



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Revelation 2:8-11

"Consolation for Tribulation"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading for this morning is Revelation chapter 2 verse 8 through verse 11. This is the second of our Lord's letters to the churches. And this one is to the church in Smyrna. Smyrna still exists and many of you perhaps have been there. It's known today by the name Izmir. And the apostle writes in verse 8,

"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works," (the Authorized Version has "thy works". The noun works in the conjunction and following it are probably not genuine and so we'll read it) "I know thy tribulation and poverty but thou art rich and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give" (the Authorized Version has the indefinite article, in the original text here the is the definite article in the better manuscripts and so we'll translate it "and I will give thee") "thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give thee thanks for the word of God and for the great privilege of reading letters from our Lord to the churches, pondering the significance of them, and making application of the truths to us today not simply as a church but as members of a local church. May we guard the lessons that our Lord was teaching through the apostle, be lessons that we learn here nineteen hundred years later. We give thee thanks for the whole church of Christ today.

We pray Thy blessing upon each manifestation, each local church. Bless the minister of the word as it has gone forth and as it will go forth this day. May the body of Christ for which our Lord gave himself be strengthened and built up and encouraged and edified today. And if it please thee, enlarged through the bringing in of some of those for whom Christ has offered the propitiatory sacrifice.

We ask thy blessing especially upon the sick. And for those who have asked their prayers of us, we pray for them, some in the hospital, some going in to the hospital tomorrow. We pray for them. And for others who have physical needs, we especially remember them, encourage them, minister to them and give healing, as it should be in harmony with Thy will.

We pray for those who minister to those who are ill, the physicians, the friends and family. We commit them to thee as well. Bless the outreach of Believers Chapel. May Thy hand be upon the work for the glory of our Lord.

We pray especially today for the staff and those who have given themselves voluntarily to seek to expand the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the tapes and through the radio and through other forms of outreach.

And Father, we pray that as we sing together, as we have fellowship around the word of God, that each of us may find in the Scriptures the sufficiency that we need to

serve Thee in a way that will please Thee. Be with us through this meeting and then again in the meeting of this evening.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today, as we'll continue our exposition of the Book of Revelation is "Consolation for Tribulation", and we're turning to Revelation chapter 2 and verse 8 through verse 11. As you know from the reading of the Scripture and from your own reading of the word of God, the second letter that our Lord addressed the churches is addressed to the church of Smyrna, an old city thirty-five miles north of Ephesus. She called herself the "Ornament of Asia".

Many of those ancient cities in Asia Minor debated among themselves about which city was the greatest of the cities and this was the claim of Smyrna. It had a beautiful harbor, one of the landlocked harbors that made for an excellent place for ships to come. There were foothills just beyond the harbor and then beyond the foothills, the argos or "the hill". And the hill was covered with the temples and buildings, very beautiful buildings in the time of the writing of this particular letter. And the hill with the temples upon it in the shape of the city was called the "Crown of Smyrna". Smyrna claimed to be the birthplace of Homer, but there were many others who claimed to be the birthplace of Homer. His head was on the coins of the city. So many claimed to have Homer among their ancestry that Thomas Haywood wrote a little epigram, "Seven cities warred for Homer, being dead, who living had no roof to shroud his head." So it's often customary for us to, after a person has had his existence, to claim the blessings that really we had nothing to do with and Smyrna was one of those who claimed to be the birthplace of the great author.

It was a very important city. We said that Ephesus was an important city, so was Smyrna. Commercially it commanded the trade of the Hermus valley. It was politically a free city and also an assize city so that important legal cases were also allowed to be

settled there. Religiously it was the center of the worship of Caesar, and the worship of Caesar was carried on in this way. Of course, the Romans had difficult problem as a political empire because they had people within their empire from all kinds of backgrounds, and languages, and places. And they were always looking for ways by which they might unify the citizens of the empire. And one of the ways that they hit upon was to support the worship of Caesar. It didn't really mean too much to the Romans, but it meant something to them politically, religiously it had no significance. They did not mind if you worshipped Caesar and any other god you wished to worship, but at least by requiring every citizen once a year to take some incense and burn it to Caesar, and say, "Caesar is lord," that is the way by which they thought they might have a binding of the citizens of the empire to Rome itself.

Of course, the Christians could not do that. They could not say, "Caesar is lord," and therefore, because they could not burn the incense, and say, "Cesar is Lord," they did not have the identifying document that the others were given. And therefore, they were the object of a great deal of persecution and particularly in the city of Smyrna, because Smyrna was a city with a very large population of Jews. And at this time, of course, the Jewish people in more recent days having been involved in the crucifixion of our Lord and the persecution of the apostles themselves were naturally very opposed to the Christian movement. And probably also because many in the Christian movement were Jewish people, the leaders themselves were all Jews at one time. So in Smyrna there was a great deal of difficulty between the Jews and the Christians. It's not surprising that our Lord should say, "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."

This little letter to Smyrna is very interesting in the light of its probably spiritual significance. Smyrna was the name for myrrh, a resin or resinous gum that was used for embalming. And if you have read through the New Testament and I hope that you have read through it more than once, you'll remember some of the places where the

term myrrh is found. For example, it's found in Matthew chapter 2 and verse 11 because when the wise men came to see the birth of our Lord and see the baby, they brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Myrrh suggests suffering. And the fact that they brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh at his birth suggests that the baby was destined to suffer. And then later, you'll remember when our Lord was on the cross in Mark chapter 15, it is stated that he was given wine mingled with myrrh.

Now, the wine which in the Old Testament was called the blood of grapes, and was probably the reason why our Lord uses wine to represent the shedding of his blood which we celebrate in the Lord's Supper. But the wine mingled with myrrh suggests, of course, the cross of our Lord. It is the place where he offers the atoning sacrifice, the propitiation, the blood sacrifice, but at the same time, it's a time and an event of suffering for him, atoning sufferings at the cross.

And finally, perhaps you remember, too, that in John chapter 19 and verse 39 the myrrh is mentioned again and in connection with the burial of our Lord. The text reads this way, John chapter 19 and verse 39, "And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight." And using the myrrh they embalmed the body of our Lord. So the suffering servant of Jehovah, for that was his place in the prophetic program, is buried in such a way as to suggest that the reason that he is the servant of God and has finished his work is that he has suffered in the atoning sacrifice.

One of the interesting things about the word of God is the way in which Scriptures are tried and used in the study of particular events. In Isaiah chapter 60 and verse 6, when the prophet writes about the Second Advent of the suffering servant Jehovah he states that those who bring him gifts bring him gifts of gold and frankincense, but no myrrh. And it has been suggested by Bible students the reason that the myrrh is not given in the Second Advent as a gift to the reigning King is that the suffering is over. Whether that's the point or not, the prophet doesn't specify, but it may be.

At any rate, in the letter to the church at Smyrna our Lord, as the suffering one, presents himself to a church that this destined to suffer. And as a matter of fact, as all of those early churches did, they were probably all ready suffering a great deal.

Now, we look at it as we've been looking at the church at Ephesus and we'll just go down the features of the account of the letter because the structure of this particular letter is very similar to the structure of all of the letters of the church.

And we begin with the address where our Lord writes, or John writes giving the words of our Lord, "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write." Now, this particular reference to the messenger of the church we spoke about last time. We suggested that it is likely that this is a reference to the spirit of the church and perhaps to the concept of a kind of guardian of the church among the angelic beings created by God so that each church would have its messenger or its angel.

Now, that is somewhat speculative because this particular type of term is not defined in the Book of Revelation. We do know this, that every other occurrence of the term angel is a reference to a spiritual being. So it's highly unlikely that this should be a reference to the pastor of the church for two reasons. That's not the usage of the term in this book, first of all. And then secondly, there is no biblical support for the idea of one man as being the pastor of a local church and having organizational authority. There is no such New Testament authority for that. If you think you found some and you'd like to discuss it you're welcome to come to me and discuss it. I'll discuss it in a, I hope, a congenial way and seek to show you because I think it's something really important that the ministry of the word of God is given to gifted men. And consequently, there is no one man who is the organizational head of a church, such as the president of a corporation, but the pastor teacher is a gifted individual who serves under the elders. The elders have administrative authority. Spiritual gifts for service are inclusive of pastor, teacher, evangelist and so on.

Now, we also made the point that in chapter 1 and verse 19 we perhaps have a divine outline of the Book of the Revelation. "Write the thing that thou hast seen," a reference to the church, I'm sorry a reference to the vision given in chapter 1, "the things which are," probably a phrase which refers to the churches and their life and letters to them, "And the things which will come to pass hereafter," the leading reason for that, although there are a number of incidental exegetical points that we might make that we don't have time to make is that in chapter 4 after the letters the churches have been given, John says after this, "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter," or come to pass after these things. So that would seem to give us a structure for the book, "The things which you have seen," the vision, "the things which are," the letters to the churches covering the entire period of time of the church on earth. And finally, "things that must be after these things," a reference to the judgments by which God secures for the Messianic King authoritarian rule over the earth.

Now that's the address, and our Lord, as he did in the Church of Ephesus, addresses the church by addressing the messenger of the church in Smyrna. And he said, "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; these things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;"

Now, this is secondly the description of our Lord. Very appropriate for sufferers incidentally because as John writes, "These things saith the first and the last," the eternal one. And because he's the first and the last, this incidentally is a term that was derived from the prophecy of Isaiah and refers to the eternity of the Son of God. He's the first and the last. In fact, in Isaiah when he writes about this he says, "This is of Jehovah" or "of Yahweh" as we would say according to present information. "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts;" this is Isaiah 46, "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." Chapter 48 and verse 12 the prophet writes

of Isaiah, "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last." So those are remarkable claims that our Lord makes for himself. The terms that are applied to Yahweh are terms that are applied to him.

Remember the Christian doctrine of the trinity is there is one God who exists in three persons, father, son and spirit. So the term Yahweh or the term Lord is a term that may be used of each of the persons of the trinity, the Lord the father, the Lord the son, the Lord the spirit. So he addresses the church as the first and the last. He also addresses the church as one who died and who also came to life. Or to put it in the form in which the verbs are of that statement suggest, his death was an episode. He died. It's not "which was dead," so much as "who died" that is emphasis upon the event of his death. And he came to life, so that he died, he has come to life, the episode of his death, the beginning of the new era of the risen Lord as the result of the resurrection.

Now, this was very appropriate for the Smyrnaeans because the experience of the city of Smyrna was quite similar to the experience of our Lord in their respect, that Smyrna had a death as a city and also had resurrection as a city, resurrection in the general sense in which we use the term. Six hundred years before our Lord, Smyrna was a very important city, but there was a very large earthquake that really effectively destroyed the city. For four hundred years, Smyrna existed only as a few little villages at that location. But in 200 B.C. the city was restored and became a very significant place. The entire city was a planned city so it was one of the beautiful cities of the ancient world. So that of Smyrna it could be said in that loose sense, Smyrna had died and Smyrna had come to life. And our Lord presents himself in that way because that would have meant especially to them.

Of course, it's tremendous comfort to us to know that he's the one that died, but his death was an event, an episode, followed by a life in resurrection glory. Cybele, incidentally, the nature goddess was the goddess of the city of Smyrna in the area. And in the claims made for Cybele was also a claim of a death and a resurrection. So our Lord,

in taking from the vision of chapter 1 the statements that he had died and his is alive for evermore, is making a point that the Smyrnaeans would have understood. And what tremendous comfort this is to realize that our Lord is the individual who knows life at its worst. He has died and he knows also that he has conquered life at its worst. He has been raised from the dead. What a comfort it is for any sufferer to realize that in giving himself into the hands of the Lord he gives himself into the hands of someone who has experience the ultimate in suffering.

Now, the commendation follows thirdly, in the 9th verse. He says, "I know thy tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." The commendation is really a parenthesis, "(but thou are rich)" but it's in the midst of mention of the things that Smyrna has suffered, "I know thy tribulation." Well, that's a good Christian experience isn't it? The Apostle Paul in writing to Timothy in his second letter says in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 12 these words, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Every one of us who has by God's grace come to the knowledge of the Lord belongs to that company. We should not be surprised if we have some persecution, if we suffer a bit of scorn, if we have some difficulties in life, we are not above our master. He has told us if the world hates me, it surely will hate you. It hated him before it hates us and we shouldn't be surprised to have those types of difficulties. In fact, the he said, "In the world you shall have tribulation, but I have overcome the world." So, "I know thy tribulation," he says. It's comforting to know that our Lord knows all of the experiences by which we are brought to pass.

He knows also their poverty. I suggest that probably this means in this instance, "I know thy outward poverty." That is if you had looked at the Smyrnaeans as a church you would have found many people who were very very poor. The Greeks, like we, have different words for poverty. One of the words that has connection with some of the

words in the New Testament means that a person is poor in the sense that he doesn't have anything but the absolute essentials. But then there is a word that means he doesn't have anything at all. Well that's the word that is used here. "I know thy poverty." So it's a term that suggests individuals who really were poverty stricken.

Now, that raises an interesting question. Some people are rich, but they're really poor. And then there are some people who are poverty stricken but they're really rich. And the church at Smyrna is of the latter kind. It's a church of which we can say they were poverty stricken but Jesus said in this marvelous parentheses, "but thou art rich," and they were rich because of the way in which they responded to the ministry of the word of God.

One thinks of the parables that our Lord has told in Luke chapter 12, the parable of the rich man and in the midst of the parable of the rich man whose ground brought forth plentifully. That means in our language that his portfolio had continued to increase and enlarged, and he had been smart and invested in the things that went up. He had taken Will Rogers advice that I gave you a few weeks back so that you'd know in what to invest. I hope you've been making a lot of money with that advice that I gave you. Here is a man whose ground brought forth plentifully and he thought within himself saying, "What shall I do because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" And he said this, "This I will do, I will pull down my barns and build greater and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul," listen to this language that he carries on with himself. "Soul," you ever address your soul that way? "Soul, soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease, eat drink and be merry." Isn't that interesting? Our Lord so marvelously touches the points of our lives. He says, "Soul though hast much goods laid up for many years."

Now, think of it. Here is a soul that is living on his goods. You ever seen a soul live on his goods? Goods don't help a soul to live. No soul can live on goods. Souls live on something else. But that's the way we think of it. We have much goods, material

things, so our souls can live. How foolish. No, no, souls live on the relationship that we ought to have with Lord God. Oh, I know those things are helpful for the body, but the soul is something else entirely. And an individual who thinks that he lives by his material goods is sadly mistaken and assure to be greatly disappointed in the judgment that is ultimately to come. So the world may call these Smyrnaeans poor, but Jesus calls them rich. I saw that's a glorious parenthesis, "(but thou art rich)".

He also says, "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." Now one of the expressions in the Old Testament by which the Lord described the children of Israel was "the assembly of the Lord." Now isn't the interesting? The assembly of the Lord, the *Qeбал Adonai*, the assembly of the Lord. Now here is an assembly that is really of Satan. It's clear that our Lord uses this with reference to what ought to be and not with reference to what is. "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." Incidentally, the term church is a term that suggests a gathered out people gathered up by the electing grace of a God of love. But a synagogue is a gathering together. So what we have is the assembly of the Lord verses the assembly of Satan or a gathered out people verses a gathered together people, a people gathered together in order to fight those who are gathered out.

Incidentally, when we read here the assembly of the Lord and it is referred to an assembly of Satan and is referred to Jewish people, we are to think of them as ethnic Jews. These are individuals who though ethnic Jews are not the Jews that the Scriptures speak of as those which have the approval of God. As Paul put it in Romans chapter 2 and verse 28 and 29, there are those who say they are Jews but they are not really Jews. This is the way that Paul puts it in Romans two twenty eight and twenty-nine. He says,

"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

Paul doesn't deny that a Jewish man ethnically is a Jew. He doesn't deny that fact but he says that's not a real Jew. That is the Jew intended by the Lord is an ethnic Jew who walks in the faith of his father Abraham. So these individuals say they are Jews but they're really a synagogue of Satan because they're not believing in Jews. You must remember, the apostle called himself an Israelite. He had no question about his ethnic origin, his ethnic relationships, but those who are Israelites are true Israelites only when they walk by faith as Abraham their father did.

Now, the individuals in Smyrna were very critical of the Christian church for a number of reasons. In fact, these slanders occurred over and over again. That is why our Lord speaks of these particular Jews as "a synagogue of Satan."

In the ceremony of the Lord's table and the early church observed the Lord's Supper every Sunday, and so they were known as those that observed the Lord's Supper every Sunday. It's very commonly known that in there ceremony they spoke about his body that was offered for sinners, and about his blood that was shed for the redemption of sins, and the ground of the new covenant forgiveness. So naturally individuals who don't really understand what's going on but they hear that there's something like a sacrifice that is taking place, and they are eating his blood and drinking, eating his flesh, and drinking his blood as they say. The story soon got out that the Christian were cannibals. And so they were persecuted for that reason.

And secondly, the Christians call their common meal that the agape, or the "love feast". But when they said it was the love feast, then it wasn't long before individuals passed the word around that the Christians love feasts were orgies of lust and immorality. So they were criticized again by misunderstanding of what they were doing.

Further, Christians, when they became Christians, often had to split from their families. It was not their intent but it was made necessary by those who had not become Christians. And so becoming a Christian meant that often families were split. When some of the members of the family were forced out of the family relationships it wasn't long before the Christians were accused of breaking up homes and tampering with family relationships.

And the heathen also accused the Christians of atheism because they couldn't understand that worship which had no images of the gods. The Christians didn't have any images. They worshipped the Lord. They worshipped in spirit and in truth. But the heathen, who had their little images all around, like the Russians for many years had their little statues of Lenin which they'd put on in the corners of their living room except these were religious images of the gods. The Christians didn't have any gods. An individual who didn't understand anything much about spiritual things coming in wouldn't find any images in the homes of the Christians. And so they would say, "These people are atheist. They don't have any gods around." So they were accused of being atheists.

They were accused of being politically disloyal also because they wouldn't say, "Caesar is Lord." And so they were thought to be potential revolutionaries. These individuals do not go to the temple to Caesar, take pinch of incense, and burn it, and say, "Caesar is Lord," and receive the little paper that indicated that they were in good standing in the Roman Empire. They wouldn't do that. And as a result, they were thought to be revolutionaries. And they were also accused of being incendiaries because they talked about the end of the world and when they talked about they end of the world they talked about how the world was ultimately going to be burned up. So you can see why the individuals in Smyrna and other places were highly critical of the Christians. They spoke of the church in a very disparaging way. Thus, we have a gather up people facing everyday antipathy from the gathered together forces of Satan that were designed to destroy them.

Fourthly, the complaint. Now if you read through the letter to the Church of Smyrna you'll find no complaint. Isn't that interesting? The missing complaint is an approval of our Lord in silence.

And so we'll pass to the fifth part of the letter, exhortation, in the 10th verse,

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer:" (the Lord says) "behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Fear none of these things," (our Lord speaks to them and he speaks to them out of the assurance of this protection hand).

In the bulletin today there was very well chosen little piece from George Mathison in which at the top is the text from Psalm 4:1, "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." That's a great experience, many Christians have had it. "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." So our Lord addresses the church and tells them to, "Fear none of these things which they shall suffer." The devil will persecute them but they have him with them.

"Be faithful unto death," the root of faithful means to be convinced. So the idea is that the faithful person is the person whose fidelity is born of conviction, and having conviction of the truth of spiritual things he'll be faithful. So the fidelity of the Christian is the product of the fidelity of our Lord in bringing conviction of the truths of the word of God to them. It's a good question for us to ask ourselves. Do I have any fidelity? Is there any conviction that has come to me that that words of the Lord and the word of God are really true words? And so our Lord says, "Be faithful." and "Be faithful up to death."

If you look around the Christian church today you don't find a whole lot of suffering God you in the United States? I wonder why. Is it because godliness is so popular today? Hardly. I think if you know anything about our society you will discover

if you examine it carefully at all that godliness is not popular today. And why is the church not suffering? Well for the simple reason that the reality of discipleship hardly exists in the Christian today, what we have is popular hybrid form of Christian living. And anyone examines the Christian church surely must come to that conviction. There isn't anything, you remember that Lord said, "Don't be surprised if the world persecutes you." The world doesn't find anything in use to persecute, and as a result, the world is pretty compatible with the Christian church in its midst. Here and there, of course, you find faithful men and women and there is opposition, but this society in which we are a part is not really a society in which godliness is popular. It's not that at all. But the church is no longer the kind of church that provokes the satanic opposition that it did in the days of our Lord.

The threat, sixthly, is found in verse 10. He says, "He's going to cast some of them into prison that they may be tried and you shall have tribulation for ten days." Commentators think of the ten persecutions from Nero in 64 A.D. to the last on the Diocletian in the beginning of the 4th Century, but perhaps it means simply for ten days, during ten days. The construction leads to that kind of translation of the genitive expression so they will have persecution during ten days. We don't have any facts about that persecution. We simply know that our Lord promised it and it probably comes to pass.

And finally, in verse 10 and 11 we have the seventh part of the letter, the promises. There are two of them. He says, "And I will give thee a crown of life." Now of course, eternal life is not a reward. So when he says, "I will give thee a crown of life," he means the crown that consists of the full experience of eternal life. You, if you've listened to the preaching of the gospel at all, you know that eternal life is not something with which you are rewarded. You do not win eternal life as you win an award. But eternal life is the gift of sovereign grace. It's something that a person receives apart from works by virtue of faith in our Lord and his saving sacrifice. So when he speaks about the

crown of life, I think he probably means eternal life that is the full experience of it. "Being faithful, you shall have the full experience of life, the crown of life." The crown, very common in ancient times, crowns were given, usually floral leaves, to individuals who won events in athletic contests. The magistrates who did their work well were given crowns. Banquets took place in which individuals wore crowns. Temples, individuals who worshipped in temples also wore crowns. And as a matter of fact, it was a kind of halo with reference to important individuals, which they wore upon their heads.

The second premise is in verse 11, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Perhaps the first death, but not the second death. The first death, the physical death, the second death, the eternal death, and our Lord promises, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

There's a lovely little story of a father who, with his child, was to be thrown to the beasts in one of the Roman arenas. And as they went into the arena and the ferocious beasts were released the little son turned to his father, and said, "Father, will it hurt?" And the father looking up to heaven said, "Perhaps for moment son but he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

Let me mention just a few things as we close. First, I think you can see that one of the dangers of the suffering church consists in the temptation to doubt his goodness. So he encourages them, "Fear none of those things which you suffer." And he gives you the impression because he said he is the one who was dead and is alive that he will be standing by their right hand upholding them. One of the dangers of the suffering church consists in the temptation to doubt his goodness. Do you remember Jacob? Jacob in the midst of his trials said, "All these things are against me." And then later on when he came to understand how the Lord had undertaken for him, he said, "The God who fed me all the days of my life."

The delights of the suffering church then are found in the fact that though they were poor, they were really rich. The wealthy church is not always the rich church. The

wealthy church very often is the poor church, the poverty stricken church. And the poverty stricken church is often the wealthy church. When we pass through the trials, we have our Lord's, "I know your tribulation. I know your poverty, but you're really rich." And when we are in the valley of the shadow of death we have his, "fear not. I have unlocked the problem of life. I have the keys to death and Hades." And we are able to say as David did, "Ye, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me." What a magnificent promise that is. "Thou art with me. Lo, I am with you all the days of the earth," the New Testament says. "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

You know how the old-timers drew their maps was something like this. They would draw their maps out and then, of course, they didn't really know a lot of the terrain. Some of the terrain they knew and they would put identifying marks. But those places that they didn't know would be marked out as an area. And sometimes you would see maps that said, "Here be demons." On the map, "Here be demons. Here be burning fiery sands." I guess that was reference to El Paso.

And finally, the inferential warning of danger to the world found in that statement, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death," is something to which we should pay attention. Beyond their physical death there is a second death. And that is very plainly mentioned by our Lord when he says those who have known him and are faithful should not be hurt of the second death.

I want to, I'd like to close with just a comment about Polycarp who was the famous bishop of Smyrna who was murdered in Smyrna on February 23rd in the year 155 A.D. In the midst of one of the games that was carried on in the city of Smyrna, suddenly someone uttered the shout, "Away with the atheists, let Polycarp be searched out." And so ultimately, through the treachery of the little boy who finally relaxed and relented under the questions that were asked him, he revealed where Polycarp was. And so

Polycarp was taken and brought to the public arena. Even the police captain did not want to burn or slay Polycarp.

And so he spoke to him on the way to the place and he said to the old man, "What harm is it, Polycarp? Caesar is Lord, to say Caesar is Lord and to offer sacrifices and to be saved from eternal death?" Well, Polycarp was adamant and said that for him only Jesus Christ was Lord. When he entered the arena it was said afterward by those who described the event that there was a voice that came from heaven saying, "Be strong Polycarp and play the man." The procouncil, when he was speaking with Polycarp shortly after, gave him the choice of cursing the name of Christ and making sacrifice to Caesar or death. And then Polycarp, in one of the great confessions of the martyrs of centuries past said, "Eighty and six years have I served him and he has done me now wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?" The procouncil threatened him. He said, "You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time and is quickly quenched for you don't know that the fire, you don't know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come in an everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come do what you will. And speaking to them to go ahead and finish what they were doing, he told them as they sought to bind him, he said, "No need to bind me with those nails. Just let me be, I'm not going to run away."

And so they just put a loose thing around him and in the midst of this he prayed this magnificent prayer. I'll only mention a few stanzas of it. It was reported afterwards. This he prayed before he was martyred, "Oh Lord God almighty, father of thy beloved and blessed child Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of thee. God of angels and powers and all creation and of the whole family of the righteous who live before thee, I bless thee that thou granted unto time this day and hour that I may share among the number of the martyrs in the cup of thy Christ for the resurrection to eternal life both of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. And may I, Lord, be received today among them before thee as a rich and acceptable sacrifice as Thou, the

God without falsehood and of truth, has prepared beforehand and shown forth and fulfilled." What a magnificent testimony of faithfulness unto death.

If you're here today and you've never believed in our Jesus Christ, of course, you do not have the freedom to look forward to escape from the second death. The first death, lies before you unless our Lord comes. The second death for those who have not responded to the appeal of the Gospel, we urge you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ to acknowledge your need before the Lord, to know the fact that Christ has offered an atoning sacrifice sufficient for your sin. And in your own heart give thanks for him who loved sinners and died for them and receive the free gift of eternal life. May God in his grace touch your heart to make that decision today.

For those of us who are believers, what a marvelous thing it is to have promises such as this. To know that in all of the experiences of life, the suffering ones, as well as the joyous ones, we have the promise of an ever-present Savior with us. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we give thee thanks for the great promises of the word of God. We think of the psalmist who said, "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress." We thank thee that in the distress of life, in the troubles of life, in the trials of life, we have the confidence of an ever-present Savior who knows our sufferings, and beyond them, and lives in resurrection to give deliverance.

And Lord for those who may not know our marvelous Savior, we pray that at this moment they may turn to him, confess their need of forgiveness of sins, and receive the gift of eternal life through grace, to the glory of the triune God.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.