



THE PRAYER CLOSET

ENCOURAGING & EQUIPPING BELIEVERS IN PRAYER

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THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA

Nowhere was life more dangerous for a Christian than in Smyrna (**Revelation 2:8-11**). The city of Smyrna was strongly devoted to the worship of the Roman emperor. Each year, its citizens would take a pinch of incense and throw it on the altar dedicated to the emperor. They would then confess, "Caesar is Lord!" Of course, most Christians refused to do this, confessing that Jesus alone is Lord of all. For this reason, the church of Smyrna received harsh persecution – from evil slander to death.

However, Christ has encouragement for this persecuted and struggling church. He assures them that He knows what they're facing. He is not unaware of their suffering. He is powerfully present and will help them. In the face of this opposition, He exhorts them to be faithful.

This text is a powerful reminder that persecution is a reality for the Christian and the church. Confessing Christ flies directly in the face of this modern age's view of tolerance and pluralism. Yet, Christ has encouragement for us in the midst of persecution. He is with us and He will strengthen us.

How does Christ encourage His persecuted church? In this issue of *The Prayer Closet*, we will look at how Jesus encouraged His suffering church. We will also examine how we can use this text in our praying. In this text, we see the ways that Jesus encouraged His persecuted, struggling church.

Jesus calls them to focus on who He is.

When a church is persecuted, it has to focus on who Jesus is. Opposition should drive us to renew our gaze on Jesus. If we look at the opposition, fear will overcome us. If our focus is on the persecution and the persecutors, it will drive us to despair. For that reason, Jesus announces to them who He is. First, he says that He is "the first and the last" (**2:8**). Jesus is the eternal and abiding one. He is Lord of history from the beginning to the end. The One they belong to is Creator and Lord of history. He is in control of history

regardless of the appearances. The Roman emperors may have been powerful; yet, Jesus is the Lord of all. The Roman emperors may rule the known world; yet, Jesus rules the whole of human history. The Roman emperors would rule for a season; Jesus reigns from eternity.

Jesus also declares that He is the One "which was dead and is alive" (**2:8**). Their Savior had conquered death. He suffered and died but He rose again from the dead. The Savior that they belonged to had faced and defeated death. He is completely victorious over death and the grave. What Roman emperor could make this claim? None! Their Savior is Lord of life and death. What a Savior!

As we face opposition and persecution, our focus has to be on Jesus. He is the Lord of history. He is in control. It may not appear so. Yet, all human rulers are subject to Him. Their greatness cannot match His glory or His power. At the same time, we have a living Savior. If Jesus can defeat death, don't you think He can sustain you and help you overcome? He is able; He is the mighty, conquering Savior. When you face opposition and persecution, fix your focus on Jesus, the first and the last, the One who was dead and was made alive.

Jesus reminds them that He is powerfully present with them.

I can't imagine any sweeter words that Jesus could have spoken to this church than, "I know" (**2:9**). He reveals that He is very aware of what this church is doing and what they are facing. He knew that they were laboring hard for Him – "thy works." He also saw their "tribulation." This word means to be pressed in on every side. The pressure of the persecutors was coming from every side; it felt like it was going to crush them. Yet, Jesus sees this.

At the same time, Jesus recognized their poverty. Because they would not confess that Caesar is Lord, their property and possessions were confiscated.

They were fired from jobs and were denied jobs. Due to these things, these believers were destitute materially.

Jesus also heard the “blasphemy” that others spoke against them. This word refers to evil, malicious slander spoken against these believers. Because of their refusal to worship Caesar, they were branded as disloyal to the empire and to the city of Smyrna. They were seen as enemies of the Roman way of life. Because of their stance for Christ, the Christians of Smyrna were the worst kind of people, worthy of ridicule and rejection.

In the midst of all this, Jesus Christ was with them. He had not abandoned or forsaken them; He was powerfully present with them. In fact, Jesus says they were “rich.” They were rich because Christ was with them. They had available to them all the power and resources of the risen Christ. There is a richness in spiritual things has nothing to do with this world’s wealth.

The same is true for all believers. Jesus Christ is powerfully present with us, especially in persecution. He will not abandon or forsake us, but will stand with us and for us. All the power and resources of the living Christ are available to us. We are “rich”!

Jesus teaches us the basics about persecution.

In **Revelation 2:10**, Jesus reveals to this church what they’re going to face in the coming days. Satan is about to throw an all-out offensive against this church. Some of the believers will be imprisoned. The church will be tried and experience tribulation for a period of ten days. He warns this church to prepare them and to cause them to know that He is in control and to be faithful to the end.

In this verse, Jesus points out the basics of persecution. We see in His words some essential truths concerning the opposition of the church. First, He reveals **the source of persecution**. The source of persecution is Satan himself. Jesus says, “behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison.” In **Revelation 2:9**, Satan stirred up people to speak evil and malicious words against the church. It is our great enemy, Satan, that is the driving force behind persecution. We see that it is the devil that actively attacks and works against the church. Our battle is not against flesh and blood but against Satan and his evil, demonic army. Satan hates the church and vents his rage against the church.

Jesus also informs us about **the limits of persecution**. Satan has such hatred for the church that he would destroy it if not for God’s protection. Satan is a murderer and a liar (**John 8:44**). He would annihilate

believers and the church if not for God’s intervention. Jesus shows us that this persecution was limited. It would only be for ten days. However you interpret that phrase, a limit has been placed on his attack on the church. Remember, Jesus is the first and last! He reigns even over Satan and his spiteful rage. Satan does not have the last word; Jesus does!

In this verse, Jesus teaches us **the purpose of persecution**. Jesus says that the devil will throw some of the believers into prison, that ye may be tried.” Satan wanted to test the whole body of believers. This was an attack on the overall church. By persecuting them, he wanted them to forsake their faith. Satan’s purpose in persecution is that believers will renounce their faith in Christ. His wicked plan is to separate believers from their faith. He longs to entice believers to walk away from Christ and His Word. Satan’s goal in persecution is to rip the faith right out of believers.

On the other hand, God allows these times not for our destruction but for our purity. Persecution purifies our faith in God. It forces us to radically depend on God. It also has a way of reminding us which thing is life really matter. This is why Jesus tells them that they are “rich.” God’s purpose in allowing these times is to purify and strengthen our faith in Him.

Jesus announces the rewards for faithfulness.

Jesus declares to this church that He knows what they have been enduring. He also reveals the attack that Satan is about to unleash on the church. In the midst of this, He calls on them to remain faithful. They are to cling to Christ and His Word. They are not to turn away from Christ but to remain faithful to the end, even to death, “be thou faithful even unto death” (**2:10**).

The Christian life is all about endurance. It is continuing with Jesus when times are difficult. It is about enduring in faith in the ups and downs of life. It is staying true to Jesus even when we are ridiculed and rejected because of Him. It is faithfully proclaiming Him when the world does not want to listen and opposes us. Christ calls His people, His church, to be faithful at all times through all things. There’s no surrender, no turning back, no walking away, no giving up.

Jesus offers a reward for faithfulness, “I will give thee the crown of life” (**2:10**). What is the crown of life? Smyrna was well known for its games. When an athlete won a contest, a victory wreath of flowers was placed on his head. Jesus uses this to picture what the faithful believer will receive. The faithful believer will receive life – eternal joy and glory in heaven. The

believer who perseveres in faith will enter into eternal happiness. He or she will receive the Lord Jesus' "well done, good and faithful servant." There is a great reward for enduring in the faith. It will not be in vain. Faithfulness to Jesus will be rewarded and it will bring eternal blessing.

Jesus says, "Don't be afraid."

In **Revelation 2:10**, Jesus says, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." Jesus calls His people to faithfulness not fear. We may face and endure suffering in this life. Yet, it will not last forever. If we will trust Jesus and follow Him, we will enter into the blessedness, joy, and rest of heaven. We will not have to face an eternity of suffering. This is Jesus' promise, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (**2:11**).

What is the second death? The second death is eternal suffering in hell (**Revelation 20:14**). It is conscious, unending punishment in hell. While we may suffer in this life, we will not suffer in the life to come. Those who persecute and oppose us will face an eternity of suffering and pain for their rejection of Jesus and opposition to Him and His church. Our suffering is momentary; theirs is for eternity. We don't have to be afraid of persecution – Jesus is with us, He will empower us, He will help us to be faithful and overcome, and He will bring us to heavenly glory and joy.

How Do I Use This Text In My Praying?

We are to use the Word of God in our praying. This text can help us seek God. The following are suggestions on how to use this text to guide and fuel your praying:

Adore Jesus:

- That He is Lord of history and the Master of the rulers of the earth;
- That He is the mighty Savior who died and rose again;
- That He knows and is concerned about His church.

Confession of Sin:

- Placing more emphasis on material riches than spiritual riches;
- Being fearful to take a stand for Jesus Christ;
- Allowing adversity to hinder our faithfulness to Christ;
- Being more concerned about what people say about us than what Christ thinks of us.

Thanksgiving:

- That your life is in the hands of Jesus Christ and not chance or the whims of earthly rulers;
- That Jesus Christ is powerfully present with His people, His church;
- That you have hope in the face of death because Christ has conquered death by His resurrection;
- That He protects His people, His church, from the attacks of Satan;
- That Christ promises and will grant us strength and help to overcome and receive the crown of life;
- That we do not have fear hell and eternal damnation because of Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection.

Petitions:

- That God will grant your church and you the grace to endure through difficult times;
- That your church would stand for Jesus Christ and His Word regardless of the consequences;
- That your church would be characterized by faithfulness and not by fear;
- That Christ will strengthen and protect your church from Satan's schemes and onslaughts;
- That Christ will strengthen the faith of the believers of your church;
- That your church will hear and obey the Holy Spirit.

Intercession For Your Area:

- That God would silence and counter the slander of those who oppose and persecute the church; that He will either put a stop to it or turn their words into foolishness to those they attempt to influence;
- That people will be open to listen to the gospel because of the church's faithfulness and unyielding compromise; that God will use this to create a hearing for the gospel in your area;
- That God would have mercy on those who persecute and oppose the church; that God would work to meet their spiritual needs and that He would be gracious to them because they are the tools, the pawns, of Satan; that God would grant them a spirit of repentance.
- That people will realize that there is a second death – eternal damnation and suffering in hell forever; that Jesus Christ is the only hope for escaping this second death; that they will turn from their rebellion to trust solely in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

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Prayer Closet News

As this newsletter goes to the printer, we are making plans to move most of our materials and furniture from the old office to the new facility. We are also planning in the near future to have the septic tank put in and at least one bathroom in the facility. We have had to deal with a series of setbacks and obstacles that have delayed our completing the new facility. The progress is slow but it is progress.

At the same time, we continue to develop materials for ministry. We are working on some new products for prayerwalking. I'm developing a ministry, the Samson Ministry, to help people pursue purity and overcome pornography. We're working on resources for seeking God for spiritual awakening. With God's help, we continue striving to equip and encourage believers and churches in prayer and revival.

I deeply appreciate your prayers and financial gifts. Please continue to pray for this ministry and for me. Pray for His blessing and help on this ministry. I need your prayers. I would also ask you to consider

giving to this ministry. Your gifts go directly to ministry. No one at The Prayer Closet receives a salary. Your gifts are used to make a difference in the lives of people and churches. I would ask you prayerfully to consider this matter. May God richly bless and keep you by His grace and power!

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