

REVELATION – SERMON 9

RICH POVERTY

Revelation 2:8-11

INTRODUCTION

- The world treats Christians today with scorn, abuse, ridicule, derision.
- They despise Christians, hold us in contempt, and sees us as fools.
- And yet they don't realise that in reality, the believer is the child of God, is the heir of the kingdom, is a king and a priest of God.
- There is a day coming when those scoffers, revilers and blasphemers will in shame and confusion lament their cruel treatment of God's people, when God takes vengeance upon them.
- In the church at Smyrna we see a body of believers who knew what it was to be hated and abused by the world, whether it was pagan or Jews.
- But now, their torments are over as they are comforted in glory with Christ, while their tormentors suffer eternal torment in hell.
- The city of Smyrna lay about 60km to the north of Ephesus, and was also a coastal city, and an important trade centre.
- An earthquake destroyed the city just a few years before the birth of Christ, but it was rebuilt, and to such a degree that it became known as the most beautiful city in all of Asia Minor, and was called the "flower of Asia".
- Culturally, it was highly advanced. It became a centre of arts, science, medicine and philosophy
- Religiously, the city was devoted to paganism; there was also a strong Jewish community there, and both of these groups persecuted the Christians.

- The city of Smyrna was intensely loyal to Rome; it was expected that every person must render worship Caesar as god; those who refused would be imprisoned and executed.
- The city was famous for its wine and drunkenness – it was devoted to the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and moral debauchery.
- The meaning of the name Smyrna comes from “myrrh”, which means “bitter”.
- Ignatius, in his Epistle to the Smyrnaeans recognized the ongoing zeal of the church at Smyrna: *“I observed that you are established in an unshakable faith, having been nailed, as it were, to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ in both body and spirit and firmly established in love by the blood of Christ.”*
- Polycarp, a disciple of John, and ordained by him as pastor of the church at Smyrna, may be the “angel of the church” that is addressed in this message.
- There is no word of condemnation to this church (as with Philadelphia)
- This does not mean it was a perfect church, because there were sinners in it, yet Christ’s desire for His church is that it be pure (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-27)
- This is a message of encouragement, not rebuke

I. CHRIST’S PERMANENCE AND RESURRECTION (8)

A. He is first and last (cf. 1:17)

1. His eternal nature

- a. Christ is the eternal Son of God, without beginning or end
- b. The most important question we all must answer is, “What think ye of Christ?” (Matthew 22:42; 16:13-16)
- c. An eternal perspective helps the suffering Christian to patiently endure trials (Romans 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17-18)

2. He is the first cause of all things

- a. As Creator (John 1:3)
- b. As Saviour
 - i. He is the Author and Finisher of salvation (Hebrews 5:9; 12:2)
 - ii. He first loved us (1 John 4:19)
 - iii. Those He justifies, He also glorifies (Romans 8:30)
 - iv. He saves to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25)
- B. He was dead and is alive (cf. 1:18)
 - 1. His death was for our sins, as our substitute
 - 2. He died so that we could be delivered from death – the second death (v.11)
 - 3. Mortal men live and die; only Christ died and lived
 - 4. Christ reminds His suffering people that He suffered and died, and now He lives and rules from heaven (Hebrews 2:18)
 - 5. For the believer in Christ, death no longer holds any fear

II. THE CHURCH'S POVERTY AND RICHES (9)

- A. Christ's omniscience
 - 1. He knew their works, and tribulation, and poverty; as well as the blasphemies of their enemies
 - 2. As God, He knows everything about us (Psalm 139:1-6; John 10:14)
- B. Their material poverty
 - 1. This a strong Greek word (*ptocheia*) meaning abject poverty, destitution
 - 2. To be a Christian in Smyrna could mean loss of employment, income, family support, possessions and liberty

3. They were the complete opposite of the church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:17)
 4. The followers of Christ have often suffered the loss of material possessions for their faith (1 Corinthians 4:11-12; 2 Corinthians 8:2; Hebrews 10:34; 11:37-38)
 5. The modern teaching of the “prosperity preachers” is a lie
- C. Their spiritual riches
1. They had little material wealth, but great spiritual riches
 2. In the Bank of Smyrna they had nothing, but in the Bank of Heaven they had innumerable treasures (Matthew 6:19-21)
 3. Rich towards God (Luke 12:21)
 4. Rich in faith (James 2:5)
 5. Rich in good works (1 Timothy 6:17-18)
 6. Making many rich (2 Corinthians 6:10)

III. THE CHURCH’S PERNICIOUS RIVALS (9-10)

- A. They suffered tribulation
1. The Latin origin of this word means “to thrash, to beat”
 2. The Christian is promised tribulation in this world (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1 Thessalonians 3:4)
 3. Yet the believer can glory in tribulations knowing that it works patience (Romans 5:3)
 4. Even the greatest tribulation cannot separate from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35)
 5. It is designed to “try” or prove genuineness of faith (1 Peter 1:7)
 6. “A faith that hasn't been tested can't be trusted.”

7. Their tribulation was for “ten days”
 - a. Many interpret this to figuratively refer to ten periods of persecutions under ten Roman emperors
 - b. However, it is best, as with other defined time periods in Revelation, to interpret this literally as a ten day period of persecution
 - c. There was a limit to their suffering

B. The synagogue of Satan

1. “Blasphemies” here means reproaches, slanders and revilings
 - a. The Jews and pagans accused the Christians of cannibalism, in relation to the Lord’s Supper
 - b. They accused the Christians of engaging in debauchery and orgies in their “love feasts”
 - c. They were called “atheists” because they refused to worship the gods of the pagans
 - d. They were blamed for causing natural disasters by invoking the wrath of the gods
 - e. They were accused of being traitors and enemies of Rome for refusing to render worship to Caesar
2. These were unbelieving Jews who persecuted Christians
3. Such Jews prided themselves on their race (Matthew 3:9)
4. But the true people of God (“Jews”) are not those of a certain race, but those who have been born again by faith in Christ (Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8; John 8:37-44)
5. The Judaizers were a corrupting influence in the early church, adding the keeping of the law as a requirement for justification (Acts 15:1)
6. Paul’s epistle to the Galatians confronts this heresy

7. Modern day equivalents include those who teach salvation by works; who teach that the church is the new Israel; whose religion is outward forms without inner regeneration; who bring Old Testament rituals into the church; who teach that Christians must keep the ceremonial laws (Hebrew Roots Movement)
8. False churches that preach a false gospel are synagogues of Satan (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:1)

C. The persecution of the devil

1. Note that the devil is said to cast them into prison
2. While they suffered at the hands of wicked men, such people were only tools in the hands of their master, the prince of darkness (Ephesians 2:2)
3. The believer wrestles “not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12)
4. He is a powerful enemy, but “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4)

D. The command to fear not

1. “Fear not” is the most oft repeated command in the Bible
2. There is no promise that they would not suffer
3. There is nothing in this world we are to fear, even torture and death (Matthew 10:28)
4. God gives us grace when we need it, not before (Hebrews 4:16)

IV. THE CROWN FOR PERSEVERANCE REWARDED (10)

A. The call to faithfulness

1. To be faithful is to be diligent in the Lord's service (1 Corinthians 15:58)

2. It is to be constant and persevering, regardless of the circumstances (2 Timothy 4:2; Acts 20:24)
 3. It is to be faithful in the little things (Luke 16:10)
 4. It is to maintain the cause and earnestly contend for the faith of the gospel (Jude 3)
 5. Faithfulness is require of Christ's stewards (1 Corinthians 4:2)
 6. True faithfulness is a rare grace (Proverbs 20:6)
- B. The extent of faithfulness – unto death
1. The martyr who gives his life for the sake of Christ, has given his life to Him long before the day of execution.
 2. If you are a believer, you are already dead (Colossians 3:3)
 - a. Dead to sin (Romans 6:10-12)
 - b. Dead to the world, and the lusts of it (Galatians 6:14)
 3. To be willing to die for Christ is every believer's obligation (Matthew 16:25)

C. The reward for faithfulness

1. This is not the crown of royalty, but the crown of victory (James 1:12)
2. Death, for the faithful disciple, is a departure from poverty, derision and suffering; and an entrance to peace, rest, and the crown of eternal life in the presence of Christ
3. This crown can be understood as an actual crown that one wears (cf. Revelation 4:10), or the *culmination* (cf. Psalm 65:11) of a faithful life here, which is everlasting life hereafter

V. THE CONQUERER'S PROMISE OF REST (11)

A. The second death

1. The first death is the separation of the soul from the body (James 2:26)
2. The second death is the separation from God of both body and soul in the lake of fire for eternity (Revelation 20:6,14; 21:8)
3. There is great “hurt” in this second death

B. The believer is not subject to the second death

1. “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” (John 11:25-26)
2. Only those who have been born again can escape the second death
3. “Born once, die twice; born twice, die once”

CONCLUSION

1. Persecution and abuse from the world is a necessary part of being a Christian
2. Professors who never suffer for their faith are not genuine believers (Luke 6:26)
3. When Jesus comes to reward His faithful servants, will you be in that number? (Matthew 24:46)
4. All those who die outside of Christ will perish in their sins and suffer torments of the second death for eternity
5. Are you certain that your sins are forgiven and you have been delivered from the second death?