

# THE STONES OF GOD'S WITNESS: SMYRNA— LESSONS IN LIVING AT THE END OF DAYS ENDING WELL

Please open to **Hymn # 372**.

The words of this hymn were written in the year **1917**. The author was 51, unable to finish the career he studied to do, weak and sickly, unemployed, and trying to make ends meet selling things door to door.

This hymn was his testimony of how he made it through life when it seemed everything was going against him, and the world around him was crumbling. Look at the bottom of page 372, what year did he write these words? 1917.

What was happening in the year 1917. World War I was grinding on across Europe as hundreds of miles of trenches oozed with millions of fighting men in a river of death, gas warfare, and plagues. In 1917 alone 2,676 ships would be sunk in the warfare and hundreds of thousands would die.

America had sat out much of the war, but then came April 6<sup>th</sup> and America entered the War as we declared war on Germany and later on Austria-Hungary. By July waves of boys that would end up totaling 4.3 million American soldiers began to start their journey toward the front where 57,476 would die. World War I saw 65 million soldiers fight, 8 ½ million killed, and 21 million returned home without the health and body they had before the war because of being wounded. And in the lands to which they stumbled back they found them ravaged by war and 10 million of their own relatives dead as civilian casualties.

## **“Living for Jesus”**

What happens when you are too weak and sick to do what you wanted to do in life? How about having to leave full time vocational ministry to

do a door-to-door sale job just to stay alive and eat? That was what happened to Tom.

Thomas Obadiah Chisholm was born in a humble log cabin in Franklin, Kentucky, on July 29, 1866. Without the benefit of high school or advanced training, he began his career as a schoolteacher at the age of sixteen in the same country schoolhouse where he had received his elementary training.

Because of a weak body, poor health, and limited finances – Tom spent most of his long life inside at a writing table. Writing, however, was always Mr. Chisholm’s first love, and he wrote more than 1,200 poems, of which 800 were published.

At 51 Tom wrote out his personal testimony of consecration in song. This poem, prayer, and consecration hymn has been the pathway of thousands who have sought to deepen their devotion to Jesus. “Living for Jesus” first appeared in a hymnal, in 1917. Mr. Chisholm concluded a long and fruitful ministry on February 29, 1960, at the Methodist Home for the Aged in Ocean Grove, New Jersey.

- Living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please Him in all that I do, yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free—this is the pathway of blessing for me.
- Living for Jesus who died in my place, bearing on Calv’ry my sin and disgrace—such love constrains me to answer His call, follow His leading and give Him my all.
- Living for Jesus thru earth’s little while, my dearest treasure the light of His smile, seeking the lost ones He died to redeem, bringing the weary to find rest in Him.
- **Chorus:** O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee, for Thou in Thine atonement didst give Thyself for me. I own no other Master—my heart shall be Thy throne: My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.<sup>1</sup>

Tonight will you think deeply with me about how you want to finish life on planet earth. Since none of us know WHEN that will be, God has allowed us to choose HOW that will be. Have you started making preparations? To start our look at Living at the End of Days we need to return to Revelation 2. We are stopped at the ancient ruins, the Stones of God’s Remembrance at Smyrna. There we have found our way to **the arches** that lead up and into the Forum.

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<sup>1</sup> Osbeck, Kenneth W., *Amazing Grace—366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications) 1997.

**THE ADMONITION** v. 10a "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..."

And unless Christ returns soon all of us face the inevitability of death. Are you ready? Have you planned for the spiritual aspects of your death? So many only get the funeral arrangements and life insurance in order. There is so much more to plan and prepare for as a Christian. The Bible teaches us much about Dying Right! In the Scriptures we find seven good ways to die:

- I. JACOB'S 'S LIFE ENDS WITH HIM TRUSTING THE PROMISES OF GOD. Genesis 47.29-49.33
  - A. HE LOOKED FOR THE LAND OF PROMISE TO THE END! Genesis 47:29 And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: (KJV)
  - B. HE FOLLOWED HIS SHEPHERD ALL THE WAY! Genesis 48: 15 Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,
  - C. HE TRUSTED HIS REDEEMER TO CARE FOR HIS SIN! Genesis 48:16 the Angel who has delivered me from all harm -- may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth." (NIV)
- II. JOSEPH'S LIFE ENDS WITH HIM POINTING TO THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD. Genesis 50:24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." (NIV)
  - A. HE GAVE HIS PAST ABUSE TO THE LORD. Genesis 41.51
  - B. HE GAVE HIS FUTURE PLANS TO THE LORD. Genesis 41.52
- III. DAVID'S LIFE ENDS WITH HIM EXHORTING HIS FAMILY TO FOLLOW GOD. 1 Kings 2:1-4 When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go, and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: `If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me

with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.' (NIV)

- A. HE EXHORTED THEM BECAUSE HE HAD ENTRUSTED HIS LIFE TO THE LORD 2<sup>ND</sup> Samuel 22
  - B. HE EXHORTED THEM BECAUSE HE HAD ENTRUSTED HIS TROPHIES TO GOD 2<sup>ND</sup> Samuel 23.16. Remember what David did with Goliath's sword in 1<sup>ST</sup> Samuel 17.54? He gave it to the Lord as we see in 1<sup>ST</sup> Samuel 21.9.
  - C. HE EXHORTED THEM BECAUSE HE HAD ENTRUSTED HIS TREASURES TO GOD. 2<sup>ND</sup> Chronicles 22, 28, and 29.
- IV. STEPHEN'S LIFE ENDS WITH HIM PRAISING GOD.
- A. Acts 6:15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.
  - B. Acts 7:54-60 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.
- V. PAUL'S LIFE ENDS WITH HIM FINISHING THE PLAN LAID OUT FOR HIM BY GOD.
- A. 2 Timothy 4:6-8 for I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day -- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (NIV)
- VI. PETER'S LIFE ENDS WITH HIM S REMINDING THE SAINTS ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD.
- A. 2 Peter 1:12-15 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. (NIV)

VII. CHRIST'S LIFE ENDS WITH HIM POINTING THE WAY FOR ANOTHER TO GOD.

- A. Luke 23:43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (NKJV)

Hymn # 372

TONIGHT WILL YOU RISE AND AFFIRM WITH ME, LIKE -

1. Like JACOB I WILL SEEK TO LIVE TRUSTING THE PROMISES OF GOD.
2. Like JOSEPH I WILL SEEK TO LIVE POINTING TO THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD.
3. Like DAVID I WILL SEEK TO LIVE EXHORTING MY FAMILY TO FOLLOW GOD.
4. Like STEPHEN I WILL SEEK TO LIVE PRAISING GOD.
5. Like PAUL I WILL SEEK TO LIVE FINISHING THE PLAN LAID OUT FOR ME BY GOD.
6. Like PETER I WILL SEEK TO LIVE REMINDING THE SAINTS ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD.
7. Like CHRIST I WILL SEEK TO LIVE POINTING THE WAY FOR ANOTHER TO GOD.

# Appendix

Remember that even those who trust in Christ may be cut down like these kids were, but that does not mean they have been abandoned by God or not loved by God, even in that agonizing moment of suffering. God's love more than conquers even through calamity.

- o Romans 8:35-39 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Mingle heart-wrenching weeping with unbreakable confidence in the goodness and sovereignty of God who rules over the sin and the bullets of rebellious people.

- o Job 1:20-21 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."
- o Lamentations 3:32-33 If He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness. For He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men.

Trust God for his ability to do the humanly impossible, and bring you through this nightmare and, in some inscrutable way, bring good out of it.

- o Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
- o Lamentations 3:21-24 This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him."

Count God your only lasting treasure, because he is the only sure and stable thing in the universe.

- o Psalm 73:25-26 Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

The martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote<sup>2</sup> from his Flossenberg cell in 1937:

Suffering...is the badge of the true Christian. The disciple is not above his master...Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the church as the community of those "who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel's sake.:...Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer.

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<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, ACTS The Church Afire, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, p. 60.

"If church<sup>3</sup> traditions are correct, Matthew knew the reality of an angelic presence when he suffered martyrdom by the sword. So did Mark when he died in Alexandria after being dragged through the streets of the city. Luke experienced the same when he was hanged on a large olive tree in Greece. It was John's realization when he was scarred in a cauldron of boiling oil and lived his last days banished on an island. So it was with Peter as he was crucified upside-down in Rome, James as he was beheaded in Jerusalem, James the Less when he was thrown from a high pinnacle and beaten to death with a club, Philip when he was hanged, Bartholomew when he was scourged and beaten until he died, Andrew when he was bound to a cross and preached at the top of his voice to his persecutors until he perished, Thomas who was run through with a lance, Jude was killed by executioners' arrows, Matthias who was stoned and then beheaded, Barnabas who suffered the same fate at Salonica, and Paul who was beheaded in Rome. On and on and on it goes."

## **A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS**

### **First, Persecution is inevitable for Christians:**

- Matthew 5:11-12 *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*
- Mark 10:29-30 *So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, 30 "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.*
- 1 Thessalonians 3:2-4 *and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, 3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. 4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. 1 Peter 4:12,*
- 2 Timothy 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*
- 1 Peter 4:12 *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;*

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, ACTS The Church Afire, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, p. 85.

## Second, we are called to participate in the sufferings of Christ:

- Acts 5:41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.
- Philippians 1:29 *For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,*
- Philippians 3:10-11 *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*
- 1 Peter 2:20-23 *For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*
- 1 Peter 4:12-16 *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter*

## Third, God's Word promises wonderful treasures for those who face persecution:

- **DEATH WILL BRING PEACE AND REST.** - Isaiah 57:1-2 The righteous perishes, And no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away, While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil. 2 He shall enter into peace; They shall rest in their beds, Each one walking in his uprightness.
- **GOD WILL BRING JUSTICE WHEN JESUS RETURNS.** - 2 Thessalonians 1:5-7 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right,



and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. (NIV)

- **LEADS TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY.** - James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (NIV)
- **PERSECUTION EARNS US HEAVENLY REWARDS** - James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (NIV)

## **Fourth, God uses persecution for His purposes:**

- **PERSECUTION OFTEN SPREADS THE GOSPEL TO OTHER PLACES.** - Acts 8:1,4 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. (NIV)
- **PERSECUTION IS TO REVEAL JESUS IN US.** - 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. (NIV)
- **PERSECUTION ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO BE MORE COURAGEOUS IN THEIR TESTIMONY.** - Philippians 1:12-14 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. (NIV)
- **PERSECUTION OF SAINTS ALWAYS GLORIFIES CHRIST.** - 1 Peter 1:7 These [all kinds of trials] have come so that your faith -- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire --

may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (NIV)

## **FIFTH, WHAT ARE PROPER RESPONSES IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION:**

- **LOVE AND PRAY FOR THE ONES WHO ARE PERSECUTING BELIEVERS.** - Matthew 5:44-45 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (NIV) 1 Peter 3:9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (NIV)
- **CALL YOUR CHURCH TO PRAY FOR THE PERSECUTED.** - Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.
- **SHOW AS MUCH CONCERN FOR THE PERSECUTED AS FOR THOSE IN YOUR OWN LOCAL CHURCH.** - 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (NIV)
- **AS YOU PRAY, REMEMBER WHO THE TRUE ENEMY IS.** Ephesians 6:12-13, 18 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand... And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (NIV)
- **REJOICE OVER THEIR STEADFAST LOVE OF GOD.** - 1 Thessalonians 3:7-9 Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? (NIV)
- **EXHORT OTHER CHRISTIANS BY THE FAITH AND EXAMPLE OF THE PERSECUTED BELIEVERS.** - 2 Thessalonians 1:4 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

- **STAND SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE PERSECUTED BELIEVERS. ACCEPT PERSONAL LOSS IN ORDER TO SYMPATHIZE WITH THEM.** - Hebrews 10:32-34 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.
- **REMEMBER THE PERSECUTED AS IF YOU YOURSELVES WERE SUFFERING.** - Hebrews 13:3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. (NIV)