

SMYRNA AND PERGAMUM: REMAIN FAITHFUL

SERIES: JESUS: LORD OF HIS CHURCH

by **Ron Ritchie**

In a recent article in Christianity Today entitled "Tortured for Christ---and Ignored" (1), Charles Colson gathered together several stories about how the church of Jesus Christ is currently suffering persecution around the world. He told of the political brutality against believers in the Sudan where Christians are given three options: convert, flee, or be killed. Christian families are being torn apart as their children are sold as slaves, women are raped or sold as servants, and some of the men are even crucified. "In Ethiopia last year, government troops raided the largest evangelical church, arresting most congregants. Many died in jail, their bodies thrown out to be scavenged by animals." John Hanford, an aide to Senator Richard Lugar, told Colson that today Christians are more widely persecuted than believers of any other faith. "'On a worldwide basis,' Hanford explains, 'Christians are the most persecuted major religion in terms of direct punishment for practicing religious activities---public worship, evangelism, charity.'"

Colson then asked his readers to keep the suffering church in prayer and ended his article with the following account: "In a cable to the State Department, an Ethiopian mission officer wrote that Christians fleeing from Sudan were 'naked but for rags around their waists; all had the dull concentration camp stare of the starving.' Yet, astonishingly, the church is thriving. As Paul Liben reports in First Things, 'Evidence abounds that within all Christians groups, genocide has brought not abandonment of faith, but renewal.'"

Jesus told his disciples on the night that he was betrayed, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...." (John 15:20). God uses suffering to keep his church pure and holy so that it can remain a lampstand that genuinely holds Jesus up as "the light of the world," so that our darkened society can see his plan of redemption. Church history is filled with stories of men and women who suffered on behalf of Jesus Christ. In Revelation 2:8-17 we will look at two more churches that faced times of suffering and temptation.

Smyrna: Remain faithful in suffering

Revelation 2:8:

To the angel of the church of Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.

As you will recall, John, the last living apostle of Jesus Christ, had been arrested and taken to the barren island of Patmos by the Romans because of his witness for his Lord in the city of Ephesus (95 AD). It was at that time that our glorified Lord Jesus appeared to him for the first time in sixty years and commissioned him with the following words: "Write...what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later [and send it to the seven churches in western Turkey]" (1:19). John recorded the Revelation or the "unveiling" of Jesus Christ, and each generation that has heard it and taken to heart the truth within it has been blessed. We are studying "what is now" in this series, which addresses the love our Lord has for his bride, the church.

Jesus had already evaluated the church in Ephesus. Now he would speak to the next two churches to the north, Smyrna and Pergamum.

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write...." As we have seen, and will see again, our risen Lord addressed his letter to an angel of the church. I have suggested before that perhaps these were guardian angels assigned by our Lord to make sure the human messengers safely delivered the scrolls to the churches to which

they were written.

The city of Smyrna was about thirty-five miles north of the city of Ephesus. It had a protected harbor on the western shore of Turkey, which permitted a flourishing trading business. This was the first city in the empire to erect a temple to the goddess Roma and the spirit of Rome (195 BC). In 25 AD the city was chosen by Rome to build a temple to the emperor Tiberius. As the seat of the sinister Caesar cult, it would naturally come into conflict with the Christian community. To refuse to sprinkle incense on the fires before Caesar's image and declare him Lord, the living God, was interpreted as a lack of Roman patriotism and disruptive of the unity of the empire. The Christian community experienced financial, emotional, and spiritual suffering because of their loyalty to Jesus as Lord.

"These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again." Our Lord addressed the church in Smyrna using one of his titles that he gave himself in chapter 1, just as he had with the church in Ephesus. The title "him who is the First and the Last" was from the prophet Isaiah (44:6). It describes the sovereign and mighty God of Israel. Jesus Christ the Son of God informed the church that he has the same title as his Father. All of creation, all of life, past, present, and future, is in the mind, heart, and hands of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the wall of security for believers. He is the only living God, the King of Israel, their Redeemer and life. Outside of Jehovah as revealed in Jesus, there is no other source of life, wholeness, joy, or peace.

This letter is also from him "who died and came to life again." This was a very encouraging word from Jesus to a people who were being threatened with death on a daily basis. He was relating to their suffering out of his own experience. In the history of all humanity he was the only person who came to this earth from heaven, and he came with the express purpose of dying for the sin of a created humanity who rebelled against their Creator. Jesus' death covered the sin of fallen humanity, and all who place their faith in him as the Son of God and as their personal Savior will find their way back into the loving arms of God the Father. This reconciliation is possible because the Father raised his Son from the tomb, and now declares him King of kings, Lord of lords, and the Head of his church. In 62 AD the apostle Peter wrote to the parents of many of the Christians to whom John's Revelation was addressed, and said, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade---kept in heaven for you...." (1 Peter 1:3-4). This title spoke of the hope of the resurrection to a church that was suffering and dying for his name's sake.

First the one who was speaking to the Christians reminded them that he is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. Then the Chief Shepherd offered his suffering flock a word of encouragement, a word of exhortation, and a promise.

Encouragement for the suffering

Revelation 2:9:

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.

Jesus, the Head of his church, is the only one who, like a good shepherd, not only knows the names of his sheep but also knows their hurts and struggles. He knows who we are, and he has full knowledge of where we are and what we are doing as well as what his enemies are trying to do to us. The church of Smyrna, unlike the church of Ephesus, had not forsaken their first love, but were prepared to suffer for Jesus in a hostile community. The word translated afflictions means stress, pressure, trouble, and tribulation. At this point one can hear the words of the apostle Paul written some thirty years earlier to the saints in Corinth: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

When Jesus spoke of their poverty, he was speaking of extreme, abject poverty, for many of them were Roman slaves or servants. They became even poorer economically as the Jewish and pagan merchants refused to deal with them because of their bold witness for Jesus in the marketplace. You can see a modern example of this kind of economic pressure in the way the Israelites sometimes cut off the road between Gaza and Jerusalem so that the Palestine Arabs can't go to work for days, weeks, months, or even a year at a time. And yet in spite of the stress of physical poverty, the Christians in the church at Smyrna were spiritually very rich in all the things that mattered to the heart of God. Paul had reminded the church of Corinth some forty years earlier of the life of Jesus on this earth and the benefits of their relationship with him: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

"I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." Since the days when Jesus had begun his ministry on earth, the unbelieving leaders of the Jewish community had refused to accept him as their Messiah. They were looking for a king to overthrow the Romans and set up his kingdom. Jesus came as a suffering servant. At one time Jesus came face-to-face with some Pharisees who challenged his claim as the Son of God and were seeking to kill him. They claimed they were the true children of Abraham, but Jesus responded, "You belong to your father, the devil ["the slanderer"], and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!" (John 8:44-45).

When Jesus eventually was crucified for the sin of humanity, the Jewish community rejected him again as their Messiah because they believed, based on Deuteronomy 21:23, that anyone who hung on a tree was cursed by God. (Later Paul would make the argument, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us..." [Galatians 3:13].) The Jewish leadership refused to believe that Jesus, the Son of God, became a curse for us, so they began to persecute and slander the new sect called Followers of the Way, then Christians, in the days of Peter, Paul, and finally John. However, as our glorified Lord Jesus looked at the hearts of the Jewish leadership when he was evaluating the church of Smyrna, he saw them not as a faithful remnant who were looking for their Messiah, but a group of men ruled by Satan and meeting in a synagogue to make plans to destroy his flock. He came to this earth to bring the gift of life, but they existed to rain down death on the Christian community, all in the name of God.

Jesus told his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12).

In every community and in every generation we find suffering churches like the one at Smyrna, who suffered because they refused to give in to the political and social pressures of their immoral society and bow their knee to Caesar, because Jesus was already their King. "In Egypt, both converts and ethnic Coptic Christians are being persecuted, their businesses looted, their churches burned. In Saudi Arabia, the government offers rewards of up to \$8,000 for information about secret worship services, which are then raided to arrest believers" (Colson). The remnant of authentic believers in our own country will come under more stress and suffering because of our spiritual and moral stand against many of the current social issues that our government would call good and we would call evil in the sight of God. Political correctness is the watchword of the day rather than truth and righteousness as defined by Jesus Christ.

Notice that our Lord Jesus gave no word of correction to the suffering church at Smyrna, because in their suffering they had drawn close to him. But now he gave a word of...

Exhortation to the suffering

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.

"Do not be afraid...." (This is literally "Stop being afraid"). Once again the Chief Shepherd spoke to these dear sheep: "Do not be afraid, I am with you. But understand that I have given the devil permission to persecute you as I once gave him permission to test Job as well as the disciples" (see Luke 22:31-34). In this persecution some of the Christians would be placed in the horrible Roman prisons that were the places of execution or banishment. But the good news was that the persecution would last "for ten days," a symbol of a short time and another reminder that Jesus, not the devil, was in control of the church. This persecution was designed by Satan to destroy the Christians, but our Lord used it to test them, to purify their faith in him as well as to reveal the genuine believers within the church.

"Be faithful, even to the point of death...." These are words of great encouragement from our Lord to a church that he gave the devil permission to place under stress, imprisonment, and the threat of death. This life is not all there is! Remain faithful, for the best is yet to come! Remember, Jesus is "the First and the Last, who died and came to life again." He was faithful to the point of death for our sins. As the Father raised the Son from the grave, so we have a living hope that he will raise us from the grave.

Once the faithful arrive in eternity, they will meet their glorified Lord Jesus, and he will give them the crown of life. Paul told the sports-minded Corinthians, "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last [the temporary crown of flowers and leaves in the sport area was a symbol of joy and victory]; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever [the crown of life is the symbol of eternal life]" (1 Corinthians 9:25). Paul also told Timothy shortly before his death, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day---and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Jesus spoke a word of encouragement, a word of exhortation, and finally...

A promise to the suffering

Revelation 2:11:

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.

Jesus was saying here, "You are listening to the words of eternal life, don't take them lightly. These are not the words of men but of the Holy Spirit, and not just to the believers in Smyrna but to all the churches. These words come from eternity, not from the earth; from heaven, not hell. The choice is yours, either life or death."

"He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." This is a very powerful statement. He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (see 1 John 5:5) will have nothing to fear. All of us who have been born will physically die, all of us will experience a spiritual resurrection, and all of us will be given eternal life---but not all of us will live in eternity with Jesus Christ. The only ones who will live forever with Jesus Christ are those who have accepted him in their hearts as their Lord and Savior. Those who reject him as their Lord, as the one and only Son of God who is willing to save them, will experience the "second death." The second death is eternal separation from God, alone and in torment. This is fully explained in Revelation 20:12-15: "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

These are difficult days for the church of Jesus Christ around the world and now in the United States. But behind the curtain of eternity we know that Jesus is giving Satan permission to test his church at different times in order to purify it. The persecution may come from the government, irate citizens, or the religious community. How are we to react to this persecution? Stop being afraid, because Jesus is in full control of his

church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And remain faithful to the Light of the world as his lampstand, up to the point of death or until he comes again. Then he will give you "the crown of life," eternal life.

As the church of Smyrna was encouraged to remain faithful to Jesus Christ in their time of persecution, the church of Pergamum was encouraged to remain faithful to him in their time of temptation.

Pergamum: Remain faithful in temptation

Revelation 2:12:

To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

Our risen and fully glorified Lord Jesus addressed the angel of the church in Pergamum using the same title he used in Revelation 1:16: "In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword." This phrase came from the writing of the prophet Isaiah (49:2). The writer to the Hebrews had also used this phrase: "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). The apostle Paul called the word of God the sword of the Spirit (see Ephesians 6:17). In this context this figure describes our Lord's full ability to issue forth devastating judgment based on truth. This church needed to hear the truth of God in the midst of the temptations to give in to heretical teachings that led to sexual immorality and idolatry. They then needed to repent, before Satan destroyed their faithful witness.

The city of Pergamum was the third Roman city on the postal route, located about fifty-five miles directly north of Smyrna. What Silicon Valley is to the computer industry today, Pergamum was to the fine parchment industry. The first temple of the imperial Roman cult was built in Pergamum around 29 BC in honor of the city of Rome and Augustus, the first emperor of the Roman Empire (27 BC - 14 AD). There were many pagan cults that worshipped the Greek gods and goddesses in that city, but in 90 AD the worship of Caesar Domitian as the divine emperor was the touchstone of civic loyalty. This policy was a constant threat to the Christian community, for it demanded that the title of Lord be given to Caesar instead of to Jesus Christ.

Encouragement for the tempted

Revelation 2:13:

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.

"I know where you live...." Here was the risen, fully glorified Lord Jesus informing these dear believers living and ministering in their wicked city that he knew not only who they were but where they were living. Our risen Lord knew of the many Greek temples built in honor of Zeus, Athena, and Dionysus. He also knew that the people were addicted to idolatry and sensual worship practices. Paul had reminded the Corinthians that those who worshipped idols were in reality worshipping demons (see 1 Corinthians 10:20). Our Lord also knew that as Satan ruled out of the Jewish synagogue in Smyrna, he had set up his throne to rule Pergamum from the temples dedicated to the Roman Caesars. For again, as in Smyrna, their ceremonies forced true citizens to declare their loyalty to Rome by bowing their knee to Caesar as Lord. To have a group of Christians declare Jesus as Lord was a political threat of disloyalty to the government. But the Christians were told by our Lord not to escape but to remain as faithful witnesses.

"Yet you remain true to my name." In the middle of this pit of hell, the small group of Christians were seeking by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to remain faithful to Jesus in spirit and truth. They held firm to the truth that Jesus is both Lord and the world's only Savior. "You did not renounce your faith in me [for your

faith was a personal faith in which you trusted me daily for your lives], even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city---where Satan lives." Jesus called himself "the faithful witness" in Revelation 1:5 and again in 3:14, and now he called Antipas "my faithful witness."

We have no information about who Antipas was, but we do know that some Christians were put to death in this city because they refused to sprinkle incense into the fire burning below the bust of Caesar and declare, "Caesar is Lord." They died because they declared publicly and privately that Jesus Christ was their personal Lord, Savior, King, and sovereign God, who had saved them from their sin and was willing to save all who turned to him.

Last year in Iran, three prominent evangelical pastors were abducted and assassinated. Many Christians there have been arrested and tortured; others have lost their homes, jobs, and businesses. All ethnic Armenian and Assyrian Christian schools have been closed or taken over by Muslims (Colson).

Our Lord now went on to give a word of...

Correction for the tempted

Revelation 2:14-15:

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. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

The issue in the heart of our Lord Jesus is that this faithful group of believers was allowing the truth about him to be overwhelmed by the error of evil men. The Chief Shepherd pointed out to the elders and the people of this church that they were allowing two heresies to grow and remain in their midst.

First, they were allowing the teaching of Balaam. There were some Christians within the body of Christ who were holding to the teaching of Jesus Christ and to that of the false prophet Balaam at same time. In Numbers 22-25; 31:16-17, we find a story that took place around 1401 BC. Moses had led God's people through the wilderness and had finally arrived on the plains of Moab overlooking the promised land. Balak the king of Moab became fearful, so he hired a false prophet named Balaam to curse the Jews. But every time Balaam tried to curse the Jews, the Lord placed blessings in his mouth. So Balaam came up with Plan B. He taught the king how to use Moabite girls to entice the young Jewish men to take part in their idolatrous and immoral feasts. He suggested that God would then become angry with his people and destroy them. It worked, for while Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor. And the Lord's anger burned against them (see Numbers 25:1-3). Since that day, the teaching of Balaam has symbolized the kind of evil that seduces the people of God into immorality and idolatry.

The church at Pergamum was also allowing the teaching of the Nicolaitans (in Greek this word means "destroyer of the people"). This group may have been a New Testament version of the followers of Balaam, or a separate group with some of Balaam's evil influences. Regardless, they were within the gates of the church in Pergamum. The Ephesian church "tested the spirits" of this group and rejected their teachings. But the leadership of Pergamum hadn't been that spiritually discerning; thus, the heresy continued to grow among the faithful Christians. These Nicolaitans claimed to be Christians, yet at the same time they declared that they were free from the Law, enabling them to participate in many activities that brought pleasure to the senses, to eat meat offered to idols with their pagan friends, and to join them in sexual pleasures offered at their Greek and Roman temples.

This teaching was a serious violation of what is called "freedom in Christ." When Paul wrote to the Galatians he told them, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free [from the Law]...For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another"

(Galatians 5:1, 13). We are not free from the Law to do as we please, but we are free to be like Jesus. The members of this cult sought to love themselves, and to use others to fulfill their own selfish pleasures. They compromised their faith by trying to marry Christianity to the world. They were open to allowing the world to rule them rather than moving out into the world of darkness and sin with the truth of Jesus Christ and his light of redemption.

The Lord gave a word of encouragement and a word of correction. Now a word of...

Exhortation for the tempted

Revelation 2:16:

Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

A command from the Lord of lords to the church of Pergamum: "Change your minds and your hearts about your relationship with me. As my bride, you cannot be in love with two husbands. You cannot serve two masters. Come back to me with a single heart of love. Come back to the only One who is the Truth and the Life. The path that some of you are presently following will lead to death. So change your minds quickly!" Pergamum was a dark city that needed the faithful lampstand to hold up Jesus as the Light of the world so that men and women could be offered the gospel of redemption and then be delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God.

The victory over this devilish heresy, with its sexual immorality and idolatry, comes from listening to the sword of the mouth of Jesus, which is the word of God, the truth of God (see Revelation 19:13). If the church of Pergamum would not listen to the sword of the mouth of the Lord, then that same sword would be used to bring judgment against the church as well as against the cults (Balaam was killed by a sword; see Numbers 31:8). The writer to the Hebrews said (12:5-6),

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you
because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

The modern church of Jesus Christ is being assaulted with so many moral and ethical issues that many of the spiritual leaders are giving in to current heresies. They find it easier to compromise the truth in the name of political correctness or peace at any price. Some are even engaging in outright rebellion against God and his revealed word. Many of the current heresies fall into the categories of sexual immorality and idolatry.

In the beginning God created man and woman in his image and so designed them to be united in a marriage relationship in which they could express their sexual desires for the purposes of procreation and mutual pleasure. Any sexual activity outside the marriage relationship by either party is defined by God as sexual immorality. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, who were having a difficult time in the area of understanding the proper expression of their sexual desires: "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

We live in a time when many church leaders do not use the Scriptures to challenge their people with God's view of sexual expression within a marriage between a man and a woman. They have compromised the gospel to such a degree that they don't say a word when Christian men and women live together outside the bond of marriage. And even this week a major Christian denomination compromised on the subject of whether a practicing homosexual or lesbian could be ordained to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Idolatry is the paying of divine honors to or worshipping any created thing; it is the ascription of divine power to a created person or thing other than the one and only Creator God (see Romans 1:21-23). The issue of

idolatry challenges each one of us on a daily basis as we find our own society filled with men and women attending seminar after seminar hoping to learn how to trust in themselves alone as the key to coping with their current realities. The church is filled with believers who are compromising their faith in Jesus Christ by trusting in their flesh to live out their lives. We are surrounded by heresies. We need the sword of the Lord, the word of God to help us tell truth from error.

The Lord Jesus has been clear in his evaluation of this church with his words of encouragement, correction, and exhortation; and now finally...

A word of promise

Revelation 2:17:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. 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.

Listen up! The Holy Spirit is speaking through our risen and fully glorified Lord Jesus not only to the church in Pergamum but to all churches at all times. He is speaking to those who are the overcomers, the authentic Christians, the remnant who believe that Jesus is the Son of God (see 1 John 5:5). Our Lord's promise to the faithful witnesses is that one day in eternity they will be given some of the hidden manna. Manna ("What Is This?") was the food God placed on the ground each morning for the Jews to eat while they were in the wilderness. Some of the manna was hidden in a gold jar and placed in the ark (see Exodus 16:32-34). The manna is a picture of Christ himself who is the bread of life, the bread of heaven. Our Lord is the one who will satisfy our spiritual hunger and give us eternal life (see John 6:31 ff).

A white stone was used in the ancient world as a token from a host for guests to enter a feast or a ruler would give one to the poor to so they could get a regular supply of corn. At times the white stone was given to the victor in the games, and may spiritually be seen as a symbol of the triumph of faith which in turn entitles the victor to the messianic banquet. The Christian is rejected on earth, accepted in heaven. The great joy is that all of us who love our Lord Jesus will one day receive a white stone on which he has written either his new name or our new name; either way it will be our assurance that Jesus accepts us and has invited us to the great supper of the Lamb, eternal life.

These are trying times for the church of Jesus Christ, times when the Lord allows Satan to use a religious community to slander us, which in turn brings persecution, stress, and suffering to his flock. Satan means the stress for destruction, but Jesus uses it for our spiritual purification. Satan also uses governments and false prophets to introduce heresies into the body of Christ. How are we to react? Remember that we are the lampstand that holds up the Light of the world with the gospel of redemption.

Remain faithful to Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior

During times of suffering and temptation,

And he will give you

The crown of life,

The hidden manna,

And a white stone bearing your new name.

Third Message
Ron Ritchie
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