

Lessons for Today from the Church of Smyrna (Go To Meeting)

Roger Kendall—August 13, 2021

It's a pleasure to address you on a topic that I think that you will find interesting and provoking in some aspects as we look to the future of what's going to be happening in the world. And more specifically, what's going to be happening in the Church of God over the next few years or whatever timeframe that God has given to us to be here in terms of doing what we're doing in preaching the Gospel.

The book of Revelation teaches us a great deal about end-time prophecy. What we need to understand, so that we as God's people can be prepared spiritually—and physically and emotionally, as well—for those things that are soon to come to pass.

2-Timothy 3:1—*Paul says*: “Know this also, that in *the* last days perilous times shall come.”

As we enter into these end of days or end-time, we know that things are going to become more precarious, more dangerous, more perilous. We need to prepare and understand what we must be doing so that we can be in good standing with God the Father and Christ, and to be prepared for all the events that are going to happen.

Revelation 1:1: “*The* revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to show to His servants the things that *are* ordained to come to pass shortly; and He made *it* known, having sent *it* by His angel to His servant John who gave witness *to* the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, and all the things he saw. Blessed *is* the one who reads, and those who hear the words of this prophecy and who keep the things *that are* written therein...” (vs 1-3).

It's important that we know, understand—through God's Spirit—the things that are coming to pass, so that we can be spiritually prepared.

“...for the time *is* at hand. John to the seven churches that *are* in Asia: Grace and peace *be* to you from Him Who is, and Who was, and Who *is* to come; and from the seven spirits that are before His Throne” (vs 3-4).

Rev. 2-3—we find Christ's personal messages, letters, to each of the seven Churches of God in Asia.

- Ephesus
- Smyrna
- Pergamos
- Thyatira

- Sardis
- Philadelphia
- Laodicea

Written by the Apostle John in approximately 94-95 A.D.; pretty much toward the end of the Ephesian era of God's Church. These seven churches represent:

1. seven literal Churches of God that existed along a trade and postal route in Asia at the time John wrote the book of Revelation
2. a prophetic history of God's Church, represented by the seven eras down through time
3. shows the attitude and spiritual condition of the various church congregations of Christians at that time
4. all the spiritual attitude and condition that may exist at the end when Christ returns

All of these factors we've heard before, I just wanted to go over that in review.

Each of the letters that went to the separate seven churches also went to all of the other churches. This is expressed when Christ said, ‘***The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches!***’ (Rev. 2:11, 17, and at the end of all the letters that He sent to the churches).

Christ wants us to personally learn from these letters at it applies to us at this time. It's interesting to note that many of God's organizations—Churches of God—want to associate themselves with the Philadelphia Church Era. Why is that?

- 1) it's one of the churches that God gave no correction and call to repentance
- 2) people who read the letter to Philadelphia may feel that they have more safety and will be protected from the coming Tribulation that will come upon the earth

Let's read about the Church of Philadelphia:

Revelation 3:7: “And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, write: ‘These things says the Holy One, the One Who *is* true; the One Who has the key of David, Who opens and no one shuts, and Who shuts and no one opens. I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, and no one has the power to shut it because you have a little strength, and have kept My Word, and have not denied My name. Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who proclaim themselves to be

Jews and are not, but do lie. Behold, I will cause them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the Word of My patience, I also will keep you from the time of temptation, which *is* about to come upon the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth” (vs 7-10).

One other church that didn’t receive any rebuke or correction from Christ was Smyrna, yet, this is a church that no one wants to belong to today. Why is that? *Because Smyrna is known as the suffering and martyred church!*

No one wants to go through the ordeals, tribulations and trials that that Church experienced. Let’s see what Christ wrote about this church of Smyrna:

Revelation 2:8: “And to the angel of the Church of *the* Smyrneans write: These things says the First and the Last, Who was dead but is alive. ‘I know your works and tribulation and poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy of those who declare themselves to be Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast *some* of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life. The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death” (vs 8-11).

In this very short letter to the Church at Smyrna Christ gave us an era of time when there will be great trial and persecution upon the people of God.

As we see in this particular letter to Smyrna that it’s almost the opposite of the spiritual condition of the Laodicean Church, which was the last of the seven churches. Their members said, ‘We are rich and increased with goods, physically rich,’ but spiritually poor. On the other hand, the Church at Smyrna was *spiritually* rich.

The Laodiceans said, ‘Look how much God is blessing us, and we have need of nothing.’ In contrast to the Laodiceans who are lukewarm, those at Smyrna were zealous for God and did not deny their faith. They stood strong and did not deny their commitment and love for God and Jesus Christ.

They were deprived of their land, their goods and even of their very lives. The Church of Smyrna is pictured as being totally faithful to their calling as true servants of Jesus Christ, and they’re also seen as a persecuted and martyred church. They faced severe tribulation for over 200 years. They were physically poor, but spiritually rich. They were chased by Satan and cast into prison for 10 days.

We can see that this church period represented a very troubling and perilous and dangerous time for God’s people. So, to the faithful brethren of Smyrna, Christ wrote of the trials that they would face. But He also gave them encouragement so that they might ‘hold fast’ and endure the persecution that was to come upon them. Rev. 6—the fifth seal—a time of severe tribulation upon the Church that will come in the future.

We will examine this very short letter to the Church of Smyrna, and from this study I hope that we can learn many spiritual lessons that we can apply today to help us to prepare and endure the increasing trials and persecution that may come, and will come, upon the Church as we see time progressing.

Let’s get some historical background regarding Smyrna and the environment in which the Church of Smyrna was raised up. This will help us to understand a little bit more what Christ was saying about this particular period of God’s Church.

The time period for this era of God’s Church is to cover the years of approximately 100-313_{A.D.} a time period of a little over 200 years. It was a time of severe Roman and Jewish persecution against the Church.

Smyrna as a city was located about 40 miles north of Ephesus off the Aegean coast. It was a major commercial and trade center of the region. As a city it had a strong reputation—it was a pagan city—for supporting the pagan gods and the Roman emperors as the Roman Empire was over that region. They were highly in favor and looked upon by the Romans authorities as being a very faithful city.

Smyrna had a very large Jewish community and the region probably received the Truth of the Gospel through the Apostle John or through the offshoot of Paul’s teaching in Ephesus. Again, the Gospel, as we know, was spread throughout all of Asia in a very effective way.

Acts 19:9: “But when some were hardened and refused to believe, speaking evil of the way before the multitude, he departed from them *and* separated the disciples; *and* he disputed *these things* daily in the school of a certain Tyrannus. And this took place for two years, so that all those who inhabited Asia heard the message of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (vs 9-10).

It basically points out that the Gospel went out to all the cities of Asia.

Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John, and Polycarp was born in 69_{A.D.} and personally taught by John and became bishop of Smyrna

following John's death in approximately 96 A.D. Polycarp traveled to Rome, defended the faith and the keeping of the Passover against heretics who wanted to do away with the keeping of the Passover, etc.

Speaking of the Smyrna Church, Christ said, Revelation 2:9: "I know your works..."—which means that He knew how they were living and their love, worship and devotion to God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Christ gave them no rebuke or correction as He did to five other Churches in the circuit. God is an all-knowing God, and He knows the hearts of men. Christ recognized their good works, which God ordained that all true Christians should follow and walk in.

In other words, there were good works that the Apostle Paul and others spoke about and taught. The good works that people should live by and do as they worship God.

Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this *especially* is not of your own selves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, being created in Christ Jesus unto *the* good works that God ordained beforehand in order that we might walk in them" (vs 8-10).

So, He knew the *good works* of the Church of Smyrna. What are the good works of God:

- loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength and being
- love your neighbor as yourself, which is the great commandment in the Law
- being faithful to keep the commandments, statutes and judgments of God
- remember the Sabbath Day, keep it Holy
- keep the Passover and the Holy Days
- to produce the fruits of God's Holy Spirit (Gal. 5)
- love and serve the brethren
- keep God's Word faithfully
- walk in newness of life and the way of Jesus Christ

These are some of the elements that we can look at as being the good works of God that He has ordained that we walk in!

1-John 2:3: "And by this *standard* we know that we know Him: if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I know Him' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the Truth is not in him. On the other hand, *if* anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is being perfected..." (v 3-5). *The works of God produces*

perfection in love!

"...By this *means* we know that we are in Him. Anyone who claims to dwell in Him is obligating himself also to walk even as He Himself walked" (vs 5-6).

We can know from this very short letter and from the way that Christ presented it, that the brethren in Smyrna were very faithful in keeping the ways of God, and that they were walking in the way of Jesus Christ. They were faithful to do the good works of God.

Revelation 2:9—to the Church of Smyrna: "I know your works and tribulation and poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy of those who declare themselves to be Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan."

It's clear that the brethren, of the Church of Smyrna, was not physically well off. They were deprived, and many times their properties were taken from them and they were accosted in so many different ways.

They were *rich spiritually*, which means that they were truly looking to God and they were close to God and faithful.

- they *knew* God
- they *knew* His Word
- they *had* His Holy Spirit
- they *were in covenant* with God the Father and Jesus Christ
- they *believe in the promise of salvation* through Jesus Christ
- they *valued their future* in the Kingdom of God greater than their short physical experience on earth.

They knew that their personal relationship and faithful worship of God were vastly more important than their physical possessions or even their lives!

The brethren were accounted to be rich in the *good works of God!* They were content with what God provided for them, even then it was not an abundant life physically. ***We, too, should have the same attitude!***

Let's read more about being content with what God provides and not being caught up and seeking the riches of this world.

1-Timothy 6:6: "But Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, *and it is* evident that neither do we have the power to carry anything out *of the world*. But having food and clothing, we should be satisfied with these" (vs 6-8).

In the Epistle to the Philippians said that *in*

whatever state he found himself, he was content!
He went through some very difficult and hard times, as well.

Verse 17: “Charge those who are rich in this present age **not to be high-minded, nor to put their hope in the uncertainty of riches...**”

Oh, is that true! Riches can come, and riches can go! The Stock Market can go up and the Stock Market can go down very quickly.

“...**but to put their hope in the living God,** Who abundantly gives us all things **for our enjoyment; to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous in giving, to be ready to share;** treasuring up for themselves a good foundation for the future, **so that they may lay hold on eternal life** (vs 17-19).

We need to seek the unsearchable riches of the Gospel of Christ, which Paul mentioned in:

Ephesians 3:8 “...that I might preach the Gospel among the Gentiles—**even the unsearchable riches of Christ.**”

So, the Gospel message, the truth of the Gospel were in their lives **the true riches of Christ!**

Matt. 6—here we see the true treasures that we should be gathering in.

Matthew 6:19: “Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and rust spoil, and where thieves break through and steal; **but store up treasures for yourselves in heaven,** where neither moth nor rust spoils, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. **For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also**” (vs 19-21).

The treasures here we’re talking about are spiritual treasures. We’re not talking the physical silver and gold, but the *spiritual treasures!* How do you store treasures in heaven? *Well, true riches come from God to the person to be ultimately stored in heaven for eternal use!*

We’re talking about developing the Holy righteous character, which will carry over from that person who loves God and is serving God and growing in the Spirit. That will carry over. So, these represent the true riches of God that are being stored in heaven. That’s where our desire and heart is.

It’s not wrong to have wealth, money, extra resources, but the lesson for us is to never set your heart on riches or physical goods, because they are, indeed, passing away!

When a person is poorest physically, many times this is an opportunity where they will be the richest spiritually.

Now let us examine the other element that Christ said that He knew of Smyrna. He knew of their tribulation or what they were to experience. This was written before the Smyrna Era began.

The tribulation of the Church of God during the Smyrna Era was very extreme due to the persecution brought upon it by the Roman authorities, by the Roman emperors. Anyone who would resist or refuse to swear allegiance to the Roman emperor or their pagan gods could be arrested, imprisoned or even put to death.

*We see that Christ makes a reference in Revelation 2:9: “...and the blasphemy of those who declare themselves to be Jews... [who did the evil work of Satan against true Christians] ...**and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**”*

The Jewish religion had paganized their religion. They no longer worshipped the true God, they worshipped *their father, Satan the devil!*

John 8:44: “You are of *your* father the devil...”

History records that the Jewish community in Smyrna organized themselves with other pagan groups in their very hostile persecution against the true Christians.

The Jewish rulers stirred up trouble against all who would profess their faith and believe in Jesus Christ and collaborated with the Roman authorities even in the persecution of the saints.

We can recall the trials and tribulations that Paul had with the Jews who wanted to track him down and kill him. They also tried to entice the Roman authorities to get involved with that, as well. So, you can see that they were working hand in hand with the Roman authorities to bring persecution upon the true saints of God.

It’s interesting to note that the Jews were not required to make sacrifices and swear allegiance to the Roman emperors as others were force to do. I don’t know why this was the case, and I’m not sure exactly what that means, but they were not required to make those sacrifices. They had it ‘in’ with the Roman authorities in some respect.

The religious Jews claim to be ‘the seed of Abraham,’ which they were physically, *but spiritually they were not! **They were doing the work of Satan the devil, and were under his power and control!***

Romans 2:28: “For **he is not a Jew who is one outwardly,** neither *is* that circumcision which *is* external in *the* flesh; rather, **he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart,** in *the* spirit *and* not in *the* letter; whose praise *is* not from

men but from God” (vs 28-29).

As we read this, it describes very closely what a true disciple and follower of Jesus Christ would be; who is in covenant with God through baptism and this does not describe the Jews who persecuted the Christians. So, we realize that this was a spiritual Jew; one who really was worshipping God in Spirit and in Truth.

There’s much evidence that the Jews spoke out against and participated in the very martyrdom of Polycarp in 155_{A.D.} The authorities tried to force him to swear allegiance to the Roman emperor, to reproach Christ and to say, ‘Caesar is lord.’

If he would do so, he would be set free. He refused to do so and instead gave testimony for his love, dedication and faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

In *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* he is reported to have said:

Article: *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*
{<http://www.crossroad.to/Persecution/polycarp.htm>}

“Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?”

He was then bound and burned at the stake!

In Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, the author points out that there were ten specific times of severe persecution against Christians during the Ephesian and Smyrna eras of God’s Church carried out by the various Roman authorities and emperors.

The first period of persecution was carried out under Emperor Nero, beginning the year 67_{A.D.} when an edict that banned the practiced Christianity, that it was illegal and anyone who practice Christianity could face persecution or be slain under this edict.

This persecution was general throughout the empire resulting in the martyrdom of most of the apostles, including Peter and Paul. The only apostle to escape martyrdom in the first century was John, who was exiled to the Isle of Patmos where he wrote the book of Revelation.

They did try to execute John by putting him into a vat of boiling oil, but God saved him, spared him, and raised him out of there. He was saved so he could be used by God and to write the book of Revelation.

The edicts issued by the Roman emperors not only banned Christianity, but it also required that all citizens of the empire to take a pledge of loyalty to the emperor and make sacrifices to their pagan gods. If anyone refused to do this or declared

themselves to be a Christian; imprisonment, torture, death was pronounced against them.

As Foxe reports in his book, many hundreds of thousands, if not millions were led to their death in martyrdom for their faithfulness. The numbers is unlimited and really unknown.

The tenth persecution—in this period of 220 years—was the most severe. It began in the year 303_{A.D.} under the wicked Emperor Diocletian. It lasted ten years to 313_{A.D.} So, there were ten years. This was the reference that Christ made when He said that they would have tribulation ten days. Noting that in Biblical prophecy a day is equal to one year. This gives you some background of the persecution, trials and tribulations that the Smyrna era underwent.

Christ told the brethren in Smyrna not to fear what was to come upon them, but to be courageous and be bold in the face of persecution. Many would face prison, scourging, torture and death by crucifixion, being covered in tar and burned or being fed to wild animals in the arena. The different methods of execution was just incredible.

The brethren in Smyrna knew that God would never forsake them, but would be with them and give them the strength and courage even in the face of death. They believe and trusted and had faith in God and Christ and God would never leave or forsake them in their time of trial.

Hebrews 13:5: “...for He has said, ‘In no way will I ever leave you; no—I will never forsake you in any way.’ So then, let us boldly say, ‘*The Lord is my Helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*’” (vs 5-6).

Let’s consider the example of Stephen, the first Christian to be martyred. The Jewish authorities became enraged after Stephen gave them a strong rebuke for their sins and rejection of Jesus Christ.

Acts 7:51—*Stephen speaking*: “O stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so also *do* you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, of Whom you have become the betrayers and murderers; who received the Law by *the* disposition of angels, but have not kept *it*” (vs 51-53).

Verse 54: “And when they... [the Jews] ...heard these things, they were cut to their hearts, and they gnashed their teeth at him. But he [Stephen], being filled with *the* Holy Spirit, looked intently into heaven *and* saw *the* glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

Verse 56: “And he [Stephen] said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right *hand* of God.’ Then they cried out with a loud voice, *and* stopped their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord, and cast *him* out of the city *and* stoned *him*....” (vs 56-58).

It’s quite apparent that God gave Stephen last minute strength, courage and inspiration to endure to the end.

Would not God give the same support, strength, encouragement and help now and in the future to anyone who is faithful to Him? Who faces persecution and even martyrdom? *I think the answer is YES!* I do truly believe that Christ will do that, for *‘He is the same yesterday, today and forever.’*

It’s reported by Foxe that when the persecuted brethren faced death, they did it with absolute faith, trust and confidence in God. Having great peace and courage, praising God with Psalms and prayers of thanksgiving that they were worthy to suffer for Christ.

Indeed a tremendous attitude of faith and trust in God, even the loss of one’s life.

Christ gave great encouragement to the Church of Smyrna, and He knew the persecution that they were going to go through, But He also gave them great support and encouragement.

Revelation 2:10: “...Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.”

He assured them that if they would endure to the end they would be in the first resurrection and have eternal life in the Kingdom of God. They would not be hurt by the second death in the Lake of Fire, which God will use to destroy all the wicked who hate Him, and choose the way of Satan the devil.

Christ personally understood the suffering and tribulation that the Church of Smyrna was to go through. He Himself experienced the worst kind of pain, suffering persecution and a horrific death on the cross. Though He died, He was raised from the dead by the Father to be their High Priest—and our High Priest—ready to intervene and come to their help, aid and comfort.

Hebrews 2:14: “Therefore, since the children are partakers of flesh and blood, in like manner He [Christ] also took part in the same, in order that through death He might annul him who has the power of death—that is, the devil; and *that* He might deliver those who were subject to bondage all through their lives by *their* fear of death. For surely, He is not taking upon Himself to help *the* angels; but He is taking upon Himself to help *the*

seed of Abraham. For this reason, it was obligatory for *Him* to be made like *His* brethren in everything that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest *in* things pertaining to God, in order to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because He Himself has suffered, having been tempted *in like manner*, He is able to help those who are being tempted” (vs 14-18).

The struggle and battle that all Christians face, including those in Smyrna is not against, but it is against the ruler of this world: Satan the devil! It’s a spiritual battle and spiritual warfare.

1-John 4:4: “You are of God, little children... [you belong to God, you are His saints] ...and have overcome them because greater is He Who *is* in you than the one who *is* in the world.”

The faithful will overcome and have victory over Satan by the power of God, through their belief and trust in their Savior God, Jesus Christ. Here it was.

The Roman persecution against Christians generally ended in about 313_{A.D.} at the end of the Smyrna era with the Edict of Milan, when the Emperor Constantine supposedly converted to Christianity. And interesting enough made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire; *an incredible thing that happened!*

It ended the Roman persecution, but we do know that the persecution of the Church of God continued on down through the time from the Jews and other pagan religions that attacked Truth of the true God!

There are many spiritual lessons that we can learn and take from the Church of Smyrna. We’re going to review some of those and hopefully that we can prepare going forward. That we can stand ready to face the trials and tribulations that will come upon the Church in the future.

Christ knew their works and their sufferings. He knows all of the saints in a close, personal way.

John 10:14—*Christ says*: “I am the good Shepherd, and I know those who *are* Mine, and am known of those who *are* Mine. Just as the Father knows Me, I also know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep” (vs 14-15).

God loves us as His begotten children, and He is now actively shaping, preparing and molding us for the future. He’s building in us His righteousness and His Truth. He’s a heart-knowing God. Nothing is hid from Him. God knows of the struggles, hardships and trials that we suffer and go through. Jesus Christ as our High Priest is ready to support us and give us help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:12: “For the Word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of both soul and spirit, *and* of both *the* joints and *the* marrow, and *is* able to discern *the* thoughts and intents of *the* heart.... [God knows everything] ...And there is not a created thing that is not manifest in His sight; but all things *are* naked and laid bare before the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account. Having, therefore, a great High Priest, *Who* has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, we should hold fast the confession *of our faith*. **For we do not have a High Priest Who cannot empathize with our weaknesses**, but *One Who* was tempted in all things according to *the* likeness of *our own temptations*; yet, *He was* without sin. Therefore, we should come with boldness to the Throne of Grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (vs 12-16).

God the Father and Jesus Christ knows our works! He knows:

- whether they are good or bad/evil
- whether they are righteous or sinful

2-Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...” *We will be judged according to our works*:

- growing in the mind of Christ
- truly developing the character of God
- developing the fruits of God’s Holy Spirit
- loving Him
- doing God’s will
- showing love toward one another, the brethren

We need to be aware of that and continue to strive to grow closer to God and become more like He is.

There are good works that we do, but they do not earn us salvation. They are an outer manifestation that we growing in the mind of Christ and that we are growing in the character of God. Our works show us:

- the way that we live
- the way that we conduct ourselves
- whether we are or not a true disciple of Jesus Christ
- whether or not we are growing in conversion

James 2:14: “My brethren, what good *does* it do, if anyone says *that he* has faith, and does not have works? Is faith able to save him? Now then, if there be a brother or sister who is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; be warmed and be filled,’ and does not

give to them the things necessary for the body, what good is it? In the same way also, faith, if it does not have works, is dead, by itself. But someone is going to say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ *My answer is*: You prove your faith to me through your works, and I will prove my faith to you through my works” (vs 14-18).

Our works proves whether or not we are living in the way of God. We shall be rewarded accordingly, as Christ tells us:

Revelation 22:12: “And behold, I am coming quickly; and My reward is with Me, to render to each one according as his work shall be.”

A reward is not something that is part of salvation, this is something that a person earns or is rewarded because of the way that they have conducted and lived their lives. Good works are reflected in the righteousness and in the loving attitude of the sheep that Christ discusses in Matt. 25, who are faithful in serving those who are in need.

Mathew 25:33: “And He shall set the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at *His* left. Then shall the King say to those at His right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from *the* foundation *of the* world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; *I was* naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me”” (vs 33-36).

Verse 37: “Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and fed *You*? Or thirsty, and gave *You* a drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and took *You* in? Or naked, and clothed *You*? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and came to *You*?’” (vs 37-39).

Verse 40: “And answering, the King [Christ] shall say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you have done *it* to one of the least *of* these My brethren, you have done *it* to Me.’”

We need to follow this example from the heart and the spirit through action.

Our current suffering and trials, hardship in this present world, is the result of many factors. We must bear our cross for Christ, and we must carry it by the strength and endurance that comes through the Holy Spirit.

Let’s review why we as Christians do suffer trials, difficulties and hardship in this present life.

Sometimes we wonder. James says to ‘rejoice in your trials.’ Yet:

- Why is that?
- Why do we suffer trials as God’s people?

because:

1. We live in Satan’s imperfect, corrupt and evil world. We’re not part of the world, but we live in the world, and experience the consequences of sin that’s in the world by those people who living by Satan’s way.
2. Suffering trials and hardship is a way that God uses to test our faith, conviction, prove our trust and confidence in Him.

1-Peter 1:6: “In this you yourselves greatly rejoice; though for the present, if it is necessary, you are in distress for a little while by various trials, in order that the proving of your faith, which is much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is being tested by fire, may be found unto praise and honor and glory at *the* revelation of Jesus Christ; Whom, not having seen, you love; in Whom, *though* at the present time you do not see Him, you believe, *and* rejoice with unspeakable joy, and filled with glory; *and are* receiving the end of your faith—even *the* salvation of *your* lives” (vs 6-9).

3. Trials test our commitment to keep seeking the Kingdom of God under all conditions! Whether good or bad!

Suffering trials keep us close to God and we realize that we are of little strength of and by ourselves. We need to trust and look to God to really be able to accomplish anything that’s good.

We are to rejoice in our trials and suffering, because with the help of the Holy Spirit we can grow in the very character and mind of Jesus Christ and turn to God for help.

Trials and afflictions help us to overcome pride and grow in humility. Suffering can help us to be perfected in the Spirit as we learn to trust God even in the toughest of times. Peter brings this out.

1-Peter 5:6^[transcriber’s correction]: “Be humbled, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you in *due* time; casting all your cares upon Him, **because He cares for you**.... [He loves us dearly] ...Be sober! Be vigilant! For your adversary *the* devil is prowling about as a roaring lion, seeking anyone he may devour. Whom resist, steadfast in the faith, knowing *that* the same afflictions are being fulfilled among your brethren who *are* in *the* world. Now, may the God of all grace, Who has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, **after you have suffered a little while, Himself perfect you, establish, strengthen, and**

settle you. To Him *be* the glory and the power into the ages of eternity. Amen” (vs 6-11).

Here we can see the value of trials and suffering, because it truly develops into some very useful things, including the character of God.

4. God also allows suffering and trials to correct us for unrepentant sin, and when we’ve gone astray from keeping His Word.

God allows us to suffer so that He can correct us and help us to go on the straight and narrow path!

Hebrews 12:7: “If you endure chastening, God is dealing with you as a *Father* with *His* sons. For who is the son whom *the* Father does not chasten? But if you are without chastisement, of which all are partakers, then you are bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had our fleshly fathers who chastened *us*, and we respected *them*; should we not all the more *willingly* be subject to the Father of spirits, and live *forever*? For in the first case, they chastened *us* for a few days in whatever way seemed good to them; but in the second case, He... [God the Father] ...*chastens us* for *our own* benefit that we may be partakers of His Holiness. Now truly, no chastisement for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yields *the* peaceable fruits of righteousness to those who have been exercised by it” (vs 7-11).

Another key lesson that the Church of Smyrna and teach us is that we must be prepared to suffer persecution and martyrdom for Christ as we approach the end of the age.

At the present time in American, and most of the Christian world, we’re not facing the kind of persecution that the Church at Smyrna was enduring. But this is not the case in certain Muslim countries where Christians are being sought and killed for their faith. So, we know that this is clearly going on, but in a limited way.

The Apostle Paul reminded us that we must go through much tribulation in order to attain to the Kingdom of God.

Acts 14:22: “*Where* they established the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *declaring* that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God.”

Let’s look at the future time of martyrdom that Christ told John that the Church would suffer in the Great Tribulation, much like the Smyrna Church suffered. There will be a time when it will be illegal to confess the name of Jesus Christ and the Bible will be burned. We find this situation in the fifth seal:

Revelation 6:9: “And when He opened the

fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony that they held; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, Holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ And white robes were given to each of them; and they were told that they should rest a short time, yet, until *it* be fulfilled *that* both their fellow servants and their brethren also would be killed, just as they had been” (vs 9-11).

It’s interesting to note that in Rev. 12 it shows that the Tribulation is coming when Satan is cast down, and the mark of the beast is instituted:

Revelation 12:13: “And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who had brought forth the man-*Child*. And two wings of a great eagle were given to the woman, so that she might fly to her place in the wilderness, where she is nourished *for* a time, and times, and half a time, from *the* face of the **serpent**” (vs 13-14)—*Satan the devil!*

It is true that a remnant of God’s Church will be taken to a place of safety during the Great Tribulation. This is to fulfill what Christ said in Matt. 16, that the grave would not prevail against the Church of God. But the rest—even the majority—would be hunted down and murdered. This will be after the mark of the beast will be put into force:

Revelation 13:6: “And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. And he was given *power* to make war against the saints, and to overcome them...” (vs 6-7).

Here we see that power will be given to the Beast by Satan the devil and allowed by God to overcome the saints.

“...and he was given authority over every tribe and language and nation. And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from *the* foundation of *the* world” (vs 7-8).

Verse 15: “And he... [the false prophet] ...was given power to give life to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast also could speak; and he causes everyone who will not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, to receive a mark in their right hands, or in their foreheads so that no one may have the ability to buy and sell unless he has the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (vs 15-17).

It is interesting to know that the execution of

the saints appears to be by beheading; the mode of execution of the saints is by guillotine!

Revelation 20:4: “And I saw thrones; and they that sat upon them, and judgment was given to them; and *I saw* the souls of those **who had been beheaded** for the testimony of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and those who did not worship the beast or his image, and did not receive the mark in their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

Matthew 24:13: “But the one who endures to *the* end, that one shall be saved.”

There’s going to be great reward for those who prevail as they will rule under Christ as kings and priest in the Kingdom of God. In Rev. 12:11 we can see that those who face martyrdom can overcome and can achieve eternal life.

Revelation 12:11: “But they overcame him through the blood of the Lamb, and through the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto death.”

We see that through our covenant with God, baptism and receiving His Spirit, keeping the Passover and through the words of His testimony, we live according the words of His testimony and they were willing to give up their lives in conviction of their faith.

Mathew 10:37^[transcriber’s correction]: “The one who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and the one who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And the one who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. The one who has found his life shall lose it; and the one who has lost his life for My sake shall find it” (vs 37-39).

We know that in the end, God will require that we do give testimony or witness our faith in Christ, as did Polycarp.

Matthew 10:17: “But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall also be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a witness to them and to the Gentiles. Now, when they deliver you up, do not be anxious *about* how or what you should speak; for in that hour it shall be given to you what you shall speak. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you. Then brother will deliver up brother to death; and *the* father, the child; and children will rise up against *their* parents and *have* them put to death. And you shall be hated by all for My name’s sake; but the one who endures to *the* end, that one shall be saved” (vs 17-22)—*and be save and shall receive eternal life and be part of the Family God*

forever!

In conclusion, I don't know our personal circumstances, whether will live through or pass away before the final martyrdom of the saints shall occur. But in any case, we must prepare now, we must emotionally and spiritually prepare now for that possible outcome.

Again, we need to be truly fixed in our mind that we will never forsake God the Father and Jesus Christ! But that we will stand firm and be a witness for Them when the time comes. We must be ready to lay down our lives without any reservation or hesitation, knowing that if we deny Christ, He will deny us before the Father.

Things we need to consider as we look to the future and this is what the book of Revelation reveals: Keep your focus on the Kingdom of God and God's promises to protect and preserve us, and to keep us even to the end. Stay close to God in prayer and study. **He will never fail you!**

Colossians 3:1: "Therefore, if you have been raised together with Christ, **seek the things that are above**, where Christ is sitting at *the* right hand of God. **Set your affection**... [love and devotion] **...on the things that are above**, and not on the things that are on the earth. For you have **died**... [through baptism] ...and **your life has been hid together with Christ in God**. When Christ, *Who is* our life, is manifested, then you also shall be manifested with Him in glory" (vs 1-4).

That is our future. That is something that we can look forward to. That is an exciting Scripture that we can read and truly have faith and trust in. The trial of suffering will be short compared to the glory that we will receive in the Kingdom.

God will give us the strength and the support that we need to endure whatever Satan and this world can throw at us. God will be there and give us the support and strength we need just as He gave to Stephen in the first century.

- be strong in prayer
- be strong conviction of faith
- know that we are never alone

God is with us always and will always be at our side!

Romans 8:31: "What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? He Who did not spare even His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not also grant us all things together with Him?" (vs 31-32).

Not just a few things, but all thing through Christ!

Verse 33: "Who shall bring an accusation against *the* elect of God? God *is the One* Who justifies. Who *is* the one that condemns? *It is* Christ Who died, but rather, Who is raised again, Who is even *now* at *the* right hand of God, *and* Who is also making intercession for us. What shall separate us from the love of Christ? **Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?**" (vs 33-35)—*martyrdom!*

Verse 36: "Accordingly, it is written, 'For Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are reckoned as sheep for *the* slaughter.' **But 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**" (vs 36-39).

Scriptural References:

- 1) 2 Timothy 3:1
- 2) Revelation 1:1-4
- 3) Revelation 3:7-10
- 4) Revelation 2:8-11
- 5) Acts 19:9-10
- 6) Revelation 2:9
- 7) Ephesians 2:8-10
- 8) 1 John 2:3-6
- 9) Revelation 2:9
- 10) 1 Timothy 6:6-8, 17-19
- 11) Ephesians 3:8
- 12) Matthew 6:19-21
- 13) Revelation 2:9
- 14) John 8:44
- 15) Romans 2:28-29
- 16) Hebrews 13:5-6
- 17) Acts 7:51-58
- 18) Revelation 2:10
- 19) Hebrews 2:14-18
- 20) 1 John 4:4
- 21) John 10:14-15
- 22) Hebrews 14:12
- 23) 2 Corinthians 5:10
- 24) James 2:14-18
- 25) Revelation 22:12
- 26) Matthew 25:33-40
- 27) 1 Peter 1:6-9
- 28) 1 Peter 5:6-11
- 29) Hebrews 12:7-11
- 30) Acts 14:22
- 31) Revelation 6:9-11
- 32) Revelation 12:13-14
- 33) Revelation 13:6-8, 15-17
- 34) Revelation 20:4

- 35) Matthew 24:13
- 36) Revelation 12:11
- 37) Matthew 10:37-39, 17-22
- 38) Colossians 3:1-4
- 39) Romans 8:31-39

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Revelation 2:11, 17; 6
- Galatians 5
- Matthew 16

Also referenced:

- Book: *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* by John Foxe
- Article: The Martyrdom of Polycarp
{<http://www.crossroad.to/Persecution/polycarp.htm>}

RK:bo
Transcribed: 11/14/21

Copyright 2021—All rights reserved. Except for brief excerpts for review purposes, no part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means without the written permission of the copyright owner. This includes electronic and mechanical photocopying or recording, as well as the use of information storage and retrieval systems.