**PREACHING NOTES: THE CHURCH THAT JESUS WANTS (REVELATION 2-3)**

**WEEK 4: REVELATION 2:8-11; 3:7-13 (REWARD)**

(Leon Mileham)

*I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

Revelation 3:11

The Church That Jesus Wants is one that is faithful and one which perseveres.

Suffering For Faith

Suffering is tough when it is self-inflicted.

It is tough when it is out of our control and undeserved.

The churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia suffered for God/the sake of the gospel.

In the UK as Christians we do not suffer persecution as believers have historically, though many in the world do today – there are approximately 450 people martyred for their faith every day and many more who have been imprisoned, who have lost their livelihood and have been disowned by society and family.

Some examples of ways we may suffer for our faith:

* Where you take a stand for godly principles, perhaps in the workplace, and you are overlooked/shunned;
* Where you refuse to join in with action that you know is wrong and are criticised/mocked;
* Where you choose to forgive someone where it is so undeserved, which causes pain;
* Where you are trying so hard to live for God, but fail;
* Where those most close to you put you down/mock you/ill-treat you/reject you/disown you.

*Matthew 19:27 NIV*

*Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”*

…

The Kingdom of God

Matthew 6:33: Jesus taught to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all that we need will be added to us [note: Jesus knows us and knows what we need! He does not make some physiological examination of what we need to stay alive and just enough to function and give us that, but he is a good Father who provides well for his children!].

Jesus’s kingdom is his rule, his reign, his agenda, the things that matter to him.

The kingdom is mysterious – it is something still yet to come, yet Jesus taught it is in us.

James 1:2-4 says:

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

…

Obedience

Jesus is looking for obedient people.

**Mary and Joseph** were simple people of extraordinary obedience – Mary was obedient to God’s purposes to carry the Son of God, though still a virgin; Joseph was obedient to God’s command to take Mary as his wife, despite her becoming pregnant with a child who was not his. God entrusted his safety to them when his life was threatened by Herod.

They had a simple obedience and a kingdom mindset – we are to be likewise.

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The Churches of Smyrna and Pergamum

**Read Revelation 2:8-11 (Smyrna) and 3:7-13 (Philadelphia)**

*There are a number of similarities between them:*

1.

Their letters contained no rebuke from Jesus;

2.

They had limitations:

The Smyrna church faced afflictions and poverty (see Revelation 2:9)

The Philadelphia church were small and quite weak (see Revelation 3:8); there are comparisons with the story of Gideon (see Judges 6, especially v12-16)

The Church Jesus wants is one that knows who it is, knows whose it is, knows what it has and does not have, but **goes in the strength it has**.

3.

They faced persecution, both from Jews hostile to the gospel (described by Jesus as the “Synagogue of Satan”), and their Roman overlords.

For Smyrna their most famous martyr was Polycarp, the then Bishop of Smyrna, murdered for his faith around 50 years after the writing of Revelation. He was burnt at the stake, despite being an elderly man, for refusing to burn incense to the emperor.

The Smyrna Church were told that some would suffer persecution and imprisonment for a period of 10 days. This imprisonment is attributed to the devil, who hates the Church that Jesus wants.

There is limitation on the devil’s power (10 days here). For believers who are struggling, who feel tormented, tempted, frustrated, fearful and overwhelmed, there is a “Day 11” for them!

*[see appendix]*

4.

They are promised a crown as a reward **(see Revelation 2:10b and 3:11)**.

Rewards

We are not saved by what we do, but by whom and what we have believed in. We do not earn salvation by good works – indeed, we get to do the good works God chose for us to do as a result of our salvation (see Ephesians 2:10).

We are saved to live lives that are seeking the kingdom of God; God has called us to serve his purposes in our generation (see Acts 13:36)

Each of the letters to the churches closes with the words “to the one who is victorious …” and there is the promise of reward.

**The promise of a crown (additional verses):**

To read and meditate on:

* 1 Corinthians 9:25 NIV
* James 1:12 NIV
* 2 Timothy 4:6-8 NIV

…

The “crown” is the Greek word *stephanos* meaning “crown” or “to circle”. It does not refer to God’s crown or a monarch’s crown [note: this is the word used for the crown of thorns that Jesus wore at Calvary; elsewhere the word for a crown worn by Jesus is *diademata*, *diadem* in English (eg see Revelation 19:12 – “many crowns”)]. The *stephanos* was the garland or laurel wreath awarded to those who had won in the games, often where life was at risk, eg gladiators, chariot racing etc.

The crown is a promise

Revelation 3:11: the indication here is of a crown reserved for us if we succeed in what God has given us to do. A promise is not physically held, but we trust it will come to pass because we have confidence in the promisor. We hold on to Jesus’s promises – they are “yes and amen” to us. But we have to hold on to them in faith.

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The Hidden Manna and White Stone

Other promised rewards in the Seven Letters ( this one to Pergamum) are that of receiving “hidden manna” and a “white stone” –

**Read Revelation 2:17**

*…*

*Hidden Manna*

**Read John 4:31-35**

Jesus speaks of “food to eat that you know nothing about” and his food being “to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work”. Jesus then goes on to speak of the harvest.

He is referring to the reward of those who will be saved because they were led to Christ by us. We get to share in the joy that was before Jesus - what an amazing reward!

Andy Elmes says that when we are called upon to give an account for our lives, Jesus will ask:

*“Who did you bring with you?”*

…

*White Stone*

White stones, like laurel wreaths, were rewards for success in the games – they had the winners’ name written on them and ownership of them brought certain privileges and rewards, such as admission into feasts.

Our desire should be to be faithful overcomers in Christ. Jesus wants to give us a white stone with a new name written on it; it says in Revelation 2:17 that it will be a name known only to him who receives it – much of what we do on this earth will go unnoticed by others (actually both good and bad!), but God sees and will reward accordingly. So much is wrapped up in Scripture of the significance of names and new names; there is a mystery to this, but we look to Jesus, step out in confidence about what we have thus far experienced and trust in what is yet to be seen:

*However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”---the things God has prepared for those who love him …*

1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV

*“Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.” He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*

Revelation 22:7,20 NIV

***Appendix:***

***A word for Connect Church, December 2017***

*Coming back to the church in Smyrna, they were told that some would be put in prison and suffer –*

*Jesus was writing to a body of people – not all would be imprisoned. Some in Connect Church at this time are really struggling.*

*We have also been studying the Book of Nehemiah in small groups.*

***Read Nehemiah 4:10-15***

*The references to strength giving out, of too much rubble - damage, mess, obstacles – of fear [notice they were told they would be attacked 10 times - compare with persecution for 10 days for Smyrna in Revelation 2:10] and the references to low and exposed points of the wall are a picture of those struggling. Nehemiah’s response was to station people in their families at these weak points. He encouraged them to look to God, to remember how awesome he is and to* ***fight*** *for those that are dear to them. God desires to position families alongside families, with great faith in who God is, to help them, strengthen them and to fight for them (with appropriate spiritual weapons – see Ephesians 6).*

*The result is that the enemy’s plans will be foiled and this will help us all to get on with the work in hand – the root of much strife, discouragement and failure comes from people failing to fulfil their purpose, their calling, that which God has taken hold of them for, caused often by personal failure or the failure of others, bad circumstances, change, distraction or offence taken or a combination of things. But God wants to bring restoration and wants to use others of his people to aid this process, thus building greater relationship and unity amongst us – building a much stronger wall/house for the success of God’s work and the benefit of all.*

*The passage goes on to speak of rallying to the trumpet call where the Lord will fight for the people – ultimately the battle is the Lord’s – he will bring the ultimate victory in our lives, the ultimate “Day 11”.*

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**“Day 11”**

**“Look to God and fight for your families”**

 **“WHO ARE YOU BRINGING WITH YOU?”**