

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA
Message 7
Words: 5935
Scripture: Revelation 2:8-11

INTRO: By way of review, let me remind us where we are. We have been looking at the church of Smyrna, the beautiful city, the city of life; but the city of bitterness. Smyrna is the counselee. The counselor was the One who is the First and the Last, the One who was dead, and came to life. There is no more trustworthy counselor than that. No other religious leader is the First and the Last; and they have all died and not come back to life. Our master did. We ought to give Him our complete obedience in life.

We have looked at the commendation:

9 "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

We have begun to look at the counsel. The Lord said:

10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.

That is where we left off, and we will finish that commendation now which is this in verses 10b-11a:

10b 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.

4) The counsel cont'd (2:10-11a)

In the previous message we did not finish with the Lord's counsel to the church at Smyrna. Let me encourage you to go on the internet and check out these cities and look at pictures of these places. It will add to your understanding. The Lord has told this church to not be afraid of any

of those things they are about to suffer. That it will involve death for some becomes clear in the words before us now when He says: "Be faithful until death..."

Now we are a soft and effeminate generation. How can you keep from being afraid? Well, let me remind us once more of the description of the Counselor to this church. He says, "I am the First and the Last." Nothing any Roman ruler ever does is going to change how long the Lord exists. He was before there were Roman rulers and He will still exist long after. And then, the same Roman rulers existed when He was on earth, and they condemned Him to death. So He says, "I am He that was dead and came to life."

Let me mention one thing I discovered in my studies when the Lord said, "Fear none of those things you are about to suffer..." Note first it says, "Fear none of those things..." What about rape, the torture of your children, the torture of your wife or husband? Fear none of those things! This is the Lord's instruction. But John F. Walvoord noted that the words fear not, is a present imperative negated by the Greek word mee. Here is what that means. It means 'stop fearing' those things you are about to suffer. They were already fearing what was coming and the Lord said, "Stop fearing those things..." When Polycarp was asked by his heathen judges to recant he said, "Four score and six years I have served the Lord, and He never wronged me: how then can I blaspheme my King and Savior?"

So the Lord has counseled them to be faithful until death. If you will read the book *Martyr's Mirror*, you can read accounts of martyrdom throughout church history. Today there are more Christians dying for the faith than ever before. By the way, as I was reading Newell he said that John Bunyan, who wrote "Pilgrim's Progress" had only two books: The Bible and Foxe's book of Martyrs.

So our text says:

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

Now our next point, according to the pattern of the other churches is the criticism. But amazingly there is no criticism! There is no, "You have done this and this, BUT..." There is just no criticism! Is it possible for a church to be like that? Yes!

5) The comfort (2:11b)

Well, we come now to the comfort the Lord gives to this church. Look at the wonderful promise the Lord gives to this church. It may be that some or even many of them might die for their faith. But listen to this promise: *He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.*

Let me take the last first, and we ask; just what is the second death? Turn to Revelation 20. Four times the second death is mentioned in Scripture, and all four are in the book of Revelation. The first one is here. The next three come at the end of this book. So we go to Revelation 20 and we'll read 1-6:

1 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, and 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.

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the

souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Now we go to verse 14:

Re 20:14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

We go now to 21:8:

Re 21:8 "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

So we ask, just what is the second death? Well, I don't want to take a long time explaining all of this let me just give it in brief. The first death is physical death. It is appointed to man once to die, but after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27). That is the first death.

All the righteous dead are raised before the millennium. After the millennium, all the lost dead are raised. Revelation 20:7-10 explains this. Then in 11-15 we find what happens. Let us read that:

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the

heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

There are two resurrections. This is the resurrection of the unjust. Now all the unsaved who died from Cain to the last person at the end of the tribulation are resurrected. This is the resurrection of the unjust. They are judged and cast into hell, and this is the second death. The first death was physical. Death is basically separation. The second death is not an end of existence, it is to be separated from God for all eternity in hell fire!

And here is the wonderful promise of our text. The one who dies as a Christian, whether by natural death or by a martyr's death, will not be hurt by the second death! After death there is nothing more the devil can do to the Christian. Here is why the Christian is to fear none of those things. By the way, somebody tell me, what does the word *martyr* mean? A witness to the Lord!

Now William R. Newell makes an interesting point from the original language of the NT. Our English says, "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." In English we are not allowed to use a double negative. When we do, it becomes a

positive. Example, He didn't say nothing to me. If he did not say nothing to me, that means he said something to me. You cannot use a double negative. But in the Greek language of the NT, a double negative strengthens the negative. So here it means, "He who overcomes shall not in any possible way be hurt by the second death!"

Now look at wonderful promise that follows this bit of instruction: *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* Be faithful until death! If you do that, you will receive the crown of life! Now in these letters to the seven churches the Lord often uses things common in their area to help them understand the significance of things. Barclay says, "Smyrna had games which were famous all over Asia. As in the Olympic Games, most famous of all, the reward of the victorious athlete was the laurel crown", end quote. You see, there are crowns of gold and jewels; these are *diadem* crowns. But the crown here spoken of is the *stephanos* crown. We get our name Stephen from the *stephanos* crown. It was a crown of leaves that soon faded. But the crown of life does not fade. And the Christian runner could win this crown, if he was faithful until death.

Furthermore, Barclay says that when a man had diligently and faithfully performed the work of a magistrate, at the end of his service he was granted a crown of faithful service. Also, he says they were in the habit of wearing crowns at banquets. It was a sign of festal joy. They also wore crowns when they approached the gods in their temples. So they were familiar with crowns, but not this crown that is the crown of the life which is given if one is faithful to the end.

Now let me point out something from the original language here. This actually reads, "Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of the life!" Well, what life is 'the life'? We say sometimes, "This is the life!" No, we do not yet know what 'the life' is. If we should die a

martyr, immediately we would receive 'the life'. This is what is called, eternal life. It really means the life of the age, or *aionios zowee*. It is the life of the age to come.

But let me note yet that it says, "Be faithful until death..." Is it possible to be a believer and not be faithful until death? Of course. I don't know anything could be more plain. There is no reason for a warning like this if it was not possible to fail God when it comes to facing death.

We come now to these words with which we are already familiar, "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes..." I left some time to deal with the words, "...he who overcomes..." How do you overcome when you may see your own spouse or children abused in the most horrible ways, or you yourself are called on to die? Well, the answer is that it is by grace of God. But the question is, just what does that mean?

Recently we received an invitation to some evangelistic messages in town from a speaker who was not from our area. The invitation said, "You are invited! GRACE Gospel Music and Message." The word 'grace' was in capitals and about four times as large as the rest of the print.

My wife read what it said on the back, and commented and so I looked more closely. It said that grace can take us through the trials of life. That is true, but then it said this: "God's grace is beyond description: any definition takes away from the vastness of it. That is why the Lord simply says that it is sufficient" end quote.

Now if you cannot define what grace is, you can do anything with that word you want to. But if any definition takes away from its vastness, now you dare not try to define it because when you do, you have made it smaller than it is. So how

then does grace help you in trials? But these statements tweaked my interest to study grace once more. I believe that it is by God's grace we can face death with courage.

So our question then is, just what is the grace of God? Let me begin with this simple definition of the grace of God to sinful man and then expand on it. Here it is: **The grace of God towards sinful man is the manner in which He gives to man the things he needs.** It is that simple, though more needs to be understood. When we need the courage to face torture or death, it is God that can give that courage to us, and the manner in which that courage comes is by grace.

Now I said grace is the manner in which God gives anything to man. So we ask, just what is the manner in which it is given? The manner is this: freely. It is given free of charge. So, Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace..." the preposition *by* indicates the manner, "you are saved", salvation is the thing needed by man and given by God. It is given "through faith" faith is the prerequisite to receiving salvation, "...and that not of yourselves..." This salvation does not come from something in man, or something he can do, because as it goes on, "...it is the gift of God..." It is given, not worked for. So it goes on, "...not of works..."

Now, there are two ways in which one can legitimately acquire things: they are earned or given. And salvation, or anything else for that matter, can never be earned from God. It comes by grace or it does not come. And last, Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "...not of works, lest any man should boast." So by receiving things by grace through faith, all works and thus all boasting are cut off and God alone gets the glory. So Romans 11:6 says, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work."

Now we ask, what causes God to give salvation by grace? Is there nothing in man, as our Calvinist friends say, that causes God to give salvation to man? Well, there is something in the person to whom God chooses to give salvation. What is it? And the answer is this: faith! You see, a very closely connected word to grace is favor. So we read many times in the OT words like we find in Genesis 6:8 says Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. The Hebrew word *chen* translated *grace* here is usually translated favor. So God spared him from the flood because Noah found favor with God. The word *chen* is very closely related to grace.

Turn to Hebrews 11. You see there was something in Noah that sparked God's favor towards him. And what was it in Noah that sparked God's favor? Faith! Hebrews 11 is clear enough on that. Hebrews 11:1:

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

When it says faith is the substance, it means faith is the foundation, or that which underlies things hoped for. Things hoped for are the things man needs. Verse 2:

2 For by it (that is faith) the elders obtained a good testimony.

3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

Now listen most carefully to verse 6:

6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

What is it that God finds in the man that finds favor with Him? Faith! It pleases God! And when we please God He is moved to give us what we ask for! He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, that is, if they seek Him by faith. Now listen to the next verse:

7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Noah found favor with God and God extended grace to Noah. Now let me say this. When sin is involved, no amount of faith will please God unless the sin is taken care of first. It is repentance first then faith. The other day my wife found this by A.W. Pink. Though a staunch Calvinist he says, "A sinner cannot truly believe unless he repents. Repentance does not save, yet no sinner ever was or ever will be saved without it. None but Christ saves but an impenitent heart cannot receive it", end quote. That is exactly right. So listen to the Jesus words in Mark 1:14-15:

14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Clearly repentance is first. Luke 13:1-3 says:

1 There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?"

3 "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

Jesus said in Luke 24:

46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,

47 "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Sin is ever man's problem and must be dealt with before true faith can be exercised. Once repentance has taken place, now one can trust God for forgiveness. If we trust God for forgiveness without repentance we deceive ourselves. It is not possible to trust God for forgiveness and receive it if repentance has not taken place. This is an absolute must. If I have sinned against man, I must repent to that person I have sinned against. There is no use trusting God for forgiveness for such sins if I am not willing to repent to that person.

Now, how are we forgiven? By grace! What does that mean? It means that when I repent and then trust God for forgiveness by faith, I find favor in His eyes. And when I find favor with Him, he grants what I have trusted Him for, and in this case it is forgiveness from sin. And how does that forgiveness come? By grace! Here is what that means. It means I cannot work for it. If I could work for it, say I prayed for 24 hours for each sin, and God then forgave me; now it would be by works. But when I have repented and then have placed my trust in God

for forgiveness, now it comes by grace. That means it comes freely!

You see, there are two ways to legitimately receive things. I can work for them and earn them, or they can be given to me. When they are given to me, they come by grace; that is they come freely. When I earn them, they come to me by works. And by works I can receive nothing from God! And if I want to get something from God, and it can only be given to me as a gift, now I have to know how to go about getting that. If it involves sin, it always, always, always requires repentance first. Then I can trust Him for forgiveness and receive it. And when I receive it, forgiveness comes by the means of grace, that is freely.

Now there is something that throws us off in our understanding grace. We treat grace as a thing. But it is not a thing, it is a means or a manner in which something is given, which is freely. We talk about giving grace etc... as though grace is a thing to be given. So 1 Peter 5:5 says, *Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*

If grace is the means by which we get something, how can you give grace? This throws us. Sometimes, if we were to render it favor we would get a closer idea of what it is. For example if we read 1 Peter 5:5b like this: *"God resists the proud, But gives grants favor to the humble,* we would get a closer understanding.

So, let me explain this use of grace. There is a figure of speech called metonymy. E.W. Bullinger, the figure of speech specialist who wrote 100 years ago says there are four figures of metonymy. He said that metonymy is when the cause is put for the effect, or the effect for the cause; or the subject is put for something pertaining to it, or the reverse of that. Well, an understanding of figures of speech can clear up many difficulties in the

Bible. The Bible uses hundreds of figures of speech and metonymy is often used.

Let me give an example. Let us say I have something I want to load on a truck but it is too heavy for me, and I say to you, "Would you please give me a hand?" And you reach out your hand and say, "Sure, take it." We have misunderstood the figure of speech. I saw a gum wrapper with a man hanging from the eaves of the house for dear life and he yelled, "Somebody give me a hand!" And down below was another person clapping his hands. He too misunderstood the figure of speech. That is what we do with grace sometimes.

When we say, "Give me a hand", we are putting the word hand for what it can do. That is metonymy and we use this figure all the time, and so does the Bible. So Peter says God gives grace to the humble. The word *grace* there stands by metonymy for that which is freely given. You don't give or get grace any more than you give your hand to somebody who needs help.

When you speak of the grace of God by metonymy, it is whatever you need whenever you need it to live godly. And it is faith that finds favor with God. Without faith, it is no use asking. Grace by metonymy is that which God freely gives because we have asked in faith. So let us say you have family problems we cannot resolve. If God gives grace, that means we have trusted Him to resolve it. And when He does we freely got what we needed to put our family back in order. If we needed money, and the Lord provided because we trusted Him, that money by metonymy is the grace we got.

If our need is related to sin, sin must be first dealt with and then forgiveness or whatever else it is that is needed is received. Faith causes us to find favor with God, and when we find favor with Him He gives to us that which we need, and it comes freely. No amount of works will ever bring us into God's favor. It can never be earned. Faith brings us into His favor and then He gives what we need.

So, in light of our passage, when it says be faithful until death, the courage and strength needed to face death will come to us freely if we but trust God. Trusting God brings us into His favor, and His favor causes Him to give us what we need freely, and that is by grace. So the Lord says, "Fear none of those things..." Why? Trust in Him and He will give us what we need when we need it. Without question Polycarp and the believers at Smyrna experienced the grace of God when they were faithful until death. This is how to overcome. It is by faith.

When I taught along this line one time one of my sons-in-law said later something like this: Would it be correct to say grace is not a blanket to cover sin but a vehicle to help one overcome sin? That is it. And the vehicle brings what is needed freely, not by earning it. And when you speak of grace of God by metonymy, it is whatever you need whenever you need it to either get saved or live godly.

You see, salvation is from sin. And if I am living in sin, I am not experiencing present tense salvation by grace through faith. If I am hooked on bad things on the internet, I am not being saved by grace through faith. Only when I come free can I say by metonymy that I got grace. That means I have overcome. If I fall, and truly confess, once more I am overcoming. I must do that until I overcome. So our text says, "to him that overcomes."

So listen to Titus 2:11-14:

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

The grace of God teaches us to live right and gives us the means by which we get the power to do so.

b. Typically

So, back to Smyrna where they are counseled to be faithful even to death. Smyrna has typified the persecuted church, and the persecuted church has existed from the time the Church began. Now let me say something here. Persecution does purify the Church. But in the midst of the most horrific persecution, false brethren exist even there. The most horrendous persecution that will ever exist will come in the seven year tribulation. And at the end of that time period, as I understand it, all who do not profess Christianity are killed by the Lord Jesus Himself (Rev. 19:17-21).

But the most amazing thing is that the Lord then gathers all those who profess to be believers. In Matthew 25 they are called sheep and goats. And the goats are professing believers. At this judgment the Lord invites the true believer to enter the joy of the Lord, which is the millennial kingdom. But note what He says to the goats. Remember now, this takes place at the end of the tribulation, before the millennium. We read verses 41-46:

41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 'for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;

43 'I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

44 *"Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'"*

45 *"Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'*

46 *"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

May I say something to everyone who is listening or will yet listen to this message? Make very sure you are a truly born again believer. There are multiplied thousands of professing believers today who are not Christians. They think they are, but they are not. How do I know that? Well listen to our Lord Himself, speaking of the very time Matthew 25 speaks of. He said in Matthew 7:22-23:

22 *"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'"*

23 *"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"*

Not even enduring persecution assures one that one is a Christian. We must be truly born again, and we must remain faithful, even if it means death. Smyrna typifies the persecuted Church.

c. Prophetically

What time period then does the church of Smyrna prophesy? J. B. Smith says, "The church in its prophetic character is typical of the period of general persecutions by the heathen world from the time of the apostles to to the year A.D. 313, when the Roman emperor, Constantine, himself having espoused the Christian faith, issued a decree making Christianity a lawful religion. In A.D. 323 he went still further and made it the religion of the state" (65-66).

Tim LaHay says that the Church reached its largest number of Christians per capita during this time period. He writes, "During the second and third centuries this persecution age saw hundreds of Christians brought into the amphitheater of Rome to be fed to hungry lions while thousands of spectators cheered. Many were crucified; others were covered with animal skins and tortured to death by wild dogs. They were covered with tar and set on fire to serve as torches. They were boiled in oil and burned at the stake, as was Polycarp in the city of Smyrna itself in A.D. 156. One church historian has estimated that during this period, five million Christians were martyred for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (52).

In this time period many copies of the NT were made, and the Latin version was translated which was used over the next 1,000 years.

Dr. Harold Willmington gives the same time period as J.B. Smith for the prophetic significance of this church. He, among others list the ten Roman persecutions of this time as referring to the ten days spoken of in our passage (pg. 413).

Well, Christianity grew strong in this time period, but something very disastrous happened. After Diocletian, the most wicked Roman ruler of all, Constantine became emperor and he professed to become a Christian, which is a huge story in itself, but with him came the greatest compromise of Christianity through the freedoms that were granted. He even went so far as to pay people to become Christians. You can imagine what that did, and the result was the Roman Catholic church.

d. Spiritually

Now how may we apply the message to this church to our own lives spiritually and personally? It did say, "He who has an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The Lord knows our works, as a church. You see, a church is made up of individual believers. He also knows our tribulation,

if we have any. He knows what we are going through. He knows we are not poor. That adds a lot of danger to us.

Tim LaHay writes, "The churches of the first three centuries were marked by material poverty and spiritual power, whereas the churches of today are marked by material wealth and spiritual weakness" (54).

Then the Lord knows those who say they are Christians and are not. Oh, can I encourage us to check our own state. Scripture says we are to make our calling and election sure. And if the Lord wrote a letter to us, would He say, "You are about to face more trouble. The devil will cause some of you to become severely troubled. But don't be afraid. Be faithful to the end and I will give you the crown of the life. If you overcome, you will not be hurt by the second death.

CONCL: So we have looked at the counsel to the Church at Smyrna in Revelation 2:10:

10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. 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, 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.

Since there was no criticism, we went to the comfort the Lord gives to this church.

11b ...He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

How do we overcome? By grace through faith. When we place our trust in God, we find favor with Him. And when we find favor with Him He extends grace to us. And by metonymy, that grace is the strength or courage or whatever we need to live right or to die right.

