

Letters to 7 Churches 03 Smyrna-Crushed Heart

by James Booker

The sermon explores the theme of suffering and how God's love and redemption can be found in the midst of trials and difficulties.

Duration: 47:11

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Revelation 2:8-11

Topics: "Persecution", "Eternal Glory"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the church of Samirna and the challenges they faced. He begins by emphasizing the comforting presence of Jesus, who sympathizes with their suffering. The preacher then highlights the suffering endured by the church, including persecution and slander from Satan. Despite these trials, the saints are ultimately satisfied because of their faith in Jesus. The sermon encourages believers to keep their eyes on God and trust in His eternal glory, even in the midst of trials.

Transcript

It's encouraging to see each one of you with us here this morning. Trust you brought your Bible, as we're going to be turning to a number of passages during the few moments we are together. The subject this morning is the Church of Smyrna.

So shall we turn, please, to Revelation chapter 2, the Church in Smyrna. Verse 8, And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write, These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive. I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, but thou art rich.

I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried.

Ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

And he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. Our gracious Father, as we consider this letter to the Church of Smyrna, we pray for the guidance of thy Spirit in gleaning from it a challenge to our hearts for this day. Each one of us have gathered with a different need.

We thank you thy Word is able to minister to each and every need that's here in this gathering. Guide us by thy Holy Spirit, as we pray in our Savior's precious name. Amen.

We noticed on Sunday the church at Ephesus, and we suggested that the church at Ephesus had a cooling heart. We're going to notice as we go through these seven letters that each church has a different heart condition. And we began with a cooling heart.

This morning I want to consider with you something that I think is close to all of us, and that is a crushed heart. A crushed heart. Tonight in the middle of the Lord, as we look at the church at Pergamos, we want to consider a compromising heart.

But we're going to be looking at the crushed heart this morning. Or another title for this particular church would be the poor rich church. In our last study on Friday we're going to be noticing the rich poor church.

But this morning we're looking at the poor rich church. But thinking of the crushed heart, beloved, I believe all of us have gone through experiences in our lives where we've been crushed. Where we've gone through trials and difficulties.

And that inevitable cry escapes our lips or escapes our hearts to the Lord. And our prayer to the Lord is, why? Why? I'm rather convinced that each one of you here this morning have had that experience, and maybe you've had it often. Why, Lord? Why me? Why this problem? Why this trial? Why this tragedy? Why? I was struck yesterday in thinking along that line of a verse in Luke's Gospel, chapter 2, concerning the Lord's parents.

And we're told in this particular portion in Luke, chapter 2, in verse 48, you remember they had missed Him. They had journeyed some distance from Jerusalem and eventually found out He was not with them. And so they had to retrace their steps back, looking and longing for the Lord because He was missing.

Eventually they found Him, and in verse 47 it says, And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. And when they, His parents, saw Him, they were amazed. And His mother said unto Him, Son, why? Notice that, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

And He said unto him, How is it that thou sought me? Wished ye not, I must be about my father's business. What an interesting verse. Son, why have you dealt so with us? We've missed you, and we've been searching you in sorrow.

And I couldn't help but think that we've all had an experience along that line where we've sort of said, Well, Lord, why have you dealt with me in this way? We've been searching for you, and we've been going through sorrow, Lord, and you seem to be in a distance, and we can't reach you. Why? You remember in Song of Solomon, in chapter 5, the bride who had grown cold in heart, and the Lord wanted to revive her heart and restore her into a close, warm fellowship with Himself, put His hand by the hole of the door, you remember, and she responded. She got off her couch, she ran to Him, she opened the door, and He was gone.

And she began searching for Him, and to her amazement, she couldn't find Him. She ran through the streets, and she cried. She said, My soul fails.

I sought Him, but I found Him not. Where is He? And just when she was awakened and realized she needed Him, somehow or other the Lord wasn't there. And I'm sure she cried, Why? Why? A few months ago in Ottawa, a Christian brother, sort of in the prime of health and life, had been asked to go out west for some meetings in service for the Lord, and at his own expense, and out he went.

And before he got to the place where he was to have these meetings, he took a very severe heart attack, hundreds and hundreds of miles away from home. Ended up in the hospital, and he said when he came back, said to me, the question that kept going through my mind that first day in the hospital was, Why, Lord? Why? Away from home. I could understand this back at home, but away from home, and away from loved ones, and out seeking to serve You, and then suddenly this.

Why, Lord? And then he went on to point out that the Lord had to teach him a few lessons there, and he had the joy during that time of leading two or three to the Lord in the hospital. And he came back just rejoicing the Lord, and that much closer to Him on his return. But there was that inevitable cry, Why, Lord? Now that's what I want to challenge you with this morning, as I challenge my own heart.

You go back in your thinking, beloved, this morning and think of those experiences when you've asked that question, Why? Maybe you're going through an experience like that now. Well, let's just take heart from the lesson, the practical lesson of this church at Smyrna. I believe the Lord's given us the answer for why.

You remember, the word of God reminds us, All who will live godly shall suffer persecution. They shall. You remember the Lord said in John's Gospel, In the world ye shall have tribulation.

Christians are not exempt from trials. They're not exempt from breakdowns. They're not exempt from difficulties, sorrows, heartaches, tragedies.

In fact, so often when we become believers in Christ, it seems that the problems seem to roll in upon us rapidly. And prior to that time, we didn't seem to have them, and all of a sudden they come in upon us. So it's evident that as believers in Christ, being a believer doesn't exempt us from the trials, the difficulties, the problems that we're faced with day by day.

However, the Lord has promised to be with us in the trials, and the Lord has promised the comfort and the strength and the blessing, and there's a purpose behind it all. And I think this is stress for us as we look at the church at Smyrna, and we think of the name to begin with, because the name Smyrna, as most of you are aware, simply means myrrh. And the reason why is because in Smyrna, they had a tremendous abundance of myrrh, and they shipped it throughout the then known world.

They had a great port at Smyrna, and they used to refer to it as the Port of Myrrh, because daily out of that port went the supply of myrrh to the peoples of the world, and hence the name. Now, myrrh is an interesting thing. Apparently, myrrh comes from a plant, a thorn bush, a very thorny bush.

And the product from which they get the myrrh is sort of that sap or the coming out of the bark, little goblets on the bark that they strip off, and having stripped it off, they crush it in order to get the flavor, get the fragrance, get the aroma. And the greater the crushing of this myrrh, the greater the aroma. But when you taste it, it is extremely bitter.

But it also has, apparently, a preserving value to it, a medication, a medical preserving value. And when you put all those things together and you think of the Lord Jesus Christ and you think of the cross,

immediately you get so many wonderful lessons, do you not? As we look at the cross of Calvary, there is the thorn tree, the cursed tree. And come from His blessed hands, His feet, and His side came forth the precious blood.

As a result of the bruising, as a result of the crushing, it was a tremendous bitter experience for our Savior. The bitter cup, love drank it up and has left but the love for us. But even though there is a bitterness associated with Him through the crushing, there is a preserving blessing to it.

There is a fragrance, the crushing of Christ or the sufferings of Christ bring out the fragrance of His love and of His grace and of His mercy. And our hearts are thrilled as we partake of the fragrance of the sufferings of Calvary. It's rather interesting to notice in the Scriptures, and I'm sure some of you have traced this through, but I'm just rather thrilled in noticing that myrrh is associated with the Lord on at least six different occasions.

And when we think of myrrh as being associated with suffering, with sorrow, you remember the first time as in Matthew chapter 2, we'll not bother to turn to it, but you recall the wise men, we have at the Savior's birth, we have myrrh at the Savior's death, we have myrrh at the Savior's burial, we have myrrh in connection with the Savior's resurrection, we have myrrh in connection with His priesthood. And the first time was at His birth. And the wise men came along and they offered unto Him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And myrrh. The gold reminding us of His glory. The Son of God coming from the heights of glory.

The frankincense reminding us of the fragrance of His life. And the myrrh reminding us of the purpose of His coming to go to the cross. And so even in His birth, suffering was suggested through the gift of the myrrh.

And then you remember as He hung upon the cross of Calvary in Mark's Gospel chapter 15, they gave Him vinegar mingled with myrrh. And again the thought of suffering is brought forth. You remember in connection with His burial in John chapter 19, Joseph, Nicodemus, they came to Him and they had myrrh.

And they embalmed His body with myrrh. And then when you go over to the book of Psalms chapter 45, and you see that prophetic psalm of Christ coming back in power and glory, you find that His garments have various fragrances to them, and one of the fragrances is myrrh. And associated with that is priesthood.

If you go back to the Old Testament, to the book of Exodus chapter 30, you find there that the holy anointing oil, all the various ingredients that are used for the holy anointing oil included involved myrrh. And when the high priest came, they took the oil and they poured it upon Him. What a wonderful, thrilling lesson to me because of this, beloved.

Our Savior has come into the world. He knew and anticipated the suffering He was going through. At the cross He experienced it.

In burial it was still evident. In His resurrection, in the glory, as our high priest, as our high priest, He understands the trials and the difficulties we go through. Hebrews chapter 4, He's touched with the feelings of our infirmities, with our weaknesses.

He's gone through them all. He knows what suffering is. He knows what hunger is, thirsting, tears.

He was the man of sorrows. No one suffered as He suffered. He has gone through all.

And as our high priest, the myrrh is still there, the consciousness of what suffering is, so He can enter into our feelings as we go through it. He understands the interesting thing. I think we should just turn to this.

It's back in Isaiah chapter 60. Isaiah chapter 60. This particular chapter is dealing with the Lord coming back and setting up His kingdom, looking on to the new heavens and the new earth.

And again, simply for time, we'll just read verse 6. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of the Midians and Ephah, and all they of Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and incense. You remember the wise men, they came to the king and they brought gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The interesting thing about this particular verse is that in the coming day when He's crowned as King of kings and Lord of lords and they come to Him, the myrrh is left out. They bring the gold and they bring the incense and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord and the myrrh is left out. For beloved, the myrrh will eventually be set aside in the glory.

No more pain. No more suffering. No more sorrow.

No more death. The former things are passed away. But all during this day in which we live, as we go through the trials, as we go through the difficulties, there's the consciousness of the myrrh.

Our great high priest, he knows. He knows. And what a comfort and challenge that is to our hearts as we go through trials.

I'll very quickly notice there are four verses here concerning the church of Samarna. I want to notice four points. One point for each particular verse.

In order to keep it in our minds, I want to put it this way. I want to notice in verse 8 for this crushed church, a sympathizing Savior. A sympathizing Savior.

Verse 8. And then I want to notice in verse 9 the suffering servants. How they were suffering. And I want to notice in verse 10 the slandering serpent, Satan himself.

And finally in verse 11 we have the satisfied saints. Isn't it wonderful? Even though the suffering time is there, there's going to be the suffering time or. And there's the satisfied saints.

And that's the way the lovely little letter to the church of Samarna begins. With the saints satisfied. Let's look at the sympathizing Savior in verse 8. Who is He? Notice three things that are said about Him here in verse 8. He's the Supreme One.

He's the Suffering One. And He's the Sympathizing One. What a wonderful Savior we have.

You recall, I'm not telling you something you don't know. You recall that in each of the seven churches the Lord always begins by revealing Himself in a way that the people need Him. He doesn't reveal Himself the same way in any of the churches.

It's always different to each church because each church had a different need. And so He's able to present Himself according to our needs. He exactly suits us in all our needs.

And so these dear saints needed sympathy. They were being crushed under the load of sorrow and tribulation and trials and persecutions. So the Lord says, let Me reveal Myself to you.

He says, the One that's speaking to you in your sorrow is the First and the Last. I'm the Supreme One. The First and the Last.

Rather interestingly, this expression is used six times in the Word of God. Three times in the book of Isaiah. And in each case in the book of Isaiah, it is Jehovah that is speaking.

And if you take the time to go back to Isaiah and look at those portions, you would find in Isaiah chapter 41, Isaiah chapter 44, and Isaiah chapter 48, He's speaking about His concern for the nation of Israel and calling them out as His chosen ones. As being the Supreme One who makes the choice in all circumstances. And Jehovah says on three occasions there, in those three chapters I've mentioned, I am the First and the Last.

None before Me, none after Me. In other words, an expression just simply revealing the fact He is the Eternal One. The Eternal One.

Now the interesting thing is that in the book of Revelation, it's mentioned three times again. Only this time in connection with our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that the so-called Jehovah's Witness and other false teachers would bring Christ down to the level of man.

But how so frequently in the Word of God, particularly as you go through Isaiah, the comments concerning Jehovah, the one God. In fact, when He speaks about on one occasion about I am the First and the Last in the book of Isaiah, He refers to Himself as the only God. The one supreme God.

And that is the title our late Savior is given in the book of Revelation. Once in chapter one, later on in chapter twenty-two, and here in this particular chapter to the church at Smyrna. Isn't it interesting? At the very beginning of the book of Revelation, the Lord takes on that title and says He's the First and the Last.

I'm the Supreme One. And right at the end of the book of Revelation, He says I'm the First and the Last. I'm the Supreme One.

And here in the midst of His church, He says I'm the Supreme One. I'm the First and the Last. It's a divine title.

And it's a delightful title because apparently the church at Smyrna, they were rather a proud people. So we've been told by historians. And they felt that their city was very, very beautiful.

And as far as they were concerned, they apparently used to express very freely that their city was sort of the supreme city of the world in terms of beauty and power. They likened themselves to the First and the Last. There's no city like ours.

And the Savior said to these dear saints who were suffering, He said lift your eyes above the city and the so-called beauty of this city and feast your eyes upon Me. I'm the Supreme One. I'm over all those dear souls down there and Satan and others who are seeking to persecute you.

Even though they have power, I am all-powerful. Even though Satan is mighty, I am almighty. Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

I'm the Supreme One. But He also says, you might think well if I'm the Supreme One and so high and so great and so mighty that I can't really stoop down and understand what you're going through. Well notice He says, I was dead.

I was dead. And I understand in the original language it means in the revised version it says I became dead. I was put to death.

I suffered. I understand. I was despised and rejected as man.

I was the man of sorrows acquainted with grief. I was wounded for your transgressions and bruised for your iniquities. I became dead.

So He said, I can understand. I'm the suffering one. And He said, now I can sympathize because He said and I'm alive.

I've come alive and He's alive forevermore. And so He's the sympathizing supreme Savior who knows what suffering is. It's so often said that we really can't sympathize with a person unless we've gone through the experiences they have.

Well none of us have ever gone through the experiences of Christ when He bore your sin in His own body on the tree in those hours of darkness. And so He can understand. He can sympathize.

They have apparently in Moscow the remains of Lenin and they say that every day of the year year after year some twenty thousand people go by that tomb of Lenin. Well beloved we don't go by the grave of Christ. We look up to the glory and we see a living glorified Savior up there.

What a marvelous and glorious blessing for God's people. We serve a risen Savior not one who has died. Many turn their eyes the Moslems turn their eyes constantly to Mecca to the tomb of Mohammed.

And they go home to the fact that they still have His remains of His body whatever is left. But beloved we have a living Christ and we have the remains of His body down here. We be of all men most miserable.

A living Savior. We live to die. But Christ died to live.

And He says because I live ye shall live also. And that's the way He reveals Himself to this dear church who is being crushed. And notice verse nine please.

The suffering saints. And again we have three things mentioned here concerning these suffering saints. We have their trials brought before us.

The triumph that's behind it all and the tormentors that are seeking to torment them. He says in verse nine I know thy works thy tribulation and that is mentioned twice you notice. In verse ten it's mentioned again ye shall have tribulation ten days.

The trials. The word trials or tribulation here simply means afflictions. Your anguish.

The pressure. Some have translated it this way. The crushing beneath a weight.

It's like wheat apparently being put under the millstone and being crushed. He said I know the pressure under which you're going through. Beloved I challenge you this morning.

If you're going through some real severe trial and pressure at this time take that to heart. The Lord says I know the pressure that you're going through. I know it.

During this particular time or later on just following this time around 120 A.D. Polycarp was martyred here. There was tremendous persecution going on among these dear saints of Smyrna. And it continued on for a number of years and Polycarp was one of them.

And I understand that even today they have a reminder of him and his testimony for the Lord. He was 86 years of age when they put him into the fire and burned to death. Eighty-six.

And they want him to recant and to deny his Lord. And it's reported that he said 86 years have I served Christ. He has never done me wrong.

How can I blaspheme my King the One who has saved me? And he was taken in a moment of time absent from the body and present with his Lord. Notice concerning these trials as well. It says, I know thy works, thy trials or crushing or tribulation and thy poverty.

And thy poverty. The word poverty here is the idea of being destitute. Destitute.

But thou art rich. Isn't that interesting? But thou art rich. Such a tremendous contrast from the church at Laodicea who said we're rich.

And the Lord said, but you're poor. This was the poor rich church. They were poor materially but they were rich spiritually.

Laodicea was rich materially but they were poor spiritually. But thou art rich. These dear ones had lost all.

And I understand among other things, beloved, that when the persecution broke out among these dear saints at Samurna, the powers that be just stepped in and took all their possessions. Any of the little ones that were left just were left with nothing. Whatever material things they had were taken from them completely.

They were poverty stricken. And I'm sure many of them must have cried out frequently to the Lord, Lord, why? As they saw their loved ones snatched from them and they saw babes being taken and put to death and so on. Lord, why? The Lord says, you're rich.

You know the Bible speaks about us being rich in faith. The Word of God tells us in 1 Timothy we need to be rich in good works. Do you recall the Lord Jesus Christ? Though He were rich, yet for your sakes became poor that ye through His poverty might be made rich.

And He's talking, of course, about the riches in Christ. The abundance of His riches. We have an inheritance that's incorruptible, undefiled, that fate hath not away.

Those dear saints who heard that when Peter wrote to them in his first epistle, they had been scattered abroad. They knew the trial of their faith. They were suffering, suffering severely.

But Peter reminded them, he said, beloved, you have an inheritance. It's incorruptible, it's undefiled, it's fate hath not away, and it's reserved in heaven for you. He said, you're rich.

And this, in a sense, is the triumph, beloved. Beyond the veil of tears, beyond the trials, the difficulties, which inevitably have a purpose behind them, drawing us closer to the Lord, causing us to lean more heavily upon Him. For when we go along without trials and difficulties, how independent we become.

How careless we get. You know that, and I know that. It's these trials, it's these difficulties, it's these things that come into life that cause to lean upon Him and realize we need Him, and we need Him constantly.

But know this, the Tremontors, it speaks here about, I know the blasphemy, they would say they are Jews, and they're not, but are the synagogue of Satan. And apparently these Jewish people, in their hatred toward these people who believe in Jesus the Messiah, they put all their effort in not only persecuting them, but seeking to slander them blaspheme, make all sorts of accusations upon them. Lord said, I know.

I know all these trials. I know what's causing it. Perhaps you're going through some trial, and you say, yes, but what's happening to me is false, it's wrong, I'm being accused of things that are not true.

Our Savior was also. I know about the Tormentors. I know about the trials.

But as I do know also, there's a triumph for you. There's a light amidst the gloom. Verse 10, the slandering servant noticed his work.

Fear none of these things that which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Now you recall frequently when the prophetic side of this is looked at.

We're reminded, and no doubt rightfully so, that temporarily during this time there were ten emperors that rose up running through to Diocletian who just went all out in persecuting the saints during that period of time. But when I think of this number ten, beloved, I think of another lesson. The number ten in the Word of God is that number of responsibility.

Testing. The testing time. This is the testing time down here.

We have ten fingers. We have ten toes. When the Lord got those dear ones together, you remember in Luke chapter 19 in the parable of the nobleman and the servant, He gave them ten pounds of responsibility.

There were ten servants. And the number ten is constantly brought before us throughout the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation. Ten commandments.

Ten virgins. And so on and on we go. All responsible.

Now this is the period of responsibility for us down here. And during this period of responsibility, there are going to be trials. There are going to be testings.

The testings will be continually until the time, the ten days are over until the responsible time is over, beloved. And not until we're taken home to glory is that responsible time over. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

The terrible persecution these dear souls went through just chills your bones. When you read such books as Fox's Book of Markers and so on, you find that during these times and apparently these dear saints of Smyrna, many of them were covered with tar and then set on fire like a burning torch while still alive. Many

were covered with animal skins and thrown among the wild beasts and devoured.

And many other diabolical things that they fought up. The Lord says, Be faithful. Be faithful.

And I understand that when it says be faithful, the thought here is be continually faithful. They had been faithful. It's not that the Lord says now, from now on be faithful.

The thought in this particular word is be continually faithful. As you have been up until now, so continue. And if you sense, beloved, it's the trial that you're going through right now, if you sense a tendency to kind of give up, the Lord says continue on faithfully.

Continue on until death. Why? I'll give thee a crown of life. I'll give thee a crown of life.

That's the diadem, at least the wreath that they gave for the victor in the games. It's not the royal diadem as such. It's the victor's crown, not the royal crown.

I'll give thee a crown of life. And then to the satisfied saints he says, He that hath an ear, let him hear. What the Spirit saith unto the churches, he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Beloved, there is a first death. But we're reminded so frequently in the Word of God of the second death, eternal death. Satan can touch these bodies of ours.

He can bring trials and difficulties to bear upon us. He can affect us up to the first death, but not the second death. Not the second death.

We shall not be hurt. We might be hurt during the first death. No guarantee of not being hurt during the first death.

But there's a guarantee of not being hurt in the second death. The lake of fire, eternal judgment, is not for the child of God. So there is that satisfactory outlook to the saint of God.

You remember how the Apostle Paul could say, and it's always an amazing statement, is it not, in Corinthians when he says, for these light afflictions, which are but for a moment. And immediately our thoughts say, well Paul, your mind must be slipping. You must be over the hill.

You can't seem to remember that for the last thirty years you've been going through all sorts of trials, shipwreck, beatings, imprisonments, stonings, dragging through the streets, light afflictions. Paul, haven't you forgotten? You've been going through this for years. For a moment.

They've been going on, Paul, on and on and on. Paul said, Paul, they work for us a far more exceedingly eternal way to glory. He said, in the light of glory.

In the light of the One who is the first and the last, who is the eternal One, in the light of eternity, in the light of being with the Lord, this little period is so small, so short, but for a moment. God grant that we might indeed be challenged to keep our eyes on Him through the trials, knowing that He is with us in them. Our gracious Father, we thank Thee that our Savior has said, I am the same yesterday, today, and forever.

We thank Thee, our Father, there is the constant promise that Thou art with us. Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Thou art with us. Our Savior has said, Lord, I am with You always, even unto the end.

We pray that Thou would comfort any crushed heart here this morning. May they indeed turn their eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, that the things of earth might grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and His grace. As we pray in our Savior's name, Amen.

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