

“Wearing out the Hammers of Satan”

(Rev. 2:8-11)

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Chapel Pointe

April 29, 2007

I. Introduction

A. Wearing Out the Hammers

1. The French Reformer, Theodore Beza,

When facing the hostile King Henry of Navarre. *“Sir, it is truly the lot of the Church of God, for which I speak, to endure blows and not to strike them. But may it please you to remember that the true church is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.”*

2. Through the centuries

“The church is an anvil that has worn out many a hammer”

B. Suffering – Part of the Christian Life

1. (Phil 1:29) – “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”
2. Seen throughout history
3. John Wesley’s expectation of persecution

John Wesley was riding along a road one day when it dawned on him that three whole days had passed in which he had suffered not persecution. Not a brick or an egg had been thrown at him for three days.

Alarmed, he stopped his horse, and exclaimed, *“Can it be that I have sinned, and am backslidden?”*

Slipping from his horse, Wesley went down on his knees and began interceding with God to show him where, if any, there had been a fault.

A rough fellow, on the other side of the hedge, hearing the prayer, looked across and recognized the preacher. *“I’ll fix that Methodist preacher,”* he said, picking up a brick and tossing it over at him. It missed its mark, and fell harmlessly beside John.

Whereupon Wesley leaped to his feet joyfully exclaiming, “*Thank God, it’s all right. I still have His presence.*”

C. Doesn’t seem to apply to the American church

1. But persecution is real in parts of our world
2. Standing for Jesus in Burma
 - a. The agony of the parents

D. When Were the Worst Times?

1. From 94 to 312 AD
 - a. Just starting as John wrote the Revelation
 - b. In exile under Domitian
 2. 95 AD
2. During the next 200 years 5,000,000 Christian martyrs
 - a. The last emperor was Diocletion
 - b. Thought he had crushed Christianity
 - c. Failed miserably
 - d. Greater spread than any other time
 1. (greater % of population)
3. As the suffering lifted under Constantine in 312 AD
 - a. The Nicene Council
 - b. Vance Havner said that not more than a dozen of the 318 delegates had not lost an eye or a hand or did not limp upon a leg shrunk in its sinews by the burning iron of torture.
4. Speaking to Ethiopian pastors

E. Today...the finest example of suffering – Smyrna

II. Review

A. The seven churches of Revelation (Rev. 2 & 3)

1. Seven literal congregations in Asia Minor = Turkey
2. From their Pastor, John

B. Three applications

1. To those seven local congregations
2. To major eras of church history
3. To you and me today

C. Last week.....The Church in Ephesus

1. Started out with a bang
 - a. Yet their passion for God and man had grown cold
2. The era of “The Apostolic Church” (33 – 100 AD)
3. Was followed by an era of suffering
 - a. 200 years of brutal persecution
 - b. The persecuted church
4. Only 35 miles north of the church of Ephesus
 - a. But life was so much different in Smyrna

III. Text (Read Rev. 2:8-11)

A. The Author (v.8)

1. *“These are the words of him who is the first and the last, who died and came to life again”*
 - a. Literally – “who became dead”
2. This is obviously Jesus speaking

B. The Congregation (v.8)

1. *“To the angel of the church in Smyrna”*

2. Smyrna

a. The modern Turkish city of Izmir

1. 2.5 million people
2. Largest city in Turkey
3. Continuous history since earliest days

b. The birthplace of Homer

c. Great harbor for Roman Fleet

1. Gulf of Smyrna reached inland 35 miles
2. Inner harbor could be sealed from invasion by a huge chain

*Chain at West Point

*Hudson River, “War of 1812”

3. Could hold the entire Roman fleet

d. Extremely loyal to Rome

1. Rome rewarded them with lots of favors

e. A very proud city

1. Called itself the “1st city of Asia”
2. “The glory of Asia”
3. Center of Caesar worship

3. Had great beauty

Not only was Smyrna a great trade town and a great political center, but it was also one of the most beautiful cities in the ancient world and one of the most

beautiful Greek cities ever erected. It was built at the head of the gulf of Smyrna, where the hills of Asia Minor run down to the blue waters of the Aegean Sea. The city was built from the low lands of the dock area up the rising slopes of the hillsides. When one came in from the sea, he saw that glistening and beautiful city, tier upon tier upon tier, one of the most magnificent sights in all the world. The streets of Smyrna were wide and spacious and well-paved and ran at right angles to each other from one end of the city to the other. The most famous of all of its beautiful streets was called the Golden Street. It began at the seaside, at the harbor, and ran the entire length of the city up to the Acropolis on Mount Pagos. That street was one of the most impressive of all of the streets that have ever been built in human history. At the beginning of it, on the sea side, was the beautiful Greek temple to the goddess Cybele. Then, farther up, there was the gorgeous temple to Apollo. Still farther, there was the incomparable temple to Aesculapius, the god of healing, beyond which stood the beautiful temple to the goddess, Aphrodite. Following that street, one would pass by the glorious monument to Homer, whose birthplace Smyrna claimed to be. The Golden Street led to the Acropolis on Mount Pagos, where stood the imposing temple to Zeus (Latin, *Jupiter*).

No city in the east had the impression, the glory...the magnificence of the city of Smyrna. It claimed to be, and rightfully so, the most beautiful Greek city in the world. One entering the city could not but be impressed by the intensity of Greek culture and life teeming everywhere. Between a hill on the northeast side of the city and Mount Pagos on the southeast side of the city, ran the road from Ephesus, through the Ephesian Gate. Close by the Ephesian Gate was the gymnasium. Then southward, toward Mount Pagos, was located the great stadium. On the slopes of Mount Pagos, on the northern side, was the theater, seating more than twenty thousand spectators, and said to be the largest Greek theater in the world. The life of the people was centered around cultural theater-programs and athletic contests and festival days and worship in the beautiful temples. (Crisswell)

4. The name Smyrna meant “suffering”

a. City got its name for its trade in an herb named *myrrh*

1. Smyrna and Myrrh – same word

b. Myrrh mentioned three places in N.T.

1. At the Lord’s birth (Matt. 2)

a. The wisemen from the East

b. Gifts

1. Gold – His Deity
2. Frankincense – His Priesthood
3. Myrrh – His suffering

2. *At the Lord's crucifixion (Mark. 15)*

- a. Offered the suffering Lord wine mixed with myrrh
- b. An anesthetic

3. *At the Lord's burial (John 19)*

- a. When Jesus died, body taken by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea
- b. Wrapped the body in long linen cloth in the folds of which they placed a hundred pound weight of aloes and myrrh
- c. For embalming

c. Myrrh always stood for suffering

1. And Smyrna was no exception

C. The Commendation (v.9)

1. Jesus knew of their tribulation and their poverty
 - a. *"I know your afflictions and your poverty"*

2. He knew and he commended them for their:

Courage in the face of afflictions and poverty

3. Their "afflictions"
 - a. False Accusations

The Jews (v.9)

- a. Large Jewish population in Smyrna

b. ***“I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”***

c. They called themselves “Jews”

1. But they were doing the work of Satan

d. Hated the Christians and their Christ

Accused the Christians of being:

1. Cannibals

On the basis of the words of Communion – this is my body, and this is my blood – the story went about that the Christians were cannibals.

2. Sexual Perverts

Because the Christians called the Communion meal the *agape*, the Love Feast, it was said that their gatherings were orgies of lust.

3. Home Wreckers

Because Christianity did, in fact, often split families, when some members became Christians and some did not, the Christians were accused of “tampering with family relationships”.

4. Atheists

The heathen accused the Christians of atheism because they could not understand a worship which had no images of the gods such as they themselves had.

5. Traitors

The Christians were accused of being politically disloyal because they would not say: “Caesar is Lord.”

6. Arsonists

The Christians were accused of being incendiaries because they foretold the end of the world in flames.....also Nero

The Gentiles

- a. A very diverse empire
 - 1. Had many people with many religions
 - 2. Multitudes of gods
 - b. Needed something to unite the vast empire
 - c. Developed the idea of “Caesar worship”
 - 1. Didn’t become compulsory until the reign of Domitian
 - 2. When “Revelation” was written
 - d. Throw a pinch of incense on the altar and say

“CAESAR IS LORD”
 - e. Then you could worship your personal favorite deity
 - f. A test of political loyalty
 - g. But Christians couldn’t do it!
 - 1. Enforced in Smyrna
 - h. Christians were viewed as *traitors*
 - i. “Death to the traitors!”
- b. The word “afflictions”
 - 1. “thlipsis”
 - 2. “tribulation”
 - 3. “pressure”

- a. Squeezing the blood out of the grapes
- b. Squeezing the life out of the Christians

4. Their “poverty” (v.9)

- a. Why were the Christians in such a fix in one of the world’s wealthiest cities?
 - b. Their faith cost them their jobs
 - 1. Every working man belonged to a guild (union)
 - 2. Each guild had its patron god or goddess which they worshipped
 - 3. Had days and festivals to pay homage
 - 4. The Christians refused to participate
 - 5. But the Christians believed in ONLY ONE God
 - 6. Caused them to lose their jobs
- c. Two words for poverty
 - a. “penia”
 - 1. The working man who just barely gets by
 - b. “ptocheia” (used here)
 - 1. Absolute and utter destruction

D. The Concern

- 1. None....a persecuted church is a pure church

E. The Challenge (v.10-11)

1. Be Fearless

- a. ***“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer”***
- b. Things will get worse!

1. The devil will lead the charge

2. But He will NOT succeed

c. It was just heating up

1. Would rage for 200 years (from 100 – 312 A.D.)

2. Satan finally tried a more successful strategy

*Next week

d. The last...and the worst was Diocletian

1. Just before Constantine (312 AD)

2. Thought he had the Christians smashed

3. Diocletian's Hasty Medal

Diocletian, was particularly violent in his hatred of the Bible and Christianity. He killed so many Christians, with such outrageous cruelties, and destroyed so many Bibles, that many Christians "went underground" and hid themselves from his wrath. When it seemed to Diocletian that he had made an end of them, he had a medal coined with this motto on it: "The Christian religion is destroyed, and the worship of the (Roman) gods is restored."

4. But within ten short years....Constantine!

e. We should not fear persecution

1. It purifies body

2. It spreads the message

3. It convinces others of your convictions

4. It builds your resolve

f. The "*ten days*"

1. Various views

- a. Actual time
- b. A relatively short period of time

2. Tom Steinbach's view

2. Be Faithful

a. ***"be faithful even to the point of death" (v.10)***

- 1. Even if it costs you your life
- 2. Sewn in animal skins and thrown to wild dogs
- 3. Boiled alive in oil
- 4. Dipped in tar and used as living torches on roads
- 5. Burned alive on a stake
- 6. Crucified

b. Jesus said ***"and I will give you the crown of life"***

- 1. One of several types of crowns mentioned in NT
- 2. Crown of Life also mentioned in James 1:12

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

- 3. Not a "diadem" which is a ruler's crown
 - a. Rather *"stephenon,"* a crown of reward
 - b. The reward is eternity in heaven
 - c. Salvation!

3.. Will be given ***"to those that overcome (v.11)***

a. ***"He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death"***

b. An "overcomer" is any person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”

I John 5:5

c. Will not be hurt at all by the “second death”

1. When God judges those who have rejected him

2. *(Rev. 20:6) “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”*

IV. Summary

A. The Pastor of Smyrna – Polycarp

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was martyred on Saturday, 23rd February, AD 155. It was the time of the public games; the city was crowded; and the crowds were excited. Suddenly the shout went up: “Away with the atheists; let Polycarp be searched for.” No doubt Polycarp could have escaped; but already he had had a dream in which he saw the pillow under his head burning with fire and he had awakened to tell his disciples: “I must be burnt alive.”

His whereabouts was betrayed by a slave who collapsed under torture. They came to arrest him. He ordered that they should be given a meal and provided with all they wished, while he asked for himself the privilege of one last hour in prayer. Not even the police captain wished to see Polycarp die. On the brief journey to the city, he pled with the old man: “What harm is it to say, ‘Caesar is Lord’ and to offer sacrifice and be saved?” But Polycarp was adamant that for him only Jesus Christ was Lord.

When he entered the arena he heard a voice from heaven telling him to “Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.” The proconsul gave him the choice of cursing the name of Christ and making sacrifice to Caesar; or death. “Eighty and six years have I served him,” said Polycarp, “and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” The proconsul threatened him with burning, and Polycarp replied “You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.”

So the crowds came flocking with wood from the workshops and from the baths, and the Jews, even although they were breaking the Sabbath law by carrying such burdens, were foremost in bringing wood for the fire. They were going to bind him to the stake. “Leave me as I am,” he said, “for he who gives me power to endure the fire, will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by the nails.” So they left him loosely bound in the flames, and Polycarp prayed his great prayer:

B. Let's return to Burma.....Adoniram Judson

Adoniram Judson, the renowned missionary to Burma, endured untold hardships trying to reach the lost for Christ. For seven heartbreaking years he suffered hunger and privation. During this time he was thrown into Ava Prison, and for 17 months was subjected to almost incredible mistreatment. As a result, for the rest of his life he carried the ugly marks made by the chains and iron shackles which had cruelly bound him.

Undaunted, upon his release he asked for permission to enter another province where he might resume preaching the Gospel. The godless ruler indignantly denied his request, saying, "*My people are not fools enough to listen to anything a missionary might SAY, but I fear they might be impressed by your SCARS and turn to your religion!*"