

Cross And Crown

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[0 : 00] Let us turn to look for a little God's help in Revelation chapter 2 and in verse 10. This is part of what the Lord is saying to the church here in Smyrna.

We can read verse 9 as well, but specifically verse 10. I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich in the slander of those who say that 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. And for ten days you will have tribulation.

Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. And the one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.

Our text is part of the second letter to the seven churches, which we have here at the beginning of Revelation. In fact, on Wednesday night we looked at verse 1 of chapter 2 there, where we saw that Jesus is the one who holds the seven stars, and he walks among the seven golden lampstands.

[1 : 21] And we saw there of how Jesus is walking among his people in his church. That's what Jesus does. And we've always got to remember that whenever we gather together, that the Lord has promised his presence with us.

And it's a beautiful picture, a beautiful idea, and something we should always have at the forefront of our thinking, remembering that Jesus is present here with us.

Now this city, Smyrna, where the Christians were being written to, Smyrna was actually a very wealthy city, which was north of Ephesus, I don't know, about 35 miles or something like that.

And while the city was wealthy, the Christians were poor, because that's what we're told here, that I know your tribulation and your poverty.

And in fact, the word that is used for poverty there is extreme poverty. So the Christians were suffering, they were really, really suffering, and they were in a state of extreme poverty.

[2 : 30] And yet the amazing thing is that in God's sight they weren't poor at all. They were actually rich, because they were a very spiritually vibrant church. In fact, there are only two of the seven churches that aren't rebuked.

All the other, the five of the churches get a rebuke from God. This one doesn't. So this was a church that was lively, a church that was spiritual, a church that was faithful, a church that was committed and devoted.

And so the Lord is saying, yes, you might be poor temporally. You might be poor. And we know that when the fires of persecution were raging, which they were in Smyrna, against the Christian, that they were losing.

Christians would lose their rights. They would lose their property. They would lose their lands. They would lose their work. They were often losing their freedom, and many actually ended up losing their lives.

So they were extremely poor from a human point of view or a temporal point of view, but they were really rich in God's eyes.

[3 : 37] And we've always got to remember that how God sees is totally different to the way that we see, because one of the other churches, the church of Laodicea, thought they were really wealthy. And they actually said, you know something, we're in need of nothing.

We've so increased with goods, we're really prospering. And the Lord says, no, no, no, you're actually really poor. You're in a bad way. So you see, God is able to see right in to how things are. And as we said on Wednesday night, one of the beauties of the letters to the seven churches is that they should act as a mirror into our own lives, into our own personal lives, into our own church life, because it can be very difficult for us to make our true assessment of how things really are.

Whenever we try and assess things, we must always do so with God's word, not just sit down and have a few ideas and sort of think, think, think through. Everything has to be measured against the word of God.

And when God's word came, it was striking very harshly sometimes towards some of the churches. But persecution here that the church in Smyrna were suffering was driving them to the Lord, which often is the case.

[4 : 54] Very often that the church that is being persecuted is a growing church. It is a pure church. It is a church that is thrown upon the Lord, utterly dependent upon the Lord.

Now, we don't suffer persecution as such. There is a persecution that becomes the lot of every Christian, because there's an offense in the cross.

Jesus tells us that. And that is why many people are hesitant to become Christians, because they're afraid of what people will say, what people will think, what the world will say.

What will the world's idea be of me if I throw in my lot with Christ? A lot of people are sort of struggling with that, and they say, well, I don't mind people knowing I go to church.

But that's all right. But if I started going out on Wednesday, people would say, oh, did you hear? And if I hear the very thought of people saying that I have the quorum, that cringed at me.

[6 : 02] I don't know if I could cope with that. A lot of people think like that. People who have a sympathy to the Christian faith, people who are sometimes moved under the gospel, and yet they hold back, because there is this idea that they don't know how they could fit in, how they could cope with the world, say what will people say.

That is, in itself, a type of the persecution, the offense of the cross. And there is, and it doesn't make any sense, because as we know, there was no more beautiful, wonderful person in this whole wide world than the Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet there was nobody that attracted so much opposition and hatred. And it's the same for those who follow him, that there is an inbuilt something in the enemies of Christ against the followers of Christ.

So, while we might not receive the persecution that's going on in some areas, in some parts of this world, some parts of this world, Christians are in isolation.

Christians can't meet together for fear of their lives. Praise the Lord. We don't have that. Let us always pray that we'll have the gospel freedom that we enjoy today.

[7 : 16] We've grown up with this, that we can walk freely to church with a Bible under our arm. We have no worries in that respect. Because it's not the same, it's not like that everywhere.

And pray that we will always have that gospel freedom. It's so important. But many places don't have. Well, the church in Smyrna was really suffering for their faith.

And it's interesting what the Lord Jesus is telling them because Jesus is saying to them, and nobody wants to hear this, you're going to suffer. When we come to church, I'm sure we would say, well, I hope I get that really nice word from Jesus today.

I hope it's something comforting, something that will lift me up. And when the word comes from Jesus to this church in Smyrna, it's a word telling them that they're going to suffer.

And that Satan is going to have a field day with them. And some of them are going to be tested severely in prison. And there's going to be a call on them to be faithful unto death.

[8 : 19] Even the word death is in there. And so these are things that it's very easy to throw people about. Be faithful unto death.

But it's interesting that Jesus, his own self-designation, every time Jesus writes to the church, he tells us something about himself. He gives a kind of a title to himself.

Like to the, for instance, that's to the church in Ephesus. He was the one who holds the seven stars and who walks among the seven golden candlesticks. In this, to the church in Smyrna, he says, the words are the first and the last who died and came to life.

So Jesus is really saying to this church, you might be called to suffer, you might in fact be called to suffer the ultimate, to death itself.

But listen to the one who's speaking to you, because so have I. I have gone that way too. And of course, Jesus went much more than any way that we will ever be called upon to suffer, even if it is to death.

[9 : 30] But Jesus is making this point. I died, but I'm the living one. I'm alive forevermore. And we've got to remember that we are so bound up in Jesus Christ, that what happened to him will also

happen to us.

He is a personal guarantee to us that when we die and when we, our bodies go into the grave, we will also rise.

Because everything, in his role as mediator, in his role as savior for us, we've got to remember, it wasn't just, he didn't just come to save our soul, ultimately he's come to save our body too.

Yes, our body will die. There will be a period of decay in the grave. That's not the end of the story.

And Jesus is saying, I died, but I'm alive.

I'm alive forevermore. And even if you have to suffer to death, the one thing is, you won't have to suffer into the second death. And that, my friends, that is a scary death.

[10:40] No, but death is not something that we want really to think too much about. It's an inevitable fact, something that's going to come our way one day.

Unless the Lord comes first, we will die. But we're told that there's also a second death. The one who conquers, we're told in verse 11, will not be hurt by the second death.

What is death? Death is a separation of soul and body. A second death is a final separation, the final separation forever from God.

That is second death. We're banished eternally from the presence of God. And when we think of being banished from the presence of God, and think of all that God is in His way of love and grace and mercy, and you think of all the fruits of the Spirit, banished from all that, it's a fearful concept.

And that is why Jesus is saying to the church, yeah, don't fear. Yes, you might suffer, you might even die. But don't fear.

[11:50] Now, at a human point of view, of course you will fear. You can't help it. If we're told we're going to suffer, if we're going to go through terrible things, then of course there's bound to be an element of human fear.

But Jesus Himself in the Gospels, remember He said, don't fear man. The worst a man can do to you is kill you. Fear God, Jesus says, because after death He has the power to cast you into hell. That's who you fear. And that in a sense is what the Lord is saying here. Yes, you might have, there might be horrible things that you have to go through, but you will never have the second death, which is the most awful end, the most awful destiny that anybody can ever face.

And so, the Lord is saying, fear, do not fear for what you are about to suffer. And of course we know that by having Jesus Christ we will be delivered from that death.

But then He says, do not fear for what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison. And here's really the power that is behind all the evil that goes on in the world, the devil.

[13:10] He's roaming about, and his whole aim is always against the glory of God. Everything really He's about is really to get at God.

He hates the very name of God. He hates the person of God. He hates the Lord Jesus Christ. And He hates the followers of Christ. And the moment you begin to follow the Lord, the moment you get interested in the gospel, Satan's around.

We said that Jesus is walking in the church. Jesus walks with His people. And as we're saying on Wednesday night, when you go for a walk with someone, it tends to be someone that you know somebody you like.

And usually when you walk, you talk. It's a time of togetherness, a time of fellowship. And so it is with Jesus. That's what He's doing. He's fellowshiping with us.

But we've always got to remember that wherever the Lord is and His people in this world, Satan won't be far away. That's going to be one of the great things about glory.

[14:18] Satan won't be there at all. It can't be. Never, never, ever, ever, ever set foot in. The amazing thing, the awful thing is that one day He was there. But He was cast out.

But He will never, ever, ever return. And neither will any of His angels. Never again tempted or troubled or tried in glory. But here He's at work.

And the devil is always at work tempting us. And we ought not to be surprised by his attacks and about his temptations. Because we've got to remember that Jesus, when He was here in this world, was tempted vehemently and violently by Satan.

And you see, the one thing that this text is teaching us is that in order to get the crown, it is by the way of the cross.

Because Jesus is telling that the one, be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He's talking about suffering, He's talking about the cross, talking about the hardships, but at the end there's a crown.

[15 : 28] And you know that when Jesus was in this world, Satan's great temptation was to try and get Jesus off the path. God had given him a path, and that path involved a cross.

That path involved suffering. And Satan was saying, if I get Jesus off the track, if I can keep him from the cross, then there'll be no crown.

And Satan knew that when Jesus came into this world, he had to do everything he could to derail his mission. And you remember that Satan, the wilderness temptation, one of the things he took Jesus up into a high mountain, and he showed him all the kingdoms of this world.

And he said to Jesus, this is only going to take a second, a few seconds, all I want you to do, you'll get, I have the power, he says, I can give you, I can give you all this if you just bow down and worship me.

That's all. Just bow down, worship me. It's all yours. All yours. And what was Satan doing? He's saying to Jesus, I can give you the power, the acknowledgement, the glory of this world, all the kingdoms use, and it'll save you going to the cross.

[16 : 52] You don't have to go through the painful way. You don't have to go God's way. I can give you this. And I wonder how many people in this world, knowingly or maybe unknowingly, have sold their souls to Satan in order to get on in the world.

Where Satan has come up whispering and he says, I can give you. I can give you. It's all mine to give. He is the God of this world. He's termed that in the Bible.

And he has amazing powers. I wonder how many people actually have sold their soul in order to get on in this world. It's an awful thought.

And I believe it's happening. I believe it has happened and it is still happening. Maybe some realize what they're doing. Maybe some don't. But he comes whispering to you. Martin my words and maybe some of you have heard his whisper along your journey in this world where Satan has whispered and he says, I can give you.

Well, if you go down that road, you're down and going to a terrible place. Anyway, remember how Jesus dealt with it. He saw the temptation right away and he said he brought the word straight away.

[18 : 12] And that's the only way we can deal with Satan is to bring God's word. It is written. And then again, do you remember when Jesus stopped with the disciples?

He was heading up to Jerusalem and he told the disciples, you know, we're going to head up to Jerusalem. And Jesus started to tell the disciples everything that was going to happen to him. And all the suffering and then being put to death. And as he spoke like that, Peter, stop, hey, he said, Peter said, no, no, no, no, don't talk like that.

Put these things away from you, Jesus. That's not to happen to you. And straight away, Jesus recognized the voice is Peter's.

But there's somebody speaking through Peter. He recognized that here's Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends in this world. And again, the temptation to avoid the cross.

[19 : 09] And that's why Jesus turned around and he really rebuked Peter. And he said, get behind me, Satan. Because he recognized that Satan at that particular point was using Peter as a mouthpiece.

Again, do you remember Jesus on trial? Trial for his life. And he's there before Caiaphas, the high priest, and the high priest says to him, tell us whether you are the Son of God.

Right? Here's the moment when Jesus could actually walk free from that trial. All Jesus had to do was to say, no I'm not. They would have said, right, great, there's the door, on you go.

There's the temptation again. But remember what Jesus very solemnly told them, that it wouldn't be too long until the tables were going to be turned. And remember what Jesus said, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.

What a thought. As Jesus is on trial before Caiaphas, the high priest, and all these ruling Jews, Jesus said to them, very shortly the tables are going to be turned and you are going to be tried by me.

[20 : 29] And of course that was it. For them, they thought, right, there's no way back. And even on the cross, even on the cross, remember what they were calling, if you are the Son of God, come

down from the cross and we'll believe in you.

See, Satan's trying to do, they've hammered in the nails, all Jesus said would have to say from the cross, all right, all right. And you know this, you and I know that Jesus actually had the power to come down from the cross.

It wasn't the nails that held him there, but it was his love and his obedience, his obedience to his father, his love to the father, his love to us, his commitment to us. He could have come down, but he didn't.

And they're saying, we would believe in you. No, they wouldn't. Satan was working to the very last. And what he's doing to, what he did with Jesus, be quite persuaded, he will also be doing with you as well.

But the cross is in your life and in my life. And you know the funny thing about the cross is that it both kills and it makes alive. Because it is through the cross, through our, through the cross that, remember how Jesus says, if any man will follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

[21 : 55] And that means not denying that we're warring against sin and fighting against sin. And the more we put to death, the more life we have. That's the way it works.

If you want to be a Christian who simply just gets by, all you have to do is just sort of, well, not be too bothered about sin, not be too bothered about the, you say, I can't be bothered with all the struggling in life.

I can't be bothered with this battle with the world and the flesh and the devil. I just want, I want an easy life. I'll read my Bible out and done it, but I'm not going to take things in too seriously.

I just want to get, kind of get by. Well, that way you don't really have the empowering life that is there, that is, should be pulsing through your veins.

Because the more we war against sin, the more we battle against it, the more life we have. That's the way it works. The putting to death brings life.

[23 : 05] And so the more that the cross is at work in our life, the more that we have life. I've seen that the time is going, there's a lot more we could say, but you'll notice that it says, behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation.

Now there's different ideas of what the ten days, but I think what I would take more than anything out of it is that there's a beginning and there's an end. And it's that God knows exactly the length of time.

And always remember that whatever you're going through in life is measured by the Lord. There's a beginning and there's an end. It's not random. It's not like you're going through it and the Lord sort of says, oh, I didn't realize he, she was going through all that just now.

No, no, everything is measured. There's a beginning, there's an end, there's a particular duration to it. And so we have this period, and it's an intense period of trial that the church is going to go through.

And as we say, for some of them it might be death because the Lord is saying to them, be faithful unto death. We often have to ask, why is there suffering?

[24 : 20] Why is there so much suffering within the Christian life? Well, there's various things. Sometimes it's discipline. For whom the Lord loves, he disciplines.

We're told that very simply. Again, it is often through suffering that we learn to become obedient. Because it's not natural for us to be obedient to God.

In fact, it even tells us of Jesus, remember what it says, though he was a son, yet learned he obedience through suffering. Again, in God's purposes, suffering is also a way of displaying God's grace in our life so that we become powerful witnesses.

You know that some of the most powerful Christian lives, their lives so speak and testify to God's grace, are people who are really suffering.

people who are going through something difficult. Sometimes people have had a really hard, bitter experience in their life. And it's amazing when you see Christians who have gone through that and yet displaying a love and a grace and a gentleness and a godliness in their lives despite what they've had to endure.

[25 : 45] Because naturally, that would cause a person to become bitter and resentful and you would see them going the very opposite way. In fact, the Lord said about Paul, or Saul, when he

called him in and he said, he's a chosen vessel for my name among the Gentiles and the kings and children of Israel and I will show him how great things he must suffer for my sake.

And that was one of the things about the apostle's life. That despite all that he suffered for the sake of Christ, you found him rejoicing. Like for instance, in the prison in Philippi.

After having a severe beating, instead of there just a really angry man, he's praising God. And the impact and the witness of that was so powerful that when the earthquake came and the doors of the prison were flung open and that the prison jailer, he recognized this man is something special.

He's just been leathered and beaten and he's bleeding all over and all he's doing is praising God.

This man must know something I don't. Tell me, he says, what must I do to be saved?

See the impact. See the effect of a godly life in the face of pain and sorrow. But then we see, and I say the time has gone, we see the reward.

[27 : 15] A crown of life. And who gives the crown of life? He who be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life. Isn't that a wonderful coronation day?

Imagine if you got an invite to Buckingham Palace and they said, you know, I'm going to give you a title. I'm going to be, give you one of the highest awards in the land.

You'll be saying to yourself, whoa, what a day that's going to be. Well, you could put every title, every title under the sun, put them together and it doesn't come near what this is going to be like.

This is going to be the royal, this is going to be the royal coronation that is above everyone. You remember today that you are an heir with Christ, right?

A joint heir with Christ. When you die and you go to glory, there's going to be the coronation day because you're going to reign with him. Have you thought about that? Throughout eternity, you are going to reign with Christ.

[28 : 20] Christ. It's quite, sometimes as we sit here and we're bogged down in life, quite difficult to realize what actually is ahead.

The crown of life is life in all its fullness, all its joy, all its vitality, all its power, forever and ever and ever. Elsewhere, we're told we get a crown of righteousness, a crown of glory, a crown of beauty. There's all these different expressions given in the Bible. That's what you get as a Christian. But you know, if you're outside Christ, there's no coronation.

As things stand right now, if you're not a believer, if you do not have Jesus as your Lord, if Jesus is not your King, King of your life, Lord of your life just now, then as things stand, there isn't a coronation day waiting for you.

That's awful, when there could be. As things stand, if right now, if you're taken away and you do not have Jesus Christ as Savior, it's a second death rather than the coronation day.

[29 : 35] Please, the great offer of the gospel is here today. Will you please accept Jesus? Accept him as your Savior. Say, Lord, as we said to the children, save my soul.

You pray that, cry that, ask the Lord to do that. And if you really mean it, he will. And then you will have your coronation day.

Let's pray. Lord, we pray to bless us this day as we've again come under your word. Lord, we pray that your word may indeed challenge us, challenge us as we need to hear what you're saying to us. Help us, Lord, not to be just picking and choosing what we want, but that we might put our lives under the microscope of your word so that we may examine ourselves and that we may see where we are.

Lord, bless us, we pray. Do us good and take away our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's conclude in the 70th Psalm, Psalm number 70.

[30 : 41] This is the Scottish Psalter on page 309 and the tune is Golden Hill, Psalm 70.

It's the first version. Lord, haste me to deliver. With speed, Lord, succor me. Let them that for my soul do seek, shamed and confounded be.

Turn back, be they, and shame that in my heart delight. Turn back, be they, ha, ha, that say their shaming to requite. To the last verse, I pour a needy am.

Come, Lord, and make no stay. My help, thou undeliverer art. O Lord, make no delay. Psalm 70, the whole psalm. Lord, haste me to deliver.

With speed, Lord, succor me. Let them that for my soul do seek, shamed and confounded be.

[32 : 06] Turn back, be they, and shame. Let them my heart delight.

Turn back, be they, and shame. Let them that sin there, streaming to requite.

In thee, let only God. I'm joy unto thee for thee.

Let them that salvation, love. Say still, God, bless you.

Say still, God, bless you. Say still, God, bless you. Say still, God, bless you. Lord, bless you. May I, and you will be.

[33 : 20] Come, Lord, and make no delay. May I, and you will be. May I, and you will be. May I, and you will be.

Amen. May I bless you. May I, and you will be. May I, and you will be. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.