

Pressure From The Smyrna

Title: The Church That was Both Rich and Poor

Text: Rev. 2:8-11

Read Rev 2:8-11
Prayer

How can anyone be poor and rich at the same time? You look at a person who is worth millions, who lives in a fine home, who has everything that money can buy. You would not say that he was poor - you would say that he was rich. Then you look at a man who lives ^{on the street} in a shack, who doesn't have enough money to take care of himself and his family, who ^{MUST} ~~must~~ depend upon well-fare. You would not say that he is rich - you would say that he is poor. But there are two kinds of riches and two kinds of poverty. A person can have millions materially, but if he doesn't know Christ, he is poor spiritual. On the other hand a man can be poor materially, but if he knows Christ, he is rich spiritually.

Now, This was the case of the church at Smyrna. They were poor in this world's goods, but rich in the things of God. I would have you notice several things of this church.

(1) First, notice The Comfort of Jesus.

Jesus begins this letter ^{in vs 8} by saying, "I am the first and the last, I was dead but am alive." I would like you to see the comfort in these words. This Church was ^{being} persecuted by the Roman empire. They were having a hard time. Jesus says to them, "I was here before Satan, and I will be here after he is cast into the lake of fire." In other words, Jesus is saying, "The one who is with you is greater than the one who is against you." The word "Smyrna" means suffering. It comes from the word "Myrrh," the same spice which the wise men brought as a gift to the baby Jesus. In order for this spice to give out a full fragrance, it had to be crushed and beaten. This church had been crushed and persecuted. They were going through the deep waters. ^{and fresh} How comforting to hear Christ say, "You are having a hard time now, but just remember that I

~~power~~ am with you. I have more power than Satan, I have been here always and I will be here forevermore." In like manner, Jesus says to you and me today, "Be not afraid, I am with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Then Jesus said another comforting thing ^(v.s) - "I was dead, but am alive."

Jesus was simply saying, "They killed me, but the grave could not hold me.

and If I have power over death, surely I have the power to help you." ^{you see} Jesus was not the one who lived and is now dead, He was the one who was dead, but who now lives. Other people live and die, never to live again in this world. But not so with Jesus. We are told that 20 thousand people come each year to see the well-reserved bodies of Lenin and Stalin. But these communist leaders lived and died. Mohammed lived and is dead. Other great leaders lived and are dead. But Jesus lives on, almighty, glorious, triumphant. Yes, Jesus was dead. He died for our sins. But now he is *out* alive, ready, willing and able to help us in all of life.

What a blessed thing to know that the children of God are linked up to a risen, living Lord. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The people of Smyrna were suffering great persecution and walking in the shadow of death. Jesus tells them, just as He tells us, that the One who went through sorrow and death understands and helps when troubles come and when they go through the valley of the shadow.

It is a great comfort to know that we have an omnipotent Saviour, One who lives forevermore and who is always mindful of the needs of His Children. No other religion can make such a claim. No people except the children of God have such a person as Jesus.

(2) Secondly, lets look at the Circumstances. Vs 9 say,



"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." *Two Rings*

1. Jesus told them that He knew their tribulation. This word "tribulation" is a strong word. It suggests the Roman whip like the one which was used upon Jesus the night before His crucifixion. But Jesus uses an even stronger word here. This word suggests the crushing of wheat under huge millstones. Now some people think today that they are having tribulation when a little trouble comes. They think that they are bearing a cross every time they have a headache. But the trouble which is mentioned here is the trouble that comes to people because they are following Christ. When does a person bear a cross? It is when you have to suffer in order to serve the Lord. I know of a woman ~~and a mother~~ whose husband causes all kinds of trouble because she wants to go to church. Yet, she remains faithful to Christ. This woman knows what I am talking about. She feels the weight of the cross every day. ~~Therefore, I say that~~ you are bearing the cross when you ~~must~~ suffer in order to serve the Saviour.

Any church is blessed when it has a good pastor. ~~The~~ The church of Smyrna had a great man for a pastor, but they ~~lost~~ lost him. He had not gone to another church, he had been burned at the stake. Polycarp was his name. As the flames leaped up around him, he was called upon to renounce Christ. It was then that he cried out, "36 years have I served Jesus, and He never wronged me. How then shall I renounce my King who saved me?" *He knew pain*

something happened to you
When you are a child and ~~trouble overtakes you,~~ - you fall and cut your knee - what did you do? You ran to your mother because you knew that you could bear the hurt better if your mother kissed it. When sickness comes your way, it is good to know that a faithful husband or wife knows and cares. But the sweetest comfort that comes to a christian is to remember that Christ knows our every need, our every temptation, our every sorrow.

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2. THEN JESUS SAID THAT HE KNEW THEIR POVERTY. These people had suffered the loss of all things for Christ's sake. They had lost their business, their social position, and almost the bare necessities of life. They were hated and outlawed. Instead of worshiping in magnificent buildings, they gathered in caves or barns or some other hiding place. But in spite of all of their poverty, Jesus said that they were rich. They were poor in the goods of this world, but rich in spiritual things. ^{Friends.} It is better to be rich in spiritual things and poor in material things, than to be rich in material things and poor in spiritual things.

Someone has ^{said} ~~said~~ that the churches of the first century were marked by material poverty and spiritual power, while the churches of our day are marked by material wealth and spiritual weakness. I am afraid that indictment is all too often true.

3. Then Jesus said that he knew about the evil things which are being said against them. ~~They were suffering from a severe persecution in Smyrna.~~

~~There was a Jewish synagogue in Smyrna which was openly hostile to the Church. These Jews said that they alone were the people of God and they slandered and falsefied the christians.~~ There was a Jewish synagogue in Smyrna which was openly hostile to the Church. These Jews said that they alone were the people of God and they slandered and falsefied the christians. Jesus said, "I know about this evil. When I was on earth I suffered just as you are suffering. I ^{know} ~~do~~ what you are going through." Jesus identified with their sorrow. ^{Likewise} ~~So~~ today he stands by those who suffer for His sake. Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are you, when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

Here is a reward for which you don't have to work. Stand up always for Christ - live for Him - speak up for Him. Then, it matters not what men call you, Jesus says that they are just laying up a reward in heaven for you. If I am speaking today to one who is being slandered for Christ's sake, life up your heart and rejoice. Your reward is going to be great in heaven.

Let's look at this prophecy

III. THE CROWN -- Verse 10 (Read)

Then, ^{Third} Jesus now tells the Christians of Smyrna the things that are going to happen to them. ^{They} The ~~devil~~ will ^{be} cast ~~some of them~~ into prison. They will be tested to see if their faith is real. They will have tribulation for ten days. ^{Now} The best Bible scholars do not interpret this literally as ten days, but as ten periods. We speak of "Abraham's day." We speak of "George Washington's day." We really mean a period of days. History tells us that the church of Smyrna ^{did} have ten periods of persecution, beginning with Nero and ending with Diocletian. So the prophecy here is that ten periods ^{of} of persecution were coming ^{upon the church}.

And these persecutions did come. These Christians were crucified. They were covered with animals' skins and tortured to death by wild dogs. They were covered with tar and set afire to serve as lampposts. They were thrown to hungry lions while thousands cheered. Their property was ~~stolen~~. Their citizenship was revoked. They were thrown into prison. To be a Christian then, in ^{The early days} ~~nearly every~~ case, meant suffering and death. Jesus didn't say that he was going to save them from these things. He did say that He was going to reward them for standing up for Him. He said, "Don't be fearful, but be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." Jesus says the same thing to us today. ~~(He didn't say that we were to be faithful until we died, but faithful unto the dying point.~~ We are to stand up for Christ.

There is a story about an eighteen year old girl who believed in serving God according to the dictates of her own conscience. The Roman soldiers discovered her disobeying the law. They took her down to the ocean and tied her to a post. Gradually the tide came in until her body was almost covered with water. As the tide rose, the people upon the shore urged her to deny Christ, so she could be saved. But she remained silent.

Then when the water began to lap around her chin, and she knew that in a few minutes she would drown, she cried out, "Never will I deny Christ, I am his."

Now no one persecutes us today. I haven't heard of anybody being burned at the stake for their faith. We are not stoned for going to church, it is easy today to be a Christian. But, I wonder what would happen if some power could tell us today that if we followed Christ it would mean torture and death. I wonder how many would deny Him rather than suffer for Him. I wonder how many would be willing to die rather than deny him. I hope we never have to prove ourselves in this manner. But the truth is that our ~~is~~ ^{witness} would be a lot greater if we had the same spirit of those martyrs who were faithful unto death.

Jesus said "be faithful and I will give you a crown of life." Jesus did not promise a crown of gold or diamonds. He promised those people who were about to die - a crown of life. They were going to have a life that never ends, a life where they would never again suffer persecution and tribulation. What is life? Is it just a few fleeting years here on earth and then six feet of dirt? ^{The Bible says} No, life is a period of time spent here in the service of the King, then eternal bliss and joy at His side in heaven. That's the promise - be faithful to Christ and life will be yours.

IV. THE CONQUERORS -- V. 11

Jesus closes this letter by telling the Smyrna Christians that those who overcome will never be hurt by the second death. Their enemies might kill their bodies, but the second death would never touch them. This simply means that there is no hell for the Christian. When you trust Jesus, you have only one death to face - the death here upon the earth. But for the non-Christian, he faces a second death. when he stands before the judgment seat of God and their sentence is pronounced. And the sinner is cased into the sea of darkness.

These people in Smyrna were poor in many ways, but they were rich in the things of God. And when we come to the end of our life, it will not matter how much money we have, but it will matter what we have done with Christ.

One day the saints will go marching into glory to stand before the Saviour. ^{There} Yonder goes a great ^{preacher} evangelist. He lived a consecrated Christian life, he preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thousands heard him and turned to Christ. Jesus is going to ^{lay} His hand upon his head and say, "You were faithful to me - here is your crown of life." Then a little ^{old} ^{man} woman will come before the Saviour, and will be robed in eternal youth. ^{He} lived in a little room for years. Few people knew ^{her}. When ^{she} died no one in the next block knew about it. But ^{she} was always faithful to Christ and His Church. And Jesus is going to say to her, "well done, here is your crown of life." ^{He} and the ~~preacher~~ great ^{preacher} evangelist were not alike in their talents, but they were alike in their faithfulness. So each of them will receive the same reward.

What is Jesus going to say to you in that great day? It all depends upon your faithfulness. Hear Him now and heed Him as he says, "Be faithful and I will give you a crown of life."

Lets' Close In Prayer

"Will he say 'depart from me - for I never knew you' or will he say: Well done, Thy good and faithful servant."