

The Church of Refreshing Faith – Revelation 2:8-11

Introduction

Welcome to My Thoughts and the second of seven segments of the Revelation Churches called The Church of the Refreshing Faith. It is hard for us to envision, but could you imagine yourself faced with the choice of either renouncing your faith in Christ or being put to death?

In a free country like ours, it is really hard to put ourselves in the shoes of those who are faced with exactly that kind of choice. There are people who have been forced to make that decision since the beginning of the church.

As we continue to study the Seven Churches of Revelation, we will see how the Church looks through the eyes of Jesus as we come to the Church of Smyrna.

- **In New Testament times Smyrna was a city with 250,000 residents.**
- **It was a thriving commercial metropolis and was a political as well as a religious ally of Rome.**
- **In 195 C., almost three centuries prior to the time Jesus is addressing them, they had already built a temple to *Dea Roma*, the goddess of Rome.**
- **In A.D. 26 they erected a temple to Emperor Tiberius and began to worship him as a god.**

The Christians in Smyrna were persecuted on all sides, but mainly by the sizeable Jewish population that lived there at that time. They took it upon themselves to report the Christians for worshipping Jesus instead of worshipping the Roman emperor, which led to the martyrdom of many.

A Man of Integrity

Polycarp was the pastor of the church in Smyrna on February 25, AD 155, he was killed for his refusal to deny the name of Jesus. He had been pastor of the church for many years and as an elderly man was given the choice by the proconsul to curse Jesus' name and live, or confess His name and die.

This was Polycarp's response: "Eighty-six years have I served Christ, and He has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" At that moment, the proconsul sentenced Polycarp to die at the stake, and he gave his life for refusing to denounce the Christ whom he worshipped.

The Persecuted Church

This was the type of situation the church at Smyrna was facing, even as Jesus addressed them in Revelation 2:8-11

⁸ **“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.**

⁹ **“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.**

¹⁰ **Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

¹¹ **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’**

In the words to the church, both then and now, we see that Jesus sees the church’s need to rely on the gift of faith to see us through the good times and the bad.

1. Faith’s Foundation is the Resurrection

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life” – Revelation 2:8.

Often in ancient writings, the author’s credentials would be listed so the recipients would have a clear understanding of who was addressing them. Here Jesus’ self-identification would bring hope to those undergoing persecution.

- **Jesus Is the First and Last**

Jesus wants them to have no doubt that they are being addressed by God Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ. This is the same language God the Father used in Isaiah 44:6: **“Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me, there is no god.”**

The message is clear: “Listen up the church of Smyrna, because you are being addressed by God Himself. Hear what I have to say to you.” This is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning, and the End, the First and the Last. Now if that is not enough to get their attention, we also read that:

- **Jesus Is Death and Life**

Jesus is the one who died on the Cross, was buried in the tomb for three days, and rose again. He has conquered death. The message for the church in Smyrna is clear. The one addressing them has the power and ability to conquer death, to be a victor of the grave, and to make them whole again, come what may. The church at Smyrna could have faith, and we today can share in that faith because the one whom we worship has risen from the dead.

“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” – Romans 10:9.

Salvation, both in the here and now and in the time yet to come, is based on our faith in a Christ who rose from the dead in power and glory. It was true for Smyrna, and it is just as true for us.

2. Faith's Power Overcomes Opposition

In a recent article on the suffering church, *Faith Works* listed the degrees of persecution a person could face for the practice of religious faith:

1. **Disapproval**
2. **Ridicule**
3. **Pressure to conform**
4. **Loss of educational opportunities**
5. **Economic sanctions**
6. **Shunning**
7. **Alienation from community**
8. **Loss of employment**
9. **Loss of property**
10. **Physical abuse**
11. **Mob violence**
12. **Harassment by officials**
13. **Kidnapping**
14. **Forced labor**
15. **Imprisonment**
16. **Physical torture**
17. **Murder or execution**

There have been more Christians in the last century killed for their faith than in all other previous centuries. What we need to keep in mind is that when Jesus is addressing the church at Smyrna the possibility of loss of life for their faith was a *real* possibility.

“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. Do not fear what you are about

to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation” – Revelation 2:9-10a

While we are not suffering at this level, many of us still face opposition because of our faith, so it is helpful to know that Jesus is there for us, come what may. Let us quickly look at some of the specific circumstances that we could face because of our faith:

- **Suffering è Poverty è Slander è Fear è Prison è Death**

The church at Smyrna faced all of these challenges and more. They knew that at any moment, they, like many they had known, could be pulled from their home, and killed if they refused to renounce Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

The very Lord and Savior they were asked to renounce is writing to them, encouraging them to stick with it, to hold out, to realize that it would be worth it all in the end, and the same is true for us, while we do not face the level of opposition the church at Smyrna did, we still face opposition in many ways.

Perhaps it is from our family, or our friends, or from those we work with, or attend school with. They are constantly giving us reasons as to why we should reject our faith, but Jesus is encouraging us to stick with it and never give up. After all, He endured the beatings of those who opposed Him. He overcame the ridicule, and the spikes in His hands and feet, the spear through His side, the crown of thorns on His head, and ultimately, death itself

Through the mouth of the one who died and came back to life, we are given the encouragement to stick with it, just like He did, and we are promised the power to make it through, no matter what comes at us, no matter what is said to us, and no matter what anyone tries to do to take away our faith. Jesus is steadfast and sure and will never leave us or forsake us.

3. Faith's Reward Gives Us Hope

Here is a funny story. A man stopped to watch a Little League baseball game. He asked one of the youngsters what the score was. “We’re losing 18-0,” was the answer. “Well,” said the man. “I must say you don’t look discouraged.” “Discouraged?” the boy said, puzzled. “Why should we be discouraged? We haven’t come up to bat yet.”

It is hard to imagine the level of discouragement, the potential loss of hope, that went on in the lives of the members of the church at Smyrna, but maybe it’s not too difficult if we begin to think of the disappointments in our own lives.

- **Things that we thought would impact our world but did not.**
- **Times when we were enthused about our faith, but others brought us down.**
- **Moments when we were tempted to give up on Christianity because we couldn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel.**

What Jesus said to the church at Smyrna applies to us also. **“Be faithful unto 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. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death”** - Revelation 2:10b-11

There are three promises here for people of faith, even in the toughest of times:

- **A Crown on Our Heads**

In the original language, there are two words used for the crown. The first refers to the crown of royalty worn by a king or queen. The second, which is used here, describes a crown that is given in joy to a victorious athlete.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, it is referred to as a crown of righteousness, a crown of boasting, and a crown of glory. This is the crown Jesus promises to place on your head because you have overcome the world through your faith in Him.

- **An Eternity to Enjoy**

Jesus said that the one who is faithful will not experience the “second death.” The first death concerns our physical body. It is something that will be experienced by everyone. The second death concerns the soul and spirit; it is eternal separation from God. Jesus promises that no believer will have to undergo that. Because of our faith, Jesus promises us eternal life.

- **A Purpose to Fulfill**

Here is one more story. Bill Broadhurst was running in the Omaha, NE, Pepsi 10k; a race of 6.2 miles. Broadhurst, who is a Christian, is slowed by a brain aneurysm he suffered as a young man, leaving him partially paralyzed on the left side.

He wanted to finish the 10k despite this obstacle. He was determined to run because Bill Rogers, his hero, was in the race that day. Rogers is a great runner and ran the race in 29 minutes and 37 seconds. The other runners finished in 30 to 50 minutes. The joggers crossed the line in 60 or 70 minutes. It would take Bill Broadhurst much longer.

As he ran, some kids did not understand he was competing and said, “Hey mister, you missed a good race.” As he ran, his left side got so numb he wanted to quit. He wanted to drop out. After two hours, the cars were back in the streets, it was getting dark on Saturday afternoon, and running through intersections became difficult.

One policeman stopped cars to let him across; a lady handed him some water. At two hours and twenty minutes, he said the pain was so bad and so throbbing, “I didn’t want to make it; I didn’t want to go on.” Then he saw the end. They had already taken the banner down. Broadhurst ran down the street on the sidewalk, saw the banner had gone, and his heart sank because everybody had left.

He thought, *What’s the use?* But he decided to finish. When he got to the end, out of the alleyway stepped Bill Rogers and a gang of people. They were waiting for him. Rogers opened his arms, welcomed Broadhurst across the finish line, and hugged him. After Broadhurst willed

his partially paralyzed body the last few steps to the end of the race, Rogers took the gold medal from around his own neck and put it around the neck of the last runner to cross the line. Rogers said, "Broadhurst, you're the winner; take the gold."

I see our lives much the same way. We are in the race, our purpose is to finish the race, maintaining our faith in Christ to the very end, and when we cross the finish line Jesus is standing there declaring us the winner!

Jesus says, "I have a crown for your head, the enjoyment of eternity is yours, and now you begin life anew, never to die again. It does not get any better than that."

Conclusion

I wonder if you find yourself living in Smyrna today? Discouraged by the opposition and in need of hope? Jesus will grant you everything you need. It is time to place your trust fully in Him, Amen!

I am Dale Van De Bogart and I fully agree on God's Word!

If you are reading this and never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, what are you waiting for? Click on [FREE GIFT](#) and make Jesus the Lord of your life **TODAY!** Remember, read your Bible daily, it's good food! Like and follow us on [Facebook](#) and subscribe to our [YouTube](#) channel and watch this and other My Thoughts videos.

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