

Rev 25-10-08a

Greetings fellow members of Grace and Truth Bible Church and anyone else who is fascinated by the Word of God in general and this wonderful book of Revelation in particular. We continue our study tonight in Revelation chapter 2. We have seen the first letter, the letter to the church at Ephesus. We're going to pick up where we left off in the middle of the letter to Smyrna and we're going to see some interesting things about this package of seven letters as a whole this evening.

I think you'll find both helpful and illuminating, certainly has been for me. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father it is such a privilege to watch the world and its history unfold to see events and circumstances both individually and in the larger realms in which we live and observe.

It is such a source of comfort and peace and encouragement to know that we are held securely in your hands. We are within the wall of fire. You selectively allow us to be tested for our benefit and for your glory.

We're grateful for that confidence we have in the Lord Jesus our Savior who represents us at your right hand, who will soon return to take us to himself and to enter us into that future kingdom and life for which we are now preparing. We pray that as a part of that preparation, God the Holy Spirit will help us to understand your word this evening and see its pertinence and application in our own lives. We ask it in Jesus name.

Amen. We had a excursion over the last few sessions into Revelation chapter 13 to make sure we know what is and isn't representative and characteristic in terms of the appearance of the system and the leader thereof that will appear after we leave and are safely ensconced before the throne of God in heaven, called often loosely the Antichrist, certainly animated by the spirit of Antichrist, enabled and empowered by Satan, and the one who will take charge and take control and the judgment of whom and of which is going to be detailed when the seals, the trumpets, the thunders, and the bowls are released during the time of Jacob's trouble, the 70th week of Daniel, determined upon the people of God known as Israel, represented by the 12 tribes, 12,000 for each being represented, and the 144,000 and so on. We have abundant clues that we will not be here, and it's tragic that there are those who worry and dread and fear and become alarmed and excitable and unstable when they see events occurring in our national and international news that seem to portend dire things approaching.

We can watch with a warm, peaceful smile on our face knowing that we have nothing to fear. God has not given us a spirit of fear. We have power.

We operate in love, and we have a sound mind. We have sobriety. We know who we are, why we're here, what God's purpose is.

So having completed that brief excursus, we will see more detail as we approach Revelation 13,

and we will move fairly quickly and get there before too long. And there's a lot of detail about the second beast who promotes, encourages, and requires worship of the first beast. We'll see that when we get to chapter 13.

But back here in chapter 2, let's read the first and second letters here. We've already seen what Jesus said to the angel of the church of Ephesus. John is told to write, These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

And that emphasis, I'm not going to read the whole letter, but remember, the church with its identity, a church is basically an input-output group. Input is the Word of God faithfully taught by the messenger, the angel. He is directly accountable to the Lord Jesus, and so he is held in his hand.

The church is supposed to take that on board, the church including the pastor himself, take that information on board, interpret it, and apply it in their own circumstances. And this is the performance of work, the accomplishment of good as measured by God himself. So Jesus walks among the lampstands.

How is the group responding to the message, to the light that is shed on their path by the Word of God? Lamp unto my feet, light unto my path, enabled and empowered by God's Holy Spirit. It comes to the individuals, they work both individually and as a group to perform this work, and they are so evaluated. The problem in Ephesus is it became about the group and the work and they lost sight of the core, the heartwood, the very center, that foremost love for God and for the Lord Jesus and for the provision of the Holy Spirit.

Loving the Lord our God with everything we've got, that got lost in the mix, and they are called to change their minds, continue to do the work, but do the foremost work, which is work that counts because it is done heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. That was the first letter. Now we're at verse 8. To the messenger of the church in Smyrna write, these things says the first and the last, who was dead and came to life.

In the same way that the stars and the lampstands portended and gave context for what followed in the first letter, here this idea of being outside of whatever time and circumstance may hold and being victor over death and the grave. Jesus was dead and came to life. Death is not a problem.

JKS used to sing a song not long before he checked out, death ain't no big deal. And it's a wonderful thing to realize that it has no power, it has no grip, it cannot instill fear in those who are founded and centered on the rock of Jesus Christ. And this becomes actually something to appreciate.

We appreciate our life, we appreciate when God has granted us the time that he has allotted, and we transition into the eternal future. What an exciting prospect. It reminds me of moving.

You can look around at your old place as you pack it up and ship things forward. You look

around the empty house one last time before you turn over the keys to the realtors or whoever's going to, you know, superintend the next people that bought your house. But at the same time, there's a new chapter.

There's potential. And we always resist change. We have a natural reluctance to move into the unknown, to what we can't see.

But we have confidence because that which the eye has not seen and which the ear has not heard and that hasn't even entered into our hearts is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. And we have confidence and we have joy. We have peace.

We have the comfort that whatever the future holds, it's from our Heavenly Father. He loves us with love beyond comprehension. The Lord Jesus expressed that love in dying on our behalf.

And it's kind of like looking at those packages under the Christmas tree. I don't know what it's in the box, but I know who the from line indicates. And that's someone who loves me.

And whatever's in that box is going to be good. It isn't a rock or a snake or a scorpion. So I occasionally have to remind myself because our old nature, the worldly point of view, seeps into our thinking almost unawares.

We're unconscious of it sometimes. And we consciously remind ourselves. We go to the Lord in prayer.

We resort to the oasis of God's word and remind ourselves of what a privilege it is that death holds no threat. It isn't something that we approach with dread or uncertainty. So that's what the introduction tells us.

And Jesus says here, as he said in verse two to the Ephesians, I know your works. I know your testing. It was accomplishments in Ephesus.

Here, it is what comes on board for the people in Smyrna. The Ephesians, they were accomplishing works in an outward direction. Here is the testing that is coming inward, that is attempting to afflict and oppress the soul in Smyrna, your tribulation and your poverty.

I know what you lack, but I'm telling you right now, you have riches that you've got to remember and have confidence. You can see them with your faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.

If Jesus says you're rich when you are enduring testing, maybe you can't see it. Maybe you don't know it, but if Jesus says you've got it, you've got it. So this momentary light affliction, this lack or pain or impoverishment of whatever kind, just convert that spiritually and mentally.

This just tells me whatever amount of deficit I have, I've got tenfold in the kingdom to come. So it's all a matter of, is it real to us by faith or not? You are rich. And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

We talked about this a little bit. Synagogue tells us that this is traditional religion. Even though many of the believers in Smyrna are Gentiles, they are being oppressed and specifically because it is not just a synagogue of Jews or a synagogue of Israelites or a synagogue of those who think they are the people of God, specifically the synagogue of Satan.

Here's a little pop quiz question for you. What comes to your mind when this is not a synagogue of the Jews, but the synagogue of Satan? In other words, what does Satan represent? There are two characteristics of Satan, especially as he attacks people of faith. Jesus pointed it out.

He is a liar from the beginning, he is going to take the truth and twist it. He is going to attempt to deceive us, to deflect us, to fake us out through presenting a story, perpetrating a narrative that does not reflect the truth. Many times our life consists of the stories that this is what secular people will say.

Life consists of the stories we tell ourselves. The story we tell about ourselves or about the people around us or about the situation nationally or internationally. The stories we tell ourselves.

The beauty and the freedom that we have in Christ is we are not relying on stories we tell ourselves. This is the truth that is communicated to us by God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, through the apostles, through the faithful communicators of the word, past and present. We are not telling ourselves a story, we are being informed of actuality and reality by God himself.

What does Satan do? He wants to substitute lies for the truth. There's danger, there's uncertainty, there's betrayal, there is danger of many different sorts. It is to alarm us, to invoke our emotions instead of our reason.

This is his line of attack. What is the second thing? And I think it's especially pertinent here in Smyrna. Synagogue of Satan.

What else is Satan famous for besides lying? He is the accuser. The accuser. There is nothing that can turn us subjective more quickly than being wrongly accused.

Look at the news. People who are reacting, in many cases emotionally and quite vocally, to false attack. You can be attacked and in some cases, if you're malfunctioning, rebuke and correction can feel like an attack.

But if it's merited, take it as rebuke and correction and instruction in righteousness. Change your mind. You could say, well, isn't Jesus attacking the Ephesians for saying that they're not doing what they do out of love? Well, if they're subjective and they want to react instead of responding, that's pretty much on them.

Satan is a liar and he's an accuser. And when he combines the two and gets others as a group to follow his tactic, that's a collection, that's a synagogue, that's a fellowship of false accusers.

And that's what was happening in Smyrna.

The synagogue was falsely accusing believers, whether Jew or Gentile, of being out of line, of not being godly, of not being righteous, of not doing the right thing. So this is what Jesus says. I know they are blaspheming.

You are doing the word of God. You are suffering patiently in a situation of hardship and lack and you're being falsely accused of being a bad Christian. In the Jews' case, of being bad Jews, of having fallen away from the traditional faith, abandoning their cultural standards and so on.

And Jesus says it's blasphemy. They say they are Jews and they are not. The seed of Abraham are those who are his sons by faith.

Paul elaborates on that at length. So verse 10, what is this strategy designed to do? False accusation by those who claim some sort of authority, who pose as capable of judging, as qualified to opine and to evaluate. And they say, you're a bad Christian.

You see this all over progressive Christianity today. Traditional church, here's all of its sins and faults and wrongdoing. And if you were living a few centuries ago or a few decades ago, well, you would be a slaveholder.

You're just like them. You're oppressive. You're a fascist.

You're this, you're that, you're the other. You're stuck in the mud. You don't love people who are different than you.

This is one of the strongest, is why aren't you accepting of those whom the Bible condemns as having made bad choices and adopted bad lifestyles, who have trampled underfoot the son of God and put into an open shame and demand to be accepted. And if you don't accept them, despite their willful disobedience to the word of God, it's your fault. You're unloving.

You're unkind. You're judgmental. You are restrictive and intractable.

And there's something wrong with you. False accusation. It happened then, it's happening now.

Do not fear any of those things you are about to suffer. The purpose of this is to fear cancellation, to fear being set aside, being rejected, being cut off, losing fellowship of some kind, division within families or within larger groups. There's something wrong with you.

We're going to penalize you in some way. And it is designed, whether it's done in the political realm, in the social realm, or especially in the spiritual realm, it is designed to make you fear consequences if you don't conform, if you don't go along, if you don't give in and succumb and adopt the standards and the opinions and the policies and the practices of this synagogue of accusers, this group of no-goodniks. Do not fear any of the things which you are about to suffer.

They're going to make you suffer for sticking with your principles, continuing in obedience and faithfulness to the word of God. They want to make you afraid of what will happen if you continue in this line. 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. This attack is not going to be stopped by God. They are not going to be halted in their tracks.

They are not going to be drowned in the Red Sea. They are not going to be prevented from perpetrating these threats and fulfilling these consequences. Where they will fail is not by failing to put someone in prison, failing to limit them, to incarcerate them in some fashion.

Their failure is going to be when we're not afraid. Do your worst. You can lock me up.

You can cancel my account. You can stop talking. You can ostracize.

You can set me aside. You can push me into what you consider to be the darkness, which is outside. But what you won't do is instill fear in me.

I am unchanged in my love for God and my dedication to what I know His plan and purpose is. You may kill the body, but I have more respect, I have more love and confidence for my Heavenly Father than you can ever extinguish with your human, temporal, mundane, momentary threats. Maybe you can punish me.

Maybe you can penalize me. Maybe you can think that you have set me back in the worldly realm. But I am in the grip and supported by the power of God in heaven beyond what you can even comprehend.

The enemies of Christ thought they had won when they crucified Him on the cross. Little did they know that God would convert that to the greatest victory in all of human history. And He worked that together for good and continues to do so.

Do not fear the things which you're about to suffer. The devil is about to throw some of you into prison, some of you, that you may be tested. Have you ever studied and studied and studied and you've learned a skill and you're getting ready for a test or an exam of some kind and then the thing is canceled? And you were primed, you were ready.

It was, hey, I would like to show you what I've learned. I would like to demonstrate my grasp of this subject. I want to show you what I can do.

I've got this. Let me air out my mastery of this subject. And something happens and you don't get to show it and you blend in with those who didn't study and it's a lucky break and they wipe the sweat from their brow and boy, ducked a bullet.

I would have failed that for sure. And you were ready, but you didn't get a chance to prove it. God is going to allow some of us to be tested on a limited basis, on a very carefully calculated basis.

Notice, Satan doesn't get to set the duration. Satan will imprison some of you that you may be tested and you'll have trouble 10 days. God set the limit, just like he does when Satan wants to go after Job.

God says, you can go this far and no further. You've got 10 days, see what you can do. But at the end of the 10 days, the imprisonment is off.

The test is over and I'm going to come back and I'm going to bless exponentially those that were put to the test and who prevailed, who were able to show the faith and the confidence and the strength that is built in their soul by the presence and the power of God's word and God's spirit. So just be faithful, pass that test, stick with it. Don't give in, don't give out, don't give up.

It's 10 days. It's a week and a half. You can do this.

I was figuring in any 10 day period, there's at least one Sabbath. There's one day of rest in there. Maybe you've got, you know, six days and then you have a day and then you get three more days after that.

But somewhere in there, there is a Sabbath. The angels will come and minister. You will be given some of the hidden manna, the strength of God will come.

When Jesus was tested for 40 days, that's four times 10. That's every test you can count on your 10 fingers times four, which is the number of universality, Northeast, South and West, every possible direction attacked from whatever quarter. This is just 10 days.

Be faithful unto death. Even if this comes to the point that you lose your life as a result of the test, fear thou not for I am with thee. Be not dismayed.

I'm your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you.

I will uphold you. What a privilege, what an opportunity, what an experience to be strengthened and helped and upheld by the right hand of God's righteousness. The Lord Jesus holds the stars in his right hand for a reason.

We are upheld by the righteous right hand of God for a reason. That's the position of strength. It's intimacy.

John is strengthened after he turns to see the glorified Christ by the right hand of the Lord Jesus. If this is the path for the right hand of God to settle on our shoulder, who's going to say, oh, sorry, that that might be troublesome. That might be inconvenient.

There might be some some hardship associated with that. For the right hand of God, let's go there. It's momentary.

It's light. It's limited. It is carefully calibrated by God.

We'll never be tested above what we're able to bear. There will be God's grace infusing that entire experience. And with it comes intimacy, presence, power from God.

If you love God, if it takes going to the hospital to bring my loved one from halfway across the country to come see me, it makes the illness a whole lot easier to bear because look at the benefit. Here's somebody I haven't seen in a long time that I dearly love, and here they are. It took a hardship to bring them, but here they are.

How great is that? I've often thought, wouldn't it be great if we could have memorials and funerals and celebrations of life for somebody before they go? Every time you go to one, people say, oh, he or she would have loved to be here and to see this gathering and the appreciation and the stories and the memories and the wonderful love that the group has centered on this individual. We waited a little bit too long. We should have done this early, but this is the kind of thing that God calls us to with his own presence, with his own love.

And if we love God, and if we think about it, this is a very small price to pay for that approval and that presence and that power and that permanent eternal benefit that comes through this 10 days. Days are earthly. Remember in the kingdom of the father, there's no night.

How do you measure days when there's no nights? It's only for time that we count days. Be faithful unto death. I will give you the crown of life.

We've talked about the five crowns. Paul mentions the crown of life. Those who love the appearing of the Lord Jesus, we look past and beyond our testing of 10 days.

All of us at some time or another, we'll find that these seven letters apply to us, maybe toward the end of our life, maybe at a season of suffering and testing and hardship, augmented and aggravated by people who misunderstand, who accuse us wrongly and falsely and try to divert us from the life of faith and confidence, from following in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, taking up our cross, following him. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches. Verse 11, he who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death, harmed or hurt.

And that's exactly what this Greek word means, to be harmed in some way, to be hurt in some way by the second death. And if you turn over to Revelation chapter 20, we have some details about the second death. Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire.

This is the second death. They go and they never come back. Unlike Satan going into the bottomless pit for a thousand years, he comes back out for Gog Magog at the end of the millennium.

This is not the bottomless pit. When things go into the lake of fire, they don't come back out. It indicates permanent total destruction.

What goes in never comes out. The other passage that we have here tells us that there is a portion for believers. We have an inheritance.

We have a portion. And when you look at the first verse of chapter 21 of Revelation, in verse 7, 21-7, he who overcomes shall inherit. I will give him these things.

We'll fix the translation there. You can see your New King James text note there. He who overcomes will inherit.

I will be his God. He shall be my son. But verse 8, the cowardly, the faithless, the abominable, the murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, all liars.

Notice this isn't a one-time sin. This isn't a single failure. These are patterns of life over time.

This becomes an identity to be abominable. They will have their part, meros. They will have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Inheritance that might have been earned at a different point in life will be lost. The potential to be an overcomer and to experience and enjoy the overcomer blessings will be lost. Your portion.

Give me my portion, the prodigal son said to his father. Divide to me my inheritance, meros, portion. These people are not in the lake of fire.

Their inheritance has gone there, meaning it is irretrievably lost and will never return. So to not be hurt by the second death doesn't mean I won't bounce around in the flames or go to purgatory. These people in Smyrna who are faithful and who earned the crown of life, their inheritance is secure and can never be taken from them.

Speaks of security. So very quickly here, what is an application for this that we have covered? All of these overcomer blessings are potential for each one of us. You didn't have to live in Smyrna in the first century of this era.

There are times when we are tested, tested severely. Many times that testing involves accusation and persecution by those who think they are holy, righteous and good and are not. They say they are Jews and are not is the symbol.

And they are actually a fellowship, a synagogue, a gathering that reflects Satan. They are accusers and they are liars. They live in a world of deceit and falsehood and they aim it at others like a weapon.

So when we find ourselves in such a situation, think about the church at Smyrna. As we said when we looked at this the first time, myrrh is a substance that releases its perfume and its beneficial oil by being crushed. And there are times when the testing reveals what is inside us.

Squeeze an orange, you get sweet orange juice. Squeeze a lemon, you get bitter lemon juice. What is on the inside? God will select some of us for testing and allow us to be oppressed from the just as He did with Job for His glory and our benefit.

So we should never fear hardship, testing, or oppression and persecution by others, whether it is minor and individual, whether it is major and group-wide in our area or beyond. God is in His heaven. Nothing touches us that He does not allow, again, for our benefit and for His glory.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we will see some very fascinating things, not only about Smyrna, but about all seven of these churches. We are going to see one of our favorite things in all of Scripture when we come back from the break.