

Bible Studies for Life: June 13

Steadfast in Difficulties • Revelation 2:8-11

By Clay Anthony



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Persecution has been a part of Christianity from the beginning. God followers have faced opposition from all sides, ranging from government interference to family disputes to social ostracizing. Look no further than the death of Jesus Himself and realize that persecution is to be expected at some point in our walk.

Trouble in this life is actually a promise from Jesus (John 6:33). The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy not to run from suffering but to share in it, for it leads to Godliness (1 Tim. 2:3).

Harsh treatment from a lost culture should not come as a surprise. Believers across the globe are actively sought out and harassed by those set against Jesus. What should be a surprise to those who would do us harm is our response to such treatment. With the grace of Jesus covering us along with the Holy Spirit empowering us (Acts 1:8), we can face any form of trial that confronts us.

That is the lesson from the message to the church at Smyrna in today's text. Note that although Jesus makes no comment about

having something against this church, as He does the others, there is still much for these believers to learn from their Savior.

They hear they are rich (2:8-9). May I encourage you to think about your bank account? Meditate on your retirement funds. Think hard concerning what property you own. Do you consider yourself rich? If you are like many people, you certainly do not. Even though we live in a wealthy nation and indeed most have our basic needs met, it would be safe to say that we do not consider ourselves rich by any means.

The people of Smyrna would agree, with good reason. They are described here as being known for their tribulation and poverty. The word, "poverty," as used here originally meant destitute beyond measure. That means these people were poorer than poor. They had nothing of value materially. They were slandered by those acting on behalf of hell itself.

They endured harsh actions and words – but those were not the final words spoken to them. Verse eight reminds us all that the One speaking was once dead and is now alive. He describes this church as far from destitute. In fact, He calls them rich.

Do they have money, property, or fat 401Ks? No. All they have is Christ, and what are all those other things in comparison?

They were encouraged to be brave (2:10). "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." That famous quote from U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his first inaugural address in 1932 would make little sense to the people of Smyrna. There was much more to fear than just fear itself for these people.

It is one thing to be fearful of something you're not expecting. We do not expect to have a car accident when we drive or to hear bad news with every doctor's visit. However, it takes intestinal fortitude to stand against something you know is going to harm you. That is precisely what these

believers were facing.

Jesus told them that trouble was coming and was specific concerning the type and duration of this trouble. This trouble could even lead to the ultimate price of martyrdom, and thus they were encouraged to look past the point of death to their eternal reward. Knowing trouble is coming gives you opportunity to prepare for what you will face.

These people were called on to rest in their reserves of bravery, for at the end of their trials they would either be standing for – or perhaps, with – Jesus. With that thought in mind, there is truly nothing to fear.

They learned they were immortal (2:11). This verse always raises a looming question: What is this second death that Jesus mentions? Modern readers need simply to step back and understand the genre to which the Book of Revelation belongs. The New Testament was written to be read aloud. For this reason, apocalyptic literature such as Revelation uses language to paint pictures for the mind.

Of course, there is no true way to kill a living organism twice. Dying, however, does lead to an afterlife. We believe that to be true. We also understand that death in this world is final and dying in Christ leads to life eternal in heaven, which will never end. Dying without Christ leads to life eternal in hell, which will never end. This “second death” of hell described here is quite simple to bypass.

Trusting in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ leads to immortality for all who believe.

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