

# KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Revelation 2:8-11**  
“Surviving the Fire”

Suppose you had lived in the first century, were passing through Smyrna, and decided to visit the church there; what would it have been like? I imagine that when you walked in, you would notice their poverty; their "suits" were probably not very nice, and their building may have been quite meager, if they had a dedicated sanctuary at all. I don't think they were respected very much in their city; I think they had bad press as they faced persecution. Their future likely looked turbulent; their seven-year plan, if they had one, probably didn't look good from a financial perspective. But I believe that you would notice a sweet and strong bond between the members; and you would sense a broken, humble spirit overall.

Some people have to survive terrible fires of persecution. While I haven't been through anything nearly as bad as these Christians, I think we can learn five things from their example.

**1: Remember that the duration is limited (v8a).** I've heard that the word **Smyrna** means "crushed"; yet they gave off a sweet odor. Someone has noted that tea leaves give off their flavor when in hot water; and often, persecuted churches are most pure. Jesus reminds them again that He is **the first and the last**; He was around before the persecution started, and He will be around after the persecution is over. If you are a child of God, then no matter what you go through, Jesus will be with you and hold your hand throughout the ordeal (Isaiah 41:13).

Persecution often feels permanent at the time; but in reality, it isn't (John 16:19-22). Though you may think that your heart is too battered to ever be completely restored, it isn't. Loss of eyesight, an amputation, or failing health may be permanent on earth, but one day, for the Christian, *all* things will be remade.

The bodies of all Christians will be completely restored (cf. II Kings 5:14); our hearts will beat with fresh joy, fully healed from the pain and memories of this world; and we will be incapable of experiencing corruption ever again (John 11:25-26).

**2: Remember that the morning is coming (v8b-9).** Jesus **was dead, and is alive**; and He arose "when it was yet dark" (John 20:1). Though "we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him" (II Timothy 2:11). The dawn may seem to linger, but it is unstoppable, no matter how dark the night.

**(v9) Jesus knows** when someone is unkind to you for your testimony; He knows the pain or sickness you have. Yes, He understood the mocking attitude of that person who was angry at you for your testimony of Jesus. He also knows your **poverty** if you are poor; He knows how difficult it is for many people to make ends meet; but He says **you are rich** if you are in Him. If other people could only see your heavenly bank ledger! If they could only have a glimpse through time and see how happy you are around the table with millions of friends at the marriage supper of the Lamb; if they could only see the crowns you are going to wear, and the fresh purpose you will have, then they, too, would say that you are rich. And even today, we have inner joy and peace that the world does not have, with persecutions (Mark 10:30).

This church apparently had bad press with the **blasphemy** of the day by **them which say they are Jews, and are not** (Romans 2:28-29). It's a creepy thought, but **Satan** actually has a **synagogue**, desiring to be worshipped. Not all monotheistic religions serve the same God, as some false teachers today claim; only those who worship Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Bible, are worshiping the one true God. Others may be religious; but sadly, if they reject Jesus Christ, then they are actually under demonic deception (Galatians 1:8).

Have you ever sat on the porch and just watched the sunrise? Let's do that in a spiritual sense, looking toward the "eastern sky" for the coming of the Morning Star (Revelation 22:16).

By faith, we see the early hues of the dawn in the sky, signaling the approaching of the coming day, even if it is very dark right now (Romans 13:11, II Peter 3:12).

**3: Take one day at a time (v10a).** It is a tough command to **Fear none of those things**; Jesus even said not to give any thought (Matthew 6:25). For me, it's easy to worry about small things like work assignments, or when I was in college, about passing exams; yet Jesus said not to worry even about martyrdom and being brought before courts for our faith. Jesus doesn't give anyone false hope; He warns them that **they will suffer** (Luke 14:27). And really, **the devil** is behind this persecution, not just the people carrying it out. Some say the **ten days** represent ten years; or maybe it was ten literal days of terrible persecution. But in any case, Jesus teaches us to take one literal day at a time and not to worry about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34; cf. I Kings 17:16).

Wouldn't it be odd for a builder to go to the boss and ask for all sorts of equipment to complete a job, even when he doesn't need it until weeks later? The boss would say to take the tools he need today, and to come back again when he actually needs the others. And in a similar sense, we should be satisfied with God giving us just enough to survive another day (Luke 11:3).

**4: Remember that the prize is glorious (v10b).** Jesus tells this church to **be faithful unto death**; in America, we have been shielded to an incredibly large extent from this sort of persecution up to this point, but it still goes on around the world. But Jesus will *reverse* the death of the martyr and give him or her a **crown of life**; how amazing it must be! Perhaps this means this particular crown will be teeming with healthy and beautiful natural material, like Aaron's rod that budded; perhaps for ladies it will have flowers woven throughout that will never fade; perhaps for men, more masculine foliage of healthy woods and exotic vines. But whatever it is, it will represent life and excitement.

Just think about heaven; life will spring up inside of us, and death will be no more. No Christian will ever be beheaded again; and we

will be incapable of dying or feeling pain, incapable of being injured (Joel 2:8).

**5: Remember that God's judgment is frightening (v11).** He that hath an ear should race toward the Bible to hear whatever he can; yet many people put their fingers over their ears. And how can a defeated martyr **overcome**? Jesus conquered sin and death by dying; and likewise, as Christians, we are overcomers even if we are killed. And we **will not be hurt** of the second death; we will not have to spend even a single minute in hell! It would be grace enough if we were delivered from hell after a certain amount of time, but Christians are *completely* delivered. Sadly, even those in hell today have not yet experienced **the second death**; that will come later (Revelation 20:14).

Do we think about hell enough? Oddly, it can actually help us to get *through* tough times (cf. Revelation 13:10, 14:12). It helps us to feel sorry for those who persecute us and pray for them more. And, when God is our "dread" (Isaiah 8:13), there is no room left to dread others. Our fear of God isn't the same kind of "fear" that we would have toward a murderer escaped from prison; rather, it is more similar to the type of "fear" we have of police men, the type that causes our hearts to jump a bit to make sure we aren't breaking any laws, even unknowingly. Sadly, most people today have *no* fear of God (Psalm 36:1); though one day they will be terrified of Him (Proverbs 1:27).

Amazingly, nothing negative is stated about this church. Oftentimes, some of the sweetest people are the ones that have gone through so much pain (Psalm 119:67, II Corinthians 12:9). I think we can learn some tips for surviving the fire of persecution from this church; we can remember that the duration is limited, and it will end. We can remember that the dawn of resurrection is on the horizon. We can take one day at a time, trying to follow Jesus' command not to worry about tomorrow. We can remember that the prize of heaven is absolutely breathtaking. And we can remember that God's judgment is frightening, from which, if we know Him, we have been completely delivered.