

Introduction: The second letter from Jesus is addressed to the church in Smyrna. Jesus describes Himself in two ways.

1. **“The first and the last”**- Jesus is eternal and unchanging. He is the focus and meaning of existence.
2. **“The one who was dead and has come to life”**.

These descriptions related directly to the situations being faced by this church. As the persecution and trials continued and would grow in intensity Jesus wanted to remind them that He was there with them. He also wanted to remind them of the truth that He too faced persecution to the point of death and He won the Victory. They too could remain faithful and share in His victory. Jesus wrote this church to **encourage** and to **challenge** them.

1. The Encouragement (vs. 9)

I know your circumstances – He knew intimately their experience of suffering for His Name. He also knew of their poverty for His Name sake.

I know your source of suffering – He knows our needs before we ask. Jesus was not surprised by the suffering. The Jews and Judaizers were being used by Satan to bring this suffering.

I know what you do not see – Jesus said they were rich. He wanted to lift them above their circumstances to be able to see who they are and all that God has given them in Christ. In the midst of the suffering Jesus encouraged them to look through God’s eyes

How were they rich? They Had:

The riches of faith - making them heirs with Christ. (James 2:5)

The riches of God’s Grace – God given desire and power to accomplish God’s will. (Eph. 1:7)

The riches of God’s Mercy – God giving us what we do not deserve. (Eph. 2:4-7)

The riches of God’s Glory – God’s holiness taking action in our lives. (Eph. 3: 14-21) God’s Glory produces:

- A strengthening by God’s power
- A growth in the inner man- Christ can dwell
- A grounding in His love-anchor of hope
- An experience of being filled by God Himself- enveloped in His love and life
- An experience of God working through us to accomplish far beyond what we could dream
- An ability to bring God glory through our lives

The riches of God’s Provision – He will meet the need of those who are faithful stewards. (Phil. 4:19)

The riches of Heavenly Treasures – (Matthew 6: 19-21)

2. The Challenge (vs. 10)

Stop being afraid! Persecution and suffering could not rob them of the riches they had in Christ. His perfect love held them in His hands. If He allowed the suffering He would use it for good and for His kingdom.

Be faithful even unto Death – literally Jesus challenged them to be willing to die physically for His Name. If we do not lose our lives we are still to be willing to die to ourselves for the sake of His kingdom. **We must die to the following:**

- Personal comfort and preferences
- Personal goals and rights
- Pride and recognition
- Personal priorities

Notice what Jesus did not say. He did not say I’ll stop the experience of persecution or suffering. **He did say** “I see it fully” and “I will permit it to get worse if necessary”. It would only last as long as needed for God’s purposes. Satan believes he can crush our faith through these experiences, yet God knows He can grow our faith and our influence for His kingdom.

Why does suffering occur?

Personal sin and /or church sin- reap what you sow – applies to believers and non-believers. If this is reason God will speak it clearly. Beware of false guilt & condemnation

God's choice to discipline us as His children. This may be allowed by God to correct us or to prevent the sin. (Paul's thorn)

To teach us to trust and obey at a greater level. Hebrews 5:8 – Jesus learned obedience through suffering

To provide a witness for God's Glory

Success in God's eyes is when He sees that we are available to him, broken, humble, obedient, and content in Him alone.

To be chosen by God as a follower of Jesus or as a church to suffer for His Name is an honor. Those who suffer and remain faithful to God will produce fruit that lasts.

This church in Smyrna is the only church of the 7 which remains. Around 1/3 of the people in this city today are believers in Christ.

Example of Polycarp, who was discipled by the Apostle John, was told to renounce Christ or die.

He said Jesus had been faithful to him for 86 years and He would not blaspheme or be found unfaithful. The orthodox Jews broke the Sabbath to gather wood to burn him alive.

To leave a legacy of faithfulness for the next generation requires time in the fire to mold us and make us usable for His Kingdom

When we are experiencing these difficulties we can see God at work in us.

- The fire keeps our passion alive
- The fire keeps us from sin
- The fire puts us in a place where God is our only hope
- The fire can lead to a spreading of the Gospel. God leads us away from the question "Why?", and guides us to ask "How can God be glorified in these circumstances?"

Conclusion

Jesus closes this letter by reminding them of the crown of life awaiting them for their faithfulness. He also reminds them of their deliverance from the second death - eternity in the lake of fire.

Do you see the riches you possess in Christ? Do you have God's perspective?

Are you successful in God's eyes? (Available, broken, humble, obedient, content)

Many are suffering from trials and many from persecution for loving Jesus. Hold to the truth that Jesus loves you. Hold to the truth that Jesus knows and cares! He may remove suffering. He may also choose to allow it so He can grow your faith and glorify Himself through your life. He offers Himself to you. He is sufficient. Do not fear, instead trust His hands and his heart. Stay faithful in the storm. God is with you.