

The Victor's Life Crown

By Paris Reidhead*

The Message to the Church at Smyrna is found in Revelation Chapter 2, verses 8 to 11. We have called this the Victor's Life Crown. It is the third in the series of messages on the studies of the Churches here in Revelation. A Message that was dictated by the Lord Jesus to the Apostle John, for these churches that then were, and for us today. I read the Text:

“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) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are of 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: and 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; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

Ephesus was the nearest city to Patmos. The next nearest was this of Smyrna. We find in the study of this church at Smyrna that it was larger than all others, except the church at Ephesus, that it was probably the most spiritually significant other than the church at Ephesus. And so, we would then say that the Lord is writing to that Church which is nearest to His heart, and has a message that is going to express to them again, appreciation for all they are and have, but also frank, open, honest declaration of that which grieves Him. The One that sees this church is the Lord Jesus whose eyes are as a flame of fire. The One that is speaking is none other than the Son of God. “These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.” All things are by Him. He sustains all things. He controls all things, and when as Peter has said all things are dissolved and rolled up as a scroll He will remain. And so He uses this word, the first and the last. We understand that it is the Lord Jesus Christ that is writing, the One of whom the Apostle John wrote saying, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” (John 1:1-3) It is this One that is writing. The Last. He controls, he sustains, and He governs-all things are not only by Him, but are for Him. And therefore He uses this Name.

Then He also says, The One which was dead, and is alive. You will find a little later in His Message to this church that He is telling them that some of them will suffer persecution and perhaps even unto death. Therefore, He is prepared to identify Himself as the One which was dead. For God loved the world and gave His Son, but the world hated His Son, and gave Him up to the Cross, and slew Him and hanged Him on a tree, and He died, and He is alive. For the grave could not hold Him, and the bars of the tomb could not keep Him, and the seal of Pilate could not contain Him. He is alive. And He is the One, the One that has died and has been raised from the dead, that is the spokesman.

And the ones spoken to are the church at Smyrna. This is an interesting church, in that Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John -- Very possibly John served here for some years. Polycarp was very close to John. You understand, of course, that Polycarp is probably one of the most honored and revered of all of the Sub-Apostolic witnesses for our Lord. He was brought before the Governor there in Smyrna, was asked to renounce Christ and denounce the Gospel. He said for 80 and 6 years have I loved and served Jesus Christ. He has always been faithful to me, and I cannot deny Him now. And tradition has it, very well verified I am sure, that Polycarp was then placed in the red hot chair that was held for heretic Christians. And all Christians were heretic according to the laws of Rome. And this man, 86 years a Christian, probably much older than that, was taken to it and thrown in upon it, and was there burned to death.

In 400 A.D., that is in the 5th Century, there were over 2 thousand Christian martyrs in the city of Smyrna. And thus our Lord does well to identify Himself as the One that was dead and is alive. “Unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.”

What things? What is He saying? What is the message that He gives. I want you to see those first two words in the 9th verse: I know. I know. If I had nothing more to say from this Text tonight than this word of comfort to every Christian, I would have a message from God. For Jesus Christ, the first and the last, the one that was dead and is now alive, says, I know. He is intimately

acquainted with every experience through which His children pass. And this is that which He wishes this Church to understand. I know. I know thy works. He has seen their testimony, their labor of love, and their faithful service as they have stood for Him, as they have turned to Him from idols to serve Him. I know thy works. I know what it has cost you to leave off the worship of the idols. I know the cost.... how you have been ostracized from family and friends, how your businesses have been taken from you, how you have been hated because you refused to continue in the vile worship that characterized the idolatry of the day. I know. I know your works. I know the things that you have done for Me. I know your tribulation: Every heart ache, all the grief through which you have passed, all the agony of spirit that you have endured. I know.

I know your poverty. I know how they have deprived you of a living, how they have forbidden you to labor, how they have refused to let you work. I know what it has cost you to stand for it, to stand for Me. I know. I suppose all of us have been moved by the fact that the family in New Orleans, that insisted that their child go to school in the integrated School, even though in Government work had such awful pressure put upon them that they had to leave the city of New Orleans and go back to New England. I am sure that all of us are aware of the fact that here was a family that stood for something, believed something, and were prepared to pay the financial price of sacrifice that it would bring. I wonder if the Lord Jesus Christ could look at you today and say, I know your works, I know your tribulation. I know your poverty for My sake and the Gospel. How much has it cost you to serve the Lord? How much has it involved you in to serve Him!

I sometimes feel greatly stricken, and smitten, when I think of my generation of which I am all too much a part. I will never forget the words of that Communist, spoken to a Pastor friend down in Anderson, South Carolina. When he asked this man that formerly had been a member of his church, but now was exceedingly active in Communist activities there and carried his card as a member of the Communist Party,... He said, Why is it that you have done this? The man looked at him and said, I'll tell you why. Because I lost confidence in the church. He said, Jesus Christ died on a Cross, and you preachers are living off of it. And every time I think of that, my heart is smitten within me.

I wonder if you and I today are prepared to put ourselves against the future. We think of the agony through which our brethren are passing in China, and what it is costing them to stand for the Lord Jesus Christ. I am sure of them, as He looks down and sees, some of them that have suffered the loss of goods, family, yes even their life, He can say, I know thy works. I know thy tribulation. I know thy poverty. He does know it. And there ought to be great comfort to you who have suffered for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there ought to be great encouragement to all of us that may have to face such a future, for we do not know what it holds. Isn't it true we do not know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future. And we realize that He has indicated to this church that there has not been a slur, there has not been an expression of hatred, there has not been a denunciation, there has not been a depriving them of a single privilege, but what He saw it. He knows. I know. I know thy works. I know thy tribulation. I know thy poverty.

But then notice what He says, But thou art rich. Thou art rich. Here we have material poverty with spiritual riches. They have loved the Lord, even to the cost of that which was precious and real. A friend was telling me of his experience in trying to buy a watch here in the City from a Christian friend who ran a jewelry store. And the man said, "Now, I won't charge you the Tax. There is a Federal Tax, but I won't charge it." He said, "Why not?" "Oh," he said, "I have to meet my competition, and nobody pays that. We get around it." My friend looked at him and said, "Well, either I'll pay the tax and you turn it over to the Government, or I won't take your watch." Here was a man that said, "Well, I've got to stay in business." I do not believe that, dear Friend. I have never had to face it in terms of business. I have had to face it in other areas. But I firmly believe that a man ceases to be a man, or a woman in her own eye, or in his own eyes, the moment that they let material consideration stand in the way of faithfulness to Jesus Christ. I know thy works. I know thy tribulations. I know thy poverty endured for My sake. There is no virtue in poverty. No virtue in poverty. But the virtue lies in the fact that one is willing to suffer being defrauded of his goods for the sake of Jesus Christ. There is no virtue in being persecuted, unless it is for Righteousness sake. He said, "If you endure graciously when you are persecuted for the things you have done wrong, what virtue is that? It is when you have done right and are persecuted that your patience is of spiritual value."

And here is a Church that stood firmly and completely and wholly for the Lord Jesus Christ, has taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods, have experienced material poverty, but have been spiritually enriched. But what do we find here in this latter part

of the 9th verse? He said, "I know. I know something else. I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan." Here was Religious profession, with spiritual poverty. First you had material poverty with spiritual riches. And here you have religious profession with spiritual poverty. Outwardly they were Jews. Outwardly they were religious. But inwardly they were ravening wolves; the same kind of attitude that characterized those that cried, Crucify Him, also cried, Crucify anyone that follows Him. And here were a people that were persecuting the Church. Probably they were those that had had the ministry of Paul, for he was in the area and had ministered here. He had gone into their synagogues. He had preached the Gospel. Some of these that are in the church at Smyrna had been Jews in the synagogue. They have come out. And now persecution has risen up against them by those that say they are Jews. But you see he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but he that is one inwardly. It is the circumcision of the heart, not just of the flesh. And so the Lord Jesus Christ said, "These people say they are the custodians of the Oracles of God. They say they are those who have the truth. No. I know them. They are outwardly Jews, but inwardly they are not." Viciously vilify the Lord Jesus Christ, denounce and persecute the Christians -- this characterized their attitude. Christ said of them, "They are of the synagogue of Satan." This does not mean that they had a building dedicated to Satan, but it means that they had concocted blasphemies and planned assaults upon the children of God as an assembly of people who were working out the plan of Satan. It was Satan that stirred up persecution against the Church. The Jews, however, here in Smyrna were his willing tools. The pagan authorities, the Roman government officials, were incited and worked up by them to cast the Christians into prison and bring them under persecution. This is what the Lord Jesus says. I know. I know you that love Me and trust Me, and I know those that have persecuted you and raised up trouble against you and difficulty for you. I know all of these things.

I wonder if this truth has ever reached your heart? You know when things begin to go wrong with a person; it is so easy to feel, "Well God has just turned His back on me. His eyes are closed toward me. He has forgotten me." But do you hear what He says? I know. I know the experiences through which you have passed. I witnessed everything that has been said, everything that has been done. The Scripture makes it perfectly clear that under no circumstance is a Christian ever to try and vindicate himself or to revenge himself. I'll explain why. And you notice He indicates by what He does not say that this Church was not doing either. They were not vindicating, nor were they endeavoring to bring revenge. They were simply standing there, committing their case to Him that is faithful. Now to tell you why. If you vindicate yourself, you use up any virtue that you may have had in the vain fruitless effort of trying to prove your innocence. There is nothing left, when you have done that. Because you have become so guilty in the effort to vindicate your innocence, that your guilt -- the guilt at the end is greater than the innocence you proved at the first. And I have said frequently in the past, No use to explain, says the Spirit of God to the child of God because your enemies won't take it, and your friends do not need it. And consequently, this Church was perfectly willing to leave their case in the hands of Him who knew. He knew their works. He knew their tribulation. He knew their poverty. And He knew all about the other. Now we say that because in just a little while later we are going to find that He sees something in them, and He knows what is wrong with them also, but here He sees what is right.

"Fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer." They are going to suffer. They are going to suffer; this church at Smyrna is going to be persecuted as few have been. Now what have we so far. Well, we have material poverty with spiritual riches, and we have religious profession with spiritual poverty, and now we have a commendation given by Christ without any censor at this point. The Lord is entirely pleased with this Church so far, up to this point. And He is fortifying the Church for what is yet to come. He is saying, "Everything is in My hands. I am the first and the last. I know what has been and is to be. I am the One, who has the ability to say to you, Do not ever be afraid of the future, because I know it. And if I ask you to pass through it, I will be with you in it." And then He says, "I am the One which was dead, and is alive. I can carry you even through death into life." This is the One that writes to this Church.

"Behold," says He, "the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." As we have had commendation without censor, we now have a prophesy concerning persecution with encouragement. You say, "What does this have to do with me." In your lifetime, if you are as old as I am, -- 40 -- 42 -- and many of you are. Others of you are much older. But in my lifetime, I know that at least according to the figures that were published by the Department - by the Government - there were some eight million people, Christian people, in Russia that died for no greater crime than that they loved Jesus Christ. Now these figures are old, back in

the late '30's. I have not seen any other figures since then. And we are told by the Government itself that in China there have been twenty million that have been deprived of existence during the last ten years, and a great many of these for no other crime than that they have loved Jesus Christ. This world is no friend of Grace, and no friend of Christ.

I do not know what may happen in my lifetime and yours. I do not know, and I am not going to hazard a prophecy concerning it. But I do know this, that two thirds of the world now is under a governmental system which is antithetically opposed to everything for which we stand, and for which the Gospel stands. For Atheistic Communism has never ceased to be atheistic, and never ceased to have hatred for those that love Christ. And, consequently, the facts are there. The world is before you. You are in it. You are part of it. I do not know what the future holds for any of us. But I do know this, that there is an appropriateness to what Christ is saying here, as perhaps there has seldom been to any other decade, and quite as clear a measure as there is tonight for us. Let me read it to you. "Fear none of these things 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: be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life."

The Lord Jesus knows exactly what will happen to this people. Some of you shall be cast into prison. They did not know which of not them it would be, but He did. They did not know when it would happen, but He did. All they knew was that He said, "Some of you shall be cast into prison." They did not know why it was going to happen, but He did: "That ye may be tried." "The trial of your faith is much more precious than gold that perisheth." (1 Peter 1:7) This does not mean they were going to be tried in a pagan court, even though this thought lies somewhere underneath the surface. The verb is to be completely tried, that is that the evidence of the genuineness of their faith in Christ can be exhibited. He wants to have it seen by all that what He has done is real. I would recommend that in connection with the message this evening you read again the Book of Job. Frankly, I think that the Book of Job is the oldest Book in the Bible, and it is written for an express purpose. You see, Satan's argument to God was, "The only reason Job serves you is because you bless him." In other words, he is motivated by selfishness. "And if You will let me touch him, I will prove You that Grace does not do anything for people. I will prove to you that the human heart is corrupt, and is incapable of any change." This is the argument that Satan presents to God. And God turns about and says to him, "All right. You can touch him. Touch his things, but not him." And you know what happens? That there is the destruction at his property, his herds, his flocks, and finally he says, "Well, if you would let me touch him, then he would curse you." And his children are taken, and finally his body is touched with boils. And Job now is there with all possessions gone, with his family gone, with his wife saying, "Curse God and die." And his friends sitting about and looking at him, saying, "The reason that you are in trouble is because you have sinned." And Job, searching his heart before God, says, I don't know where I have sinned. I don't know any reason for it. And I am not going to be hypocrite and confess to sins of which I am not guilty, just to please you. I'll sit here. Though He slay me, yet am I going to trust Him. I am not going to do it. I am going to stand on the grounds that I have sought to serve the Lord with all my heart, and here boils or not boils, dearth or no dearth, loss or no loss... And he sits there. And then the arguments that comprise those many chapters of the Book of Job, and finally Job sees the Lord, and of course there is wrought in his heart a great breaking, a great humility. "I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. And I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5,6) But the fact is that Job did not curse God. There was a trial of faith. I believe this is the oldest Book of the Bible because it was God's answer to Satan, saying that when Grace works a miracle in the heart, that miracle is of enduring quality, and nothing can change it. I believe that.

Now I believe that this is the reason why we have persecution even unto death in Revelation. It begins, does the Bible, and ends with the same thing, that when God performs a miracle on the human heart they are willing to stand with the loss of all things and to the suffering of all grief and agony. They are going to stand for Jesus Christ. This is what we have. I am allowing you to go into this experience. Satan is the one that has originated it. The same one that tried unsuccessfully with Job is going to cast some of you into prison. And I am going to allow this to happen in order that you may be completely tried, and the genuineness of My work in your heart can be demonstrated. How long is it going to last? And ye shall have tribulation ten days. I do not think it has reference to ten days in the literal sense, but ten days in the sense of a complete period. It is going to go on until it is completed, until everything that I have purposed for it is wrought. Everything that I have intended by it is accomplished. Actually the duration is not, in my mind, revealed here. I think these ten days could have included the death of

Polycarp in 66 A.D. (71 years after John wrote this in 95 A.D.) Ten days to me means a complete period. I am going to allow you to be tried until the trial has done everything I have purposed for it. If you wish, I will even extend those ten days onto the 5th century when, as I have said, two thousand died for Christ in the city of Smyrna.

But you know something? I wonder if those ten days are completed. Five is the number of grace. And this is the day of grace. And I think that as long as there is God's Open Door to sinners there is going to be Satan's attack upon saints. As long as Jesus Christ says, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden," there will be the enemy saying, If you do, you will die. (Matt. 11:28) I believe that. I do not expect the time will ever come when the Word will be altered which says, "They that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Are you prepared to undergo this that this Church heard?

If I am tonight speaking, and I do not claim to be by any means, but were I speaking to you as John did speak to the Church at Smyrna, what would be your attitude? If you knew that you were going to be cast into prison, that you were going to suffer, you were going to be tried, you would have tribulation ten days, and some of you would die, what your you do about it? What would you do if I were to say to you that in your future is a prison cell? What would you do with Jesus Christ. If I were to say to you, Now listen! In your future is a Cross. What would you say?

I have told you of that company of Christians during the last ten years to whom the authorities came. Laid a cross on the ground, and said, If you will walk on it you will live. All they had to do was step on the Cross, and walk across it to the other end, and they were free. But if you don't... For under the Cross and on it was the Bible... And if they would walk on the Bible, and step on the Cross, they could go free. There was a bridge to their own deliverance. But the one that escaped and came out to Hong Kong said that there were one hundred and fifty crosses raised for men who refused to step on it. What would be your reply if this were addressed to you? It could be very well, you know.

Is it not interesting that our Lord Jesus shows exactly what He wants His own believers to do in the face of this persecution? Notice what He does not say. He did not say, "Pray to be delivered from this prison: Pray to be delivered from this suffering: Pray to be delivered from this tribulation." Nor did He say, "Rail upon those that are condemning you, bitterly assail those that attack you, fight for your rights, demand protection, organize, unionize." These are things He does not say. None of these things are in His Word. What does He say? Be thou faithful unto death. Just stand. In Ephesians, the 6th Chapter, verse 13, He says, "Take unto you whole armour of God whereby ye shall be able to stand in the evil day and having done all, Stand. To stand." Just stand. Refuse to bend. Refuse to bow, Refuse to offer the pinch of incense to the altar of the Emperor. Refuse to take the oath that is going to compromise your Lord. Just stand.

Now, death is not the only evidence of faithfulness to Christ. The Lord seems to want only a limited number of martyrs. It may not be your privilege to go to see Him by means of a martyr's death. Sometimes one wonders in that precious moment, if there would not be as there seemed to be in the history of Martyrdom through Foxes' Book of Martyrs, given by the Spirit of God, a great exaltation at the privilege of dying for Christ. I wonder sometimes whether it would not be harder to live for Christ. When Mr. Adeney was here last week, he was saying that some of the young people at the Chinese Fellowship that afternoon had said that the experience through which Christians in China are passing now is infinitely harder than that through which they passed under the Roman Empire two thousand years ago, because this is a persecution against the mind. This is at pressure on the human spirit. This is subtle. The other was direct, and open, and physical. And the Lord Jesus demands faithfulness...In whatever measure of tribulation, He allots to us in order to try us. And our attitude during this tribulation, What is it?

In Luke the 6th Chapter, the 28th Verse, we hear Him say, "Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." And commit the keeping of your soul, to Him that is faithful. Turn it over to Him. This is what He commands. Keep on becoming faithful. Keep on proving faithful, even unto death. Be ye faithful unto death. Keep on proving yourself faithful.

Why? Well you see He says, "The crown of life will only be given to those who prove themselves faithful." This word crown is an interesting word. You have heard the name Stephen. Well the word Stephen means Crown. It comes from the Greek word, *stephanos*. And the *stephanos* is a crown used to mark out royalty; it is a crown worn by a King. Remember what we read in Revelation 1:5,6: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own Blood, and hath made us kings and priests

unto God.” And so He says, “Keep on proving your faithfulness until you have received that crown that signifies that you are indeed a king; made to be a king.”

Perhaps it did not impress you; but this has been a very interesting week to us -- Mrs. Reidhead and I being missionaries in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and having such close friends in Ethiopia for so many years. We are vitally interested in the fact that this little man, Haile Selassie¹, that was driven out of his country by the invasion by Italy some 20 years ago should now have a coup and an attempt to drive him out of his country by his own son.

We were strangely moved when we read that Haile Selassie’s son had organized a coup against him and was endeavoring to take the Throne from him. But you know something. Here is a man who trusts God. Here is a man that loves Jesus Christ. Here is a man that has trusted Him for many years. During his years of exile in England, he had a faithful witness. Throughout these many years he has been a close friend to those who have known and loved our Savior. And somehow with a little man, not very tall, not very imposing, there seems to be a dignity that would thwart this, would hinder it. And we were all, that knew him and new what pressures he has withstood, what efforts he has put forth in behalf of his country, certainly were praying for him, and for the interests of the Gospel that he represented. And he has done his very best to promote and maintain it there. But he wears the crown well, one of the few absolute Monarchies left. I do not know whether I should be in favor of that or not. The thing I am in favor of is that here is a man that has bowed his knee to the King Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ, and humbly testifies that he is trusting not in the ritual or the rite of the Coptic Church, but he is trusting in the shed Blood of Jesus Christ for the salvation of his soul. He wears *stephanos*, the mark of a king.

Now there is going to be every pressure of hell put against you to dethrone you, to get you to renounce Jesus Christ, to get you out from the position to which He has exalted you, you who were the least of all saints, you who was the chief of sinners, you who were the off scouring of all things, you who deserve nothing but His wrath, the Lord Jesus Christ loved you, and was made to be sin for you, and died your death, and raised you not only to forgiveness and pardon, but to be a joint heir with Him, and that when He sat down on that Throne, you sat there with Him. For unto Him that loved us, and washed us in His Blood, and made us to be kings and priests unto God. And now the enemy is going to come and try to get you to cast aside your inheritance in Christ, and get you to renounce the Lord Jesus, and give up your crown. And He said, “Be thou faithful.” Continually prove your faithfulness, for I will give thee the mark of royalty, a *stephanos*, a crown.

Paul sought this. You listen to the testimony of the Apostle, and you hear him say, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only but unto all them also that love His appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:6-8) Where did Paul go at the conclusion of his Ephesians Epistle - or his Epistle to Timothy rather? Where did he go? Outside of the city gate, as tradition tells us, with a little group of Christians following the band of soldiers that escorted him, and there he knelt, not being given the dignity as some have thought of dying in the Colosseum, but dying outside the city, a place of squalor and filth and darkness. And there he died, his head severed from his body by the one swing of the sword in the hands of the executioner. But what is it he said, “There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

Then there is this exhortation to the church, but more than that, there is an exhortation to the individual. He says to the entire church, “Be thou faithful.” But then, in the conclusion of this wonderful letter to the church, He said, “He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” (Rev. 2:17) There is an individual call which Jesus Christ put to each believer. He that hath an ear, let him hear. The church is, of course, made up of individuals. And the church will only obey Christ as each individual obeys Him. However, there are some churches that may fail. The very individual in such a church that will, need not to be carried by it. It is often a very lonely thing to go with Jesus Christ. Come out from among them and be ye separate. Go outside the camp, bearing His shame, and His ignominy, His disgrace. A Church many times finds it wise and profitable in their own lights, and in their own judgment to repudiate Christ and His Word, and slip and slide and skid passed the issue to the

¹ Haile Selassie (1892-1975) Ethiopia’s regent from 1916 to 1930 and Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974.

point of no return. And of course, the only way that such a church can possibly justify it is to prove that everyone else is wrong, just as the Pharisees could deal with Jesus Christ on only one of two basis. They either had to seek what He taught, or kill Him. And if you are in such a church and you do not go with the group, then you are going to be ostracized, and they will have to turn on you if there is a law against killing, they will use some other means. But the issue is always the same. We trust the church will stand. But if the church will not, you must. Do you see? If the church won't, you must. It is not, My country right or wrong. Abraham Lincoln² was asked, "Let's have a day of prayer in order that we may ask God to come on our side." He said, "We don't need that. We can't get God on our side. There is only one reason for a day of prayer, and that is that we can find out what God's side is and get on it with Him." And so it would be with you. God is not going to be moved because the group is moved. He is almost never with the throng. Almost always is the Lord Jesus alone. And so frequently when our thinking is colored for us by the group thinking it is wrong thinking.

I remember so often hearing Dr. Moyer³ in Northwestern Bible School in Minneapolis saying, Truth is not what you have been taught. What you have been taught may be true, but it is not true because you were taught it. And there must be a constant reference to the Book. This Book is not true because I say it is. It is true because it is true. You do not judge the Book by what I say. You judge me by what the Book says. And there must be this constant unchangeable standard. Truth is not where the Church is. This was the ancient heresy of Rome. And Luther⁴ said it well: The Church is where truth is. Well now, when the church leaves the truth, and you stand with the truth, you may stand alone, but the Scripture says, "He that hath an ear to hear what the Spirit says unto the churches." You stand with the Spirit of God. You stand with the Word of God. You stand with the Son of God, for whatever the Spirit says, the Son says. Both Christ and the Spirit deliver the Message. The Holy Spirit in the Prophet is the interpreter and enforcer of Christ's words. And so what the Spirit says is what Christ says. What does He say? He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. He that overcometh. He that overcometh. This is the call that He has made with promise of Life. You are not to be intimidated by poverty. You are not to be threatened by the confiscation of your goods. You are not to be discouraged by tribulation. You are not to be hindered by persecution. Even death itself is not to stop you in your firm testimony for Jesus Christ.

What does this mean? He that overcometh. He that meets intimidation. He that meets confiscation. He that meets tribulation. He that overcomes persecution. He that endures martyrdom. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. I believe that the second death speaks of damnation in eternal Hell. I believe of eternal loss of the never dying soul. This morning we spoke of Apostasy and the danger of it. And the Lord Jesus Christ writes to the church of Smyrna and He says, "Listen." The synagogue of Satan over which Satan himself presides, using evil men, are going to try to divert you, and allure you, and press you and drive you and entice you. Every pressure that the evil genius of hell can possibly conjure up is going to be exerted upon you to get you to leave the Son of God, but he that overcometh shall not be hurt by the second death, shall escape hell, shall have eternal Life.

But who is it that overcomes? John tells us in his first Epistle, and gives us this word. What an encouraging word it is. "Whoever is born of God overcometh the world. And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Who is he that overcometh the world? He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God. Have you believed that Jesus is the Son of God? Have you committed to Him your possessions? Have you committed to Him your future? Have you committed to Him your life? To believe is to commit. You have heard the illustration so often. I believe in this chair. And there it is. Well why don't you sit down on it? Well I'm afraid it won't hold me. I believe it's a chair. I believe others have sat on it, and I believe if I sat on it, it would hold me. You do not believe on that chair until you commit yourself to it, and you do not believe on Jesus Christ until you commit yourself to Him, not only all that you have to Him, but all that He demands you commit to Him. And all that He has committed to you, you receive from Him. This is what it means to believe.

Who is he that overcomes? He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God. The first and the last, the one that was dead and is now alive. What will this commitment involve? We pointed out to you today in the Morning Study that it involves the pledge of

² Abraham Lincoln (1809 – 1865) The 16th President of the United States.

³ Dr. Robert Moyer-Professor at Northwestern Bible School

⁴ Martin Luther (1483-1546) German monk, former Catholic priest, who wrote the Ninety-Five Theses.

absolute purity, absolute truth, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love. You commit your future to Him that even though He allows you to go into tribulation and persecution, suffering even martyrdom, it is in His hands and in His purpose. All the past is committed to the One that is the first. All the future is committed to the One that is the last. And Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Oh what a Church was the Church at Smyrna. He did not have one thing to hold against it, not one indictment to level. He is pleased, perfectly pleased with this church.

I wonder tonight is He perfectly pleased with me. With you? Certainly the deep desire of our hearts, if we have committed our lives to Him is to please Him, perfectly, perfectly. And you are here tonight unsaved. I would sin against your soul if I were to imply that to believe on Jesus Christ is to get on a Merry Go Round for a few years of a happy lark. It is more than that. If I were to suggest to you that it does not cost to be a Christian, that just because Jesus paid it all there is nothing that is going to be exacted from you, I would be utterly dishonest with you. I tell you this, sinner friend, if you come to Jesus Christ; it is going to cost you everything. It cost Him everything. It is going to cost you everything. First, it means the dethroning of yourself, and the enthroning of Christ, the renunciation of yourself, and the consecration to Christ, the commitment to Him as Lord and as Savior. Secondly, it involves the giving to Him of all you possess and the abandoning to Him of all your future, commitment to Him of your life, and obedience to Him in the face of opposition, and criticism, and Satanic attempt to dissuade and divert you. Oh, beloved, it costs everything to be a Christian.

But I want to tell you one thing else. It's worth everything. It is worth everything to be a Christian, to have Jesus Christ living in you. I read it again. "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and 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; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life. 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."

From a wonderful Savior. Is He yours? Do you know Him? Do you love Him? Do you trust Him? Does He have all because He is worthy of all? Are you saying as did Paul, I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. Let us bow in prayer.

Oh God, our Father, we hear the Son of God speak tonight as He spoke before saying, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth." (Matt. 10:34) In our hymns and in our carols we shall sing, Peace, over and over again. And we know there is only peace through Thy dear Son who died and shed His Blood. But He said, "I came not to send Peace, but to send a sword." (Matt. 10:34) A man's foes shall be they of his own household. Whosoever will save his life will lose it. "Whosoever will lose his life for My sake and the Gospels will save it." (Matt.16:25) This is the message Thy Son gave us, and we give the worldThat it costs everything to follow Him. But He is worth everything, because He is alive from the dead. Oh might there be someone here today that would say, Yes, Yes, I want Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, someone good enough, worthy enough, holy enough, so that I can live for Him, and if need be die for Him, someone that can enable me to be all that I would be, that He would have me be, someone that is wise enough to tell me what to be and strong enough to enable me to be it. I need Jesus Christ. Might there be someone here of that heart and spirit tonight, to whom Thou art speaking, that Thou wilt call to Thy Son.

Everyone here that profess faith in Him, Oh God, help us to realize we are either of this sort or we too are of the synagogue of Satan, with a Name to live, but being dead. Oh Father, let it not be so. But let there be here, this evening a company of committed men and women who are willing to live for the Lord Jesus Christ at whatever cost, to the despoiling of their goods, to poverty, to tribulation, even to death, to live for Him, even to die for Him. Might we be such a people. Lord, the world is only changed by dedicated, committed people. Might there be such commitment tonight, found in our hearts, as we bring to Him the gift He asks, the abandonment of everything to Him. Might He see of the travail of His soul in and for us, and be satisfied.

With our heads bowed, and eyes closed, Are there those who would say by upraised hand, Pray for me. God has spoken to my heart, and I find that I have not committed my life to Him, but tonight I would, and I do. In just such terms as you have outlined, I want to indicate by my upraised hand that tonight I am committing my life wholly to Jesus Christ on these terms. Would you put your hand up and take it down again? I see it, and God bless you. Anyone else? Anywhere?

Let us stand for the Benediction. (I invite the one whose hand has been raised and others who may be here with spiritual need, desiring consultation and prayer, to remain behind in your seat and I will come to you shortly and talk with you and pray with you, and help in any way we can.) Father, drive Thy Word deep into our hearts, burn it upon us; let the message that Thou didst give to the Church at Smyrna encourage us that whatever the future may hold, Thou dost hold it and us in it, and Thy purpose is only our dross to remove and the gold to refine. And so, Father, we pray that Thy Word may be a salve to the wounded, and a rebuke to the disobedient, and a comfort to the assailed. Whatever the need may be, let Thy Word be that to us, and in and through it all being glory to Jesus Christ for His Name's Sake. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Evening, December 18, 1960 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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