THE FEAR OF SUFFERING

 **DATE: 5/27/2018 am**

**TEXT: Revelation 2:8-11**

**INTRODUCTION**

We started looking at The Dangers Facing the Churches today

And our Church in particular

America is in Dire Straights

There’s never been a more dangerous time for our churches

We are facing the immoral decline of our culture

And honestly, churches are struggling to keep their heads above water

From the outside,

We face a growing opposition from the Gov’t and the reality of an increasing hostile anti-Christian majority

There is no longer a Moral Majority / the tide is turning

From the inside,

Church leaders who are coming up with all kinds of unscriptural ways to fill their pews

There are all kinds of false doctrine floating around

And Pastors who are trying to stay true to the Word of God are left scratching their heads …

Marveling at the migration of members leaving for the lukewarm liberal churches

The situation looks incredibly bleak

But here’s the thing, this situation is exactly what the Apostle John was facing in his day

And the Lord Jesus addresses these issues with the Apostle John in chapters 1- 3 of the Book of Revelation

The churches of Asia Minor in the 1st century where the first recipients of the Book of Revelation

And as our church is in danger …

So, they faced the same pressures of living in a culture of rampant immorality and idolatry …

These churches, 2000 years ago and several thousand miles away, were experiencing exactly what we are facing today

And it’s no surprise, that we face the same dangers at the hands of the same enemy, employing the same methods, using the same tools

Except that nowadays, it looks a little different

It looks like Christians being mocked on talk shows or sneered at on social media

It looks like Christians cowed into silence in their workplace because they fear losing their job

Or told to keep their faith in their churches and not bring it out into public

It looks like church leaders falling into sin

It looks like denominations embracing a new definition of marriage

It looks like congregations losing heart because attendance is dwindling and the soul of their nation seems so irreversibly lost

There’s no denying it

And there’s no point burying our heads in the sand

Every church is in danger— and that includes ours

In fact, there are only really two kinds of churches:

-- Those who are soberly aware of the risks and are prepared to face them, and …

-- Those who are carrying on completely unaware

The devil is prowling for both

The question is: what are we going to do about it?

I hope to help answer that question with this series of messages – Why?

So, we’ll be able to **“Face the Danger”**

Last week we looked at Loveless Orthodoxy in **vs. 1-7**

Today we are going to look at another church and their temptation to Fear Suffering in **vs. 8-11**

So, let’s pray and look at this Danger this morning

**“THE FEAR OF SUFFERING”**

**~~~Prayer~~~**

**I. A “CRUSHED” CHURCH -vs. 9b-10a**

It is easy to see that this church was going through some intense problems because of their testimony for the Lord

They were letting their light shine in a dark world and they were paying the price

Notice how they were crushed …

**A. They Faced ‘Persecution’ – v. 9**

***“I know thy … tribulation”***

That word means*pressure*

It refers to crushing something under the weight of heavy stones

In the original language it was the word used to describe the stone wheels used to crush the wheat

We might call them Mill Stones

This church was paying the price for their allegiance to Jesus

The pressure was on, and they were suffering

This persecution did not come from the pagans in Smyrna alone

**v. 9** tells us that they were also suffering at the hands of the Jews

The Jews in Smyrna joined hands with the idolaters in that city to destroy the Christians by whatever means necessary

Jesus calls them “***the synagogue of Satan***” and accuses them of blaspheme (**“*slander”***) against these believers

Why did the people of Smyrna hate the believers?

History tells us several reasons …

**1.** The Jews and the pagans accused the Christians of cannibalism

Because they held Communion

**2.** They were accused of Immoral Behavior

Because they Fellowshipped

**3.** They were hated because of the separation that took place after they got saved

4. They were accused of being atheists because they stopped worshipping all the so-called gods

And spoke out about those false gods

5. They were accused of being political enemies of Rome because they refused to bow to Caesar

**They Faced** **‘Persecution’**

**B. They Faced ‘Poverty’ – v. 9**

***“I know thy … Poverty”***

The word ***“poverty”*** speaks of being *absolutely destitute*

These poor people had nothing of this world’s goods because of their relationship with the Lord Jesus

They were denied jobs because of their testimony

These people had nothing in a city that possessed everything

**C. They Faced ‘Prison’ – v. 10**

***“the devil shall cast some of you into prison,”***

Not that being Persecuted and Poor isn’t bad enough

But now they are notified that some of them will be throw into Prison

Prison in those days wasn’t like the prisons today

When people went to prison under the Roman system,

They did not receive a college education, learn a skill and spend their days writing books, working out, and watching television

When a person went to prison in those days, it was to await execution

The only way you got out was to die

Now we can see why there could have been a great temptation to be afraid!

They were Suffering

It’s one thing to Suffer, and I’m not saying it’s easy

But if you start to Fear Suffering

Then you will back off your Christianity

Jesus told them at the beginning of **v. 10**

***“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer”***

Let me just say something

Everyone who will live a holy, separated, and dedicated life for Jesus Christ, in any generation, is going to face persecution

**II Timothy 3:12 – *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”***

That shouldn’t shock us, nor surprise us

Jesus said that it would be this way …

**John 16:33** – ***“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”***

The reason the world hates the believer today is the same reason the world hated the believers then

(They used all the excuses that I mentioned earlier)

But the people of Smyrna hated the believers for just one reason

They loved Jesus!

Folks that is why the world hates us today!

-- That is why the liberals hate us

-- That is why the homosexuals, the lesbian, the abortion lobby and the rest of the perverts, (in-for-hells) infidels hate us

-- That is why the liquor and drug crowd hate us

 -- That is why the Muslim, the Jew and religionist hate

 old time fundamental believers

They hate us because …

-- We tell them there is one way to God and that His name is Jesus

-- We tell them that they are headed to Hell unless they repent

-- We won’t join them and confirm them in their abominations

-- We’re different; we are intolerant of sin and we are not afraid to say so

They hate us today, but things are just going to get worse!

It used to cost something to name the name of Jesus

Now, folks can call themselves Christians and act just like the rest of the world

I think the day is coming when the fires of persecution will burn again

I think God will use the hatred of humanity against His Son Jesus to purify the Bride of Christ before she is taken home to glory

I’m not a prophet of doom, but I think there are some difficult days ahead for the faithful, fundamental people of God!

The Danger is that your Fear of Suffering will cause you back away

They may have been a …

**A “CRUSHED” CHURCH**

But they were also …

**II. A CONSISTENT” CHURCH - v. 9a**

Even though they were paying a harsh price for their faithful love and service to the Lord

These people did not back up from their profession

They stayed the course and demonstrated a faithful testimony for the glory of God

Smyrna was famous for myrrh

Myrrh was a substance that came from a shrub-like tree and produced a bitter gum

When the leaves of this tree were crushed, they exuded a very fragrant odor

Myrrh was used as a fragrance by the living and an embalming agent for the dead

It was only when the leaves of the tree were crushed that their fragrance was released

These people were being crushed under the terrifying pressure of persecution and they were releasing the fragrance of love and faithfulness to Jesus into the atmosphere of Smyrna

Let’s examine their testimony here

**A. A ‘Positive’ Testimony**

Jesus sent seven letters to seven different churches

Five of the seven churches received words of rebuke and correction

Only Smyrna and the church at Philadelphia received no correction

 The Lord had been observing their walk and He was pleased

Why? They were Consistent!

If Jesus were to comment on our church, would He have any words of correction for us, or would He come to us with a positive word of encouragement?

**B. A ‘Powerful’ Testimony**

Jesus says to them “***I know thy works***”

The word “***works***” refers to the *business which occupies a person’s life*

In spite of all the darkness around them, these people continued to be a light for Jesus in the midst of an ever-darkening world

They were not intimidated by their enemies

They were not frightened by the hatred of their opponents

They proved they were genuine and that their faith was real by the way they carried themselves in society

Their testimony was Powerful because they stayed the course and stuck to the task for the glory of God!

They were a Consistent church!

**1.** What do our works say about us as a church?

What do your works say about you as an individual?

In a world like ours, where darkness, wickedness and opposition to our way of life … abounds;

There is a tendency to back off the message, to tone things down

The church has withdrawn from the Public …

We have moved within the walls of our buildings where we are safe from the critics and the enemies of truth

What we fail to understand is that we cannot impact the world if we never confront the world

If our message is maintained within the walls of our church and never shared with a lost and dying world, we can never make a difference for the glory of the Lord

-- We need to step out of our comfort zone and reenter the world with the message of salvation

-- We need to publicly proclaim, without fear, the

 saving Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ

-- We need to take our stand for the Lord Jesus one more time and be willing to suffer or to die, if need be, for the glory of God

That was Paul’s desire

**Philippians 3:8-10 …**

 It should be ours as well!

If we are to be a powerful witness for the Lord Jesus,

Then we must live out our profession, regardless of the personal or public cost

Those men who walked with Jesus paid a terrible price for their faith

Every one of the Apostles, with the exception John, died a horrible death for their testimony

Down through the years it estimated that some 70 million believers have died for their faith in Jesus

It’s said every year some 300,000 Believers are martyred for their faith

One day, it may be our turn to take a stand for Jesus

If that day comes, are you ready to stand?

Are you ready to die if necessary?

Are you prepared to live out a Powerful testimony?

Or are you Afraid of Suffering?

**2.** Regardless of what comes our way,

We should ask the Lord to help us be Consistent and Faithful to Him

When we think of all that He has done for us,

 He deserves at least that much from us!

**A “CRUSHED” CHURCH**

**A “CONSISTENT” CHURCH**

Lastly, let us look at …

**III. A “COMFORTED” CHURCH - vs. 8-11**

Jesus comes to this struggling little church and Comforts them

Let’s look at what the Lord tells them

**A. His ‘Interest’**

This church’s only Interest was in doing the Work of the Lord

They weren’t interesting in Socializing, Politicizing or Theorizing

Notice that Jesus says “***I know thy works***”

But more important than their Interest in the work …

… was the Interest the Lord had taken in their efforts

The word “***know***” means *to know by experience*

Jesus is saying - “*I know you folks are having it tough; but you need to know that I am in this with you. I experience everything they do to you. And when they do it to you, they do it to Me!*”

He is telling them that what they are going through is bigger than they are

 Jesus is telling them that Satan is using the evil people of Smyrna to attack Him through His church

He just wants them to know that they are not alone in their struggle

This stuff is real, it’s not fiction folks

I don’t know about you, but that encourages me!

I am glad that our Lord is with us every step of the way

**Hebrews 13:5** – ***“…for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”***

When we are attacked, He knows all about it because it touches Him too

**Hebrews 4:15** – ***“For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”***

Thank God, He promises to help us weather the storms and endure the pain

He is always there to help His suffering saints

**Hebrews 2:18 – *“For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted”***

**His ‘Interest’**

**B. His ‘Involvement’**

When Jesus comes to this church …

**v. 8** - He comes as **“*the first and the last*, *which was dead, and is alive*”**

**1.** The title **“*first and last*”** identifies Jesus as the **“*I AM*”**

It labels Him as the One Who is in control of all things

The people in the church in Smyrna might have thought things were out of control,

But they were in the hand of the Lord

Jesus is still Sovereign!

Let the devil do whatever he pleases, he controls nothing!

God is the One Who calls all the shots …

… and lets Satan have what liberty he exercises against the people of God

He is nothing but a chained lion

**2.** The statement **“*which was dead, and is alive*”** …

Identifies Jesus as the One Who has been there

He is telling these saints that He knows what they are facing because He has already faced it

 The Religious Leaders Hated Him, They Persecuted Him, They Crucified Him

They poured out all their wrath, hatred and anger upon Him; yet He prevailed!

Since He is the One Who has been through the trials and conquered them all,

He is able to help His people when they face the fires of persecution and hatred

**John 10:29 – *“My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand”***

**II Timothy 1:12 – *“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for 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”***

No one knows what we will be called on to face

But, we have the blessed assurance that no matter what comes our way, our Lord has already been there

He has already secured the victory for us and He will meet us there when we arrive at that place

 **Romans 8:37 –** says we are **“*more than conquerors through Him that loved us*”**

**II Cor. 2:14 - “*Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place*”**

Glory to God, I can face anything if I know He will be with me!

**Roman 8:31 - “*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*”**

**C. Our ‘Investment’**

Jesus says - **“*I know…thy poverty*”**

They were poor beyond belief, but then He adds this statement - **(*“but thou art rich*”)**

They may have lacked the world’s goods,

But their faith and the faithful display of their testimony had purchased them treasures in Heaven

They were poor here, but they were rich over there!

The world may have taken everything they had down here

But they had treasures on the other side that were safe from the hands of any enemy

**Matthew 6:19-21 – *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”***

These people had nothing, yet they possessed everything

**II Corinthians 6:10 – *“As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”***

The day may come when this world will take us and our property

The day may come when they threaten us with death

The day may come when our testimony becomes a death sentence in this world

If that day ever comes, take comfort that all you are giving up is what you would have lost at some point anyway

Even if everything you have is taken away, including your life, the treasures you have laid up in Heaven are safe and your soul will merely be liberated to fly home to glory

Therefore, do as Jesus said in **v. 10 - “*Be thou faithful unto death*”**

Folks, all we really have is what we give away for Jesus

**Our ‘Investment’**

**D. Our ‘Inheritance’ – vs. 10b -11**

***“I will give thee a crown of life”***

Their faith had purchased for them more than just a testimony here

Their faith had purchased eternal life for them in Heaven

Jesus is telling them that while they may lose it all down here, even their lives, but they will live forever over there

They may endure Hell on earth for a while, but there will be no Hell for them in eternity

He is telling them that they can’t die but once!

He promises them “***a crown of life***”

That word ***“crown”*** refers to the “***stephanos***”

Or the laurel crown that was given to victors in the ancient Greek games

You see, this church looked like a bunch of losers to the world

 In reality, they were mighty victors, waging spiritual warfare in the name of Jesus Christ!

The day would come when they and their faith would be vindicated!

The lost man will die twice

He will live without God in this world and he will die

After death, he will go to the Lake of Fire

The saints of God need never Fear that happening to them

They have passed from death unto life

**John 5:24** – ***“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life”***

Their faith has bought them eternal life and they will be crowned with victory and glory when they arrive home

Thank God, there is far more awaiting us there than we will ever have down here!

**CONCLUSION**

Church, it might get bad down here before we leave this world

There may be trials and there may be tribulations

There may be pain and there may be persecutions

But, I want you to know that, at the end of the road, we’re going home to be with Jesus

So, press on brother! Press on sister!

It won’t be very long and we will be looking at it from the other side

We will leave this world far behind and we will enter that precious land of song!

If we are not careful there is the Danger of someone being Afraid of the Suffering

**A “CRUSHED” CHURCH**

**A “CONSISTENT” CHURCH**

**A “COMFORTED” CHURCH**