

June 23, 2019

Do Not Fear What You Are About To Suffer

Revelation 2:8-11

2:8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

2:9 “‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

2:10 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 ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

2:11 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.’

Revelations 2 and 3 contain the message of Jesus Christ delivered to the seven churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. All of them consist of depictions of the figure of Christ, words of praise, words of rebuke, and words of promises. However, there is no compliment in the church of Laodicea, and there is no excuse in Smyrna and Philadelphia.

The church in Smyrna doesn't have words of rebuke, but Christ says, “Do not fear what you are about to suffer.” (verse 10). Because it is said that “Do not fear” Christians in Smyrna were “fearing” against the persecution that is coming, and it is not a rebuke, but Christ has warned it.

We too have fear in various things. One of the gifts that God gives to believers is peace, which can be lost by fear. Be sure to listen to Christ's words, “Do not fear” so as not to do so.

1. Looking at Ourselves

But why do we fear? It seems that three things we do not look at. The first is “ourselves.” Fear comes when we do not look at ourselves correctly. We often think that we have no power to face difficulties or have no patience to endure the pain, We may see only our weakness and poverty, and we may miss the gift of God given to us.

There is people who are proud of themselves and look down on the other, though they do not have anything. It is a false sense of superiority. On the other hand, there are also people who lose sight of the good things given to them, and think that they are inferior to others, and atrophy. Such inferiority is also wrong. Because believers make efforts to be humble, they may end up with a false sense of inferiority. Being humble is different from swallowing yourself and staying stomping on people like a doormat. Being humble is not about throwing away any pride. We discard our human pride, but we are proud of God and of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:3). We are the “Children of God”, members of the Royal Family, and “the heir” of the Kingdom of God (Romans 8:14, 17). We can boast of the privileges that the Lord has given.

The town of Smyrna was the third largest in Asia Minor, and the people of the town were proud that “Smyrna is the metropolis of Asia.” Perhaps the church in Smyrna was also a rich church. However, as Christ said, “I know your tribulation and your poverty” (verse 9), the church lost its members and became poor because of persecution. It seemed that Christians in Smyrna had lamented that if they suffered further, they would have feared that they would no longer be.

But Christ said, “but you are rich.” (verse 9) The church in Smyrna lost many things and became poor. But the church became more faithful. The loss of the earthly ones and poverty have made the church come to rely on God instead of relying on the earthly ones. God has made those who trust in him “rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom” (James 2:5). As Christ says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)

The Smyrna believers were discouraged in persecution and suffering. they lost sight of “the riches of faith” because they did not look at themselves through faith and the eyes of Christ. So, Christ said to the church in Smyrna, “But you are rich,” and let them look at “the riches of faith” given to the church. Let us not only look at our own insufficiency, but also on the “riches of faith” given by God. Let us to overcome fear and problems without being crushed by it.

2. Looking to Enemy

Second, we are afraid because we do not see problems and difficulties correctly. It is because we think that it is too big, difficult, and unmanageable for us to fight against it. We have been lost before the fight. It may be said that it is because we did not look at the enemy correctly.

Christ told them that the church in Smyrna was approaching suffering. “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.” (verse 10) They feared when they have heard the words, but Christ said that the suffering was not endless and it was restricted. In other words, the suffering that was

about to come was not martyrdom but imprisonment, and that imprisonment is only for ten days, not months or even years. Someone in the church, perhaps one of the leaders, would be caught and put in jail. However, it was said that he would be released after ten days.

It is true that what is written in 1 Corinthians 10:13. “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” God will never give us into the temptation that we may not be able to endure it. an unbearable test. In every trial there is an “the way of escape.” The trial is not a cave. It is like a “tunnel”. There are no exits in the cave, but there is an exit in the tunnel. Even if it is dark, if you believe in God and move on, you can see the light ahead. Beyond the dark path there is salvation and reward. At the end of the trial, the light of grace and the light of glory are waiting.

Christ also said, “Behold, the devil is ...” to tell that the devil was going to use this suffering to destroy the faith. God uses suffering to strengthen believers, but the devil uses suffering to discourage them, to give them fear, and to pull apart believers from God. The devil is also called “Satan,” which means “enemy,” but he is not equal to God. He has already been defeated and was under the rule of God. He is not almighty. God allowed the devil to test the church, but he was not allowed to destroy the church.

There is a scene in Bunyan’s “The Pilgrim’s Progress.” The traveler has a lion on both sides of the road and is about to bite and attacking for a moment, but when he look closely, the lion has a collar

and is chained. As long as he walks in the middle of the road, the traveler will not be attacked by the lion. This lion represents the devil. He is attacking believers as 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” This story teaches that the devil can not touch those who walk the path of faith straightly following Christ.

It is a trick of the devil to show himself as a “lion.” The real “Lion” is Christ. Do not be deceived. There is no other Lord than Christ. We sway out our fears with the faith in Him and walk in fear of who is truly afraid.

3. Looking to Christ

Third, we are feared, lost in peace, and unable to move forward with the problems and difficulties because we do not look at Christ.

When the disciples tried to cross the Lake Galilee without Jesus, there was a storm that prevented me from moving forward. Then Jesus was walking on the water and approaching. At first, the disciples were afraid to say that it was ghost, but when they realized that Jesus was, Peter wished to walk on the water. Peter walked a couple of steps towards Jesus, but he was afraid to see the rough waves and sank quickly (Matthew 14:27-31). Peter sank because he took his eyes off Jesus. If you look at the suffering and not the Savior, if you look only at the enemy and not the Lord of triumph, you will sink into the suffering and problems. Christ says, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” (Matthew 14:27) Look up at Christ, look at Christ and rise from there.

Each of the message to the seven churches in Revelation describes

the figure of Christ. And, for the church of Smyrna, Christ is described as “The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.” (verse 8) “The words of the first and the last” means “eternity.” “Died and came to life” means the cross and resurrection of Christ. Christ bore the sins of human and dies on the cross because of his love. However, by his power he destroyed the last enemy of human, the death, and brought eternal life to believers.

Christ promised to the Church of Smyrna “the crown of life” and he said, “The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.” (verses 10, 11). “The Crown of Life” represents eternal life. The “second death” is the judgment after death. Everyone’s life ends and dies. This is the “first death”. However, those who are saved live on eternal life even after the earth’s life is gone. They spend eternity with Christ. But those who do not have eternal life will experience “death” once again. That is the “second death.” The first death is only the entrance to glory for those who have the eternal life given by the One who has been risen and live forever. The “second death” has no power to the people who live in eternal life. So, Christ said, “Do not fear Be faithful unto death.” Christ is the One who protects the believer’s life, and the One who leads to a better life.

There is a Spanish praise titled “*Nada Te Turbe.*” It sang the words of Theresa of Avila in 16th century. “Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten, Those who seek God shall never go wanting. God alone fills us.” It sings the peace that has been released from fear. Theresa was able to do that with confidence because she was staring at Jesus in deep meditation. We also want to be freed from fear, satisfied with peace, and faithfully serve the Lord by looking at ourselves, the

enemy, and above all, our Lord.

(Prayer)

God the Father of Jesus Christ. How many times did you tell us “Don’t be afraid?” So much, we are often afraid, we lose peace and we are closed to our weakness. Help us not fear, obey Christ, and witness our faith in Christ. For that purpose, please help us to keep our eyes on Jesus Christ. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.