

SMYRNA: THE SUFFERING CHURCH

Revelation 2:8-11

(Main Idea of the Texts)

Jesus encouraged the church at Smyrna to remain faithful during suffering because He would reward them.

(Main Idea of this Study)

As Christians we should remain faithful to Christ during any suffering we may face because Christ will reward us in the future.

I. Christ is characterized by His deity and resurrection power (8).

A. He is the eternal God (8a).

- *Smyrna*-see video.
- *says the First and the Last-protos kai eschatos*. The emphasis is on Jesus' eternality and sovereignty.
Isaiah 44:6: Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: '**I am the First and I am the Last**; besides Me there is no God.
Isaiah 48:12: Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, My called: I am He, **I am the First, I am also the Last**.

B. He is the resurrected Lord (8b).

- *who was dead, and came to life*-Rather, "who became dead." Jesus Christ described Himself to this church as the eternal One who had died and then experienced resurrection. These believers would have found encouragement, that even though the prospect of death threatened them, resurrection and eternal life with Christ were certain.

This may have been a slap at the nature cult of Cybele, the mother goddess. Many of the ancient fertility religions based their world-view on personified cycles of nature, winter death, and spring rebirth.

II. The Church is commended for its faith and perseverance (9-10).

A. We must accept sacrifice (9).

- *I know your works*-deeds (Ephesians 2:10).
- *tribulation*- Jesus Christ knew the afflictions (tribulation, affliction, distress, pressures, oppression) these Christians were experiencing as a result of their testimony for Him. It is theologically significant that in the book of the Revelation believers suffer "tribulations," but unbelievers suffer "the wrath of God." Believers are always protected (sealed) from divine judgment.
- *and poverty*-Evidently their persecutors were cutting off some of their incomes.
- *(but you are rich)*-In spite of their physical poverty, the Christians in Smyrna were "rich," spiritually.

James 2:5: Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world **to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom** which He promised to those who love Him?

B. We will be attacked by Satan (9).

- *I know the blasphemy*-defame, revile, slander. This word had an OT connotation of "to revile" and was usually used in connection with verbal attacks on YHWH.
- *those who say they are Jews and are not*- Evidently some of the persecutors were ("say they are") "Jews," who both slandered the Christians and cursed Jesus Christ. They apparently claimed to be committed to God, but were not true (believing) Israelites. From Acts and Galatians we know that the Jews caused great opposition to the proclamation of the gospel.
- *but are a synagogue of Satan*-They came from Satan's camp ("the synagogue of Satan"). The name "Satan" means "Adversary."

C. We can anticipate suffering (10).

- *Do not fear*-This is a PRESENT MIDDLE or PASSIVE (deponent) IMPERATIVE with the NEGATIVE PARTICLE which meant to stop an act already in process.
- *any of those things which you are about to suffer*-These persecuted Christians did not need to "fear" their adversaries or death, since they would live forever with Jesus Christ.
- *the devil is about to throw some of you into prison*-"The devil"
- (Gr. diabolos, "Slanderer" or "Accuser") would incite their foes to imprison some of them shortly, having received permission from God to do so. Behind evil human leaders lurks a supernatural personal force of evil.
- *that you may be tested*-This would be a trial that Satan would use ("you will be tested") to try to entice them to depart from the Lord. This term "tested" is used in two senses: (1) believers are tested so as to show their true faith and grow stronger (cf. 2:10; Acts 14:27; Rom. 5:3-4; 8:17-19; Heb. 5:8; Jas. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 4:12-19) and (2) unbelievers are tested to show their unbelief and deserved judgment (cf. 3:10). James 1:2-3: My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, **knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.**
- *you will have tribulation ten days*-The "ten days" of trouble may refer to a period of relatively brief duration, specifically the "days" of persecution under 10 Roman emperors.
- *Be faithful until death*-This is a PRESENT MIDDLE or PASSIVE (deponent) IMPERATIVE which emphasizes the believer's need to continue in faith even if it means physical death.

III. The Church is challenged by God's reward and promise (10-11).

A. We will receive a crown for our faith (10).

- *I will give you the crown of life*- This was the victor's crown called the "stephanos." It was the reward of Christian martyrs. John uses the term for life, *zoē*, to refer to eternal life, resurrection life. It is the crown which is life, or the reward which is life, not an actual crown to adorn the head. "Crown" here does not refer to the kind royalty wear, but to the wreath awarded winning athletes.

B. We will overcome the second death (11).

- *He who has an ear, let him hear*- This is a recurrent admonition for spiritual attention and discernment (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9). Listen up! Pay attention!
- *what the Spirit says to the churches*-What the Holy Spirit is saying.
- *He who overcomes*-This is also a recurrent admonition to faithfulness.
- *shall not be hurt by the second death*- This is a DOUBLE NEGATIVE ("shall not no be hurt) which shows God's ultimate care for those who are martyred. The "second death" referred to hell or eternal separation from fellowship with God.

Revelation 21:8: But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, **which is the second death.**

Matthew 10:28: And 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.