

## ***JESUS' ENCOURAGEMENTS TO HIS SUFFERING CHURCH***

*Revelation 2:8-11*

According to Open Doors Ministry, each month, there are 322 Christians throughout the world who are killed for their faith in Jesus. Each month, there are 214 churches and properties which are being destroyed. Each month, there are 772 forms of violence committed against persecuted believers all around the globe. As we reflect on the words of the Lord Jesus to the suffering church of Smyrna, we will consider four divine encouragements that should motivate us to persevere in the midst of suffering and persecution so that we may live faithfully for Christ and die valiantly for His gospel.

***1. Jesus as the Eternal God exercises sovereign \_\_\_\_\_ over death.***

At the very beginning of His letter to the suffering believers in Smyrna, our Lord Jesus encouraged His people by reminding them of who He is: "He is the First and the Last, the One who died and came to life" (Rev. 2:8). In describing Himself as the First and the Last, Jesus is claiming to be the eternal God who transcends time and history (Isaiah 44:6). Our Lord Jesus, the eternal God, became man and has tasted death through crucifixion as a perfect sacrifice for our sins (1 Pet.3:18). On the third day, our Lord Jesus rose again for our justification and has conquered the power of death, so that we who trust in Christ will be delivered from the grip of death and receive eternal life.

***2. Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ our sufferings as His people.***

Our Lord Jesus has detailed and comprehensive knowledge of the state of the church of Smyrna. He said that He knows their experience of tribulation, poverty and slander (Rev. 2:9). All these afflictions remind us that the life of a faithful believer is a persecuted life (2 Tim. 3:12; Phil. 1:29). What makes Jesus the greatest encourager of our soul is the fact that He could identify with our sufferings. He Himself has experienced the most severe and brutal persecution which led to His death on the Cross (Heb. 12:2-3).

***3. Jesus calls us not to \_\_\_\_\_ but to remain \_\_\_\_\_ unto death.***

Our Lord Jesus exhorts His people never to fear because their suffering for righteousness' sake, though incited by Satan, is under the absolute and sovereign control of God (Rev. 2:10). In our own strength, we will never be able to withstand such fierce persecution. But by God's grace, we will certainly persevere and remain faithful to Christ unto the end, because the fiercest persecution that Satan could inflict upon us will definitely accomplish God's divine purpose of perfecting, confirming, strengthening, and establishing us (1 Peter 5:9-10).

4. *Jesus promises to reward us with \_\_\_\_\_.*

The Lord Jesus encourages the faithful believers in Smyrna with His promise that He would reward their perseverance in suffering with the crown of eternal life with Him (Rev. 2:10-11). We who conquer through Christ will never suffer the second death, which is eternal separation from God and everlasting torment in hell.