

Study Notes For Revelation 2:10 *Womens' Retreat 2007*

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN'S REVELATION

There is a perplexing problem that all Christians face. God tells us that he considers us his children and lavishes his love on us (1 John 3:1). He tells us his incomparably great power is at work for the good of us believers (Ephesians 1:19). He tells us that we share in God's glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). He tells us that everything belongs to us, including the world itself (1 Corinthians 3:22). He tells us that we are his chosen and royal people (1 Peter 2:9).

The perplexing problem is this. If all that is true, then why is life so filled with hardship, temptation, suffering, disappointment, sin, shame, heartache, tragedy and death?

The book of Revelation specifically addresses the tension between the fact that "God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9) and that therefore "we WILL be with the Lord forever" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and the fact that "we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22) It reminds us that the nature of life here on earth is a struggle and a battle, particularly against the devil. The stakes are human souls. But victory is guaranteed. In fact, victory has already been accomplished by our Savior Jesus Christ. That victory is ours by faith even now. And we'll enjoy that victory in all its fullness when we get to heaven.

THE AUTHOR

The author calls himself John, the servant of Jesus Christ, in both the first and last chapter of Revelation. He was the "disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn 13:23)." He was one of the "sons of thunder," with his brother James. His father's name was Zebedee (Mt 10:2). John was one of Jesus' inner circle and saw the raising of Jairus' daughter (Lk 8), the transfiguration (Mt 17) and was there at Gethsemane (Mk 13). He was also one of the first disciples to find Jesus tomb empty (Jn 20:2). Jesus entrusted Mary to his care (Jn 19) while he yet hung on the cross. According to tradition, John was the only one of the Twelve who died of natural causes.

DATE & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

When John wrote Revelation, he was in exile for his faith and the church was undergoing widespread persecution. There were two periods of widespread persecution in the first century; one during the last years of Nero in the mid-sixties and the other during the reign of Domitian in the early nineties. There are some who believe the book was produced during the reign of Nero, but most scholars agree that it was written during the later persecution some time around 95 A.D. John tells us that at the time of his vision he was in exile on the island of Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor, not far from Ephesus. John was on Patmos because of the Word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:9). Christians could expect to be thrown into prison because of the efforts being made to wipe out the Christian Church.

PURPOSE

The main purpose of Revelation is to encourage members of the Christian Church on earth in its struggles against Satan and all his allies; the demons, the world and our sinful flesh. These words are a comfort that no matter what the battle, we shall triumph over sin and evil because Christ has triumphed over sin and evil.

There is a second purpose in these words in a warning not to give in to temptation and thus ally ourselves with Satan. The second purpose is an encouragement to remain faithful until Judgment Day.

PRESENT DAY VALUE

Although we are, at this point in time, able to worship our Lord openly, there is no doubt that we live in a society which is more and more hostile to Christianity. What are some “labels” you’ve heard applied to Christians?

The teachings and way of life that we hold dear are under attack even now by Satan and his allies. The lure to give in to Satan's way of thinking is great. With this in mind, Revelation is a timely encouragement for our generation.

UNDERSTANDING REVELATION

The wording and the context of the book of Revelation itself make it clear that this book makes generous use of symbolism to communicate important truths. "We will have learned how to deal with this book when we have learned to read the Apocalypse (Greek word we translate as “Revelation”) the way we read the parables." Dr. Siegbert Becker. This advice is the key to understanding and reading Revelation. We read it literally- in other words, we treat the visions of Revelation as the visions, symbols that they are. We do not read it literalistically, that is in a falsely literal manner, where we attempt to treat these words as something other than as visions and symbols.

It is also important for the student of revelation to understand that this vision or series of visions is not linear. In other words, it does not begin at one point (in history) and end at another. Revelation is concentric in nature. It repeats itself about the same subjects in slightly different ways similar to what would happen if you were on a merry-go-round and came back to the same point many times despite the fact that you continue to move. The Revelation Jesus gave John depicts the basic war of the devil, demons, unbelievers, and the world against Jesus and his believers from various vantage points.

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction (Rev. 1:1-20)
- II. Letters to the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22)
- III. Vision of the Seven Seals (4:1-8:6)
- IV. Vision of the Seven Trumpets (8:7-11:19)
- V. The Seven visions (12:1-15:8)
- VI. Vision of the Seven bowls (16:1-21)
- VII. Victory over the Antichrist (17:1-19:21)
- VIII. Victory over Satan (20:1-22:5)
- IX. Conclusion (22:6-21)

INSIGHTS INTO REVELATION 2:10

Revelation 2:10 *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.***

The Broad Context of Revelation 2:10

The book of Revelation opens with John stating that his revelation is “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1:1) and “the testimony of Jesus Christ.” (1:2). This book of divine revelation is about Jesus Christ and from Jesus Christ. Those who hear it and take it to heart are blessed. (1:3)

John writes to the seven churches in the province of Asia Minor, a province of the Roman Empire. This province was along the coast of the Aegean sea, in what is present day eastern Turkey. His

greeting focuses the Asia Minor Christians on the Risen Savior whose completed work of redemption has freed them from their sins and freed them for service to God until his return. (1:4-8)

John identifies himself with their suffering for the sake of Christ. (1:9) He describes how he was given this revelation while in exile on the island of Patmos (a small, rocky island in the Aegean Sea, about 50 miles from Ephesus). Apparently, the Roman government had sentenced John to exile for preaching the gospel. An angel sent by Jesus gave John his revelation by means of a vision, and commanded him to write it down and send it the seven churches of Asia Minor. (1:10)

He sees Jesus himself in his vision, who assures him he is the Risen Christ, with a message for the seven churches. (1:12-20) The churches addressed are Ephesus (2:1-7), Smyrna (2:8-11), Pergamum (2:12-17), Thyatira (2:18-29), Sardis (3:1-6), Philadelphia (3:7-13), and Laodicea (3:14-22).

The Lord of the Church is intimately aware of what the churches are facing, and what their strengths and weaknesses are.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what Spirit says to churches!” Listen up!

COMMENDATIONS:

EPH 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. 6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

PERG 13 I know where you live-- where **Satan** has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city-- where **Satan** lives.

THY 19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. 24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets

SAR 4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

PHI 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently,

ATTACKS FROM WITHIN:

EPH 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

THY 20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

SARD I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

PHIL 8 I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

LAO 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my

mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

ATTACKS FROM WITHOUT

SMYR 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.

PERG14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. 15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

PHI 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars-- I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

THY 20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

REBUKES & PROMISES

EPH 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, ***I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*** 8

SMYR 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.***

PER I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 To him who overcomes, ***I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.***

THY 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. 26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, ***I will give authority over the nations***-- 27 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' --just as I have received authority from my Father. 28 ***I will also give him the morning star.***

SAR 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. 4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. ***They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.*** 5 He who overcomes will, like them, be ***dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.***

PHI 7 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, ***I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.***
11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who ***overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem,*** which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and ***I will also write on him my new name.***

LAO 14 16 So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. 19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. ***If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.***
21 To him who overcomes, ***I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.***

Jesus has overcome the devil and this world, those evil allies that are the enemies of the child of God:

- John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
- Revelation 17:14 They (the forces of this world allied against Jesus) will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings-- and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

Paul reminds us that our true battle in life is not against problems, illness, adversity, etc. but against "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12) We are warned not to be overcome by these forces:

- 1 Timothy 5:11 As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry.
- Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- 2 Peter 2:20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

The Word of God assures us that all who trust in Jesus have overcome (salvation is assured through Jesus' finished work as our Savior) and will overcome (Jesus will bring us through whatever we face in this life to eternal glory):

- 1 John 2:14 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.
- Luke 10:19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.
- 1 John 5:4 For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

- 1 John 5:5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

The Immediate Context Of Revelation 2:10

Revelation 2:10 is part of the address to the second of the seven churches in Asia Minor- the church in Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11). According to an ancient coin inscription, Smyrna was “First of Asia in beauty and size”- a prominent city in that part of the world.. It was located about 35 miles northwest of Ephesus, on a well-protected harbor into which the Hermus River flows. A major trade route ran inland along the Hermus valley. Smyrna (present day Izmir in Turkey) is still a thriving city of over 350,000 people. About half the population there today is considered Christian.

The city of Smyrna was destroyed around 600 B.C. and lie devastated for three centuries. It was re-founded in 290 B.C. as part of the empire of Alexander the Great. It was therefore a city influenced by Greek culture. When absorbed into the Roman empire, it showed loyalty to Rome and was used as a naval base by Roman forces. In 26 A.D., the city appealed for permission to build a temple to the Roman emperor Tiberius.

The cult of emperor worship, which led to the persecution of Christians who refused to worship the emperor as a god, was therefore strong in Smyrna. We know that the government was executing Christians in Smyrna by the mid-150s A.D.- including the bishop of the church in Smyrna, Polycarp, who had personally known the apostle John. (Polycarp was 86 years old when he died. If the Revelation was written around 95 A.D., and Polycarp died in 155 or 156 A.D., Polycarp may have been the bishop of the church at the time Revelation was written) Christians may have come to Smyrna from Ephesus while Paul was preaching there (Acts 19:10) or as a result of the missionary activity of John the apostle.

2:8

Jesus is “the first and last, who died and came to life again.” (See 1:17,18) This description of Jesus shows that he is both true God (first and last, comes to life again) and true man (that he could die). He is worth listening because he is the ultimate authority-God, and because he loves us, as the God who became man to be our Savior.

2:9

When we are experiencing adversity or persecution, we wonder if God knows or cares about what is happening to us. The fact that Jesus mentions their situation shows that he cares for the Christians in Smyrna. What “afflictions” were the people suffering? Were they being misrepresented and slandered, as Christians sometimes were, as disloyal to the government (refusing to acknowledge the emperor as a god), as trouble-makers (refusing to participate in the pagan elements of life in their culture), as cannibals (the Lord’s Supper), and as social outcasts (meeting privately for worship, their membership often made up of the lower classes, slaves, the down-and-out, etc.) Was their property being confiscated? Were they suffering economic discrimination?

Jesus knew about the afflictions of the Smyrnan believers. Afflictions do not mean that God has turned his back on us. Rather, afflictions prove the faithfulness of God as he distills what it is we truly need (spiritual blessings that do not change, decay, break down, let us down, get lost, disappear, etc., as temporal and earthly things do) and as he meets our needs in Christ through all of our afflictions. Christ is also with us in our suffering as one who knows suffering. He has suffered the greatest of all suffering- hell itself, that we rightly deserve, so that we never have to fear that punishment. Our suffering links us with Christ, as we suffer persecution for his sake- a privilege, considering his suffering for us. Our suffering actually serves to build up our faith and develop Christian character, as it sends us back to God for our strength and comfort and hope.

- Matthew 5:1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- 1 Peter 2:19 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. 20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." {22 Isaiah 53:9} 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.
- Romans 5:3 Not only so, but we {3 Or let us} also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God
- Hebrews 12:7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
- Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin.

Jesus also knew about their poverty. The believers were rich in the most important way. They had "the incomparable riches of God's grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:7) They knew that "God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19) They had "the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ." (Colossians 2:2) Their eyes had been opened by faith "in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints." (Ephesians 1:18) They could describe themselves as Paul described himself in 2 Corinthians 6:10, "Poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything." (at least everything that matters in the end, right?) They knew that their economic poverty did not make them poor:

“Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?” (James 2:5)

While Christians are frequently reminded of how rich they are in Christ, they are also warned about the lure of earthly riches:

- Luke 12:15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." 16 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"
- 1 Timothy 6:9,17 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.
- Revelation 3:15-17 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.
- Mark 10:23,25 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

The Smyrnian believers were being slandered by fellow Jews. They were not true “Jews”- namely, those who are God’s people through faith in Jesus Christ, who reconciles us to God (Romans 2:28,29, 9:8, Galatians 3:6-9) They were “God’s people” only in name, as circumcised, physical descendants of Abraham. Jesus called the Jews of his day who refused to believe in him “children of the devil.” (John 8:33-44) The Jews’ “slander” of the Christians in Smyrna may have included accusations that they were turning away from the God of Abraham, and that they were not God’s children unless they were physically descended from Abraham or adherents of Mosaic law. They were of the synagogue of Satan because their damning lies were from the devil himself. (John 8:44, Revelation 12:9-10)

It was not uncommon for Paul to experience harsh opposition and condemnation from Jews in the synagogues on his missionary journeys. In fact, at times the unbelieving Jews who had rejected the gospel stirred up the Gentiles to act against the missionaries and those who had believed in Jesus. (Acts 13:45-50, 14:1-19, 17:5-17) This Jews in Smyrna may have done something like that, slandering the Christians to the Gentiles, and causing persecution against the Christians.

2:10

Things would get worse before they got better. The persecution would escalate to imprisonment. The Christians would suffer persecution for “10 days”. (literally “go on suffering persecution”, meaning that the persecution was already being felt and would continue) 10 is one of those key Biblical numbers. It implies completeness, and means that the persecution would be a specific amount of time, fixed by God.

The devil, not the Jews or the civil authorities, would be the one actually responsible for the persecution. In whatever works against our faith to discourage or deter us from believing in Jesus, enjoying his blessings, or living out our lives for him, the devil himself is at work. But Jesus limits what he can do to us and even uses it in the greater scheme of things to bring glory to himself through his people. So the believers in Smyrna should not be afraid. The Lord of the Church was with them (Matthew 28:20) and he was still ruling over all things for their eternal good (Ephesians 1:18-23).

This leads to our keynote verse: "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you a crown of life." Although the plural "you" is used at the beginning of verse 10, Jesus uses the singular "you" in this final statement of verse 10. Each believer believes for himself or herself.

Our mission is simply to be faithful. The Greek word for "faithful" comes from the word for "faith." "Keep trusting in me all through this life until your life is over," is the command of Jesus. "Don't let go of me for I am eternal life to those who trust in me." Jesus is called "the faithful witness" (1:5) and "Faithful and True" (19:11). We know this about our God's faithfulness:

- 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
- Hebrews 2:17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for {17 Or and that he might turn aside God's wrath, taking away} the sins of the people.
- 2 Timothy 2:13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.
- 2 Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.
- 1 Corinthians 1:8 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.
- 1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

It is God's faithfulness that inspires our faithfulness to him. We express our faithfulness by clinging to Jesus in faith, clinging to his Word, putting it into practice, and living for our Savior's glory. Some ways we express our faithfulness are:

- 1 Corinthians 4:2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

- Matthew 25:23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"
- Romans 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
- 3 John 1:1 The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. 2 Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. 3 It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. 5 Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you.
- Hebrews 3:6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.
- Timothy 1:12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Thus, "be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." (literally... "the crown of the life." It reminds us of how Jesus said, "...I am the life..." (John 6:14) and "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10) The "crown" here refers to the garland crown that was given to the winner of athletic contests at the public games. If life in heaven is like a crown of victory after an athletic contest, we are also being reminded that life is like an athletic contest. It involves effort and energy in the face of opposing forces, and focus on a clear goal.

It's interesting to note that ancient writers describe the large hill, towering above the seaport city of Smyrna and dotted with porticoes rising up from it, as looking like a crown.

2:11

This message ends with a plea and a promise. The plea is to hear, and the promise is paired with verse 10's invitation to faithfulness. The one who has the crown of life will not be hurt by "the second death." Revelation 20:6 reminds us: "Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years." God told Adam and Eve that disobeying him and eating the fruit from the forbidden tree would result in this; "When you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:17) Spiritually speaking, they did die as soon as they sinned. All of us are now born into this state of spiritual death. (Ephesians 2:1, Colossians 2:13) The second death is when we physically die. This death, for the Christian, does not harm us by leading to eternal death in hell as punishment for our sins. Our sins are forgiven through Jesus. We lay claim to that gift through faith, making death the door that opens to eternal life for all who "overcome" the attacks against that faith in this life, by clinging to Jesus Christ.

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. Agree or disagree: "We often set expectations for our faith and life of faith that are way too low." Explain your answer.
2. "Be faithful, even to the point of death..." What does the term "faithful" imply? What kind of employee is a "faithful" employee? What's a "faithful" spouse? A "faithful" child? What expectations for our relationship with God do we see in that word?

3. "God tells us to be faithful "even to the point of death." Does that mean "until we die" or "even if we have to die in the process of being faithful to Jesus"?
4. How would you complete these statements?

"If I were really faithful, I would..." (Think of something you should do, but don't)

"If I were really faithful I wouldn't..." (Think of something you do, but shouldn't)
5. "Be faithful..." Those words don't do a lot for me, when my essential problem is that I am unfaithful. What is the solution to our guilt upon hearing Jesus say, "Be faithful..."
6. How does God's faithfulness inspire ours? (Check out the passage about God's faithfulness above)
7. What would you say to the person who says, "Sounds like God is cutting a deal here: Be faithful to me and I will reward you with life in heaven."
8. The context of this verse is a situation where the faith of the Christians in Smyrna was being threatened. What threats or challenges to our faith do we face today....

...in regard to our beliefs?

...in regard to lifestyles?

...in regard to our families?

...in regard to the church?
9. "Here the cross, then the glory." What does that phrase mean to you? Why do we need to be reminded of it?

"The Life" is reserved for me by Jesus. How does the world try to convince me that this life is THE life? What is the value of disconnecting from that notion and looking to heaven?