

“Smyrna -The Suffering Church –” by E A Terry Delivered 08 16 20
Psalm 37: 1 – 8, Romans 8:18-39; 1st Peter 2: 11 – 24, **Revelation 2: 8 – 11 (Sermon)**

Last week we looked at the letter to the church at Ephesus which had lost their intense love for The Lord.

If love is the first characteristic of a truly effective church, the second characteristic of a truly effective church is their ability to endure suffering.

I say that because suffering proves the genuineness of our love.

We are willing to suffer for those people we love.

The Christians at Smyrna were experiencing intense suffering but they had not lost their passionate love for The Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 9 Jesus said, ***“I know about your afflictions, your poverty, and the slander you are experiencing.” “I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”*** (Revelation 2:9).

The Greek word translated ***“afflictions”*** means severe pressure or crushing pressure.

The Greek word translated as ***“poverty”*** means severe poverty.

Biblical scholars tell us the church at Smyrna suffered physically, economically, and socially they were marginalized.

Because they were Christians they were imprisoned, they were not allowed to buy and sell, their property was seized, they were ostracized, and they were burned at the stake.

Sadly, that kind of religious persecution is what thousands of Christians experience in many parts of the world today.

As we read about the suffering the church of Smyrna was experiencing, the age-old question always comes up.

Why do Christians have to suffer?

The answer is there is sin and evil in this world.

In verse 10 Jesus said; ***“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.”*** (Revelation 2:10)

Remember God created humans in His holy image and God gave man a perfect environment to live in.

But when man disobeyed God sin entered the world.

We suffer because there is sin and evil in this world.

We all have a sinful attitude and we all commit sinful acts. (Romans 3:23)

1st Corinthians 11:30-32 says, ***“That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.”***

The Bible does not promise that we will have an easy life in this world.

Instead, it is just the opposite.

Jesus said, ***“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also”*** (John 15:19-20)

Sometimes God allows suffering in our life so we will mature in our faith.

James 1:2-4 says, ***“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”***

When Christians go through difficult times, it is as if Jesus is saying:

- If you were never sick, how would you know that I’m a healer?
- If you never went thru difficulties, how would you know that I’m a deliverer?
- If you never had a trial, how could you call yourself an overcomer?
- If you never felt sadness, how would you know that I’m a comforter?
- If you never made a mistake, how would you know that I’m forgiving?
- If you knew all, how would you know that I will answer your questions?
- If you never had troubles, how would you know that I will come to your rescue?
- If you never were broken, then how would know that I can make you whole?
- If you never had a problem, how would you know that I can solve your problems?
- If you never had any suffering, then how would you know what I went through?
- If you never went through the fire, then how would you become pure?
- If I gave you all things, how would you learn to appreciate my gifts to you?
- If I never corrected you, how would you know that I love you?
- If you had all power, then how would you learn to depend on me?
- If your life was perfect, then you would not need Me to save you.

God’s Word to us today challenges each of us to examine our commitment to Jesus Christ.

Would you remain faithful to Jesus if the police came in and arrested you for being to church today?
Would you remain faithful to Jesus if you were fired from your job because you were a Christian?
Would you remain faithful to Jesus if your house were burned down because you were a Christian?
Would you remain faithful to Jesus if the only way you could buy food was to deny Jesus?

Friends, we must ask ourselves these questions because we must be certain our faith in The Lord Jesus Christ is capable of withstanding the crushing blows of this life.

God has blessed The United States with religious freedom and to date God has spared us from the intense suffering and persecution that the Christians in Smyrna experienced.

But Satan, who is our enemy, has a thousand other ways to crush a believer's spirit.

For example; Are you silent when people make fun of Christianity?

What do you say when someone takes The Lord's name in vain?

What excuses do you make when you chose to miss Bible study and / or worship?

What do you tell your boss when you are asked to work every Sunday?

If it were a crime to be a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?

As we think about the crushing opposition, the economic disparity, and the abject poverty, ostracism, slander; and imprisonment the Christians in Smyrna faced each day we ask **how** did they endure the suffering, **why** did they endure the suffering, and **what** gave them the courage to carry on?

To answer these questions, we need to look Smyrna's strengths.

First of all, the church at Smyrna was strong because they knew Jesus.

They knew and they trusted Jesus who identified himself as "***the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.***" (v 8)

To remain faithful, we must know Jesus is eternal, unchanging, and in total control of the universe.

We must know Jesus is directing all of the events in our life.

We must know Jesus loves us and Jesus wants to be our best friend.

We must know Jesus is someone who can be trusted.

We must know Jesus is God.

To remain faithful, we must have a close personal relationship with Jesus.

Secondly the church at Smyrna was strong because they had the correct view of their circumstances.

Even though they were afflicted and physically poor verse 9 tells us were rich in the things of God.

You can have peace of mind knowing that Jesus loves you and knowing that you are living a life pleasing to The Lord.

When you have a personal relationship with Jesus, it feels like you are more than a billionaire.

Next, they kept an eternal perspective about their suffering.

Verse 10 tells us their persecutions were temporary.

Additionally, they knew their sufferings was an opportunity to grow closer to Jesus.

James 1:2-3 says, ***“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”***

Finally, the church at Smyrna was strong because they focused on their eternal rewards.

In Revelation 2:10-11 Jesus told them ***“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for 10 days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life...He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”***

Jesus promises a crown of life that will never pass away for the people who are faithful.

Our eternal future is secure in Jesus Christ.

Our lesson from Psalm 37 also gives us some practical advice for enduring hardships and handling any adversity.

In Psalm 37 verses 1 & 2 we are told we are not to worry or get upset because of what evil men do.

In verse 3 we are told to put our trust in The Lord and to continue to do good to others.

In verse 4 we are told to remember our joy and that lasting satisfaction comes from The Lord.

In verses 5 & 6 we are told to turn everything we do over to The Lord.

In verse 7 we are told to rest in The Lord and wait patiently on Him. And verse 8 tells us ***“do not be angry”***

As you know before Jesus was crucified Peter boasted that he would never deny Jesus.

But Peter failed and Peter denied Jesus 3 times when a servant girl asked him if he was a disciple.

However, after Peter came face to face with the risen Christ, Peter boldly proclaimed the good news of Jesus (Acts 2:14-41).

In Acts 5:41 we read ***“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”***

Peter rejoiced that he was worthy of being flogged because of his faith in Jesus.

God’s word to us this morning challenges each of us to ask ourselves *“what am I willing to suffer for Jesus?”*

Remember talk is cheap.

But real commitment is standing firm for Jesus when it is not popular and / or when it puts you in danger.

You see the secret to overcoming suffering and / or persecution is your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Knowing God is in total control, living life with an eternal perspective, and knowing your eternal reward is far greater than all the possessions and pleasures this world has to offer will allow you be victorious over whatever Satan or whatever this life can throw at us.

In our lesson from Romans we read that The Apostle Paul had the correct way of looking at suffering;

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18) ***“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** (Romans 8:38 – 39)

And 1st Peter 4:16 says; ***However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.***

Jesus begins His letter to the church at Smyrna by saying; ***“These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again”*** (verse 8) and Jesus ends His letter by saying ***“I will give you the crown of life”*** (verse 10) if we are faithful to Jesus throughout our physical life.

This reminds us that our relationship with Jesus is forever.

We must never forget that Jesus took our place by dying on the cross to pay the price for our sins.

Jesus was misunderstood, falsely accused, arrested, beaten, spit on, stripped naked, and abandoned by His closest friends **just** so you could experience the abundant life that God planned for you in this life and throughout eternity.

Remember the words in Hebrews 12:3; ***“Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*** AMEN