race. The athletes were given these crowns, these wreaths and that is what Jesus is referring to. He says stay faithful, run the race and when you win I will be there at the finish line. And I will put upon you the crown of life.

The NET Bible translates verse 10 as: *I will give you the crown that is life itself.*

Jesus says, "Listen. Just hold on. You think what you are going through is everything and all that matters is your circumstances get fixed. I'm telling you I know about them, don't be afraid of what is coming, be faithful and your victory is when you see me face to face and I place on you the crown that is life itself. That is real life."

Listen, guys. Jesus wants to take you through the hard times you are in. He wants to take you through the tribulation you are in. But his job is not to just flippantly fix everything for you. He wants you for himself. He wants you to cling to him. To know that he knows, to not be afraid and to be faithful to the end. Amen!

Listen; there is only one thing that matters. Please hear me. Being faithful until the end. Be faithful until the end, man. Hold on. Jesus is worth more than just a genie to fix your circumstances. Hold on until the end. That's where the victory is at. Hold on. And Jesus himself will give you the crown that is life.

Revelation 2:11

Revelation 2:11 (esv)

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.

Listen, if you want to have an ear, you can have an ear. If you desire to hear, Jesus desires to save you.

Listen, I don't care what Rob Bell says, there is a second death. There is a second death and you want to avoid it. *You want to avoid it.* There is a second death. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. You conquer in Jesus Christ. There's an old Christian saying that says "Born once, die twice. Born twice, die once." Guys, we've got to be born again. We've got to be born again. It is the only way to avoid the second death. Jesus is talking about the eternal death, which is separation from God. That is what real death is. Because Jesus is life. He exists as life. Separation from him is death. Do you

know that darkness in and of itself doesn't exist. Darkness is the absence of light. Death is the absence of life. Jesus Christ is life. Make the connection. Separation from God is true death. We need to hear, we need to believe and receive as John 1:12 says, we need to receive Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Hear it is, what I've been telling you all morning. Jesus says to you today, if you are under the pressure of tribulation,

"I know what you are going through." And listen, you may not want to hear it, but he says "Don't be afraid of what is coming." Because it will make you crazy. It will make you make choices in the flesh and you'll follow the world and you'll go the broad way. Don't fear what is coming. Instead Jesus says, "Be faithful. Hold on to me, I'm the one that is going to bring you through this." It's not the world's ways. It's not your own clever ideas. It's Jesus Christ. He will bring you through if you hold on to him. Amen!

Let's pray. *Heavenly Father, may we have ears to hear what your Spirit says to the church. May we have ears to hear, Lord. May we know in our tribulation, in our trials and in our suffering, may we know that you know. That you've been there already for us. That you've experience it and immeasurably more on our behalf and you've conquered it. May we know that you know, and may we not be afraid. May we not look into the future and be fearful, but may we know that you have our future in your hands. And may we trust you more than we trust our own ideas or plans for our future. And please, we commit to you right now to be faithful until the end. But we know we can't do it without you. So Lord, we surrender. And we pray your life in us would cause us to be faithful to the end. We commit to choose you. We pray you would fill us with the power to be faithful.*

If you have an ear to hear, then have a heart to respond. If you would say, "Jesus, I'm afraid that might not be me." Then make a different choice today and never let it go. Respond to him right now. You can pray right now where you are at. You pray something like this.

Dear Jesus, I believe. You've touched my heart. I receive you. I believe you are who you say you are. And I believe I am lost without you. And so I jump to you. I trust you. I put my full faith, all of my faith in you. I trust you. I believe you died for my sins and I believe I will conquer in you alone. Make me a conqueror in you. In Jesus' name, amen.