

Faithful Unto Death (*Part 4*)

Revelation 2:8-11

Thought for the Day: We need not fear persecution or suffering because God is in control of the circumstances of our lives. He will give us endurance and help as we set our hope on the blessings of eternal life in His kingdom.

The church in Smyrna was a suffering church. The believers were being persecuted by the Roman government because they refused to render worship unto Caesar. They were also being persecuted by the Jewish population. But ultimately, Satan was the real source of their suffering. Did Jesus promise to deliver them from their suffering? What is His counsel to those who are suffering in the crucible of persecution?

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.

II. The Recognition (2:9)

9 I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

A. They were suffering physically

B. They were prospering spiritually

III. The Exhortation (2:10a)

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer.

A. Don't Be Fearful

1. It's a command! (Matthew 10:28-33; Luke 12:4-6; 1 Peter 3:13-15)
2. Our love for the Lord, our fear of the Lord (i.e., reverential awe and respect), and our faith in the Lord must be so strong that we are not afraid to suffer and die for the Lord.
3. 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.

1. Contrary to the health, wealth and prosperity gospel so popular today, Jesus did not instruct them to take authority over the devil and command him to depart.
2. God allows the devil to test the faith of believers. (e.g., Job in the O.T.)
3. Satan can do nothing more than God allows; there is a limit.
4. Their suffering would come to an end in God's timing. He is completely in control of the circumstances of our lives.

B. Do Be Faithful

Be faithful unto death...

1. Matthew 10:22 – We are not saved by our endurance; rather, we demonstrate the reality of our salvation by our endurance.
2. “Standing firm to the end is not a way to be saved but the evidence that a person is really committed to Jesus. Persistence is not a means to earn salvation; it is the by-product of a truly devoted life.” (*The Life Application Study Bible, p. 1980*)
3. Matthew 24:9-13; Revelation 12:11.

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

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

- The crown which is the enjoyment of eternal life in the kingdom of heaven.
- James 1:12; Revelation 3:11; 4:4, 10
- “Believers need not fear death because it will only result in their receiving the crown of life... 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). (*Life Application Commentary Series*)

A. Christ’s Call

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

1. Note that this is addressed to individuals and to the churches.
2. This teaching is for all believers and all churches in all places at all times.

B. Christ’s Promise

The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

1. Who is the one who conquers / overcomes? (1 John 5:4-5)
2. What is the second death? (Revelation 20:11-15; 21:5-8)

Suggested Applications:

1. It is our love for the Lord, our fear of the Lord, and our faith in the Lord that will enable us to be strong in the face of persecution and suffering. What are you doing to develop these qualities in your life now?
2. How do you respond to the idea that God allows Satan to test our faith? Does this cause you to question the goodness, power and wisdom of God? Do you believe He is truly in control of the circumstances of your life?
3. Jesus calls us to be “faithful unto death.” Faithfulness must be developed in the trials of life. What opportunity do you have right now to develop faithfulness?
4. In many of the Scriptures that deal with persecution and suffering, we are exhorted to set our focus on our blessings in the life to come. How can we do this?