

LETTERS TO THE 7 CHURCHES –

The Suffering Church - MAY 5, 2021

Sister Shelbia:

Psalm of God - John Hagee. Lessons from the potter, our God. Please remember we are the pot. God has absolute sovereignty in your life. This means he can do what he wants in your life if he wants, as long as he wants, without explanation of it forever.

Opening Prayer:

Hear me oh Lord. We need you. We are nothing without you. We need the life giving substance only you can give. I'm thankful for ever lady that has come today. We know you have brought every lady that is suppose to be here. I'm asking that you will give every person here something they can take with them today. We are glad to hear the good news about Kathy - you know the reasons of what is happening. We trust you God. We are praising you that Janey's UTI is cleared up. We praise that you know all our needs. We thank you for the concerns these ladies have for one another. We are ever so grateful to Sharon for her home. We are thankful for your leaders, David Jeremiah, John Hagee, David Reagan. Please help us spread Your Word. We want to glorify you in the name of Jesus. Amen.

THE SUFFERING CHURCH:

The prophecy within Revelation speaks of more than just the end of days. This is a collection of 7 letters to the early Christian Churches. They, like Revelation, are prophetic. Christs words speak to all the churches through all the ages. 7 messages for today's believers. Words of encouragement as well as prophecy.

CHURCH OF SMYRNA:

Rev 2:8-11 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

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.

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.

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.

What do you say to somebody who is suffering? How do you counsel people that are going thru great times of sorrow and tribulation? What would you say to an individual whose family has been torn apart because of the stand they have taken for Christ? What if your neighbor has lost his job and is experiencing poverty. How would you reach out to him and what would you say?

We've all done our best when in this place as friends and counselors. We've given it our best shot. We've often walked away from these conversations wondering if we said the right thing said in the right way. Wouldn't it be great if there were a page in the word of God with exactly the right words to say for every situation we face? Something like a counseling manual with an index.

The more you study the Bible the more you realize you have exactly that kind of book. As we learn, we become more anxious to know more and more about what the Bible says because ultimately, it provides you the best answers. As you become familiar with every section and message in the scripture, you are able little by little to locate central passages on almost every situation in life. Here before us is our Lords own formulae for encouraging those who are going through suffering and sorrow and pain.

It is a personal letter written to a church that was living in tremendous pressure. Please take note because you are going to need what Jesus said to this church sometime in your life. Suffering you see, touches everyone of our lives at one time or another. We cannot avoid it, and preparing for it is something that always makes us stronger.

The Church of Smyrna was located 35 miles north of Ephesus. It was founded as a Greek colony on the summit of the hill of Patmos about 1000 B.C. Smyrna was captured and destroyed by hostile forces in 600 B.C. General Aetius, one of Alexander's 4 generals rebuilt the city in 300 and 281 BC. It was a matter of pride with the inhabitants of Smyrna that their city had died and it lived again. Smyrna was the proudest and most beautiful city of Asia and it was considered by historians as the most beautiful city the Greeks ever built.

The city sloped to the sea. Its splendid buildings on the rounded top of Pagas cut what was known as the crown of Smyrna. Along the slopes of the hill was one of the largest Greek Amphitheatre that accommodated over 20,000 people.

The coins of Smyrna boasted that she was the first city of Asia. Some called Smyrna the glory of Asia. It was here that Caesar worship was centered for the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

Smyrna was the birthplace of Homer, the great Greek poet.

The city today is known as Ismar, the Turkish corruption of the word Smyrna.

It is by far the largest city in Asia today and it has a population of 275K people.

The city got its name from its chief export - an aromatic extract taken from a thorny tree. An extract that was used by the ancients as a perfume and as an anesthetic and embalming fluid.

The word Smyrna actually occurs three times in the New Testament in connection with Jesus Christ:

At Jesus birth, the wise men came from the east and opened their treasures, they presented Jesus with gold, frankincense and Smyrna.

At the crucifixion of Jesus, those that stood by offered him wine mixed with Smyrna to help deaden the pain of his suffering.

At the burial of Jesus, Nicodemus came with Joseph of Arimathea and the two men took the body of Jesus down from the cross, wrapped his body in linen, and in the folds of the linen Jesus was wrapped in, they put 100 pound weights and Smyrna in it.

No one knows for sure how the church of Smyrna got started. Its history is not written in the book of acts as many of the churches of the New Testament are. It was probably started as an outreach of the church of Ephesus. Remember, it was only 35 miles away.

Paul had directed a three year campaign that caused all of Asia to hear the word of God. The word Smyrna perfectly describes the church. The Christians in this city were persecuted and as one writer said, they were laying embalmed in Smyrna in the precious spices of their suffering.

Even the process of processing Myrrh matched the situation in the church you see. Myrrh was made by crushing a plant and from the crushed plant then the embalming fluid was extracted which was Myrrh.

Isaiah the prophet has an interesting omission in his prediction concerning the second coming of Christ. Listen to ***Isaiah 60:6 The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD.***

Isn't it interesting that when he talks about the second coming, Myrrh or Smyrna is left out. Jesus will never again come as the suffering savior when he comes again, he will be the sovereign savior and there's no need for Smyrna when he returns.

This is one of 2 churches in the list of seven churches that God says nothing negative about.

Remember last week, the Lord said Ephesus was a good church, nevertheless, I have somewhat against you because you have left your first love. You read the letter to the Smyrnians and you don't find anything he said that is negative. What was there about this congregation that caused them to suffer so much? So much so that Myrrh is a significant representation of the church itself.

The church was despised and disdained in the city because of its insignificance.

Think about this with me for just a moment. On the streets of the gods in the city of Smyrna were huge, impressive shrines to Apollo and Sibelius.

At the end of the street, elevated above was the temple of Jupiter. But where were the Christians in Smyrna to be found? They were huddled in homes, hiding in the catacombs, quietly worshipping the Lord. The pagan Jews and the Greeks of the city abhorred and despised the simplicity of the early Christians and they persecuted them because they had no standing in the city whatsoever.

But perhaps the real for the persecution in Smyrna lies in the worship of Ceasar, which was centered in that city. Smyrna was the first city to ever build a temple to honor Rome and Tiberius, The emperor. To the average Christina, Rome has always been held in disrepute because of the published reports of her full treatment of the church. We consider the Romans like tyrants.

But the people of that day did not consider Rome like that. The citizens of Rome loved their government because the people did not fear war anymore. The 'Peace of Rome' took their fear away for any type of war. War was abolished simply because Rome had become so strong, that no one could ever attempt to attack her. And the Roman government was also responsible for linking together the great system of roads that pushed the empire into an almost instant touch with one another. It allowed for easy travel to other places.

The Romans banished pirates from the high seas; and they established a system of high law that handled the disputes of the people.

If you lived in Rome back in those days, you loved Rome. Rome made everything work for you. They took care of everything, all your needs. You didn't despise Rome at all. The Roman Empire was a blessing to the people and the people were very grateful and they were willing to worship the spirit of Rome. But when it became difficult to worship the spirit of Rome, It was just a small step to worship the spirit of Rome as it was personified in the emperor, Ceasar himself.

The emperors began to be worshipped and at first, they resisted it and then reluctantly they accepted it and finally, not only did they accept it but they expected it and actually began to accrue to themselves the attributes of deity.

By the time the book of Revelation was written, emperor worship was compulsory. John was banished to Patmos and the churches were persecuted because they would not bow down to Ceasar and declare their loyalty to Rome. They refused to burn a pinch of incense in the temple dedicated to the emperor and confess that Kysar Curious 'Ceasar is lord'. They refused to do that. Because the Christians refused to burn this little piece of incense, they were marked men and women. They were considered traitors. They were disloyal to the government. The persecution was not so much religious as it was political. To be a Christians in the Roman empire was to live in jeopardy every day. And in Smyrna, the city that prided itself as the center of emperor worship, it meant pressure, and poverty and persecution.

Some Christians were tortured on the rack, which was a wheel about 2 feet wide and above 8 feet tall. The ankles of the deserter would be chained to the floor and his wrists to the wheel or the rack. And every time the believer was asked to recant Christ, the rack was turned and tightened until his limbs were torn from his body.

Other Christians were burned in boiling oil, Others were crucified and many were thrown to the hungry lions before 50,000 blood thirsty people in the colosseum. The most painful torture was to be burned slowly, at the stake.

The suffering of the Christians in Smyrna is described for us in this letter by three words: Pressure, poverty and persecution.

Revelation 2:9 says 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.

The Greek word THLIPSIS means pressure.

The picture is one of placing a heavy rock upon a mans chest until it crushes him to death. It is like the grinding of a millstone until wheat is produced.

It is like the pressure that squeezes wine out of the grapes.

The Christians were under constant pressure from the pagan society around them. There was never a moment of any relief. There was constant, uninterrupted pressure. They also experienced poverty. Notice in the text, I know your Poverty.

There are 2 key words for poverty in the New Testament language:

Penia - we get penny. The word in John's day referred to a man who had to work for a living and just got by. He was a poor man forced to work hard in order just to survive.

Ptocheia (tokia) means absolute poverty. A word that describes someone who could not support himself at all. Destitute. This word is used to describe someone who has absolutely no means to support himself at all. He was unable to put food on his table. In the midst of the wealth of this city, the believers were Ptocheia.

The Believers were penniless and poor.. and were subject to object poverty. Their poverty was due to their faith in Christ. Not only were they mobbed and lured and robbed, they were boycotted in the city. When people knew they were followers of Christ, they were banned from making a living. The trade unions and businesses shut them out because they considered them disloyal to the emperor, and thus to the empire.

There's a kind of heroic excitement to persecution. Under such pressure many daring and exciting things are accomplished. But if you add to the persecution, daily financial and personal burdens, the load is almost too heavy to bear and such was the Christians who lived in Smyrna. They suffered from pressure, poverty and persecution.

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.

Blasphemy might be better translated by our word slander. A group of unbelieving Jews had been drawn to Smyrna because of the business opportunities generated by the Myrrh business. They were probably Jewish converts who did not want to leave the Jewish traditions and they tried to marry these traditions with Christianity and Ephesus sent apostles who were not; and Smyrna had men who said they were Jews and they were not; and they persecuted the people. They caused them great harm in every way they moved. Every day in Smyrna, things became worse and worse for men and women who called the name of Christ.

To this suffering family of believers, Jesus writes this letter and he tells them Two things. This is where the advice from Lord to suffering people comes in: One is a negative prohibition and the other, a positive instruction.

1. verse 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. don't let your life be controlled by fear.

The 23rd Psalm of David talks about not fearing evil. Fear not. Don't have any fear of evil.

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

The Church of Smyrna was to face the trials we have talked about and Jesus comes to the people of Smyrna with a simple instruction - I don't want you to be afraid. Suffering, prison and martyrdom are to be met with the gracious word of the Lord. Don't be afraid. Do not let your life be controlled by fear.

You say, Pastor, that's easy to say but not so easy to do.

If there's any emotion people are feeling today, it's a quiet fear.

Where is this all going? What's going to happen? What's going to happen in our culture? Our economy? What's going to happen in our faith? If we aren't careful we will allow our lives to be run by fear. And the Lord Jesus comes to us in the midst of our troubles and says to us, **FEAR NOT, FOR I AM WITH YOU!** Someone has said there are 350 Fear Notes in the Bible. One for every day of the year. There's a lot of fear notes in the Bible, especially connected with the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of his great messages to us from his birth throughout his whole life, "IF YOU HAVE ME YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AFRAID BECAUSE I'VE OVERCOME THE WORLD!"

If you've come here and you're going through a lot of stuff, maybe you think I'm gonna tell you to buck up and try harder. Work harder, but what I want to say to you is what Jesus said to the churches: **DON'T BE AFRAID!!!! YOU DON'T HAVE TO FEAR WHAT IS HAPPENING, WHAT MAY HAPPEN. FEAR NOT.**

But notice, there's another word from the Lord Jesus that is perhaps even more important.

2. Verse 10 Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. don't let your life be controlled by fear.

Now there's some disagreement about what this means. Does this mean to be faithful all through your life until you are killed for your faithfulness or does it mean to die a natural death. It really doesn't make any difference. The severity of life at that time, I would think Jesus is saying you may end up losing your life for your faith, but be faithful until death because as you notice in this text, Jesus sees life from an eternal perspective and he wants us to learn how to do this as well.

John explains that we need to remember that faith and faithfulness are the same word in the Greek language. **This is understandable because it is from faith that we get faithfulness.**

Trust in Christ and show ourselves to be trustworthy. Rely on Christ and we shall be reliable; depend on Christ and we shall be dependable; have faith in Christ and we shall be faithful.

Faithful, if necessary, even until death the way to lose fear is to gain faith.

Christ surrounds us with His reassuring word that places the suffering in eternal perspective.

Even though this is a short letter **there are 5 things David Jeremiah wants to tell us** that we need to know about this letter that will help us not be afraid but to live in faith:

The opposite of fear is not courage for the believer, it is faith. Faith in God, what he has said, who God is, what he has promised us.

1. Lord wanted believers to know that the reputation of Christ was better than reputation of Rome. verse 8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty..

1:17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

Smyrna was as perfect church to be addressed like this.

In her suffering and persecution, she needed to be encouraged by the one whose name transcended all limitations of space and time. Christ was first in the dawn of creation and he will be the last at the end of creation. This claim to eternity is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the eyes of the church who was to suffer was to be fixed on Jesus Christ who was still alive after they had done everything they could to kill him. He was still the first and the last. What Jesus is saying is this - through all the trial you've ever had, I am the beginning of it and I shall be the end of it. And there shall be with you of all of this, the ones whose name is the first and the last.

The citizens of Smyrna who fought against the believers and slandered them with false accusations and scorn, stood in proud opposition to these simple, humble believers. After all, their city was the first of all Asia and their culture was the last word. Were they not the city that had died and come alive again? How proud were the citizens of Smyrna and the more to be despised were these peasant

believers. The Christians were to be courageous and faithful because they were citizens of another country whose King was the eternal God. He had been dead and he was alive. He was their resurrected savior and they should take heart because he was the real first and the real last. And so we should take heart today. It is awful hard when you live in the midst of struggles and challenges of life to remember, this **WORLD IS NOT OUR HOME - WE ARE JUST PASSING THROUGH. THIS IS NOT EVERYTHING THERE IS OR WILL BE. THAT THIS IS ONLY A MOMENT IN THE SCHEME OF GODS PLAN; AND HE IS THE FIRST AND HE IS THE LAST.** The reputation of Christ was better than the reputation of Rome.

2. The recognition of Christ was better than the recognition of Rome. I know your works, your tribulation and your poverty. Notice what Jesus says to them in chapter 2, Verse 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.

First of all we look at verse 2, let me point out that in many manuscripts the words, 'thy works' are not found. ***2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and your persecution and his knowledge was not just that he was aware of their problems.***

Here in ***verse 9 what Jesus actually said was this: 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.***

I know your tribulation and I know your persecution. His knowledge was not just that he was aware of it, he was not just aware of their problems, he uses a word for know that goes much deeper than that. It is the word OIDA, and it means to know by experience. What Jesus was saying to the church was this, whatever you are experiencing, I know it. I don't just know about it, I have experienced it myself. The Lord recognized their suffering and their trial, and he'd already been there before them. They were to take charge and remain faithful because The one they served understood what they were experiencing. What words of encouragement these were. What a tower of strength to a suffering church or a suffering Christian. We hear the Lord Jesus saying to us, I KNOW! I KNOW! Here's the mighty God and the suffering savior saying to us in our struggles saying My child, I KNOW. I don't just know about it, I know in my own soul.

The one who for three years lived under the sentence of death said, I know your pressure. The one who had no place to lay his head and was poorer than the foxes and birds had himself said, I know your poverty.

The one who was slandered about and falsely accused, and whipped and brutally beaten and hung on a Roman cross, we hear him saying, I know your persecution. And we learn this from the book of ***Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. that we do not have a high priest He was hung on the cross for our sins.***

We are without sin.....because of Jesus. You can almost hear the lord as your pray to him and say, Lord, to you know what I am going through? And you hear the Lord say, my child, I KNOW! I don't know just about it, I've already been there. I've experienced it.

One writer has said the Jesus took cognizance of our sorrow. His heart felt every pain. He counted every tear. The weight of oppression was fully known to him and His devine sympathy still went out of him and still today, not a trial passes unnoticed or any difficulty, unobserved. Our great shepherd knows every bruise sustained by his sheep and every suffering experienced by them. And because he too has passed through that suffering he sympathizes with it.

One of our greatest needs in trouble is someone with whom to share it. We long to unburden ourselves to someone who understands. And now we hear Jesus Christ the worlds greatest confidant, saying to the suffering church **YOU CAN COUNT ON IT - I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE EXPERIENCING**. There is no friend who can bring to us the peace and relief that our Lord can bring. These believers were recognized by anybody in the city of Smyrna. They were the outcast of their culture. They were looked down upon and despised. Hated, hunted and berated, but they were known by Christ. His knowledge of them should fortify their courage and strengthen their resolve to be faithful.

The reputation of Christ was better than the reputation of Rome; and the recognition of Christ was better than the recognition of Rome.

But keep reading,

3. **The riches of Christ were better than the riches of Rome (verse 9). 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.**

These words were meant to strengthen the Church. They were very poor, yet they were very rich. The Lords values were very different from those of the Jews and Paganizers. Jesus commands us to lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven. And Paul says in ***II Corinthians 6:10 As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*** Is that not true?

2 Corinthians 8:9 says For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

The lord Jesus speaks to this suffering church and reminds them that though They have no money, they don't know where the next meal is coming from; and when it comes to their relationship with the Lord Jesus, they have a richness the world cannot possibly comprehend. Perhaps these words are a good reminder and a good warning. Outward adversity of a church or a people or a person is not a proof of the central poverty and weakness. It is not always the wealthy church that is the rich church. The material wealth of its members does not create the true wealth of the church. How often it has been that some company of believers fighting for poverty, contending with various difficulties has been the truly prosperous church.

The Christians of Smyrna were to take heart and be faithful. Spiritual inventory was to offset the empty coffers of the church and encourage each of them in their struggle with personal poverty. though they were poor, the Lord Jesus wanted them to know they were really rich. We evaluate wealth on the basis of the way the world sees it and God evaluates it from his perspective. And he sees it far differently than we do.

Some of the most miserable people I've known in my life are people that have a lot of money. And some of the most precious people I've ever know in my life are people that are very simple and poor and have really nothing in their life except the knowledge that they are a child of God, loved by him and all of the real important things about life are already cared for and they would say to you, I am rich.

4. **The reckoning of time by Christ was better than the reckoning of time by Rome. Rev 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.*** This does not seem to make sense when you read it in the text. This phrase has caused many over the years to wonder what's meant by the 10 days. Some think it means the ten years of persecution that was coming to the church of Smyrna. Perhaps being climaxed by the death of their pastor, Polycarp. Some think it refers to the period of Roman persecution in the second and third centuries. If you study that period of history, they have enumerated 10 waves of

persecution that took place under 10 Roman emperors the last of whom was Diocletian. There were 10 years of persecution under Diocletian and some think the 10 days refers to that time. Maybe all of these are true. But I think I see what the Lord is trying to say to this church. The intent of Christ's words was to prepare the church for the suffering that would be very brief in contrast to eternity. Jesus is saying to them, this is going to seem like a long time but in comparison to eternity, it's just 10 days. I remember the words of *1 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* The 10 days may seem like long and endless in the midst of pain and suspense, but it was a period that marked the shortness of the time of tribulation when it was looked at from a Divine standpoint. God remains in control. He had set a limit to the ordeal. It was only for a restricted period and the knowledge of its duration was an added reason for them to be steadfast and patient.

You may think, Pastor, this that I am working on right now, what I'm going. Though right now, it's never gonna end. But I say to you, it is gonna end. And God has every day numbered - he will not allow you to go thru more than he will help you experience. And in the midst of it all, He is showing you the importance of eternity in comparison to the temporal issues we face in this life. To the believer in Smyrna the clock was moving slowly. How many of you know that trouble seems to slow time down, but God lives and moves in another time zone and fearlessness and faithfulness are enhanced when we understand this truth. It's but for a moment. It's just for a little while and the Lord has great plans for his people.

5. Finally, The rewards of Christ were better than the rewards of Rome. *Rev 2:10-11 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. 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.* The athletic games of the Roman Empire were cause for much pride among its citizens. Part of the pride of Rome was attached to the great pageants and their games. The crowns won by the Roman citizens were flaunted in the faces of believers. Christ reminded these suffering saints that they were in a different race. They would win a different crown. Their crown would be the Crown of life which is specifically reserved for those that were faithful unto death. Where is this found? James 1:12 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 crowns, according to Rev 4:10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, When we receive these crowns, they are not for ourselves, so we may flaunt them throughout eternity. When we receive these crowns at the judgement seat of Christ, we are going to cast them at the feet of the savior. This prize would be a great motivation to courage and faithfulness in times of trial. The crown is the positive reward but notice Rev 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.

2:11 kind of a negative reward, if you will 2:11- he that overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

Everyone of us in this room will die the first death if the Lord Jesus doesn't come back soon. Some are closer than others, some may be closer than they want to be to this death.

David Jeremiah was in an airport recently in New York, talking with a pilot who was going to fly the plane back to San Diego. There was a storm and the plane couldn't fly. In fact the plane David was going to fly on hadn't even made it to the gate yet because of such a monsoon storm. David was talking to the pilot about the fact that on the way out he flew with a pilot that was doing his last flight

before retirement. When they arrived in New York, everyone gave him a big hand and he walked off to the glory support of everyone that was on the plane. The new pilot that was flying back to San Diego said, I'll be doing this someday as well. He was in his 60's. He said he didn't have much longer, and then he said, 'It's one thing to get on a plane when you know its your last flight but its another thing to get on a plane when you don't know its your last flight', and its your last flight. I thought, oh my word!

All of us are going to die sometime, but a lot of us in this room will never die the second death. The first death is when you die and your soul is separated from your body temporarily; but the second death is separation of your soul from God forever nad ever.

Listen again to what the Lord God said of Jesus Christ, His church. ***Rev 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.***

The original language here is very strong. It says literally, he shall in no count or no wise be hurt of the second death. The first death is a shadow of the second death. It is the first death that seems so dreadful to us. So will the second death. Christ reminded the believers of a tremendous fact, that the world lives to die but the believer dies to live.

The Christian Church in Smyrna had nothing to fear from martyrdom. No matter how cruel the torture, the Romans could never separate the believers from the Lord. Separation from God is the second death and the separation of the soul from the body is the first death.

If Christ tarries in his coming, all who are alive will experience the first death, but those who have put their trust in Christ will never, ever experience the second death.

The simple truth is wrapped up in this little slogan, ***"If you were born one, you will die twice, but if your born twice, you only have to die once!"***

Thank God for many of us here who have been born again. We have been born twice! We may have to go thru physical death but on the promise of the Word of God we shall never, ever have to experience spiritual (the second) death.

You say, well what does that have to do with these believers. These believers realized that many of them would give their lives for their faith. ***Luke 12: 4 And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.***

Jesus told the Smyrna believers they do not have to fear him (the second death). Because of your faith in Jesus Christ, they may take your life through some of those terrible persecutions mentioned earlier, but they can't take from you the one thing that matters ultimately, and that is your eternal relationship with Almighty God.

The reputation of Christ is better than the reputation of the world. Recognition of Christ is better than the recognition of the world. You don't have to be known by the world, but if you're known by Christ, you're somebody! The riches of Christ are better than the riches of the world. The reckoning of time by Christ is better than the reckoning of time by the world; and the rewards of Christ are better than the rewards of this world.

When you're going thru stuff, like we're all going thru stuff right now, how important it is for us to get our head out of the sand and out of the dole-drums, and get our eyes upon God and get our heart and our head in His Word and remind ourselves that the really important things are already, ultimately taken care of for every single one of us who know the Lord.

And he who gave to us his son, will he not always freely give us all things? **IF GOD GAVE US THE BEST GIFT, WHAT WOULD KEEP HIM FROM GIVING US THE OTHER GIFTS THAT WE NEED TO BE SUSTAINED DURING OUR TIME?**

There's a very famous story about the pastor in the church of Smyrna. He was a student of the Apostle John who wrote Revelation. His name was Polycarp - It was to this messenger that Christ spoke, and John wrote the second letter. Polycarp's ministry ended in February AD 156, when there was a sudden upsurge of persecution in which 11 Christians were tortured and thrown to the wild beasts. Polycarp who was a vocal spokesman for his faith and led the little Christian church in Smyrna valiantly and faithfully and fearlessly, was on the list and he was ultimately tracked to a farm having refused to go into further hiding. Food was brought to his captors. While he engaged in prayer. Did you hear me? He brought food out to those that were taking him away and he went to pray. Then he set out with them to the city and he was brought to the amphitheatre. The Jews as well as the Pagans were waiting for him in a mob that had been incited to fever pitch. As Polycarp was marched into the theatre, an unknown voice called out to him from the mob, be strong Polycarp and play the man. No one saw the speaker, but the voice was heard by many and it was certainly heard by Polycarp himself.

The Roman council tried to get Polycarp to swear by Caesar and revile Christ. Swear they said and we will set you at liberty. Reproach Christ. Polycarp answered with words that have become very famous, for 80 and 6 years I have served Him and He never did me any harm. How then can I blaspheme my King and my savior? The mob continued to press him for not denouncing Christ and the ancient pastor responded. Since thou art urging that I should swear by the allegiance of Caesar, should I pretend not to know who I am? Hear me! I am a Christian!

A little later the governor threatened, I have wild beast at hand....to these I will cast you unless you change. Later, when no response was received, the pro council said, 'I will cause you to be consumed by fire', seeing you despise the wild beast, if you will not change. Polycarp answered - thou threatens me with fire when fire burns for an hour, and after a little, is extinguished. But though are ignorant of the coming judgment and the eternal punishment reserved for the unGodly. But why tarry? Bring forth what you will. And even though it was the Jewish Sabbath Day and against their law, the Jews gathered wood and began to heap up the wood to build a fire. Their hatred for this man was bitter and cruel and they cheered as they brought the Godly man to the stake.

As the flames began to curl up around his aged body, Polycarp prayed this prayer: I thank thee that thou hast graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour. That I may receive a portion in the number of thy martyrs in the cup of the Christ. The flames bent into an arch around him; and a soldier used a sword to end the ordeal. Polycarp was faithful unto death. That almost seems like a fairy tale doesn't it.

It seems like this couldn't possibly be happening anywhere today, doesn't it? The reverend Andrew White is the Vicar of Baghdad. He oversees one of the most dangerous churches on earth. During Easter weekend of 2010, he secretly baptized 13 adults, most of whom were dead within a week. Despite frequent kidnapping and killings in his church, White continues to serve the Christians of St. George. The only Anglican congregation in Iraq.

In an interview with Joe Carter, White expressed his perspective of the persecution of Iraqi Christians and the struggle of ministering in a war zone. He said, so many of our brothers here in Baghdad have been killed, kidnapped or tortured, even in the last few months. Members of my staff have been killed. Just this morning I was trying to sort out post hospital care for our former chief of security who recently had a leg blown off.

We cope because the Lord is always with us. When you are where the Lord wants you to be, he always enables you to cope.

Look at Daniel. He had not planned to come into exile in Babylon under the King, Nabucadnezzar. But God provided him with all that he required. He had not intended to be an interpreter of dreams, but God gave him the knowledge to do all that is needed and enabled him to serve with joy. In the same way, wrote the vicar of Baghdad, the Reverend Andrew White said, I had no intention of coming to Iraq. But God brought me here 13 years ago and now there is no where in the world I'd rather be. Even in the midst of terror and persecution, we have the joy of the Lord.

The persecution of our people, a persecution that is far worse than anything we read about in the Bible. A few months ago, 58 people were gunned down and killed during worship at the Syrian Catholic Church just down the road from us. What followed were several weeks of Christians being killed including several of our own staff and church members, yet despite these atrocities, we are such a happy church. **When you have lost everything you realize that Yeshua is all that you have left.**

So I tell you, it's happening in our day. And I'm not a prophesy of doom. It's going to happen more and more as we approach the end of the age. So far as I know it hasn't happened in this way within the boundaries of our country, but many of our missionaries tell of the stories of these kind of things happening throughout the world because of their faith in Jesus Christ. If you listen to the Vicar of Baghdad, and the pastor of Smyrna, you hear the same thing, How wonderful to be in fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even, the fellowship of suffering.

Some of you are in the fellowship of suffering with him now. Not unto death, at least not that we know of. You may think it's unto death, usually feels like it's undo death, but I want to encourage you with these two words we have heard from our Lord: **BE FEARLESS AND BE FAITHFUL - AND REMEMBER GOD HAS IT ALL IN CONTROL!**

Sister Shelbia shared - This is to build our faith. The opposite of fear is faith! We have to build our faith to the point we are willing to do whatever he wants us to do.

We will honor our Lord, prepare ourselves, encourage one another because he won't let us go through more than we can handle. All of us have been through things we couldn't have gone through without His presence!

FOXES BOOK OF MARTYRS - increased SHELBA'S faith when she saw how people were brought through. One of the faithful ones was sewed up with snakes inside them and thrown into the sea.

If you are burned at the stake, just bend over and breathe in the smoke and you'll go quickly. John R. Rice said, "Worry is putting question marks where God puts periods."

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen called worry a form of atheism for it portrays a lack of trust in God. We have to trust God to increase our faith.

Shelbia watched David Jeremiah this morning. Satan mostly uses immorality, greed and idolatry but God has said we will not be tempted if we stay focused on him.

Satan goes about like a roaring lion, but Jesus pulled Satan's teeth at Calvary.

2 TIMOTHY 3: contains a list of things the world is like today:

1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

6 For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,
7 Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.
8 Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.
9 But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was.
10 But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience,
11 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.
12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.
13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.
14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;
15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:
17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. In the last days, paralysis times will come.

INCONTINENT means a lack of self control.

3:12 Yea, and all that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. WE WILL LIVE GODLY.

*The world hates us. We are seeing this more than we have ever seen it before.
Our spiritual eyes are opening and we are seeing it.*

Satan starts out small - Abortion is an example of this.

Mens tradition makes Gods word non-affect. Mans tradition replaces God's power.

IFAPRAY.ORG

Dawn recommends this web site.

God has people in Washington, DC t take a stand against abortion. He has people everywhere for such a time as time! Pray for Josh Hawley!

Our first love -

Remember the beginning, REPENT of the things that cause you to go away and REPEAT what you did originally.

The suffering one - we will have suffering and we won't be persecuted worse than we can handle!

THE OPPOSITE OF FEAR IS FAITH.

For when your faith is tested your endurance has a chance to grow, so let it grow for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything!

JAMES 1:3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

We will end today on some things that are silly and some that are down right stupid:

Shared a little story from Ruth Lee, 2004, still think you are having a bad day?

A man was working on his motorcycle on his patio. The motorcycle was running while he was working on it.

His wife was working in the kitchen.

The man was holding onto the handlebar of the motorcycle as he worked;

All at once, the motorcycle ran into, and shattered, the patio doors on the house.

The wife ran into the family room and found her husband bloody and cut.

She called for an ambulance.

While waiting for the ambulance, she quickly blotted up some spilled gasoline from the motorcycle; and some of her husband's blood with a paper towel; then put the paper towel in the toilet.

Off they went to find treatment at the local hospital.

Once they returned home from the hospital, her husband went into the bathroom to do his business.

As he sat down on the commode, he

lit a cigarette.

The wife heard a huge explosion and sounds of her husband crying out in surprise!

She found her husband laying on the bathroom floor, with burns on his buttocks. His pants were laying on the floor next to the commode. He's was writhing in surprise and pain. His wife called for an ambulance. The same ambulance crew responded to the second call to this home.

When they arrived, they asked the wife, how did he come to burn himself? She relayed the story of what had happened. They laughed so hard, they dumped the husband off their stretcher they were trying to carry downstairs.

The husband fell down the remaining stairs and broke his arm.

DOTTIE – Shared this story with her son and daughter-in-law on the phone:

I went to a friend's house on Christmas who are my adopted grandchildren. They gave me a roll of toilet paper that said, Merry Christmas on it. After I opened it, they asked if I wanted another gift?

They brought me another gift. It was another roll of toilet paper.

I took the extra roll with me and gave it to a friend that works in Culver's.

All I knew was that it said, Merry Christmas on the roll of TP.

The woman who works at Culver's, took the roll to the kitchen and they all laughed. Unbeknown to me, this roll had a poop IMOGI on it with a Santa hat on. It said, Merry Christmas, I love the 'poop impogi' out of you!

The lady at Culver's hasn't spoken to me to this day!

NOTE - please pray for the BLM issue this weekend at the AZALIA parade.