

THE STONES OF GOD'S WITNESS: PERGAMOS— LESSONS IN LIVING AT THE END OF DAYS

There is a problem each of us face – we can't get to Heaven in the form we are in right now. Remember flesh and blood can't enter the Kingdom (**1st Corinthians 15.50**). So for each of us there must be the putting off of our earthly tent as Paul calls it in 2nd Corinthians 5. This is death for most – and the Rapture for some. So almost every one of us sitting hear tonight are facing almost certain death by the time we reach the collective average age of 77.6 years old.

We aren't ready to live until we are prepared to die. And we live best when we know what counts when we die. Along that line I have enjoyed the systematic repetitive reading of God's Word for many years. In fact for the past twenty-eight years I have read the Bible through at a rate of twice through the Old Testament and three times through the New Testament each year. In these repetitive readings I have always looked for something. One of the areas that has fascinated me over the years as I have read and reread God's Word is the way the Lord records the end of the earthly lives of His beloved saints. I searched each page of God's Word for the closing scene and the recorded words of God's saints. What a study.

In the context of Smyrna we need to learn about ***Ending Well: How to suffer and die Triumphantly.***

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.

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..."

Look out trouble is coming!

The early Church did indeed have just ten great persecutions under the Roman emperors, beginning with Nero and ending the Diocletian, whose last persecution and probably the most terrible of all, was just ten years long! Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Severus, Maximum, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian and Diocletian, were the ten principal pagan persecutors. However, there was constant, though not always general trouble until Constantine's edict of toleration.

The pathway to true discipleship begins when a person is born again. It begins when the following events take place:

1. When a person realizes that he is sinful, lost, blind, and naked before God.
2. When he acknowledges that he cannot save himself by good character or good works.
3. When he believes that the Lord Jesus Christ died as his Substitute on the Cross.
4. When by a definite decision of faith, he acknowledges Jesus Christ as his only Lord and Savior.

Here at the **ancient Roman Forum of Smyrna** martyrs walked to their deaths. They were sent to their death by the power of Rome, directed by the Emperors of Rome. There were fifty-seven Emperors who sat upon Caesar's Throne. As John captured and recorded Christ's words in this letter to a suffering church, the 10th Emperor -- Domitian sat upon the Throne of Rome. These men held the power of the world in their hands. They commanded the nearly invincible legions of Rome. Wealth and riches flowed like rivers into their Imperial coffers. Yet how did they die? Here is what Charles Spurgeon¹ quoted once about these men and their ends:

Of thirty Roman emperors, governors of provinces and others in high office, who distinguished themselves by their zeal and bitterness in persecuting the early Christians, one became speedily deranged after some atrocious cruelty, one was slain by his own son, one became blind, the eyes of one started out of his head, one was drowned, one was strangled, one died in a miserable captivity, one fell dead in a manner that will not bear recital, one died of so loathsome a disease

¹ Spurgeon quoted by James Montgomery Boice: *Psalms Volume 1 – Psalms 1-41*, pages 24-25.

that several of his physicians were put to death because they could not abide the stench that filled his room, two committed suicide, a third attempted it but had to call for help to finish the work, five were assassinated by their own people or servants, five others died the most miserable and excruciating deaths, several of them having an untold complication of diseases, and eight were killed in battle, or after being taken prisoners.

Among these was Julian the Apostate. In the days of his prosperity he is said to have pointed his dagger to heaven, defying the Son of God whom he commonly called the Galilean. But when he was wounded in battle, he saw that all was over with him, and he gathered up his clotted blood and threw it into the air, exclaiming, "Thou has conquered, O thou Galilean."

So has it been throughout history. So will it be to the end.

Not a very pretty picture, not a very nice ending. Only Jesus can take the sting out of death. And that is exactly what He promised the suffering saints at Smyrna. And that is what he offers to us.

Smyrna: ending well

The most important decision you will ever make in life is how you want to die! The saints at Smyrna wanted to die in Jesus.

Remember how **Polycarp**, Bishop of Smyrna, was martyred² on Saturday, 23rd February, A.D. 155?

The proconsul gave him the choice of cursing the name of Christ and making sacrifice to Caesar or death. "Eighty and six years have I served him," said Polycarp, "and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" The proconsul threatened him with burning, and Polycarp replied: "You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will."

And there he stayed until the fires had consumed his life, and his spirit rose safe in the arms of Jesus. Polycarp died, a martyr for the faith.

² Barclay, William, Daily Study Bible Series: The Revelation of John - Volume 1 Chapters 1-5 (Revised Edition), (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2000, c1976.

It was not easy to be a Christian at Smyrna, and yet the letter to Smyrna is one of the two in which there is undiluted praise.

Martyrdom³

1. First of all, our lives do not belong to us anyway.
2. Secondly, we are all going to die anyway if the Lord does not come in the meantime.
3. Thirdly, the least we could do would be to die for Him.
4. Finally, it is criminal to hug our lives when through their reckless abandonment eternal blessing might flow to our fellow men.

The Appeal v. 10b "Be Faithful Unto Death, and I will give you the crown of life..."

"Faithful" means be convinced. As in Revelation 1.5 we believe that Jesus is the faithful witness. Christ is faithful so faithful, we saints are convinced that we must rest on Him depending on what he says. Be convinced of Him, He will be your strength and courage.

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

³ William MacDonald, (1975) True Discipleship, Kansas City, Kansas, Walterick Publishers, p. 4, and p. 72.

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 TRUSTED HIS LIFE TO THE LORD 2ND Samuel 22
 - B. HE ALWAYS GAVE HIS TREASURES TO GOD 2ND Samuel 23.16
- IV. STEPHEN'S LIFE ENDS WITH HIM PRAISING GOD. Acts 7:59-60 while they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. (NIV)
- V. PAUL'S LIFE ENDS WITH HIM FINISHING THE PLAN LAID OUT FOR HIM BY GOD. 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 REMINDING THE SAINTS ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD. 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. 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.
 - a. He Looked for the Land of Promise to the end! Genesis 47:29
 - b. He Followed his Shepherd all the way! Genesis 48:15
 - c. He trusted his Redeemer to care for his sin! Genesis 48:16
2. Like JOSEPH I WILL SEEK TO LIVE POINTING TO THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD. Genesis 50:24
3. Like DAVID I WILL SEEK TO LIVE EXHORTING MY FAMILY TO FOLLOW GOD. 1 Kings 2:1-4
4. Like STEPHEN I WILL SEEK TO LIVE PRAISING GOD. Acts 7:59-60
5. Like PAUL I WILL SEEK TO LIVE FINISHING THE PLAN LAID OUT FOR ME BY GOD. 2 Timothy 4:6-8
6. Like PETER I WILL SEEK TO LIVE REMINDING THE SAINTS ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD. 2 Peter 1:12-15
7. Like CHRIST I WILL SEEK TO LIVE POINTING THE WAY FOR ANOTHER TO GOD. Luke 23:43

Year		Emperor	Year		Emperor	Year		Emperor
23 B.C	1	Augustus	217	20	Macrius	305-307	39	Flavius Severus
14A.D	2	Tiberius	218	21	Elagabalus	308-324	40	Licinus
37	3	Gaius(Caligula)	222	22	Severus/Alexander	306-337	41	Constantine I
41	4	Claudius	235	23	Maximin/Thrax	337-340	42	Constantine II
54	5	Nero	238	24	Gordian I, II, III	337-350	43	Constans
68-69	6	Galba	244	25	Philip and others	337-361	44	Constantius II
69	7	Otho and Vitellius	249	26	Decius and others	361-363	45	Julian
69	8	Vespasian	253	27	Gallienus and others	363-364	46	Jovian
79	9	Titus	268	28	Claudius II	364-375	47	Valentinian
81	10	Domitian	269	29	Aurelian and others	364-375	48	Valens
96	11	Nerva	275	30	Tacitus	367-383	49	Gratian
97	12	Trajan	276	31	Probus	375-393	50	Valentinian II
117	13	Hadrian	282	32	Carus	379-395	51	Theodosius I
138	14	Antoninus Pius	283	33	Carinus and	385-388	52	Maximus
161-180	15	Marcus Aurelius	*	34	* Numerian	392-394	53	Eugenius
176-192	16	Commodus	284-305	35	Diocletian	395-423	54	Honorius
193	17	Pertinax	286-305	36	Maximian	425-455	55	Valentinian III
193-211	18	Septimus Severus	293-296	37	Constantius Chlorus	457-474	56	Leo I
198-217	19	Caracella	293-311	38	Galerius	475-476	57	Romulus Augustulus

