

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON FEAR

LESSON TWENTY-SIX: PEACE AND JOY THROUGH SUFFERING

by Sandy Harber

"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."
Revelation 2:10

John recorded Jesus' last words to His Churches in Revelation chapters two and three. These seven letters were addressed to seven literal churches located in Asia Minor. But, the messages contained in those letters are relevant to all churches everywhere throughout the entire Church Age, which began at the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2) and will end with the Rapture (I Thess. 4:13-18). The Church will face periods of persecution, contend with false teachers and false doctrines, and wrestle with the temptation to compromise teachings and practices with which the world does not agree. Jesus gave advice and warnings for the situations that His people will encounter.

To the Church of Smyrna, the persecuted church, Jesus said, "Fear not." Don't be afraid of anything that you will suffer. What does that tell us? That we will face suffering to some degree. This is true for the Church, the Body of Christ, as a whole and for the individual believers. Each of us will face situations that are painful and unpleasant. Jesus did not promise His followers a problem-free life. Just the opposite. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," Jesus told His disciples (John 16:33). What He did promise was peace in the midst of the tribulation. That peace comes from Him (John 14:27). It is His gift to us. He can make this promise because He has "overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Specifically, the world-system, over which Satan rules as prince (John 12:31), was defeated at the cross. For a little while Satan has been permitted to continue his activities as "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4). But, Jesus has already won the war. Meanwhile, the believers at Smyrna were cast into prison, tried, and endured tribulation. It seems strange if Jesus was already victorious why did He allow His followers to suffer? The answer is in verse 10. They were given the opportunity to prove their faith and endure even unto death. Death is not the end. Jesus had reserved for each overcomer a "crown of life." A reward, a crown, that each recipient will cast at His feet in gratitude and praise (Rev. 4:10).

The Church at Smyrna teaches us to endure suffering without fear. When we face trials it is a time for rejoicing because Jesus is giving us the opportunity to prove our faithfulness to Him. The disciples rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus (Acts 5:41). James tell us to "count it all joy" when we have trials (James 1:2) because this is how we grow in our faith. Understanding that Jesus allows trials and suffering into our lives for our benefit takes the fear out of the situation. Instead of fear, Jesus has given us joy and peace in the midst of tribulation.

"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