

Checkin' Out My Walk
#4 Church of Smyrna > Persecuted & Crowned - Part II
Faithful Unto Death

II. Praise & Commendation: The Comfort and Approval

Rev. 2:9a I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich);

B. I know your "Poverty" = ptocheia > describes absolute poverty or complete destitution.

To grasp this word, we might compare it with another, penia.

Penia refers to one who has the necessities, but nothing superfluous.

Ptocheia describes the state of one who has nothing at all

Note: Because of their refusal to obey the Roman laws, they were not allowed to belong to the labor guilds. They were not able to obtain decent paying jobs to support their families. Christian shop owners were boycotted, thus they went bankrupt and lived in poverty.

Note: Between 100 AD and 313 AD, the persecuted Church indeed seemed very poor.

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brothers: Has not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him?

Christ assures them He knows and cares about their condition and the great suffering on His behalf. I know," oida, oida, probably emphasizing the knowledge of experience, more so than just some kind of observation, I know, I know what you're going through; I know it by My own experience. I've been there, I've been poor, I had not a place to lay My head, I've been persecuted, I've been killed, I know...I know your tribulation. I know it not because I can see it happen, I know it because I've been there, I feel it > The sympathetic high priest.

He then commends them for their spiritual wealth in the midst of their physical poverty and suffering, much of which was brought about by the religious Jews of Smyrna.

1. They were rich Positionally in Christ, which was by grace.

Eph. 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

2. They were rich in that God had counted them worthy to suffer for Him.

1 Pet. 3:14-17 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.

"And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."¹⁵ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;¹⁶ having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

¹⁷ For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

I Peter 1:6 In **this** (look back to verses 3-5) you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

a. You have a LIVING HOPE through the RESURRECTION of JESUS CHRIST.

b. INHERITANCE > Incorruptible, Undefined, Won't Fade Away, Reserved in Heaven for you
c. You are KEPT by the POWER OF GOD through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

I Peter 4:13-14 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you

3. They were rich in their spiritual lives because they were living close to God by faith.

Note: They just leaned all the more on Jesus Christ and they never left their first love.

4. Spiritual wealth = laying up treasure in heaven that NO ONE could take away. Matt. 6:20

Principle: Suffering for Christ and the sake of the Gospel increases eternal riches.

Ponder: Do I see suffering as an enriching experience with Christ?

The Bible's teaching regarding suffering: it enriches the Christian's life and testimony!

Often, the godliest of men and women have suffered the most.

Charles Stanley said: 'Jesus is specially the partner of His poorer servants.

To be poor, to be destitute, is to go the way that the Master went.'

II Cor. 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. It was the way He came into this world.

1. Joseph and Mary, heavy with child, came to the inn, and an inn was a place where you were judged regarding what you had, and they were refused entrance. He was born in a stable.

2. The Lord Jesus for 30 years adorned the apron of a carpenter in His father's shop.

3. When He began His ministry, He had to ask a man for a penny.

4. He borrowed a boat in which to preach.

5. The very tomb that His cold corpse lay in after His crucifixion was not His own!

6. The moment He died, He left nothing behind Him; even His clothes were gambled for by the soldiers.

7. Yet being destitute, He possessed everything! He holds the world in His hand!

C. More Commendation: Rev. 2:9b and I know the blasphemy (slander) of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.

Note: Satan is mentioned 5 times as being against the church!

Note: Reference to those Jews in Smyrna who denounced Jewish Christians before Roman officials for not being "true Jews."

Consider: The Jews who professed Jesus as the Messiah had been expelled from their synagogues, leaving them open to persecution. Jews were exempt from participation in the emperor worship cult, but Christians did not enjoy the same legal protection.

He knows the persecutors. Smyrna's large population of influential, apostate Jews who didn't practice their faith, hated the Christians. They did everything they could to hurt the church in Smyrna. A large Jewish population poisoned the minds of the people against The Christians. Jesus identifies them...those who slander you; say they're Jews, but they are not.

They are a synagogue of Satan; it is NOT the synagogue of God.

Remember: The proconsul sentenced Polycarp to death by fire. At his trial, the unbelieving Jews of Smyrna joined with the pagans in condemning him to death. Although it was the Sabbath, the city's hostile Jews gathered wood for the fire. Eusebius writes:

"the Jews, being especially zealous . . . ran to procure fuel" for the burning.

These religious Jews claimed to be the seed of Abraham (people of God). They were, but only physically. Spiritually they were of Satan and under his power and control. (John 8:31-47)

In Numbers 16:3, Israel was called the congregation of the Lord,

John 8:44 You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.

These False Jews were labeled "*the synagogue of Satan*"

Rom. 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart.

God's People are to be the "temple (dwelling) of the Holy Spirit." > I Cor. 6:19

What? Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you,

Early persecution of the Church was brought on by Jews , not the Romans

Acts 13: 44-45 The next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

Acts 14:2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brothers.

Acts 17:13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.

Acts 18:5-6 [Paul] testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed him, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads; I am clean; from now on I will go to the Gentiles."

III. Condemnation; Concern

Christ offers no criticism of this church.

The saints were faithful in spite of suffering at the hands of their Jewish persecutors.

IV. The Counsel and Admonition > Prophecy > Announcing a Persecution of Ten Days

Rev. 2:10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.

(impending persecution) Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.

Be faithful until death, (Some will experience martyrdom.) and I will give you the crown of life. (Promise)

Note: The promise is for more suffering; Not relief. Jesus gives hope to His church:
Matthew 5:11-12 Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Note: There is no mention of complaining among them > Christ-like

I Peter 2:20-21 For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, *if you take it patiently*, (James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.) this *is* commendable before God. ²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

A. Concerning Fear and Suffering. "Do not fear" is literally "fear nothing." No matter how small or how severe, the One who has overcome death says, "fear nothing."

Consider: I should not let the enemy rob me of my eternal riches.

I do not want to stand ashamed before Jesus Christ. (I John 2:28)

Phil. 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

1 Pet. 5:7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Ps. 55:22 Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you;

He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

Isa. 41:10 Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God.

I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you,

I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

B. Concerning the Future and Testing

1. Attributed to the Devil- It is a continuation of the serpent's battle with the Lord Jesus Christ and those who belong to Him. (Gen. 3:15) > enmity between her Seed & your seed Satan's goal is to destroy God's plan and purposes. He attacks salvation by confusing the Gospel. He wants to destroy the regenerate by robbing them of their abundant life.

Human means and men are those we see persecuting the church of Jesus Christ, but behind the scenes is the old arch enemy, the prince of the power of the air.

Never fear! He shall be bound; he is a defeated foe.

Rev. 20:1-3 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ² He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³ and he cast him into the bottomless

pit, shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

Rom. 16:20 The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.

Col. 2:15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

2. Length of Trial - Face Prison, Severe Testing & Even Death for Ten Days.

a. The church would be crushed by the iron heel of pagan Roman.

b. View of Ten Days:

1). From 100 to 313, history records 10 separate attempts by 10 separate Roman emperors to exterminate and eradicate Christianity from the Roman Empire. During the rule of these 10 Caesars, it is estimated 5 million believers were killed by the Romans as well as by Jews that rejected their Messiah.

Interesting Note: The beast of Rev. 13:1 will have 10 horns.

2). History reports the most severe persecution during this period was the one launched by the emperor Diocletian. It began in 303, and ended exactly 10 years later, in 313, with the promulgation of the Edict of Milan by the emperor Constantine, which made Christianity the official religion of the Empire.

3). "Ten Days" in the Bible can signify "a brief time."

Gen. 24:55 But her brother and her mother said, "Let the young woman stay with us *a few days*, at least ten; after that she may go."

c. Christians during those 213 years were martyred, butchered, burned for Jesus Christ. Their bodies were torn apart on racks. Their fingernails were pulled off. They were hung by their thumbs, often for days. They were wrapped in animal skins and thrown out for bulls to gore and to pitch around. They were covered with tar and set alight in the gardens to light the festivities of the pagans. They, like the resin they represent, would be cut, bruised, wounded, crushed for Christ - but from that process of tribulation there would be a savor, and a fragrant smell that would ascend unto God.

d. Reminds us of the believers in Hebrews 11:37-38: They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth*.

Note: Heb. 11:36 Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

e. Length of their trial is short in comparison with their eternal rewards.

Comfort: Present Sufferings end with this life. Blessings & reward continue through eternity.

Consider: It has been allowed by God for His purpose and for a predetermined amount of

time. The purifying fires of affliction caused the lamp of testimony to burn all the more brilliantly.

C. Concerning Faithfulness and Rewards

a). Smyrna was a free city, one that knew the meaning of loyalty and fidelity to Rome unlike most cities. Cicero called it, "one of our most faithful and our most ancient allies."

Note: It was the first city in the world to erect a temple to the goddess Roma and to the spirit of Rome. Her fidelity to Rome was famous in the ancient world.

b). Christ said, "Be faithful unto death" (martyrdom) to receive a reward (Revelation 2:10).

Promise: "I will give you the crown of life."

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation: for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those that love Him.

Note: The reward is not eternal life. Eternal life is a gift through faith or personal belief in Jesus Christ (John 1:11-12; 3:16; 1 John 5:11-12).

This is a special reward for endurance under persecution.

The Greek word here for 'crown' is 'stephanos', not 'diadema' which is a kingly crown.

'Stephanos' is the laurel wreath that was put on the head of a victorious athlete.

c). Note: Their will was in line with that of Jesus, "*obedient unto death.*" (Philippians 2:8)

God Uses Our Suffering

1) To Purify Us > I Peter 1:6-7 In *this* you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

2) Witness To Others > In the 2nd-century Tertullian wrote that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church." Just as myrrh spreads its fragrance when crushed, the martyrs' blood, once spilled, becomes a seed of life for all those who witness their faithfulness.

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| 3. To Glorify God | Daniel 3:16-18; 24-25 |
| 4. To Keep Us From Pride | II Cor. 12:7-10 |
| 5. To Build Faith | I Peter 1:6-7 |
| 6. To Teach Obedience & Discipline | Acts 9:15-16; Phil. 4:11-13 |
| 7. To Equip Us To Comfort Others | II Cor. 1:3-4 |
| 8. To Prove the Reality of Christ in us | II Cor. 4:7-11 |
| 9. For Testimony to the Angels | Job 1:8; Eph. 3:8-11; I Peter 1:12 |

Endurance is Vital:

I Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves also with the same mind*,

I Peter 2:21-23 & Heb. 12:2

He endured it willingly & looked beyond the suffering to God's purpose and will.

Heb. 10:35-37 "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

Holding on to your beliefs during difficult times.

Our perseverance will be rewarded with the imperishable crown:

Striving for a Crown

I Cor. 9:25 And every man that strives for the mastery is temperate in all things.

Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown; but we an imperishable.

II Tim. 4:7-8 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith.

Finally there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love His appearing.

Matt. 10:39 He that finds his life shall lose it: and he that loses his life for My sake shall find it

Finding Joy In Suffering: Trials, tribulations and pressures are doing something valuable to us and for us. Victory in this present life is closely associated with occupation and orientation to the weightier things of eternity and the glories which shall follow.

Truth: God is Transforming Me

Romans 5:3-4 we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance (abide or stay under pressure); and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

II Cor. 12:9 My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

II Cor. 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward *man* is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which *are* not seen are eternal.

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

What does my Spiritual Walk Reveal?

Would I Be Willing to Lay Down My Life For Jesus Christ or Would I Deny My Lord?

Matt. 10:28 *Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Rev. 2:10 Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Promise)

Rev. 2:11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.