

Faithful Unto Death (*Part 3*)

Revelation 2:8-11

Thought for the Day: The health, wealth and prosperity gospel is a false gospel ("doctrines of demons" – 1 Tim. 4:1), leading millions astray from the truth, and those who proclaim it are false teachers ("speaking lies in hypocrisy" – 1 Tim. 4:2). We need to "set our minds on things that are above" (Col. 3:1-4) and "lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven" (Mt. 6:19-21).

The believers' experience in Smyrna, and that of millions of suffering Christians in the world today, completely contradicts the lies of the health, wealth and prosperity gospel that is being propagated in the American Church today. (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

I. The Greeting (2:8)

A. The Addressee: And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write...

B. The Sender: ...The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

Jesus described Himself in this way to the believers in Smyrna:

- 1) To assure them that they did not need to be afraid of what they were about to suffer. (Cp. vs. 10)
- 2) To communicate to them that He fully understood their suffering because He too had suffered, even to the point of death, as some of them were going to experience. He was not asking them to endure something that He Himself had not experienced.
- 3) To remind them that He had risen from the dead, and because He had risen, they too would rise from the dead and live forever with Him in heaven. (Cp. vss. 10-11)
- 4) To remind them that He is the eternally existing, all-powerful God of the Old Testament. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and He will certainly sustain them through their suffering.
- 5) He was with them at the beginning and He would be with them at the end; He's in control and therefore, they have nothing to fear!
- 6) He who is the Author of their faith is also the Finisher of their faith; He who had begun a good work in them would bring it to completion.

"Christ was reminding them that he was sovereign and eternal. No matter what they faced, Christ already knew about it; as the 'First and the Last,' nothing could take him by surprise... Even if [they had] to suffer to the point of death, Christ, the one who "came to life again," would raise them to eternal life with him." (*The Life Application Commentary Series*)

II. The Recognition (2:9)

A. They were suffering physically

9 "I know your tribulation and your poverty...

- Tribulation – "This term *tribulation* (or pressure) was used in classical Greek to

describe the torture of being slowly mashed to death beneath the crush of an enormous boulder." (*Swindoll, Letters to Churches...Then and Now, p. 9*)

- Poverty – abject poverty; reduced to a state of begging.

...and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

- They were persecuted by the Roman civil government.
- They were persecuted by the Jewish religious community.

B. They were prospering spiritually

...(but you are rich)... (Matthew 6:19-21, 24; 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19).

III. The Exhortation (2:10a)

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer.

- It's a command! (Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:4-6; 1 Peter 3:13-15)
- Our love for the Lord, our fear of the Lord (reverential awe and respect), and our faith in the Lord must be so strong that we are not afraid of suffering and dying for Him. *Now* is the time to develop these qualities in our relationship with Him!

Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation.

- Just like Job in the Old Testament, God allowed the devil to test the faith of the believers. Satan can do nothing more than God allows—He is in control.
- Best understood as ten actual days. Their suffering would come to an end.

Be faithful unto death... Don't be fearful, be faithful!

IV. The Promise (2:10b-11)

...and I will give you the crown of life.

- The crown of life which is the enjoyment of eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. (James 1:12; Revelation 3:11; 4:4, 10)
- "The message to the Smyrna church was to remain faithful during their suffering because God is in control and because his promises are reliable. Jesus never taught that by being faithful to him, believers would avoid troubles, suffering, and persecution. Rather, believers must be faithful to Christ even when suffering. Only then will their faith prove genuine. Believers remain faithful by keeping their eyes on Christ and on what he promises for now and for the future (see Phil 3:13-14; 2 Tim 4:8)." (*The Life Application Commentary Series*)

A. Christ's Call: 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

B. Christ's Promise: The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'

Whoever stands strong for the faith despite persecution and suffering will not be hurt by the second death. (Revelation 20:14; 21:8, 27; 22:14-15).