



# THE EXHORTER

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***“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40***

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***Revelation 2:10 "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."***

Our verse today was the message that the church at Smyrna received. From Heaven's perspective, it wasn't bad. Some would suffer a short time. It will be over. The victory belongs to the Lord. However, from our side of things, it looks very dark. Cast into prison, by Satan! You WILL have tribulation. You WILL be tested. Be faithful until DEATH. Those are all scary words.

There are some lessons for us from these words to Smyrna.

First, God was aware of these things. This message didn't come from the enemy. This wasn't ISIS taunting God's people or making death threats. These words came from Heaven. God knew.

Second, God was going to allow this to happen. He wasn't sending angels to thwart what was coming. He wasn't going to gather His people up into a safe house. The storm was coming and God was going to allow it.

Third, it would be hard. Tribulation. Prison. Testing. Death. Those are not nice words. God who watched His Son suffer and die, would allow this suffering upon the Christians at Smyrna.

Fourth, God was in charge. The suffering was limited, ten days. The suffering would end. This would not crush nor destroy the Kingdom. The outcome was a victory crown. God was going to grant His people a crown. It was a crown of life, not of death. The crown wasn't worn by the enemy, but God's suffering saints.

We sometimes have a hard time understanding why there are hard times. We'd like to have a Heaven like utopia on earth. We'd like it for the storms to skip over our homes. We'd like it for diseases to miss us. Suffering saints is something that is hard to grasp. As parents, we've tried to protect our children from injury. We tried to shelter them from harm. We run to them when they cry and are upset. We try to make every moment filled with joy and happiness. That may work well with two-year olds, but as the kids grow, parents realize that they can't shelter their kids from disappointments. Broken hearts from failed romances, disappointments because they didn't make the team, upset because some friends were not really friends, and then the homework and the tests and the quizzes. The laughter and smiles disappear because of study and work. But as parents we know that this is good and right. You can't be forty years old and play all day, every day. That's not good for a person nor society. Life has bumps and bruises. Our pets die. Tears are a part of life. We learn things in suffering and sadness that we never see in joy and happiness

God's people have always been those who suffered and endured.

- In Egypt, it was the cries of Israel that reached Heaven.
- During the Judges, the pleas for deliverance from oppressing nations, led God to send deliverers.
- There was the Babylonian days.
- There were the Romans
- John the Baptist was behead
- James, the apostle, was executed
- Jeremiah was thrown into a well
- Peter was imprisoned
- Paul was beaten with rods
- Jesus was nailed to the cross

Yet, the fact that we suffer is not an indication that God is not in charge. Nor, does it mean that He does not love us. Suffering from Heaven's perspective toughens us. It makes us rely upon God. It helps us to see what is really valuable in life. It brings us closer to Him.

We see the value of pain when we consider a surgery. Sure it will hurt. It won't last long. And, in the end, the person will be better. Without the surgery, things would be a lot worse. Is spiritual suffering any different? Sure it hurts. It won't last long. And, in the end, the person will be better. That's how God sees it.

So, there may be some who ignore you because of your faith. There may be some who say unkind things to others about you. There may be some who try to get you fired because of your faith. We walk with the Savior. This won't be long. There is a crown awaiting those who keep walking with the Lord.

We need reminders like this. Some days can be tough for some of us. Family and friends can turn. The world can get really dark. We may think God has forgotten us. He hasn't. Believe.

There is a crown for you. Don't quit. Don't give up. Be faithful to the very end.

Roger Shouse