

The Message to the Church in Smyrna

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[0 : 00] We're going to begin our service singing from Psalm 102, the first version of the Psalm, at verse 13. Psalm 102, the first version, verse 13.

Do favour for her sake. So shall the heathen people fear the Lord's most holy name, and all the kings on earth shall dread thy glory and thy fame.

When Zion by the mighty Lord built up again shall be, in glory then and majesty to men appear shall he. The prayer of the destitute he surely will regard, their prayer will he not despise.

By him it shall be heard. For generations yet to come this shall be on record. So shall the people that shall be created praise the Lord.

Let us sing these verses of Psalm 102, the first version, verse 13. Thou shalt arise, and mercy have upon thy Zion yet. Thou shalt arise, and mercy have upon thy Zion yet.

[2 : 01] The time to live, and mercy have upon thy time, thy love has said.

For in her abyssal, her storms thy selfless pleasure fail.

Ye, they thou bearish the sea of two favour, and mercy have upon thy sin. So shall the hidden people fear the Lord's most holy name.

And all the kings on earth shall bless thy glory and thy name.

O Lord, and all the kings on earth shall be, in glory then and majesty to men appear shall be. O Lord, and all the kings on earth shall be, in glory then and majesty to men appear shall be.

[3 : 42] O Lord, and all the kings on earth shall be. O Lord, and all the kings on earth shall be heard. O Lord, and all the kings on earth shall be heard. O Lord, and all the kings upon him shall we cease. Lee that need Mend.

For generations yet to come, then shall be on record.

So shall the people that shall be created, praise the Lord.

Let us join together in prayer. Let us pray. As we do pray, we give thanks for the words that we were singing, that remind us of the fact that you are a God who hears prayer, and a God who answers prayer, even more than we could ever conceive of imagining your answers.

Who is able to show us that very fact, even in answering before we ask.

[5 : 54] So as we do come this evening, we seek forgiveness for the way in which we do not ask for what we should be asking.

We are going to do our activities so that we do the most important things first. But we live in a generation where there are so many things that we are called upon to do that we are distracted to dealing with the most urgent first.

Urgent in the sense of time, but not necessarily in the sense of what is of most important.

Grant to us that discernment given to us through your word of knowing what is of worth and what is of import as far as our spiritual wellbeing is concerned.

For each of us is on the way to eternity. Each one of us may believe ourselves to be part way of the journey there.

[7 : 38] not realizing that what lies before us is something that is unknown to us, but known to you.

We may extend our years as far as our thinking of what is before us is concerned. For us in reality, the time before us is shorter than we think.

We pray that you would enable us to live in the light of that great eternity upon which our face is set. We bring before your cares and concerns at this time.

We pray for our people remembering those that we know of that are in need, those who are unwell, those who are confined to their homes because of illness, some who are fearful of the ongoing ravages of disease arising out of the pandemic.

We pray Lord for them and ask that you would encourage them to rest in the Lord and commit themselves to your safekeeping. That you may hold up their head above the waves of discouragement.

[9 : 02] Remember in your presence those who may be unwell by reason of the pandemic. Whatever they may be, we don't know them, but you know them.

Some may be critically ill. Some may suffer from various frailties that make this illness severe.

So we pray for any who have been caught up in it. Mindful of the fact that within our lives there are many other issues that need to be dealt with. Not just our physical wellbeing.

These things are ongoing. We have many health matters that may be a care and concern to us. But so too there are issues that arise out of our lives in this world.

So for those who have these cares, we bring them to you. And ask for your blessing to be their portion in the sense that you would encourage them by your presence and remind them that you are never far from them.

[10 : 13] We pray that you would be merciful to us at this present time and grant to us healing, grant to us remedies for our ills, grant to us the wisdom that can only come from the divine source.

We pray that you would fill the hearts and minds of those who are struggling to find answers for the current situation.

That they may learn to look to yourself first. And then that we believe that all things will fall into their hands. So we pray for those who govern us to that end, the various parliaments.

We pray them that they would know your blessing in their own personal lives and that they would be willing to acknowledge that relationship with you, our God.

So we ask, Lord, that you would remember the preaching of the gospel, thankful that it speaks to us of life without end, that it reminds us of the one who secured that by virtue of his death.

[11 : 25] We remember in your presence, all that has been done in his name on this day and each day. And we pray that whatever seed is sown, that it may heal the fruit that you have purposed for it.

The day will come when there will be a reckoning, there will be a revelation of the purposes of the Most High. When your church will be gathered in and all who are part of it will be revealed as indeed those who have no interest, no genuine interest in the things of God.

So remember us this evening. Remember all we entrust to your care as far as the delivery of the gospel is concerned, whatever they are called to preach and proclaim the word of truth.

We give thanks for the opportunity to disseminate the scripture. We pray that you would bless every agency and every medium of communication that allows this to take place.

We are mindful of this day being appointed as a day where our denomination is garnered to petition the heavens for your blessing, for your mercy, for our sinfulness, for a spirit of true penitence, to overtake us, that we may recognize that our waywardness and our bitter resistance to the truth is part cause of our ongoing situation.

[13 : 10] Remember us, Lord, as we pray and guide us as we reflect on the things of God, even as we meet together around your word.

Continue with us now, forgiving sin. In Jesus' name we would ask it. Amen. We are going to read the word of God as we have it in the first epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians chapter 2, second chapter.

First Thessalonians chapter 2 For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance into you, that it was not in vain.

But even after that we had suffered before and were shamefully entreated, as ye know at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile. But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, which trith our hearts.

[14 : 25] For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God as witness, nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others.

For we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as our nurse cherishes her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because you were dear unto us.

For you remember, brethren, our labour and travel. For labouring night and day, because we could not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto the gospel of God.

Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe.

As you know, how we exhausted and comforted and charged every one of you as a father does as children, that you would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

[15 : 39] For this cause also we thank God, without ceasing, because when we received the word of God which he heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God, which in Judea are in Christ Jesus. For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us.

For ye, brethren, and have been taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I, Paul, once and again, but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, our joy, our crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.

And so on. May the Lord add his blessing to this reading of his word and to his name be the praise. I'd like us to turn now to the book of the Revelation, chapter 2, and reading at verse 8.

[17 : 27] Revelation chapter 2, verse 8.

And so on.

God, God, that is blessing to this reading of his word and to his name be the praise. We're looking this evening at the second letter that we have in this epistle.

The second of seven letters written to the church in Asia. The writer and preacher John Stott says of these letters that they are seven marks of the ideal church.

Now clearly he cannot mean that these churches were perfect. For perfect they were not. As we have noticed before, the use of the number seven is figurative.

[18 : 59] Where used it does not mean the number that is more than six and less than eight, but rather the number that suggests completeness or perfection.

And for that reason it is suggested that it is representative of the universal church. Stott argues that you can recognise emphasis falling on one particular feature for each church in turn.

The author of each letter is Christ, but in each letter he bears a different description. In the case of the letter to Smyrna, he has designated the first and the last, which was dead and is alive.

What then can we say first of all about the physical location of this church? It lies about 35 or 40 miles north of Ephesus.

Even by modern standards it was a large town with a very active trading reputation. Looking at the ancient history of the region it had known devastation.

[20 : 14] Because of conflicts as well as natural disasters. However there is a modern city identified as being built upon the ancient foundations.

The Smyr in Turkey, the third largest city of Turkey. Which many tourists would have visited as part of their itinerary until recently.

The scripture does not really have much to say to us about its past. So what can we say about the author's self-description or self-designation?

John had previously spoken about the Lord using this description. Chapter 1, verse 17. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.

And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not. I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth and was dead.

[21 : 21] And behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And have the keys of hell and of death. To say that this is a description of the divine is an understatement.

It speaks not only of power, but an eternal existence. Many interpreters have suggested that the manner in which Christ is to deal with the name church.

And indeed how they need to be dealt with is suggested by how he describes himself. As someone had said with regard to understanding the parables, the key is usually found at the door.

Joseph Parker, Joseph Parker, reckons that Christ reveals himself to his people according to their moral condition. So the Christ who speaks here is the one that John introduced his Gospel by identifying him as the Word who was God.

And with God, the one who as Creator made all things, who possessed eternal life. And so on.

[22 : 43] But he is also the one that every eye shall see, as the Son of Man, sitting at the right hand of God's glory. Who will come with clouds.

He is the one to whom judgment is committed. That's the picture that is conveyed to us about this passion. So as this one, his knowledge is perfect.

In verse 9 he says, I know. There are no blind spots, no speculations, no logical working out so as to base what he says on conjecture or any formula which may or may not be true.

I know, he says. But the knowledge of Christ here is meant to convey comfort to a church that is enduring testing. I know thy works, thy tribulation, thy poverty.

His knowledge is not merely the knowledge of a spectator. Not just someone who is moved to sympathy by what he sees. But as the late Philip Hughes put it, this is the knowledge of compassion.

[24 : 01] He himself suffered like no other. He endured the enmity of the world. He became pure, who was rich beyond our wildest dreams.

As the writer to the Hebrews has it, we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

We know that where these Christians lived was a wealthy region, but it was not uncommon for Christians to be treated as second-class citizens, who were denied privileges that others enjoyed.

If cheated, the cheater often had legal power or support on his side. Skills of justice were tilted against them. They often had to endure slander of the worst kind, just like the Saviour they trusted.

But he says, I know. Is it not often the case that those who are most malicious in adopting or persecuting the church, taking upon themselves a persecuting spirit, are themselves more corrupt than we could imagine?

[25 : 18] They say they are Jews, but are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. There is no doubting his involvement in all that befalls the people of God in Smyrna.

It is him who cast them into prison. Sometimes we are quick to blame Satan for many things that befall us, when the truth is our own foolishness was the root cause.

Yet there is no doubt he has many human agents. How often his temptations come the way of a believer by someone who would deny the malice that was in their heart against the believer.

Satan could not know of his existence by reason of all knowledge. He is not all-powerful.

He is not all-wise. He does not possess the divine faculty for knowing all things.

[26 : 26] And yet he is someone who is constantly on the go. He is going up and down, as Job said, on the surface of this earth.

And if 100, David commits suicide as his stones and invody and his kings of Tribe from King of the Melus Braithuny, what is before him and he will stoke the fires of discord when he can or provide or provoke envy and stir up strife when he can.

That is his business. That is what he is about and he has decided of doing that in order to do all in his power to destroy the work of God.

But look at the encouragement the Lord gives. You shall have tribulation, he says, ten days. That doesn't mean the literal ten days.

Again, the figure ten is a figure that, like the number seven, conveys completeness. There's a limit placed upon it.

[27 : 52] God is in control. He may not be responsible for the imprisonment of his people, but he will not allow the temptation go beyond the limits of endurance.

This time will not last. Christ brings comfort in the midst of trouble that no other can provide. He is not saying, never mind, it is nothing, or you'll get over it.

What he says, he says, as one who has overcome. He has overcome the last enemy. Be faithful unto death, he says. But what can be worse than death?

Well, there is worse than death for the unbeliever. There is eternal death. And when Satan intrudes into the activities of the world, one thing he is intent on doing is turning attention away from God.

Anything but that. The preacher Chris Tigreen writes, Above all else, Satan wants to disrupt your worship of God.

[29 : 00] If he cannot stop it, he will try to distort it, degrade it, diminish it, distract from it, and diffuse it in any way possible.

He hates it because it is the worship he craves, and it is given to God who is his greatest enemy. Be faithful unto death, because you are mine.

No one can pluck you out of my hands. Christ says that. Satan still thinks he can do what God has said is impossible. He still tries, although he has never succeeded.

John Calvin, you all know the name. The Protestant reformer, was at one point thrown out of Geneva, and his attitude was, If I served men, it would be a poor reward.

But I have joy in knowing that the one I serve will reward according to his promise. Christ tells them in Smyrna, You are rich, and you will be richer still.

[30 : 06] Charles Hodge has written, Some are faithful for a while, and then become false, just like Judas. But it is only those who persevere to the end that are saved.

And Christ gives a crown of life. This crown is one of life, not only living, but consisting in life.

Life that is spiritual and eternal. The highest kind of life. Imperishable. The second, death cannot hurt you.

When people suffer personal, private griefs, the hardest part is going through these alone. Perhaps there are some you cannot speak of to others, and Satan will say something to you that will convince you of your condemnation.

But Christ again says, I know. For Smyrna, there is no rebuke, only encouragement, and admonition. What could be more precious to the tried saint than to know the precious promise of a crown of life?

[31 : 19] As David Campbell put, a crown of joy and consolation, bringing Christ himself and life in his presence to our attention.

Many of the churches in Asia, they knew the condemnation of Christ. Surely they enjoyed encouragement from his mouth.

But Smyrna was a church who suffered much for her faith, suffered much for living out their life of faith.

And sometimes that is what happens to us in the life of faith. When we are through, that faithfulness often brings with it the testings that we would not otherwise be able to endure, were it not for the promises that Christ gives to those who would endure to the end.

We find throughout the letters that bear his name in this epistle, they all conclude with similar words, He that endureth shall not be hurt of the second death.

[32 : 35] And we pray that we would know the surety and the certainty of the promises of Christ. Let us pray. Eternal God, we give thanks that you are our God and that there is no God like unto thee.

We give thanks for our Saviour Christ Jesus who understands his people, who bear his name here in this world. There is nothing about him that he doesn't already know.

There is nothing that is ongoing in their life that he doesn't know. And we give thanks that even when the tempter comes alleging otherwise, that he will prove true and a true friend to the needy.

So continue with us, we pray, remembering the world in which we live and all who are tried in it, especially we pray for the church that are undergoing challenging times by reason of their faith.

We pray that you would keep them and uphold them and that they would be reminded of your love for them. Grant mercy and peace for all our sins and now may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you all now and always.

[33 : 55] Amen. Amen.