

I. JESUS ENCOURAGES THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

- A. The city of Smyrna had laid in ruins for 300 years, then was rebuilt in 290 B.C. It was a city that had come back to life. Jesus' reference to His own resurrection in Rev. 2:8 may possibly allude to this fact.
- B. The church in this city was probably founded by Paul during his third journey, 53-56AD (Ac. 19:10). Polycarp, bishop of the church at Smyrna, a pupil of John was burned at the stake in 155AD at the age of 86. He had refused to declare that "Caesar is Lord." It is one of the 2 churches, the other being Philadelphia, of which no weaknesses are mentioned. It is also the only city (and church) of the 7 that has continued to the present day (Izmir, Turkey)

II. JESUS REVEALS HIMSELF TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA (V. 8)

- A. ***The First and the Last*** (cf. 1:8, 11, 17-18; 22:13)
Jesus applied this OT name for Yahewh to Himself, clearly claiming Himself to be God (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12 cf. Col. 1:18)
- B. To a church of martyrs, Jesus reveals Himself as a man who died but conquered death. He experienced the worst that man can do to us and triumphed over it.

III. JESUS AFFIRMS THEIR FAITHFULNESS (V. 9)

- A. Jesus saw their labors in ministry in the midst of on-going tribulation or persecution.
Heb 10:32-34 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³ partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴ for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.
- B. Jesus prepares us ahead of time, so we that should not be surprised by persecution.
John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."
Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."
2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.
- C. The believers had continued to endure in the face of blasphemy and slander (Mt. 12:24-32 cf. 8:44)
- D. End-Time persecution will greatly affect finances (Rev. 13:16-17) so we need to prepare.

1. One way to break the spirit of the world and fear is to give generously. Go directly against the spirit of greed and fear. Greed of wanting more. Fear of not having enough.

Luke 6:38 "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

2. Some people give out of excess. What is leftover is given to God. Rather, give God your first-fruits (OT), not your last-fruits or left-over-fruits.

Mal 3:8-10 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. ¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it."

1 Tim 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

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?

IV. JESUS CALLS BELIEVERS TO FEARLESSNESS AND FAITHFULNESS (VS. 10A)

- A. Jesus warns them that some would face prison and even death. Jesus tells them ahead of time to prepare them (Luke 22:31-32)

Luke 22:31-32 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. ³² "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

- B. It is clearly the work of Satan to try to tempt them to draw them back from faithfulness to Jesus. Satan inspires evil men to imprison some of them. The Lord delivers some from prison like Peter (Ac. 5:19; 12:7-11) yet allows others to die in prison like James and John the Baptist (Ac. 12:2; Mk. 6:27).

Dan. 3:17-18 "If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ "But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

- C. Jesus allows imprisonment of His servants to magnify His testimony through their faithfulness.

1 Pet. 1:6-7 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Acts 5:40-41 And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

- D. It is important to have a theology that incorporates suffering and persecution in this present age. Otherwise, we will be disillusioned and unprepared for the end-times (Luke 22:31-32; Song 4:16). There will be many believers with the grace of martyrdom in the end-times.
- E. Tribulation 10 days could refer literally, perhaps to the 10 day gladiatorial contests in which Christians were thrown to the wild beasts. It could also possibly speak prophetically of the 10 periods of persecution under the Roman Emperors (from Nero to Diocletian) until Constantine declared Christianity to be the official state religion of the Roman Empire in 313 AD. The 10 days figure was meant to encourage them. It's temporary, limited suffering vs. eternal glory. Prepare for the worst, live in sonship. Life is not a series of problems.

1 Cor. 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

2 Cor. 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

V. JESUS PROMISES ETERNAL REWARDS FOR OVERCOMERS (V. 10B; JAMES 1:12)

- A. The crown of life is not referring to the gift of eternal life that all born again believers receive by faith. Jesus was speaking to believers who had already received the free gift of salvation. Jesus was not exhorting them to be born again. He was offering born again believers rewards as incentives to greater diligence in the face of temptation and pressure. He was calling believers to live in a way to receive heavenly rewards. Salvation or justification is a free gift given to us. It is based on Jesus' worthiness (Eph. 2:8-9). Heavenly rewards are given to us according to our works, or our response of gratitude to Jesus for giving us so great a salvation.
- B. In our resurrected bodies, we will all have different capacities and abilities (1 Cor. 15:41-42). The NT refers to the different kinds of crowns that a believer may receive from the Lord (Rev. 3:11; 1 Cor 9:25..) crown of life (Jam. 1:12; Rev. 2:10), the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8), the crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4)
- C. We must see the relationship of being challenged by our hardship to receiving eternal rewards (2 Cor. 4:16-18; 1 Pet. 1:6-7).

2 Cor. 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

VI. WE NEED THE SUPERNATURAL MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO OVERCOME IN THE LAST DAYS (V. 11)

- A. The second death is separation from God forever in the lake of fire (Rev. 2:11; 20:6; 20:14; 21:8).
- B. An overcomer in this context is one who matures in the specific areas of faithfulness that Jesus emphasized in their life. Overcoming does not mean attaining perfection in one's character but rather constantly reach for victory with all our strength. The Lord evaluates us with great tenderness. He is very kind in His evaluation of our lives. For the believers at Smyrna, to overcome was to remain faithful in persecution.
- C. The judgment seat of Christ, and then the second death will show forth the "great reversal" in history when righteousness is seen as wise and valuable and sin is seen as a terrible waste of life.
1. Revelation gives one of the most in-depth teachings on rewards. Jesus knew we would need to be motivated and stabilized during the release of the glory and crises in His End-Time plan (1 Cor. 3:8; Luke 6:23; Mt. 16:27; 1 Pet. 1:17).
- Rev. 22:12 And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.***
- Matt. 16:27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.***
2. These equip us to persevere by being anchored in eternity with confidence that our choices will be rewarded in eternity. When suffering is seen in God's light, it loses its power to intimidate.
- D. We need to develop ears to hear what Jesus says to us through the Holy Spirit; otherwise, we will not be able to understand eternal rewards which impact our hearts to live for God in the present.