

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The Church of Enduring Hope

Revelation 2:8-11

Keywords: Revelation, prophecy, End Times, Jesus Christ, Seven Churches

PowerPoint Presentation included: None

SermonAudio Blurb: In this letter to the Church at Smyrna we have the opportunity to strip aside the false trappings of how this age defines success and what a church is to be; and instead we are able to focus on what Jesus says is true about a faithful church. It is a sobering revelation but it is also a good revelation as it helps establish what any church potentially faces in its life.

I. Introduction.

- A. We continue our study of the book of Revelation here in chapter 2.
 - 1. A challenging book to study or preach through due to the many ways people approach this book.
 - 2. A key verse (1:19) that is worth pausing for a moment and consider.
 - a. This gives us a basic, broad outline of the entire book.
 - b. The things which you have seen = what John just wrote regarding the vision he first had of our risen Lord.
 - c. The things which are = these seven letters to the churches.
 - d. The things which shall take place after these things = chapters 4-22.
 - 3. This is one of many reasons why I treat these messages to the churches as first and foremost historical rather than symbolic of the various stages of church history.
- B. Read 2:8-11.
 - 1. Last week we saw the praise and yet grave warning to the church at Ephesus.
 - a. Orthodoxy never gives us the freedom to abandon the great commandment of our Lord. To love one another as He loved us.
 - b. If you consider that as you read your New Testament you will find it woven throughout the various books, manifesting itself in so many different ways.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- c. Example in Ephesians 4 where we are commanded to preserve the unity we have in the Holy Spirit. This, beloved, cannot be done without actively seeking a biblically informed love for one another.
 2. Today we will see that tribulation and suffering is a natural part of a normal church's experience and it is to be seen in light of God's sovereignty and our spiritual good.
- C. Smyrna.
1. In the nation of modern Turkey there is a city named Ismir, a large city of over 2 million.
 2. In A. D. 95 it was a city of about 100,000 and was known as Smyrna.
 - a. Interestingly the name means "bitter" which certainly fits the life of the church there. Also, the word "myrrh", associated symbolically in the New Testament with weeping, burial, and resurrection, is related to the name of this city: Smyrna.
 - b. Because of its location, possessing an excellent natural harbor, it was a wealthy city.
 - c. Like most cities in that part of the world, conflict was a way of life.
 - d. The city in John's time was one established by the successors of Alexander the Great. Later it entered into a close relationship with the Roman empire, which built honored it in A.D. 26 by exalting it over the other cities in the area by building a major temple there.
(Thomas, p. 159)
 - e. It was known as the "beauty of Asia" due to location and the nature of the city's structural development.
 - f. More interestingly is that of the seven churches in Revelation, it is the only church that still exists. Not only exists, but thrives. The modern city of Ismir has a large population of Christians.
- D. The structure of the passage is one of a series of contrasts:
1. Poor but really rich.
 2. Those who claim to be Jews but are not.
 3. Faithful to death and you will have life.
- E. By now it is likely many of you already see the dominating theme for this church—tribulation and suffering.

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

1. Today I want us to see the situation into which Jesus is sending this letter to this church. It is a hard message but also an important one.
2. The goal for Missio is to understand the reality of tribulation, the presence of God in the midst of hardships and suffering, and the hope that causes us to endure to the end.

II. The Church of Enduring Hope.

A. The trouble.

1. As already stated, the trouble is a church that is well-acquainted with suffering. Notice in vs 9 how this is delineated: Three bullet-like terms:
 - a. Tribulation.
 - b. Poverty.
 - c. Blasphemous slander.
2. And in these terms, if you sit back and think on them you get a real sense of a church under attack from every side and in every way.
 - a. Before going on let me simply ask you to think about how you would frame your prayers if you were this church? Or if you heard of this church and its hardships?
 - b. Form your thoughts quickly and then consider what is said in the rest of this sermon.
3. Tribulation.
 - a. One of the most common terms to describe sufferings and as a result is very broad in its meaning.
 - b. You find it used to describe the horrors and calamities connected to wars, of the hardships of giving birth and commonly of persecutions, especially those Christians find themselves in the midst.
 - c. In the context of this short letter the tribulations they suffering are primarily in the form of persecutions by non-Christians.
 - d. Instead of trying to identify the various ways they are suffering it is best to leave it vague and open-ended for it gives the reality they were facing much greater impact in our thinking.
 - e. They are a church that knows tribulation and are well acquainted with persecution.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

4. Poverty.
 - a. Two words that mean poor.
 - (1) One speaks of one who has nothing superfluous. This is what Americans think poverty is.
 - (2) This one speaks of one who has nothing at all. This is what is meant by most of our world when they think of poverty. And this is what is used by John.
 - b. There was a true and definite cost to claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ in this city. Jobs and business opportunities were lost.
 - c. It would not be uncommon for them to endure unfair and even illegal seizures of money and property simply because they were pushed to the edges of the society. In that day they would be excluded from the trade guilds and so they could not make a living.
 - d. Many can endure various hardships but abject poverty is a true trial of the deepest sort.
 - (1) It is not just the lack of basics, but it also entails the inability to even improve your situation.
 - (2) Perhaps you might think that this is still not too bad, but imagine you hold your precious child who is lying near death because of insufficient food.
 - (3) And all you have to do is deny Christ to fix the situation.
5. Blasphemous slander.
 - a. This evil speech was directed to these Christians from unbelieving Jews. “Say they are Jews.”
 - (1) They were Jewish in their heritage but not in their faith. Their Messiah had come and they rejected Him and even nailed Him to the cross.
 - (2) And now, fifty years later, they were still nailing Him to the cross by openly opposing and speaking evil lies against His Body there in Smyrna.
 - b. So they are described as belonging to the “synagogue of Satan.”

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- (1) Remembering that “Satan” literally means “adversary” and you get the sense of their opposition and slander.
 - (2) These were men and women who lived out the lifestyle of their father, the devil.
 - (3) Just as Jesus Christ condemned the religious leaders in His day: “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John. 8:44)
 - (4) The Christians of the early church were usually lumped in with the Jews, something that the Jews would have hated. The Jews, therefore, sought to make a strong distinction between themselves and the Church.
 - (5) This hatred for the church continued for quite some time. Even in the 2nd century, the synagogue of Smyrna was instrumental in the martyrdom of Polycarp.
 - (a) History tells us that they actually led the way in bringing firewood to burn him to death.
 - (b) Then, when the believers sought to gather his body they prevented them from doing so.
6. Though the suffering they faced was enough for any of us it was not all they faced (10).
- a. They are apparently seeing an even greater level of suffering on the near horizon and so Jesus tells them to stop fearing it.
 - (1) Think about that in light of how you view impending hardships and suffering.
 - (2) You look to the Lord for relief and He says to you, stop being afraid of it.
 - b. Note how this is an event that is being instigated by the devil. This strips back the physical curtain of people hurting people and shows us the spiritual warfare that Paul described in Ephesians 6.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- c. Some of these dear believers were to be thrown into prison. Likely this was to add salt to the wounds of the whole church there, seeking to cause them to deny Jesus Christ.
- d. And this time of intensity of suffering was for ten day. There are many views on what this means:
 - (1) 10 periods of persecution on the Church by the Roman Empire.
 - (2) 10 days = 10 years.
 - (3) 10 = long time, indeterminate.
 - (4) 10 = short time, indeterminate.
 - (5) 10 days means 10 days.
- e. Because there is nothing in the context that gives us reason to see this as symbolic (frankly the entire letter is without symbolic language); therefore it is best simply to take it for ten days—ten very, very hard days.
- f. The tribulation is something they are familiar with, but here it is something even greater than normal.
 - (1) Notice the casualness of the words.
 - (2) Jesus was clear on the cost of following Him and that tribulation is the norm, not the exception for most churches and individuals.
- g. Note also that he does not tell us to figure out how to get out of the trials but rather to endure them.
 - (1) This requires wisdom for it is not wrong to seek relief but to also grasp that true trials often have little or no escape to them.
 - (2) Trials are not the same as consequences though they can morph into one another.
 - (3) **At times the only escape from a trial is simply a sinful one so care must be taken in the midst of tribulation.** Counsel should be sought.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

- B. The Lord of the trouble.
1. Note first how He is described in vs 8.
 - a. "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:"
 - b. Note how Jesus describes himself for this church. Why? For it is facing persecution to the point even to death and they need to know that death is not the victor anymore.
 - c. Note how this is book-ended by vs 11 as well.
 - d. Just as Jesus' description in 2:1 applied to the Ephesian situation, so too, His description is intended to establish a sure foundation on everything else He says to this church.
 2. Note second the critical relationship between the Lord Jesus and Satan, the arch enemy of the Church (10).
 - a. We learn that Jesus is sovereign in the midst of evil (cf. Genesis 50:20).
 - b. We learn that though Satan works evil, he is at best a tool for the greater purposes of Jesus.
 - (1) "That" speaks of the purpose of the casting into prison. It was not some uncontrolled, meaningless event. God has a purpose.
 - (2) He cannot go beyond what he is allowed (i.e. 10 days).
 - (3) Cf. Job 1-2.
 - (4) Luke 22:31.
 3. Finally, notice that He is the giver of life for those who persevere to the very, very end of this life (10c).
 4. To summarize this section:
 - a. Jesus holds all of time and life situations in His grasp for He is before the beginning and after then end of all things.
 - b. He is intimately aware of our sufferings, they do not escape His notice or care.

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- c. These trials and persecutions only happen because He allows them to happen, even they are from His hand ultimately.
 - d. Learn to see your struggles and suffering as the narrow way Jesus spoke of that leads to life. It is your pathway to heaven.
- C. The hope when in the trouble.
- 1. First, in vs 9 Jesus clarifies what appears to be reality with true reality.
 - a. Yes they are poor, utterly poor in every way. And yes this would be a source of great humor to this prosperous city of idolaters.
 - b. Yes, there is the apparent shame attached to following Jesus. They suffer not because of simple events of life but because they hope in only one Lord, Jesus Christ. What fools!
 - c. But then Jesus speaks into that situation of poverty and says, no. In reality they are actually rich.
 - d. Unlike the church in Laodicea who thought themselves to be rich, but were actually poor.
 - e. Rich in what way?
 - (1) Rich in that in their poverty and suffering because of it they were learning contentment in the sufficiency of the promise of the gospel.
 - (2) Rich in that they were learning many spiritual lessons that made them steadfast and immovable.
 - (3) Rich because in their suffering the trueness of their faith was constantly being revealed. What value is it to be rich in this world and yet forfeit your soul?

III. The Application to Missio Dei Fellowship.

- A. Simply put, though not simply lived, learn to see your situations through the lens of a life in Jesus Christ rather than as this age defines life.
 - 1. One is a true life for eternity.
 - 2. The other is a comfortable lie that leads to damnation.
- B. Grab hold of what John Piper calls “future grace.”

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

1. If you only see the pain and loss of suffering and persecution you will not endure.
 2. In the times of hurt and sorrow remember the warning in the parable of the shallow soil in Matthew 13. Where is your “root.”
 3. The promise is not relief here and now. The promise is, endure and when your eyes finally close forever to this age in death, then you shall be brought into eternal life.
 4. “And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many. You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. **Then** they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. **At that time many** will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead **many**. Because lawlessness is increased, **most people's love will grow cold**. **BUT** the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. (Matthew 24:4-13)
- C. Come to grips that there is a far greater battle going on than merely between people.
- D. Do not be shocked when you suffer and are persecuted, it is proper and to be expected.
- E. Do not let yourself be defined by your sufferings but by your position as a child of the Most High.
- F. Learn sooner than later the hard truth that suffering for the name of Jesus Christ is a grace given to you by your Lord, not a punishment.
1. Suffering is how God reveals his power through us (2 Corinthians 4:7).
 2. Suffering is the will of God for Christians: Acts 14:22; John 15:20; 2 Timothy 3:12.
 3. Suffering is a gracious gift to us: Philippians 1:29 (‘granted’ = ἐχαρίσθη graciously given).

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

4. Suffering is a way God uses to shut the mouth of Satan who believes we only serve God because of the comforts (Job 1:9-11).
5. Suffering is different for all believers (1 Peter 1:3-6, note that here the trials may or may not come).
6. Suffering purifies our faith (1 Peter 1:7).
7. Suffering produces stronger faith (James 1:2-4).

IV. Conclusion.

If we believe that our lives are in the hands of the Creator of all things, who knows all things, who is all powerful and has promised to work all things for good, you are free to risk anything and everything that love might demand at that moment.

Martyrdom is not an accident and God is not surprised by it, nor is it a set-back (cf. Revelation 6:1). Effective in-roads for the gospel in countless nations took place on footpaths of blood of martyrs. If I decided to go to Indonesia to reach the Muslims there and 2 days into arriving there I am killed because of my faith, would you view it as a waste? Your answer determines your understanding of God's calling to us. Tertullian said in the second century, "We multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is seed" (*Apologeticus*, 50).

Do we fear for ourselves and our family more than we fear the Lord? In Miango, Nigeria there is an SIM guest house and chapel. Behind the chapel is a cemetery with 56 graves, 38 of them the children of missionaries. How do you react to that? Here is what one man said when he visited the graveyard and read the names of these children, "The only way we can understand the graveyard at Miango is to remember that God also buried His Son on the mission field" (*Future Grace*, 346).

- A. *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.* (Revelation 2:8-11)
- B. My question is this: Do you have a ear to hear and receive this?

V. Benediction/Doxology.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Small Group Questions

- I asked everyone to think about how they would likely pray if they heard of a church with this type of suffering. Then I asked everyone to compare what first came to mind to what the sermon ultimately showed in the passage. Discuss what your thoughts were, why you thought them, and how, perhaps, they changed by the end of the sermon.
- In light of vs 9 how do we measure true wealth? How does this challenge the spirit of this age we live in? And what are ways we can make sure we are actively resisting defining our wealth and comfort/well-being according to this age?
- Take the time, after dealing with the first two questions, to go through the various passages that show that suffering is a grace.