

BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

Revelation 2:8-11

As Jesus speaks to the suffering saints of Smyrna challenging them to be faithful unto death He does so as their Sovereign Lord (the first and the last) Who was, Himself, faithful unto death (who died and came to life.) His death and resurrection guarantees their ultimate victory if, in fact, they are martyred on account of Jesus.

❖ Comfort & Approval

- ✓ I know your tribulation (2:9).

The word “tribulation” is *thlipsis* which means to press, to crush. Satan was trying to crush the Christianity out of the believers in Smyrna.

- ✓ I know your poverty (2:9).

This term for “poverty” (*ptōcheía*) indicates complete helplessness. Another term, *penes*, means poor, but capable of providing for oneself. These persecuted believers were *ptocheia*. Homes looted, shops boycotted, names blacklisted. They were struggling to put food on the table.

Though materially poor they were spiritually rich because of their faith and their inheritance in Christ Jesus.

- ✓ I know your persecutors (2:9)

These were hostile Jews who claimed to be serving God, but were in fact serving the purposes of Satan (Rom. 2:28).

☒ Critique

None

✚ Counsel

- ✓ Do not fear what you are about to suffer (2:10).

Jesus predicted an imminent Satanic attack: some church members would be thrown into prison and face death. These will be tempted (tested) to deny Christ and abandon The Faith. It would be for “ten days”, probably meaning a short, limited period of time; others believe “ten days” is a reference to ten principle persecutions under the Roman emperors from Nero to Diocletian.

- ✓ Be faithful unto death (2:10).

Death is neither the end nor the worst thing that can happen to a Christian. In fact, the one faithful unto death will receive the “Stephanos” crown, the victor’s crown of life from Jesus. Ultimate victory is ours through Jesus Who is alive forevermore.

⊖ Chastisement

None

✘ To the One Who Conquers

To overcome means here to remain faithful to the Lord even if it meant death. Here our Lord was simply reminding them that though some would die for Him, the second death (lake of fire, Rev. 20:14)) could never touch them. The use of this negative promise, “will not be hurt ...” is a literary device known as **litotes**. This is a rhetorical device used to affirm the positive by a negation.

In a masterly understatement, the Lord Jesus says in effect: “The first death may ‘hurt’ you briefly, the second not at all!”

The Account of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (155 A.D.)

“86 years have I have served him, and he has done me no wrong.
How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”

~ Polycarp ~

The Proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On hearing that he was, he tried to persuade him to apostatize, saying, “Have respect for your old age, swear by the fortune of Caesar. Repent, and say, ‘Down with the Atheists!’” Polycarp looked grimly at the wicked heathen multitude in the stadium, and gesturing towards them, he said, “Down with the Atheists!” “Swear,” urged the Proconsul, “reproach Christ, and I will set you free.” “86 years have I have served him,” Polycarp declared, “and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”

“I have wild animals here,” the Proconsul said. “I will throw you to them if you do not repent.” “Call them,” Polycarp replied. “It is unthinkable for me to repent from what is good to turn to what is evil. I will be glad though to be changed from evil to righteousness.” “If you despise the animals, I will have you burned.” “You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and is then extinguished, but you know nothing of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. Why are you waiting? Bring on whatever you want.”

Ready to be an acceptable burnt-offering to God, he looked up to heaven, and said, “O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of you, the God of angels, powers and every creature, and of all the righteous who live before you, I give you thanks that you count me worthy to be numbered among your martyrs, sharing the cup of Christ and the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body, through the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be received this day as an acceptable sacrifice, as you, the true God, have predestined, revealed to me, and now fulfilled. I praise you for all these things, I bless you and glorify you, along with the everlasting Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. To you, with him, through the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and forever. Amen.”