

02-08-23a Revelation

Let's take a few moments at the outset here to clear our minds and prepare our hearts. No, I thought about that. I say clear our minds.

I don't mean clear it like blank and vacuous and waiting to accept just anything, but I think we all come to a point where we're getting ready to study the Word of God more than we're likely to carry with us a lot of the cares of the day and the pressures of the week. And it's easy, particularly if the teacher or the pastor doesn't get off to a real swinging start, you know, if he doesn't start out with an anecdote or a joke or something to kind of shake your mind free. And he has kind of a droning beginning.

I have had this happen to myself where suddenly my mind begins to wander back to whatever it was working on before I showed up. And it is such a wonderful opportunity to avail ourselves of the grace of God as it is expressed and revealed and transmitted to us through God's Word. And it would be a shame for us through inattention or lack of concentration or distraction to miss what God the Holy Spirit can teach all of us through the scriptures that we visit as we study together.

So we take a moment at the outset. It's an opportunity if we, hopefully we don't go very long without coming before the Lord and acknowledging any sin that's in our life. I have never really stressed that.

There are people that talk a lot about confession of sin right before Bible class, but I would hope that we don't wait until that point to suddenly say, oh my, I'm about to study the Word of God. I guess I ought to review the day or the week and see where I've sinned. But it is an opportunity to thank God.

To me, it's like the blessing before a meal. We sit down and we see the bounty that God has provided us in security and in safety. And we thank Him for the things that nourish our body.

And I think it's equally important to say grace, if you will, over our spiritual meal each time we gather. So let's take a moment here to go to the Lord in prayer. Father, thank you for this day.

Thank you for all the ways that you have provided for us and not only met our needs but surpassed in so many ways, ways we're not aware of. We have been protected from accident and disaster, things that we never saw coming have been quietly taken out of the way. You have orchestrated the details and the circumstances and the events of our lives in such a way that we have come to this point with the opportunity to renew our souls and to refresh ourselves in the truth of your word.

We thank you for the ever-present ministry of God the Holy Spirit. We thank you that He is our seal and our guarantee that our future is with you in eternity and with the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray now that as we study together that God the Holy Spirit will find willing and ready hearts that

we can rightly divide the word of truth and take full advantage of everything that you have revealed for us this evening.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. We resume tonight our study in Revelation.

We're in chapter 2. We are at the closing section of the second church that Jesus addresses in this vision to John, the message that he sends to the church at Smyrna, beginning in verse 8 of Revelation chapter 2, and to the angel of the church in Smyrna write. We know that that angel is the pastor. He is the under-shepherd.

He is the messenger who has as his primary task and as the primary area of exercise of his gift and his function in and for the church the communication of the word of God. These things says the first and the last who was dead and came to life. I know your works, tribulation, and poverty.

We noted that the word works is sort of a later addition. The earlier and better manuscripts lack that addition, which has crept in from some of the other letters. So he basically, Jesus says here, I know your tribulation and I know your poverty.

And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a 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.

Well, we have given ourselves a good background on the church in Smyrna, haven't we? Do you remember what the name means? It is the Greek word for that spice, myrrh, that was associated with the birth of Christ in terms of the gift of the wise men, as well as his death. Joseph of Arimathea donated very extraordinary quantities of this particular spice for the preparation of the Lord's body for burial. We know its association with the myth of the phoenix, which was prominent, was well known, and it was associated with the city of Smyrna historically.

It had resurrected itself more than once in its history, and this was well known. Jesus says in verse 9, I know your tribulation and your poverty. What is striking about this, when you compare this to the other six letters, is this is the only letter where Jesus does not make some reference to their works, and that's probably why someone felt like they needed to add it in so that they would all match.

But as we are going to see, Jesus is going to say to each of the churches, I know what you've been doing. I am evaluating your activities, your actions, what you've been up to. But for the church at Smyrna, the one who was dead and is alive, says, I know your status.

I know your circumstances. And there are times when that's really uppermost in our own minds, isn't it? We're not concerned. We're not beseeching God's throne over what we're trying to do or

what we're trying not to do.

It's where we are. It's our circumstance and our status in life. So the message to the church at Smyrna is interesting, particularly as it applies to those times when our challenges all revolve around where we are, our environment, our pressures and circumstances that have nothing to do with what we are up to, nothing to do, primarily at least, with our actions.

It's just the environment. And Jesus talks about the fact that they are being persecuted. This is people testing.

Their status, their circumstance is people testing. There are people who don't like them, don't approve of them, want to get rid of them, want to see them out of the picture. And these are the very people who should be brethren, who should be one with them in the faith, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one doctrine, one God and Father of us all, one spirit.

The unity of the spirit and the bond of peace, all of these things ought to be the case with believers, with fellow believers, with Jews who ought to be believers. Whether these are or not is hard to tell because we don't have much information about their standing or their status or who and what they are, what they've been up to. We do know that Jesus says they say that they're Jews and they're not.

And last time we looked at how can you say that you're a Jew and really not be one. And we saw the idea, all Israel is not Israel, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. We saw Jesus talk to his audience when he was trying to bring in the kingdom.

And he says you Pharisees claim Abraham as your father. Remember we went through that whole chapter where he says you claim Abraham as your father but you're doing the works of your real father who is the devil. He is the father of lies and the father of liars and you lie and don't do the truth.

If you loved the truth you would love me and so on. And this is the case where Pharisees were sort of considered the ultimate Jews, the ultimate Israelites, and yet here's the Lord of Glory standing in front of them. If anybody should have been able to recognize him it would have been the Pharisees and they were just like the stream in the desert, just over the dune.

Good comes by and they couldn't see it. Well, he says I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not. And this is a helpful thing.

You wouldn't think that you'd already be at a point of application in this letter. But stop and think. How many times all of us at one time or another, some of us right now, might be in some sort of contention or some sort of tense uncomfortable situation with people, possibly fellow believers, possibly family, possibly co-workers, whatever it might be.

What is our line of defense? It is one of the hardest areas. People say, well, have love, have joy, have peace, have patience. And you can say, well, I can be patient.

I can put up with things. But you have turmoil in your soul when you're crosswise with people. We just can hardly help it.

I don't know anybody who can be in a situation where there is criticism and where there is tenseness and where there is discomfort and people quit talking to you and you get the feeling that a lot of other people are talking to each other about you and you're starting to get the cold shoulder. And when you do talk, there's vituperation and bitterness seems to come up. And you don't know whether it's better to not talk or to talk because when you don't talk, there's a stony silence.

When you do talk, it seems to turn into a sin of the tongue fest. And it's just uncomfortable. No human being likes that kind of environment unless they are seriously twisted in their soul.

You'd have to be psychotic to get any pleasure. You'd have to just be an 18-hour-a-day soap opera watcher or something to enjoy that kind of environment. So what's our line of defense? You can quote all the promises you want to yourself and it isn't going to quell the turmoil in your soul.

You can cite verses. You can pray until you're blue in the face and you'll not necessarily arrive at a place of peace in those circumstances. This requires a very specific application of a category of truth.

And the category of truth that we need to make real to ourselves and that we need to remind ourselves of in that situation is this single word in Greek here right at the beginning of verse 9. And that word is oida. Oida. O-I-D-A.

Translated from Greek, it means I know. This is Jesus speaking. And he says, I know your situation.

I know your tribulation, your calypsus, T-H-L-I-P-S-I-S, almost as hard to say as it is to endure. And I know your poverty. I know what you lack.

I know what it is that you ought to have and you don't. If you think about a child, especially if you're a parent and you think about a child and you know that they're going to have to undergo something that's not pleasant. And what's one of the ways that we try to comfort a child? We say, look, I've been in your situation.

I know how scared you are. I know how fearful you are. I know that you're dreading this.

I know. And we comfort them with that, don't we? We say, look, you're talking to somebody that has been through, and look, I'm still here. I grew up.

I survived. I got up out of the dentist's chair or the doctor's table. I survived the cleaning of the gravel out of my scrapes.

I survived my stitches. I survived whatever it is. But how do we try to comfort them? We say, I know what you're going through.

We empathize with them. We try to give them what we need because we ourselves have been in that position. That's what Jesus says here.

He says, I know. The very first thing out of his mouth to this church that's impoverished and persecuted and undergoing tribulation, he says, I know exactly where you are. Don't think that I got busy and wasn't paying attention or that I just don't have a good idea of the kind of pressure that you're facing, how serious it is, how life-threatening in this particular case it is.

I know your tribulation. I know your poverty. But you are rich.

And that is a promise. Remember what Jesus told the disciples? Any of you that have given up father and mother, brothers and sisters, houses and lands, will have it restored a hundredfold. The disciples, like Jesus, barely had a place to lay their head when they traveled with him.

When they went out to preach the good news of the kingdom, they didn't even take an extra pair of sandals. They didn't take money in their belt. They just walked along as though they were making a trip of the length of a city block, and yet they were going miles and miles out into the villages and countrysides.

They were poor, and yet they were rich. They were rich in the faith. They were rich with the message that Christ gave them.

What believer wouldn't love to trade places with one of the disciples for a few days and experience that kind of poverty, to be with the Lord Jesus, to hear him teach, to see him do the miracles, to just look at his face? Who would not want that particular kind of poverty because the spiritual riches, both present and future, are so far surpassing that it just dwarfs any lack in this life into insignificance? Well, Jesus says, look, you may be doing without some things that the world says you need or that you think you need or that even by rights you ought to have. You ought to have freedom. You ought to have privacy.

You ought to have your property without having a crystal knocked and somebody breaking all your windows and burning down your house. You ought to have a lot of things that you don't have. But when Jesus says you are rich, you know what he's saying? You have an inheritance.

You're already in the book for inheritance. It's not a question mark. It's not a maybe.

It's not a potential. He doesn't even have to talk about their works because they are well past that point. He doesn't have to say, I know your works and here's where you've done well and here's

where you've done poorly.

They have persevered and they have established a pattern in their souls where their clarionimia, their inheritance is no longer in question. Jesus doesn't say you might be rich. He doesn't say you will be rich.

He says you are rich. It is a certainty. Your inheritance in heaven is a certainty and why is that? Well, we have to look closely because Jesus doesn't really have a commendation section here, so to speak, but the commendation is implicit in what he says.

He says, I know your tribulation, I know your poverty, but you are rich. That's a great confidence builder. What would you give for the Lord Jesus Christ to walk up to you later this evening, somewhere private, and say, fill your name in the blank, I just want you to know I've got your inheritance reserved.

I've already seen it. It's a wealth. It's a treasure.

You are rich. He says, I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not. It's a hard thing sometimes because people will twist and distort and slander and take circumstances and take bits and pieces of what you might have actually said and turn it around and use it against you.

And there becomes a sort of a prevailing knowledge amongst your enemies that oh well, this is why this happened and you can see how selfish they are. Look at what they did here and look at what they did there. It gets distorted and twisted.

It is a blasphemy, the root meaning of the word blasphemy means to distort and twist, to change something around and make it into what it's not. Well, it's very frustrating because the more you try to defend yourself against something like that, if you say, no, no, that's not the way it is, let me tell you how it really is, let me straighten it out. You've seen people and how pathetic that is because all they do is give more ammunition.

Once people get in that mood, there is nothing you can say. You cannot refute. You can't quench.

And with your brilliant dialogue and your brilliant repartee and you come back and just put them all to silence. It doesn't matter how logical you are. Watch, I think he's off the air now, but you may remember Bill Maher and his Politically Incorrect.

You could have the most brilliant conservative thinker on the planet on that show and if he made a good point, those people would resort to ad hominem. They would say, oh, you belong to the party that has so and so and pick some ne'er do well. And, you know, they'll give you guilt by association or they'll give you personal attack instead of addressing your issues.

It is a no-win situation. If people start slandering and accusing and starting a besmirch campaign

and gossiping and maligning and judging you verbally, it is a waste of time, and this is a biblical principle, it is a waste of time to go into some kind of defense mode or to try to start a counter campaign. Jesus says, look, I know they're twisted words.

I know they're blasphemy. So it comes into the same category as vengeance is mine, I will repay. Jesus says, I know your situation and I know what these people are doing.

And that ought to be a comfort to us. The Lord knows. He sees, He hears every word.

There's not a detail that escapes His notice. I have been reading a book that stretches the very limits of my ability to even begin to comprehend. It talks about the creation of the universe and all of the scientific evidence that has been amassed, particularly just in the last 10 or 15 years and even as late as this year.

And I'll just give you one little tidbit from that. But all of the evidence, it is overwhelming evidence, that there was a singularity, what has been popularly called the Big Bang, at which everything came into existence. And some people in Christian circles have been a little bit leery about the Big Bang because, well, it was so many billions of years ago, and maybe that's anti-Bible or anti-Genesis 1 through 3 and that sort of thing.

Not at all. That is exactly what the Bible teaches. God spoke and instantaneously things came into being.

The only difference between what science has been discovering and what the Bible teaches is our reference point. Because when we try to look at things from inside time, our time is relative to what time does right now. And yes, there is a sense in which the universe came into existence 14.5 billion years ago, but there's another sense in which it came into existence 6,000 years ago.

Because, for God, time is not a constant. For us, it is. So it all depends on your point of view.

Think of it this way. When you're standing on the playground, you're watching kids, all of us have had to do this or have done it at one time or another. Maybe you're sitting on a park bench and you see a little child sitting on the ground.

What is the relative speed between you and the child? Well, it's zero. You're sitting on the bench, they're sitting on the ground, there's no movement. Well, you have that same child sit on the merry-go-round and then spin it, or the carousel, whatever they call that spinning round thing.

Well, he's still sitting still. And if all he could see was his carousel, he says, Hey, I'm still sitting still. And yet, when you're on the bench and you look at him, you say, Oh, look, he's moving to my left.

Now he's moving to my right. Now he's moving to my left. Now he's moving to my right.

Or you get up above a little bit and say he's moving in a circle. But if all he could see, have you ever been on a ferry? You get on the ferry and you're going across a harbor or something and you go inside where you can't see the water. You're moving, but you have no sensation of movement.

And sometimes people get busy, they're waiting at a stoplight and they get to digging around in their purse or looking for something under the seat and their foot slips off the brake and they start rolling through the intersection, but you don't have any sense of apparent motion. This is the idea that things are relative. Once you speed up in an airliner and you're traveling hundreds of miles an hour through the air, you get up and you're now free to walk about the cabin.

You walk around, you don't say, Well, when I'm walking forward, I'm going 605 miles an hour and when I walk toward the rear, I'm going 595 miles an hour. You have no sense of movement once the acceleration stops and you're at a steady speed and yet you're actually traveling hundreds of miles an hour. This is a very crude, and this is not in the book, I'm just telling you my crude brain machinations, but there's a sense in which we're on the merry-go-round and God is outside of it.

There are things that we perceive and things that we try to measure when we are inside our four dimensions that don't apply to God. That's why the Bible says, for God, a thousand years are like a blink, like a day, and a day can be like a thousand years. Think of it this way, for us, time is a line.

Remember your geometry? What defines a line? It has length and direction, right? Well, for us, time began when we came to consciousness, at the earliest it would be at our birth or whatever, and we experience time in a linear fashion going forward. But it's a line and it's actually half a line because it only goes in one direction. We can't do time travel, we can't go the other way.

Well, that's great. You think about that and you can mark off graduations on that line. Well, suppose, see if you can just stretch your mind and imagine, what if time was a plane? What if it had two dimensions in it instead of just one? Instead of only traveling in a linear fashion along the line, instead of rolling down like a marble down a tube, which is what we do, suppose it was a tabletop instead of a tube.

God can go forward and backward, he can go sideways, he can take any moment in our timeline and spend as much of his time as he wants to looking at it and talking to the angels about it, drawing on the heavenly chalkboard and saying, now look all you cherubs and seraphs and all the rest of you, look at this individual I've got on the hot seat down here and look at the prayer they're praying right now, look at the priorities and the goals and the values and the different things that are going on in their soul. God can have a university class and take a whole semester and study one point of time in our history because he's not inside this little tube with a marble rolling down it like we are. I say all of that to say that getting back to science and the origin of the universe, if you look at the evidence it is just virtually indisputable.

Every single piece of evidence that physics and astronomy can come up with point to the expansion of our universe and the distribution of matter, the regular matter that we can see and dark matter and everything else, black holes, that's why it takes a book to explain it. But here's the point, if you go back to that moment when everything was compressed into a space, if you can imagine the entire universe was compressed into a space smaller than the period at the end of a sentence in a book, it's just incomprehensible but it is not only mathematically possible but that's what happened. But when it gave birth, that singularity, God spoke, we could have been a baby laying on his desk up in heaven and God spoke and he said I'm going to turn that into a universe with ten dimensions and I'm going to put the humans in four of them, length, width, height and time.

And it began to expand. The speed at which it expands and the nature of the space and time and so on that was created in there is so critical. The precision with which that singularity had to take place, there's basically one chance in trillions and trillions and trillions that this would happen in such a way that matter would form, that galaxies would form.

Because if the universe expanded too slowly, if that big explosion took place too slowly, all you would have is neutron stars and black holes. You would never have had galaxies and suns and the conditions that support human life. If it had expanded too quickly, everything would have expanded out into gas and gravity could never have formed any celestial bodies, could have never created stars.

When you think about that, too slow, it's all collapsed and imploded. Too fast and it's all spread out too far and you don't get anything. Well, how many chances are there that it would turn out like it is right here? You can't believe the number of zeros, one in billions and trillions and trillions.

If it was a chance occurrence, it could not have happened. And this has so shocked all of the physicists and the astronomers that they have been squirming and trying to find a way. That's why there is opposition in the unbelieving physics world to the Big Bang.

They don't want to believe in the Big Bang because it cannot have happened by chance. If the Big Bang is true and all of the overwhelming evidence points to it, even the unbelievers will say there had to have been a designer. Someone had to have set this off because the chances are too astronomically impossible.

They talk about what are the chances of evolution. The chances of the Big Bang happening the way it did and resulting in galaxies and in solar systems and in a planet that would support life is so astronomically minute, you cannot believe. Basically, there is no chance that it could happen by accident.

There had to be someone to set these parameters and set them exactly right. And that someone is God. There hasn't been a lot in the literature because all of the scientists don't want to talk

about it.

If you are interested, you can talk to me and I will give you the name of the book because it is written at a fairly popular level. He answers things that Stephen Hawking said in A Brief History of Time. But the wondrous thing is we have a God who is operating at this huge macroscopic level tweaking the constants that form the universe to the 18th billionth degree.

And He is the same God who knows every detail of our circumstance. Once you begin to look at that, you can see why Jesus said, the very hairs of your head are numbered. They really are.

God knows where every single atom and molecule, every neutron, every quark in the universe is. He knows every minute detail. There is nothing He does not know.

It is just an astonishing impossibility to begin to comprehend what God knows. So when Jesus says here, I know your tribulation and I know your poverty, be convinced He really does know. He knows the smallest detail.

He knows it by experience. He knows it from His position as the omniscient God of the universe. And He says, I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not.

Do you think that God is qualified to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart? He is inside those thoughts and intents looking at them with a telescope. He is outside them looking at them with a microscope. He is everywhere at all times knowing everything.

We seriously underestimate our God all the time. So when He says in verse 10, do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. We need to have the childlike faith that we hope our child has when we say, look, I know you are scared sitting here in the chair.

I know you are scared about what is about to take place. But trust me, it is going to be okay. Just follow my instructions and you are going to be fine.

And our love and our concern and our care for our child is so minuscule compared to the love and concern that God has for us. If we can just trust Him the way we ask children to trust us, do not fear any of those things. And we say, but wait a minute, this is serious.

These people can burn down my house and kill me. He says, look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested. And this word tested is perazzo.

You test it and you see what it is made of. This is not dokimadzo, testing for the purpose of approval. This is perazzo.

This is often translated tempted, that you may be tempted. But it is also the word that was used of the Ephesians when it says, you have tested these who say they are false prophets, say they are apostles and are not, and you found them to be liars. But they were not dokimadzoing those

either.

They were not testing to try to approve them. They teased apart the fibers to find out what was inside. And that is what Satan is going to do.

Kind of like what Satan did with Job. And you think, oh Lord, I don't want to have to go through a Job experience. Well, let's stop and think about that for a moment.

God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind. God blessed Job in the latter end more than the beginning. He had twice as much of everything.

Had seven new sons and ten new daughters. Had the same old wife though. But do you really not want to be Job? Is it really not worth it to see the glory of God reflected in forty wonderful chapters of scripture? To have your life be an example that God can use to bless literally millions and millions of people? Can we not trust God like Job did? Are we really not ready to believe that what he did for Job he will do for us? It is a serious thing to say.

But wouldn't it be great if we could say, I would like to be Job. I would be willing to take up a cross and deny myself if that was God's plan. If God could use my life and I believe God's promise that he'll bless me in the latter end even more than the beginning.

I will trust him through that dark valley. I will trust him through that difficult time because I know him to be the God who never fails his promise. I know that he knows everything I face.

We ought to seriously ask ourselves, why is it I'm so afraid to be Job? Am I so concentrated on the things of this life and the tests of this life that they're more real to me than the blessings of God and the promise of God? Why am I afraid to be Job? That's the church at Smyrna. Do not fear any of those things which you're about to suffer. And then he tells them the most scary thing.

He doesn't say the synagogue of Satan is coming to get you. He says the devil is going to throw you into prison. It's the same devil that got Peter.

You will have tribulation. You will have philipsis. He says, I know your tribulation.

Well, you're going to have some more. It's going to last ten days. But he does say ten days.

It's got a finite limit. Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life. This phrase, be faithful until death, is interesting because I would expect it to be be faithful and then eis, the Greek preposition that means unto or with a view toward.

But it's not. This is the Greek preposition achri, A-C-H-R-I. And achri means a lot of times until or for the period ending at.

The lexicon says it's a marker of continuous extent of time up to a point. So what this really says is be faithful in all of the time preceding your death. It doesn't say be faithful while you die or after

you're dead.

But death is the big period at the end of life. All of life precedes it, obviously. And he says don't let your faith end before your life does.

Those great lyrics that are set to that piece of music that says, What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend, For this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end? Lord, make me thine forever, and should I fainting be, Lord, never, never let me outlive my love for thee. And what Jesus says here is don't outlive your faith. Be faithful as long as you live would be a perfectly good way of translating this.

Be faithful as long as you're alive. Be faithful until death. And I will give you the crown of life.

The word crown here is stefanos. Remember the first martyr in Acts? What was his name? Stefanos, crown. There's another Greek word for crown that has come over into English as diadem.

And it's not used very much. It is used primarily here in Revelation. And it is the symbol of ruling authority.

Later on it talks about the beast with the seven heads and the ten horns and each of the heads has a crown. That's the diadem, the ruling authority crown. Stefanos has a number of uses and it's broader than what we have in our English use of the word crown.

It's used, for example, of the winner's crown for a race. It was a wreath. It could be like the laurel wreath.

It could be the crown that was used for talking about someone who was in a place of honor, an orator, who was giving a political speech, might wear a wreath or a crown. Politicians, it was a symbol of authority and of importance. They would wear this crown.

It was used for victory and importance and someone to be recognized in a number of different contexts. The idea here when it says crown of life, a lot of people say this just means everlasting life. The crown of life is just everlasting life.

Pretty much everybody who is saved and is going into the eternal future is going to have this crown of life. But this is a symbol. A crown was always a symbol.

A crown doesn't give you magical powers. It doesn't let you subjugate anybody who sees you, like Medusa's face turns you to stone or something, or her crown of hair has some power to turn things to stone. The crown is a symbol, right? So if Jesus says, be faithful until you die, and I will give you a crown of life, this is a symbol of something.

I would submit to you that this is very similar to what we have seen already promised in the sense

of having the right to the tree of life. I will give to eat from the tree of life. This is the second time now that something associated with life has been promised as a part of reward.

The right to eat from the tree of life means that you're going to have that physical access. You're going to be able to walk in and walk up to the tree, and whatever that's going to mean in real terms, it's going to mean that there is a subsistence, that there is a beauty, that there is all of the things that Eve saw when she looked at the tree of knowledge of good and evil. She saw that it was good for food.

She saw that it was desirable to make one wise. There's going to be a beauty. There's going to be a desirability.

There's going to be a great benefit and blessing to have the right to the tree of life. And not everyone is going to have that blessing. You don't have to have that access to the tree of life to have eternal life and to live in the eternal future.

This is a reward. This is a selectively assigned privilege. Same thing with the crown.

Crowns were worn by priests in the pagan world. Oracles who communicated mysteries wore crowns. The Roman frescoes that they have found in places like the lava-buried town Pompeii and the other one nearby, they found frescoes on the walls, and there will be a picture of a prophetess giving oracles and things, and she's wearing a crown.

It was a sign of divine insight and special favor from the gods that you got special knowledge and special wisdom that you could impart to others. And this is what people are going to think of. They're living in that culture when this letter is written.

The mystagogues had crowns made of myrtle branches in the Yersinian Mysteries, and the neophytes in the Isis Mysteries, the people who were in the know and were in a special place, had these crowns. So the point here is when Jesus says, what's more real to you, the persecution you're about to endure, or my promise that I know exactly what you're going through, and if you are faithful, if you continue, He encourages them to be faithful because He knows they already know how. He doesn't say, return to your first love.

He doesn't say, remember from where you have fallen. He doesn't say, I wish you were hot instead of lukewarm. He says, you just keep on being faithful.

Keep doing what you're doing until you die. Don't change. His commendation is to not tell them they're doing anything wrong.

He just reminds them that He knows their adversity. They're in a very special place testing, and sometimes it is the only way God can reveal what He has done in our souls. Can we be a Job? Can we hang on and endure and have more real than anything else? That promise, I will give you a crown.

It's the victor's crown. They actually have sort of a double promise here, don't they? Because He says, if you are faithful, 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, plural.

It's not just the Smyrnans who get this word. It's churches in the plural. Each letter is addressed to all the churches in this sense.

He doesn't say, let him hear what the Spirit says to Smyrna. It's to the churches. That means it's for us.

He who overcomes. This is just one word and its article in Greek. Ha-nikos.

Like Nike. Ha-nikon. Ume-adikethe.

Ectuthonetu. To Deuteru. Well, that's what we're going to have to look at when we come back from our break.

But we need to ask ourselves the question, are we really afraid to trust God through adversity? And if so, why? What's holding us back? We have many wonderful examples in Scripture. We have a wonderful, powerful God, and that's really what separates us. That's what's going to spread us out in the kingdom and in the eternal future is whether we can decide that God is worth trusting and to what extent.

It's a sobering thing to meditate on in our days ahead. Let's pause here and take our break, and we'll come back to a little happier theme because we're going to look at not being hurt by the second death, and I think you'll be surprised at what we see there.