Revelation 2:8-11 “Suffering and The Greater Crown”

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Thank you all. If you could turn in your Bibles, we will return to our study of Revelation. And we will turn to chapter 2, verses 8-11. If you are visiting this morning, my name is Bill Herrett. I am an associate pastor here at Southwood.
And I am grateful to be able to lead you through God's word. This morning, as we turn our hearts and minds to our God. And so, this morning, before we get started, I want to ask you a couple questions.
And that's first, what do you turn to for comfort? And what do you turn to for hope in your life?
And as a room full of church attenders, goers, members, we would probably give the very church answer, Oh, Jesus. Where do you go when you are hurting?
[1:05] I want you to imagine a time long ago, long before online games, screens, streaming, people who would be hurting in a time, let's call the 1990s.

Some of us would go to our rooms in the midst of deep sadness, hurt, pain, struggle. And we'd pull out this thing called a cassette tape.
Kids, ask your parents. And we'd grab that tape and maybe we scribbled on that tape and it said sad songs. Whether it was an R&B; classic or Pearl Jam, you might have taken that tape and put it in.
And it's a mixtape if you're unaware of sad songs that you recorded off the radio. So again, kids, ask your parents. And you would isolate these songs onto a mixtape of sadness that you would go in to your room, you would shut the door and you would find yourself in all your feelings.
Whether it was grief, pain, sadness, we would go to this place. And I know this may sound to you a silly story and it may be real, it may not be.
[2:30] But many of us, Christians included, those who have found their hope and faith in Christ, we find ourselves turning to other things when we face strife and struggle.

When we see pain, suffering, and hurt in our lives. And in this world that we live in, we use this word a lot. I think it's, as I've gotten older, I realize it's more and more perhaps in the vernacular, but perhaps I just didn't pay attention when I was younger.
But we self-medicate. We find ways to numb the pain. We find ways to avoid the pain. We want to get rid of it as much as possible.
And we want to feel better. And in this passage, we are going to see the great, amazing, incredible Savior, the Son of God, Jesus, address very real pain and persecution, suffering in the church in Smyrna.
And he tells them where they need to turn and fix their eyes. He tells them what they must hold fast to. He tells them where their comfort comes from.
[3:57] He tells them where their hope is found. And so this morning, I'm going to read to you first. Let's read from Revelation chapter 2. This is Jesus addressing the church in Smyrna through John in the book of Revelation, chapter 2, verses 8 through 11.

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 the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 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.

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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. This is God's word. Let's pray. Father, would you, as you speak to us through your word, would you help us to see clearly the greatness of Jesus, the beauty of a life rooted in him, the comfort we have as his people, and the great hope that we have no matter what we may face.
[5:28] Lord, the great hope we have in eternity with you. And so, Lord, we thank you for today. We thank you for your word. It is perfect and inerrant and infallible.

And we thank you that it teaches us how we might serve and follow you in all that we do. We love you and pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So there's three things we're going to talk about this morning.
And one is much more informational than anything else. It's our first point is that Jesus looks to Smyrna and he addresses the pain of the church.
Right? He knows their pain. And we're going to go a little bit more in depth in this idea of him knowing their pain. But Jesus is addressing the pain of the church. And one of the things that's important to remember about this letter to Smyrna is that Jesus is not rebuking them.
He's not calling them back to their first love. He is encouraging them. For he knows their suffering. He knows their pain. And he's addressing it. And so what kind of pain is Jesus pointing out?
[6:28] What kind of pain is Jesus seeing? He sees that the church is suffering for Christ's kingdom. He is suffering. They are suffering for the gospel.

For the good news of what Jesus has done. And so we need to ask ourselves, how are they suffering? And there's a word that gets used here for their tribulation, their overarching struggle and pain.
Right? The word that is used here is he's talking about this very kind of more broad struggle. Right? And the language of the Greek kind of tells us more that it has something to do with more of a generic problem.
Right? But then Jesus hones in and he goes deeper than just saying, you guys have got problems. He talks about them being poverty stricken. Though you have your poverty, right?
And says, not just struggling, but poor in the sense of financial and well-being. And everything we know about the church there is not just that they are impoverished because perhaps they are facing pain.
[7:37] Perhaps their poverty is because they are also generous because there's notes that tell us that in the ancient church in times of great trial and struggle, the Christians would be willing to give away more and more.

And so their poverty is not just because of the pain they're suffering through, but because of their generosity and their understanding of care for one another. But what Jesus addresses is that he knows that they are poverty stricken.
And they are poor. He also addresses this idea of slander from those that say they are Jews and are not. They are from the synagogue of Satan, giving them really strong and dark description.
And these two things would have been very interconnected. The slander that they're experiencing, the impoverished state that they're in, right? They are in Smyrna, right?
A Roman city full of pagan worship, full of emperor worship. And then they also have another group in the Jewish community saying that they worship a God that is different from the Jews.
[8:43] And one commentator puts it, and I'm kind of going to summarize his words. He's like, Rome was antagonistic to new religions. And in the Roman world, the Jews would have had a special place.

But what would be happening is Gentiles or God-fearers would be joining the church. And this could stir up frustration. And the Jews of the time would point out that they're not like us.
They're not just another split or sect of Judaism. They would be describing them as something else. And so slander means to misrepresent them in who they are.
And they would tell them that they are not at all a specialized group of Jews. And they would belittle and destroy their reputations.
And so they would be worshiping in such a way that the Romans and Smyrna, the pagans, they all would be upset.

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[9:44] The Jews would be upset. They would be calling them blasphemers. And they would be living in an antagonistic culture. And so what should we expect?

As Jesus addresses their poverty and the slander they're facing. They would be affecting the spiritual and financial status quo of a culture that has money, time, power, invested in the religious practices of its people.
And you'd think that if in a world that the church in Smyrna would be living in, that that would be enough. That would be enough trouble for them.
That there are people who are misrepresenting them, calling them out for things that are untrue. Accusing them of evil and pain. But he warns them even more.
He warns them that the suffering is not just done in the slander and in the poverty. He says, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested.
[11:01] And for 10 days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death. He warns them that their suffering is going to continue.

And they're going to be thrown into prison for their belief, for their faith. And it's a suffering that some of us have hard time imagining. And not just imprisonment, but he kind of gives a time of 10 days.
And there's lots of debate within kind of this idea. It could mean a literal 10 days and Jesus being prophetic and telling exactly what's going to happen. It could mean some sort of like a saying of 10 days.
It could mean an idea of 10 days as kind of a representative time. Regardless of the term, Jesus is telling them that they will face prison for their faith.
And even worse, the thing we, most of us fear, death. Not just that they would be hurting.
[12:07] Not just that they would be poor. Not just that they would be in prison. But death is even possible. Be faithful unto death.

This is a picture of Jesus knowing the very suffering of his church. Of his people. Whom he loves. So what do we do with this suffering? What can we do with this suffering?
We live in a very different time. We live in a very different place. The circumstances of Southwood. The circumstances of Huntsville. The circumstances of your schools. The circumstances of your neighborhoods. They are very different than what the church in Smyrna are facing.
[13:06] And I think one of the things that's amazing is that we have. And I'm hesitant to ever really mention any of our mission partners. Because I know that we've had conversations with them. And about the different suffering that they have faced.

Mission partners that have not been allowed to buy certain buildings. Because they don't want to let any Christian have a hold on anything. Or property in their country. Mission partners that are turned away.
Because they know that the Christians that perhaps have come before them. Did so with ill intentions. We know that there are mission partners who have struggled against proclaiming the gospel.
Because they themselves would be called out as people who are disruptors. People who are here to break up what the government or perhaps even the city wants.
And they would be antagonistic to those who believe in something else. And one of the beautiful things that we do get to do at Southwood. Is we get to engage with Christians across the world.
[14:13] We've met some of them. They've come to this very room. They've preached from this pulpit. And they've told us about the things that are going on. And yet God has called us as our brothers and sisters to them.

That we are called to engage with them. And pray for them. And encourage them. And remind them over and over and over again. That their mission is not fruitless.
And so we as people of Christ. Must engage and step into and acknowledge that this is really a part of the church.
And what it faces across the world. Oftentimes we will withdraw. Or we want to forget. Or we want to be people who don't actually look to the pain and suffering.
Of our fellow brothers and sisters across the world. I know I am guilty of withdrawing. When we see hurt and persecution.
[15:17] Pain and suffering of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We must be people who turn to our fellows and brothers. And remind ourselves that we have some sort of unique.

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And beautiful and mystical connection. To every brother and sister in Christ. Because of the work of Jesus. We can't look away from it.
We must be people who engage it. And I'm not going to tell you all the ways that you. I could list out. Here's what you should do. Here's how you can be. Here's what you need to. How you need to show up and go.
I think first and foremost. We need to be people of prayer. For our brothers and sisters that face persecution. We have to lean in. And understand. That this is not just their battle.
But it is ours as well. We must be people. Who continually. And repeatedly. Turn our brothers and sisters in Christ.
[16:16] Back to Jesus. So that they might be encouraged. In his presence among them. And I know this is really different for us.

Because we're not going to walk out. And people in our neighborhood. Are not going to be protesting us. For the sake of our belief. But we have to acknowledge.
That Jesus. Is going to bring. Conflict with us. When we start to address things. Like you are a sinner. And you need a savior.
And there's a kingdom greater than anything else. In this world. And so we have to be people. Who actually lean into. That conflict. Jesus addresses the conflict.
But then he does something. Incredible. That hopefully. Goes well for all of us as well. He comforts the church. The church in Smyrna. Doesn't just say. Well you got this problem.
[17:13] Jesus doesn't say. You got this problem. Good luck. Jesus offers comfort. And I think this is. What I wanted to make sure we said. And that's why I was trying to make this second point. That I'm making. And then our third point.

Different is that. Jesus is comforting the church. In the now. This is the now. Reality. Okay. We live in a world. That we can go to any.
News organization. We can find articles. About Christians facing. Hurt and persecution. And pain and suffering. And even death. And Jesus offers comfort.
To those who are even. Suffering now. He reminds them. Of what they actually have. As Christians. Not just their situation.
They have something. Much more. He says. I know your tribulation. I know your trouble. And your poverty. But you are rich. Rich. He reminds them.
[18:11] Of who they are. Not that they are rich. In wealth. And in finances. And in property. And in business. But they are rich. Because they have Christ. It reminds me.

Of the parables. Jesus tells. In Matthew. Of the hidden treasure. And of the pearl of great value. The kingdom of heaven. Is like a treasure. Hidden in a field. Which a man found. And covered up. Then in his joy. He goes and sells. All that he has. And buys that field. The parable. Of the pearl of great value. Again. The kingdom of heaven. Is like a merchant.
In search of fine pearls. Who on finding. One pearl. Of great value. Went and sold. All that he had. And bought it. All that he had. Everything else. Is worthless. Compared to owning.
The one thing. And in this case. The one thing. Is God's kingdom. Found in Christ. In Christ alone. And so. In these stories. We have this.
[19:05] This picture. Of the one thing. And Jesus. Is reminding Smyrna. Of the one thing. Yes. You are. Impoverished.

You are in poverty. But you are rich. He goes on. And I think he's.
In comforting the church. Not just in reminding them. That they are rich. Though they face great troubles. They are more than rich. More than that. They tells them about. What it means. As a follower of Christ.
They have something more. They have eternal life. In Mark chapter 8. Jesus talks about. He called the crowd.
Alongside the disciples. And he says. Whoever wants to be my disciple. Must deny themselves. Take up their cross. And follow me. For whoever wants to save their life. Will lose it. But whoever loses their life.
[20:01] For me. For the gospel. Will save it. What good is it. For someone to gain the whole world. Yet forfeit. Their soul. The Smyrna church.

Is more rich. Than they could ever. Imagine. Because they have. This great pearl. This great treasure. They have their very soul.

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Eternally. They are more rich. Than they could ever imagine. And there is no present struggle. Or trouble. That could take that away from them. So not only.
Is Christ reminding them. Their riches in Christ. He is reminding them. Of something else. That is there. He knows their pain. Christ offers to them.
The fact that he knows them. And as I was reflecting on this passage. I kept coming back. To this idea of Jesus promising. Behold I am with you. Even to the end of the age.
[21:03] And how beautiful is it. That Christ knows. What they are going through. He is present. In their struggle. And suffering. He knows it. And he knows them. And he is not far away. But he is very near.

By the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ knows. What they are enduring. And more than that. Christ himself.
Knows suffering. At the very beginning. It says. The words of the first. And the last. The one who died. And came to life. Jesus' own death.
In this passage. Is a reminder. To the church in Smyrna. That he knows their suffering. Even in death. Even death on a cross. Jesus has endured pain.
And suffering. And we could go through. The whole litany. Of his suffering. When it comes to his death. And his crucifixion. And his betrayal. And his hurts. That he would know. And this is incredible.
[22:06] Because this is. What God has done. He has provided us. With a comfort. Of knowing. That our God. Will not forsake us. In the midst of our suffering. And our trials.

And this. This. This. Verse. In chapter 8. When it says. To the angel of Smyrna. In Smyrna. Write. The words of the first.
And the last. Who died. And came to life. Jesus. Has conquered death. Not just. Experienced it. But conquered it.
And so. If we can. If we can. Go to Jesus. For comfort. In the midst of the struggle. That we experience. In this life. Here and now. He does more than that.
By pushing us. Towards something. Beyond. Even the here and now. And shows us. That there's life. Beyond this world. That we are kind of. Experiencing right now. Who.
[23:00] Can promise us. A hope. It won't be. The things of this world. That we turn to. It won't be. The weak. And the. Thin.

Things that we. Grab a hold of. To give us. Money. Power. A good savings. A good job. A good marriage. A good family. Those things are all great. When they honor Christ.
But those things. When they become our idol. When they become the thing. That we hold on to. To make us. Feel comfort. In this world. They will fall short. Everything. Will fall short.
And so we can trust. For comfort. In Jesus. Because he knows. Our suffering. But more than that. We can look to him. For hope. Because he's the only one.
Who has conquered death. And so. Jesus looks. To their suffering. And he offers to them. Comfort. In the midst of it. But he offers them. Something even more. Beyond it.
[23:56] Only the one. Who can defeat death. Can make these kind of promises. And give them. The kind of crown.

That lasts. And so Christ alone. This is our last point. That Christ alone. Gives them the hope. Of a greater crown. Beyond their suffering. Beyond the things.
That they're experiencing. Beyond the things. That we experience. In this world. Christ alone. Can offer them. A crown. That is greater. He has given them.
Beauty and richness. In life. And he will give them. The victor's crown. Even in death. Because here's the words. He who has ear.
Let him hear. What the spirit says. The one who conquers. Will not be hurt. By the second death. That is a promise. That only Jesus can keep. That is a promise.
[24:51] That Jesus gives us. In our hope. Is beyond our suffering. In this world. See what's happening here. Is.

Jesus kind of also. Gives us. A little bit of a resume. About why. This is something. We can cling to. In our hope. The reminder of. Of verse 8.
Says this. The words of the first and last. Who died. And came to life. And this is a repeated verse. From Revelation chapter 1. Verses 17 and 18. When I saw him. I fell at his feet. As though dead.

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But he laid his right hand on me. Saying fear not. For I. Fear not. I am the first and the last. And the living one. I died. And behold. I am alive. Forevermore.
And I have the keys. Of death and Hades. Jesus. Is reminding us. Here that he is God. He has the keys. To death and life. He has power.
[25:44] Power over all these things. And so we see Jesus. And his deity. And all his deity. Having power over death. He himself. Conquering death.

He tells them. Be faithful unto death. And I will give you. The crown of life. He who has. Ear to hear. Let him hear. What the spirit says. The church.
The one who conquers. Will not be hurt. By the second death. And in this crown. As we've thought. About there's a lot. Of royalty language. In. Revelation.
In a lot of ways. But this is one. That is. To the victor's crown. This is not. The kind of crown. That you were thinking of. So. I wanted to.
Think on this. As I studied. I thought. I thought I was talking. About a dated. Think of a dated reference. But apparently. It's not as dated. Because one of the kids. Already saw me. Carrying this in. Today. And.
[26:42] I thought. I'm not going to put it on. I promise. But I thought of. The Burger King crown. That is the crown. That as a child. And having a dad.

Who really loved. A Whopper. I just can't see it today. If I have the choice. For Chick-fil-A. Except maybe on a Sunday. That this is the crown.
I kept thinking of. Whenever I thought of it. And I know it's not the right crown. But. If you grew up. Going to Burger King. You knew. That if you put this crown on.
No one was making you king. Or queen. Of any land. Right. Right. It never really was. It was not real. It didn't really give you any power.
I didn't walk in. And I'm like. Sir. Your finest. Of chicken nuggets. I didn't do that. Because this is. A paper crown. It is.
[27:39] Something. I can ball up. And throw away. And be done with. And so. In the same way. Like. We have these across the street. Because we often will do it.

Where we'll have games. And we have these. Fake. Plastic. Gold. Metals. Right. This one I can put on. I'm not going to do it. Because I don't want to. Bump the mic. You can put on these crown. These gold medals. And be like. I have won. I have. Beaten every other. Middle schooler. In the game we're playing. And now I have received. This everlasting. Plastic.
Gold medal. And everyone knows. That. At least with. With some form of sense. We can look to this crown. And look to this gold medal.
And we can know. That these things do not last. And there's something. Greater. In the crown. That Jesus is offering his people.
[28:39] He knows. That they are suffering. He knows. That they are in pain. He knows. That they are. Struggling. And he knows.

That that could lead. Even to death. But Jesus is the one. With the real victor's crown. Because he has defeated death.
He has risen again. And so he alone. In this world of. Things we put our trust in. He's the only thing. That gives us hope.
And a crown that lasts. A victor's crown. Because he has accomplished. Forever on the cross. The work. Of atonement. He alone. He alone. Has brought us.
From death. To life. He alone. Has given us. Power. In this place. Because we have life eternal. In Christ. He alone.
[29:37] Gives us life. That tells us. We can never. Be hurt. By second death. Because we. Will have life. And life eternal.

God. And Christ. And Christ. Is the only one. There is no other way. You can find victory. Except in him.
There is none. Who can hand out. A gold medal to you. Otherwise. You're just receiving. A paper crown. Otherwise. You're just receiving. A plastic. Gold medal. Only Jesus.
Can offer. Real hope. In the greater crown. That is beyond. Suffering. In this world. And as we turn our eyes. To. To our own hearts.
For a moment. Let's think on those things. Think. Think on the. What are the. The paper crowns. What are the. Plastic. Metals. What are the places you go. When you. Turn. For comfort.

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[30:36] For hope. Where are those places. That you. Give up on. Jesus. And you instead. Turn your hearts. And minds. And lives. Onto accomplishing. For yourselves. Jesus.

Tells us. I am the first. And I am the last. I'm the living one. I died. And behold. I am alive. Forevermore. I have the keys. To death. And Hades. The church. In Smyrna. Needed. To be reminded. That their great hope.
Is not found. In the suffering. It's just surviving. The suffering. They're going through. Their great hope. Is found. Into Jesus. Who carries them. Now. And forever.
Into eternal life. And as you look. To yourself. As you look. For. These kind of. Treasures.
[31:34] To give you hope. And value. Would you run from them. Would you reject them. Would you remember. There is a greater. Crown. For you.

That lasts. Now. And forever. Let's pray. Father. We are so grateful. For. Lord.
Your kingdom. Your work. Your word. And the faithfulness. Of Jesus. He alone. Could give life. And life eternally. Lord.
Would you help us. To remember. That you. You are. Our greatest treasure. You are our great. Victory. You are our great hope. And you Lord.
Give us comfort. In the midst. Of our struggles. Today. Lord. We love you. We know. That you are with us. And we pray. That you would strengthen us. And encourage us.
[32:30] And help us. As we seek. To honor. And glorify you. And help us. To cling tightly. Not to nothing else. But Jesus. The one who has conquered death.

Forever. Amen. For more information. Visit us online. At southwood.org.

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