

Revelation 2:8-11 – June 23, 2024

Links

- Daniel Chapter 7 Teaching

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FezNE2cpFjQ>

- THE FOURTH PERSECUTION UNDER ANTONINUS VERUS (Polycarp Testimony)

<https://www.exclassics.com/foxe/foxe8.htm>

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

KAPONO: Would you join me in a word of prayer? Heavenly Father, we glorify Your name this morning, Lord. We thank You so much that we have a place that we can come and fellowship and be encouraged by one another, Lord, but also, we have a place that Your word can speak to us.

So would you guide us and lead us in Your word this morning, in the Book of Revelation. As Pastor JD delivers, Lord, would You give him the strength, give him the words to share Your word with us this morning. May we receive it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PASTOR JD: Amen and amen. And good morning. Welcome. Glad you're here. You can be seated. Those of you online, we're glad that you're joining with us.

We do have a couple of announcements that we want to mention first. I'll have Pastor Mac take the first one. Oh, this is the coolest picture ever right here. Hey, how's that one?

PASTOR MAC: Right? All right. See?

[Applause]

This is the response that was required and desired. Praise the Lord. And so I just wanted to let everyone know about next Sunday at 1:00 p.m. here in the sanctuary where Raymond and Renea will be getting married — and we're so thankful for that — under the eyes of the true and living God. And also, afterwards, there'll be a small cake ceremony here in the fellowship hall, and the congregation is invited.

So those of you who have been pulled to do so and come or stay behind and witness this occasion, I know they'll be blessed, and we'll be blessed to be a part of it. And for those of you who have experienced seasons of loneliness, this is hope. Provide you with hope.

[Laughter]

But God, right?

[Congregation says, "Right."]

So join us and praise the Lord and thank you.

[Applause]

PASTOR JD: He forgot to mention the time. No, no, I'll do it. I'll do it, I'll do it.

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

PASTOR MAC: No, no! Lord willing, next Sunday and if we're still here!

[JD says, "Get your own material"]

[Laughter]

And, oh, yeah, most importantly, if Pastor JD does not have a two-hour sermon, Second Service.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

PASTOR JD: Wow. I see how it is.

[Laughter]

So the ceremony starts at 1:00 p.m. And what Pastor Mac was trying to explain, let me just explain it to you, so it's clear. You know, this presupposes that the Pastor doesn't go too long. So hold on very loosely to the 1:00 start time.

[Laughter]

Is that good? You're good. All right. Hey, a couple more things before we jump in that I want to apprise you of, the first of which is that this Thursday, upcoming the 27th, I'll be hosting Dr. Chris Dubuque in a discussion that we've titled, 'A Medical Doctor Speaks the Hard Truth.' We'll start right at 7:00 p.m., not 7:30 for those of you online. We will have worship prior to, but we will not be doing the Daniel Bible study, which we usually start the livestream at 7:30. So please note the start time of 7:00 p.m. And we're going to address what's really happening in today's medical industry and where everything could soon be heading according to Bible prophecy.

As many of you know, Dr. Chris is part of our local church ohana and his bride, Laura, have been a tremendous blessing to us as a church body. So that'll be coming up this Thursday.

And then the second thing I wanted to mention was last Thursday in our verse-by-verse study through the Bible, we were in *Daniel Chapter 7*, which is the most comprehensive chapter concerning Bible prophecy in the entirety of the Old Testament. And in it, we were Thursday night studying through it. We find a record of the prophecies in Daniel's visions of

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

all the world's kingdoms, including now, today, in our day concerning the Antichrist, who is alive and well today behind the scenes, which will soon and very soon gloriously give way to Jesus Christ.

So I mention this because we're providing a link to this. It comports with today's Prophecy Update, last service, and it also comports with our verse-by-verse study through the Book of Revelation, this service.

So with that, *Chapter 2:8-11* is our text, the letter to the church in Smyrna. I'll ask you to stand if you're able. If not, where you're seated is fine, but you can follow along as I read. The Apostle John, by the Holy Spirit, is told to write, *verse 8*, **“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan. [We're going to have to talk about that verse]**

Do not be afraid [Verse 10] of what you are about to suffer. I tell you; the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”

Let's pray, if you would join with me. Father, thank You so much for Your word and this word to us today. That's why we have this in our Bibles. Because this is for us even though it was written well-nigh 2000 years ago. It was written for us today as it was for them in their day.

So that's why we're here today because we want to hear You speak into our lives in that still, small, refining voice, unmistakable voice of the Holy Spirit. Because we know as Your sheep the voice of our Shepherd when You speak. So Lord, please speak and speak clearly as we go through this letter, that we might take out of it and from it and take home with us from it that which You would have us to apply to our lives in this world in these last days. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen and Amen.

Revelation 2

Navigating Persecution

Pastor JD

You can be seated. Thank You. So I want to address something that all of us, though in differing yet increasing measures, are encountering and experiencing in these last days. And it's getting worse. And of course, what I'm speaking of is that of the persecution of Christians, which is intensifying in this world, not our home, this world that we long ago overstayed our welcome in, just passing through.

Here's what I'm hoping to accomplish with today's sermon. I always have an aim in mind, as I seek the Lord and prepare my heart to prepare a sermon. And I always inquire of the Lord as to the aim, the direction that He would have me to go. And what I'm hoping will happen today is that we'll all, myself included, be provided with practical and more importantly, biblical ways that we can navigate the increasing persecution that we will seemingly be facing in the days ahead.

I hope you know that I know that we here in America have — we have it pretty good. We have not drunk as deeply from the cup of persecution as have our brothers and sisters in Christ in other parts of the world.

I mention that because the tendency — and we're all prone to this — is that there's that disconnect where, you know, when you talk about Christian persecution here, even in Hawaii, we have it really good here. But there's that tendency to disconnect and disenfranchise oneself from the passage because it's foreign to us.

There's a — it's hard to relate to this — but we might do well to listen to what the Lord has for us even though this may seem somewhat foreign to us. And here's why. Be assured that between now and the pre-tribulation rapture, the persecution of Christians could get infinitely worse and even now really is, so much so that we're already beginning to see it ramping up.

What's ramping up? What I affectionately refer to as pre-rapture persecution. It's a pre-tribulation rapture, but pre-rapture it's going to get — and we're already sort of tasting from this cup — it's going to get worse. I don't know if you've noticed, but the world is increasingly hostile to Christians, very unfriendly to us as Christians. And it's getting worse.

Enter the text that we have before us today. Short letter. Please know that does not equate to a short sermon.

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

[Laughter]

I just wanted to get that out of the way, make that clear. In fact, I have to confess that when I first started out to prepare the teaching for today, I already knew this was a short letter. So you know, I'll just mine the riches from the text and teach it and preach it, and, you know.

But, man, I started getting into this thing, and boom! I mean, it was like one thing after another. I'm going, Lord, stop! Wow, this is so packed, so full, with so much! It is arguably one of the most compelling of the seven letters to the seven churches. We call it the persecuted church, the persecuted church in Smyrna.

I want, at the end of our time together today to take away, walk away from this being encouraged.

Well, Pastor, you're not off to a good start if that's your aim.

Let me explain. This church was one of only two of the seven churches for which there was no rebuke, no correction, even exhortation. And make no mistake about it, this persecuted church was a church that was pleasing in the sight of the Lord. He was so pleased with them, though they were suffering much affliction and persecution.

Well, again, Pastor, how does that encourage me?

Because, as we're about to see, like with Smyrna, it's when we're broken that the Lord is the closest to us. And while we tend to devalue broken things, even throw away broken things, God values brokenness. And you might be here today or watching online, and you've been just crushed. Well, be encouraged because that's why we have this letter to the church in Smyrna who was experiencing a crushing persecution.

Now, I think it's incumbent upon me to give you a backstory of this city, and by extension, the church in this city. And I'll start by drawing your attention to this map from our overview, pictured here, so as to see the bigger picture, as it were. The reason being is that Smyrna was approximately 40 miles north of Ephesus geographically, but they were miles apart spiritually.

I point this out because of the precise order of these seven churches uniquely representing the chronological order of the church age, which we today are now at the end of. It started

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

with the first church, Ephesus, then Smyrna. I want to draw your attention also to this chart from our overview and this for a couple of reasons, the first of which is related to church history. Stay with me.

The persecuted church in Smyrna historically witnessed approximately 5 million of their brothers and sisters in Christ being martyred. And this continued even after the year 313 AD. What happened in the year 313 AD? Constantine issued the Edict of Toleration, which in effect decriminalized Christianity.

Did you catch that? Because see, prior, it was a crime to be a Christian. It was against the law. And if you came to Christ and were born-again of the Spirit of God during this time, you would be tortured, persecuted, and put to death. And they were.

Constantine, by the way, is going to come in — we'll meet him next week. You'll have to come next week. You'll meet Constantine next week. He basically — and we'll see him in the letter to the church of Pergamum — he married — perverted marriage — pergamu, gamma, gamey, polygamy, monogamy. He married the church with the state in a perversion, a corruption, of the church and the state.

And now it was legal because see, Satan realized the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church. If you can't beat them, join them. So he did, and they were joined together in unholy matrimony. That's next week. So you have to come next week to meet Constantine. He's not our guest speaker, but he's going to be very involved in the teaching.

Now, why do I elaborate on this? Because up until that point, if you were a Christian, you were — first of all, you were fired. You're fired. Second of all, they take all of your possessions, they confiscate all of your property, and now it belongs to the state. Because if you're a Christian — and now you're living in what we call today, abject poverty.

And this is the second reason. I want to draw your attention to this chart because it has to do with the personal application to every single one of us when it comes to persecution, specifically how it is — and I want you to think this through with me. It's trials and tribulation, persecution and affliction that make us grow in our faith, prosper in our faith. Adversity brings prosperity, and conversely, prosperity brings adversity.

Revelation 2

Navigating Persecution

Pastor JD

One of the things I'm learning in my walk with the Lord is that prosperity is more of a difficulty to handle than is adversity. Because when you're going through times of adversity, you're relying upon the Lord. When you're going through times of prosperity, your tendency is to kind of distance yourself from the Lord.

And it's during — in fact, this is Ecclesiastes 7:14. You might want to write this down. Not right now because I'm still preaching, but you might want to refer to this verse. Solomon writes this. He says during times of adversity, or prosperity, enjoy. When times are good, hey, praise the Lord. But when adversity strikes...

I wish he didn't say it like that. I wish he would have said if by chance, you know, there was a likelihood or a possibility, very small, that, you know, you might experience adversity... No. When. When adversity strikes, stop and consider and realize that God allows one as well as the other. Some translations render it: God brings the one alongside the other.

He brings the adversity alongside with the prosperity. Why? So that man can discover nothing about his future. Translated: So that we don't get too comfortable during times of prosperity because adversity might be around the corner. And when that adversity strikes, that's right around the corner, that's when we call upon the Lord.

I mean, come on, let's be honest with ourselves. During times of prosperity, what's your prayer life like? Thank You, Lord. Bless You, Lord. Bless them. Bless this. In Jesus' name. Amen. Prosperity prayer. Adversity prayer. Oh God!

[Laughter]

Oh, Lord Jesus! Oh God! Oh, now I got your attention.

[Laughter]

It took adversity to get your attention. You know, Christians can — let me be careful — let me rephrase. I didn't even phrase it, so there's nothing to rephrase. So I'll just say it this way. I think that prosperity can really mess up Christians because they don't know how to handle it. And God knows that.

You know, we quote *1 Corinthians 10:13*. We will get to our teaching here in a moment. But you know *1 Corinthians 10:13*? We quote this. We actually really paraphrase it. We don't

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

quote it actually. God won't give you more than you can handle. Isn't it hard to warm up to somebody who says that to you? And they're just — they're fine, but you're going through the trial of your — God won't give you more than you can handle.

[Laughter]

Have you ever thought about it in the context of, well, okay, God won't give me more adversity than I can handle because God will not allow us to be tempted above that which we are able but with the temptation, He will provide a way of escape so that we're able to bear up under it? That's *1 Corinthians 10:13*. That's why it's a paraphrase, you know, God won't give you more than you can handle. Well, listen, that word trial and temptation are synonymous in the original language.

In other words, we always couch it in terms of God won't give you more adversity than you can handle. He knows — and it's different for every one of us — that certain point, God knows exactly where that point is. He will not allow you to be tempted above that which you're able, otherwise He'd be party to our disobedience. So it's not just that God won't. It's that God can't because that's inconsistent with who God is.

But have you ever thought about it, in terms of prosperity, that God won't give you more prosperity than you can handle? So here we are praying, God, give me that brand new Mercedes Benz. (Singing) And He hasn't answered that prayer. Why? Because it won't be good. It's going to mess you up. Yeah, but I'll take people to church in it.

[Laughter]

Oh, did I strike a chord?

[Laughter]

Like you're going to get one over on God. You know when you ask, you do not receive because you ask with the wrong motives.

Yeah, I know why you're asking Me for that. No, you're not gonna get it. And by the way, you don't want Me to answer that prayer that way because it wouldn't be good for you, and it wouldn't bring glory to Me. So no, you're not getting one. I'm going to get you a Yugo. Remember Yugos?

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

[Laughter]

That dated me. The Yugos were a no go. They don't even make them anymo. Mo.

Okay, so back to the sermon already in progress because there was a point that I was trying to make here. These trials and tribulations and afflictions have the propensity to either make us bitter or better. It's been said — I think it's a good comparison — that the same sun can either melt or harden.

And I think that's a takeaway for us today because when life hits — and life hits — God's not going to violate our will. He's given us sovereignty. It's our choice. We have to make a decision. Are we going to become bitter because this is happening in my life, and God's allowing it to happen? Or am I going to be better? The church in Smyrna was better because of the persecution.

It's also been said that if you want to grow the church, persecute the church. You know in Jerusalem, the early church; we always say, man, we need to be like the early church. Not so fast. They had a lot of problems, and it didn't take very long. And we're going to see it here pretty soon.

We saw last week with Ephesus, some 35 years after Paul planted the church. They're already messed up. It didn't take that long. But there were the early church. In fact, some of these letters are really don't be like the early church because of what happened in the early church.

Well, the Book of Acts gives us detailed accounts of the early church. And I have to say that, you know, they just wanted to stay in Jerusalem, and they did not heed the Great Commission to go to the uttermost parts of the earth, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth, to make disciples in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Well, they just all bunched up there in Jerusalem.

So what is God going to do to get them out of there and spread them out? Well, He allowed persecution and that spread them out. Here's a great analogy. This is not mine. So if you like it, it came from somebody else. If you don't like it, it didn't come from me.

[Laughter]

Revelation 2

Navigating Persecution

Pastor JD

Christians have been likened unto manure. No, wait. When all clumped together, it stinks. But when spread out, it fertilizes.

[Laughter]

That's a horrible word picture, you know, image. But is that not true? This is why when people talk about communal — wouldn't it be great to just, you know, have communal, you know, have a communal? They tried that, by the way, in the '70s. It did not end well, I'll just let you know.

But oh, man, just to be on an island, just with Christians. We would kill each other by the time — it wouldn't be — what, the first month?

[Laughter]

And then God did not call us to do that. God called us to make disciples of all the nations, to spread out, to evangelize, and fertilize. Don't just bunch up. You stink when you do that. I won't take that any further, though I would like to, but I won't because we have a sermon to get to here.

So can I take you on a journey of sorts in order that all of us, again, myself included, will know from God's word how to navigate persecution, and even — I want to take it a step further — embrace persecution? That might kind of be difficult, but we've been conditioned to do everything we can to avoid persecution, when in fact, persecution could be the best thing that could ever happen.

If you allow me to, I want to share with you seven ways. You know, last week I had a three-point sermon. I repented, and now I've got seven this week. So seven ways, practical again, biblical ways to navigate the persecution now as well as the potential for it to get worse in the days ahead.

So what follows is seven ways, seven ways, as it was in the days for Smyrna, so too is it as we fast approach the very last day in our day. And the first one is the one I just mentioned in the first part of *verse 8*. And I don't know that this can be overstated, but persecution can actually be a good thing.

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

You know the litmus test that has served me well in my walk with the Lord over the years is to ask myself and answer this question. Does this, that, them — whatever it is — you fill in the blank — this form of entertainment, this hobby, this recreation, this relationship, this — you fill in the blank — does it draw me closer to the Lord, or does it distance me further from the Lord?

Now persecution has this much-needed effect of drawing you closer to the Lord because when Jesus is all you have, it's then that you'll realize that Jesus is all you need. But see, in times of abundance and prosperity, no need. And again, it shows up in our prayer life. It's like that college kid. The only time they call mom and dad is when they need something.

Oh, we're like that with our Heavenly Father. The only time we pray is when we need something. Don't think that that's lost on God. He knows the drill. He knows; oh, man, the only time JD calls upon Me is when he needs something. I miss him; haven't heard from him for a while, so I think I'm going to allow a need into his life just so I can hear his voice again. He'll call. He'll call. Boom. Adversity strikes. Oh, God! Hey, I was expecting you.

Now, I know that when I say something like persecution can actually be a good thing, it makes people uncomfortable; however, Scripture is replete with accounts of how the persecution of the church was, in the end, what added to the church. We read in Acts, again, the account of how that it was God — thank God it's not in my job description.

Church growth. Ha. You put that on me. I have to add to the church, start advertising. We'll start putting banners out front. You know, we'll start offering free iPads at the end of the Prophecy Update, and it goes for an hour and a half. You know just because we want to grow the numbers and add to the church.

Ah, excuse me. It's the Lord who adds to the church those who must be saved. If you put it on a pastor —and I feel sorry for pastors that have succumbed to this, and many have. I would even mention it to say that most have If in the job description of a Pastor is to grow the church, (Big sigh) I'm sorry. Bye. That's on me? That's a lot of pressure. No.

You know what? I pray this sometimes when I pray at the beginning, Lord get our attention by the Holy Spirit and hold our attention, so our minds don't wander. I am so thankful that

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

also not in my job description is you got to get their attention and hold their attention. You got to keep it fast, keep it moving, be relevant, hip.

[Laughter]

I did that pretty good, didn't I? Too good maybe. So thank You, Lord. No, that's not on me. All I have to do is be faithful to preach the Word.

[Congregant says, "Amen."]

Feed the sheep. Oh, job descriptions: You guys have job descriptions? You know, what is it like, at least a full page? I barely got one sentence. Preach the Word. Feed the flock. Do you love Me, Peter?

Yes.

Feed My sheep.

That's it?

Yeah. Preach the Word.

That's it?

Yeah.

What about church growth?

No, not in here. Not here. Lord's got that in Acts.

That's it?

Yeah, I'll take care of the rest.

Okay.

You just be faithful in season and out of season to preach the Word because My sheep are starving to death, and they need to be fed and nourished. And if you love Me, you'll feed them and be faithful to teach them the whole counsel of God, so the blood of no one is on your hands.

So that's what I'm doing here, by the way, and I'll be here all week. So...

[Laughter]

Revelation 2

Navigating Persecution

Pastor JD

Let's talk about this persecution. We really have to talk about this because we fight it. We do everything we can to avoid it when it may be the very thing that we need. And Smyrna is an example of this. Let me explain.

The name Smyrna: Remember, the name is the nature. It comes from the word myrrh, which was used to embalm one's body at death and is associated with death. In fact, Joseph of Arimathea, the wealthy guy that gave up his tomb for the Savior, had the body of Christ embalmed with myrrh. It's associated with death.

Remember the gifts that — I always ruin everybody's Christmas because they think there were only three of these wise men from the East. There was actually an entourage. And everybody's got in their — I know it's not — we're not close — maybe we can get away with it — but you know, your nativity scenes? I don't pull mine out anymore because it's just wrong.

First of all, they didn't go to the manger when he was born. They went to the house when he was a toddler. Did I just mess you up?

[Laughter]

Merry Christmas early.

[Laughter]

So they brought him — remember the gifts they brought? And don't imagine, you know, just a little bottle of frankincense. Oh, here's some myrrh, and here's some gold. No, first of all, the gold was financial provision.

But all three of those gifts spoke to His deity, His royalty, and ultimately, the cruelty of His death on the cross. And myrrh was one of those gifts. You know what's interesting? The prophet Isaiah makes reference to the gifts in the Kingdom Age, the Millennium, which include both gold and frankincense but not myrrh. Why? He's already died on the cross.

So myrrh, what is it? It's an herb. And not only does myrrh point to death, so too is it a bitter herb. By the way, Jesus was offered, you know, water just for His parched lips with a hyssop branch that was brought up to His lips because He said, **"I thirst."** He was dying of thirst, literally to the point of death.

Revelation 2 Navigating Persecution Pastor JD

So it's an interesting herb. It's bitter. It's bitter. But when you crush it, it becomes a magnificence — in its fragrance — a fragrance of magnificence. But it has to be crushed in order for that fragrance to be released. Are you watching this? Bitter to fragrant.

Remember when the Israelites are — I mean three — I think it was about three days after the Red Sea crossing. Miracle. Unquestionable miracle. You know, they're — I won't go into it.

You already know they're saying God brought them there to kill them, there weren't enough graves in Egypt. Then He parts the Red Sea, they walk on dry ground, and God brings the Egyptians, and He drowns them and kills them. And then now they're singing on the other side. Right song, wrong side, as one said. And so three days go by, and they come to a place called Marah.

And they're thirsty. And they're letting everybody know how thirsty they are. And they start complaining. Weren't there enough graves that God had bring us out here... And there's water, but it's bitter. So Moses was told to take and put in that bitter water a wood, piece of wood, a picture of the cross, to make that bitter water sweet so they could drink. That's the typology of it.

Well, so too with myrrh when it's crushed, only when it's crushed, when it's persecuted, when there's affliction and suffering, it's only then that the myrrh releases the fragrance of magnificence, and not only the fragrance of magnificence, but also the blessing of abundance that comes via the crushing persecution.

What? These — they had all of their wealth confiscated. They were in abject poverty, and you're talking about abundance? Where are you getting that? Oh, Jesus said that. I know of your suffering and your affliction and your persecution and your trials and your tribulation and your poverty, but you're rich. Ha ha! Woo! You got a trust fund up here, baby, I tell you. But see, that's what the world, that's the world's standards.

Where do we — (Frustrated sigh) easy for me to say. We are so messed up when it comes to our definitions of prosperity. We always think of it in terms of the material and the financial. And to do so is to err greatly.

Revelation 2

Navigating Persecution

Pastor JD

Example: *Romans 8:28*. Very well-known verse and wonderful promise. **“For we know that God works all things together for the good to them that love Him and are called according [Or the called according] to His purpose.”**

Okay, well, wait a minute. Here's how we interpret it. God's going to bring good out of this, so He's going to give me a gooder job.

[Laughter]

Let me try that again. We define the good that God's going to work out of that trial as something material or financial.

Wait a minute. What if the good that God's going to work out of that situation that you're in is to make you more like Jesus? Meek. Isn't that good?

Oh, no, I thought you were talking about the other good because that would be good.

Well, that's what you think good is. That's not My definition of good. Because see, *Romans 8:29* defines what the good of *Romans 8:28* is. Those who are called according to God's purpose are being shaped and made to be more like Jesus, into the image of Jesus Christ.

Well, what does that mean? The good that God's going to bring out of the adversity in your life is going to make you more loving, joyful, kind. good, meek, (Struggling to say next word) patient, and have more self-control, a life lived under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, yeah, you thought — yeah, no, you misunderstood, JD. You thought the good was that you're going to get a raise. You're going to get a new boss because your boss right now is the Antichrist.

[Laughter]

No, that's not what I mean. I'm going to work it out for the good. But you need to redefine what you define as good because your definition of good is not compatible with My definition of good.

That's a game-changer, isn't it? I mean, when you see your affliction and suffering and persecution through that lens, it changes the whole complexion of it. Oh Lord, You're — I — I see why now persecution could be good, affliction could be good, a crushing can be good.

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

Oh, how fragrant this must be in Your presence, O Lord, and how bitter it was prior to the breaking, the crushing persecution.

Well, interesting to note the symbolic evidence of this. Do you know that Smyrna was the only of the seven cities in which the seven churches were, it's the only city that still exists today? Can I show you a picture of it? It's going to blow your mind. It's the modern-day city of Izmir in Turkey.

Two bays. Isn't that Kailua? Kai = two (Sea). I know Lua. Don't, don't — I know that. I got it.

[Laughter]

I've had so many people take me aside and say, by the way, you know what Kailua means? No. What? It means two luas. You know what a lua is? And that's when I should have stopped them because...

But two bays. And that's what Izmir has today. It's a prosperous, populating, populated, thriving Metropolis. The only one. Go to Ephesus, all you're going to see are ruins. Go to any of the other seven cities. All you're going to see of those churches and those cities are ruins.

But when you go to Smyrna, now Izmir, it was called by one — hope I get this right — the Paris of Asia Minor. Beautiful, I mean breathtaking. Look at the color of the water. Is that — if you didn't know any better, I could have cropped it, did some photoshopping and said, look, Kailua. No, Smyrna.

What's your point, Pastor?

Well, God as only He can, brings beauty out of the ashes of suffering and persecution. And actually, it's the suffering and hardship that we must go through to enter the kingdom of God. And it's not a works thing. It's a world thing. And by that I mean, God loosens our grip on this world, readying us for the next, and He has chosen the tribulations and the afflictions and the persecution to do it.

Listen to what Paul said in *Acts 14:21–22*, a very unpopular passage of Scripture. How's that for an intro? **“They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of**

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. [Wow, they were encouraging them] [Well, what did they say to encourage them?] “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

[Laughter]

That's supposed to encourage me? How do you reconcile that?

No, you — the harder it is down here, the more you're going to want to go up there. And the better things are down here, the less you're going to want to go up there. So it's kind of like you got to go through the hardships to let go of this dying world, to enter the next.

Did you make that connection? So be encouraged. If I'm Paul, I'm saying, you must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. Have a nice afternoon. Bye. I want to draw your attention to the original word in the Greek for hardships. It's the Greek word thlipsis.

Wow, Pastor, that's so helpful. Thank you so much.

No, but this is an interesting word. It carries with it the idea of a crushing pressure and torture. This is what they would do. They would take a large, heavy block or plank of wood or rock and place it on the chest of the individual they were torturing, so when they breathed in, the weight was so crushing they could not, they could not take another breath. And that's how they would die a grueling death.

Those crushing — you know, when you're going through those crushing trials and you're just like — they're breathtaking. I mean, I'm starting to wheeze right now teaching this. I mean, these are those crushing trials and afflictions in life, but they're turning your myrrh, bitter, into sweet fragrance. So you must go through the thlipsis, the crushing pressure.

How about *2 Timothy Chapter 3:12*? **“In fact, [It gets worse] everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be [Will be] persecuted.”**

I bet you none of us — I know I don't — I'll confess I don't have this on my wall or wallpaper or anything. This is not a life verse for me. I mean, right, we all avoid this, or we downplay

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

it, or we question it. Sometimes the question is, well, I'm not being persecuted. Well, maybe you're not living a godly life.

Oh, wait a minute, Pastor. Come on, you're killing me here. You're supposed to be encouraging me. You're killing me. So you're saying that proportionate to my godly life will be the persecution on my life?

Yeah. Can I just — well, I'm just going to do it. I'll just be as convicted as you, along with you when I say it. But when you're with somebody and you're ashamed of the Gospel, you know why you shy away from sharing Jesus with somebody when the Lord presents an opportunity to do so? Because you're afraid that they will unfriend you, slash persecute you, slash not like you, slash never call you again.

Conversely, the one who lives godly, is not ashamed of the Gospel, you're going to be spit on. You're going to be called the most vile of names. You're going to have things posted on social Media about you. You will be the recipient of the worst imaginable false accusations. Don't take it personal.

I know it's easier said than done, right? Don't take it personal? Don't take a personal?

Well, what did Jesus say? Be blessed man.

What a blessing it is when they persecute you and speak evil of you and post stink on social media about you. And you know you are blessed if you're — that, I'm not — that doesn't bless me. How am I supposed to be blessed?

Because it's the fellowship of My sufferings and persecution. Jesus said to the disciples, listen, don't take it personally, guys. They're going to hate your guts. Why? Because of your association with Me. See, the more we're associated with Jesus and live a godly life pleasing in the sight of the Lord, the more persecuted we're going to be. And it is proportionate.

The second one. Man, we better get going. Know that even if persecution results in death, it cannot ever have the final word. Second part of *verse 8*. We'll move a little faster. But here, John, by the Holy Spirit writes how that these are the words of Jesus, then describes both who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. And this again is unique to every church.

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

To this church He says, **“I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, who died but lives.”** There were being put to death. This is why He's emphasizing that He defeated death. I died for you instead of you to give to you the gift of eternal life. Don't be afraid. I'm getting ahead of myself.

Matthew 10:28. Jesus speaking. **“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”**

Listen, the martyrs, you can kill the body, but all you're doing is ushering me home to be with the Lord. So what's taking you so long? Let's get this show on the road. We're going to see that in a moment.

1 Corinthians 15. I want to read verses 51–55. You'll see why this is a pre-tribulation rapture passage. Paul speaking by the Spirit, says, **“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, [Not a blink] at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible [Speaking of our bodies] must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.**

So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, [When we get our new bodies. Can't wait] and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: [He's quoting Scripture, taunting death] “Death is swallowed up in victory.” [Oh, and then he addresses death as if it's personified] “O Death, [Ha!] where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”

You're a defeated foe! Smyrna, be encouraged, even to the point of death. I know the persecution is crushing. I know that they're killing you by the millions and there are martyrs. But I defeated death. There's no sting in death. Do not be afraid of death. Am I yelling?

[Laughter]

Number 3. First part of *verse 9*. I've talked about this. We've talked about this, right? But we forget this. We need to be reminded of this. Our faith is a paradox, an oxymoron. You know what I mean by that? You know the example of jumbo shrimp? I know last week I mentioned Microsoft Works. It's an oxymoron. It's a paradox, juxtaposed.

Revelation 2

Navigating Persecution

Pastor JD

And it's irony because it's not so easily seen at first read as it relates to these Christians of that time. They're all being slaves. All of their possessions have been taken. And this is again, what we call today abject poverty. And think about this. Wouldn't that in and of itself add to their already multiplied afflictions?

So I mean, what a paradox. But the paradox is that Jesus says, I know by the world's standards you're suffering crushing persecution and affliction, and you're in abject poverty, but you're rich.

Here's what I want to say. The sooner you and I get to the place where we embrace the paradox of our faith, the better. Our faith is a paradoxical faith. You want to live? Die. The way up is the way down. You want to follow Me and be one of My disciples? Die to yourself. You want to keep your life? You're going to lose it. You want to — if you're willing to lose your life, you're going to keep it. It's paradoxical.

And we fight that too. We don't understand it, let alone embrace it. And he's saying to Smyrna and to the persecuted Christian today, maybe here in this service or online, Look, I know it's paradoxical. You think that you're suffering these crushing afflictions and you're in abject poverty, but you're not seeing your life through the lens of how I see your life. You are rich beyond imagination.

You know what's interesting? When we get to the Laodicean church — pardon me — **“To the church of the Laodiceans.”** It wasn't the Lord's church anymore. They fancied themselves as being rich. But God said, you're poor. You think you're all that, you know, you're with the finest clothes which they were known for at the time, but you're naked. How's that paradox? It works both ways.

Number 4. This is a hard one, isn't it? Endure the slander against you when you take a stand for Christ. Let me back up on this one just real quick. This presupposes that you already know you're going to get slandered. Yeah, I think that Christians are naive to believe that hey, you know, I'm not going to be on the receiving end of slander and false accusations.

But the problem is, as soon as you identify yourself with Jesus Christ, man, you're going to get slammed and slandered in ways that you could have never imagined. It's a badge of honor.

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

In fact, when you should be concerned is when nobody's slandering you or nobody's persecuting you because of your Christian faith and boldness and not being ashamed to share the Gospel.

If — when the enemy leaves you alone, trust me, you're in big trouble. It's when the enemy is all over you — of course, his demons, not him — he can't be all places at the same time — but when the spiritual warfare is intense, man, you did it now.

But that's a good thing. That's a test to know that you've aroused the ire of the enemy. You pose a formidable threat to the enemy and the kingdom of darkness. Keep up the good work.

If you're not being slandered and persecuted and all of the above — in fact, it's the opposite. You get a — you go to get the mail one day and there's a card from Satan to you, your address. You open it up. It's a gift card, a thank you card.

Thank you for — keep up the good work. You're — just keep doing what you're doing; nothing. You pose no threat to me. Just keep preaching sermons about stupid stuff. No problem. Stay away from any mention of sin. Don't talk about — don't you dare do the ABCs of salvation. because that's that takes ground from the kingdom of darkness and takes ground for the kingdom of God.

That's why it is, by the way, that all hell breaks loose when you try to share Jesus with somebody. I mean, just the mere mention of the name of Jesus in a conversation, have you noticed how it changes the whole complexion of everything, especially with somebody who apparently speaks French? Because they'll say, excuse my French. Listen, dude, that wasn't French.

But when you introduce Jesus into the discussion, it changes everything. And see, now you're at enmity with them because of Jesus. Why are you surprised by it? Expect it and endure it. This is that verse where — I'm sorry that — I did want to allocate more time to it — but this is that verse that's really causing a lot of problems today because it's where John writes, they say they're Jews but they're not. They're of the synagogue of Satan.

So what are you going to do with that? What does that mean? Some have even gone as far as saying, well, that means that the Jews in Israel today who say they are Jews are not.

Revelation 2

Navigating Persecution

Pastor JD

They're of the synagogue of Satan. Oh, my goodness. Well, somebody needs to get the memo to Satan because he's persecuting the wrong people. I mean, is he that stupid? From the beginning of time, he's always been trying to eliminate and exterminate the Jewish people. Well, if they're not the Jews, he's got the wrong guy.

So that's off the table. That's not what he's talking about at all. Sadly, this has led to the false teaching of replacement theology, which says the church replaces the Jew as God's elect. Well, congratulations. You just put the church into the 7-year tribulation by doing that. And you've also made God a liar because God said that He had an everlasting covenant with the Jews.

So if God's through with the Jew, then I don't know how secure are you because doesn't God have a covenant with you too? He must have lied about it because He broke a covenant. And if we have a New Covenant, then what's to say He's not going to break that covenant too?

I mean, no matter how you try to slice and dice it — now, don't be militant with people. Listen, I have a PhD in being militant when I was younger, and I had energy. Man, we're doing this. Well, I — I'll play with you on this one. I'll dance around a little bit with you on this one.

Okay, so let's just say that they're not the Jews. And then I would take them through the Scriptures. What about — what are you going to do with that one? Oh! Well, you better rip that out of your Bible because that directly contradicts what you're telling me this verse is saying.

Okay, well, thank you very much, Pastor. If that's what it's not saying, what is it saying? You know, it's like a sign in town that says, this is not the way to Kaneohe. How helpful is that sign? So what does it mean?

Well, listen to this. In that day, those who weren't Jews would say that they were Jews in order to avoid the persecution for not complying. And here's why. The Jews had a religious exemption that was accepted by Rome. And in turn, they would receive a certificate [*A vaccination card*]

[Laughter]

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

No. Stay with me. For real. This certificate, in effect, verified that they were in compliance with the mandate — they had a mandate at that time — to confess Caesar as Lord with a pinch of incense. That’s all you got to do.

But the Jews had a religious exemption. I mean, just say Caesar is Lord, and you can worship whatever God you want. Well, the Jews are like, okay, but we're Jews and so we get an exemption. And so they just show them their vaccination card, you know, their forehead at some point, and they were exempt.

So they were saying — they weren't really Jews, but they were saying they're Jews in order to be exempt from the persecution. Because if you refused to take this pinch of incense and say, Caesar is Lord, game over.

Here's what one commentator explained it. “Toward the end of the first century, in the days of Domitian, *[He was the worst]* the final step was taken, and Caesar worship became compulsory. *[Mandatory]*

Once a year the Roman citizen must burn a pinch of incense on the altar to the godhead of Caesar; and having done so, he was given a certificate to guarantee that he had performed his religious duty.

All that the Christians had to do was to burn that pinch of incense, say, ‘Caesar is Lord,’ receive their certificate, *[Go along to get along]* and go away and worship as they pleased. But that is precisely what the Christians *[in Smyrna]* refused to do. *[Thus they were persecuted and martyred because of it]* They would give no man the name of Lord; that name they would keep for Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.”

Could you imagine the pressure? Come on. It's just a pinch. Everybody's doing it. Get your certificate, go back, worship the Lord.

No. No.

Well, you're going to get persecuted. You're probably going to get martyred.

Bring it.

Revelation 2 Navigating Persecution Pastor JD

And that's Number 5: Be fearless in persecution and suffering. The first part of *verse 10*, this is another difficult part. The whole letter is difficult. But this is a difficult part because it really speaks to how we're all prone to go to that default of becoming fearful. We're fearful. If we're honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we all unnecessarily fear that which we should never, ever fear. And the reason we should never fear it is because God will never allow us to go through anything unless, in the end it's for our good according to His definition of good, and more importantly, for His glory. Well, I kind of already covered this. I'll be brief.

But Number 6 is, simply: Expect it. Expect persecution or even death pre-rapture. Now, I know that makes us uncomfortable, but it could rightly be argued it's already taking place in this last hour as we draw ever so near to the pre-tribulation rapture. The closer we get, the worse it gets. We did an Update on that.

I want to share with you about a man named Polycarp. He was the pastor of the church in Smyrna. The Apostle John himself disciplined this man named Polycarp. And I want to share with you from Foxes Book of Martyrs — a must for any library — because I think it'd be grossly remiss were I not to. It's an abbreviated testimony of the martyrdom of this pastor.

And it goes like this. “At that time, a horrific persecution was launched on the Christians of Smyrna. This pastor was even urged to leave Smyrna to save his own life, which he did for a short while until one day in prayer he had a vision of his pillow on fire and knew that this was God’s way of speaking to him that he needed to return even saying to the brethren, “I see that I must be burnt at the stake.”

One of his companions was arrested and tortured until he revealed Polycarp’s location. Upon their arrival to arrest him, they immediately proceeded in their attempts to persuade him, even pleading with him to just offer a pinch of incense and confess that “Caesar is Lord.”

When Polycarp refused, he was brought into the arena to be burned at the stake, where he and the other Christians present heard a voice from heaven saying, “Be strong, Polycarp, play the man.”

Revelation 2 Navigating Persecution Pastor JD

Then, after they gave him one last chance to renounce Jesus as Lord, Polycarp looked at them, and waved his hand toward them and said this: “For 86 years I’ve served Jesus; how dare I now revile my King?”

As they readied the fire to burn him alive, he told them, “It is well. I fear not the fire that burns for a season and after a while is quenched. Why do you delay? You threaten me with fire which shall burn for the space of an hour and shall be within a little while after put out and extinguished; but thou knowest not the fire of the judgment that is to come, and of everlasting punishment, which is reserved for the wicked and ungodly. But why make you all these delays? Give me what death soever – come -- do your will.”

So they did, and when they did, this pastor prayed [*And his prayer was*] “Lord, I thank You that You have graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour, that I may receive a portion in the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Your Christ.”

After he prayed, he was lit on fire, however, no flame touched him. As you might imagine, his executioners were so infuriated and enraged that one of them stabbed Polycarp repeatedly. Immediately, his blood poured out and ultimately extinguished the fire.

When this happened, witnesses said they saw a dove fly up from the smoke into heaven. At the very same moment, a church leader in Rome named Iraenus, said he heard God say to him, “Polycarp is dead.” God called his servant home.”

Wow! You know, many times we think of people like Polycarp, and if we were ever in that situation — I want to just share with you something that the Lord has ministered to me that has settled my heart. If I were ever to be in this position — which is not an impossibility, by the way — God in that moment will give you supernaturally, as only He can, the strength to stand and to endure and to be martyred.

I mean, I wrongly compare myself to Polycarp. I'm thinking if I'm praying, being burned at the stake, I'd be praying, God save my life. Not Polycarp. Thank You that my life would be deemed worthy to be numbered amongst those who were martyred.

I'll tell you, this — this brings to mind the likes of an Esther, who would say “**If I perish, I perish.**” How about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego when we were in Daniel? Listen, Nebuchadnezzar, God will deliver us. But even if He doesn't, we're never going to bow down

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

and worship this image you made. If we die, we die. I don't fear those who can kill the body. I fear God who can kill both body and soul.

Well, I'll close. I'll try to gather myself first. This isn't a play on words, I hope you know. But this is something we need to remember as well. Because we forget that to be born twice is to die only once. And this is why, again, uniquely tailored to this specific church, Jesus says what He says about death and life eternal. He says to this specific church, you will not even be affected at all, you won't be harmed at all by the second death.

What's the second death? Oh, that's when it's appointed unto men once to die, and then the judgment. And you're judged and sentenced to death in hell for all eternity. That's the second death. But if you're born-again, you're born first, physically, you're born twice, spiritually, you only die once. You may not even die once. Because if that trumpet sounds, you won't see death because you'll be amongst those who are alive and remain.

How cool would that be? Just for that reason alone, Lord, cause I'm a wimp when it comes to — you know, I remember as a kid thinking, man, I don't want to die. I didn't know the Lord yet. And if I die, I hope it doesn't hurt. You know, I want it to be fast and all.

Did you guys ever think like that? Or did you ever think like that? And, you know, death is like the number one thing that people fear. And then I came to Christ and all of a sudden I'm thinking, wait a minute, death is my friend now.

Remember when Paul was torn about — man, I'm really struggling, you guys. man, I'm really struggling, you guys. I love you guys, but if I had my preference, I would leave and go be with the Lord. Because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. But you know, it's your fault that I'm still stuck down here because I know you guys need me.

So I'm still here. But I know that when I die, I'm going to go be with the Lord. So you know, can you guys get your act together so I can go home?

[Laughter]

I can't think of a better way to end a sermon than to talk about eternal life in the context of death, knowing that in glory there's no more death. You know, it was never God's plan,

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

originally, before sin entered the world — death was — see, death entered with sin because the wages of sin is death.

But God died so we could live for all eternity. The second death: you got no worries. You're born-again, born twice. **“It’s appointed unto men once to die, and then the judgment”** Hebrews says. But *1 Thessalonians 4* says you may not even have to do that. And this judgment throne — we talked about the wreath — one last thing — can I just do one last thing?

Oh, this was a Prophecy Update. You know, we run the race for a crown that perishes. This was the original Olympics. They would get — instead of a gold medal around the neck, they put a leaf wreath on top of the head to the winner. And this is going to last, what, a few days? And they train and discipline themselves for a wreath that's not going to last, that perishes. But we for a crown that will last forever.

So I was thinking about that today. There's the Bema Seat of Christ and there's the Great White Throne Judgment. And they couldn't be more opposite than each other. So you know, these Olympic Games, they have the judgment seat, the panel, the judges that hand out the awards, the gold, silver, the bronze — is it bronze? Yeah.

And that's what we're going to. We're not going to go to the Great White Throne Judgment, where we're going to be punished for all eternity in the second death. We're going to go to the Bema Seat judgment, and that's where we're going to get — not perishable wreaths made of leafs — but we're going to get crowns and awards and riches and treasures based on our lives here.

Okay. I'm done. I'm sorry for going so long again. Kaponu, come on up. Why don't you stand up? We'll close in prayer and song. Thank you for your grace. You guys are very gracious to me. Short letter. Very long sermon.

Father, thank You. This was a tough one, but a good one. Much needed, Lord, especially in the day in which we're living today with everything that's happening in the world, the growing hostility towards anyone associated with You, Jew or Christian. Lord, I just would pray for anyone that maybe is going through their own thlipsis and the crushing affliction.

Revelation 2
Navigating Persecution
Pastor JD

Lord, I pray that they will emerge from it, trusting in You to get them through it as only You can. And do encourage their hearts.

And for all of us, Lord, let us be numbered amongst those who see persecution as a blessing and a good thing, and that we're blessed when we're persecuted and spoken evil of knowing that it's because we're associated with You, saved by you. We deem it an honor, Lord, like Polycarp. Thank You Jesus. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.