

BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH!

(Revelation 2:8-11)

Christian persecution has a long violent history from the birth of the New Testament Church in the first century until the present day. Open Doors Ministries reports that in 2018 alone, there are about 3,066 Christians who were killed for their faith, 1,252 who were abducted, 1,020 who were raped or sexually harassed and 793 churches which were attacked. As we reflect on the words of the Lord Jesus to the persecuted church of Smyrna, we will consider three essential reasons why we, as followers and lovers of Jesus, should be faithful to Christ until the end.

1. *Jesus is* _____.

In order to be faithful unto death, the glory and greatness of Jesus must be bigger to us than the reality of death itself. 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 knows* _____.

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.

3. *Jesus comforts us with His* _____.

Our Lord Jesus exhorts His people never to fear because their suffering for righteousness' sake has a divine purpose which is to test their faith (Rev. 2:10). Furthermore, Jesus comforts the believers by reminding them of His divine power. Though their persecution is incited by Satan, the devil's work is under the absolute and sovereign control of God (Rev. 2:10). Finally, the Lord Jesus encourages the faithful Christians in Smyrna with His divine promise that He would reward their perseverance with the crown of eternal life with Him (Rev. 2:10-11; John 10:28-29; Jude 24; 2 Tim. 4:18). We who conquer through Christ will never suffer the second death, which is eternal separation from God and everlasting torment in hell.
