

Session 3 Jesus' Message to the Church of Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11)

I. THE PRIMARY MESSAGE: FAITHFULNESS IN SUFFERING (REV. 2:8-11)

- A. The church of Smyrna suffered persecution. Jesus called them to walk in the grace of fearlessness and faithfulness that would result in some being martyred—and then greatly rewarded by Jesus.

⁸“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: ⁹“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews...but are a synagogue of Satan.

¹⁰Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹He who has an ear, let him hear ... He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”” (Rev. 2:8-11)

- B. In the *command* to be faithful and fearless is the *promise* of the enabling to obey. There are no super saints but only weak and broken people who are strengthened by the Spirit of glory.

¹⁴If you are reproached...blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory...rests on you. (1 Pet. 4:14)

- C. Smyrna was a port city on the Aegean Sea (west coast of Turkey) with over 100,000 residents. It was a beautiful city referred to in the ancient world as “the Flower of Asia. It was a prosperous harbor that had roads connecting it to many cities in Asia. Today, it is the city of *Izmir* with about 200,000 people. This is the only city of the seven cities in Revelation 2-3 that still exists today.

- D. Emperor worship was a unifying factor in the Roman Empire. Forcing people to declare their loyalty to Rome publicly through emperor worship enhanced national security. Thus, the Christians who refused to participate in this were sentenced to death as criminals of the state.

II. JESUS' REVELATION OF HIMSELF: THE FIRST AND THE LAST

- A. ***The First and the Last***: Jesus is the source of all blessing, and He has authority over how all things end. As the First, He existed before all things and is the first source and reason for all blessing. He can multiply all that His people lose due to persecution. Jesus as the First and Last is mentioned seven times (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 1:8, 17; 2:8; 22:13)—in Isaiah (3x) and in Revelation (4x).

- B. ***Jesus was dead, and came to life***: Death is the ultimate physical loss in this age. It is what people fear most (Heb. 2:15). Jesus revealed Himself as one who “was dead”—He experienced the pain of being killed in a cruel way. Thus, He fully understands what His people go through when facing martyrdom. He came to life and, thus, showed forth His power over death. He knows the way to victory. He experienced the worst that men can do to us, yet triumphed over it.

¹⁵...those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb. 2:15)

¹⁵We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted [tested] as we are...¹⁶come boldly to the throne of grace... (Heb. 4:15-16)

III. AFFIRMATION FOR FAITHFULNESS

- A. Jesus knows the sacrifices that His people make, what they endure, and how they feel. He saw how hard they worked, what they accomplished, and how much pressure that they endured.
- ⁹I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. (Rev. 2:9)***
- B. The church in Smyrna was poor as a result of being persecuted. They lost business opportunities and property, leaving many of them in poverty. Jesus would greatly reward them for this.
- ³²You endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations...³⁴[you] joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better...possession for yourselves in heaven. (Heb. 10:32-34)***
- C. The end-time persecution will affect the finances of the saints.
- ¹⁶He causes all, both small and great...to receive a mark...¹⁷and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark...of the beast. (Rev. 13:16-17)***
- D. **You are rich**: Jesus declared that they were spiritually rich and would have treasure in heaven. Jesus taught on the foolishness of neglecting to acquire riches in God and treasure in heaven.
- ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ²⁰But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you..." ²¹So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Lk. 12:19-21)***
- ²¹Sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven... (Mt. 19:21)***
- E. The church at Smyrna was a financially poor yet spiritually rich church in contrast to the Laodiceans who were a financially rich yet spiritually poor church (Rev. 3:17).
- F. Poverty is neither a sure sign of spirituality nor of a lack of faith. However, often the poor are more eager to follow the Lord, and the rich often find it harder to enter into or embrace kingdom values.
- ⁵Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith...? (Jas. 2:5)***
- ²³...it is hard for a rich man to enter [experience] the kingdom...²⁴It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom... (Mt. 19:23-24)***
- G. **I know the blasphemy**: Believers in Smyrna bore the stigma of ridicule by fellow Jews.

- H. ***The synagogue of Satan*** (2:9; 3:9): They denied Jesus' divinity, persecuted believers, and concluded that His miracles were done by the power of Satan. The scribes blasphemed the Spirit by saying that Jesus did miracles by the power of Satan (Mk. 3:22-30; cf. Mt. 12:24-32).

⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. (Jn. 8:44)

²²And the scribes...said... "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons"... ²⁹he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never as forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"

³⁰... because they said, "He has an unclean spirit." (Mk. 3:22-30)

IV. JESUS DID NOT CORRECT THEM FOR COMPROMISE

- A. Jesus gave no rebuke or correction to this church whose members were faithful even unto death.
- B. The churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia were the only ones in Revelation 2-3 that received no correction. Both were persecuted by demonically energized people in a "synagogue of Satan."

V. EXHORTATION TO RESPOND

- A. Jesus exhorted them not to fear "any" of the things they were to suffer such as losing their money, position, freedom, or their lives because in the age to come He would multiply all that they lost.

¹⁰"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Rev. 2:10)

1. ***Do not fear***: They did not need to fear death because they would live forever. Jesus wanted His disciples to know that some would go to prison and even be killed (Mt. 10:28-33), but that not a hair on their hair would ultimately be lost (Lk. 21:18).

²⁸And 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... (Mt. 10:28)

¹⁶...they will put some of you to death...¹⁸But not a hair of your head shall be lost. (Lk. 21:16-18)

2. Jesus told His disciples in advance that they would be persecuted so that they could interpret it through the lens of love instead of fear and not conclude that He overlooked them (Jn. 16).

¹These things [of persecution] I have spoken...that you should not be made to stumble...⁴that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them... (Jn. 16:1-4)

3. Scripture teaches us to expect persecution (Jn. 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 2:12; 3:12).

¹²All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (2 Tim. 3:12)

- B. ***You will have tribulation for ten days***: This may refer to a literal ten-day period of persecution that took place possibly in the gladiatorial games which included Christians being killed by wild beasts. There is nothing in the text that leads us to interpret the number ten in a symbolic way.
1. Some see this as being fulfilled in ten periods of persecutions under Roman emperors (from Nero to Diocletian) or as referring to ten years—Diocletian's "Great Persecution" lasted ten years (AD 303-313) and was the longest and most intense persecution in the early church.
 2. Some see this as an idiom speaking of a "short period" but not limited to ten literal days.
- C. ***The devil is about to throw some of you into prison***: This persecution was the work of Satan who inspires men to put believers in prison to tempt them to draw back from their faithfulness to Jesus. Jesus allows "some" to go to prison and die. He delivers some from prison like Peter (Acts 5:19; 12:7-11), yet allows some to die in prison like John the Baptist (Mk. 6:27). Some like Paul were delivered from prison and then imprisoned again (Acts 16:24-27; 22:4; 26:10; 2 Cor.11:23).
- D. ***That you may be tested***: Times of testing show forth the depth of one's love for Jesus and thus openly proves the worthiness of Jesus to them (Acts 5:41). The larger body of Christ is also tested when one of its members is thrown into prison. Will they become fearful, offended, or draw back from their faithfulness to avoid also being put into prison? When a few believers are put in prison, it tests the larger body who knows them—knowing that they too may possibly be imprisoned.

⁴¹***Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Acts 5:41)***

- E. ***Be faithful until death***: Testing increases our opportunity to receive eternal rewards.

⁶***Now for a little while...you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷that the genuineness of your faith...though it is tested by fire, may be found to [result in] praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:6-7)***

- F. The Antichrist will overcome the saints physically via martyrdom, yet the saints will overcome him spiritually and will be victorious over Satan by standing faithful in their love for Jesus.

⁷***It was granted to him [the Antichrist] to make war with the saints and to overcome them [physically through martyrdom]. (Rev. 13:7)***

¹¹***They [martyred saints] overcame him [Satan via the Antichrist] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:11)***

²***I saw...those who have the victory over the Beast [the Antichrist]... having harps... (Rev. 15:2)***

VI. TWO PROMISES FOR OVERCOMERS

- A. ***Crown of life***: This is not the same as the gift of eternal life that every believer will receive by faith. Two Greek words describe the two different types of crowns. One is the *crown of a ruler* (Gr. *diadem*), and the other is the *crown of a victor* (Gr., *stephanos*) given to those who win in the athletic games. *Stephanos* is used many times (Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11).

¹⁰Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹He who has an ear, let him hear...He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. (Rev. 2:10-11)

- B. This is a “crown of triumph” given specifically to those who endure persecution and temptation. This crown affects one’s honor and place of function in the millennial kingdom.

¹²Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved [found consistent], he will receive the crown of life...promised to those who love Him. (Jas. 1:12)

- C. ***Not hurt by the second death***: The first death is the death of our physical body. The second death is synonymous with being cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:6, 14). It is “death” because it is a separation from God forever. It is called the “second” death because it follows physical death.
- D. The most terrifying time in human history will occur when the second death is administered to billions of people at the Great White Throne. The second death is the most intense and severe “hurt” that any can experience. The saints in Smyrna were “hurt” temporarily—physically, relationally, and financially—but, if they stayed faithful to Jesus, they would not be hurt at all by the second death.