

Revelation 2:8-11

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles, turn with me to the book of Revelation. Revelation chapter 2. Revelation chapter 2, the last couple of weeks we have been in the book of Revelation, which is continuing to make our way through this.

This is a great book, but it is a very difficult book. It is a great study, but it is one that pushes us to see things as they are and as they will be.

And it is a book, many said, that it's sure that it speaks of things to come. It is a book of Revelation. It is a book by the title of Revelation.

It is not a revelation of things to come. Rather, it is what? The revelation of Jesus Christ. And this is the book that speaks of things yet future, and we have not gotten to them yet because we will get to them following chapter 4.

It is from my understanding that after chapter 4, the church is raptured, and those things pertain to things that I do not plan on going through, but a number will, chapter 5 and following. But we understand it is not just a book that speaks of things.

[1 : 07] It is a book that speaks of a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. We looked a couple of weeks ago at Revelation 1, the outcome of this book, Revelation, how it is in a category of its own.

It is the only book in all of Scripture in which there is a promise attached to it, that if you read it publicly, that if you listen to it in a public setting and you obey it, then you will be blessed, the Word of God says.

It also has a curse attached to it, that if you add to or take away from it, and let's be honest, there are some things as we get to the book of Revelation that we would love to take away from or add to. The Bible says that you will have curses added to and taken away from you. Your name will be taken away from the book of life, or the blessings that would be coming your way would be removed from you. It is a book of very great importance.

It is the last book written in all of Scripture, recorded somewhere between 90 and 95 A.D. by the Apostle John while he was on the island of Patmos in exile because of his proclamation of the gospel.

[2 : 13] Last week we began Revelation chapter 2. We began looking at the letters to the seven churches. We looked at a number of things in Revelation chapter 2, how these seven churches could represent seven church epics or seven church seasons, which if we were to study church history, surely we could find correlation between each of these.

We can start with the first one in the church at Ephesus and see how this was a church which left its first love. By the time John wrote the book of Revelation, the church was not yet a century old. As a matter of fact, it was not very old at all. It was only 60-something years old, and already the church had begun to fall away from being in love with Jesus and began to be more in love with style and format and regulations.

And that could appeal to the first one. We could go all the way through the seven and get to the church at Laodicea and see how the church at Laodicea was a church of lukewarmness, and we can surely find how that applies to the church today.

But we've also said that we cannot say that these seven letters just refer to seven church epics because we would confine ourselves to the European or American church, and we would have to separate ourselves from places where the church is thriving today because in case we do not realize it, the church is not just lukewarm all over the face of the earth.

[3 : 25] It just happens to be lukewarm where we live on the face of the earth. There are portions of the world in which the church is red hot, and it is exciting, and it is spreading like wildfire, and it is a place where the church is active.

So we have seen that these letters not only correspond to seven church epics, they could also correspond to a lot of different things, but we have seen that the number seven always in Scripture

represents completeness or fullness.

And last week we began to see how these seven churches point to seven characteristics that should be found in the church. That one church could not say, I'm going to be this one and not this one.

These are the total desire of our Lord in heaven as He stands amongst the churches in heaven and in control of the churches in heaven. Remember that picture that John had in the midst of the seven golden lampstands with the seven stars in His hand.

He stands in the presence of and in control of His church in heaven. This is what it looks like when the church on earth is being controlled and is in the presence of its Savior, which is in heaven.

[4 : 31] All seven of these attributes or characteristics should be found in the church. Last week we looked at the first one of the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2 verses 1 through 7, that the church should be a place of supreme love, that surely the church should be a place of supreme love, not of supreme love for one another, but of supreme love for its Lord and Master, its Savior, Jesus Christ.

That it doesn't really matter the doctrine that the church has or the practice that the church has or the things that the church is doing, it needs to really be in love with its Savior. And we saw that Christ expects His church to be madly in love with Himself.

This week we will get to one of the shortest letters, if you will, to the seven churches, the one in which it does not take a lot of words to say, but it speaks of great volume.

And it is Revelation chapter 2, starting in verse 8 and reading down to verse 11. So if you are physically able and desire to do so, I'm going to ask if you'll join with me as we stand together and we read the Word of God, found in Revelation chapter 2, starting in verse 8 and going down to verse 11.

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, the first and the last who was dead and has come to life says this, I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich in the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

[6 : 01] Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison so that you will be tested and you will have tribulation for 10 days. Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you so much for this Word.

God, we thank you for the privilege and the opportunity you've given us to read it and to hear it.

Lord, we pray now as we have heard it and we have seen it, O God, that we would understand it as it is proclaimed to us.

Lord, that it would not be the thoughts or even the interpretation of man, but it would be the very Word of God which grips our hearts. We pray, Lord, as we see it as it is, that it would transform and change our lives for your glory and your honor.

And we ask it all in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. Amen. Throughout the ages, the Bible has been the top, if not the very top, among the top of the bestsellers in book publication ever since it went into print.

[7 : 11] In 1583, a book was printed which followed suit and it was among the perennial bestsellers. And that book was Fox's Book of Martyrs.

For years, Fox's Book of Martyrs was updated and renewed and republished and it just stayed at the top of the list of bestselling books.

I used to have a copy of Fox's Book of Martyrs. To be honest with you, I've misplaced it and I can't find it. But Voice of the Martyrs, or VOM, found by a pastor by the name of Richard Wombrant who served in persecution under the church's desperate condition in Romania.

He was in prison for a number of years and when he was released from prison, he started an organization called The Voice of the Martyrs. And they picked up that banner of Fox's Book of Martyrs and continue to this day a website which speaks of that.

They put out a book with a band DC Talk of which some of you may know Toby Mack was a part of and other portions of Christian music were a part of. And they put out two books several years ago called Jesus Freaks.

[8 : 15] Jesus Freaks 1 was one that spoke directly of those who died for their faith and Jesus Freaks 2 was those who were suffering for their faith. Both of those I have enjoyed. Both of those, by the way, are not only in my library, in my office, but also in the church's library and I hope that you take time to read them.

Because throughout the ages, we have seen that believers suffer and are persecuted and die and pay a great price for their faith. What we find in the second letter written to the church at Smyrna is a characteristic of a church which Christ expects and it will be there, but it is one in which we desperately try to avoid and at times we flee from.

And it is that it would be a church of not just supreme love as found in the first letter, but it would be a church of suffering obedience. Christ expects His church to be a body of believers who live out suffering obedience.

The very word itself seems to appall us and it seems to want us to push back and it seems to say we want nothing to do with that because suffering is something that we are to avoid at all costs. I believe it was David Platt who wrote recently of the irony of sitting amongst other believers in different parts of the world and listening to them in laughter and in joy and almost jovial celebration talking about the scars which were on their bodies and pointing to the scars of how they had been tortured for Christ and how wonderful it was to be considered worthy of such suffering.

[9 : 55] We read in the book of Acts when the church was being persecuted for their faith. The apostles did not say, Oh God, take this away from us. Rather, they thanked Him for being counted worthy of the ability to suffer for His name's sake.

What John Fox did in his book is he recorded the testimony of those who have suffered for their faith. And it is something that is very trying to one's own personal faith.

It is very testing of one's own commitment level. But we see here when Christ writes the church at Smyrna, He is calling the church to be a body of believers who live out sacrificial, suffering, obedience.

He is calling them to live a life for His glory and His honor. I told you last week that my aim was to use the same outline for all seven letters.

Well, I'm going to go ahead and tell you, you can scratch that because it didn't happen that way. I had it outlined for all seven and God changed that for me, especially when I got to this one. So I'm sorry that if last week I told you that and you wrote it down and was going to follow it, that's not going to be the case.

[11 : 03] So I want you to see this morning what it looks like when the church becomes defined by this thing called suffering or sacrificial obedience. We'll see four things.

Number one, I want you to see the person who comforts them. Because each one of these churches, Jesus introduces Himself in a very personal way. He is actually using one of the attributes that John saw of Him in Revelation 1 to apply to that church and a local assembly that would mean the most to them.

It is important to know the names of God because you're not always going to need a Jehovah Jireh. But you need to know what Jehovah Jireh means. You need to know that your God is your supplier because that's what that means.

That God is our supplier. He will meet our every need. And you need to know that for seasons in your life when you have a need, you need to know that one of the names of God is Jehovah Jireh. You need to know that the Lord is the banner over me.

He is your Jehovah Nissi and the banner over you is love. So that in a season when you need to know if someone loves you, that He has that banner over you, you need to know that He is Jehovah Shalom, that He is your peace.

[12 : 07] That way when you enter a season in life and it is very unpeaceful by the world standards, you know that there is a God with you who is defined by peace. You need to know that He is the Lord, your God Almighty because sometimes there is a day when you need something bigger than you or anything around you.

The names of God are important and all throughout history, God revealed His names and I'm talking about biblical history so that man would have a greater understanding of Him so that when they face a situation in life that that name or that character of God would apply to that situation in their life.

And to each of the churches, Jesus reveals a different portion of Him. So we don't get a full picture of Him until we see all seven churches, but He revealed the one that applied at that time because there are times where we need a Savior.

That is, when we are separated by sin and we need someone to save us and He is our Lord and Savior, but we need a comforter and we need a counselor and we need all of these things. So I want you to see as we begin this church of suffering obedience, the person who comforts them.

He says, and to the angel of the church at Smyrna writes, it's always important to take things in context, so I want you to understand Smyrna. Smyrna is not where Nisan is located up the road, okay? It's not that place.

[13:26] Smyrna is not the place where there's some pretty nice houses and all those other things. Smyrna was one of the regions in ancient Asia, which is modern-day Turkey, in which Paul had not personally been to but surely would have heard the gospel because of the preaching of Paul around the city of Ephesus.

If you went from Ephesus and went counterclockwise, Smyrna would have been just up the way. Smyrna was not a very wealthy town, but Smyrna was characterized, listen to this, by very, very loyal obedience to the Roman throne and a very prolific attitude of emperor worship.

Now listen to that, emperor worship. To proclaim that Caesar is Lord is what Smyrna loved to do. They were considered one of the most faithful cities in all of the Roman Empire, and not only did they love to worship the emperor, they also had a very large and influential Jewish population.

Now, think about that just for a minute. You have a great segment of society who loves to worship Caesar, and then you have another large influential segment of society that loves to follow the Mosaic Law, and in the middle of that you're going to drop a church.

Doesn't seem like a very easy place to do church. Because everyone around you is fixed between two places, either proclaiming that Caesar is Lord. You say, well, what difference does that matter? Matters all the difference in the world.

[14:50] Because there is but one Lord who is Jesus Christ, our Savior, right? So you have one large segment of society that wants to proclaim Caesar is Lord, and they have all of these Greek statues around them, and they're worshipping all these false gods, and then you have the other one that is this very strong adherence to the Mosaic Law found in the Old Testament, and then in the middle of that you have the church saying, well, the Old Testament Law has been fulfilled, it's no longer applicable, and we don't worship Caesar.

Hopefully you can begin to see a little bit of the problem that is going on in the church. If there was a church that stood out more than any other, it would have been the church at Smyrna. And to this church, Jesus says, he who is the first and the last.

Smyrna never once deviated from its loyalty to the Roman Empire from the time it was founded until the time the Roman Empire crumbled. But Jesus says, before Rome was, I was.

After Rome, it will be, so I will be. I am the first and the last. I am the one who is over all, longer than all, and above all. Adrian Rogers used to say, some of your problems, you need to outlove them.

Others, you need to outlive them. Think about that just for a minute. Adrian Rogers, everybody said, oh, he was such a kind and compassionate man. And he was. Adrian Rogers was a great pastor and he said, listen, sometimes you just outlive your problems.

[16:14] And here's what I want to tell you. Jesus has outlived every one of our problems. He's outlived. He's been there longer and he will be there longer. He is from eternity past and he is to eternity future. And the church was surrounded by problems.

The church was surrounded by people who did not like them and people who hated them. And Jesus said, before they were born, I was. After they're going to be gone, I am. He says, listen, I am from the beginning and I am to the end.

And then he says, and I am he that was dead and yet I am back alive. What is he saying? He said, the worst thing they can do is kill you. Guess what? The person who's comforted you has already been there and back. That makes a difference, right?

Those who don't like you, I've been there longer than them and I love you. Those who are going to, the worst thing they can do to you is kill you. He says, guess what? I've already defeated that. I've already been to death, hell and the grave and I came out victorious.

I am the risen, victorious Savior. And for a church living in uncertain days in a very hostile environment, that's exactly who they needed.

[17:18] Friend, listen to me, a church that's going to live in suffering obedience needs to know Jesus always has been and always will be and he has already overcome the worst thing anyone can ever do to us.

They need to know that because apart from that, there is no comfort. Apart from that, there is no steadfastness. Apart from that, there is no suffering. Apart from that, there is no obedience and we need to understand the person who comforts them.

Number two, not only do we see the person who comforts them, we see the persecution which confronts them. We see the persecution which confronts them. Look at what it says. I know your tribulation and your poverty.

All of a sudden, the first and the last, the one who was dead and has come to life says this, I know. I don't know if that ever comforts you, if that ever brings great joy to you, but whatever it is you're going through, we're talking about a church suffering here.

We're not talking about a church that was inconvenienced. We'll get to it in just a minute. We're talking about a church that was suffering. We're talking about a church that was going through pain and Jesus says, I know. I'm just going to be honest.

[18 : 24] I have no idea how the world that does not know Jesus Christ makes it without understanding He knows our struggles. Some of you say, well, I've lived that life.

I've tried to live without the realization that He knows and I've tried to live holding on to everything. Jesus looks at them and says, I know. I know your tribulation.

I know your poverty. Look at this, friend. They were suffering physically and financially. It was literally costing them something to be followers of Jesus Christ.

But Jesus says, this is what I also know. I know I only know what the world is doing to you but I also know that though you are in poverty, you are rich. He says, yet you are rich.

He said, what do you mean I'm rich? Look, Jesus, look around me. Everything I have, the world is taken away from me and it was happening in Smyrna. Look, everything that I get, they're confiscating and it was happening in Smyrna.

[19 : 21] Jesus says, quit looking at what you can lay your hands on and look at what you've stored up in heaven because you are rich. See, their persecution which was confronting them was physical, was financial, was all these things.

He says, but it doesn't matter. I know some things. I know what you're going through. I know what they're doing to you. I know how the world says you're destitute and afflicted. I know how the world is taking everything away from you.

Yet, I want you to also know you are rich. He says, and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not. He says, those who proclaim to know it all, who have it all. Some people read in here that the church was holding on to false doctrine.

I don't read that, okay? Even the one Bible commentator that I greatly respect sees these people as being members of the church. That's not how I read that and it's okay to have disagreements with different people. I believe that there are two churches in the letter to the seven churches which have no negative comment, no reprimand given to the church and this is one of them.

I think he has nothing bad to say about the church at Smyrna because I believe this group are those who are coming against them because of the setting of the city of Smyrna. He says, the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not but are the synagogue of Satan.

[20 : 34] These were the people that were opposing them who were of Jewish descent. They had to write Linnaeus, they had to write birth, they had to write ancestors, they had to write law and Jesus says they're the synagogue of Satan.

That's harsh language. He says, even these legalistic opposition that are coming against you, I know you're dealing with it physically, you're dealing with it financially, you're dealing with it spiritually, you are being bombarded on every side.

Friend, we live in a great country, we live in a great land, but we need to also understand that God has called His people at times to suffer physically, He's called His people to suffer financially, and He's even called them to suffer spiritually.

Jesus didn't say these things may happen to you, He said these things will happen to you. He says, if they have done it to the head of the house, how much more will they do it to the servants of the house, which is what we are?

He said, oh, well the land I live in, that doesn't happen. The land I live in, is it not happening or are we not living in such a way that would ensure that it happens? Just a question.

[21 : 45] Are our lives ensuring that suffering is completely ignored and completely avoided or are we living in such a radical way? I told you the name of that book was Jesus Freaks, right?

Are we living in such a freakish way? By the way, the first story in that first chronicle of Jesus Freaks was a story found on American soil. not in any other land of a 15-year-old girl who professed her faith in Jesus Christ and then was shot.

So it's not just in every other land, right? Jesus says, I know this is the persecution which confronts you and we are fooling ourselves if we think this is a problem for the rest of the world. this is a problem for those who take the Bible seriously and live it out literally. Then all of a sudden it moves to our front door and we get to see these things.

I heard just this past week an audio on the radio of someone being interviewed by, I'm not going to call it out because I'm not in the business of this, someone being interviewed at a Senate hearing by one that is running for a presidential election and the questioning was consistently, are you a Christian who believes that those who do not know Jesus Christ are condemned to an everlasting hell?

[23 : 12] Is that your doctrine? And he was pushing the button, he was pushing the button, and he was pushing the button. And the man answered him and said, my doctrine stays true to the Bible. He says, then do you think that that is a hate crime for everybody involved in America?

All of a sudden now it became a crime to hold on to biblical doctrines. Friend, listen to me. in our own land. Now this man testified and testified and testified and said, yes, I do believe that. And still was appointed to the office that he was being appointed to in our own land. This is something that we need to take dearly, the persecution which confronts them, the church that lives in suffering obedience.

Number three, we see the purpose that controls them. Because why in the world would we do it? Why would we live out suffering sacrificial obedience? Why in the world would we do that? Because now all of a sudden we are met with a problem here, if you will. Because look at what the word of God says. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Now wait just a minute. Here all of a sudden is a problem in which the agnostic and the atheist scratch their head and to be honest with you a number of believers scratch their head and we begin to get a little bit angry.

[24 : 28] And we begin to get a little upset about it because the problem is this. Jesus says, I know what's happening and then he says, and you are about to suffer. Now if he knows, isn't a good God a God who would stop it?

If he knows, doesn't he have enough power and authority to stop it from happening? If he knows what's going on and he knows even before I know that I am about to suffer, isn't he loving and caring enough to stop it?

Because the question is, is he powerful enough? And the answer to that is yes, because if he is not powerful enough, I want nothing to do with him as my Lord and Savior. And that's just me being honest with you. I want a Lord and Savior who is stronger than anything on the face of this earth. That's what I need. And if he is powerful enough, then why will he not stop it? Because that doesn't seem right. That doesn't seem fair, especially in our humanity, in our society, where we want to avoid pain at all costs.

We want to avoid displeasure. We want to avoid anything that makes us inconvenient. We want to avoid, especially that word suffering. We do not want to suffer. As a matter of fact, it's a challenging thing here, and I've read it on a number of issues, and I've lived it out personally.

[25 : 42] We want to protect our children so much, and we want to keep them so safeguarded that we never allow them to see things which challenge them, and we never allow them to see things which may bring them a little bit of difficulty, because in the name of safety, and I'm not, some people are going to come against me, I understand this, and I'm probably going to get in trouble.

I don't know how I lived, just to be honest with you, to make it to the time that I did, because I know the things that I did, but we so safeguard, and we put bubble wrap around everybody, and then when they turn 18, we look at the young boys, and we say, now go be a man.

When it's the pain, and the suffering, and the discomfort which leads you to what? Be the man. You say, oh, now all of a sudden we're getting a little chauvinistic here. No, we're trying to be a little biblical, right?

God's created them male and female, and he's created them to live in different realms, and I'm not saying anything other, starting a little sweating here, right? Going to start getting a little bit of trouble, pastor. My wife's not in here. She's going to get on to me later when she listens to this, but that's okay.

God has created us to fulfill certain functions, in the home, and in society, and in the world, and in our culture, we try to safeguard and take everything that's painful, and everything that's uncomfortable, and everything that may cause displeasure, and pull you out of it.

[26 : 54] Friend, listen, I'm not speaking of one whose kids didn't go through any pain. I know my kids went through pain. Every one of my children have been hurt in sports except for Braden's because he hadn't played them long enough, and the question was always, why in the world do you let your kids still play sports?

Because more character was built in them through the pain which created in that than I could have ever built in them in the home. Now, that's just their desire, and I know some of you I'm speaking your life, but I'm about to go through that surgery, and it's not fun. Sorry. But, you know, understand that.

There's these things that God builds into us because here's the thing. God knows, yet God allows. Why? Jesus, the head of the church, says, I know what you're going through.

You're about to suffer. Why? That's the challenge. That's the question. And here's the answer. He says, right here, look at what it says.

Behold, the devil's about to cast some of you into prison. God, it would be so much better if we just didn't get cast into prison. But he says, behold, the devil's about to cast some of you into prison. Here's the answer to that. Here is the purpose that controls them so that you will be tested.

[28 : 03] So that you will be tested. This is a hard pill to swallow in the American church, but we need to understand this. Jesus is more concerned about testing his people than he is preserving his people.

The eternal security is already there. He refines his people through the testing and the suffering that they go through. And he allows that.

The Old Testament book, the book of Job, completely demonstrates that because we understand that when there came a time for the sons of God to come before God and give an account, that Satan was there as well. And God asked Satan where he had been and Satan said he'd been all over the face of the earth and all this other thing.

And then you remember, it was God who brought up Job. You ever read that where God says, have you considered my servant Job? And he brought him up and then Satan's like, yeah, I've seen him. And he said, okay, go ahead. And it was him who brought it up. Why? Testing and refining and purifying that faith. Now this is the part of the heart, this is the meat of Christianity which we have to wrestle with at times.

[29 : 09] Is that okay? Well, it is to the church of suffering, sacrificial obedience because Jesus says, you're going to be tested. Why has he allowed persecution to run rampantly throughout his church, throughout the ages?

so that he can test them. As a matter of fact, I believe it was one of the churches, I think, I don't want to name the country because I don't want to get there. Well, I'll go ahead and say it.

The Chinese churches, Chinese church leaders were speaking not too long ago, and Chinese church leaders said, you know, for years, we prayed that God would stop the persecution. We prayed and we prayed and we prayed and we prayed and we prayed that God would stop the persecution.

Then the day where the persecution stopped came, and the government released some of its holding, and we no longer were underground. We got to come above ground and we got to meet in buildings, just like you do in America.

We got to come together to corporate worship. And the church leaders in China said this, now we are praying that the persecution will come back. Because what has happened is when the church was in persecution and the faith was real, people were spreading the gospel.

[30 : 11] Now that it's legal and it's okay, everybody's content to sit in the pews and go home. Now that the season of testing has passed, it doesn't mean as much.

We see here, Jesus says, I'm allowing this because the purpose is that it will test you. And this is not a popular message, by the way. This is hopefully just a biblical message.

It says it will test you. Now look at what he says. He says, and you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Ten days. Friend, listen to me. Maybe you're in the middle of one of those testing seasons. I want you to understand this.

You say, what do the ten days mean? There's a lot of interpretations on what it could be, but one thing we do know for certain, Jesus says it is for a fixed amount of time. I know it's coming. I know it's coming.

And I know how long it's going to last. Friend, he who was the first or is the first and the last, was dead and has come back to life, tells us that he's going to allow us to enter into suffering.

[31 : 09] And he says, but it's only going to last ten days. He's in control of how long it lasts. We can endure anything that he leads us to because we know that he is leading us to it for a fixed amount of time.

It's not indefinite. It's not like it's going to last forever. He says, I know what's coming. I know the pain it's going to cause. But here's the good news.

I also know how long it's going to last. I'm going to allow it to start. I didn't tell it to start, but I'm going to allow it to start. The devil is going to be the one who brings it. But I've already told him when he's going to stop. I'm in control.

It's going to test you and refine you, but it's only going to do it for a fixed amount of time. What is it the Proverbs says? Psalm comes in the night, but joy comes in the morning.

It's only for a fixed amount of time. And you can endure it for a fixed amount of time. A number of you in here are bus drivers, and I've had some ask me, what's it like driving a bus?

[32 : 12] I said, listen, I can deal with anything for a certain amount of time. When I know I only have those kids for 45 minutes, I can deal with anything 45 minutes at a time.

Because in the end result, I'm not taking any of them home. I'm taking them to their home, right? It matters. When the time is set, and we know I only got to make it, and believe me, I have my watch on and a clock on the radio.

Hey, five more minutes, I'm free. Five more minutes, I'm free. Jesus says, you're going to suffer, but I know how long it's going to last. And I'm going to hold it to that time.

And I'm going to stop it when the time is right. It's going to be difficult. It's going to be painful. It's going to test you. But guess what? It's only going to last for a time. I've got one more, and we need to get to this. You see, the person who comforts them, the persecution which confronts them, the purpose that controls them, and the promise that challenges them.

Because this is a challenge. This is a challenge. Look at what it says. Be faithful until death. That's a challenge, right? Be faithful until death. What a challenge. It doesn't say be faithful until it doesn't feel good anymore.

[33 : 17] Be faithful as long as you can. It says be faithful until death. Here's the challenge. Now here's the promise. And I will give you the crown of life. That word crown is the victor's crown. You will get the victor's crown of life.

I'll put the triumphant victory crown on your head. Think about that. This is Jesus saying, I myself will put the crown of life on your head. He says he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Not just to the church. Right? To the churches. He who overcomes. There's the challenge again. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death. Now this does not say that if you can endure all these things, you'll earn your salvation.

This is not talking about earning salvation. This is you will have the confident ability to, the ability to live in light of the certainty of your salvation. What does that mean? There are some people who are saved.

They are saved, born again believers. And they live their life in doubts, not really understanding if they're eternally secure. And then there are those who can overcome and who can live suffering sacrificial obedience.

[34 : 15] And they know that they're saved. I mean, they know that they know that they know. And the second death has lost all sting, not just in eternity, but even in time and in space because no longer do they fear death.

No longer do they fear the grave. No longer do they fear Satan because they already know who they are in eternity. And as they live suffering obedient lives, their lives are no longer affected by the greatest tool in the armory of Satan.

And God says, you'll have the victor's crown and you'll live triumphantly to the place of death and you will reign on high with me. It is the challenge that is always met with a promise.

You know the irony of all this. And I'm closing. The oldest recorded death we have of a Christian outside of the Bible. is a death recorded in A.D. 155.

The man who died in A.D. 155, his name was Polycarp. Not a name that any of us probably want to name our son, but his name was Polycarp. Polycarp was a pastor of the age of 86 of the church at

Smyrna, nonetheless.

[35 : 22] And the irony is that Polycarp was the last known individual to ever personally speak to the Apostle John, who wrote to the church at Smyrna about suffering obedience.

As a matter of fact, Polycarp had been taught and disciplined by John before he had been exiled on the island of Patmos. And the history books recorded in 155 A.D.

At the age of 86, the Smyrna government wanted to quieten Polycarp, so he was told to go in hiding. He decided to go out of the city and went out into the country and was hiding in the attic of some friends of his when the Roman officials showed up.

When they showed up, he had the opportunity to run away. Now I'm thinking 86 years old, running away, I don't know. But he had the opportunity to flee, but he refused to flee. He went and surrendered himself. So very quickly that day took him into the arena in Smyrna and gathered a crowd together of emperor worships and Judaizers and came together and gave him three opportunities to recant, to proclaim that emperor is lord.

And each time he said he wouldn't do it. And they said, Polycarp, all you have to do is proclaim Caesar is lord and we will leave you alone. And his last testimony was, So a herald was sent to the center of the arena to proclaim three times that Polycarp refused to recant.

[36 : 54] At that sound, the crowd began to be aroused and the crowd said, Bring out the wild beasts, let them eat him. Polycarp said, that's fine, bring them on. And the leader said, I can't do that because they had recently outlawed the wild beasts in Smyrna.

So they said, Polycarp, if you do not refuse, if you do not recant your faith in Christ, we will burn you at the stake. He said, what does a fire that lasts but an hour compare to the fire that lasts for eternity?

Bring on your fire. So they went out into the city and they gathered all kinds of wood and dried wood and they brought it in and they piled it up in the center of that arena. And they came and were going to nail Polycarp's hands to the stake.

And he said, there's no need to nail my hands, I will gladly stand in your fire. So they did not nail his hands. His only request is, if you don't mind, give me an opportunity to pray before you light the fire. For an hour, Polycarp stood and prayed out loud in front of that arena and in front of that leader of that city. He prayed for those who were persecuting him. He prayed for those who were about to kill him.

[37 : 58] And he prayed a prayer of thanksgiving for his opportunity to suffer for his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. History records that when they lit the fire, the fire went all around Polycarp but never consumed him.

That all he did was glow like refined silver in the fire. And he stood there in the midst of that fire, never moving, until some soldier finally had mercy and went and stabbed him through with a sword. Polycarp knew what it was like to live a life of suffering obedience. And it happened in the church at Smyrna. That's exactly where John said it was going to happen. Friend, listen, this isn't just a challenge for the church at Smyrna.

It's not just a challenge for the church and other portions of the world. This is a challenge for us. Is our faith that real?

The only way it has been said we would be willing to die for Christ tomorrow is if we honestly live for him today.

[39 : 02] And if we don't really live for him today, we will never die for him tomorrow. Let's pray. Lord, I thank you so much.

Lord, I thank you that you've even called us to difficult days at difficult times. But God, the reality is that it's a subject we don't like to speak on or to think about or to consider.

But it's one that you put before us many times in Scripture. So I pray, O God, that you would search our hearts and our minds. Lord, begin with me. Help me to know is my life genuinely committed to you for your glory and your honor and yours alone.

And I ask it in the sweet name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.

[40 : 51] Thank you.

Thank you.