

To the Saints of God at Topeka, Kansas
December 28, 2014

As you may recall, I am covering the seven churches of Revelation two and three. The last time I spoke, I talked about the church at Ephesus, which was the first church. However, I did not quite finish. I had one more verse.

Rev. 2:7 *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

Beloved, 'he that hath an ear' means new ears... sheep's ears, to hear these peculiar things of God, (like dogs that can only hear a high frequency whistle). 'Let him (and him alone) come and hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.' 'To him that overcometh' means overcoming Satan's forces, including worldly lusts, false teachers, idols, fleshly wisdom, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:16), and Satan's temptations and persecutions, will 'Christ give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.'" Beloved, it is not enough to participate in the fight to gain eternal life and heaven. We must overcome and be victorious in our fight. We must fight to the end. His grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9). If we overcome and prevail, Christ promises we will individually obtain the privilege and the right to eat of the tree of life (Gen 2:9) which He will give us. The right to eat of this tree was lost at The Fall. Eating of this tree means, life everlasting in heaven, which practically speaking is dwelling forever with the love of our friend, Christ Jesus.

*And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, **was there the tree of life**, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 22:1-5). See also Eze. 47:6-12.*

It is His eternal love which is the prize. This is a faithful promise the Lord Jesus Christ makes personally to each of us. Beloved, this is what is at stake! It is a wonderful promise, if we will just see this to the end! Is not this a worthy prize? It is the most sought after prize ever! *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world* (John 16:33). We must overcome the world like Christ did. *For whatsoever 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, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* (1Jo 5:4-5).

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him (1Cor. 2:9). Our love for Christ is tested here in waiting for Him patiently, in overcoming our adversaries and enduring to the end and not leaving our first love.

The Church at Smyrna v. the Church at Laodicea

Rev. 2:8-11 *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 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.*



Beloved, the church at Smyrna was a suffering church. *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong* (2 Cor. 12:10).

Shame on these churches of our day all around us, and on their pastors, and these people that take their ease! They take their ease now, while there is a war going on. They are saving their life and not losing it *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it* (Mat. 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, Luke 17:33).

*So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. **And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease...*** (Zechariah 1:14-15). *Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria...* (Amos 6:1).

The churches at Smyrna and Laodicea are on opposite ends of the spiritual spectrum. The Church at Smyrna is outwardly beat down. It is under great tribulation and stress from Satan's forces including society and the religious powerful (there were a lot of Jews in Smyrna) that ran that community. The church at Smyrna was impoverished in a worldly and financial sense. Beloved, they were at war with this world and this world was so mad at them, they wanted to kill the members of that church, like they regularly beat those drums against us. But, this little, beat down, down trodden church that is despised by everyone, is the apple of Christ's eye and is greatly increased in spiritual favor and goodwill, which is the most important commodity in this world.

A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory (Mat. 12:20).

The church at Smyrna was bold and engaged in spiritual warfare. Their words were sharp as a two-edged sword and that is why the Jews and the religious powerful wanted to kill them. They were most certainly railed upon by this world and subject to vicious hard speeches and probably called "verbal domestic terrorists" by the rich and powerful. There is one thing for sure and that is they were not lukewarm. There was a shout of a King in their midst. *He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the*

shout of a king is among them (Nu. 23:21). Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners (So 6:10)?

Now, compare that church to the church at Laodicea. *And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write...I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Rev 3:14-17).*

The church at Laodicea is rich in worldly goods, rich in public adoration and their spot in society and the community. Christ knows their works... and they have no works of enduring tribulation like the church at Smyrna! Christ omits this from His description of that church. Beloved, Christ is carefully watching 24/7/365 and He knows the works of His churches and he doesn't care about the rest. Christ's standard is His church's have tribulation and much of it! *Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we **must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God** (Acts 14:22). *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world* (John 16:33). If your church does not have religious tribulation for your words against the sins of this world you do not have a true church. Period. It is a prerequisite to being a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you change that, you have changed a fundamental aspect of the spiritual business model of Christ and it is no longer one of Christ's churches.*

The Church at Laodicea has no tribulation. They have no worries or fears to overcome. The world loves them. The members are comfortable with their church, comfortable with their Sunday schools, comfortable with the youth activity programs, comfortable with their pastor (who doesn't say anything to disturb the sinful norm), comfortable with their potluck dinners, and comfortable with their singles club for God's sake, but they are not engaged in the wars of the Lord. *Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon (Nu. 21:14).* Beloved, there is a written historical account of the wars of the Lord being written right now, and this church at Laodicea was not in it – they had dropped out of it and decided to save their lives.

By the way, the dating site, ChristianMingle.com (“Find God's Match For You”) has not missed my attention. They have 10 million members. But they recently have lost some members. A Navy Officer in San Diego, a “hero,” don’t you know, was convicted of raping two women, one of which he found on ChristianMingle.com and the other he found on Match.com. He won't be dating for a while, he was sentenced to 37 years in prison.

Beloved, if the church at Laodicea has no tribulation, then they have no spiritual future. And, they don’t have any tribulation because the gospel they preach is anemic. They are spiritually dead and ready to perish. They have leaned on their own understanding. *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths* (Proverbs 3:5-6). It is a great sin to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ in this sinful and adulterous generation.

And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming (1Jo 2:28). ...That in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. (Php 1:20). Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God. (2Ti 1:8).

It is a great blessing that this Iowa State Rep called us “verbal domestic terrorists” on national TV because he doesn’t like us telling soldiers “thou shalt not kill” and telling Sodomites “God says homosexuality is an abomination.” It shows we are not lukewarm, we have not lost our boldness, and that our spiritual words are still sharp.

Satan greatly desires that all churches would be as Laodicea. *Fair as vomit, clear as gross darkness and terrible as a Gloworm.* That is what Satan wants. If you are looking for a passive, comfortable church, you are not looking for a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, His word for it! The timid need not apply for this job. Beloved the bridegroom and all his friends were slain! We must receive our evil things on earth.

The Church at Smyrna

Smyrna is in present day Turkey. It was about 35 miles north of Ephesus. Like Ephesus, it was an important port city and was famous for its wealth and commerce. Smyrna was the home of the famous poet Homer and it was filled with pagan temples to Apollo, Aphrodite and Zeus among others. Smyrna had a large Jewish population, so it was an extremely difficult place to live as a Christian. The text itself alludes to the persecution of the Church at the hands of the Jews.

I know thy works, and Tribulation – Christ testifies that he knows of their tribulation. Strong says “tribulation” means afflictions, anguish, persecution, distress, oppression and straits. It refers to the pressure put on the church – a “pressing together” for the purpose of breaking it. Gill says that tribulation is “Christ’s legacy to his people” and it is their way to heaven. Christ takes notice of the persecutions of His Churches and what they suffer. This tribulation also refers to all of the heathens’ hard speeches (Jude 15) they have made against the church. There has almost been an infinite number of these regarding this church, including newspaper editorials, slanderous news television/radio stories, vicious blogs, foul mouthed tweets toward our Gospel words, lawsuits, false police reports, vandalism, criminal prosecutions, rumor mongering, perjured testimony against us, attacking e-mails, fierce voicemails, angry middle fingers, screams out car windows and all the rest. You can rest assured the church at Smyrna suffered similar things in their day. Take heart beloved, Christ your Savior, remembers every one of them! And the appointed day will come when everyone of them will be accounted for.

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned (Mat. 12:36-37).

I know... thy poverty (but thou art rich) – The Church at Smyrna was impoverished. ...[A]nd took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance (Heb. 10:34). Beloved we know that when this world hates you they spoil your goods. Christ takes notice of this because their poverty came not by sin, but by suffering for His sake alone. Beloved, in our nearly 60 years here, we have amassed nearly zero financial wealth. If it

costs \$10.9 million to preach the Word of Christ boldly (and without apology), it's a bargain. *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need* (Heb 4:16). The Lord Jesus Christ said the Church at Smyrna was on earth, financially impoverished but rich, wealthy, and abounding in eternal substance. They were spiritual billionaires. Like Smyrna, this church is rich in faith, rich in Christ and Godly favor, rich in the blessings of the covenant, rich in the fountains of the living water that has no end, rich in good works, and rich in the heavenly inheritance that is better than gold that perishes. (1 Pet. 1:7).

Christ contrasts Smyrna with Laodicea. Smyrna is poor in the world's eyes but rich in God's eyes. Laodicea on the other hand is rich in the eyes of the world but is spiritually poor. I spent a lot of time recently looking at church wedding photos and I have to say, I think our church is the most boring, mundane, plain church I have ever seen. But it is beautiful in Christ's eyes, because it is not polluted with idols, or filled with people that hate his words or teach for doctrine the commandments of men. Christ doesn't care how beautiful your church is, or what your balance sheet looks like, he is worried about one thing and one thing alone: are you spiritually clean or not! If your church is not in financial poverty, you are doing it wrong.

Beloved, the Catholics own their own bank for God's sake – since 1942. It has been a source of embarrassment for them because it is fraught with fraud (including money laundering and bribes) and scandals but they have one. *Forbes* magazine calls it *the most secret bank in the world*. I believe the Catholic church was the first true multinational company the world had ever seen. According to the *Economist* magazine they estimate the world wide Catholic church has \$170 billion dollars in annual spending. Apple and GM have revenues in the \$150 billion range. According to the *Economist* Catholic institutions employ 1,000,000 people world-wide (one of the world's largest employers). The Catholic church lacks any kind of transparency whatsoever. They hold billions of dollars in real estate worldwide, billions of dollars in gold ingots stored at the Federal Reserve Bank of NY, billions of dollars in stocks across the world, and billions of dollars in art and antiquities. They have spent 2,000 years collecting wealth. One writer says: "*The Catholic church is the biggest financial power, wealth accumulator and property owner in existence. She is a greater possessor of material riches than any other single institution, corporation, bank, giant trust, government or state of the whole*

globe.” Christ doesn’t care about finances beloved, (HE OWNS IT ALL!), he cares about spiritual fidelity to his Word. But Peter said unto him (Simon the sorcerer) Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money (Acts 8:20).

I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. The word “blasphemy” means slander, railing, and evil speaking.

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. (Rev. 12:10).

Christ testifies that He knows that there are Jews at Smyrna that actively and maliciously slandered the Church and the people in the Church and that these Jews themselves were people of bad principles and practices. They were Jews by national descent but were not spiritual Jews (Rom. 2:28-29). These Jews were the children of the devil and they were influenced by Satan to make evil speeches against them and to oppose them whenever possible. Please shut up about Interfaith and diversity. The Jews at Smyrna were NOT Jews of God, there were satanic counterfeits and world class blasphemers! A synagogue of Satan is an assembly, a congregation or bringing together of evil people (also called a collection of devils) energized by Satan to be an enemy of God’s people. Just as Christ has His churches on earth, so does Satan have his. These synagogues of Satan are assemblies which are set up in opposition to the truths of God, which promulgate damnable heresies and which promote the blasphemy and the vain intentions and commandments of men. Their charter is to oppose God and to revile, prosecute and persecute Christ’s servants. Satan is their ruler and high commander. He works in them and they serve his interests and his alone. They are his soldiers and they do his bidding in this war. We know a lot about synagogues of Satan. We encounter them every day. The Synagogue of Satan at Smyrna was filled with evil people. They, like their father, were murderers and persecuted the church to the death. So much for Christ not saying anything bad about anyone.

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer – Beloved we are going to suffer many things in this life for Christ’s sake... persecutions, prison, death... *For I will shew him (Paul) how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake (Acts 9:16).* But do not worry beloved, Christ has this. This is the spiritual business model, have faith in Christ – this will not just come out alright, but it will be amazing. Don’t despair because of your afflictions, we must suffer like Christ suffered and then reign. *If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us. (2Ti 2:12).*

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... Christ encourages the Church at Smyrna to be faithful unto death. He warns them of what is coming – trials, temptations, tribulation, prison and death will be coming to them – but directs them to not fear, hold fast unto death and overcome. He lets them know that the persecution has a set time – thus the reference to 10 days – and that he, Christ, is keeping track. He lets them know that Satan is persecuting them. The Church is commanded by none other than Christ himself to not fear them which kill the body.

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered (Mat. 10:28-30).

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:28).

This is similar language to when the angel of God stood before Paul and told him to *“Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar”*, Acts 27:24. Paul knew he would be killed at Rome but the Angel told him to fear not. We have no reason to fear – our God is in control. We must also be faithful and trustworthy when it comes to preaching the pure unmixed Gospel of Christ. We also must overcome. There is no prosperity Gospel in Revelation 2 and 3! We must not be intimidated by poverty, the spoiling of our goods, tribulation, persecution and death itself. The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ overcomes in all ages!

... 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.

Beloved, we must be faithful and patient unto death, but then the reward comes!

*Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, **his reward is with him**, and his work before him. (Isa 40:10).*

*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, **he shall receive the crown of life**, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. (Jas 1:12).*

*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. (2Tim. 4:8).*

*And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, **ye shall receive a crown of glory** that fadeth not away. (1Pet. 5:4).*

*The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, **and cast their crowns before the throne**, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (Rev. 4:10-11).*

I love you all. Amen.