

## Ultimate Victory.

Text: Rev 2:8-11

Suggested Hymns:

489, 352, 200, 340, 493

1) God Mightily Overrules

The Evil Plans Of Our Enemies

2) The Saviour Graciously Promises Ultimate Victory

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Revelation 2:8–11, <sup>8</sup> *“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: <sup>9</sup> ‘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.*

<sup>10</sup> *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.* <sup>11</sup> *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”*” (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A part of verse 10 of this chapter is a statement very dear to many of you. For some of you it may have been your confirmation verse: *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* For others it may be one of your favourite Bible-passages.

A crown signifies victory. We read in 1 Corinthians 9:25, <sup>25</sup> *And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*

St. Paul looked forward to the day of Judgement, when he would receive the crown of victory as we read in 2 Timothy 4:8, <sup>8</sup> *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

As we near the end of another church-year, we look forward earnestly to the end of life, and hope for the crown of victory. Let us today consider not merely this one verse, which speaks of the crown, but the context also, which speaks of a cross.

We shall see that, as long as we live, we shall experience trials, but that *For Every Christian there Is Ultimate Victory*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. God Mightily Overrules The Evil Plans Of Our Enemies.**

Firstly, let us note that afflictions, defeats, and calamities come to Christians. That was the experience of the church at Smyrna. John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, finds much to criticise in the seven churches. We read of them in Revelation Chapter 2.

The church of Ephesus - *I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ... Repent.*<sup>1</sup>

The church in Pergamos - *I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.*<sup>15</sup> *Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*<sup>16</sup> *Repent.*<sup>2</sup>

The church in Thyatira — <sup>20</sup> *Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*<sup>21</sup> *And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.*<sup>22</sup> *Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.*<sup>3</sup>

Only two of the seven congregations receive commendation without criticism. Smyrna is one of them. Jesus directs John to write his letter to the angel of this church. The angel of the church is its messenger, its head elder. Today we would call him the pastor of the congregation.

In our text the Holy Spirit finds nothing to criticise in the church at Smyrna. On the contrary we read, "*I know your works,*" which implies, "*I know your good works.*"

Jesus introduces Himself to Smyrna with some of the same words He used to reveal Himself to John at the beginning of the vision.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is *“the First and the Last.”* As true God, He is eternal and unchangeable, *“the same yesterday and today and forever.”*<sup>5</sup>

He is also true man, *who was dead, and came to life.* What they are about to hear are the words of Him, the eternal God who entered history to be their Saviour. *“Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”*<sup>6</sup>

Even though *the church in Smyrna* did good works, nevertheless, it must suffer temporarily. They are listed in our text. *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.*

Poverty. Perhaps the Jews and the heathen alike made it difficult for the Christians to earn a living. They hated the Christians and “spoiled their goods.”

No matter what made them poor, the Lord who knows and cares interjects, *“but you are rich.”* Smyrna was the opposite of the materially rich but spiritually poor Laodicean church.<sup>7</sup>

The poverty Smyrna incurred by its faithfulness to Jesus had stored up for them *“treasures in heaven.”*<sup>8</sup> This congregation typifies believers everywhere: *“poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”*<sup>9</sup>

Tribulation. The Christians were persecuted and had to suffer physical and mental pain on account of their faith.

Scorn, at the hands of those who said they were Jews but were not. The orthodox Jews despised the Christian Jews for becoming unfaithful to Judaism. They made it appear as though they were the ones who were true to the faith and the Christian Jews ignorant or malicious deserters.

The slander of those who say they are Jews and are not added to Smyrna’s troubles. Ever since Paul began his missionary work among them, Jews throughout Asia Minor had slandered Christians. They told Christians they were not God’s children unless they were physically descended from Abraham or conformed to Moses’ circumcision.

But Jesus had taught Jews during His earthly ministry that the real descendants of Abraham were those who hold to His teaching.<sup>10</sup> And Paul assured the Romans, in Romans 2:29, <sup>29</sup> *but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*

Behind of all this was Satan. *Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested.* Satan, who wanted them to fall from faith and to gain them for his kingdom, was using the Jews and pagans to accomplish his purpose. Remember how Satan tempted Job.

In the face of slander by evil men, the believers at Smyrna were content to live with God's praise. Jesus knew their faithfulness. His all-seeing eyes knew that the slanderers were really a *"synagogue of Satan."*

During his earthly ministry, Jesus told Jews who claimed to be children of God because of their physical heritage, *"You belong to your father, the devil."*<sup>11</sup> In the same way, he speaks of the Jews who slandered the believers at Smyrna. Although they "say they are Jews," they "are not."

We, too, suffer affliction. We read in Job 5:6-7, <sup>6</sup> *For affliction does not come from the dust, Nor does trouble spring from the ground; <sup>7</sup> Yet man is born to trouble, As the sparks fly upward.*

In the middle of trouble, we often wonder whether God knows or cares about our situation. Twice in verse 9, Jesus says he knows. The fact that He mentions it shows that He cares. He knows all about the afflictions and poverty at Smyrna. We cannot be sure what caused their problems. The Romans may have imprisoned them and confiscated their property for refusing to worship the emperor, or the congregation may have suffered religious persecution and economic discrimination from their townsmen.

Affliction is not always a chastisement. It may be testing to strengthen your faith. When tempted to ask, *What have I done?* Let us remember the congregation at Smyrna. " <sup>9</sup> *"I know your works (good works)... Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested.*

Listen to 1 Peter 2:20, <sup>20</sup> *For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.*

We, too, must sometimes suffer on account of faith. Friends, relatives, ridicule us for our devotion, for spending time at church, and for denying ourselves the pleasures of this world.

We are called narrow-minded because of our strictly Scriptural position on worldliness, and on avoiding Ecumenical activities, and so on. We can be as broad as Jesus and the Bible; but remember that there is a broad way that leads to destruction. In times of affliction we must not fail to see the ultimate victory.

Secondly, let us note that God knows our afflictions and tribulations.

Our text says *I know your ... tribulation*. It sometimes seems as though these things could not be if a merciful, powerful God knew of them. But God wants to reassure us. *“I know,”* He says to the Church. He knew what He was doing when He permitted the persecutions. He knows today. Let us be comforted by this fact.

A child falls and bruises its head and tells Mother how it hurts and is comforted by Mother’s “I know.” God will not allow us to be tempted above that we are able to bear. He knows.

Since God knows, we need not fear. Our text tells us <sup>10</sup> *Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer*. Often it is not what has happened, but what we fear will happen that makes us despondent. The fear of pain is worse than the pain itself.

If admonished not to fear, then there must really be nothing to be afraid of. God will bring us safely through all affliction. The devil is limited: “Ten days.” *Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days*. Ten days represents a limited time fixed by God. God knows what troubles His people face and limits the influence of evil on His children.

No matter who the human agents are, the devil is always behind the persecution that tests believers. We read in Ephesians 6:12 that *we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers,*

*against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

“Satan”, who led the Jews to slander, is the proper name for the devil mentioned in verse 10. In chapter 20 we learn that Jesus limits his power and finally destroys him.<sup>12</sup>

This is a wonderful sentence, <sup>10</sup> ***Do not fear any of those things.*** Let us take it to heart. God will always overrule the evil plans of Satan and the world and lead us to ultimate victory.

Let us apply this to ourselves. First the cross; then the crown. That is the rule. God permits afflictions. We endure, we grow stronger. It is to make us spiritually strong and to keep us from falling that God allows them. Let us not murmur at afflictions, but be comforted by remembering God’s purpose and promise “Fear not, for victory will be yours!”

## **2. The Saviour Graciously Promises Ultimate Victory.**

Firstly, the glorious content of His promise to us.

“The crown of life,” ***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*** Jesus will give it to us. We do not earn it by enduring affliction. ***“Be faithful,”*** continue to believe His promise.

“Shall not be hurt by the second death,” <sup>11</sup> ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”*** There is a first death, common to all. This is physical death. At this point the time of grace has ended for the person.

The second death is worse which means being cast into hell for of all of eternity. But we shall escape. For that reason we do not fear even the first death.

Secondly, This promise is certain.

Jesus Himself experienced glorious victory after bitter persecution. Our text says, ***“These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life.”*** Jesus was rejected by men, despised, crowned with thorns, ridiculed, scourged, and crucified. He had to bear His cross.

But He never murmured at afflictions but bore them willingly to save us. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God. For Him ultimate victory.

When the ship was sinking, the captain committed suicide. He saw frustration on every side. It was more than he could stand.

Jesus experienced persecution, frustration, from the cradle to the cross. He patiently bore it because He saw ultimate victory. He knew that it pleased God to save us in just this way.

We can be sure of all this because it is Jesus' promise. He is the "First and the Last," "the Alpha and the Omega." He is from eternity to eternity, God. He knows the truth. He speaks the truth. He is trustworthy.

What soldier would ask to be crowned who had not endured fighting? If we hope to be crowned victors, we must be victorious over something. This makes affliction, trial, and temptation necessary.

Let us not rely on our own strength. Let us *hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.*<sup>13</sup> In hearing and believing what God has done and what He has promised lies our assurance of ultimate victory.

The promise of ultimate victory makes us rich.<sup>14</sup> Contrast that to those who are rich in this world, but poor in faith.

Jesus' closing words to the spiritually rich at Smyrna summarise the comfort He has already offered. To trust that God limits evil for our good and to believe amid troubles that Jesus always triumphs over the devil — that is what it means to be faithful.

In Greek, as in English, the word *faithful* comes from the word *faith*. Although Jesus uses the plural in the first half of verse 10 to warn them that the devil will put some of them in prison, he reverts to the singular "you" in the command to be faithful. Christians may be persecuted in groups, but each person must believe for himself or herself.

The invitation to faith is in the form of a command: Carry this trust to your grave! *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev 2:4-5

<sup>2</sup> Rev 2:14-16

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 2:20-22

<sup>4</sup> Rev 1:17, 18

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 13:8

<sup>6</sup> Romans 4:25

<sup>7</sup> Rev 3:17, 18

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 6:20

<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:10

<sup>10</sup> John 8:31

<sup>11</sup> John 8:44

<sup>12</sup> Rev 20:2, 7, 10

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 2:7

<sup>14</sup> Verse 9