

UNRAVELLING THE BOOK OF REVELATION | SESSION 13

THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA

*REMAINING FAITHFUL AND
FEARLESS UNTIL THE END*

(REV. 2:9-11)



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“Deny Jesus now, or I will skin your son alive!”

“No daddy, please don’t deny Jesus, it’s not worth it. If I am killed today, I know where I am going...” With tears in his eyes, the young boy pleaded with his dad.

The missionary’s eight-year-old son was killed right before his eyes. His wife was then raped and killed. He too was martyred. All three did not deny Jesus!

This was a true story that happened in Asia not too long ago. Persecution and martyrdom of Christians are constantly happening around the world. Both are common themes in the Bible, but the Western Church is largely unfamiliar with them.

The primary message of the letter to the **Church of Smyrna** is clear — **Jesus is calling the church to be fearless and to remain faithful in the midst of persecution, until the end.**

Smyrna was a city by the Aegean Sea. All her citizens were required by law to participate in idol worship and to burn incense on the emperor's altar once a year. Failure to comply with the latter meant death. **It was a church living in the midst of intense pressure and persecution!**

There are **two main purposes** of this letter:





1

TO WARN BELIEVERS OF THE COMING PERSECUTION.

The Bible consistently warns us of persecution and the coming tribulation (2 Tim. 3:12; Acts 14:22; Matt. 24:21-22; Lk. 21:12,16; Jn. 16:1-2). We are right now living in **the beginning of birth pangs, the time frame described in Matthew 24:4-8. The verse that follows tells us that there will be increased persecution and martyrdom (Matt. 24:9). This is where we are heading!**

The Bible is clear that **we will go through the Great Tribulation.** Daniel 7:25 tells us **the saints will be persecuted and given into the hands of the Antichrist for three and a half years, which is the duration of the Great Tribulation.** The rapture of the saints will only happen after that (Matt. 24:21-22, 29-31; 1 Thes. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:51-52).

Many of us have an unbiblical paradigm that God will totally shield and deliver us. **Yes, God will deliver some believers. But He will also allow some to be martyred. We really need to get this right so that we will not be offended with God when it happens.**

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW PERSECUTION?

To purify, refine and strengthen the Church (Dan. 11:35; 12:10; Rom. 5:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-9; 5:10) and to separate the wheat from the tares (Matt. 13:24-30). Also, the blood of martyrs opens a door for the Gospel to enter into a region.

Another purpose of the letter to the Church of Smyrna is this:



2

***TO ASSURE US THAT THERE WILL BE
GRACE TO OVERCOME FEAR AND TO
REMAIN FAITHFUL UNTIL THE END.***

Fear is one of the most common emotions at the End of the Age (Lk. 21:26). It will affect every person on the earth; no one is exempted.

God commanded the Church of Smyrna not to fear and to be faithful until death (Rev. 2:10).

**EVERY COMMANDMENT THAT
GOD GIVES COMES WITH THE
PROMISE OF GRACE AND
EMPOWERMENT TO OVERCOME.**

HOW DO WE OVERCOME FEAR?

By cultivating **CONFIDENCE** in the Lord.

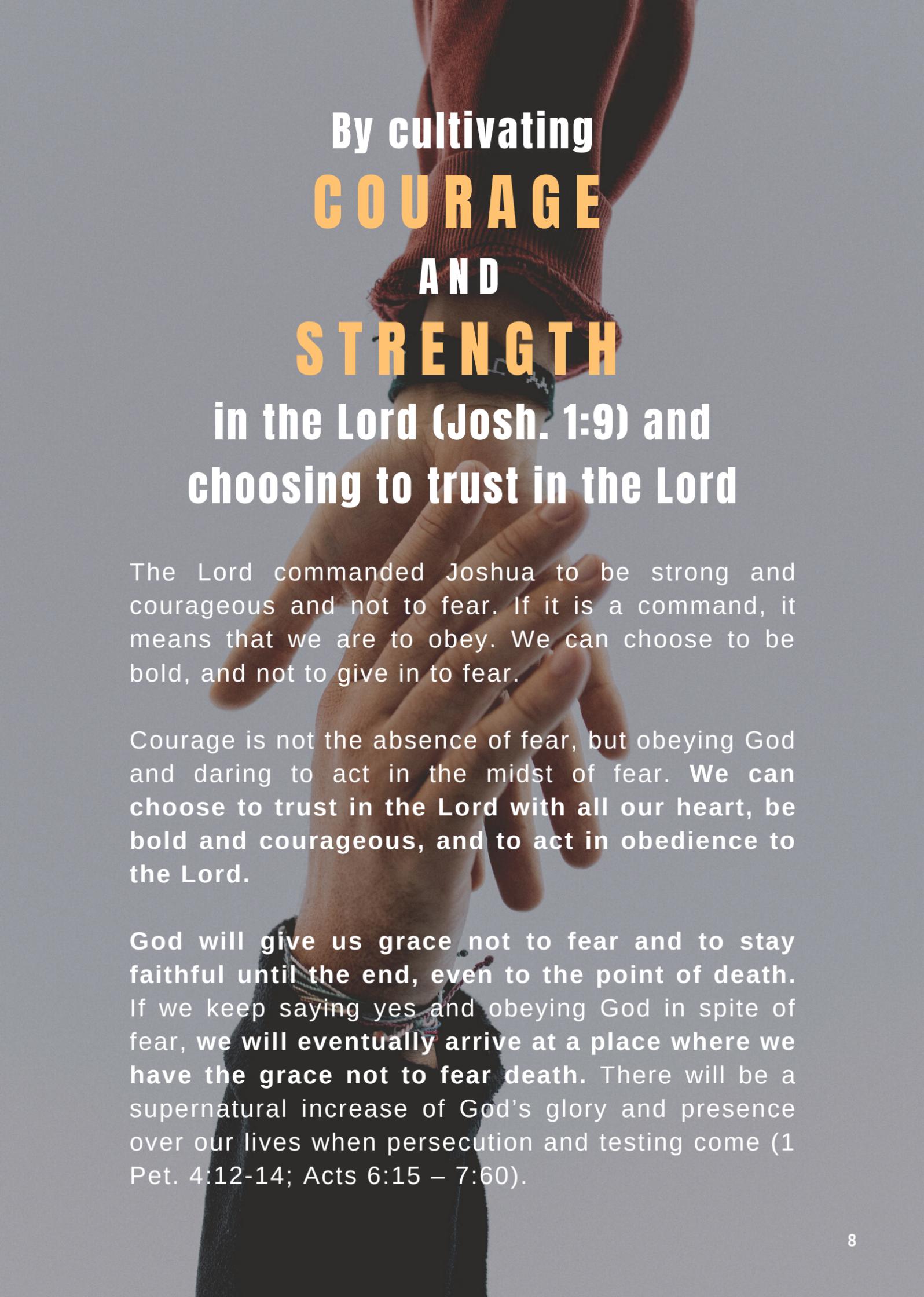
As we encounter who the Lord is, our confidence in Him will grow.

This is why the Lord revealed Himself as “***the First and the Last***” to the Church of Smyrna (Rev. 2:8).

Jesus is the eternal, uncreated God who is in control of our life. He is the Beginning and the End, and has the final word in all things.

If Jesus is the Beginning and the End, He knows everything that is happening in between. He alone determines our path, our destiny and our blessings. Though we may suffer loss in this life, no one can rob away what Jesus has determined for us.

“***Who was dead, and came to life***” speaks of Jesus as a man who has overcome death. He alone possesses the power over death and knows how to bring us to victory!




**By cultivating
COURAGE
AND
STRENGTH
in the Lord (Josh. 1:9) and
choosing to trust in the Lord**

The Lord commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous and not to fear. If it is a command, it means that we are to obey. We can choose to be bold, and not to give in to fear.

Courage is not the absence of fear, but obeying God and daring to act in the midst of fear. **We can choose to trust in the Lord with all our heart, be bold and courageous, and to act in obedience to the Lord.**

God will give us grace not to fear and to stay faithful until the end, even to the point of death. If we keep saying yes and obeying God in spite of fear, **we will eventually arrive at a place where we have the grace not to fear death.** There will be a supernatural increase of God's glory and presence over our lives when persecution and testing come (1 Pet. 4:12-14; Acts 6:15 – 7:60).



Jesus affirmed the Church of Smyrna with **three powerful “I know's”** in Revelation 2:9. He knew their works, the tribulation they went through, and their poverty — how they suffered financial loss by refusing to compromise. He assured them that they are rich in His eyes and that He will reward them with the crown of life if they overcome.

Finally, there are **three crucial issues** in which the Church needs to have the correct paradigm.

1

It is more important to be rich in God than to be rich on this earth.

We need to have an eternal perspective and lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, rather than temporal riches on this earth.

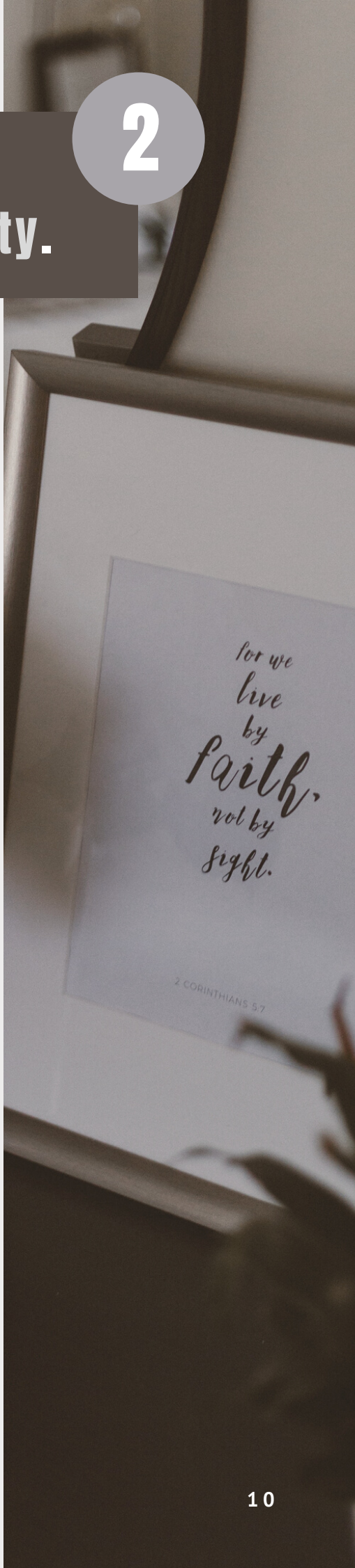
The Issue of Financial Poverty and Prosperity.

Many will suffer financial loss even as we choose to stay faithful. If we do not have the right paradigm, we will be shocked and offended with God.

A couple of commonly held paradigms that are wrong:

- It is a wrong paradigm to think that if we walk right with God, it will always lead to financial blessings and prosperity.
- It is a wrong paradigm to think that if God is in a ministry, it will always have financial prosperity and will not be in need of money.

To be rich or poor is not a measure of spirituality. Paul knew what it is to be in need, and what it is to have plenty (Phil. 4:11-12). He himself had suffered hunger, lack, and poverty (2 Cor. 6:4-10). There are seasons where God allows us to be in need so as to test and refine us, but in the totality of our life, we will lack no good thing.



For we
live
by
Faith,
not by
sight.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:7

A silhouette of a person standing on a dark hill, looking out over a landscape under a sunset sky with purple and orange hues. The person's arms are slightly out to their sides.

3

The Issue of Persecution and Tribulation

It is unbiblical to think that if we believe and walk with God, He will keep us completely from persecution and tribulation. **We are setting ourselves up for failure if we hold on to this paradigm.**

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

Expect persecution.
Embrace suffering.
Cultivate courage and
confidence in the Lord.

**Prepare ourselves now
for what is to come.**

**As we keep doing so, we
will receive grace not to
fear and to stay faithful
and steady until the end.**



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