

Comfort and Joy Under Trials

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A sincere relationship with God provides Christians with comfort and joy, even in times of trial and tribulation. Most are familiar with John's vision recorded in the book of Revelation. Our study begins with the discussion of issues faced by the first century believers assembling at the small congregation in Smyrna (Chapter 2, verses 8-11).

Revelation denotes this church as "the suffering church". It is one of only two of the seven churches to receive praise for their actions:

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: 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.

Revelation 2:8-9, NKJV

Smyrna was persecuted because of their faith in Christ. In comforting Smyrna, Jesus does not remove the threat of persecution but, instead, encourages believers to continue in steadfast faith, knowing their persecution will continue to grow in intensity and brutality.

Addressing Smyrna, Jesus refers to Himself by the title, *"the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life"*, and gladly joins Himself to the believers during their time of affliction. Jesus, the Living Savior, who was once dead but was made alive by His father, sends a message to this small afflicted congregation: Just as Jesus endured suffering and death in order to enter God's everlasting joy, the believers at Smyrna were encouraged to travel the same path.

Revelation identifies the persecutors of God's people as part of the "synagogue of Satan":

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. 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. Revelation 2:10-11, NKJV

God's response to Smyrna includes two incredible, albeit conditionally based, promises:

Jesus instructs the faithful: *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."* This reward is based on actions motivated by a relationship deeply rooted in a love for Christ – endure temptation (James 1:12).

Secondly, Jesus assures His disciples: *"He who*

overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” In essence, eternal life awaits all who are willing to endure and overcome the evil snares of this life. We often note that right deeds flow from a right relationship with God; this is an essential component of a genuine relationship with God and God's community of faith. We have the comfort and joy that accompanied the glorious promises of a faithful God: freedom from the “second death” of being cast into the lake of fire, the eternal abode of the unsaved (Revelations 20:14). God's redeemed will not be hurt by this death.

As a small church, Smyrna was not politically powerful and was literally being trampled beneath Jewish persecution. With this backdrop, Jesus tells them, “*I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich).*” How could Smyrna be considered rich? The answer is important for us to understand; because the Christian believers at Smyrna remained faithful in their

relationship with God, they found favor with Him!

Finding favor with God is true wealth! The riches brought to believers through a faithful relationship with God are the only riches that will survive this world! Jesus spoke of this spiritual concept in Matthew 16:19-21. Spiritual riches bring glory to God and are stored up in heaven. With that in mind Jesus goes on to remind the faithful that where their treasure is, their hearts will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

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