

Smyrna, the Persecuted Church

Revelation 2:8-11

In the New Testament, in Luke 22, Jesus looks at Peter and He says, "Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you like wheat." Satan's after you, Peter. He came to Me and asked if he could have you. You can imagine Peter saying, "Well You told him no, didn't You?" Jesus said, "I told him, yes." Why? You know I'm saved, You don't need to put me through this test. I know I'm saved. I'm not going to have to get that information. What are You doing this for? This is another message to Satan to prove that saving faith is indestructible. And he went after Peter, but He said – Jesus said, "I prayed for you that your faith fail not." And it didn't. And a messenger from Satan went after Paul and couldn't destroy his faith either. In fact, through it Paul became stronger than ever.

I really believe on a supernatural level that God and Satan are engaged in a battle over the strength of faith. And Satan is constantly trying to destroy true faith. And God says, "All right, give it a try." And Satan in total frustration comes back defeated. So God says I'm engaged in a war with Satan, and I'm going to show him My glory, and I'm going to display the power of My salvation. And I'm just telling you the devil is going to come, and he's going to put some of you in prison, and it may not be more than ten days. And it's a test, not to reveal anything to you and not to reveal anything to Me but to make the point to him and his whole kingdom that saving faith is indestructible.

- I. The way Jesus describes himself to the church in Smyrna assures them that He is in absolute control even if life for them seemed scary and uncertain. Their affliction came from the governing authorities who demanded that they bow down and worship Caesar or face death and from the Jews who hated them and did what they could to slander them and get them in trouble. Consequently, no one would hire them, their businesses failed, and their living conditions deteriorated to the point of extreme poverty. Yet, he assures them that they are rich because of their unyielding, determined, uncompromising stand for Him.

Rev. 2:8-9

Rev. 1:18

Phil. 3:10

Isa. 44:6,8 *"This is what the Lord says— Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."*

- II. It might seem unreasonable or even unrealistic for Jesus to command the church to not be afraid. Yet, it was necessary for them to understand that fear of the uncertain, unknown, man, persecution, circumstances or even for their very lives could keep them from remaining faithful to Him through the testing that they were about to go through. Satan loves to see believers compromise their faith through fear. In fact, he'll do what he can to induce fear, discouragement, or dismay to defeat them. Jesus on the other hand, loves to enable believers to stand strong in their faith as a testimony to the power of knowing Him. Those who stand strong even to the point of death, will be richly rewarded with the **stéphanos or victors** crown of life.

Rev. 2:10

Lk. 22:31-32

1 Peter 5:8-9

James 1:12

Psalm 46:1-3-,7 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, thou the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging... the Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

1. Crown of Righteousness – Love the Lord's appearing – 2 Tim 4:8
1. Incorruptible Crown – Disciplined bodies / Self-control – 1 Cor 9:22-27
2. Crown of life – Endured patiently through trials – James 1:12; Rev. 2:10
3. Crown of glory – Godly leaders who were examples to the flock – 1 Peter 5:2-4
4. Crown of rejoicing – Shared the gospel and brought people to Christ – 1 Thess 2:19; Dan 12:3

- III. The Lord sees all believers as overcomers. It is our faith that overcomes the world and because of that, we will never experience the second death that all unbelievers will experience at the great white throne judgment. The first death is physical. The second death is spiritual and eternal. The first death is inevitable and not worth holding onto as a compromise in our stand for Christ. The second death does not apply, so why not stand strong for Him despite the present circumstances we are in.

Rev. 2:11

Rev. 20:11-15

1 Jn. 5:4-5 *4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*