

Revelation 2: 8-11; "Do not be afraid, be Faithful (Part 2),
Sermon # 17 in the series – "The Faithful and True
Witness", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
May 21st, 2006 in the Afternoon Worship,
and again on July 31st, 2011.

We have been speaking about the fears that come to God's people when they have been trying to do God's will, and in doing it they come into trouble with other people because of it. I said to you last week that it is an integral part of our witness to Jesus Christ to learn to overcome our fears so that we can prove the sufficiency of the grace of Christ in any situation. In the process we will show forth the truth and strength of that grace to others. We looked at 2 of the 3 fears of the church at Smyrna last week; poverty and persecution. I believe that the people of this church were not poor because of a lack of diligence but because they were being persecuted. And the persecution was probably coming from the local Jewish synagogue. These intensely religious Jews thought that they were true Jews because they were circumcised and observed all the ordinances of the law. They adamantly opposed those who preached that salvation was by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Some of the people of the church of Smyrna had probably been Jews by birth and raised in this synagogue, and at some point had heard the gospel and had come to faith in the Lord Jesus. But now they were being reproached for their faith and the pressure was on these believers to renounce Christ. Perhaps their persecutors said that Jesus was a false prophet and not the Christ. Perhaps they were boasting in their Jewish heritage as being that which gave them eternal life and they were speaking evil of the Lord Jesus and His righteousness; the uselessness of His death. This is blasphemy. The Lord Jesus tells the church at Smyrna "Do not fear." And so we want to look at the 3rd of the fears which needed to be addressed by the church at Smyrna, and fears which probably need to be addressed in us as well. It is the fear of the Devil's schemes. After that I will attempt to explain to you what rewards that our Lord had for them for being faithful, and also what will be ours if we fall under similar circumstances.

Let's look at the 3rd fear- The fear of the Devil's schemes.

It is interesting that the devil's schemes are clearly linked to the activity of evil men in positions of authority in these verses. We need to understand that the devil uses misguided and deceived men to further his purposes to oppose the advance of the kingdom of God and Christ. These men may be very worldly wise; very educated and very able in their professions; but still, they will be made use of by the devil if he can. It says here, "The devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested." Now the

Devil cannot physically throw any man into prison. He is a spirit being, a fallen angel, and he does not have a body. But he can build upon the ill-will of men who are convinced that the gospel of Jesus Christ and the truth of the Bible are a threat to their supposed liberties and their false conceptions of what our Savior came to do and actually did accomplish. The devil loves to test the reality of the faith of Christians. He loves to prove them to be false professors if he can. He cannot do anything to a Christian apart from the permission of God, but he has many schemes that he promotes to try to overthrow Christ's good work in our lives. Many of these schemes involve suffering of various sorts. I think of Job when I say these things. It is usually the person who is trying to come to the place of being sincere in their obedience; a person of integrity, that bothers Satan the most. It is often the person who is trying to be a Christian in his heart and mind and actions, a doer of the Word as well as a hearer, who is greatly opposed by the devil. Turn with me over to the first chapter of Job. Listen to the conversation which takes place in the heavenly places between the Lord and our adversary Satan. Verse 8 – "Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'"

This is the kind of man that Satan likes to make his target. Now listen to Satan's response to God's righteous evaluation of the man, which is found in verse 9. So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' "Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?" "You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land." "But now stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will certainly curse You to your face!" This is a very great test indeed. And God permitted it for Job's good and God's triumphing over this scheme. The scheme in this case was the devil's saying that Job served God because He was blessing him so greatly with material possessions and a good family. But if the Lord permitted Satan to take these away; then Job would curse God to His face. No wonder that he is called "the wicked one" in other places in the Bible. Sometimes Satan's scheme involves physical bodily suffering, that he gains permission from God to afflict a believer with. You probably remember the woman in Luke 13: 16 who it says, "had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up." Jesus laid his hands on her and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue was indignant because she was healed on the Sabbath. And the Lord said to him, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water?" "So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound-- think of it-

-for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" Satan can get permission to afflict in this awful way. But this woman's healing was all of Jesus' will and doing.

But what we should understand is that this persecution of some at Smyrna, and this kind of suffering, was a scheme of the devil using the murderous hatred of wicked men in authority. Let us remember that the persecutions that we undergo as believers have a definite limit set to them by God. And He knows how to sustain his dear believing suffering saints in the time of their tribulation. What He asks of us is to be faithful unto death. This may not be the death of martyrdom. But it is suffering for the time appointed, which has definite limits. "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. This also happened to Job when the devil afflicted Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. The temptation was for Job to think that God had become His enemy. He knew that God was sovereign. He knew that nothing like what was happening to him could come to him except God had ordained it. But he forgot that God, even though He did ordain it, did not approve of Satan's malice or cruel and murderous schemes. We must not forget this either. The Devil's form of testing godly men is to tempt. God tempts no man to sin. But God makes no mistakes in what He ordains for every man. If you are passing through trials where you are suffering for doing what is right, know that God is for you. He is not your enemy. He will perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you after you have suffered for a while. Our text says, "and you will have tribulation 10 days". Now this may be ten literal days; that is entirely possible. But it may be a number representing a longer period of time. The ten days may be representing 10 years; the day for a year principle being seen later in the prophetic section of this book. Or it may represent, as a number of commentators indicate, the 10 successive persecutions under the Roman emperors which are mentioned later on.

How we are to be sustained during the time of our personal or corporate tribulation is to focus on being faithful. Realize that your faith is not in yourself and realize that it is not in other men; men who you might think that you will be able to persuade them to change their mind about persecuting you. Realize that the devil has a scheme and that God permits it so that you can overcome it. This is why the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6: 10, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." The word "wiles" is rendered "schemings" in the margin. It goes on to talk about how our battle is not against flesh and blood. It is not fighting against men per se. We want to win people to Christ and the only way to truly overcome Satan is by using

the weapons of our warfare. The weapons that are given to us are not swords and guns. They are the weapons of truth and righteousness. They are the weapons of Christ's choosing. We preach the gospel; we live the truth of God's Word and pray that our witness will be faithfully born even to persecuting and antagonistic men. We pray for them and we pray for all the saints with all prayer. We pray for each one in our church to conduct themselves honorably before God and men. Satan, however, we resist and we fight him with all that we have been given us by Christ. Having done all that we can to promote truth and righteousness and finding that we must suffer, we stand against him and his schemes. The schemes of the devil are intended to ruin us, but God by His grace will enable us to overcome them and him. This is why it is so very important to hold up the shield of faith, as it is spoken about in Ephesians 6: 16. It is so that we can quench all the fiery darts of the evil one." He prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. But we are to resist him, steadfast in our faith.

This leads us 2ndly to the rewards which Christ will give to every overcomer. (Verses 10b and 11)

"Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life." What is the crown of life? The crown of life is the reward of the conqueror, the one who has overcome his enemies. It is not an earthly crown. In Proverbs 27: 24 says, "Riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure to all generations." But here we find the Lord Jesus holding out an eternal crown to those who overcome. It is that the afflictions and persecutions that we endure for Christ's sake are rewarded with great and lasting glory as we hear the "well done thou good and faithful servant." "Our momentary light affliction, which is but for a moment (in comparison to eternity), is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2 Corinthians 4: 17) James speaks of this same crown in James 1: 12 when he says, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." Thomas Manton says, "Mark, it is not said to them that fear Him or trust in Him, but them that love Him; because it is love that makes us hold out in temptations, love that engages us to zeal and constancy, that overcomes all difficulties and oppositions for God."

You can see a good example of one who had to endure temptation in John the Baptist. Turn to Luke 7: 18. John was in prison. He had been thrown in prison because he had been faithful to tell Herod of his sin in taking his brother Herodias' wife. He was the forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming His kingdom and His glory, and yet it looked like he was going to die there in prison, instead of seeing the great things that He thought that Messiah's kingdom would bring. Verse 18 says, "Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things." (That is the

things of Christ's healing many and even raising the dead) "And John calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" "When men came to Christ, they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to You saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" "And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight." "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.'" "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." I think that John had thought that if Christ could do these great miracles, He would also find a way to have him released from prison. But it was not to be the case. Jesus reminds John of the miraculous things that He was doing that were the fulfillment of the prophecies of Scripture. And He was intimating to John that He was indeed the "Coming One". And yet He was also intimating to John that it was the will of God that John finish his earthly course by triumphing by faith in his suffering for things that Christ was doing at that time, and the things which He would do for him in the future, when He Himself would go to the cross. The cross and the crown go together in the advance of Christ's kingdom. Jesus was saying to him what He was saying to this church at Smyrna, and to us as well: "Be not afraid; be faithful." And John was faithful unto death. He did not stumble over Christ. He was not offended because of Him. And that was because his faith was working by means of his love to Christ. This is how he could face the temptation to disbelieve that Jesus was the Christ.

And I would say that to have this kind of love for Christ; the love that leads to suffering for Christ; we must remember the love of Christ Himself for us. We have to remember the crown of thorns which our Lord Jesus, who is the King of Kings, wore to the cross. He endured the mocking of the soldiers of the governor, Pontius Pilate. Matthew 19: 29 says, "When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews.'" He suffered so that our sins would be forgiven, but also, that we might overcome when we are persecuted and afflicted. He is the "First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life; and so shall we. "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him." And we shall reign gloriously with Him. The second death shall not touch the one who has overcome his fears by the grace of Christ, to be able to suffer for His Name's sake. There will be no punishment of eternal death for the one who believes and identifies himself with the Lord Jesus and suffers for His Name's sake. Instead there will be fullness of joy and holy pleasures forever. These are the rewards of the inheritance which are promised to

those who love the Lord Jesus. And we know that we love Him because He first loved us.