

Revelation A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #6
Revelation 2:8-11
7/26/2006

Christ's Letter to the Church at Smyrna

In 1 John 4:18 John had written under the direction of the Holy Spirit that, *“perfect love casteth out fear.”* That it was correct was reaffirmed by Jesus in His encouragement to the believers in Smyrna. Because of His love for them they need not fear no matter what Satan did to them. In the hands of Jesus is safety even as Jesus had said in John 10:28 that *“no man is able to pluck them out His hands.”* And, yes, we are also safe in the hands of Jesus.

They would be *“tried”* and *“have tribulation for ten days.”* *“Tried”* is from **peirazo** (3985) and means “to prove” in a good sense and “tempted” in a bad sense. The believers would be proven to be genuine in their faith through the difficulties of the “tribulation” they were going to face. The *“ten days”* likely referred to the rule of ten Roman Emperors, from Nero (64-68 AD) to Diocletian (303-313 AD).

CHRIST'S PROMISE OF BLESSING

“Be thou faithful unto death” He encouraged them, and they were. They were faithful martyrs for their Lord. Jesus has special crowns for those who are faithful in the midst of tribulation. In James 1:12 He said to us, *“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”*

Those who receive those *“crowns of life”* may pay a dear price for them here, but they will have something wonderful to rejoice over for eternity.

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

Jesus said, are you paying attention to Me? He's speaking to us today as much as He was to the believers at Smyrna. If we are paying attention we, like the believers at Smyrna, will be “overcomers” and victorious in whatever situation we face.

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For instance, the widow Jesus told us about in Luke 21:1-4 was a **penes** widow when she came into the Temple, but after she gave her **"two mites"** she was **ptochos** widow, i.e., she gave everything she had and had nothing at all to live on. The faith of the believers in Smyrna had cost them all of their worldly possessions. They were absolutely without anything.

"But thou art rich" Jesus said. First of all, they were blessed here with all spiritual blessings which money and earthly wealth cannot buy. Without these spiritual blessings all of the money in the world cannot make one rich, even here, for no earthly possessions can truly make a person blessed. Second, they were laying up treasures in heaven which Jesus was using to prepare for their arrival there.

It is interesting to contrast the "poverty" of the believers in Smyrna with the "riches" of the folks in Laodicea.

4. ***"I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."*** The situation which Paul had dealt with much of his ministry had infected and saturated Smyrna. First, there were many Jews who, while born of some Jewish parents, had rejected the faith of their fathers. These were simply secular or atheistic Jews, "false Jews." Even though they were of Jewish blood they were no longer Jews in their faith. Second, there were some Gentiles who had converted to Judaism and became fanatics about the legalism of the Jewish practices, rejecting the spiritual truths of the Jewish faith while insisting upon the outward practices. Third, there were those Jews who, like the Pharisees Jesus addressed in John 8, practiced the Jewish faith as a way of thinking they were earning their way into God's family. Jesus told these that their father was actually Satan. From what we know about the situation in Smyrna it seems like all of these descriptions fit.

Paul wrote about some of these in Romans and Galatians. In Romans 9:6-8 Paul wrote: ***"For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."*** In Galatians 3:7 Paul wrote ***"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."***

The believers in Smyrna had wisely and faithfully identified and rejected those imposters who claimed to be God's children and had not allowed them to infect and weaken their fellowship.

Even today, we have many who are "descendants" of these of the synagogue of Satan, but they do not claim to be Jews, claiming instead to be Christians, but are people who claim to be God's children based upon their works and efforts.

CHRIST'S ENCOURAGEMENT AND WARNING

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

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called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”
And 1 Peter 4:12-13, 19 says *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”*

Suffering has no real benefit for the unbeliever — it is just something that is a part of life which he must experience — but, for the one who belongs to Jesus, it always is used for something that is glorious and beneficial. When the believer asks God “Why me?” in the midst of pain and suffering he may not get a specific answer, but he can always know that his Lord uses it for his benefit, always! Jesus is always in charge of everything.

Because so many of those addressed in this letter would die as martyrs for their faith — history tells us that over 5 million died for their faith during those years — Jesus then referred them back to His statement “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen.”

Bishop Polycarp is a good example of how this encouraged and strengthened the faith of the martyrs. It is said that before he was burned alive at the stake the Roman Proconsul begged him to recant and live, but He said, “Eighty and six years have I served my Lord and He never did me any injury. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”

Christ was triumphant over death and His victory over death belongs also to those who give their lives to Him.

CHRIST'S COMMENDATION

“I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.”

Jesus had only commendation, no condemnation at all, for the church at Smyrna. He was in their midst and knew all about everything that was happening to each of them.

1. **“I know thy works.”** **“Works”** **ergon** (2041) means “performance or the result of effort.” Jesus knew all that they had accomplished. Nothing had gone unseen by their Master.
2. **“And tribulation”** **“Tribulation”** is from **thlipsis** (2347) which is from **thilbo** (2346) which in turn is from **thlao** which means “to break, to crush, compress, squeeze.” **Thlipsis** symbolically meant grievous affliction or distress which caused a heavy burden upon the spirit as well as upon the physical body. This was not the Great Tribulation spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24 regarding the end times, but it did make it very costly to be faithful to the Lord. Because of their faithfulness they lived in the midst of constant trouble and pain.
3. **“And poverty”** **“Poverty”** is from **ptocheia** (4432) from **ptochos** (4434) meaning “poor and helpless.” This word denotes the type of poverty in which one has nothing at all and is completely helpless as contrasted with **penes** (3993) which means poor but capable of providing for oneself.

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Christ's second letter was addressed to the Church at Smyrna, the martyr church was the church that suffered martyrdom for Christ. The word *Smyrna* means "myrrh" which implies suffering.

The city of Smyrna is still in existence today, but is known by the Turkish name, Izmir. Having visited there a number of times, Dr. Vernon McGee gives us some interesting information about Smyrna and the following is summarized from information in his book, Through The Bible, Vol. 5, page 904.

"Smyrna was one of the loveliest cities of Asia. It was called a flower, an ornament, and has been called the crown of all Asia. The acropolis is located on Mount Pagos. The city was adorned with beautiful buildings and beautiful temples. It had a temple of Zeus, a temple of Diana, a temple of Apollo, and a temple of Asclepius. It also had a theatre, a music center and a stadium and it was at that stadium where Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna and a student of John, was burned alive in A.D. 155.

As Ephesus represents the apostolic church of the first century church, so Smyrna represents the martyr church which covers the time period from about 100 A.D. to approximately 314 A.D., from the death of the Apostle John to the Edict of Toleration by Constantine, which was given in 313 A.D. and ended the persecution of Christians all over the Roman Empire."

Revelation 2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

Revelation 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

Revelation 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Revelation 2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

CHRIST'S SALUTATION

As He addressed "*the angel*," the pastor, of the church, Jesus referred their attention back to His words in 1:17-18, "*Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*"

Jesus chose particulars from His description of Himself to apply those characteristics to the church He was addressing. To this church of suffering He reminded them that He was before anything — any circumstance or any experience — in this world and He will be after all things no longer exist. They needed to be reminded that nothing is allowed to happen to them that is beyond His control and use — that each and every thing that came into their lives would have to first pass through His hands and that He would use it for their benefit and for His glory. Romans 8:28-30 says "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also*