



DON'T BE AFRAID OF AFFLICTIONS

The second episode of the Seven series.

Last week, we looked at the Church of Ephesus. God's instruction to them was to get back to the first love, which they had lost.

The message to the second church (Smyrna) is "Don't be afraid of afflictions."

Sufferings a part of our life and it keeps coming but it is important to stay calm during these sufferings.

Mud Pot: A man asked a mud pot how it was keeping itself cool, always. The pot replied, "I know that I am made out of mud and I know that I will return to mud."

The lesson we learn from mud pot is that we all have come from mud and we all will return to mud, and we cannot add or take away anything.

In this second episode, the message is to the Church of Smyrna. This church goes through a lot of afflictions. God gives them an appreciation, a piece of advice and an award.

Church of Smyrna

Revelation 2:8

8 - To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again

The message God has for this church is - He says I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek language and Omega is the last letter. It means the Lord is the beginning and the end of everything.

Some information about Smyrna city is as follows:

- Smyrna is about 35 miles away from Ephesus
- Smyrna was a prosperous city with a population close to 2,00,000 people
- The city of Smyrna was destroyed by a massive earthquake a few years after the birth of Jesus Christ but it was rebuilt
- The city of Smyrna possessed a safe harbor where ships from all over the world came to buy goods
- Smyrna was called the Crown city. It was also called the Flower of Asia.

Smyrna was a well-planned city. It was distinct and very special. But the word 'Smyrna' means 'bitter.' Sometimes, in our lives, everything will look fine on the outside, but there will be a lot of bitter and sad things, on the inside. Smyrna was known for its special product called Myrrh. Perfumes were made out of it. It will be very bitter and was used to anoint priests and during special occasions. It smelt good but was bitter. We too, meet people who are good on the outside but do have bitterness inside.

The Lord appreciates Smyrna. Let's look into two things.

Revelation 2:9

9 - I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

God tells them to be:

1.Positive

2.Powerful

Of the seven churches, only to two churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia), God speaks only positive things in every aspect. About Smyrna, God says, “I know the works of your Church, how you stood strong during tough times.”

God speaks only positive things. When a person wants to appreciate us, they will appreciate us first and then there will be a ‘but’ after that. It means, whatever was said before ‘but’ has no meaning or value and there is something wrong. But whatever God talks about Smyrna is positive. There is also a powerful testimony about this church – amidst all afflictions and persecutions, they stood. How is our testimony today? Is it positive and powerful, or either one? Our testimony should be both positive and powerful.

This church is undergoing a struggle.

1. Pressure

Today, we all undergo some kind of pressure. Read the verse again (2:9). What was the struggle they were undergoing? God says, “I know all your afflictions.” They were undergoing a lot of pressure. And this pressure was not from the unbelievers; it was from the Jews, people who were in the church. They were all against this church and did not allow them to grow.

Many of our problems are from our people and not from the outsiders. Jews said that these people were not honouring Caesar, they were not doing things in the right way, and they were accusing them. But God says, “Amidst these afflictions, I like your works.” Standing for God when everything seems to go well, does not matter. We must stand amidst pressure and persecutions.

2. Poverty

The other challenge was their poverty. It was a rich-poor church. They were rich at heart but financially they were poor. Jews and the people in the church of Smyrna made sure that they did not get opportunities. But God said, “Though you are poor, yet you are rich in My eyesight.” We might lack big things in our life, but the stand we take for God is precious and more valuable in the sight of God. Not what we own but what we do for God, your testimony for God is more important. We think little things are insignificant. For example, for three cups of rice to be boiled, we add only a pinch of salt and not three cups of salt equivalent to the rice. The little salt adds flavor. The little is significant and has more value. You might be thinking that you are of no worth and your talents are not worthy. But God says, “What looks little in your sight is big in My sight.”

3. Persecution

Revelation 2:10

10 - Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

God says, “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.” If somebody says that there won’t be persecution or pressure, it is false information. Persecutions and pressure take us closer to God. Prison (mentioned in this verse) in those days was not like the current ones, where prisoners are mentored and taught good values. In those days, people who go to prison have to face death. Their life was over. But God says, “Though you are amidst these persecutions, it will change.” Be faithful to the point of death. God wants you to take a stand and endure. You must be able to spend time and do God’s work amidst all your persecutions. Prison meant the end of life but God said not to be worried.

Testimony of Bishop Polycarp:

He was the Bishop and Pastor of the Smyrna Church in AD 155. During the persecution, the Romans and Jews said that Caesar was the Lord and forced him to worship. He was 86 years old. But the Bishop said, “The Lord had led me for 86 years and now you are forcing me to say the Caesar is the Lord. I cannot do that for Christ is the only living God.” Bishop was persecuted. They took him to an arena where there were 20,000 people and were about to kill him. They threatened to kill him if he doesn’t worship Caesar. But the Bishop said, “No matter what happens in my life, I will only worship Jesus.” They burnt him alive but he was worshipping Christ even at the time of his death.

It is important to worship God amidst all persecutions, pressures and problems. Do not give up. Smyrna Church had a powerful testimony – this Church stood amidst all persecutions. God says, “Do not be afraid of the sufferings. Stand by My strength.” Be encouraged to stand for the Lord amidst your persecutions.

4. Promise

God says, “whoever withstands, I will give him the crown (2:10).” He will have eternal life and will escape the second death (lake of fire - hell (2:11)). So much of the focus is given to our lives and we want to leave an identity here in this world. What is important - the appreciation of the people around or the crown of life? It does not matter what we are going through currently, we always have a better and a great life, and a reward from the Lord.

Do not avoid suffering. We have stopped proclaiming about Christ because of fear and persecutions, and we do not want to suffer. Every one of us wants to live in our comfort zone and we don't want to sacrifice at all.

Romans 5:3-5

3 - Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

4 - perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 - And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Paul says, “We glory in sufferings.” Can we take pride in saying that I suffered doing the work of the Lord?” For sufferings produce perseverance, perseverance produces character and character produces hope, so that you lack nothing and it perfects you. Sufferings perfect our life. We can also proudly say that we glory in sufferings.

Pressure exposes the cracks. Pressure does not create a crack.

Example 1: New employees (freshers), who join for work in Oil Rigs, will be instructed to test the pipes placed under the sea. They will take all the new pipes (though they have been tested) underwater and will give a lot of water pressure on those. The pressure will reveal all the cracks that are in the pipe, as the water will start coming out through those cracks. Then, they will weld all those cracks.

Example 2: When you put puncture for your flat tyres, the person who puts the puncture fills the air in the tube and puts it underwater and it will expose the place where the damage is. Pressure reveals the cracks and the holes.

Every one of us has some kind of cracks and holes in our lives. It gets revealed only when we go through pressure, tough times. Marriages reveal the cracks when we go through tough times not during the initial days. A person's characters are revealed during pressure. Our faith is revealed during pressure. Cracks and the holes are revealed during pressure and not due to pressure. The welder fixes the holes in the pipe and makes it right. Are pressures, sufferings and afflictions exposing the cracks in your life? It's time to get back to the welder or the doctor. The Heavenly Father will take care of the holes and cracks in your life.

Do not be worried about the problems, the persecutions and the pressure in your life; stand for God. Smyrna church stood for God amidst all these. Are you willing to take a stand? The world will put us into a test.

Conclusion:

Do not be afraid of afflictions. The pressure can reveal the holes but we have a Welder (God) who will take care of our cracks and holes. We have a Doctor (God) who will take care of our sickness. Do not be worried about what you are about to undergo. Do not be worried about the sufferings which the devil is about to take you through. For the Lord is on our side. He will give us the crown of life, here on earth and in heaven. Let us hold on and stand amidst persecutions, like the church of Smyrna. Amen.

