Overcome Suffering and Tribulation

Sunday, October 14, 2012

Bob Bradley

Revelation 2

8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

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 the synagogue of Satan.

10 Fear none of those 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.

11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

We don’t like to think much about suffering. Sometimes we don’t like to think about it or talk about it. I want you to understand and we all know this; we all know that suffering is part of living on planet earth. There are different things that cause us problems just simply because we are human beings. There are things that wear out. There are things that we tear up. There are things that we misuse. That is true. Isn’t it? I’ve said this many times and heard others say it. If had known that getting old would hurt this much, I would have taken care of myself a long time ago. I would have done better taking care of myself. We don’t understand sometimes that we are going to get old and parts do wear out. Suffering is a part of being here.

I don’t necessarily want to talk about physical suffering tonight, but I don’t want to diminish that because that is part of the suffering that we are going to talk about. However, what I want to talk about tonight is this church at Smyrna. It is one of the churches that Jesus Christ has spoken unto John about when John was on the Isle of Patmos. When they put him over there because of his testimony that he loved the Lord Jesus Christ; they put him out here in the Aegean Sea on a big barren rock. That basically is all it was and they just thought they would put him out there and he would die. Thus, they would get rid of him. However, isn’t it great that God takes care of His people wherever we end up at? He might have been on a barren rock, but while he was there God spoke unto him and revealed some great things unto him. Since he did that we have some great things today and some great promises that we can look at today because of what John went through. We know that God spoke unto John while he was there and gave him a revelation about some things that were happening and some things that were going to take place. He tells John to write these things down in a book and send them unto seven churches which are in Asia. He tells him which church to send them unto.
I was thinking today. These seven churches; there were many different churches in Asia Minor. There were many more than seven of them. However, there is no doubt in my mind that these seven that were there and the characteristics of these seven would make up the rest of the church. In other words what I am saying is that the churches that were in Asia Minor would fit into one of these churches here that John is speaking unto and what is going on there.

The church at Smyrna—I don’t know although I’m sure I probably have, but I don’t really remember talking about this church any. I’m sure I probably have over the years. The word Smyrna means bitterness. It means myrrh. Myrrh is something that is very bitter. Myrrh comes from a little shrubby bush that has some gum on it. During the time that John was writing, they would take the gum that came off of this bush and made all kinds of stuff with it. They made perfumes, incense and different things that smelled good. Although it may have been bitter they could do some things to it and use it.

Here in the city of Smyrna there were a bunch of people who were saved here. There was a church here that had been established. There were people here that loved the Lord Jesus Christ that God has placed them here and saved them. God was doing some great things here in the city of Smyrna. Along with the city here and inside the city, not only were they Christian people here but also there were many Jewish people. The Jews were very zealous about their law and the Old Testament. When someone or somebody, or some organization would get up and preach and teach that Jesus Christ was the Son of Almighty God and that the Jews killed Him over in Jerusalem; we understand that they would get upset as we read history. The Jews were very rich people, and very wealthy people. Not only were there Christian people here being persecuted by the Jews living in that city but they were being persecuted by the city itself. They were just common, ordinary people. Do you know why? It is because the Jews were very influential people. They had money. They could go to the townspeople and they probably supported all the work that was going on there. They were doing a lot of different things with their money and wealth. Do you know what they were trying to do? They were trying to stop and stamp out this way called Christianity.

When we look at this church here and when we look at what was going on here; they were going through tremendous sufferings. I want you to understand something tonight. The church of Jesus Christ in every age, if we will live godly in Christ Jesus the Bible says we are going suffer persecution. If we are not suffering persecution today because that we are saved then it is an evident fact that we need to get closer to God.

I heard a song one time about people getting so close to the world, Christian people getting so close to the world that we could not really tell them apart. I believe the day and time that we are living in; I think there are many people in that situation and they are in that situation tonight. They have become so close to the world that they act like the world, they talk like the world, and they just blend in with the world. I’m glad tonight that there are still yet a few people, a remnant that God has called and saved, that God has redeemed, and that God has filled with His presence and power that are still yet living godly lives. It is more than just here at Campbell Chapel. God has people scattered all over the world. I’m glad that He has. Aren’t you? I’m glad that God has people everywhere.
The people here at Smyrna; the Bible tells us here they were going through tremendous sufferings. Do you know what Jesus was going to do? He was going to give them some things that were going to help them as they were going through their persecutions.

The Bible tells us that the first thing that he writes here the message unto the angel of the church at Smyrna. I have said this many times before. As leaders of churches and spiritual leaders; we have a responsibility to teach people the right thing.

Today, I thought about, as I was reading this; I am glad that the God of heaven is still yet speaking, my friend. He has not died. He has not stopped speaking. He is still yet speaking today unto those who will listen to Him.

The Bible says that He spoke here unto the angel of the church at Smyrna. When you look at the word “angel,” it comes from a word that we get our word “messenger” from. He was talking to the messenger or the pastor of the church here at Smyrna.

Listen. God is still yet speaking today. God still yet has pastors and Christian leaders that He is speaking to and talking to. I’m afraid to say that in many places today, if the electric would go off and they couldn’t get on the Internet; many of our pastors may not have too much to say today.

Listen. God has a book called the Bible. When we will read it and study it and when we will get our noses in the book; God will speak unto His man about the messages that we need. God will do that. In a world today that is trying to silence God; they do that by trying to silence God’s messengers. Amen! They try to silence God’s people. It goes more than just the messengers. If you are living a godly life on your job; you will find out that there is going to be somebody that is going to try to shut you up. Amen! It might take a week, month or a year but there will be somebody come along and try to get you to shut up. There may be a lot of different things happen but there is a different message there.

The Bible says the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking unto the angel or pastor at this church. He is speaking to this pastor here that He wanted him to tell the church here at Smyrna.

8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

Do you know what He is saying here? When He tells the church here that He is the first and the last; I thought about this. They were going through all kinds of sufferings. Some of these people in Smyrna were losing their jobs. Do you know why? They lost their jobs because they had claimed the name of Jesus. They had been born again. They were serving and worshiping the King of kings and Lord of Lords. Some of them had lost their jobs. Some of them had been put in prison. Some of them had lost their lives. However, they were going through tremendous sufferings. When Jesus said, “I am the first and I am the last…” He says, “I was there when the persecution started. I will be there while you are going through the persecutions. When it is over, I will still yet be right here.”

I’m glad that we have a God that will never leave us nor forsake us. I’m glad He will be with us always, even unto the end. I want you to know something else tonight. There is a lot of persecution starting in
America today. It has been going on for a while, but it is ratcheting up today. I want our leaders of our countries to know the leaders of our local governments to know that you may persecute the people of God for a while but I want you to understand that you are going to stand before Him one day and He is going to have the last say. You might say, “I don’t believe that.” You may not believe it, but that does not change the fact that you are going to stand before the God of all eternity one day to give an account for how and what you have done in this life. That is going to happen. God is there. He sees everything that you do. He sees everything that is going on. He sees everything, and hears everything that comes out of your mouth. God sees your actions. He knows why you do what you do. Some people want to manipulate situations and things and God sees all of that.

8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

Not only does He say, “I am with you. When the persecutions started, I was with you. As you go through these persecutions I am going to be with you. When these persecutions come to an end; I’m going to be right there with you.”

8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

When you look up the word “was” it means that He became dead. It means that Jesus Christ, the One who is speaking to this church, or giving the message unto the pastor and he is going to give it to the church; He says, “I became dead. Not only am I the first and the last, but also I became dead...” When we read the scriptures, I know sometimes we make the statements they killed Him and murdered Him; and they did do that. However, Jesus laid down His life freely. When they hung Him on the cross, when they nailed Him there, and when they did all that they did to Him; He laid down His life willingly. When we read the book of John, it tells us that He laid down His life willingly.

He wants these people here to know that He became dead but He said, “...am alive...” There was a time that He became dead, but when we look at the word “alive,” as in He has become alive, which means “once and for all.” Jesus Christ is alive tonight and He is never ever going to die again. He is alive and since He is alive, since He is alive, and since He has went through the chambers of death; that should have been some encouragement to these folks. Even though they may die, if they trust Jesus Christ; everything is going to be okay. That is true for us too.

People don’t like us. This world does not like you. They hate you, actually. Some of them are your own family. Amen! Some of them, you may have slept in the same bed with over the years. There are people who hate us. They do not like us. They don’t like what we stand for.

The people here at Smyrna here, the Romans here—do you know what they thought? Do you know what they preached and taught? They taught that a man’s first allegiance was to Rome. In other words, you give Rome...Rome was number one. Even here at Smyrna they were commanded by the Roman government once a year, to come before the local authorities to stand and proclaim Caesar’s god. If you are saved, you are not going to proclaim Caesar’s god. Caesar is not god. Amen! Jesus Christ is God.
That is why these people were persecuted so badly is because they would not come and declare that Caesar was god. They lost their money. They lost their jobs. They lost their homes. They lost their properties. Some of them had been put in jail. Some of them had been killed. Some of them went through all kinds of sufferings that we cannot understand that they were going through here.

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 the synagogue of Satan.

As you read about the church here a Smyrna, you will find out that to this church, Jesus Christ has nothing—not one thing to say about them that was not good. He had no condemnation to speak to them about. He had nothing to tell them that they needed to straighten up. He had nothing to say about them doing anything wrong. This church was doing it all right. They were doing it all right. That does not mean that they did not have any issues. However, there was nothing here that needed Jesus Christ’s attention. He says, “I know what you are doing.” He goes on and says this.

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 the synagogue of Satan.

He says, “I know your tribulation.” The word “tribulation” is a good word. It means that these people were suffering to the point of being crushed, or crushing afflictions. It is just like someone would be crushed and something would crush the life out of us. These people here were going through that kind of suffering and tribulation. The life was just being crushed out of them.

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 the synagogue of Satan.

Not only does it say that; He said, “I know your tribulations.” He also says, “I know your poverty.” I know that you don’t have anything. I know that you are totally broke. I know that you are totally destitute. I know that you don’t have a penny. I know that. Isn’t it great that God knows that? He knows how much money you have in your wallet. Not only does He know what we are doing, but also He knows what we are carrying around. Isn’t that great! That keeps us honest. Since we know that God knows that anyway, then that keeps us in line. If God did not know that and if there is something that God could not see then we might veer off a little bit. However, since God knows who we are, what we are, and what we are carrying around in our wallets, purses or socks; it keeps on the right way. Doesn’t it?

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 the synagogue of Satan.

He says, “...but thou art rich.” The reasons they were rich—His not talking about rich in money, but He is talking about rich in spiritual relationship that they had with Him. They were going through sufferings. They were going through problems, these tribulations, situations, and afflictions that were just crushing things and were just horrible. God knew their works. He knew what they were doing. He knew their poverty. He said, “You may not have any money, but you are very rich spiritually.” That is really all that
matters in life. That is really the thing that matters in life. Do you know what else I have found out? I have found out that when I get in my spiritual life where I need to be in my spiritual life and get to where I know that when I get on my face before Almighty God that He speaks to me as I am speaking to Him, as I get my face in His Word and meditate upon His Word, when I am doing that, He speaks to me and is answering my prayers. I have found out that the material things don’t mean near as much anyway. When I get to where I need to be with God spiritually then I will understand that physical things do not matter anyway. It is just stuff. It is just going to burn up anyway one day. We put a lot of emphasis on it sometimes. However, when we get our relationship with God as it needs to be—I’m not going to say we are going to give it all away but it is going to have less importance to us than it once did. Amen!

I did not get too many Amen’s on that. Did we? That is okay because it is true. That may be a sign that we need to move up some. Amen! It may be a sign that we need to move up some. It may be a sign that we have some areas that we need to work on. It may be a sign that we have priorities in the wrong spot. Amen!

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 the synagogue of Satan.

The word “blasphemy” means slander. I know those who are slandering you. I know those who are lying about you.

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 the synagogue of Satan.

Get that. He says, “I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not.” When we look at the New Testament, a Jew was not one that was outwardly necessarily, but rather one inwardly. A Jew should have been someone that should have been following Almighty God, and who was listening to the voice of God. That is what Jesus is saying here. If these fellows here were really Jews, they would be following the God of heaven. They are not following the God of heaven. They are slandering you guys. They say they are Jews. They say they are following the God of heaven. They have a synagogue in the city of Smyrna, the Jews have. They say they are worshiping the God of heaven. However, they are not really Jews because they are not really following me. He says here, “They are of the synagogue of satan.” That is a strong statement for Jesus Christ to say. Don’t you think? To tell a bunch a people here that you are going to a church, a synagogue that satan is in control of. That is strong talk. Isn’t it? Jesus says, “I know there is slander. I know who they are. I know they are not following me. I know they are of the synagogue of satan. I know who is behind this. I know where they go. I know who they are. Jesus knows that. Doesn’t He?

10 Fear none of those 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.
Not only did He say that, but He says, “Fear none of those things. Fear not.” He says that a lot. Doesn’t He? Jesus does. Throughout the New Testament and the writings we have about Jesus; He says that many times, “Fear not.”

10 Fear none of those 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.

As I said earlier, some of these folks had been cast into prison because they would not stand up and testify that Caesar was god. They were not going to do that.

If I am living in the Will of God, living as I should be living, I’m not going to get up and tell the world that our leaders are god. I’m not going to do that. I’m not going to declare that our President, Prime Minister, or Pope—that they are god. I’m not going to do that. I know better than that. We will be persecuted because we won’t do that. Listen. I would rather be persecuted and go to heaven than I would be to lose my soul.

10 Fear none of those 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.

The words “ten days,” have a good thought when you look at them. It actually means for a short time. You are going to be cast into prison. You are going to be there. You are going to suffer persecution and tribulation for a short time but He says, “…be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Isn’t that awesome to think about? There are different crowns in the scriptures that we can win by faithful service, by soul winning and by being faithful to those things that God has called us to do. The crown of life is going to be given to those who have been faithful, and those who have stood the test of time.

Stephen’s name, if you read that in your Sunday school book—I hope you did—I think it was in your Sunday school book; Stephen’s name means crown. It means victor’s crown. When Jesus made the statement, “I’m going to give you a crown of life.” These guys here would know what that meant because they knew what it meant to participate in the athletic games and the Olympics that went on. They would have known what it meant to win a crown, or to get a crown, or to get a victor’s crown. They would have known what that meant.

I’m glad that there is going to be a day that persecutions are all going to stop. I’m glad there is going to be a day when troubles, sufferings, and sorrows, heartaches, hardships, and all the things that go along with living on planet earth; I’m glad there is going to be a day that is all going to stop. It all is going to stop. It may be a lot sooner than we think. It may be very soon that Jesus Christ is going to come.

The question I want to ask is this. Are you being faithful to God? Are you really being faithful to God? Since Jesus looks into our hearts, and He knows what is in my heart. He knows what is in every one of our hearts and our lives, if He would write on the blackboard tonight what is in your heart and what is in
your life; what would it really be. Would it be faithfulness? Would it be that “Hey, you are like these folks here. You are living a faithful dedicated life even though you are going through persecutions, sorrows, and financial issues.” You may be going through all kinds of things, but would He write that this one is being faithful. Would He have something else totally different to write? That is a good question that you need to ask yourself. Since He knows what is in your heart, since He knows what is in your life—I’m not talking about the shows we put on sometimes. I’m not talking about hypocrisy that comes out of our mouths sometimes. However, if He would write on the board tonight and put your name beside of it; would He be able to write “faithful” or “not faithful?” That is the question that you need to ask yourselves. Faithful people are not only blessed in this life but people who are faithful to the mission, to the call of Almighty God, in following Jesus Christ daily and being habitually faithful to Him; He could say this one is faithful. Listen. Church and being faithful to God is more than just coming to church once or twice a week or once or twice a month; being faithful to God is more than that.

If you are not being faithful to God—I don’t know your hearts. I can’t do that. I can’t say that. I am going to say this. You are missing out on so much in life if you are not being faithful to God. God has called you and saved you. God has a job for you to do. If you are not being faithful to that job, God will move you out of the way and put someone else in that job that will be faithful. He cares that much about His church and about how things work in His church and the organization of things in His church that if you are not willing to step up and do your part; He will put you on the shelf over here. You just collect dust. I have seen many people in life do that. I have seen many people in life that God says, “If you don’t want to do anything, that’s fine.” Then He sets you on a shelf. I’m not saying you are lost. I’m not saying you are going to hell. I’m not saying that. I’m saying you are missing out on so much in your life on planet earth by not being faithful to God. Do you know what happens many times? I thought about this a minute ago. God puts us on the shelf. I thought God is going to perform a miracle when someone was reading a while ago. God is going to perform a miracle when we get to heaven. Do you know what that miracle is going to be? There are going to be some people who are not going to be crying. That would be a miracle to me because we have a lot of people crying today. I’m talking about whining. God puts us on the shelf and we do a lot of whining from the bleachers. Things are not right over in the bleachers. You can look down and see what everybody else is doing and you are very critical of everybody and what they are doing or what they are not doing. You are very critical of people while all along you are just sitting up here collecting dust. Do you know why? You are collecting dust because God has spoken to you about being faithful. God has spoken to you about doing something for Him. God has spoken to you and said, “This is the direction that I want you to go in life.” You said, “Lord, I don’t want to do that. I’m not going to do that.” God will allow you to do that. He will put you on the shelf and you will live the rest of your life here on planet earth; if you don’t decide, “I don’t want to sit on the shelf anymore. I don’t want to collect dust anymore. I want to get back to where God will bless my life. I want to get back to being faithful to Him so that I can enjoy living on planet earth.” Do you know what you would find out? You would find out the pressures in life is not near as severe.

Some of us sitting here tonight are going through some crushing events in our life. The majority of them are being brought on by the lack of being faithful to God. That’s a hard statement. Being unfaithful to
God brings a lot of issues in our life. When we are unfaithful to God, we cannot enjoy the blessings of God. I’m not being judgmental at all. I’m just saying it is time that we evaluate where we are at. It is time that we evaluate, “Am I being faithful to God? Am I doing what God asks me to do? Am I just going through the motions? I’m wearing myself out doing nothing to bring glory to God. Some of here are getting lazy. Some of us are.

We had 79 people that went to City Mission last night. I thank God for that. That is great. We had a wonderful time. I thank God for that. I thank God for our giving, offering, and people being faithful in giving and laboring. I thank God for that. Some are but some are not. Some of you cannot muster enough strength to come down stairs and pray with us. We can run to Lowes. We can run to Walmart. We can run laps everywhere, but we cannot muster enough time and effort to come downstairs and pray. I wonder about that. I know some people have issues and I know some have physical limitations. However, when I see them at Walmart and walking into Lowes then making excuses why we can’t do this or that; I wonder about those things sometimes.

You might say, “That is a small thing.” Well, it is small thing. However, some of you are missing out on some things that would be good for you if you just participate in that one little small thing. The five minutes you save by not going downstairs in prayer; I’m not sure what you are doing with it. I’m sure that there is going to be some invaluable thing that you are going to do with the extra five minutes at home. It gets quiet. Doesn’t it?

I want us to be faithful. I know that Campbell Chapel in the near future has many things ahead. We have many projects ahead. We have many building ahead. We have many things to do ahead. As we move forward, it is going to take people who are willing to pay the price. As we studied this morning, it is going to take people who are willing to stand up and say, “Lord, I want to be counted for you.” To put some of the things of the world aside and say, “I want to be a part of what you are doing.” God is going to send people. There is going to be enough people to do the work. I love you guys. I want you to be a part of it and experience the great blessing that is ahead. Don’t worry about what your neighbor is doing. You take your view and what God is asking you to do; if you will just be faithful in that area of your life, when you come to church Wednesday night, we will have people who will want to stand up and praise the God of heaven. We won’t come here acting like we are a bunch of dead people. We will come here acting like a bunch of people who are alive. If we are saved tonight and indwelled by the Spirit of God, we are alive.

**10 Fear none of those 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.**

He says, “…be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” If we will just be faithful to God, and do those things He asks us to do. Don’t worry about what your neighbor is doing. You take your view and what God is asking you to do; if you will just be faithful in that area of your life, when you come to church Wednesday night, we will have people who will want to stand up and praise the God of heaven. We won’t come here acting like we are a bunch of dead people. We will come here acting like a bunch of people who are alive. If we are saved tonight and indwelled by the Spirit of God, we are alive.
Since we are here and covering a few things, I might meddle just a little bit here. Okay? Some of us are going backwards. Some of us have gained some ground. Some of us have got over some hurdles. Some of us had conquered some things in our life and we are going back and putting it in the wheelbarrow and pushing it along with us. We went backwards and picked it up. Now we have it in the wheelbarrow and pushing and taking it everywhere we go. We take it home. We take it to work. We take it to the grocery store. We bring it to church. There are things that we have already overcome in our life, things that were hindering us in our relationship with God. God had helped us to put it aside and put it behind us but we would not let it alone. We went back and as Randy Travis says, we start digging up bones. There were things that were dead, things that we should leave alone, things that God has helped us to overcome; we go back, dig them up and resurrect them. Listen. It is causing you spiritual problems.

You know who you are and the only way you are going to get mad is if you are guilty. If you keep your mouth shut, you may not let everybody know who you are. Okay? It is amazing what you can learn by just talking sometimes. It is amazing what you learn just by listening sometimes. I’m not mad at anybody. I’m not that at all. I know that God wants to bless you.

God is doing some great things at Campbell Chapel. God is doing some awesome things here. I know that it is getting crowded. I know that on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night we are sitting here shoulder to shoulder. I understand all of that. I thank God that is happening. I know sometimes that it gets uncomfortable. If you will just be patient, God has a plan. If you will just be patient, God has a plan. If you get a little too tight where you are at and you can come up here and sit with me. I will give you a seat up here with me. Just be patient. Let God be God and let God do what He is doing. Let’s just follow His leadership. When we do that, God will continue doing some great things. Some of you need to cheer up. Amen!

God is a great God!