

Lessons from the Church at Smyrna

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Bible Text: Revelation 2:8-11

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In Revelation 2 and 3, the Apostle John writes the messages of our Lord Jesus to the 7 churches in Asia. Of the 7 churches, Jesus rebuked 5 of them for their sins. Only 2 of them escaped the judgment of God. John records the first one, to the Church of Smyrna, in Revelation 2.8-11. I want to examine with you certain sure truths from this letter that God expects from His Church.

Comprehension Of Their Condition

Early in this message, Jesus tells them, “I know thy works.” (1) He reminds these believers that He knows about them. He observes their conduct and behavior. He’s consciously mindful of them.

His knowledge encompassed their circumstances. For example, these believers endured the pressure of tribulation. Affliction, like stones in the mill, ground them like wheat. Furthermore, because of their faith in Jesus Christ, they became poor. (2) They lost their positions and their possessions. Like Job and their Savior, they lost everything through no fault of their own. It resulted from their Christian faith. To add insult to injury, the godless crowd vilified them, defamed their character, lied about their motives, and ridiculed their lifestyle.(3)

To these tired and tattered believers, Jesus sent a message of comfort, “I know.” (4) Their difficulties had not escaped His awareness.

Nor do yours, my friend. He sees the trials and the taunts that cross your path. He sees when we sit and when we stand. (5) He knows all about us. And like this message to the Church at Smyrna, our Lord wants you to find comfort in His divine omniscience.

In addition, Christ’s knowledge extended to their works. He knew the quantity of their works. He saw the deeds and labors of love. The presence of their labors did not go unnoticed. He noted, too, the quality of their works. He readily distinguished between acts of the flesh and the effects of the Spirit. The Lord recorded their self-less faithfulness and obedience.

The Scriptures confirm this same truth for the believer today, too. God reminded Noah, Samuel, and Solomon that He looks not like men who look at the appearance of things.

(6) No, God looks at the heart. Thus He discerns and distinguishes its thoughts and intents. He observes the motives that drive our actions. Nothing escapes the all seeing eyes of our Lord.

This truth serves both as a comfort and a caution. The omniscient Christ sees our trials and troubles. In like manner, He observes our faithfulness and obedience in the midst of difficulty. The holy Jesus takes note of our unfaithfulness and disobedience, too.

Does this truth describe your understanding of Jesus the Lord? Do you recognize His omniscience? Does it matter to you that the Lord Jesus sees your motives and your works? His all seeing eyes discern the false and the true. May His omniscient comprehension of our affairs encourage and challenge us to Godly character.

Compliments For Their Conduct

In His message to the Church at Smyrna, the Lord Jesus next moves to compliment their conduct. Although they lacked worldly goods, Jesus called them rich, rich in Christian graces. (7) They showed great grace in troubled times. In the midst of evil attacks from professing Christians (sometimes the worst form of trial) they showed endurance and faithfulness. These believers adhered to the truth with constancy.

Grace under wrongful treatment does not come automatically. For example, Moses, when tempted the second time for water, spoke unadvisedly with his lips. (8) Unlike Moses, Joseph grew and prospered under cruel judgment. (9) Which one describes your response to wrongful treatment? Do you endure and grow, or do you fail? O that we, like these Christians at Smyrna, would conform to our Lord Jesus and endure faithfully while under siege.

These believers at Smyrna had stored up riches toward God. Too many believers follow the pattern of the rich fool recorded in Luke 12.15ff. They accumulate worldly possessions and treasures for themselves. True riches result from one priority, obedience to Jesus Christ; one passion, faith in Jesus Christ; and one purpose, the kingdom of Jesus Christ. These make one rich toward God.

Where does your treasure lie? Have you laid up treasures for your self or God? Do you count earthly possessions or eternal treasures? Do you seek true riches or these that rust and decay? These who received Christ's commendation followed the command of Jesus recorded in Matthew 6.33, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

If you examine the passage closely, you will note the absence of a complaint of their conduct. Silence from our Lord does not always mean disapproval. It can also reveal approval and encouragement to keep on in the faith.

Covenant For Their Conformity

Although Jesus forecast additional trials for them, He gave them great assurances and promises. He encouraged them in the face of hardship. It would bring questions, doubts, awe, and alarm. Yet the One Who died and lives again assured them, "Fear not." (10) He Who experienced the same kind of infirmities also would succor them.

The faithful would receive a crown of life. (11) They would rejoice in victory. Their faithful, obedient endurance toward God in their duty would grant them the spoils of a conqueror. They would wear the crown of life.

In like manner, the Scriptures remind us that all who would live Godly in this present world will suffer persecution. (12) Those who would follow Jesus Christ must bear their crosses.(13) The servant shares what the Master endures. (14) Yet He promises a way of escape.(15)

Those who endured would escape unhurt by the second death. Note, my friend, the certainty of the second death. Christ confirms it. The unfaithful and unbelieving will find their place in the lake of fire. But to those who remain faithful, they flow not from death to death, but from death to life. For the believer, the first death becomes a gateway to heaven, not a trap door to hell.

Thus, adversity does not always indicate weakness and punishment. It can show identification with Jesus Christ our Lord and Master. Further, it comes to the believer with the sovereign control of King Jesus.

Into which category do you belong, the persecutor or the persecuted? How do you respond to adversity? Those who come to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith have no fear. Those who trust and obey Him find eternal reward.

Conclusion

I trust that the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to understand these truths from His holy word. Where has He identified your failure to apply these truths in your life? What does He see in your works? Does He see unbelief or trust? Obedience or disobedience? Does He observe a failure to deny self? A neglect of your spiritual duty? May the Holy Spirit show us our guilt and its grief to a Holy God. May our helplessness to atone for our sins drive us to Jesus for relief from our sins.

What changes does the Holy Spirit need to bring into your life today because of these truths? A defense of your actions will only continue God's judgment in your life. Guilt of sin demands immediate repentance.(16) No excuse can explain delay.(17) God calls us to holiness and faith.(18) True repentance calls for sorrow, shame, and hatred for sin. It brings confession and a turning from sin unto God.

References

1. Revelation 2.9
2. Revelation 2.9
3. Revelation 2.9
4. Revelation 2.9
5. Psalm 139.1-5
6. 1 Chronicles 28.9; Genesis 6.5; 1 Samuel 16.7
7. Revelation 2.9
8. Psalm 106.32-33
9. Genesis 39.5, 23
10. Revelation 2.10
11. Revelation 2.10-11
12. 2 Timothy 3.12
13. Matthew 16.24
14. John 13.16
15. 1 Corinthians 10.13
16. Genesis 6.5
17. Psalm 95.8
18. Leviticus 20.7

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