

He is no fool, who gives that which he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose. Jim Elliot, 1949 Later killed by the auca indians.

8“*And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:*

*The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:*

9‘*I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 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. 11‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.’*

This is the shortest of any of the letters. In words.

But there is truth here that most of us will never learn in this life time. Or maybe we will.

The Bible is full of paradoxes.

*but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

This is a paradox. In this world, foolishness. Outside this world, power, redemption, wisdom, life.

*1Cor. 2:7 but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory;*

We speak God's wisdom in a paradox.

*1 Cor 12:10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

*1 Cor. 3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks*

*that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. 19For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God*

*Mt. 16:25 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it..*

*Gal. 2:20 I am crucified with Christ. Never-the-less I live, but not I, Christ lives in me.*

Gaining through losing, Ppn. 3:7-10

In the world, but not of this world. Jn. 17

*Rest by taking up a yoke Mt. 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*

*Mt. 19:30 But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.*

*1Cor. 7:22 This one is like a riddle: For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.*

The reason every one of these is true, is because this world is NOT what it seems.

Our five senses are lying to us. There is a world unseen, that the Bible describes for us.

But we don't get long drawn out pictures, probably because our current state isn't wired to understand it all anyways. Paul says, now we see in a mirror dimly. We don't have all the details.

When God does reveal some of the hidden things, it looks like beasts with 7 heads and 10 horns and we end up more confused than we were in the first place.

One of my very favorite bible stories is of Elisha and his servant in 2 Kings 6;

*8Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel; and he counseled with his servants saying, "In such and such a place shall be my camp."*

*9The man of God sent word to the king of Israel saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Arameans are coming down there."*

*10The king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God had told him; thus he warned him, so that he guarded himself there, more than once or twice.*

*11Now the heart of the king of Aram was enraged over this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you tell me which of us is for the king of Israel?" 12One of his servants said, "No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." 13So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him." And it was told him, saying, "Behold, he is in Dothan." 14He sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city.*

*15Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" 16So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 18When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. 19Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city; follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he brought them to Samaria.*

*20When they had come into Samaria, Elisha said, "O LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." So the LORD opened their eyes and they saw; and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.*

*21 Then the king of Israel when he saw them, said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" 22 He answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." 23 So he prepared a great feast for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel.*

Did you catch the paradox in that story?

*"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."*

What 're you talkin' about those who are with us! There's like 2 of us and there's a whole army out there, and we're surrounded!

That's where our senses end. But there's more! So much more.

All of those paradoxes, are foolishness to the world. But to me, they're like;

*Psalms 19:10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.*

The Bible's paradox's are for the mature. When you're new to all this, you scratch your head and think, this doesn't make much sense. But when you've traveled much in this world with the Lord, they all begin to make perfect sense, and then you love them. The world hates them. We love them.

How interesting that the church that is the most perfect of all of the churches Jesus wrote to, get's the entire message in paradoxes. They GET IT!

This little letter is full of paradoxes, from the salutation to the promise, and everywhere in between. This is going to be fun! I love that everything in this letter is just the opposite of what it seems. ALL of it!

Smyrna is about 40 miles north of Ephesus. Ephesus is gone. You can find the ruins, but it's gone, but Smyrna still exists. It's called Izmir today.

Izmir is one of the most beautiful cities imaginable. On the sea, but protected with land on both sides that extends for 40 miles. So it's like it's at the end of a long bay.

Temperatures are comparable to Los Angeles. Mild in winter, and in summer. It's just a beautiful beautiful spot. Over 3 million people live in the area now.

So let's dive in. 8“*And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:*

The first 2 paradoxes;

*The first and the last.* How can you be first, and last, at the same time?

There's only one way, right? If you are Eternal God. If you transcend this time space continuum. If you were, before anything was, and will be, after everything ends, you can make this claim.

From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. This world will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

Get on a soap box and preach this truth in today's secular world. They'll laugh you to scorn. You'll find out just the opposite is true. The world made itself. It took it trillions of years, and it'll be here for trillions of more years.

That's the best our 5 senses and our reason can do. If God didn't enter our world and reveal Himself to us, that's where we'd be at.

We have a God who is both first, and last. And it's Jesus, who is co-equal with the Eternal Father.

*who was dead, and has come to life*

Another paradox. Another riddle. How can someone be dead and come to life.

Jesus, who is eternal, entered this world, that He spoke into existence, and died on a cross, payment for my sins, then came back to life, resurrected from the grave on the 3rd day

That's just crazy to the world. Silliness. But the world should wise up and believe ALL of the credible witnesses. Credible people saw, touched, walked with, ate with, put their fingers in the nail holes, and their hands into His wounds, and stood and watched Him ascend into heaven.

Disbelief is a conscious choice, because the witnesses are many, and they are credible people. This didn't happen in a loony bin.

*who was dead, and has come to life* This is a paradox that can only be true if there's a world outside of and beyond this one. We believe that.

But then, we're surrounded by folks who were dead spiritually, and have come back to life. We can see the undeniable first fruits with our own eyes.

We need to be the kind of church where the world sees this....in us!

*The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:*

*9'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich),*

Third paradox: You're destitute and there is pressure squeezing the life out of you, but you're rich. This is the poor ~ rich church.

Smyrna is the greek word for myrrh. Myrrh is a perfume that comes from a thorny tree. You have to crush the tree to get the perfume out. What a perfect picture of this little church. The more the world crushes it, the more fragrant it is.

Think about this. How come the Nicolaitan teachers didn't go stir up trouble in Smyrna? How come the balaam teachers and the Jezebel people didn't go spread all their false teaching in Smyrna. Maybe the false apostles that got thrown out of Ephesus could have made a go of it in Smyrna!

The answer is obvious. False teachers and half committed christians don't hang around where christians are the target in the bulls eye.

MacArthur has a story about a visiting preacher from the former Soviet Union. After the service the guy comes up and introduces himself to John and says, I could never preach here. I don't know how you do it?? John says, why? And the guy says, I could never preach where the people have all this comfort and entertainment and riches drawing them away from Jesus. I don't know how you do it!

The word for tribulation is pressure. Stress. Crushing pressure.

The word for poverty is not the one for folks like us who are blue collar workers, but have what we need and no more. It is the word for the kind of poverty where you don't even have your daily needs met.

*I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich),*

This is a paradox that only believers can understand. They've got trouble and they're destitute, according to this world. But Jesus says they're rich!

In the spiritual realm, unseen by this world, they are rich!

*and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

Paradox #4. Jews. The world sees respectable Jews in a respectable religion. God sees Satan.

Don't be confused. Jewish folks, as much as we love them because they

brought us faithfully the revelation of God, and they've still got time on God's clock, and they are God's chosen people.....

When they are in the condition of rejecting their messiah, they are no different than any other false religion that has Satan at it's core. Hindu's, Moslems, Jews, and whatever else you've got that's false, is a synagogue of satan.

In Jn. 8:44, Jesus told the leading Jews, "you are of your father, the \_\_\_\_\_?"

The jews in Smyrna were the agents of trouble for the christians. They were slandering the church. The word for blaspheming there is slander.

Smyrna had a temple called Dia Roma. God Rome. Ceasar worship was huge in Smyrna. Domition was the Ceasar, and he had set himself up as a God.

You could worship your other gods if you wanted, but once a year you had to worship Ceasar, and there was a certificate that showed you had complied.

The christians would not do that. And the jews, who did, used it as an opportunity to persecute the christians. Since they wouldn't bow down to Ceasar, they were branded as atheists! And, by the way, the penalty was death.

*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.*

Paradox #5: You're going to suffer. Do not fear.

How exactly does that work?

Some guy with a bayonet is marching you toward a pit that's a mass grave, and Jesus says do not fear??

I will tell you that I think I understand this conceptually. God is sovereign. We believe that all things work together for good. We believe that all the bad guys can do is kill us. Absent from the body, present with the Lord.

Paul said, For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I'm right there conceptually. But when the day comes . . . God would have to supply the grace for me to put concept into action.

Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna 60 years after this letter was written. Nothing had changed. Listen to this ancient account and you can see that grace in action.

Polycarp 156AD: *"Away with the atheists, let Polycarp be searched for."*

*No doubt Polycarp could have escaped but already he had a dream in which he saw the pillow under his head burning with fire and he had awakened to tell his disciples, "I must be burned alive." His whereabouts were betrayed to the persecutors by a little slave girl who collapsed under torture and they came to arrest him. Not even the soldier captain wished to see Polycarp die. On the brief journey to the city he pled with the old man, "What harm is it to say Caesar is lord and to sacrifice and save your life?" But Polycarp was adamant that for him only Jesus Christ was Lord.*

*He entered the arena. The pro-consul 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 pro-consul threatened him with burning. 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 he remained unmovable. So the crowds came flocking with their sticks from the workshops, from the baths and the Jews, even although they were breaking the Sabbath law by carrying such burdens, were*

*foremost in the clamor and bringing wood for the fire. They were going to bind him to the stake. "Leave me as I am," he said, "for He who gives me power to endure the fire will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved, even without the security you will give by binding." So they left him loosely in the flames and there he died for Christ.*

*Vs. 10b 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.*

Paradox #6 be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

All the world sees is the death. Physical death. Problem solved. The christian is gone. Good riddance, he got what he deserved. That's where our 5 senses end. But that isn't the end at all.

Jesus says be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life!

I started with a Jim Elliot quote. *He is no fool, who gives that which he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.* Jim Elliot, 1949

The whole world looked at Jim Elliot after the auca indians killed him and said, "fool!" You wasted your life.

Jim Elliot understood what Jesus was saying here to the church at Smyrna, and he put it into action. He gave his life, which wasn't his to keep anyways, and gained a crown of life that he will never lose.

*Vs. 11 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'*

Notice how the trinity is interchangeable in these letters.

Who are the letters from? Jesus. but *hear what the Spirit says to the churches*

Another paradox. Three persons, co-equally God, and interchangeable.

The world just shakes their collective head when you try to explain the in-explicable.

Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. This is for us!

*He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.*

The world can kill you. But you will have joy in the presence of the Lord forever. No second death.

The world that killed you, will also die, and they will experience eternal punishment. The second death is the lake of fire judgement.