



Sermon Series Notes

“The Positive Side of Suffering” (Revelation 2:8-11)

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BACKGROUND ON SMYRNA

- Smyrna was about 35 miles north of Ephesus, also a seaport city with its harbor right on the Aegean Sea. Smyrna rivaled Ephesus with its export business. Smyrna means “bitter” and is related to the word myrrh. Myrrh was a perfume used to embalm the dead. As the linens were carefully prepared and wound around the body, myrrh was packed between the folds of the cloth. Myrrh was one of the gifts the wise men brought to offer Jesus when they came to worship Him. It prophetically spoke of his future suffering and death. When He comes again, only gold and incense will be brought to him (Isa.60:6). Interestingly, myrrh was one of the products of ancient Smyrna.
- Domitian, the emperor who banished John to Patmos, made emperor worship a requirement for all Roman citizens. Smyrna became a center for emperor worship, with a Temple to Tiberius Caesar built in 23 B.C. Those who refused to worship the emperor could receive the death penalty. If not death, they had a very tough time getting a decent job, and were despised by the community. Once per year, all citizens had to burn incense on an altar to Caesar. While burning the incense they would say “Caesar is Lord.” This gives great insight to the meaning of I Cor.12:3...no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”
- Smyrna had a large Jewish population, and the majority of them were not sympathetic to Christians, especially Christian Jews. So to be a Christian in Smyrna meant persecution from both Romans and Jews. In A.D. 156, Polycarp, one of the church fathers, was burned alive in Smyrna at age 86. It was tough to be a Christian in Smyrna.

THE SUFFERING OF THE SAINTS IN SMYRNA

- Afflictions
 - 2347. thlipsis, thlip'-sis; from G2346; pressure (lit. or fig.):--afflicted, (-tion), anguish, burdened, persecution, tribulation, trouble.
 - To crush beneath a weight.
- Poverty
 - 4432. ptocheia, pto-khi'-ah; from G4433; beggary, i.e. indigence (lit. or fig.):--poverty.

- Completely destitute
- But from heaven's perspective, rich!
- James 2: 5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

- Slander
 - This came from those who say they are Jews but are not, a synagogue of Satan. See Rom.2:28-29. These Jews were just like the ones who put Jesus on the cross, full of religious pride, but rejecting Jesus as their Messiah.
- A promise of future suffering – prison, death (martyrdom). Jim Elliot was one of five missionaries killed on January 8, 1956 while attempting to evangelize an unreached tribe of Auca Indians in the jungles of Equador. On October 8, 1949, Jim Elliot made this entry in his journal: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” The next line he wrote in that day was the last part of Luke 16:9...that when it shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”
- Most of us will probably not die a martyr's death for our faith in Christ. But should that be our destiny, Jesus has very encouraging words for us in this letter to the church of Smyrna (read vv.10-11). The second death is mentioned at the end of the book of Revelation (Rev.20:11-15).
- The degree of our willingness to suffer for Christ is linked to our degree of commitment to Christ. Note: There is no rebuke for the church of Smyrna. This is a church that experienced deep suffering, but a church that had a deep commitment to the Lord.
- Every true believer will suffer to some degree for their faith.
- II Timothy 3:12...**all** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will **suffer** persecution.

ADVANTAGES OF SUFFERING IN THE WILL OF GOD

- Proves your faith (I Peter 1:6-7)
 - Rom.8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may share in his glory.
- Reason to rejoice (Acts 5:41; Luke 6:22-23)
- Necessary for spiritual growth (Heb.2:10; 5:8-9; James 1:2-4).
 - Romans 5:3-4...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character...
- Means of fellowship with Christ
 - Phil.3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...
- Opens doors for the gospel (Acts 16:25-34; Gal.4:13).

- Phil.1:12-13 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.
- Sparks courage in other believers (I Samuel 13:5-7, 23; 14:1-7, 14-15, 20-22).
 - Phil.1:14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers have been encouraged to speak the Word of God more courageously and fearlessly.
- Increases our dependence on the Lord
 - II Cor.1:8-9 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.
- Helps to keep us humble (II Cor.12:7)
- Aids in keeping the power of God upon our lives (II Cor.12:8-10).
- Keeps us from being lukewarm (I Peter 4:1-2).
- Motivates us to get back in the will of God
 - Psalm 119: 67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.
 - I have known people who, as a result of tough times, grew very close to the Lord. And some of those same people, when things got better, strayed away from the Lord.
 - I Cor.11:32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.
- Is worth it in the end
 - Rom.8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.

CONCLUSION

- The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions. One day while scavenging for food, he noticed smoke coming from the area where his hut was. He dropped everything and ran as fast as he could. He arrived to find his little island home engulfed in flames. There was nothing he could do but watch as it burned to the ground. He fought back the tears, wondering how God could let this happen. He cried off and on the rest of that day, then fell asleep that evening right there on the beach, filled with grief and exhaustion. Early the next morning he was awakened by the sound of a ship approaching the island. At first he thought he was dreaming, but when fully awake realized he was about to be rescued. His ship had indeed come in! When he asked those on the ship how they knew to come to this island, they said, "We saw your smoke signal."

- Are you suffering for your faith in Christ? Have you ever suffered for your faith? If not, it is likely you are not really born again.
- If you are suffering for your faith, keep up your courage, persevere, because there are tremendous advantages to suffering in the will of God.
- If you need to recommit your life to the Lord, and pick up your personal cross for Christ, do it today (Hebrews 10:32-39).
- Read I Peter 4:12-16