

OVER COMERS IN CHRIST JESUS

PART # 9

10-11-26

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN "OVER COMER" AND THE SEVEN PROMISES FROM GOD – TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN "THE BOOK OF REVELATION"

THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA

Of the "Seven Churches" in the Book of Revelation – the church in Smyrna, was given the shortest of Scripture, concerning the spiritual condition of the seven churches. Christ Jesus was to the point in describing this church.

The name "SMYRNA" means "BITTER" and is related to the word "MYRRH" – USED IN EMBALMING IN DEATH. The city remains a functioning community today called "Izmir", with about 300,000 population today.

Smyrna was a large, beautiful and proud city. It claimed to be the "Glory of Asia". Smyrna was a rich city specializing in the wine trade. At the time of the description of the church in the Book of Revelation, the population of the city was around 200,000 people.

The famous street in Smyrna, was the "Golden Street", in which stood the magnificent temples to "Cybele", "Apollo", "Asklepios", "Aphrodite" and the great temple to "Zeus". By the time of the Book of Revelation, pagan god worship was dying out in Smyrna. The real focus was on the worship of the Roman Emperor.

In 196 B.C, Smyrna built the first temple to "Dea Roma" – the "Goddess of Rome" – the spiritual symbol of the Roman Empire. The "Spirit of Rome" worshipers, took the next step, to worshiping dead Roman Emperors, then to worshipping the living Roman Emperors of Rome, and then to demanding "Emperor Worship" to be mandatory, as evidence of political allegiance and civic pride of the Roman Empire.

In 23 A.D, Smyrna, won the privilege of 12 cities, to build the first temple to worship the Emperor Tiberius Caesar. Smyrna was a large city in the "Roman cult of the of emperor worship".

From 81 A.D. to 96 A.D. the Roman Emperor Domitian, was the first to demand worship under the title "LORD" (GOD), from the people of the Roman Empire and was a test of political loyalty.

Once a year, the Roman citizens had to burn a pinch of incense on the altar to the godhead of Caesar and having done so, they were given a "Certificate to Guarantee", that they had performed their

religious and patriotic duty, in which, the person could then buy and sell in the city. This was an early forerunner of "The Mark of the Antichrist" (REVELATION 13: 16 – 18), yet to come in the future!

Smyrna, had a large Jewish community but the Jewish people did not patronize the "Imperial cult" because their "Religion", was on the "Approved list of religions", allowed by the Roman Empire, at the time of the writing of the Book of Revelation and was exempt from "Caesar Worship".

* One of Smyrna's principal products was "MYRRH" – it tasted BITTER but was used in making perfume and smelled "SWEET". It was one of the oils used in the anointing oil of the priests and for embalming of the dead (JOHN 19: 39). Many believe that this church represents the "MARTYRS" of Christ Jesus, throughout the history of the "Church age" and that the Christians who died as a result of persecution that their faith in Christ Jesus, was both "Bitter to the personal taste" but was "A Sweet smelling fragrance to God". It was the sweet smelling fragrance of their devotion unto death.

2 CORINTHIANS 4: 14 – "Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you".

2 CORINTHIANS 4: 15 – "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God".

2 CORINTHIANS 4: 16 – "For which CAUSE we FAINT NOT; but through our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day".

2 CORINTHIANS 4: 17 – "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory";

2 CORINTHIANS 4: 18 – "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal".

REVELATION 2: 8 – 11 - TEXT

* THE OVER COMER IN CHRIST JESUS MUST NOT BE AFRAID OF PERSECUTION AND DEATH BUT INSTEAD "DIE TO SELF" BY PICKING UP THEIR CROSS AND FOLLOWING CHRIST JESUS

MATTHEW 10: 38 – "And he that taketh NOT his cross, and followeth after me, is NOT worthy of me".

MATTHEW 10: 39 – "He that findeth his life shall LOSE IT: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall FIND IT".

* THE OVER COMER IN CHRIST JESUS IS NOT LOOKING FOR A "TITLE" OR A POSITION HERE ON EARTH AND IN THIS LIFE BUT TO BE "SEATED WITH CHRIST JESUS" (REVELATION 3: 21) FOR ETERNITY YOU MUST NOT BE FOCUSED ON TITLES

MATTHEW 20: 20 – "Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons (JAMES AND JOHN), worshiping Him and desiring a certain thing of Him".

MATTHEW 20: 21 – “And He said unto her, what wilt thou? She says unto him, grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on the RIGHT HAND, and the other on the LEFT (HAND), IN THY KINGDOM”.

MATTHEW 20: 22 – “But Jesus answered and said, YE KNOW NOT WHAT YE ASK. ARE YE ABLE TO DRINK OF THE CUP THAT I SHALL DRINK OF, and TO BE BAPTIZED WITH THE BAPTISM THAT I AM BAPTIZED WITH? They say unto Him. WE ARE ABLE”.

MATTHEW 20: 23 – “And he said unto them, YE SHALL DRINK INDEED OF MY CUP, and BE BAPTIZED WITH THE BAPTISM THAT I AM BAPTIZED WITH but to sit of my RIGHT HAND, and on my LEFT (HAND), is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is PREPARED of my father”.

MATTHEW 20: 24 – “And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren”.

MATTHEW 20: 25 – “But Jesus called them unto him, and said, you know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, And they that are great exercise authority over them”.

MATTHEW 20: 26 – “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister”;

MATTHEW 20: 27 – “And whosoever will be CHIEF among you, let him be YOUR SERVANT”:

MATTHEW 20: 28 – “Even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to MINISTER AND GIVE HIS LIFE A RANSOM FOR MANY”.

It is a sad commentary on human nature that immediately after the third prediction of Christ Jesus's sacrifice in the “Cross”, in the Book of Matthew, His followers were thinking more of their own glory than of His suffering!

(1) . MATTHEW 16: 21 – 23 – Christ Jesus told the disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the Elders and Chief Priests and Scribes, and would be killed and be raised again on the third day. Then Peter rebuked him saying: “Be it far from me far from the, Lord this shall not be unto thee”. Then Christ Jesus turned to Peter and said “Get thee behind me Satan: thou art an offensive to me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God but those that be of men”.

(2). MATTHEW 18: 1 – 4 – The disciples come to Jesus and ask Him: “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven? Then Jesus said that “Whosoever shall humble himself as a as a little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven”.

(3). MATTHEW 20: 20 – 28 – The mother of Zebedee's children (JAMES AND JOHN) came to Jesus and ask Christ Jesus if her two sons can be on the “LEFT HAND and the “RIGHT HAND”. This is right before the “Triumphant entry into Jerusalem” and for James and John to be on the left and right side of Jesus would have made their mom proud and would shown the city of Jerusalem, that they were powerful men, within the ministry of Christ Jesus. Then Christ Jesus asked the disciples the two disciples whether or not they would be able to drink from the “CUP” (OF SUFFERING AND DEATH) and be “Baptized” with the baptism that Jesus would experience (THE BAPTISM OF DEATH) ?

The two disciples not knowing what Jesus was talking about said that "THEY WOULD" and in return, Jesus said To the disciples "That they would INDEED DRINK FROM HIS "CUP" AND BE "BAPTISED" WITH THE "BAPTISM" THAT HE WAS ABOUT TO EXPERIENCE" – BUT for the disciples to be on Christ Jesus' "RIGHT HAND" and to be on Christ Jesus' "LEFT HAND", was not for Him to give but of the Heavenly Father.

* TWO THINGS TO NOTE ABOUT THIS PORTION OF SCRIPTURE:

(1). "JAMES" WAS THE FIRST OF THE APOSTLES TO DIE AND "JOHN" WAS THE LAST OF THE ORIGINAL APOSTLES TO DIE!

(2). WHEN CHRIST JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED, THERE WAS ONE PERSON ON THE "RIGHT HAND SIDE" AND ONE PERSON THAT WAS ON THE "LEFT HAND SIDE" OF CHRIST JESUS - AND IT WAS THE TWO "THIEVES" AND THEY DIED WITH CHRIST JESUS!

REVELATION 2: 8 – 11 - TEXT

REVELATION 2: 8 – "And until the angel of the church in Smyrna write; these things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive";

REVELATION 2: 9 – "I KNOW thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (BUT THOU ART RICH) and I KNOW the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan".

"I KNOW... I KNOW" – Christ Jesus was reminding the church that even though they were suffering persecution and in different forms, all severe, nevertheless God was reigning and ruling and had a purpose for why they were suffering.

"I KNOW THE BLASPHEMY OF THEM WHICH SAY THEY ARE JEWS, AND ARE NOT" – Historically, there was a large and hostile community of Jews in Smyrna, but the Bible tells us that a true Jew is one who trusts God and believes in Jesus Christ (PHILLIPIANS 3: 3). Others may be Jews ethically – which still has a place before God – but they are not Jews spiritually before God.

"POVERTY" - According to history, Smyrna was a prosperous city. Yet the Christians were poor. The word used for "POVERTY", is the Greek word for "ADJECT POVERTY". They were not just poor, they were "Dirt Poor"!

The Christians of Smyrna knew poverty because they were robbed and fired from their jobs in persecution for the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Early Christian joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods, knowing that they have an enduring possession for themselves in Heaven (HEBREWS 10: 34). This kind of economic persecution was one of important reason why Christians were poor in Smyrna. Even today, this is a common form of persecution against Christians.

In contrast, the Christians at the church at Laodicea, thought they were rich, but they were really poor (REVELATION 3:17). Laodicea was a poor rich church. Smyrna was a rich poor church. Better to be a rich poor church than a poor rich church.

REVELATION 2: 10 – “Fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation TEN DAYS: BE THOU FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH, AND I WILL GIVE THEE A CROWN OF LIFE”.

“PRISON” – Being thrown into prison was severe persecution. And that day, “Prisons”, was never used to rehabilitate someone, and rarely used to punish someone. Normally, you were thrown into prison as you waited trial and execution. The “Ten days” can have various meanings, in this verse, I believe, but that this probably the time given before you were given a trial and executed.

“CROWN” – The Greek word for “CROWN” here is “STEPHANOS”. The “Crown” here in this verse is given as a trophy to a winning athlete. Jesus looks at the Christians of Smyrna, and says to them: “YOU ARE MY WINNERS AND YOU DESERVE A TROPHEY”!

Christ Jesus promised a special “CROWN” – “THE CROWN OF LIFE”. A champion athlete received a crown of leaves, which would soon get brown and die. Jesus’ champions received “The Crown of Life”.

REVELATION 2: 11 – “He that have an ear, let him hear what the spirit says under the churches; HE THAT OVERCOMETH SHALL NOT BE HURT OF THE SECOND DEATH”.

POLYCARP OF SMYRNA – MARTYRED IN 155 A.D. – STABBED TO DEATH BY A SPEAR – 86 YEARS OLD – POLYCARP WAS THE BISHOP OF THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA AND WAS MARTYRED ABOUT 60 YEARS AFTER “THE BOOK OF REVELATION” AND THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA :

The year after Polycarp returned from Rome, a great persecution came upon the Christians of Smyrna. His congregation urged him to leave the city until the threat blew over. So, believing that God wanted him to be around a few more years, Polycarp left the city and hid out on a farm belonging to some Christian friends. One day on the farm, as he prayed in his room, Polycarp had a vision of his pillow engulfed in flames. He knew what God said to him, and calmly told his companions, “I see that I must be burnt at the stake.”

Meanwhile, the chief of police issued a warrant for his arrest. They seized one of Polycarp’s servants and tortured him until he told them where his master was. Towards evening, the police chief and a band of soldiers came to the old farmhouse. When the soldiers found him, they were embarrassed to see that they had come to arrest such an old, frail man. They reluctantly put him on a donkey and walked him back to the city of Smyrna.

On the way to the city, the police chief and other government officials tried to persuade Polycarp to offer a pinch of incense before a statue of Caesar and simply say “Caesar is Lord.” That’s all he had to do, and he would be off the hook. They pleaded with him to do it, and escape the dreadful penalties. At first Polycarp was silent, but then he calmly gave them his firm answer: no. The police chief was now angry. Annoyed with the old man, he pushed him out of his carriage and onto the

hard ground. Polycarp, bruised but resolute, got up and walked the rest of the way to the arena.

The horrid games at the arena had already begun in earnest and a large, bloodthirsty mob gathered to see Christians tortured and killed. One Christian named Quintis boldly proclaimed himself a follower of Jesus and said he was willing to be martyred, but when he saw the vicious animals in the arena, he lost courage and agreed to burn the pinch of incense to Caesar as Lord. Another young man named Germanicus didn't back down. He marched out and faced the lions and died an agonizing death for his Lord Jesus. Ten other Christians gave their lives that day, but the mob was unsatisfied. They cried out, "Away with the atheists who do not worship our gods!" To them, Christians were atheists because they did not recognize the traditional gods of Rome and Greece. Finally, the crowd started chanting "Bring out Polycarp."

When Polycarp brought his tired body into the arena, he and the other Christians heard a voice from heaven. It said, "Be strong, Polycarp, play the man." As he stood before the proconsul, they tried one more time to get him to renounce Jesus. The proconsul told Polycarp to agree with the crowd and shout out "Away with the atheists!" Polycarp looked sternly at the bloodthirsty mob, waved his hand towards them and said, "Away with those atheists!" The proconsul persisted. "Take the oath and revile Christ and I'll set you free!" Polycarp answered, "For eighty-six years I've served Jesus; how dare I now revile my King?" The proconsul finally gave up, and announced to the crowd the crime of the accused: "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian."

The crowd shouted, "Let the lions loose!" but the animals had already been put away. The crowd then demanded that Polycarp be burnt. The old man remembered the dream about the burning pillow, and took courage in God. He said to his executioners, "It is well. I fear not the fire that burns for a season and after a while is quenched. Why do you delay? Come, do your will."

They arranged a great pile of wood and set up a pole in the middle. As they tied Polycarp to the pole, he prayed: "I thank You that You have graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour, that I may receive a portion in the number of the martyrs, in the cup of Your Christ." After he prayed and gave thanks to God, they set the wood ablaze. A great wall of flame shot up to the sky, but it never touched Polycarp. God set a hedge of protection between him and the fire. Seeing that he would not burn, the executioner, in a furious rage, stabbed the old man with a long spear. Immediately, streams of blood gushed from his body and seemed to extinguish the fire. When this happened, witnesses said they saw a dove fly up from the smoke into heaven. At the very same moment, a church leader in Rome named Iraenus, said he heard God say to him, "Polycarp is dead." God called his servant home.