



Seven: Letters of Revelation
Revelation 2:8-11
05/19/2019

MAIN POINT

Jesus' faithfulness to us enables us to remain faithful to Him through times of suffering.

INTRODUCTION

Share a way, big or small, suffering has touched your life this week. How did you react?

Did your circumstances or your reactions to those circumstances reveal anything about the character of God? If so, what?

What difference did the hope of Christ make in your suffering or persecution?

During seasons of pain, we can be tempted to turn away from God in anger or despair. But these times are actually meant to have the opposite effect. When we lose everything else, we come to remember that Jesus is sufficient. Further, we begin to realize that even while we are suffering, God is showing love and mercy by working good into our souls. When the Lord is our portion, we can hope in Him even in the most painful places. Because we know He loves us, we can trust in and submit to His work in our hearts.

UNDERSTANDING

Revelation 2 begins with the letter to the church at Smyrna, one letter in a series of letters from Jesus to seven churches located in modern-day Turkey (the same region where John, the writer of Revelation, was a pastor). Each message was unique to the church Jesus addressed, but the messages have one central call: to remain true to the risen Christ.

| Have a volunteer read Revelation 2:8-11.

⁸ "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

The first and the last, who ^[e]was dead, and has come to life, says this:

⁹ 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say 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 cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. ^[f] Be faithful until 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. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'

According to Jesus' letter to them, what problems was the church at Smyrna facing?

What do Jesus' words to the church in Smyrna teach about suffering?

Jesus commended the Christians in Smyrna for enduring persecution and pledges them eternal life, even though their troubles are about to intensify for a short time. These persecuted believers were not promised escape from tribulation; they were promised instead something far greater: the grace to endure afflictions without fear and the pledge that the one who died and came to life again will certainly bring them through to the "crown of life."

The believers in Smyrna were very poor, but Jesus told them they were rich. What did He mean by that?

How are all followers of Christ rich spiritually? Read Ephesians 1:3-14 to aid in your discussion.

A statement is that persecution is a punch but it lets you know that we are in a fight. As the church of Smyrna was faithful, persecution was going to come. As believers, God has blessed us with the riches of Christ Jesus. No matter what we endure in this life, we have "the victor's crown," eternal life with Christ, to look forward to. For that reason, we are able hold the things of this world loosely, which means we are in a better position to sacrifice ourselves on behalf of others' needs and endure whatever comes our way with our faith intact. In America, we fear rejection more than persecution. Let's look at two other passages that help us understand how we can model the faith of the Christians in Smyrna.

Sermon Notes

| Have a volunteer read James 1:1-4,12.

***James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes who are ^[b]dispersed abroad: Greetings.***

***² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you
encounter various ^[c]trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith
produces ^[d]endurance. ⁴ And let ^[e]endurance have its perfect ^[f]result, so that
you may be ^[g]perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.***

***¹² Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has ^[a]been
approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to
those who love Him.***

In what circumstances does James command us to be joyful? How is this possible?

How do you tend to respond to difficulty or persecution in your life? How does your attitude compare to the one James commands believers to adopt in such situations?

James did not merely encourage believers to endure trials for the sake of eternal reward; he challenged them to be presently joyful in the midst of them. When Christ is our Lord and treasure, trials become avenues to spiritual growth rather than merely frustrations to be avoided. Perspective is key as James warned his readers against losing sight of their identity in Christ as they face difficulties which leads to sin (vv. 13-15). James' teaching on trials is not intended to encourage believers to seek them out but rather to demonstrate how life's pressures have a way of strengthening our character and faith. In other words, they help us develop perseverance.

Why is perseverance important? What reward comes with persevering in the faith (v. 4)?

Perseverance or "endurance" is not the goal, but the means of reaching the goal. The goal is to become mature and complete. A physically mature adult who behaves at the level of a young child is not a mature adult. Likewise, a Christian who is mature in the knowledge of Scripture but whose behavior does not match his or her profession of faith is not a mature Christian.

In what specific ways does suffering provide an opportunity for believers to show they believe in Jesus and rejoice? How is Jesus' life a model for this? How can testing or trials actually strengthen a believer's faith? What is promised to those who "persevere under trial" (v. 12)? How have you experienced this?

Endurance is self-authenticating; we grow in endurance by staying the course of faith and not being swayed by trials. Proven character follows naturally from the believer who has remained faithful through trials. Enduring trials causes us to grow in faith, and such growth is a testimony of faith's authenticity.

Sermon Notes

| Have a volunteer read 1 Peter 4:12-19.

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled [a]for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a [b]troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin [c]with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, [d]what will become of the godless man

and the sinner?¹⁹ Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

Why shouldn't we be surprised by persecution and suffering (vv. 12-13)? What is the difference between "participating in the sufferings of Christ" and suffering as a "criminal"? How can we be sure that we are suffering for the right reasons?

When we suffer for our own stubbornness or stupidity, we are not being persecuted. True persecution arises when believers are mistreated for living out of their identity in Christ. The only suffering that results in blessing is that which is endured according to God's will and for the sake of the name of Christ (v. 14,19). Peter says that such persecution produces joy in the hearts of believers because they are more deeply identifying with their Savior who suffered on their behalf and whose glory will soon be fully revealed (v. 13).

Sermon Notes

APPLICATION

How has God used suffering and trials to strengthen your faith in the past? To deepen your joy? How might remembering God's past faithfulness in your life help you trust Him in the present?

Read 2 Timothy 3:12 and John 15:18-21. While we do not currently face much persecution for our faith compared to Christians in other parts of the world, why is it important to be ready for potential persecution in the future? How can we prepare for true persecution?

How might we as a group help each other find joy in Christ in the midst of trials? How might we help each other persevere in faith in the midst of trials? What trial are you facing right now?