

08. The Book of Revelation—2:10-11

(7/1/20)

We have entered into the second major section of the Book of Revelation (chapters 2 and 3), where Jesus dictates 7 letters to 7 churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

Of all the chapters in the book, chapters 2 and 3 are far more practical and meaningful for us who know the Lord and are members of His Church than the bulk of the book which contains all the cataclysmic judgments that are coming upon the earth—which we won't be here to see.

Last time in our study in the Book of Revelation we got as far as the letter to the **Church of Smyrna**—a *suffering* church.

The name **Smyrna** means “*bitter*” and is related to the word *myrrh*.

Myrrh is a resin that comes from the dried sap of the ‘Commiphora tree’ and was used to bury the dead—remember, the name of each church and its meaning is important.

Suffering for the sake of Jesus is ‘part and parcel’ of the Christian life—we are promised in Scripture:

2 Timothy 3:12 (NKJV)

¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Philippians 1:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

Notice that when Jesus said to this church—

Revelation 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ 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.

There is no promise in this letter that they would escape their suffering, and God makes no such promise to any of His children—He simply admonishes us to endure it and be faithful to the end no matter what.

As someone has said—the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

One Christian writer said—

“The day of martyrs is definitely not past. All over the world, Christians face persecution, especially in Asia, Eastern Europe, and in the Muslim world. Some people estimate that more Christians have suffered and died for their faith in the 20th Century than in all previous centuries combined. A news report illustrates this:

“The gruesome martyrdom of a pastor in central India led to several hundred conversions to Christianity. A former Hindu who had changed his name to Paul James was murdered by a crowd of extremists as he spoke in a field prior to a...church service in the Phulabani district. *“Jesus, forgive them,”* eyewitnesses said James called out as his assailants cut off his hands and legs, and severed his torso. The attackers also decapitated James, an outspoken believer who had planted 27 churches... The attackers’ hatred and violence have left many Indians wanting to emulate the love shown by the victim, said K. Anand Paul, head of Gospel to the Unreached Millions. *“The gospel is spreading because of persecution,”* said Paul, who has been beaten seven times and kidnapped once by fanatical religious groups. *“We are risking our lives to do this. People need to pray for us.”*

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

“**Crowns**” in the ancient world were given to soldiers that were victorious in battle and to athletes that were victorious in athletic competition—in fact the Greek word for ‘**crown**’ is ‘*stephanos*’ which means the ‘victor’s crown’.

Warren Wiersbe—

“The ‘*crown of life*’ is the winner’s crown awarded at the annual athletic games. Smyrna was a key participant in the games, so this promise would be especially meaningful to believers living there. The Lord...assured His people that there was nothing to fear. Because they had trusted Him, they were overcomers—victors in the race of faith (Heb. 12:1–3)—and, as overcomers,

they had nothing to fear. Even if they were martyred, they would be ushered into glory, wearing crowns! They would never face the awful judgment of the second death...”

And so, they were used to the idea of *victors* wearing crowns.

But when Jesus promised that He would give crowns to all the ‘**overcomers**’—while they understood the *concept*, they maybe didn’t fully grasp the *context*.

In other words, what arena of competition would the battle take place and what exactly is this crown He would bestow?

Well, from the context the *arena* was the world and the *opponents* would be those who represent God (Christians/the Church) fighting against those who belong to the devil. (Eph.6:12)

It’s interesting that the *battle* wouldn’t determine who would become the victor—the *victor* would determine the battle.

In other words, once a person receives Jesus as their Lord and Savior—they, at that moment, become an overcomer:

1 John 5:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

As a believer ‘in Christ’ we are not working *towards* victory, we are working *from it*—as Paul tells us, “*Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*” (Romans 8:37)

We are more than conquerors *through* Him because we are now *in* Him (salvation)!

Colossians 2:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to

us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.¹⁵ Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. [Jesus victory is our victory because we are in Him.]

So, the enemy we are fighting is Satan (and his demonic army); the battlefield is the world in which we are living; and the prize for victory is the “**crown of life**”.

This is not a crown we *earn* thru *faithful* living; it is a crown that is ours thru *faith*—the faith we exercised the moment we received Jesus as our Savior and He gave us eternal life.

This crown will be placed on us someday like the wedding ring a groom places on the finger of his bride *after* he vows to love her for the rest of his life—this crown will be placed on us by our Bridegroom on the day we see Him face to face and we are finally wed (married) to Him (right now we are betrothed to Him).

One pastor and author said—

“There are two different words for crown in the ancient Greek language. One described the kind of crown a king would wear [called a ‘diadem’]—a crown of royalty.

The other kind of crown—the stephanos, used here—is given as a trophy to a winning athlete. Jesus looks at the Christians of Smyrna and says to them: “You are My winners. You deserve a trophy”. The stephanos was also the crown worn at marriages and special celebrations. The picture is of Jesus and His bride, each wearing their crowns [‘wedding rings’]

The **crown of life** mentioned here by Jesus in Revelation 2:10 is not to be confused with the crown Paul talked about which will be awarded to believers for faithful living and service to Jesus—

2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

This crown is given to those believers who lived righteously upon the earth in service to the Lord Jesus Christ—those who finished the work He gave them to do while keeping a vigilant watch for His return (because they loved Him)—this crown is earned (a reward).

Here in Revelation 2:10, Jesus promises to give these believer's the crown *all* believers in Jesus will receive someday—the crown of the overcomer, the crown given to all true believers in Jesus—the crown the bridegroom gives to his bride!

The Call

Revelation 2:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches...

We all have an ear, so this letter applies to *all* Christians.

The Challenge

Revelation 2:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ 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." '**

The '**second death**' is referring to the final judgment of all unbelievers in the Lake of Fire (hell)—

Revelation 20:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

The Bible talks about 2 kinds of death—one *physical* and the other *spiritual*.

Physical death is where a person's *soul* is separated from their body, but spiritual death is where a person's *soul* is separated from God.

It is possible for a person to be alive *physically* but dead *spiritually*—

Ephesians 2:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Dwight L. Moody put it like this: “*He who is born once will die twice; he who is born twice will die once.*” (Explain)

Among those who are unbelievers, *physical* death is the greatest fear they have—but Jesus said that *spiritual* death is to be feared much more:

Matthew 10:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

In Revelation 2:11 Jesus promises categorically that—all overcomers (true believers in Jesus) will absolutely not be cast into the Lake of Fire.

Revelation 20:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

The term ‘**first resurrection**’ is a ‘category of resurrections’ and not a ‘single event’.

In 1Corinthians 15 Paul talks about the first resurrection—

1 Corinthians 15:23 (NKJV)

²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.

The word for “*order*” in verse 23, “*But each one (group), will be resurrected) in its own order*” is the Greek word ‘*tagma*’ and it means “*a series of succession.*”

The word originally referred to military rank—the order of command (i.e. “order of importance”).

Paul is telling us that the physical resurrection of believers doesn’t happen all at once but consists in a series of successive resurrections starting with:

1. The resurrection of Jesus, the Firstfruits

“But now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1Cor. 15:20)

As the Lamb of God, Jesus died on Passover, He arose from the dead three days later on Sunday—which was the Feast of Firstfruits. (Lev.23:9-14—Explain)

By offering God the firstfruits of the harvest it was their way of honoring Him by putting Him first in their lives and giving Him back *first* some of the blessings He had given to them.

After they gave God the firstfruits of the crop—He then responded by giving them an abundant harvest later on at the time of the great Fall harvest.

Even so when Jesus was raised from the dead and became the Firstfruits of the dead—it was God’s assurance to us that we shall also be raised one day as part of that great future harvest of souls from the dead—*“Because I live, you will live also.”* (John 14:19)

Referring to Jesus as the **“firstfruits”** of those who will be raised to eternal glory doesn’t mean that Christ was the first one ever to rise from the dead—we have instances of people who were raised from the dead *before* Jesus in both the Old and New Testaments.

But Jesus’ resurrection was different from all of those in that—they were raised and yet died again (physically)—Jesus rose never to die again—because He rose with a glorified body!

2. The resurrection of the Church saints

After the resurrection of Jesus next comes the physical resurrection of the Church (the Body of Christ)—all those people who came to saving faith in Christ from Pentecost to the Rapture (the Church Age).

1 Thessalonians 4:13 (NKJV)

¹³ But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

To believers, death is only “*sleep*”—the body sleeps, but the soul and spirit are at home with the Lord (“...*to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord*”—2 Cor.5:8).

At the rapture, the physical body will be resurrected (“awakened”), glorified, and will be reunited with our soul and spirit—

1 Thessalonians 4:14-16 (NKJV)

¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [*The dead saints belonging to the Body of Christ, the Church*]

These will be joined by believers who will still be alive upon the earth at that time—

1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

‘**Caught up**’ is the Greek word *harpazo* (‘snatched away’)—the Latin is *rapio* from which we get the word ‘rapture’.

Don’t confuse *this* coming of Jesus (the rapture) with the Second Coming—here Jesus comes for His Church in the air—whereas, the Second Coming is Jesus coming with His Church to the earth to establish His Kingdom. (Revelation 19)

3. The resurrection of the Tribulation saints

Many will come to trust in Christ during the Tribulation Period (7 years total)—especially during the last 3 ½ years known as the *Great Tribulation*.

During this horrific period of time, many godly people will be put to death by the Antichrist for their faith. (Rev. 6:9-11; Rev. 7:9-10, 14; Rev. 13)

At the end of that period of time, Jesus will return to the earth, end the Antichrist's persecution of God's people, destroy his armies and cast him into the Lake of Fire. (Rev.19:20)

Then Jesus will resurrect all those believers in Him that the Antichrist martyred, and they will become a part of His Millennial Kingdom and reign with Him—

Revelation 20:4 (NKJV)

⁴ And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

4. The resurrection of the Old Testament saints

The resurrection of the Old Testament saints, I believe, will occur simultaneously with the resurrection of the Tribulation saints (when Jesus returns, and they also will be a part of His Kingdom).

The resurrection of Old Testament saints was promised by God through the OT prophets like Daniel—

Daniel 12:1-2 (NLT2)

¹ “At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued. ² Many of those

whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace.

This very much parallels what Jesus said in John 5:28-29—

John 5:28-29 (NKJV)

²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹ and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

And again, if it weren't for other passages in the New Testament, we would be left to conclude that this will be one giant all-encompassing resurrection of believers and unbelievers together.

5. The resurrection of Millennial Kingdom believers

Then during the Millennial Kingdom there will, of necessity, be the resurrection of believers who die during that time.

Remember, death won't be done away with until after the Millennial Kingdom when God creates a new heaven and a new earth—

Revelation 21:1, 4 (NKJV)

¹ Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

One pastor commented on this by saying—

"It is interesting to think that they may well be raised as soon as they die, no burial being necessary. It would make death for a believer during the Kingdom nothing more than an instant transformation into his eternal glorified body."

Although, because of the conditions upon the earth during the Millennial Kingdom (I believe the earth will be returned to a paradise state as it was in the Garden of Eden before the fall)—most people will live for the entire thousand years—

Isaiah 65:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ "No more shall an infant from there *live but a few* days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For the child shall die one hundred years old, But the sinner *being* one hundred years old shall be accursed.

After all believers are raised from the dead in their own order of succession (first resurrection)—that leaves only one final resurrection—the resurrection of the unrighteous.

The resurrection of the unrighteous will take place *after* the thousand-year Millennial Kingdom comes to an end—

Revelation 20:5 (NLT2)

⁵ This is the first resurrection. (The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years had ended.)

Again, this final resurrection—the resurrection of the unrighteous (all unbelievers that have ever lived)—these will be raised to condemnation and eternal punishment at the end of Christ's thousand-year reign (Revelation 20:11-15).

Jesus promised the believers in the church of Smyrna (and by extension all true believers in Him) that we all will be a part of the first resurrection and that on us—the second death will have no power—

Revelation 20:6 (NLT2)

⁶ Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years.

This is exactly what Jesus promised—

John 5:24 (NLT2)

²⁴ "I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.

And Paul the apostle—

Romans 8:1 (NLT2)

¹ So now there is no condemnation [eternal punishment in hell] for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

And once again, every believer, whether they are a member of the Church (those saved during the Church Age—Pentecost to the Rapture), or an Old Testament saint, a Tribulation saint, or Millennial Kingdom saint—they all belong to the category of the ‘first resurrection’.

And again, to this group of people (all true believers) Jesus promised—they will never perish in hell.

However, that doesn’t mean we won’t be persecuted on earth for our faith in Jesus—

Revelation 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ **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. [Comment]**

More Christians have been killed in the last 150 to 170 years than in the first 19 centuries of church history combined.

Richard Wormbrand endured 14 yrs. of imprisonment and torture in his homeland of Romania between 1948-1964. He had led a secret underground ministry when the communists seized Romania and tried to control the church for their purposes. Wormbrand, like the apostle Peter stresses the tremendous need to get spiritually ready to suffer. Listen to what he said,

“What shall we do about these tortures? Will we be able to bear them? If I do not bear them, I put in prison another 50 or 60 men whom I know because that is what the Communists wish from me to betray those around me.”

And here comes the great need for the role of preparation, he wrote, *‘It will be too difficult to prepare yourself for it when the Communists have put you in prison. I remember my last confirmation class before I left Romania. I took a group of 10-15 boys and girls on a Sunday morning, not to church but to the zoo. Before the cage of lions I told them, Your forefathers were thrown before such wild beasts for their faith. Know that you also will have to suffer, you will not be thrown before lions, but you will have to do with men who would be much worse than lions. Decide here and now if you wish to pledge allegiance to Christ.’* They had tears in their eyes, and they all said ‘yes.’”