

The Church of Smyrna

by Brent Williamson

This sermon focuses on the church of Smyrna and their unwavering faith amidst persecution and suffering. It highlights the importance of remaining faithful to God even in the face of death, drawing inspiration from the Smyrna church's example of enduring hardships with joy and trust in Jesus. The message challenges listeners to have a deep revelation of God's presence and grace, to be willing to suffer for Christ, and to live out their faith boldly without complaint or compromise.

Scripture: Revelation 2:9, Revelation 2:10, Matthew 16:24, 1 Peter 4:13, Philippians 3:8

Topics: "Faithfulness in Persecution", "Enduring Hardships with Joy"

Description

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Transcript

I know about your suffering and your poverty, but you are rich. I know the slander of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they really aren't because there's a synagogue of Satan.

Don't be afraid, verse 10, of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison and put you to the test. You will be persecuted for 10 days.

Remain faithful even when facing death, and I will give you the crown of life, verse 11. Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be hurt by the second death.

Lord, we thank you for being here with us today. It is a privilege and an honor just to experience the presence of God. We thank you for the worship, Father.

I pray that you would be, you were adored and revered. Father, now as we break forth the bread of life, I pray again that you would be adored and revered through the Word. Father, I pray that no one would hear my message or my sermon would be from the Holy Spirit wrought from above.

And Father, I pray that you would truly speak to our hearts and help me to speak this word faithfully. I ask as always, Father, you keep me behind the cross, and I pray you would make this message truly a tragedy to the devil and that the heavens would be opened upon this hour and this time that we can hear the voice of God. As many, Father, today know the Word, but it's time that we know the voice of God through the Word and help us to hear your voice this morning in Jesus' name.

And the church said Amen. So we have just to be boring, kind of be boring just for a minute, just to give you some history lesson so I can, I got to go down. It's like a plane going down the road.

You got to say some things that get off the runway. But as Pastor Mark preached on the book of the church on Ephesus last week, the city of Smyrna was 35 miles north of Ephesus in Turkey. Ephesus obviously is 35 miles south of Smyrna.

Smyrna is still there today in Turkey. Now it is called Ismar. And it's actually the third largest city in Turkey today of approximately 500,000 people.

Back here as we read in the scripture, Smyrna was approximately, the historians say it was approximately 100,000 people in the city. And it was and it still is a wealthy city. It was a very wealthy city, very prosperous city.

It was a very beautiful scenery where they had it, near a sea. And they had auditoriums and beautiful statutes and pillars. I mean, it was just, I looked up through some history books and it was just a beautiful place.

As a matter of fact, back in the day, even back then, they called it the ornament of Asia. Just a beautiful place by sight. And Jesus in verse 8 describes, and he's always describing in each church in a different way.

He tells himself to each church in a different way, in a peculiar way, but in a different way. Something I believe and expresses to them, so something how they're going to understand, he's addressing it to them anyway. Because he says there at the beginning of the letter that he was dead and alive.

And I think that expresses two things. I mean, we can have some debates on what it really expresses, but first and obvious that when he says, hey guys, to the church in Smyrna, I am the first and the last. I am he that you're suffering for.

I am the one that was resurrected from the dead. I am the one that you're doing this for. So it's like a confirmation to them immediately.

Because we know a lot of times, mainly in the scriptures, when they wrote letters, they signed their name at the beginning, not the end like we do, obviously. So I am the one, he says, that was dead and alive forevermore. And it also expresses in that fact that, hey, I understand that you're going to be facing some death yourself, but look at me.

I'm alive forevermore. In the same context, some of you may be a martyr, but sometime here in the near future, you're going to be alive with me. Expresses the second thing I see in scripture.

It expresses that in 600 BC, that Smyrna was actually destroyed. The entire city was destroyed. It was left desolate.

It was a desert place in 600 BC. No one lived there any further than after that. And then to about 200 BC, then they came back into the city and began to rebuild it.

So here, Jesus says, knowing that they came from the dead to alive again in the city. Again, he says, hey, I'm alive and I'm dead. Now I'm alive.

Again, expressing the same thing that the city went through themselves. They were dead and now they're alive. And he says, I understand in verse nine.

I understand what you're going through, but you have to remember it's for me. It's for me. Jesus has no rebuke.

There's only two churches that really has no condemnation or rebuke from Jesus. One was Philadelphia, which we'll be hitting on that later on. I'm not even sure who's preaching on that.

Yeah, I'm preaching. Okay. Says what I know.

So there's two churches and Smyrna was one of them. There's no rebuke whatsoever. The other five had rebuke and condemnation that Jesus was against them.

But you know, as I was reading it this week, the thought came to my mind. I said, you know, we always think about how there's no rebuke to the church of Smyrna. But when you read the persecution of what they went through, the suffering they went through, there is a rebuke though.

To those that are comfortable and luxurious, comfortable in their Christian walk with God, there was a rebuke to them that read it. There is. The city was utterly filled with idols.

Back then, the historians reported full of Greek gods, full of pagan worship. And that was the central theme of it all back then. I mean, Smyrna was just wicked.

Again, just full of wicked idols. And there was a big pack of Jews, a large accompaniment of Jews living there back then as well. But it was a very prosperous city overall, very prosperous.

Christianity was very despised. Why was that? Because simply because their belief of Christians, our belief as a Christian, idol that they have. So they don't want that around.

They don't want to attend commandments. And they knew the law of God, obviously, most of them did back then, especially the Jews. But they were hated.

So Jesus wrote them. I honestly believe Jesus wrote, you know, we can ask the question, why did Jesus write them? Because I really believe he actually wrote them to encourage them. Because when you read it, which we just read, you would think immediately to yourself, there's not much encouragement right here.

I mean, he doesn't say, good job, guys, keep it up. You're doing it for me. I mean, there was really no pat on the back, per se, as we read that text.

But I really believe he wrote it. And I mean, because when I see this, and how he wrote it, I'm alive and I'm dead forevermore. I'm the first and I'm the last.

Again, he's just saying, hey, it's me. What an honor. The Smyrna church can look and look at a letter.

Jesus wrote us a letter. That's an encouragement in itself, that he's still with us and he's still walking with us. Wow, a letter again from Jesus.

And he's pleased with our suffering. Well, that's an encouragement, isn't it? Some of you think about that. He's pleased with our suffering and the right attitude, though.

So we find that Jesus acknowledges their suffering. He acknowledges their suffering. He acknowledges their tribulation of what they're going through, their severe hardship.

But he didn't stop there. I mean, as you're reading this letter, imagine the church of Smyrna reading this. And he says, oh, he's acknowledging, he sees our tribulation, he sees our hardship.

But he goes, whoa, wait a minute, there's more. Some of you will be thrown in prison. Some of you are going to wear the martyr's crown.

There's more coming. Look at verse nine again. I know about your suffering and your poverty, but you're rich.

I know the slander of those opposing you, etc. And he goes on in verse 10, don't be afraid of what they're about to do to you, about to do to you. There's more coming.

The devil will throw some of you into prison and test you and persecute you and so forth and so on. So he acknowledges and he warns them that there's worse things coming than already what they're experiencing. He's preparing them.

I think it's a letter of encouragement. I think it's a letter of preparation too for what's coming in the future. And as I'm speaking this morning and what my prayer was, I'm going to show some things of how this can relate to us.

What I really prayed for and want more than anything else, I wanted the text to minister to us more than anything else. Okay. I just wanted this just to unpack into our spirits.

I think that would do more than anything else that I could possibly say. So he prepared them. So what were they going through back then? And what were they really going through? This tribulation, this suffering.

I mean, Jesus mentions poverty. He says, I know your poverty. Well, what's that mean? I know your poverty because you're in a wealthy, prosperous city.

But he says, yet you're rich. But he acknowledged that they were in poverty. Why? Because the persecution was so heavy and so hot and so intense that they lost jobs.

They could hardly work because they were so despised back then. They looked at, I mean, mainly they looked, people looked at them as vile. And they couldn't work for the most part.

And because they couldn't work, they had a lack of food. They're hungry. You know, their jail system is not like ours.

Our jail system, hey, it's like the rural Caribbean. In our jail system, you get cable TV, three meals a day, warm bed, right? And it's free, so to speak. But their jail system was a little different.

Their jail system, you had feces, rats, and hardly any food fed to you whatsoever. That was their jail system. The Bible says they were slandered.

They were slandered, blaspheming, made fun of continually. Again, looked down as vile and wicked people themselves. But wait, but wait, there's more coming.

Jesus, isn't this enough? Have you ever asked yourself, Jesus, this is enough? I can't take any more than already this. I've already got this. I can't take any more.

This is enough, Jesus. And Jesus says, no, but wait, there's more. There's more? There's more.

The more, so what was the more that was coming? The more that was coming was very inhumane. I know this is going to sound gross and grotesque, and some of you won't be able to stomach some of the stuff, what they actually did, but it's part of what they went through. These people, to the brothers and sisters in Christ, for standing up for Christ, and let me say this too, typically people are not persecuted for being quiet.

I should have more amens than that. The church ain't being persecuted for silence. The church ain't being persecuted because she's quiet.

So think, they weren't quiet in an atmosphere of wickedness, of vile people serving all this stuff, and they proclaimed, because Jesus would have scolded them for that. Think about this. He would have scolded them if they were being quiet.

So what they did, several things. They would pour tar all over them, all over their bodies, and put them in to an area in a city where people could watch them at night burn. You know, there was a movie out called Paul, which showed some of that, and they called them roaming candles.

So they would pour oil on them, or tar, and light them up, and they were used as a spectacle for everyone just to watch and to enjoy, like an arena. Entertainment, that's what it was. It was entertainment for the crowd.

They would put them into arenas, arenas packed full of thousands of people, thousands and tens of thousands of people would pack it out just to come to watch Christians be eaten alive by wild animals. They would gather around and watch people making a choice, deny Christ, give to Caesar. If you don't deny Christ, if you don't give to Caesar right here, right now, I'm gonna cut your baby into pieces right now, and they wouldn't deny Christ, and they cut their babies in pieces right in front of the mom and dad.

If you don't deny Christ to the husband, if you don't deny him right here, right now, I'm gonna cut the breast off of your wife, and he wouldn't deny him, and they cut her breasts off right in front of them. This is all written in the Fox Book of Martyrs. This is all written in history, and during this period of time frame of the first two or three centuries, the Fox's Book of Martyrs said there was about five million Christians slaughtered.

Five million. You know, we think that's a lot of people, but I think we're so blinded by being here in the United States, America, this blessed country, and our comfortable Christianity, that there's more Christians today being slaughtered than ever in history. So think about that when I just said five million.

A lot of you gasp at that, but think about what's going on today. Don't be a Christian in North Korea today. You won't be seen again if you start proclaiming Christ in their arenas.

But this is what Hebrews 11.35 stands for. Hebrews 11.35, not accepting deliverance. I think that's one of the most powerful verses in the entire Bible, personally, I think so.

Because when the Book of Hebrews names of all, they were hiding in caves, they were torn in pieces, they were torn in two, they were tortured, burned, and yada yada yada, and it came down to verse 34, not accepting deliverance. So anytime that you feel like you're going through some trials and tribulations, I encourage you to read the Hebrews 11. I do.

But imagine someone, a little sarcastic side note, but truthful, because I remember my pastor many years ago that my wife and I were attending his church, and he gave a sermon illustration, I don't know why I was just thinking about this the other day, this was like 22 years ago, someone is a big church of 600 people, and someone called, and the secretary said, Pastor Curtis, he said, I got someone on the phone right now, they want to know what you guys, what this church can offer our family. He said, give me that phone. He said, hello? Well, what can you offer our family? He said, ma'am, I'll tell you what we can offer our family.

He said, that's Jesus. That was it, that was it, Jesus. But you know, people do that all the time now, because of the buffet, of the different styles, different types of churches today, got the lights, got the fog machines, got the children, what can you, Jesus.

I want to go to a church that offers Jesus, that gets closer to him than anything else, that makes him, I don't want a church that gives me 10% of Jesus, I want a church that gives me 100% of Jesus. Amen? So you imagine, the church of Smyrna, bringing in kind of, you know, the light of 2019, of course they didn't have phones back then, someone calls up the book of, calls up the church of Smyrna and says, hey, what can you give us? What can you give our family? I did, I thought about that. Oh, yeah, we'll give you a severe hardship serving Jesus, and we'll also give you a martyrdom for serving Jesus.

Oh, never mind, I'll go to the church down the road. Wrong church, you know. I'll look for something a little more comfortable.

That's a little edgy on my end. But you know what, this is the church of Smyrna. This was it.

And I know it's very strange for us to hear this stuff, because it's really polar opposite of what the church we experience today, isn't it? Polar opposite. Jesus said, you're poor, materially, he told him. He said, yeah, I know you're poverty, but he said you're rich.

And obviously he means by that, you're rich spiritually, you're rich in my grace. You're rich, your spiritual wealth is more important. John Bunyan said, the poor man that loves Christ is richer than the greatest man in the world.

Amen. I love that statement. See, what they were doing, they were storing up treasures in heaven.

I mean, when you read their accounts of what they went through, man, their bank accounts were full. There was no dollar bills up there or no pennies in the bank account. There was no bankruptcy in their bank accounts.

Their bank accounts were full. I mean, they had the rubies probably all around, double coated around their crowns when they got to heaven. But they were storing up, but they were rich, which is the most important thing for all of us, to be rich towards God.

And that's what Jesus was saying to them. Don't see yourselves as poor. See yourselves as I see you.

The world might see you as vile and wicked and abnormal and strange, but I see you wonderful. I shed my blood for you. I died for you.

I see you as rich towards me. Amen. So Jesus mentions the Jews, the unbelieving Jews.

Now there's several things and there's several debates in exactly what or who they were or who they were not. But several things that we can bring out. The Jews obviously wanted to distance themselves from the church, because basically, I don't want anything to do with that.

You know what I mean? Holy cow, if I started serving Jesus, I'd get to experience that. I'll just stick with the one true God. And Smyrna was kind of being cozy with the Jews.

Okay. Smyrna also has some close ties into Rome. So by having some very close ties into Rome, because Rome, as we all know, Rome was a place that persecuted Christians heavily.

You don't want to be persecuted in Rome. You don't want to be. Those people were wicked, what they did to Christians.

But they had some close ties to them. So he mentions the Jews. And these Jews may have not, they may have been idol worshippers themselves.

So they were pretenders of being a Jew. These Jews, probably most of them, didn't accept Jesus as the Messiah himself. So ultimately they were pretenders, faking who they really said they were.

And you will find those, and more and more as I'm seeing, and more and more as I, you know, as we go through each century, year by year, you find those who cause you and I the most problems are those within the church walls. It's true. The most complaints, the most criticized I get, I don't know about you, 99% of the time, it's not from those with outside the walls.

It's within. And I'm not speaking generally right here. So don't think, you know, don't be looking at each other, you know, like Judah's situation.

Is it an eye? Is it an eye, Lord? But that's true. Pretending to be Christians and are not, because Jesus was tortured and killed, crucified by those who attended, quote, church regularly. Yeah.

So when you have such a vicious attack on this church, especially in Samarna, it was established as the synagogue of Satan. Well, yeah, the enemy was hell-bent on bringing hell to them, right? He says, you know what? Be faithful. And I think, you know, be faithful unto death and I give you the crown of life, and that's, you know, the biggest word.

I told someone the other day that was going through some hardships and the Lord gave me a word for this particular person. I walked up to him and I knew they're going through some major struggles. And I just, I said to him, I said, I think the Lord really wants you to hear this word.

And it's two words. He said, what's that? I said, be faithful. Be faithful.

Be faithful to the very end. Endure. Be faithful.

I want that to sink in. Just be faithful. The church in Samarna was faithful to the very end.

And the apostle John that wrote the book of Revelation appointed, which leads me on to something else, he appointed a man called Polycarp. He was a bishop. Matter of fact, he was known as the bishop, keep cracking with me.

He was the bishop of Samarna. He was known as a very godly man. He was a man that was full of the scriptures.

He was the man that they called a gatekeeper that kept out the heresy from the church. He was like the guard for the church at that time that blocked on false doctrine from coming in. And he knew the scriptures very well.

Matter of fact, you can read, if you get online, you can get a history book, you can read. He actually wrote a letter, actually a long letter, to the Philippian church. Obviously, we know that Paul wrote a book to the Philippians when he was in jail, but Polycarp wrote a letter also as well.

And what I like about Polycarp, what for all of us, what intrigues me most about this, because it was a continuation from the New Testament church past. It's still the New Testament. So as soon as the scriptures are done, we can read in history.

We have to get into history books to see a continuation, a track that things kept moving along and proceeding how they were already. Follow me? So we can read that stuff. I'm a big history buff.

I like reading that kind of stuff. I like knowing whether or not there were still healings and still deliverances and stuff like that. And there was, all through history, there was.

And so important for the church and so important for the young people of the church, they don't know church history at all. Because a lot of times what's going on today, I was sharing with someone last night and I said, you know, we've got these people who are going to these progressive churches and they're just, they're babies. You know, when I was selling life insurance many years ago, the headquarters of the agency did not want established agents already.

They wanted people who knew nothing about selling insurance. They didn't because they couldn't minister or they couldn't work with the agents because they knew too much. But if we can get a bunch of newbies, I can mold them the way I want.

And so we got a bunch of newbies coming up in the progressive church and saying, this is church. And they have no idea of the history of the church. In the last 30, 50 years, the church that has done a U-turn in America, she went, whoop, like this.

And when all you have to do is look at China right now and the underground church in China and the underground church in China is very similar to the book or to the church in Samarna. It's a continuation right now, as I'm talking, they're being persecuted, suffered tribulations and on and on, being killed and their buildings are being destroyed. So in order to know truth, we got to know the scriptures, number one, we got to know the text.

Amen. That's number one. And number two, we got to know church history.

By those two, you should know whether or not the church is doing right. So again, the Apostle Paul, John, Apostle John, I got off sidetrack. I do that sometimes.

So Apostle John appointed Polycarp. Polycarp, he was from, he was born 8069 and he died 8155. So Polycarp, long story short, this is the same time frame that we're talking about here.

The emperor called for Polycarp. He was 86 years old. He goes like, so these guards come to Polycarp and they were here to take you to the emperor.

And so Polycarp says, okay, because Polycarp knew what this was about. Obviously he knew that Christians were being slaughtered and being destroyed and he knew his life was over. So these guards came to take him.

I'm not sure exactly how many there was. And he says to them with humility and the love of Christ, someone that was going to take him away and kill him, he offered them food. He said, you want a meal before we go? While you talk about the love of God.

And they said, sure. He said, plus, he said, that'll give me some time to pray. He said, can you guys give me at least one hour to pray while you're eating this meal? They said, sure.

So it's kind of like Brent when he gets up and preaches, when he says he's going to end the sermon and he doesn't, he keeps going on for another hour. You know, it's kind of like that's what Polycarp did. He prayed an extra hour longer.

What do you ask for? So I borrow that from him. But the men that heard him upstairs praying, they said in the history books that he prayed with such fervor and passion and tears like they've never heard anybody pray before. They actually repented, listening to him pray, being downstairs.

God got all over them by listening to that man, godly man, pray. But they still had a duty to do. Even though they repented, they still brought him before the emperor.

They were still employed. And so they did. And they brought him before and then the emperor says, I want you to burn incense to Caesar right now.

And if you deny Christ and you burn incense to Caesar, we'll let you walk away. And someone wrote notes. It was in the audience, so to speak, listening to the whole procession.

And I can't go into exactly, but basically Polycarp said in this, he looked at the emperor and he said, I am 86 years old. I've served, I've served the Lord Jesus Christ faithfully for all these years. And dare not I deny him right now.

And they took him away and they whisked him away. And he said, you know what? Because what they used to do with the stakes, they would nail you to a stake. He said, you know what, guys, you don't need to nail me to a stake.

You can tie my hands and keep me up. He said, I'm not going to resist. You can just tie me to the stake.

And the tradition says they lit it on fire. And I read many reports, just try to back this up. And every report, every report and every report all said the same thing, that the fire did a mushroom all around him.

It wouldn't touch him. God was keeping him safe for a moment. So after this went on for a little bit and the mushroom went around him, this blaze of fire, the guard walked up to him and basically said, forget this.

And took a spear and shoved it into him and killed him. Polycarp was a very famous martyr back in Smyrna. You can read a ton of history about him being faithful to the very end, being faithful to the very end.

So Smyrna was known for myrrh. Myrrh. And myrrh is used back then and they made perfume.

And in order for myrrh to work in perfume, they got it to a spice. They have to crush it into small little pieces. And so Smyrna was known for myrrh to get a fragrance.

And we look at 2 Corinthians chapter 2, 2 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 2, 14 through 16. Listen to what he says. Paul says, but thank God that he has made us his captives and continues to lead us along Christ's triumphal procession.

Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere like a what? Sweet perfume. In other translations, it talks about fragrance. We are the fragrance of Christ.

But in order to be a fragrance, in order to have a good scent for Christ, we have to be crushed, unfortunately. So the prophet says, it pleased, didn't displease, it pleased the father to crush his son. And it created perfume and a fragrance for all the world.

So when God crushes us, it's not to be mean or harsh. He wants us to be a fragrance that others can smell and see the life of Christ in you and I. Follow me? But he kind of puts into perspective what it says in 1 Peter chapter 2, Kirsten. 1 Peter chapter 2, 2 to 21, it says, for God called you even if it means what? Suffering.

Just as Christ suffered for you, he is your example and you must follow in his steps. Wait a minute, I came to this Christian thing, I don't want, you know, that's not why I came into this. The Bible says, those that live godly, it's promised by God, those that live godly shall suffer persecution.

And actually it's a question, why, if you're not suffering persecution, are you not living godly? Examine yourself. I'm just going by the text, amen? This ain't preacher talking, this is just the text. Question for you and me.

Suffering for us. You know, our suffering, honestly, let's think about our suffering today. Our suffering today really entails, you know, we say something on social media and they get unhappy and they block us.

Or they unfollow us, unfriend us. And then we call the pastor, pastor, my feelings are so hurt, they blocked me. I'm going through such tribulation and trials.

That's true. Because I've heard Christians complain that someone, how dare they block me? Really? Yeah, really. He says, you know, or, you know, someone, our suffering also entails, you know, someone, you know, we see someone in the store and they kind of like, you know, they hide their face or we see them turn their back and they won't talk to us anymore.

You know, that's kind of our suffering. I didn't do anything. How can they talk? Why are they voiding me in the store like that? I was just in a family function.

What did I do? And we get all tiffed about it. Upset. We hear people gossip about us, telling false things.

Christians claiming to be Christian, telling others about stuff about us. That's not true. Well, so they did to Jesus.

And he goes on, he talks about this 10 days, and I'm not too far from being done, 10 days. And basically what it boils down to, we can talk about dates and seasons and times, but basically all the theologians just about agreed that the 10 days that Jesus was referring to is like, hey, you're going to go through this for 10 days. There's a metaphor for a very short period of time.

In other words, you can make it. Paul said, Paul talked about, if you look at what you're going to experience, the glory of what you're going to experience, this, what we're going through can't even be compared to, he said, right? If we can get a true revelation of who he is, you know, I guess he says, if you want to look at it that way, Jesus says you're not going to experience the second death. And he's basically saying, all that you've done, this is your reward.

You're not going to go to hell. That's what he says. And you're going to be with me.

Because Jesus, for the Samaria church, was all sufficient. That's how they got through this. He was all sufficient.

That's how they did it. Exactly how they did it. They sold him for who he was.

That's how a friend of mine, who just came back from China, was a full Timnitus wife, full time missionaries in China right now. They're undercover as teachers, witnessing, sharing the gospel over there. They've been there for full time, eight years.

And he came back to Indiana the other day and they take a three week break. But when he came back, the persecution is so intense now with the church there. Those of us that are on the news, we've heard about it.

They're taking pastors away, leaders away, church members away, and they're hiding them. They don't know where they're taking them to. So my friend Chris had no contact with the secret police of China until he was on a plane and he got back home and the friends of China called him and let him know the secret police have been looking for you in your life.

Because they said they're hearing that you're talking about making other people disciples of Christ. And then all of a sudden I'm reading the comments, you know, this is social media, and some people said, don't go, don't go back. Why would you want to go back there? Dear God, don't go back there.

You're done if you go back there. They're looking for you. Immediately my mind switches to Paul and what the prophet told Paul, he said, the person who wears his belt is bound to go to Jerusalem, will suffer, will suffer great persecution.

And the disciples tried to sway Paul from not going to Jerusalem because he knew this was going to be a tragedy for him. He says, I've got to go because this is the will of God for my life. If I'm in the will of God for my life, I should be the happiest of all.

And that's what Chris said on social media to everyone that was trying to talk him out from going. He said, this is the will of God for me, for me and my wife. We know this is the center of it all.

And that's if that is the center of the will of God, that is the safest place that I could be, scary to the flesh. And Friday he gets on, he got onto a plane flying back from his three-week vacation, not knowing what beckons, not knowing what's going to happen while we sit here comfortable. He's safe right now.

He reported back he's safe, but it still depicts that things of Smyrna is still going on today in other countries, still going on. So how does this relate to us? I've shared some things already, and it's not hard, but it's going to sound hard. But when they went through all of this, they didn't complain.

They didn't complain. They didn't complain. I want that to sink in because they did complain.

Jesus would have scolded them for it. Because if we can't resist the temptation to miss church on a Sunday or a midweek service because we don't feel like it, how in God's name are we going to face persecution when it really comes? We are not called to search out persecution. But don't get me wrong, that's not the job of Christians, right? We're not called to search it out, but we're also not we're also called not to avoid it either.

I'd rather be known, and I hope you would too, I'd rather be known as a radical for Christ than an indifferent disciple for Christ. Amen? I hope that's your prayer. And in 1 John chapter 1 verse 1, we proclaim to you, John says this is also the apostle John again, we proclaim to you that the one who existed from the beginning we have have heard and seen, we saw him with our own eyes, touched him with our own hands, and he is the word of life.

They touched him, they saw him, they heard him. And in the context of that, I realize that's a physical application there, but also I look at that as a spiritual application. You know, we can't compare our our walk with God with someone else's walk with God.

We can't. And I see that happening a lot. We compare, well I'm not like that, so you shouldn't be like that.

I don't raise my kids like that. Why are you raising your kids like that? Why do you say that? Get off my back. You're not my Holy Spirit.

Amen? So don't let anybody dictate to you how to live your Christian walk. You obey the word of God and the Holy Spirit. The Smyrna church can't really put it in the words themselves if you ask them what was birthed, listen, what was birthed in them.

You can't put that in the words. It was birthed in them. That which is birthed in you is of the Holy Ghost, the scripture says.

It's around far beyond earthly words. You can't put it in the words. It's beyond our own thinking.

What was birthed in you by the Holy Ghost? And Jesus even said, I always do those things what I see my Father do. He's looking to another realm. We are called to live in the Spirit.

We are called to live in the Spirit and not not what someone else's opinion is of us. I see that. How we raise our kids and our families.

We start allowing voices. The kids say, Mom, Dad, so and so, you know, they let their kids do this. Well, they let them, you know, and we're not them.

I'm held accountable for my kids and you're held accountable for your kids. You're held accountable for your life. Amen? Not anybody else.

But the further, and again, the further the church drifts away from God and those of us that hold the truth dear, hold them dear, the truth of God's Word, we'll be more slandered in the days to come. It's serious. It's happening now.

The closer we get to the cross ourselves, we're trying to draw near to him and he'll draw near to us, but the closer we get to God and the further the world slips away and those that are pretending to be Christians and kind of drift with the world become more progressive, stay 10% into the truth, you and I will be looked at as radical, hard, high and mighty, holier than thou, can I name some more, because it's here and it's coming. Because when we read stuff in the history of the church in the 1500s and 1400s and 1600s, I'll look at their sermons. It's night and day from what we're hearing today.

They had revival. They knew they were suffering for Christ. But beloved, let's not live a Christianity walking on eggshells.

This ain't eggshell Christianity in Jesus' name. Amen? This ain't eggshell Christianity. Jesus told his disciples before he was descended in the martyrs and you translate that, that says, you shall be witnesses and translates that, you shall be martyrs, i.e., dying ones for me.

That was God's promise to his disciples. But the Smyrna church didn't cave in, praise the Lord, they didn't cave in. And that's the encouragement for us, that we can do this.

Because with all the luxury and the prosperity that they had and they were living for, I mean, they had in the city and everyone else around them had it all. They were driving the Bentleys. They were driving the BMWs.

They had the bigger houses and they had it all. And there were poverty restrictions and they couldn't work and they couldn't hardly eat. And people are eating at Texas Roadhouse, you know, and they were eating better then.

And we couldn't hardly get a crumb of food anymore because we're despised for our faith now. They never caved in. They didn't conform to the world.

By the grace of God and the Spirit of God, we can deal with that too. Amen? Because it's not something, you know, we look at the physical beatings, we look at the tribulation, we hear the sufferings, all that I talked about this morning already. And, you know, we look at the physical aspect of the cross, what Jesus did and all that stuff.

But, you know, it's beyond that. It's beyond that because they didn't think about the beatings. It was about them seeing a revelation.

They had a revelation of the majesty of the Almighty God. How in the world could someone go through that and not complain without having a revelation of Jesus Christ Himself? We need visions of God over and over and over and over and over and over. And how easily, just to encourage everyone, I am on my

last page of notes.

So, I'm not lying. But I'm serious for a moment. I still want to be serious because this is a serious thing going on right here.

How easily do we, and I capitalize we, how easily we lose our joy over trivial things living in this nation. Trivial things. Blow up someone, yell at someone.

And I read this, and I read this, and they didn't complain, but I get upset over something stupid and carnal and petty. And then I have to complain, Lord, I'm suffering. You're really suffering.

And he looks at the Smyrna church. Come on. How easily we lose our tempers.

You know what, though? I was thinking about this. What we have to be careful is this. We may not come to the forefront of our minds, but in the back of minds, we might say this.

In the back of our minds, we might say this. We might actually say, well, if I had a mate, or if my husband, or if my spouse, my wife was a little bit more spiritual, and they weren't so tempered, and they wouldn't do this, you know, I'd be a little more spiritual. Come on.

Well, if I would have had, you know, if I had a little more money at bank, and I could do, I could have a little more joy in my life, I'd be more spiritual. We might not say that. It's in the back of our minds.

But if he wouldn't, or she wouldn't this way, I would be a little bit more for God. If I didn't go through all these sexual temptations, you know, there's sexual urges all the time, you know, I just, I would be a little bit more spiritual. Some of us think like that.

I mean, I haven't before. You know, a lot of churchgoers, I've said it once, I'll say it again, but a lot of churchgoers, it blows my mind when I read the book of Samaria, the church, it really blows my mind. Because it's just not our church, it's across the board.

Barna Research has shown it over and over, that the majority of churches now are having one service per week, and we've got to cram pack everything in one hour and a half. Well, not if Pastor Brent's preaching, but we'll work with that. But that's the average church today.

Because we know the majority of people won't show up for the rest of the week, because it's too much of an inconvenience for us. We're going to miss our favorite TV show, favorite sport, or sports are taking over the church today. And I read that.

Jeremiah chapter 12, verses one through five. I'm not going to read verses one through four, though, because I want to get to this here. Jeremiah was actually, in four verses, I can hurry up, he was actually complaining.

He was, it was actually petty stuff. Just murmuring about this, this, this, and how he's going through this, this, wasn't much. It was just petty complaints.

And then God shot back at him. And this is what the Lord said to him. If you're racing against mere men, and it makes you tired, how will you race against horses? If you stumble and fall at open ground, what are you going to do in the thickets near the Jordan? Which I just said a minute ago, if we can't handle this, how are we going to handle that? That's what the Lord said.

And I close with this illustration. True story. And I got to read it, because I don't, it's hard to, Adreninus, not good with that name.

I didn't ask my wife before I came up here to say, hey, what's that? How do you say that? Adreninus. 280 AD, during the persecution that we're talking about here this morning. And he was employed by the Romans, which I said already, that's very, they were very strict about killing Christians.

And Adreninus watched these Christians day in and day out pass by him, going to the slaughter, being martyred, being burned, being eaten alive. Every day he watched them go by him. And after so many days and so many weeks and so many months, it finally dawned on him.

He stopped one of them as they were passing by to go be martyred. And he says to them, why do you guys have this joy and smiles on your face, walking to get burned? I don't understand that, he told them. And he asked several of them, I haven't seen one of you complain.

He said, I haven't seen one of you not have joy on your faces. Every one of you have this joy. He really wanted to know, how are you taking this? And they said to him, because of the Lord Jesus Christ, who strengthens me.

That's what they told him. And they quoted a verse, every eye, no eye is here, eye is seen. And they went on with that verse, but the reward coming to them.

And that's what they quoted Adreninus. So Adreninus got so convicted by them saying that to him, that he wanted to be a Christian. He said, I'm going to give my life to Christ.

So he runs, ushers off to the emperor, who has a list of everyone that needs to be slaughtered. And he stands before the emperor. And he literally says this, write my name down as a Christian, knowing what was going to befall him.

And they whisked him away. And they tortured him first. And he became a martyr.

What do people see in you and I, when we complain about trivial, petty things? Are we not winning this world to Christ? Because they're not seeing Christ in us. We're not willing to suffer. Get angry so easy.

We get miffed up so easy. I get mad at my wife, I get mad at my husband, I get mad at my kids. Maybe it's time that we come to the place, you know, God, I need a work of grace like I've never had in my entire life right now.

I need to come, please. Y'all stand. And I don't know if there's any other time to pray than this morning.

As she plays, you can start coming anytime you want. But God, I need a work of grace. I need a work.

I need a vision. I need a vision of God. Because maybe, just maybe the kids have gone wayward because we've complained and they haven't seen Christ in us.

We complain and murmur and yell and get mad at trivial, petty things continually. Not to say we're perfect. I'm not saying that, guys.

I'm not saying that. And they don't see Christ in us. Our workers don't see Christ in us.

Can we be the Christian this morning that says, write my name down. Write my name down this morning. Write it down.

Why? Because he's worthy. Simply, Jesus is sufficient. Paul had a thorn in his flesh he asked God to remove.

And obviously, God didn't remove it. But what did he say? His grace was sufficient. Accepted the thorn.

Accepted the suffering. Peter says, I rejoice, 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 3. He said, I rejoice being a partaker in the sufferings of Christ. Are you a partaker? Let's pray.

And I'm going to invite you to come. Father, as people are coming now, I pray, Father, that you would help us. Help us to have a revelation in the vision of your holiness once again.

Help us to have a heart for God willing to count it all but loss. Willing to suffer and give it all. To pay a price.

To follow in the steps of our master. God, do a work in us. Do a work of grace in our hearts, God.

Oh, God, we need you, God. We need you more than we've ever needed you. Persecution is coming.

It's going to get worse. God, prepare us. And I believe you're preparing us through this message.

Cause us to live. Cause us to live in you. If you want to come, still come.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/xK-7ozhAZJo.mp4>

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