

Revelation 2:8-11

To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

There is more!

No one seemed to care. He lay there starving. He was just a matter of feet away from luxury and wealth and all the food a guy could eat, but no man cared enough to help. They passed him by, left him by the gate. He lay in physical and emotional anguish and the dogs would add to his shame. As they came and licked his sores he lacked the strength or the pride to shoo them away. But as bad as it got, Lazarus knew something better was coming. He knew there was something more. In faith he knew a blessed place had been prepared for him, a blessed and eternal inheritance had been set aside for him. No doubt, he knew the promises of God; the words of the prophets, the psalms, the scriptures, that pointed him to the promise of heaven, the rich pastures of eternal prosperity and peace. As bad as it got, he knew the answer to life's biggest question, "Is there more?" There was more, and all the fullness of heaven was waiting for him, prepared for him, given to him by his gracious and merciful God.

The rich man, however, neglected to ask the question, "is there anything more after this life?" Dressed in purple and fine linens he paid no attention to eternity. He was too enamored by the here and now. And then one day he died. His lifeless body, no doubt, still dressed in luxury was buried. It was far too late when his immortal soul finally considered the reality that there is more after this life. He had rejected the free gift of saving faith and he was given over to eternal agony of hell that is difficult to fully describe. A single drop of water placed on the tongue would have been sublime in its relief. He would beg for a miracle so that his brothers might not share in his eternal anguish. But the reply was clear, no wondrous miracle was necessary, only the simple word of God could work the miracle of saving faith. ***'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'***

The Bible, the Scriptures, tells us that there is more than just this life. This reminds me of a playful acronym that has been used a few different times to describe the Bible using the letters B.I.B.L.E. (Basic Information Before Leaving Earth). God's Holy Word given to us through the Bible tells us that which we so desperately need to hear we have an eternal God who existed before time was and he is the one who cares for us now and forever. The Bible tells us that those who believe in Christ will be spared from the punishment that we as sinners

deserve and instead we will be given the glorious and gracious prize of heaven. These are real and lasting treasures that God gives to us so that we may one day leave this place and be with him where we enjoy his blessings in full.

Maybe those Christians at Smyrna felt at least a bit like poor Lazarus. They were suffering for all to see and it seemed like no one cared. Ignored by some, abused, mocked, mistreated by others. They were subject to the slander of the Jewish people. They were forced into poverty and danger and death by those in power. And so these are the words of comfort and promise and victory that the LORD Jesus delivers to these poor and suffering souls through these words of John's Revelation. *There is more than just this life! There is so much more! **To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!*** The eternal God cares about you. He sees you, he knows your pain, he knows your suffering, and he knows your ultimate need. And so because of his love, because he came and lived and died in your place, because he defeated sin and death and rose again, because of your gracious God, you are rich! Take comfort, there is so much more beyond this life! There is an eternal God out there who cares for you, and he blesses you with eternal riches. He speaks to you through his messengers of grace and grants you with blessings that have lasting value. As those who believe in Jesus you are rich and blessed. No matter if life is treating you well or when life is challenging you can always know that there is more to this life. The eternal God cares about you. Your LORD and Savior speaks to you of his lasting and precious blessings.

A woman sat next to a pastor on a bus and when she found out his occupation she asked one of those big questions. *"If God is an omnipotent and all-knowing God", she said, "why would he allow evil and suffering in this world".* She was a nurse and so she added a personalized picture. *"Why does a place like a children's hospital and the pain and the sorrow of such a place have to exist?"* The pastor paused as the small talk had turned so suddenly big and he did his best to turn the conversation toward the grace of God. *"Can I answer your question with a question?"* he replied. She was interested in any answer at all so she willingly allowed it. And so the pastor replied, *"Why would a holy God have anything to do with sinners like us?"* He paused very briefly this time and then quickly continued, *"In his love God came down to save sinners even though we broke his perfect world. And in his love and his wisdom he even uses the brokenness of this world to remind us of his promise to restore us to a paradise in heaven through Jesus Christ who died to take away our sins and to grant us forgiveness and eternal life."* The pastor continued, *"It doesn't always happen this way, but too often people who have everything go right for them don't bother to consider anything beyond this life, but God in his wisdom and love may use both blessings and even suffering in this world to bring families closer to each other and most importantly closer to him."* The answered seemed for the most part to satisfy and so she then asked him, what question was his favorite for people to ask him. He replied that hers was a pretty good one and after giving a few other examples off the top of his head he commented that he just wished that people would ask those big questions more often instead of just passing by through life uncaring, unaware of things eternal.

A day later, that same pastor sat among a large group of pastors gathered for worship and

heard the preacher speak about an outspoken atheist who walked into his office and asked about coming to church for the first time. The man had driven past the church hundreds of times on his way to work, he had received the mailings at Christmas and Easter and special events, he had seen the church building erected a dozen years ago, and had at one point decided that if he would ever darken the door of any Christian church it would be this one. But that was all merely hypothetical until the day he watched his mother die from cancer. In that moment something inside of him broke open as he was forced to ask that all important question, “Is there anything more?” “There has got to be more!”

He would find out that there is. There is so much more. The pastor was able to lead him into God’s Word and through that word he learned about his holy God. The pastor was able to proclaim to this man that he has a God and Savior who came into this world to save a sinner like him. The simple word of God was proclaimed and that saving word thundered like a hammer smashing against a cliff face as it broke down years of doubt and unbelief. All that had separated him from his God and the treasures of heaven came crumbling down as this man heard His God speak to him of all the blessings that were now his through Jesus Christ our Savior. He heard of sin and grace. He heard of his Savior, the almighty God, who gave up his throne in heaven to save undeserving and rebellious sinners. He heard things like, ***He who had no sin became sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God {2 Corinthians 5:21}***. He would come to know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that through his poverty we might become rich {2 Corinthians 8:9}. He heard of the eternal God who took on flesh, who lived a perfect life, and died a sacrificial death, to save him, to grant him the eternal riches of forgiveness and peace with God and the imperishable inheritance of eternal life in heaven. And this treasure was opened to him when that question was laid before him, “is there more to this life?”

When trials come, when suffering suffocates, and when pressure surrounds us, we might be tempted to view such hardships as evidence that no one cares, not even God, or that God doesn’t even exist. After all, how could he let such suffering befall his people? But as we look at the truth of his word we see that often he uses such moments to focus our eyes on what lies beyond this life. There is more. There is so much more. The apostle Paul once put it this way, ***19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. {1 Corinthians 15:19-22}***. Through the gift of faith, we know that there is more so much more, and we have been given so much more in Jesus Christ. We have forgiveness and peace. We have eternal victory in heaven, victory over sin, victory over the problems and pains of this world, victory even over death itself.

The Christians at Smyrna would be persecuted. Some would even be killed. But do not be mistaken, God cared and God had blessings in store for his people in Smyrna. In his love and wisdom, he would use this period of intense suffering as a test to strengthen his people in that ancient city and throughout time and history. The word of God thundered as John carried these words of Jesus Christ to the pastor and to the people of this congregation. The words of

Jesus would provide comfort and courage, peace and power, to the Christians of Smyrna, when they needed it the most. ⁹***I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*** ¹⁰***Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*** Suffering would come, but no matter how bad things would appear, God was with them. They would be slandered and mocked by those around them. The devil would do his best to convince them that God didn't care about them. But there is more in store for those believe in Jesus than just this life. They would suffer for an a relatively brief amount of time (that's why it is described as ten days) especially when compared with the brilliant and lasting glory of an eternity heaven. Suffering would come but for those who by God's grace would remain faithful they would receive the victor's crown, the crown of life that not even death itself could tarnish or touch. Yes, he who has ears. Let him hear. *He who overcomes through faith in Christ will not be hurt by the second death.*

In the midst of our earthly lives we will see both suffering and joy. As we stand in those moments of joy and prosperity, as we sit in our comfortable homes, in our comfortable chairs, in our comfortable beds, dressed in our comfortable clothes, and we go about our often very comfortable lives, let us not become so enamored by the things of this world that we cannot see the eternal treasure set before us. There is more than just this world.

In those moments when we lay in our sin, as we struggle to stand in those periods of grief or pain, and frustration. As the fears and the troubles of this life wear us down, even when we tremble and shake under in the presence of death and sorrow, know and remember that God speaks to us with words that answer that one question that needs to be asked, that question that he answers for us in this simple yet powerful Word of God... there is more.

No matter how bad things looked for the Christians in Smyrna, no matter had bad things got for poor Lazarus, no matter how tough or how easy things are for you or for me, remember there is so much more. The eternal God watches over you. Your gracious Savior bespeaks his blessings upon you so that you may be ***faithful, even to the point of death, and He will give you the crown of life.*** To our eternal God and Savior be the glory. Amen.