

The Suffering Church

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[0 : 00] We have new life. We have eternal life to come. And our Lord Jesus is reigning now. He raised and then he ascended and then he sat down at the right hand of the Father in heaven on his throne.

So though it doesn't seem always in our eyes outwardly that Christ is reigning because of much tribulation, because of suffering those things, Jesus is reigning. He is on his throne. All things have a purpose. All things are for good. And we particularly see that as we look at the second church in the book of Revelation chapter 2.

Jesus has shown himself in chapter 1, this marvelous vision, not of what he literally looks like, but what he is like, portrayed by these pictures.

And now he is writing through the Apostle John to these seven churches. And he has a specific message for each church. Last week we saw to the church at Ephesus, he commended them for their doctrinal purity, for their handling of truth, for their holding to what is right.

[1 : 30] And yet he had against them that they had abandoned their first love. They had the truth right. But they lost their heart.

They lost the reason for the truth. They lost the first and great commandment. And the new commandment which Jesus had given.

Which is their light. And so he told them to repent. And if they did not repent, he would remove their lampstand. He would remove their light.

He would remove their witness in the world. So it's one thing to be doctrinally pure, to get the truth right. That is very good and important.

But not at the sacrifice of loving one another. So now we come to a second church. And this is the suffering church, Smyrna. A little shorter message.

[2 : 28] And you'll note that unlike the church in Ephesus, he does not say, I have this against you. He seems to have nothing against this church.

This is a suffering church. They don't have time to get something wrong. They are being purified. And so, I want to read from Revelation chapter 2, beginning of verse 8 through verse 11.

Christ's message, both to the church in Smyrna and to our church here in Palmer Lake. So if you're able, please stand as I read from Revelation 2, beginning of verse 8.

Jesus says to John, and to the angel of the church in Smyrna, write, the words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich. And I know the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

[3 : 46] Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison. That you may be tested.

Can we close that door back there, please? When we're reading the Word of God, I really don't want distraction. Verse 10.

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison. That you may be tested. And for 10 days, you will have tribulation.

Be faithful unto death. And I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. So reads God's Word. Let us pray for understanding. Father, we ask this morning that you would...

[4 : 52] We know you're already here. We know you're already present. You're always present with us. But we ask, Lord, that you would come in that special way by your Spirit as we open your Word.

That, Lord, you would cause this Word to come to life today. That you would cause it to act upon us. So, Father, may your Spirit come with His sword to pierce us, to convict us, to comfort us, correct us, and encourage us.

Give us eyes to see and ears to hear, and especially give us hearts to receive what your Spirit says to the churches. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Please be seated.

Got my little book. Where's my book? I forgot my notes.

Where's my notes? Uh-oh. Might be really short. You're going, oh, yes, please. Wouldn't that be something, huh?

[6 : 16] Fox's book of martyrs was written back in the 1500s. John Fox was a man who was impressed by the history of those who had laid down their lives for Jesus Christ.

And so he began to gather all of those, and he was living during a time of persecution himself, during the Reformation, and was gathering the stories of those who stood for Christ and who stood to confess Him and who died for that, and he began to gather those stories.

And then he began to gather the older stories, those records of eyewitness accounts of the Christian martyrs throughout the centuries.

These are stories that were passed down through the centuries, gathered and held by the churches from the first century on of what happened to those, to many of those who stood for Jesus. during the time that Rome was in, you know, held control of the known world there, there were 10 times of persecution upon the church coming from the Roman emperor.

[7 : 44] Roman emperor believed that he was not just a king, but a god. Being a Roman, he believed in many gods, he had a pantheon of gods, and he believed that he was one of them.

And that all should acknowledge that and all confess that. Some emperors were stronger on that than others. in the time that Jesus was writing to this church in Smyrna, that was one of the emperors, Domitian, was very strong in that belief and demanded honor.

And to those that did not show that honor, he persecuted, exiled, or killed. The first persecution came before that by a guy by the name of Nero.

You ever hear of that guy? This was before the fall of Jerusalem. This was 64 AD or so. His rage against the Christians was so fierce that Eusebius records, a man might see cities full of men's bodies, the old lying together with the young, the dead bodies cast out.

Many Christians in those days thought that Nero was the Antichrist because of his cruelty and abominations. Peter, of course, died a martyr's death under Nero as well as Paul.

[9 : 13] Second persecution time, there was so, so they kind of, there was a time of persecution under Nero and then there was a time of peace for a while. And then up would come another emperor that would push, push, push the pressure on people.

So the second one came during the reign of Domitian. Domitian exiled John, our writer of this gospel. He says that in Revelation chapter 1. I was exiled because I'm a witness and a testimony of Jesus Christ.

So he didn't want to kill an old man. John was very old. So he just banished him to an island, to a penal colony out in the middle of the Mediterranean. Fox explains this.

He says, why did the Roman emperors and senate persecute Christians so? First of all, they didn't understand that Christ's kingdom was not a temporary earthly kingdom. And they feared for their powerful leadership roles if too many citizens followed Christ.

Secondly, Christians despised the false Roman gods, preferring to worship only the true living God. Imagine that. Preferring to just worship one true God.

[10 : 24] Whatever happened in Rome, famine, excuse me, famine, disease, earthquake, wars, bad weather, was blamed on the Christians who defied the Roman gods.

Death was not considered enough punishment for the Christians who were subjected to the cruelest treatment possible. They were whipped, disemboweled, torn apart, stoned.

Plates of hot iron were laid on them. That's where you get the word tribulation. Pressure. Get it. Iron plate, and then another iron plate, and another iron plate until they couldn't breathe anymore.

Some were strangled, some eaten by wild beasts, some hung, some tossed on the horns of bulls.

After they were dead, their bodies were piled in heaps, left to rot without burial.

Nevertheless, the church continued continued to grow, deeply rooted in the doctrine of the apostles and watered with the blood of the martyrs.

[11 : 32] Sometime later in the fourth persecution period under Emperor Marcus Aurelius, about 66 years after John wrote this letter of Revelation, One of those who suffered this time was Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna.

Polycarp was the last living disciple of the apostle John when he was a young man in his 20s, teens and 20s. He was a disciple of the apostle John.

He later became the bishop, which just means elder, overseer, of the church in Smyrna. Three days before he was captured, Polycarp dreamed that a pillow under his head caught fire.

And when he awoke, he told those around him that he believed he would be burned alive for Christ's sake. Hearing his captors had arrived one evening, Polycarp left his bed to welcome them, order a meal prepared for them, and then asked for an hour alone to pray.

The soldiers were so impressed by Polycarp's advanced age and composure that they began to wonder why they had been sent to take him. But as soon as he had finished his prayers, they put him on a donkey and brought him into the city.

[12 : 59] As he entered the stadium with the guards, a voice from heaven was heard to say, Be strong, Polycarp. Play the man. No one nearby saw anyone speaking, but many people heard the voice.

Brought before the tribunal and the crowd, Polycarp refused to deny Christ. Although the procouncil begged him to consider yourself and have pity on your great age, reproach Christ and I will release you.

Polycarp's famous reply, eighty and six years I have served him and he never once wronged me. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me?

Threatened with wild beasts and fire, Polycarp stood his ground. What are you waiting for? Do whatever you please, he said. The crowd demanded Polycarp's death, gathering wood for the fire, preparing to tie him to the stake, to nail him to the cross.

Leave me, he said. He who will give me strength to sustain the fire will help me not to flinch from the pile. So they bound him but did not nail him to the stake.

[14 : 19] As soon as Polycarp finished his prayer, the fire was lit, but it leaped up around him, around him, did not burn him.

Can't even burn this guy. So, the people convinced a soldier to plunge a sword into him.

When he did, so much blood gushed out that the fire was immediately extinguished. The soldiers then placed the body into another fire and burned it to ashes, which some Christians later gathered and buried properly.

Polycarp. A member of the church in Smyrna, an overseer there. Eighty and six years old. Such was the contempt of Rome for Christianity. the church at Smyrna suffered under these persecutions.

[15 : 28] Emperor Domitian. John was exiled. The church was now under threat of death. Jesus even said, be fearful, not be fearful, be faithful unto death because it may come to that.

the church was persecuted by Rome for believing and confessing Jesus Christ as not just a God but the one and only God.

And they would not deny him. So here we come to look at the second church, the letter to the church of Smyrna in the book of Revelation.

As I mentioned, we looked at the church of Ephesus, the loveless church, the church that had abandoned its first love. It was told to remember and repent. Return to the things you did at first. Return to those first callings, the first priorities, loving one another, which proves that you love Christ. Now we come to a church that as I mentioned, Christ does not say, I have this against you.

[16 : 42] He simply knows what is going on with them and encourages them to be faithful. So what was Smyrna like? Just to kind of give you a little background. Well, like Ephesus, it had a harbor.

It was on the west coast of Asia Minor there. It had a thriving trade. It had a big stadium, it had a library, and a huge theater. It had a theater that was even bigger than the theater in Ephesus that held 25,000 people.

Sardis, also not some small little village, was a burgeoning, bustling, thriving city.

It had 200,000 people in population in the city in the first century. Big. Ephesus was bigger, 250,000, but 200,000 is nothing to be unimpressed by.

But more importantly about Smyrna, what sets them apart, Smyrna was a Roman city. It was a Roman city. It was completely committed to Rome.

[17 : 57] Roman, to Rome. It had special privileges for its citizens. They were proud of their temples to the emperors. In fact, they, of all the cities of Asia, were the first ones granted to build a temple in honor of Caesar.

And they expected all to acknowledge Caesar as God, as divine. And if you did not in this city, if you did not in this city, you were ostracized.

You were kicked out of the trade guilds. You were marginalized. You were excluded. It meant for Christians they lost business.

They were not allowed the prized places in the marketplace to set up their trade. They were, no, you don't have a trade card. No, you're out. Go find a place out on the road somewhere.

Which is why they became poor. They had poverty. Because of their Christianity. They were accused by the people, led by the Jews, of upsetting the peace of Rome and defying the Roman gods.

[19 : 12] Yet, what I want you to notice here in two ways that Jesus describes this church's experience. Look at verse 9. End of verse 9.

Jesus is unveiling behind the scenes. This is a revelation. It's not just a revelation of things to come. It's a revelation of how things are. And he's telling this church, I see behind the scenes.

I see what's really going on. You're under tribulation, but I know the source of it. It's Satan. It is the devil. He says, at the end of verse 9, he says, it's the synagogue of Satan that is behind the slander.

And it is the, verse 10, it is the devil himself who will lead and drive your arrest and imprisonment and martyrdom.

So it's not all as it seems. Oh, it's just Rome doing it. No. Jesus is saying, I don't need to mention Domitian.

[20 : 21] Domitian is under someone else's influence. It's really Satan behind the scenes pulling the strings, trying to use too many analogies.

things. So I want you to note that. This is a church under satanic attack. They're in tribulation. They're suffering.

But it is driven by Satan. Jesus says it's Satan. He's behind the synagogue. He's behind the government. So what does Jesus say to this suffering church?

What does he give them? what words of comfort and encouragement does he give them? Does he tell them, I'm coming, I'm going to rescue you? No, that's not.

Does he say, I'm going to turn the tables on them? No, would like that, but no, that's not his message. Does he say, get out there and fight back?

[21 : 25] No, he doesn't say that either. Nothing that we expect. In fact, he sounds a lot like Jesus when he was on earth. He still has the same kind of message.

He has two messages really for them. One is, I know your experience. I know what you're going through and I want to encourage you. I want to let you know you're okay.

And then secondly, he does have some exhortation. He's going to tell them, do not fear and be faithful unto death. He's going to exhort them to keep steady. So let's look first of all at verse 8 and 9 where Jesus is encouraging them.

He says, I know you. I know, he says, I know your tribulation, your poverty, but you are rich and the slander of those who say they're Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

I know. I know what you're going through. So let me summarize it this way. I know that you are really, you are spiritually rich. It looks like you're poor, but you're really spiritually rich.

[22 : 34] And I know you're under persecution, but I want you to know that the attack is satanic. There's a purpose and there's a reason behind all this.

I want you to know the attack is because you're mine. Be encouraged by that. Not that you want to be attacked, but know that you're being attacked for the right reason.

Right? The attack is spiritual. It's Satan driven. This is not just people who are against you. Okay? This is not, oh, let's hate the Jews.

No. Recognize who's behind that. Okay? So, not all is as it seems.

In fact, he uses several paradoxes here. He talks of himself in verse 8 as the one who died and came to life. So we have a living dead one who's speaking to them.

[23 : 37] That's a paradox. He's dead and alive. He was dead. Now he's alive. Paradox. Then he's speaking to a church that is poor, but you're rich. They're the rich poor.

And then he's talking about the source of the attack comes from a synagogue. Well, we expect good things in a synagogue. that's satanic. Paradox.

So not all is as it seems. See? Jesus died. No, really, he's alive. The church is in poverty. No, really, they're rich.

So you don't see, we don't see that. We see, oh, outwardly, yeah, they're a poor little church. They're barely making it. How are they going to make their budget this year? Right? We'll get a report on that later, right?

But really, they're rich. And then the synagogue, you would think and expect that's a synagogue dedicated to God, to Yahweh. And yet, what's really going on is not at all dedicated to Yahweh.

[24 : 45] Because if it was, it would be following Jesus. Jesus. This has now become a synagogue of Satan. So, these paradoxes.

So, please, as we go through these letters, it's not like, hey, let's get to that stuff later on that talks about what the future. Here, he's already unveiling. He's already revealing stuff about what's going on now.

What we're dealing with now. There's things going on behind the scenes that we don't see, but we need to understand. Because we're fighting a spiritual battle.

We fight not against flesh and blood, but we fight against what? Spiritual forces of wickedness. So, first of all, notice the living one who's speaking in verse eight.

Jesus takes from the vision of chapter one, one of the qualities of that vision, what John had seen. and he applies the two highlights from that vision in chapter one to this church.

[25 : 54] Why does he do that? Well, these two highlights from the vision apply to this church. So, he says, first of all, I'm the first and the last. In other words, I'm I was there at the beginning.

I'm going to be there at the end. I'm there all the way through. I'm the ever eternal one. I'm there at the beginning. I'm there at the end. I got this, in other words.

I got this. And then he says, I was the one who was dead. Let me be more clear about who I am. I was the specific one dead, now living.

Oh, that's Jesus. Got it. Wow. Blazing eyes and face like the sun. Okay, he looks different than he did before, but now, okay. But that's not what he literally looks like.

That's just displaying what he's like. He's pure. He is a priest. He is a king. He is a warrior. The sword comes out of his mouth.

[26 : 56] So, but to this church, he wants them to know, I'm the first and last, and I am the victor over death. Why would it matter to this church?

Because they're facing death. He's saying to them, I've been there, and I'm with you. Be faithful unto death, because that's not the end. I was there too.

I laid down my life for you, but I conquered that. The Father accepted my sacrifice on your behalf for your sins, and now he rose me up and placed me in honor.

I'm going to do the same with you. I'm going to raise you up and give you honor, because you're faithful to me. Then he talks about this church.

I know, I know your tribulation. Well, what is their tribulation? He mentions two things. One, their tribulation is poverty because they're standing for Christ, and secondly, their tribulation is accusations that come from the Jewish synagogue.

[27 : 57] The slander, the blasphemy, literally that word is blasphemy, abusive speech. They're being harassed by the Jewish synagogue.

So your tribulation, you are in poverty, but really you're rich. They're in poverty, they have outward poverty because they don't participate in emperor devotion.

They're excluded from social business, public life, they're not allowed to sit up in the marketplace. So yeah, all that's exterior, all that's earthly, all that's time bound, but who you really are, because you're doing it for me, you're really rich.

You're not storing up your treasure on earth, you're storing up your treasure in heaven. You're rich. You're piling it up. You're piling it up. You're so rich.

You have an eternal inheritance. You have a kingdom that's not of this world, a kingdom that doesn't just come and go and go up and down and fade away. You have a kingdom that's eternal. You have a kingdom that will never end.

[29 : 05] You have a kingdom that constantly is making progress in this world, although it doesn't look like we think it should look. But he's constantly making new converts.

He's constantly reaching new lands. He's constantly going out. Because he's got people out there. you're rich. You have true life. You're forgiven. You no longer have condemnation or shame.

Set you free. You have the real riches. And then finally he says in verse 9, here's the source of the attack. I know. I know you're being attacked. I know there's people lying about you.

I know there's people slandering you. I know they're blaspheming you. I know. I hear it. I got it.

You're not out there by yourselves. I hear. I know. I know exactly.

[30 : 01] I've been there too, by the way. And I want you to know. I know the source of it. Verse 9. The slander of those who say that they are Jews.

They claim to be Jews, but are not. But in actuality, they are a synagogue of Satan. They are Jewish persecutors.

These are not Jews who are part of this church. These are Jews of a synagogue, not of the church. And they are accusing the church of whatever. Breaking the peace.

Rome's really into peace. Pax Romana. And Rome also is into honoring their emperor. And Christians, because they believe in Jesus Christ, cannot do that.

They would be lying. They cannot say, yeah, he's a god. No, he's not a god. So they suffer for that.

[31 : 03] And the Jews, now here's the thing you need to understand about the Jews, because you would say, but the Jews too. They would say the same thing, right? They worship Yahweh. They don't recognize another god. But the Jews had a deal with Rome.

The Jews had a deal with Rome. They had a special exemption. Only them. They had an exemption. So they could say the Christians aren't doing that.

They didn't do it either, but they could, you know, you can't touch us. We're untouchable. We're Israel. Which they had a deal with Rome. Yeah, well, we're going to keep these Jews calm.

You know, they rise up every once in a while, so let's just keep the peace and let them do what they do. We don't really need to worry about them anyway. They're just a little group of people. So the Jews instigated this persecution, but really, Jesus says what's behind that is Satan.

He's the slanderer. He's the blasphemer. It's a spiritual attack. Now, he says, interesting, he says they claim to be Jews, but they're not. What does he mean? Well, they are physically Jews.

[32 : 16] They're Jews by birth. They have their birth line. They have their physical descent. But to God, a Jew is not one who's won outwardly.

He's not one who simply has all the pedigree. He's one who's won inwardly. He's one who really serves God the Father. And one who has rejected God's Son is not of him.

Not a true Jew. He is a hardened heart. A true Jew would receive the Messiah of God's Son. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 2.

Paul says, No one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. That's just a symbol. But a Jew is one inwardly.

And circumcision is a matter of the heart. By the spirit, not the letter. It's internal. And a real Jew, his praise is not from men. Doesn't matter what men say.

[33 : 18] His praise is from God. He does what God says. He hears God. That's the true Jew. The true Jew is the one who is constantly following the Lord. Who is hearing what he has to say.

Jesus also, let me back this up. John chapter 8. Gospel of John chapter 8. Jesus charged the Jews of his day of the same kind of Satanism.

After he did, they tried to stone him, but it wasn't his time. But listen to what he said to the Jews of his day. Jesus said to them, John 8, 42, If God were your father, you would love me.

For I came from God and I'm here. I came not of my own accord. He sent me. Your Yahweh sent me. Why do you not understand what I say?

It's because you cannot bear to hear my word. And listen to this. You are of your father, the devil. He's saying this to Jews in the first century.

[34 : 31] Dedicated, synagogue-going Jews. You are of your father, the devil. Why can't he say that? Because you're not following God, the Father.

You're following someone else. You're listening to someone else. And your will is to do your father's will. He was a murderer from the beginning. And he does not stand in the truth because there's no truth in him.

When he lies, he speaks out of his own character for he's a liar and the father of lies. That's why you lie too. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.

Which one of you convicts me of sin if I tell the truth? Why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. Tough words to hear if you're a Jew. Of course, they didn't believe him because they couldn't believe him.

[35 : 37] So to the Jews of Jesus' day, Jesus says, God is not your father, the devil is. And the reason I know that is because you do what your father does. You act just like your father.

You don't believe. You have no truth in you. You lie. You murder. You seek to kill me. Which, a few verses later, it's the very thing they sought to do. By the way, John chapter 8, 12 begins with, to the Jews who believed in him, Jesus said.

So it's possible to believe in Jesus and yet not really believe in Jesus, in other words. There's a kind of believing that's not real believing. They believed what they wanted to.

My truth about Jesus is this. So here are Jews and this isn't, don't get anti-Semitism.

Am I saying that right? He's not saying all Jews are bad. He's saying, what's a real Jew? And, the other thing he's saying is behind them.

[36 : 44] It's not the Jews that are your enemy. They're just the tools. They're the victims. They're the ones captive to do the devil's will. Just like all of us were captive to him before we were born again.

When we were dead in our sins, when we were enslaved and under the control of the evil one until Jesus broke that, they're the same.

They're not the bad guys. Okay? Don't hear that, please. Jesus is not going anywhere near that. He's saying, what's behind it, that's what's evil.

The one driving this, that's the enemy. That's the adversary. Remember, Paul was one of those captive guys, remember.

Yeah? And now he's one of our faithful ones, right? So, here he says to encourage this church, you are really rich, even though it looks like you're poor.

[37 : 47] Really, you're rich. You're storing up riches in heaven. And the attack that you're suffering, know that this is a spiritual thing. Know that this is a spiritual attack which tells you you're on the right road.

If you're getting this kind of attack, know that you're doing the right things. And the devil is trying to stop. So that's encouragement. There's a second message he says now.

Now what will he tell them? He's encouraged them. He says, I know what you're going through, but what do you say to a church that's under spiritual attack? How do you respond to that?

How do you handle suffering? How do you handle when outwardly everything seems to be going wrong? You know, we're not prospering.

We're not growing. And there's people saying stuff about us that we know is not true. It's all taken out of context or it's blown up or it's... What do we...

[38 : 45] What do you say to someone going through that? Well, Jesus says, verse 10, Do not fear what you're about to suffer. Behold, the devil, yeah, the devil, the adversary, the accuser, is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested and for 10 days you will have tribulation.

Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. That's what he says to them. What does that mean? Let's break that down. First, he... Well, to summarize this, here's his exhortation.

Your suffering is a brief test. It has a purpose. And your faith is the victory. That's how you're going to overcome. Your suffering is a brief test.

It has a purpose and your faith is the victory. That's really the bottom line. So, he... He talks to them three ways. He talks about being fearless, being faithful, and be fighting for the future.

First of all, he talks about don't fear. Be fearless against the devil. Do not fear what you're about to suffer. Don't be afraid of that. The devil, the word devil means slanderer, blasphemer.

[40 : 07] he's the one leading the arrests and the jailings. He's about to put some of you, not all of you, some of you, he's going to put into prison.

And prison means, by the way, in Rome, prison means you're waiting for trial. It means you're waiting for trial. And when you get to trial, remember, Paul appealed to Caesar, so his waiting in prison was a long time.

Because, you know, take your number, you're going to go talk to Caesar. So, he's waiting, waiting, waiting, finally appeals and gets to Caesar and the verdict is either you live or you die.

Okay, so they're all waiting for this appeal. John's already had this, didn't go to Caesar necessarily, but John was exiled because he was so old, apparently. Not killed. But, of course, the Lord's behind all that because he still had some things for John to do.

Well, in his old age. I hope he still has things for me to do in my old age. don't fear what you're about to suffer. Why not fear? He gives two reasons.

[41 : 12] Notice this in verse 10. Don't fear what you're about to suffer. Behold, the devil's about to throw some of you into prison. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Why? What's the purpose of this suffering?

That you may be tested. So, don't fear because, one, it has a reason. It has a purpose. This is not just, you know, you're suffering for no reason.

You're suffering from God's perspective is a test. From Satan's perspective, it is a temptation to get you to deny Jesus, to walk away from Jesus.

From God's perspective, it is a test to prove the genuineness of your faith, to purify you, to strengthen you. Even if you fall, it'll be a humbling.

Remember, Peter's, Peter's, the denial. Peter, you're going to deny me three times, right? I've prayed that you won't fail, right? No, he didn't pray that you wouldn't fail.

[42 : 09] No, I want you to fail because you need to fail because you got a little problem up here.

And I need you to get a little more broken and a little more humble and a little more recognizing that you're not as strong as you think you are, Rock.

You got some crumbling edges and you need to see that. And so, even in failure, God's purpose in testing us is to strengthen us, to humble us so we're stronger, to cause us to recognize our weaknesses, to purify us and remove the dross.

That's God's purpose. So, one, don't fear because I have this in my hand and I'm behind this. It's good for you in the end. It's good.

It will be good. Secondly, because it's only 10 days. Right? Into verse 10, for 10 days you will have tribulation.

It's just 10 days. Now, we're in Revelation, right? So what does 10 days mean? Right? We got things in Revelation talking about 1260 days. We got things that talk about three and a half days.

[43 : 18] We got things that talk about a thousand. So what is days? What's 10 days? Well, right?

So seven in Revelation, remember, we know means fullness, completeness. So seven churches, they're representative of all the churches.

So seven lampstands, seven eyes of the Lord, perfect perception, those kind of things. So seven, seven. Yeah, we get seven. 12 is the same kind of thing. 12 tribes, 12 apostles, 12, okay, 12 foundations.

Okay, that's kind of a representative fullness. fullness. What's 10? There weren't 10 apostles. There weren't 10, you know, what's 10?

Well, 10, we see 10 later in Revelation in reference to the beast who has seven heads, right? And those seem to be longer periods of reference of kingdoms.

And then, also has 10 horns. So the 10 horns kind of come out at the end. They're kind of brief.

They're kind of local. They're kind of limited. Go back to Daniel.

[44 : 25] We're going to be going back to Daniel a lot. Daniel chapter one. Remember, Daniel gets taken by this new kingdom and he's one of the good looking smart kids. So he's picked out to serve the king.

But to serve the king, you got to get trained, you got to get a new name and you got to eat the diet of the king. And Daniel said, no, I don't want to defile myself eating, food sacrificed to idols. So would you let me do a test for 10 days?

Hmm. Brief period of time just to kind of prove myself. If I'm healthier than everybody else, if me and, you know, Shadrach, Hatrach, Haystack, whatever their names are, if all those guys, if we're healthier just doing vegetarian stuff instead of eating your meat sacrifice, you know, then would you let us bypass that diet?

And of course, 10 days later, they were stronger, healthier, and all that. 10 day test. Brief, limited. I think that's all it means. 10.

10. And in that period, now if we go back historically, we learn, okay, this happened under the reign of Domitian. Domitian, John writes in about 95 AD, John was released after the death of Domitian in 97.

[45 : 40] So the most that 10 days could mean is two years for that situation. So relatively brief. Okay? So don't fear.

It's not going to go on forever. There's light at the end of the tunnel. It will be limited. Okay? Can I go to the dentist and handle a little bit of pain for the, you know? No.

It's only going to be for, you know, for a little while. I was eating a burrito the other day and my front tooth popped out and I'm like, what? No, I got to go to the dentist.

Still there. I came, I smiled at Delinda. She's like, ew. I'm like, I kind of like the look. It's kind of the hillbilly, you know? I kind of, I'm a billy.

All right. It was kind of freaky. She's like, no, go get it fixed. All right. So what's his message then? What does he want them to do? Don't be afraid.

[46 : 49] Know this. And then secondly, he wants them to be faithful unto death. He says, be faithful. Be faithful unto death. Keep being faithful. Keep believing.

Keep trusting. Keep relying on Jesus. Keep depending. Keep abiding. That's your victory. It's not, go get strong and stand up to them.

It's keep abiding. Keep depending. Draw your strength from him. Get your grace from him to stand a little longer. Keep looking to him to endure.

Right? How, how do we fight a spiritual battle? That's not flesh and blood. We fight it by faith. What did Paul say in Ephesians 6?

What do we do to stand firm? We put on the armor. Not my armor. God's armor. It's not my truth that I'm putting on as a belt.

[47 : 54] Especially nowadays. Well, my truth is this. Yeah, what's that going to do for you in the battle? No, his truth is what will hold me together. It's his righteousness, not my righteousness.

My righteousness isn't going to protect me very long. Okay? Because if it's up to my righteousness, forget about it. I'm toast. It's his righteousness. He made me righteous.

I'm not condemned because he took that from me. And then he gave his perfect righteousness to me. Hello. We've got the belt and the breastplate.

We've got the shoes of the gospel. I need to keep telling the gospel to myself every day. God still loves me. God's done it for me.

Just trust him. And then, what do I got? A shield? Okay, when all the flaming darts come, what do I do? Get my bazooka law. You know, I'm going to get my A something or other super, you know, no.

[49 : 00] Just a shield. That's a big shield. Big shield, right? It's going to extinguish the flaming darts. Shield. Faith. Trust. Trust. He will never leave me.

He is always good. There is purpose in this. Helmet of salvation that I would keep the broad picture alive, right? Remember, okay, it's about salvation.

It's not about me. It's about him. And then the sword. When I do need to resist the devil, I will take out the sword and I don't say my words.

I say his words. Because Jesus promises when I resist him, when I stand up like Christian to Apollyon, I take the sword and I stand and I say, no, this is what the Lord says.

Swerved. Swerved. No, Jesus says, flee immorality. No, Jesus says, don't be anxious.

[50 : 10] I quote his word. His word has power. My word doesn't have it. His word has power. So, so I fight. See, that's what fighting looks like.

I'm faithful unto death. I continue to trust and depend and just speak his words. And then why, finally, at the end, how does he summarize this?

Why do we endure? Why would we stay at it? Why, if it keeps going, what if the 10 days seems to go 11? You know, what if it's longer than I think it should be?

What if it's 12 years of depression? Why fight? Well, I don't fight for now.

I fight for the future. Jesus says, be faithful unto death and what, what, what, what? And I will give you the crown of life. Be faithful unto death.

[51 : 06] You may physically die, but just like your poverty is just a, it's just a physical thing. You're really rich and your death. Man, no, that springs to real life.

Everlasting life. He will never touch you again. I'll give you the crown of life, the everlasting crown. The crown is, is the victor's wreath, right? It's, it's, it's to the one who conquers, to the one who wins.

He's given a wreath. He's rewarded for his endurance, for his running. And so we too, by being faithful, but continuing to trust him.

Well, given that wreath at the end, he promises that. And to the one who conquers, to the one who overcomes and defeats the devil, who vanquishes the devil, who doesn't do it because he's smarter than the devil or because he's stronger than the devil, but because he uses God's word against the devil to that one, right?

He will never be harmed by the second death. Not only have the crown of life, you have eternal life. But the flip side of that is you don't have to even worry about another death after that.

[52 : 22] There is another death after that. There is one death that's our physical death. There's a second death that comes later. That's after the judgment. That is eternal death. Death meaning separation.

So the first one is a separation from my body. The second one is a separation from God. To live eternally apart from God.

Which is described like a lake of fire. Like Gehenna. Like just misery. Punishment. But we choose that.

So, yeah. There's the problem. You don't even have to worry about that. Man, you're hanging on to me. You don't even have to worry about that. So how is God testing us when we suffer?

He says it's for testing. What's God's purpose? When we suffer, how are we being tested and why? Let me just give you a daily example.

[53 : 29] An example I think we can relate to in 1 Peter 2. Peter talks about suffering in a very normal relationship at work.

And he gives two reasons for it. He says, servants, you who are serving masters, you who are employed, in other words, you are under an obligation to another person, be subject to your masters with all respect.

Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the employers, to the masters who are unjust and unfair. Okay? How do I respond to a boss who's not fair?

Be subject with all respect. That doesn't seem like the right thing. Well, what Peter goes on to explain is this is a gracious thing. This is a grace thing.

This will take grace for you to do this. This will take a gift from God to do this because it's not natural. Okay? You know that. It's not natural. It will be a grace thing.

[54 : 31] When mindful of God, say I'm God-directed, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it?

What grace is in this when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? So what? You get what you deserve. But if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a grace thing in the sight of God.

So that's the first reason. Why do we suffer? Because it's a grace thing. It shows that we're like Jesus. And then secondly, because we suffer because to this you have been called. Because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His steps.

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, when He was slandered, He was slandered. When He was slandered, He did not slander in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten.

But He continued to entrust Himself to Him who judges justly. To Him who will make all things right. To Him, not me. To Him who will bring justice in the end.

[55 : 40] I keep entrusting myself to Him. Vengeance is His, not mine. Oh, and by the way, He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree.

Yeah, that's where His suffering led. So why did He do that? So that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. There's that death life thing again. We might die to sin and live to righteousness, the real life.

By His wounds you have been healed for you were straying like sheep but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. Healed. Anybody need healing today?

Need some spiritual healing today? Just return to Him. By His wounds you are healed. You were straying. We all do that.

We're all straying like sheep. But then He wakes us up and we come back and He heals us. So how does suffering test us?

[56 : 40] Well, it tests us to see how much we're conformed to the image of Jesus. Do you endure unjust treatment with grace? Okay, let me think about that.

When I'm mindful of God, I do. But at first my natural reaction, no, not a lot of grace going on there. That's why I need to keep believing and trusting.

Do you follow Jesus' example? Who does, right? But I'm working on it. And with His help and with His grace and by the strength of the Spirit, I'm going to start following some of those steps a little bit better than I have before.

Are we truly entrusting ourselves to a just God? Do we really trust that payback is His business? How many movies do we watch where it's like, oh, payback.

We want payback. We want justice. Feels good, doesn't it? The good guys get the bad guys. And Jesus is saying, eh, I'm the only good guy.

[57 : 53] You don't do the payback. I'll take care of that. And by the way, we've already received from Him undeserved grace. He did not pay us back what we deserved.

He withheld that because He gave it to His Son to take what we owed Him. So why would we treat others different than how God has treated us?

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the example of this church, oh, Father, this church that You loved, this church that You understood and watched and cared for.

Thank You, Father, that we're not totally in the shoes of that church. We don't suffer physically necessarily. But Lord, we do suffer. We do lose business because we're believers.

we don't have all the bells and whistles because we're trusting You. We don't look as rich on the outside as we really are.

[59 : 11] And we do hear slander. We do. And it's unfair and unright. But we recognize, Father, that it comes from the adversary, from the accuser Himself.

So God, grant us courage to stand when You determine us to suffer. And we pray, Father, that You would help us to continue to trust You, continue to look to You, that we would have active faith depending on You through it all.

This we pray in Christ's name. Amen. .