

## Revelation 2:8-11

“Born once; Die Twice. Born Twice; Die Once”

Remember, repent & repeat your 1<sup>st</sup> works. The clarion call to the church of Ephesus was that they were to return to their 1<sup>st</sup> love. They had fallen into that subtle yet simple trap of substituting works *for* God in the place of a love relationship *with* God.

Instead of faith working *through* love it was faithful works *instead* of love. Jesus said, “Remember therefore from where you have fallen”, one of the key words in that phrase is the word “fallen”. They were in a backslidden state spiritually; it’s so simple to fall into that place, it’s so subtle in the way it seeks to overtake us, which is exactly why it’s so critical that we guard against it w/all that we are. Every one of us should be deeper in love w/Jesus today than we have ever been before. If we’re not; we’ve fallen. Oh it may be to varying degrees & in different ways but don’t be deceived; you’re either moving forward *in* the Lord or you are falling away *from* the Lord, there is nothing in between.

The warning was “Repent or be removed”. Jesus refuses to remain in a church that lacks love. Regardless of how many programs there may be, how much service & sacrifice is going on; if it’s lots of labor *w/out* love as opposed to labor working *through* love... the Lord will leave.

Paul the apostle said that all kinds of fervency & even spiritual activity (the gifts of the Spirit flowing abundantly) may be happening, but yet there is a “more excellent way”.

He said, you may speak w/the tongues of men & angels, you might have faith to mountains, you might understand all mysteries & knowledge, you might bestow all your goods to feed the poor & even sacrifice your very life; but if you have not love (that is, if the love of God is not in you, motivating you & flowing through you) it profits you nothing. Works apart from love are worthless.

The exhortation is to overcome apathy; lay aside spiritual lethargy (even if you appear busy practically) & renew your 1<sup>st</sup> love. Get back to the basics of loving on Jesus & abiding *in* His word, being obedient *to* His word. “To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

As we approach Vs 8 we will see the church of Smyrna; just up the coast from Ephesus, Smyrna (Izmir) is still thriving today. It was named after it’s chief product, that being Myrrh; Myrrh was used both as a perfume & an embalming spice. It was manufactured or obtained from the sap of a tree & as the sap hardened it turned to resin & the resin would be crushed causing it to release it’s fragrance. (Then added to the oil for perfume or whatever).

Apropos considering that the church of Smyrna would be crushed in persecution causing the fragrance of Christ to be released in an ever increasing way into their culture.

Now though Smyrna was an actual church physically at that time, it would also represent historically the persecuted church from about 100 A.D. through about 313 A.D. whereby some 5 million + Christians would lose their lives for the sake of J.C. Now when you consider the population of the earth being around 190 million in 200 A.D. that would be the equivalency of 182,000,000 Christians being put to death today because they refuse to bow down & worship the President of the U.S. saying, "The President is Lord." Look at Vs 8..

#### Vs 8-11

If I were to sum up &/or apply another NT passage to this particular church it would be the words of the apostle Paul found in Rom Ch 8, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*<sup>1</sup>

Of the 7 churches that Jesus wrote to only 2 of them received no word of warning, no sin that needed sifted out; Smyrna is one of them. It was G. Campbell Morgan who once said that, "The church of Christ persecuted has been the church of Christ pure. On the other hand, the church of Christ patronized has been the church of Christ impure."

This is a church whom (historically) would be fed to the lions, burned at the stake, covered in tar & used as human torches to light pagan festivities, they were crucified, tried, tested, they endured tribulation and straight out of the gate Jesus wants to encourage & comfort them, "I know you, I have My eye on you & can identify personally with you." He says, "These things says the 1<sup>st</sup> & the Last, who was dead (or literally 'who became dead') & came to life."

To give you a bit of a back story Smyrna was a very pagan city. We know that in Smyrna was one famous street in particular called "Golden Street".

<sup>1</sup> The New King James Version. 1982 (Ro 8:35-39). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It housed temples to Cybele, Apollo, Asclepius, Aphrodite & a great temple to Zeus. Yet by the time John wrote this the worship of those pagan gods was actually beginning to phase out & the religion of the pop culture of the time was the worship of Rome (the Roman Emperor to be specific).

It was in 196 B.C. that Smyrna built the 1<sup>st</sup> temple to Dea Roma – the goddess of Rome. It would be akin to building a temple to the Statue of Liberty, it wasn't to honor a specific person, but the spirit of Rome; but once the "spirit" of Rome was worshiped it was but a small step to worship the emperors past & just one more small step to worship the emperors present & then to demand such worship as evidence of political allegiance and civic pride.

In 23 A.D. Smyrna won the privilege (over 11 other cities) to build the first temple to worship the Emperor Tiberius Caesar. So Smyrna was a leading city in the Roman cult of Emperor worship.

It was the Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.) (this same Domitian who had John exiled to Patmos where he received this revelation) who 1<sup>st</sup> demanded worship under the title "Lord" from the people of the Roman Empire as a test of political loyalty. What it amounted to was once a year the Roman citizen had to burn a pinch of incense on the altar to the godhead of Caesar & say "Caesar is Lord"; and having done so, he would be given a certificate that guaranteed that he had performed his religious duty. (Sort of a worship receipt).

Christians wouldn't do that, they wouldn't bow before the bust of Caesar & declare him as Lord because there is only one Lord (J.C.). But refusing to bow the knee & worship Caesar as Lord presented a bit of a problem for Rome. It (to them) was rebellious & seditious, a crime that warranted capital punishment; enter unparalleled persecution.

So Jesus immediately identifies w/them. If there were ever anyone who suffered unjustly, for the sake of no wrong He himself had done personally; it was Jesus. But here is His word to them, "There is hope beyond this life, I am the 1<sup>st</sup> & the life; I became dead & came to life again." "Don't focus on the present death facing you, but on the eternal life awaiting you." Jesus says, "Look to Me, trust in Me for hope beyond this life."

There is a bigger picture than the things that pertain to this life; we concern ourselves w/the here & now (& understandably so it's all we know). God's main concern is the there & then; He's preparing us presently for what awaits us eternally.

He wants them to know most importantly (concerning where they were at presently) that death wasn't the end. "I was dead and came to life"; the encouragement is unto faithfulness. Jesus reminds them that He was faithful to them unto death & now they're being called upon to be faithful to Him unto death.

Really the basis of Christianity begins in these words of Christ, "I was dead & came to life." The death & resurrection of J.C. is the heartbeat of the gospel message. He was delivered up for our offenses & raised up for our justification (Rom 4:25). In Vs 9 we read...

### Vs 9

How easy it is in times of tribulation to feel as though God has maybe forgotten us. Jesus says, "I know; I know." He's quick to assure them that He knows exactly what's going on in their lives & how their faith in Him personally has cost them tremendously. **The word for "tribulation" here speaks of being crushed. Jesus is saying, "I know you're being crushed economically, you're being pressured & squeezed spiritually; I know you're being slandered and blasphemed viciously by those who claim to be God's people but are in reality of the synagogue of Satan."**

The word for poverty here speaks not of being down & out, it speaks of abject poverty, having nothing at all. Being a Christian not only cost them their jobs; but it also invited a pilfering & a plundering of any & everything they had.

**But Jesus wants them to know that though they may be the poorest; they are the purest among His churches. He says, "I know your poverty (materially) but you are rich spiritually." In contrast the church of Laodicea (3:17) lived in material prosperity but were poverty stricken spiritually. Believe me when I tell you that if you have a choice you'd much rather be in a poor/rich church than a rich/poor church.**

Now there are those that teach that true spirituality is demonstrated in material prosperity; Jesus takes issue w/that. There is nothing inherently spiritual about being rich. Having said that it's equally true that there's nothing inherently spiritual about being poor. Sometimes the poor struggle w/greed and covetousness way more than the rich. If you don't believe that I would say to you that you haven't been around many poor people.

**But the point here is that they have been subjected to poverty due to their commitment to Christ & Jesus is telling them that as such they are storing up for themselves treasures in heaven & they are (in truth) much more wealthy than what they could possibly perceive.**

The proverbs put it like this: *"There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; And one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches."* Proverbs 13:7 Jesus says, "You may be poor, but you have great riches."

Now when Jesus mentions those who say they are Jews & are not, what He's saying is that they may be Jews ethically, but they are not the people of God in reality. Perhaps you recall in John Ch 8 where Jesus had a run in w/the Pharisees who claimed to be right w/God on the basis of being Abe's descendants... But the Lord explained to them that being right w/God has nothing to do w/physical lineage but rather spiritual heritage; meaning that the true "Jew" (regardless of ethnicity) is the one who believes God by faith (like Abe). That's what makes you a child of God, not physical lineage.

They were trying to say that God was their Father because they were children of Abe. Jesus said, "If God were your Father you would love Me because I came forth from God & I do the will of God." He said, *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him."*<sup>2</sup>

So just because they were of Jewish ethnicity, the truth is they were being used of the enemy. They were of the "synagogue of Satan" and as such they served as a catalyst promoting persecution of the believers.

### Vs10

This is almost where we'd have expected Jesus to say, "But never fear I am here!" As though He were going to swoop in & save the day. But notice He doesn't promise to spare them, He doesn't say that He will save them from the persecution, as a matter of fact He says, "It's been bad, the worst is yet to come."

"You're experiencing tribulation personally, you've been subjected to abject poverty, yet you're about to suffer tremendously." He says, "Don't fear", literally, "stop being afraid". Sometimes we seem to think of the persecuted church as standing boldly in the face of their trials & tribulations. The truth is that just like you & me they feared, & they were taken to depths of fear that we know nothing about.

When you're in an underground church, you're not as excited about growth. You don't know if that new person is an informant, who will turn you in. Or if someone in your group will crack & tell the authorities where you're meeting.

<sup>2</sup> The New King James Version. 1982 (Jn 8:44). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It may not be yourself that you're worried for (though it may be) but you have a family to protect & provide for; it's a whole different ball game. Jesus is preparing them that they might be able to stand in the midst of their suffering.

Now; here we gain a bit of insight into the nature of spiritual warfare. The suffering would be brought on by Satan, but it would be limited by God. Trust me when I tell you that Satan wouldn't want this time to be limited to 10 days; but that's the parameters God placed on it.

Now there are those who want to establish different meanings behind the phrase "10 days". I'll spare you the various theories & simply say that it's either a literal 10 days or more probably that Jesus is saying that the time frame is limited & won't transgress the parameters that He's placed around it.

Understand that when prison is brought up in the context of the ancient world it wasn't used as a holding tank of hopeful rehabilitation as often is the case today. If you were placed in prison it wouldn't be (in most cases) for very long. You would be placed in prison only to await your trial at which time you would rarely be released but more than likely you would either be subjected to forced labor or put to death. Prison simply confined you so that your sentence could be carried out.

Regardless of what is meant by the 10 days the exhortation remains the same; "Be faithful unto death & I will give you the crown of life." "In losing your life for My sake, you'll be given eternal, everlasting life; the victors crown. Not a perishable crown, but an imperishable eternal reward." Jesus is wanting them to understand what Paul taught the Romans when he said, *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* Romans 8:18

God will never be a debtor to man. Jesus is assuring them that they will never get to heaven & say, "If I knew this was it I wouldn't have gone through all of that..." The glory will *by far* out way the affliction, the suffering & persecution.

God allows us to be tested; the question is will you be found faithful...or will you fall away? Will you resolve to be true to Him, or pull the ripcord & bail out? For faithfulness unto death...the crown of life.

**Vs 11**

Again these words weren't only for them at that time & on that day; they're for you & me as well. We can know that because...well... we have an ear; that qualifies the message as for me & as for you.

Here's the incentive; the comfort, the freedom from fear... "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." "Second death? You mean there's more than one?"

That's absolutely what I mean, it's what the word of God declares. "Well, what is the 'second death'?" Leave Rev Ch 2 & let's flash forward to over 1,000 yrs from now to **Revelation Ch 20** (Vs 11-15).

Right now there are countless millions (if not billions) of people (both righteous & unrighteous) who have partaken of the 1<sup>st</sup> death (that is they've died physically). It's something that outside of the rapture we will all partake of.

But there is coming a day whereby all who have died, both small & great will stand before the throne of God & be judged according to their works; & anyone's name not found written in the book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire which the bible calls "The second death." Here's the deal; as D.L. Moody used to say, "Born once, die twice. Born twice die once." What does that mean?

It means if you're only born physically you'll experience a natural death & a spiritual death being separated forever from God in outer darkness having been cast into the lake of fire. But if you're born physically & then born again spiritually you'll experience the natural death but the 2<sup>nd</sup> death has no power over you but you will abide eternally in the presence of the Lord.

The question that confronts you is: have you been born once... or twice? The second death need not have any power over you; give your life *to* & live your life *for* J.C. Be faithful unto death & so receive the crown of life.

Prayer Points:

God once again we come to You humbly & we thank You for Your Word. Lord Jesus even though many of us will never know what true persecution costs we want the resolve of heart to be faithful unto death. Help us not to be distracted by the cares & concerns of this life. Help us to stay true *to* You, that we might be used *by* You & we praise You for the hope that we have *in* You. May we lay hold of that for which You have laid hold of us & bring glory to Your name.

One day Jesus was talking to a man by the name of Nicodemus & Jesus said to him, “Most assuredly I say to you, unless one be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Apart from being born twice (once through natural means, once through supernatural means) you cannot see the kingdom of God. Begg a question doesn’t it? How can I be born again?

Jesus answered that question as well, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever would *believe upon Him* would never perish but have everlasting life.” How are we born again? Through faith, believing upon J.C. for new life, forgiveness of sin, and making us clean before God; right in His sight.

If you’ve not been “born again”; let me implore you, turn from your sin & trust in Jesus.