

The Poor Rich Church

Revelation 2:8-11

Pastor John Miller

Revelation 2:8-11 says, “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.’””

The letter to the church at Smyrna is the shortest of the seven letters. It has been called “the postcard to those who are in pain.” It is the letter written to the suffering saints in Smyrna.

Notice verse 9: the Lord says, “I know your...tribulation...”—or “your persecution”—“...and your poverty...”—but He makes this statement—“...(but you are rich).” That’s why I’ve called it “the poor rich church.” They were going through persecution, they experienced poverty, but spiritually, they are a very rich church. The church at Smyrna was a persecuted church.

When He says “I know your...tribulation,” He does not mean the Great Tribulation, which is the seven-year period after the rapture, when the Antichrist is revealed and makes a covenant with Israel for seven years. It is known as the “seventieth week” or the seven-year period of Daniel’s prophecy of 490 years. It is also known as the time of “Jacob’s trouble.” It primarily deals with the Jews in preparing the nation of Israel for the Second Coming of Messiah.

But that is not the “tribulation” the church at Smyrna was going through. Some people believe—and I believe that is wrong—that the church will go through the Great Tribulation.

I want to make a very important distinction. The Great Tribulation, which is future, has as its source, God. It is coming from God to a Christ-rejecting world. The tribulation that we experience right now, as believers, has as its source the world, the flesh and the devil. So the Great Tribulation is God pouring out His wrath.

The Bible says that “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” So we are not appointed to this time of wrath, the Great Tribulation, because Jesus paid our penalty on the Cross for our salvation.

But right now, we are not immune from troubles, trials, hardships and difficulty. If you have been a Christian for very long, you know that is true. Jesus said, “In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” So our tribulation comes from the world, our flesh and the devil. Notice in verse 9 that the devil is mentioned bringing about this persecution. So as believers, we are not appointed to wrath, but we do go through trouble or

tribulation.

The true believers in Smyrna were overcomers in Jesus Christ, and we are, too, in this present world.

Now there is no word of condemnation to the church in Smyrna. I think this is significant. Its suffering had purified it and made it strong, in contrast to the church at Ephesus, where they had left or drifted away from their first love; their love for God had grown cold. Many times God will allow trials, trouble and persecution to come upon the church to refine, purify and strengthen it.

I believe in America we have been quite blessed for many, many years. But the day may come when we will be openly persecuted, as Christians, in this nation. From what I see going on in the world around us right now, that day is not far off. When the government tries to dictate what the church can do—whether we can worship, whether we can congregate—“We ought to obey God rather than men.” That’s why we are congregated; we’re of God’s kingdom, and we obey God. I believe the government flies in the face of commands that God has given us to congregate, worship and study and preach His Word. The day may come in America when we may be arrested, put in jail and imprisoned. Who knows how far the persecution will go?

I think we have been lulled into complacency, because the history of the church is a history of persecution. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. Someone said,

“Must I be carried to the skies

On flowery beds of ease,

While others fought to win the prize,

And sailed through bloody seas?”

That’s a good question. Our Bibles were brought to us at the price of people giving their lives to translate and get the Word of God out.

So the history of the church is that of suffering, and I believe in America very soon we are headed into this kind of persecution. So Smyrna was the poor rich church.

The church in Smyrna pictures the post-apostolic era in the time of Constantine, which was 100-312 AD. It was the greatest time of persecution that the church had ever known. It’s estimated that over 5 million Christians, during this period of time, were put to death by the Roman government because of its hatred of the Christian faith.

Now I want to look at what Christ says and thinks about this suffering church at Smyrna. Number one, notice verse 8 mentions the church and the city. It says, “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna.” The “angel” is the Greek word “aggelos.” It can be used for a “messenger,”

so it is believed—and I think, most likely—used as a reference to the pastor, the bishops or the spiritual leaders of the church. It's possible that at this time, that even Polycarp, who was an early church father, was one of the pastors of the church at Smyrna. So he could have been "the angel of the church in Smyrna."

We don't know much about the beginning of the church there. The only thing we know for sure about the church at Smyrna is what is recorded for us here in this letter in Revelation. There is no reference to this church in Acts, and there are no epistles addressed to them elsewhere.

As I mentioned, one of its pastors, or the bishop of the church there, was Polycarp. He lived from 69-155 AD. He was martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ. So this was a faithful church with a faithful pastor.

The city, in verse 1, is Smyrna. It was located 35 miles north of Ephesus. It was on a circular road that went to the seven churches. It had a large, natural harbor that was an inlet, and it was on a main east-west trade route. The city was called "the ornament of Asia," because of its beauty and splendor. Alexander the Great actually personally planned and laid out the design for the city. Smyrna exists even today. It is now called Izmir in Turkey and has about a 300,000 population. It was one of the important seaports and a commercial center. It was known for its trading in wines.

It had many temples, including the temple to the Greek god Zeus. It was the center of emperor-worship. This is significant to the message to Smyrna, because it was there that they had to hail Caesar as lord, which the Christians wouldn't do. So they were put to death, because they wouldn't acknowledge Caesar as lord. It had a large population of Jews, it had a Jewish synagogue, and they, with Rome, persecuted the Christians there.

The name "Smyrna" is significant; it means "bitter." We get our word "myrrh" from it. It is actually a gum resin taken from a tree that was used to make a perfume used for embalming in death.

Three times myrrh—"Smyrna"—is mentioned in the life of Christ. When He was born in Bethlehem, the three wise men—we assume there were three—brought three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. When Jesus was dying on the Cross and He cried out, "I thirst," they took a sponge dipped in "wine mingled with myrrh" and put it to His lips. And when Jesus was buried, the cloth that was used to wrap Jesus' body for burial had myrrh in it. So all these references relate to the idea that Jesus came to die on the Cross.

So "myrrh" means "bitter," and certainly this church was passing through a time of bitter persecution and opposition, with many of them facing imprisonment and death.

Now notice, secondly, in verse 8, the Christ, who writes the letter and sends the message. He is called "the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life." This description of Christ is very significant. It was taken from Revelation 1:17-18. It is fitting, in light of the persecution and death that the believers in Smyrna were facing.

So there are two facets of who Christ is that He reveals to the suffering, persecuted church. Number one, He says that He is eternal—"the First and the Last." Number two, He is the source of life—"was dead, and came to life." So He says that He is the eternal God, the source of life and He lived, died and is now alive forevermore.

When Jesus said that He is "the First and the Last," that is a description of the fact that He is eternal. He had never not been God; He has never not existed. He is the pre-existent, eternal God. I know that's hard for our minds to comprehend, because we want to know, "Who made God? Who made the guy who made the guy who made God?" But the Bible says that God is "eternal." We think of everything by time, space, matter and energy. But God is outside our time-space continuum.

Because He is the eternal God, He is immutable or unchangeable. Have you ever had a friend who you hadn't seen in many years, and then he shows up? You think, Whoa! You've changed. You don't look quite the same. It's like people come up to you and say, "Hey, John!"

"Do I know you?"

"Yeah! We went to high school together."

Whoa! I don't recognize him.

You don't believe me? Go home and get your high school annual out. Look at yourself. You go, "Whoa! What happened to me?!" You got old; you changed.

But God is the eternal, unchanging God. He is the fixed point on which to fasten your life. He never changes, fades away or becomes obsolete. He is the eternal rock on which we can fix our marriages, our ministries and build our lives and families on, because He is unchanging and immutable.

In Hebrews 13:8, it says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." That's basically saying that He is eternal, He is immutable and He is God. So you can build your life upon the solid rock of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is also the source of life. Verse 8 says, "...who was dead, and came to life." In those two descriptions, we have His Crucifixion and His Resurrection. Now how do you have the eternal, immutable God dying? It's called the Incarnation; God became flesh. God came from heaven through the womb of the Virgin Mary and took on humanity. He took on human nature. Because He was a human being and had a body, He could die. He was sinless, but He was human. He was God—He never ceased to be God—then took on humanity in order to die. We call it the Crucifixion.

And we need to understand that when Jesus died on the Cross, He died voluntarily and substitutionarily. He voluntarily gave His life in your place; you and I should have been on the cross. We all should have died because of our sins. But Jesus took our place on the Cross, so

that we could be forgiven and free. He paid the penalty for our sins. He died as the propitiation to satisfy the demands of God's law. My debt has been paid. He died to reconcile me back to God. So because of how wonderful that is, we glory in the Cross of Christ. "God forbid that I should boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," Paul said.

Then we have Jesus' Resurrection, in verse 8. He "came to life." So He died, He was buried and then He rose from the dead. That's the Gospel. Jesus died for our sins, was buried and then He rose from the dead.

How fitting it is that He said that He "came to life" to a group of Christians who were living with the danger and threat of being martyred for Jesus Christ. Many of them would die for their faith.

But Jesus Christ has conquered sin, death and the grave. In 1 Corinthians 15:55, it says, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" Jesus conquered the grave and conquered death, so we need not fear.

In verse 10, Jesus said, "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer....Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." So it's apropos and fitting that these persecuted Christians in Smyrna, who were in danger of being martyred, would be reminded that Jesus died, Jesus rose and Jesus lives. Jesus Christ is our living hope.

Dead men can't help you. If you're lost in the woods, and you can't find your way out, but you come across a dead person, would you get excited and think you're saved? No. Even if he had a ranger outfit on, he couldn't help you, because he's dead.

It's only a living Savior who can save us. A dead person can't save us. That's why Buddha, Confucius and Muhammad can't save you. It's only Jesus Christ, because He has risen from the dead. He said that He is "the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Me." He is the God-man, who died and rose to take us to heaven.

So Jesus gives these persecuted Christians the hope of eternal life.

Thirdly, I want to move to the commendation. Jesus commends them for how they faced a hostile world, in verse 9. He says, "I know your works." Some modern translations omit the word "works." So it reads "I know your tribulation." Some translations translate the word "tribulation" as "persecution," and that's fitting. He says that He knows their "...tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

I want to break it down into five things for which Jesus says He commends these suffering saints. He says He knows their persecution. He says, "I know your works." He knows they are working and laboring. Then He says He knows their "tribulation" or "persecution." Again, it's not the Great Tribulation, but it's the troubles from the world, the flesh and the devil that believers are experiencing.

Why were they being persecuted? Because of, number one, emperor worship. Unless they would put incense on the altar once a year in Smyrna and declare that Caesar is Lord, they could be put to death. They actually were being thrown to the lions. They were covered with pitch and then ignited with flame as human torches. They were covered with animal skins, and then they let the wild animals tear them apart. So they were being put to death for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "I know your...persecution." Isn't it nice that God knows what we're going through? God knows your trouble and trials that you are passing through.

Secondly, they were persecuted because of the pagan religion. There were a lot of pagan temples in the city of Smyrna. One of the biggest ones was the temple to Zeus. So the pagans weren't excited about the Christians.

There also was Jewish hostility. There was a synagogue in Smyrna. Jesus calls it "a synagogue of Satan." These Jews hated Christians and hated Christ, and they were the perpetrators of a lot of the persecution that came against the believers.

Notice, secondly, God says that He "knows" their "poverty." He commends them for this. Jews and pagans would not do business with Christians. They wouldn't let them buy, sell, barter or shop with them. They had what we call today "the cancel culture."

If you're going to vote this way or believe this way, then you should lose your job and you shouldn't do business, we won't sell to you and you can't come in or work here. It's prevalent in our culture today—not if you wear a MEGA hat, but if you wear a Jesus tee shirt; you can't wear that in school. "This is a government building; you can't carry your Bible here." The next step is persecution. We're not far off from the church at Smyrna.

The Christians couldn't be a member of the guild, and they had what's called "the ten percenters" at this time. If you reported on or squealed on a Christian to the Roman authorities and the Christian was arrested, you got 10% of the goods the Roman authorities confiscated from those Christian believers.

I like what God says in parentheses: "But you are rich." Never forget that true riches are spiritual, not material. You may not have the things the world can give or you can afford, but if you have Jesus, you've got everything you need. I'd rather have Jesus than anything.

My Dad used to sing a song in our church when I was growing up.

"I'm a child of the King.

I'm a child of the King.

With Jesus my Savior,

I'm a child of the King.

A tent or a cottage, why should I care.

He's building a palace for me over there.

Of rubies and diamonds and emeralds and gold

His coffers are full; He has riches untold.

I'm a child of the King.

I'm a child of the King.

With Jesus my Savior,

I'm a child of the King."

I'll never forget being in church watching my earthly father singing about his heavenly Father. What an impression it made on my heart.

It doesn't matter if you don't have a lot of money in the bank or the things the world has; if you've got Jesus, you've got everything you need. You have riches in Christ.

Paul spoke of this in 2 Corinthians 6:10. Speaking of his ministry, he said, "...as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." So he was a poor preacher, but he went out and preached the Gospel and people became spiritually rich. He had nothing, but he went around making many rich, "possessing all things."

Now notice, thirdly, God says, "I know the blasphemy" or "the slander." These were probably Jews who were accusing the Christians. They first accused them of being cannibals. Because they heard the comment that Jesus said at Communion, "This is My blood....This is My body," they thought the Christians were cannibals.

They also called them atheists. The Greeks had gods made out of stones that you could see, but the Christians had the invisible God. The Christians didn't have a God made with their hands, so they referred to Christians as atheists, because they didn't believe in their Greek gods. So the believers had all these slanderous reports that came against them.

Verse 9 says, "I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." These were Jews, but they weren't believers in Jesus. They didn't trust Jesus as the Messiah. So Judaism, without Jesus, is just as much a false religion as any other.

Sometimes Christians like to get into Judaism because they like the rites and the rituals and the fascination of all those things. And, yes; Judaism has its fruition in Christianity. But if you are in

a Judaistic, legalistic kind of thing, and you don't come to Jesus, you're without God, and you're without salvation. If you're wrong about Jesus, you're wrong about God. You can't be a Jew and go to heaven without Jesus Christ.

Look at Paul the Apostle. He wrote in Philippians 3:5-9 that he was "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin..."—the most respected tribe any Jew could be a part of—"...a Hebrew of the Hebrews..."—following Hebrew culture—"...concerning the law, a Pharisee." As far as the law was concerned, he was blameless. If anyone was going to get to heaven, he was your boy. "If anyone can get to heaven by being religious, it's me. I'm your man." But he said that all those things that were his religious pedigree, he counted as "rubbish" or a pile of manure. All his Judaism was a pile of manure, that he might "be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ."

Any religion that is without Jesus Christ is without God. If you don't have Jesus Christ, you don't have God. If you don't abide in the doctrine of Christ, you don't have God. Jesus, as I've already quoted, said that He is "the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Me." You can't get to heaven unless you go through the Cross of Christ.

So these Jews were of "a synagogue of Satan." There is such a thing as false religion. It is one of Satan's tools to deceive people. In the book of Acts, one of the greatest persecutions that came against the Christians is the Jews. They followed Paul around and falsely accused him, slandered him and had him arrested. They persecuted him and the other believers.

Now notice, fourthly, that they were thrown into prison, verse 10. The Lord says, "Indeed, the devil..."—which is fitting; he's the "accuser of the brethren"—"...is about to throw some of you into prison." This is the lot of the Christian. You want to be a Christian? You'll be slandered, persecuted, you can't buy or sell anything, you'll be ostracized, you'll be put in prison and you could be put to death.

Paul spent a large portion of his ministry in prison. Can you imagine having a pastor who spent most of his time in prison? "Hey, where's the pastor today?"

"Oh, he's in prison again. We hope he gets out soon."

But Paul would get busy with his pen, and he wrote his prison epistles. Thank God for the pen of Paul! He did more for God in prison than we do out of prison. God used him so wonderfully.

So God said that some of them would be thrown into prison.

Fifthly, in verse 10: death. He said, "You may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death."

Now what does he mean when he says, "tribulation for ten days"? Scholars say it could be 10 periods or epochs of persecution from the Roman emperors. That's possible. Some say it could be 10 years. But why not just what it says—10 days? You know, when the plain sense

makes good sense seek no other sense unless it becomes nonsense. If God means 1,000 years for the millennium, why wouldn't He mean 10 days of persecution? That there could be a very intense period of 10 days when many Christians lost their lives for Jesus Christ?

But He says, "Be faithful until death." Last night, as I was thinking about this sermon, I thought, Could I die for Jesus? Could I give my life for Jesus Christ? Would I be willing to die, to leave my wife and my kids and my church? If I were to be burned at the stake or executed for Jesus, would I be willing to die for Him? Sometimes we, as Christians, won't even sacrifice the least, let alone our lives.

Polycarp, the pastor or the bishop of Smyrna, when he was 86 years old, was arrested by the Roman government and told to recant and deny the Lord and acknowledge Caesar as Lord. He said, "I cannot." And when they were going to restrain him at the stake, they were going to nail his hands to the wood. But he said, "No need to do that; I'm not going to go anywhere." Then he said, "For 86 years, my Lord has faithfully taken care of me and been faithful to me. I cannot deny Him now." So they lit the wood, the flames engulfed Polycarp and he began to worship God and prayed, "Lord, into Your hands I commit my spirit."

Paul the Apostle describes his death by martyrdom in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Before he died, he wrote to Timothy his last words. He said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race....There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness." But right now he was "already being poured out as a drink offering," like a glass of wine that they would pour out into the dirt or on the altar as a drink offering. Paul talked about his soon-coming exodus.

Paul was taken from Rome, his head was laid on the block, the sword was lifted and his head was severed from his body. But the moment his head was severed from his body, he was in the presence of the Lord and wearing a crown. "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." And the Lord promises that you will get "the crown of life."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor who was hanged by the direct order of Himmler, at Flossenbürg concentration camp on April 9, 1945, wrote in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, "Suffering then is the badge of the true Christian. The disciple is not above his master. Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer."

I like the stories of John Wycliffe, John Huss and William Tyndale. These were great, early reformers, who gave their lives to preach the Gospel. They were burned at the stake. The term "cooked like a goose" is a reference to John Huss, the goose. He gave his life willingly to die. As the flames leaped around his body, he prayed for those who were executing him. He was a faithful martyr for Jesus Christ. William Tyndale actually gave his life to get the Scriptures out in the English language.

How can these people in Smyrna go on? How can they continue? God gives them through the letter here Christ, who gives them comfort, verses 10-11. "Be faithful until death, and I will give

you...”—here’s the comfort and the promise—“...the crown of life.” Number one, if you’re faithful, even to the point of death, you’re going to get a crown of life. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. ‘He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.’”

Notice, “be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life,” verse 10. The word “crown” is the Greek word “stephanos.” We get our name Stephen from this word. This means the victor’s crown. There is another word for “crown” in the Bible, and that is “diadem.” Diadem is for the king; stephanos is for the victor. When someone ran a race and won, they put a laurel wreath on their head; it was called a “stephanos.” They didn’t get a gold, silver or bronze medal; they got a bunch of leaves plopped on their heads. But it was a badge of honor. So the Lord says, “You run the race, you finish the course, and there is a crown of righteousness, a crown of life waiting for you.”

Isn’t it interesting that the first Christian martyr, Stephen or Stephanos, in Acts 7, was chosen as one of the seven to wait on tables to feed the widows. He was called by God to preach, and he did it with power. The Jews were listening to him preach the Word, and they were getting angry and would grind their teeth, clench their fists, tore their clothes and threw dirt in the air.

When you’re preaching and people are grinding their teeth, ripping their clothes and throwing dirt in the air, it’s time to wrap up your sermon. Stephen said, “God bless you. It’s great to see you. I’m outta here!” At the back door, the car is running and I’m outta here!

No, not Stephen; he continued to preach. They looked at his face and the Bible says that it was “as the face of an angel”; it was glowing. So the Jews ran onto Stephen and grabbed stones and stoned him to death. He was the first Christian martyr. He was the first one to wear the victor’s crown or the stephanos.

When Stephen was dying and the rocks were hitting him, he looked up to heaven, it opened up and he saw Jesus “standing at the right hand of God.” Jesus wasn’t seated; He was standing, probably to welcome Stephen home. Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then, like Jesus on the Cross, he said, “Do not charge them with this sin. And...he fell asleep.” The Bible says, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”

“Do not fear those who can kill the body,” because there is no more that he can do. Can you imagine how the disciples felt when Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Don’t freak out. All they can do is kill you.”

“Alright. I can dig that.”

Death is not something for the Christian to fear. We don’t have to be afraid of him who only has power over the body. Jesus said, “But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

In Revelation 4:4, it says, “Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I

saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.” This is the church, victorious in heaven.

Notice, secondly, and lastly, the promise to the overcomers, verse 11. “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” What does He mean by “the second death”? I believe that the second death is a reference to hell. It’s a reference to “the lake of fire.” In Revelation 20:14-15 it says, “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” This is what is known as “eternal hell.”

At the end of the millennium, Jesus Christ will sit on a great, white throne, and all the wicked dead throughout all of human history will be resurrected from Hades or hell. They will stand before Christ, the books will be opened and if their names are not found written in the Book of Life, they are cast into “the lake of fire,” which is “the second death.”

Now why is it called “the second death”? The reason is if you are only born once physically, you’ll die once physically and then you’ll die a second time spiritually. The etymology of the word “death” means “separation.” Physical death is when your soul and spirit separates from your body, but spiritual death is when you are separated from God in hell for all eternity. So if you are only born once—physically—you’re going to die twice—physically and spiritually; you’ll be separated from God. But if you’re born twice—physically and then spiritually—you will only die once—physically. So if you’ve been born again, yes, you will die physically, but you won’t die spiritually; you will be in heaven with God for all eternity.

There are only two eternal destinies: heaven or hell. That may sound like old, fire-and-brimstone preaching, but it’s true. The truth doesn’t change. The moment you die, you either go to heaven or to hell.

You ask, “Well, what determines where I go?” Your relationship to Jesus Christ. If you’ve been born again, you’ll only die once and go to heaven. If you haven’t been born again, you’re going to die spiritually and be separated from God for all eternity. So what’s the antidote? Believe in Jesus, repent of your sins and trust in Him; be born again.

In John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again if he was going to enter the kingdom of heaven. So it is the truth for us: we must be born again to enter heaven. So we are either saved, and we go to heaven, or we are unsaved, and we go to the lake of fire, which is the second death, also known as hell.

Now notice what Jesus says to these suffering saints. In verse 8, He said that He “was dead...”—that’s His Crucifixion—“...and came to life,” that’s His Resurrection. So Jesus died and Jesus rose. He is the eternal God. Verse 9, He is the all-knowing God. Verse 10, He is the sovereign God. Verse 11, He is the God who saves. How does He save? By grace through faith. You can’t work for it. You can’t earn it. You don’t deserve it. You can’t merit it. It is “by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift...”—isn’t that

good news?—"...of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast," Paul says in Ephesians 2.

So if you haven't trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you're in danger of going to hell. You're on your way to hell right now. You're on the broad road to destruction. But if you will admit that you are a sinner, turn from your sins—it's called "repentance" or changing your mind—and you believe that Jesus died for you and rose for you, and you will put your faith in Jesus Christ and trust Him, then your sins will be forgiven, the Holy Spirit will come to take up residence in your life and you are then born into God's family. You'll have the life of God in your soul.

What does it mean to be a Christian? Christians go to church and read their Bibles and are good people. No; Christians are people who have the life of God in their soul. It's not a religion; it's a relationship. If you haven't been born again, you can do that right now.

Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.