

REVELATION: HELP FOR LIVING, HOPE FOR LEAVING

Sermon no. 3

THE RICH LITTLE POOR CHURCH

Revelation 2:8-11

In the passage we will look at today, we will see what Christ had to say to a persecuted church — the rich little poor church of Smyrna — which was persecuted and impoverished yet rich with God's promise of victory and the fullness of eternal life. We will learn that it was suffering for their faith in Christ that made them a sweet aroma to God.

Faith, like our muscles, can only become stronger with resistance, and so suffering for one's faith should be a cause of rejoicing for us from an eternal perspective. The church at Smyrna should encourage us to push on and live for Jesus.

1. THE CORRESPONDENTS: TO A FRAGRANT CHURCH FROM A FOREVER LORD (Rev. 2:8)

a. The Addressees

The city was named after "myrrh" a fragrance that was used as a perfume. It was a fitting name for a church that was like a fragrant offering before God because of the suffering that she experienced for her faithful allegiance to Jesus Christ in the midst of a hostile culture.

b. The Author

Because He "died and came to life" they know that they too will experience the same (John 11:25). Because He is the beginning and the end, they know that all of human history, even the circumstances of their lives, were under his complete control (Isaiah 46:10). Because he holds the keys to life and death, they can be assured that they are invincible until He ordains that it is their time to go home (John 21:22).

2. THE COMMENDATION: THOSE WHO ARE TRIED RECEIVE TREASURE THAT IS OUT OF THIS WORLD (Rev. 2:9)

a. Their Afflictions

It must have been comforting to the Smyrnan believers that the Lord that they loved knew exactly what they were going through (Hebrews 4:15; Isaiah 53:3), and they were going through a lot. In our world, suffering in this life is not an achievement but in the case of Smyrna, their suffering was the crushing that released the fragrance of their faith to God.

b. Their Affluence

If the Lord ended his commendation with the enumeration of their afflictions, then it would not sound like a commendation at all. His commendation for this church was expressed in His declaration — “but you are rich!” They were rich in Christ and toward God (James 2:5; 1 Tim. 6:18; Hebrews 11:26).

3. THE COMFORT: THOSE WHO ARE TESTED TO DEATH WILL HAVE FULLNESS OF ETERNAL LIFE (Rev. 2:10-11)

a. “Do not fear”

His subsequent words bring not only comfort but great joy! First, He declared exactly what kind of suffering they were to experience. Nothing relieves us more of our anxiety about the future than to know what the future holds. Second, He declared the purpose for the imprisonment. The testing of the Smyrnians was to reveal authentic faith for the glory of Christ who is the author of that faith (Hebrews 12:2). Third, He determined the time period of the testing. He was in control.

b. “Let him hear”

The promise of Christ here for the suffering yet rich, victorious Smyrnians is the fullness of eternal life. There is no greater promise.

CONCLUSION

Smyrna represents for us today, those who suffer because of their faith in Christ and their faithful obedience to His commands. We suffer reproach for Christ in that we are sometimes ridiculed, laughed at, ostracised, marginalised, discriminated against, disowned and sometimes even disinherited by loved ones. 2 Tim. 3:12 says, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” And if we are, then Jesus promised us blessing in Matthew 5:10-12.

I close with this true story: About 50 years after the Apostle John wrote Revelation and sent this message to the church at Smyrna, his disciple and Pastor of the church, Polycarp was arrested for his allegiance to Christ, and failing to provoke him to recant his belief, he was brought to the stake to be burned alive. Just before he was burned he said, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and he never did me any injury; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior.”