



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 9, 2022

Pastor James Enderle

Lenten Midweek 1

First Lesson: [Isaiah 14:12-17](#)

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Revelation 2:8-11](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 24:4-14](#)

Smyrna: Fear unto Death vs. Courage unto Life

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

I think there are some things in life that are pretty fearful but you see some people do it and they aren't too afraid. And you think "How could they do that?" But they are at ease. They are calm. If anyone watched the winter Olympics this year, I was watching the snowboarding and it had the halfpipe where they do tricks going up and coming down. They go up like 20 feet in the air and come down on pretty much concrete with a little bit of snow. They were doing flips and running around and they were being pretty dangerous. But they look at ease and even when they fall, they don't seem too hurt and they get up and do it again. I'd be pretty fearful to do that at all, but I think they have a lot of confidence and they wear the right things. They have the helmets and it's really cold so they have padding and protection.

There is a photo of me scuba diving. It's one of the things I actually miss being here in Wisconsin and not being in Asia because I love scuba diving. A lot of times when I tell people that I love scuba diving they say, "Oh, I would never do that." You can see in the background (of the picture) there is a ship that was sunken. That's probably when I was training to do the low-level or deep-level diving, which is probably about 30 meters (so maybe 90 feet deep). I know for a lot of people that is frightening. They say "It's so dangerous," but when you're used to it and you have the right equipment, it's so easy and comfortable and you feel natural down there. Something so fearful, something what some might say is dangerous becomes quite comfortable. You can have courage and strength because you've been trained, you know what you're doing and you have the right stuff.

If you would do snowboarding, doing the halfpipe and going up 20 feet, I think I'd feel a little less safe without a helmet. If you were going to try to go 90 feet deep when scuba diving, it would be pretty dangerous to do that without all the equipment. I think there

are a lot of people in life that go through life kind of like this; where they think "I can live life without really being prepared, without having all the equipment, without knowing what is ahead and being prepared." How do we then get prepared is what we are going to look at. There are things to be fearful of in this life, but we can have courage and strength.

As we look at our letter to Smyrna, we see a great contrast between the people who know God and the people who don't know God. We see some people who have everything and those who don't have everything but yet maybe still do, and those who are told to not be fearful even though the world might say "You should be fearful." So as we look at Smyrna, let's see what it means to be rich, to have everything, and also to have courage in this world that has reasons to make us afraid.

When John writes, using God's Word, he says ***"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer."*** So now you see a little bit of a contrast. But first to understand a little bit, he is saying "You're in poverty" but this area that they were in wasn't a really poor area. Smyrna was called the Golden Crown. They had built temples to many Roman gods and they even built a temple to the Roman senate. Yet the Christians were in poverty. So we know that there are people around them that are not. They are rich. You might say that they have everything.

Later here it says: ***"I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not..."*** Some are slandering them. They think they know everything. I think there are a lot of people in our world who think they know everything and they think they have everything, but yet they are really afraid. Think about that. Why would they be afraid, or how do we know they are afraid? It's how they act. It's how they lash out at Christians and the truth. They think they know the truth. They think they have everything. They may be very rich. They may be very successful. But what do they do with those supposed riches, that everything? They don't live in peace. They live out of fear. They think they know everything. They don't think they need to come to God or learn from the Bible. In fact, they say "Everything you know is wrong because the Bible is written by man and it's changed," so it can be rejected so easily. They've come up with so many different ways of saying they know what is right. That whatever is in your heart, follow your heart. But they live in fear. It really boils down to whether or not you trust in God. They think they have everything but they live in fear because they don't have God.

Think about the simple thoughts of evolution and how people say "We come from this little thing and this little thing becomes this and it becomes greater and greater," and

they laugh at Christians that say "God created the world." They know everything. We don't. You tell me, when you look at a building, you look at a church, you look at anything and you say "Hey, that has a builder. Someone built that. Someone planned that," and you tell me when you look at a sunset, you look at our world and say "That happened by chance?" and there is no designer, there is no painter, there is no one behind all of that to create it? They take out God. When they do that, what do they have to trust in? They trust in their things, their knowledge, and themselves. What does that drive? It drives them to fear because what happens to money? What are we seeing right now? Stock markets, world peace, it's all fine, right? People are good. Nothing will happen. And we find out that people are sometimes evil and people do things we don't expect. When we trust in man and we trust in money and our things, even though we might think we have everything and know everything, it causes great fear because those things can go away.

We have to look at ourselves and at the times that we do this as well. When do you trust in things other than God? Think about your priorities because that's in some ways what you put your time and your focus on, so that's what you trust in. Are you putting your priority in God and trusting in God? Or, are you putting your trust in something else? In your work or your money or sometimes it can be a person. Trusting a person is not a bad thing. You want to trust people. But if I put all of my hope in my spouse for them to fulfill me, to make me happy, to give all the answers, they are a person—they are going to fall short. I put unrealistic expectations on them and it's not fair. I'm going to come out sad and fearful because people fail. Even as a parent, maybe you put all your hope and trust in a child. Maybe your children are young. Maybe you're older and your children are grown and you put your trust and hope in them of fulfilling all your dreams, or that they should act this certain way. What happens? They are their own people. They can't do everything you want and they are going to fail and they are going to fall. Finally one day they are going to grow up and have their own family as well. But we too can put our trust in things other than God to make us fearful and become distracted.

As we look here, John is writing to a people that knew God and though they had lost many things, he said they are rich. Most of all, he says this to them. ***"I know your afflictions and your poverty..."*** Jesus knows you and your afflictions. The afflictions of Smyrna were that they were going to be persecuted. They were going to be thrown into prison. They were maybe going to lose even more money than the little money that they had. Some of them were going to be beaten. Some of them were going to even be killed for their faith. He tells them that he knows what they are going to suffer. Verse 10: ***"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days."*** This persecution and suffering that they were going to be inflicted with was

great, to the point of death. But he tells them, "I know this. Do not be afraid and be prepared because I am with you." God knows what they are going through. So when it happens, they're not surprised.

What about us? Do we believe that lie that life should be easy? That we shouldn't run into difficulties? It's so shocking when something bad happens and we say "God! How could you let this happen? How could this change happen? How could gas prices rise? How could you cause difficulty for my business or my family? How could you bring the death of a loved one?" All these different afflictions that we have, God knows them. He knows them before they happen yet it's easy for us to question and to doubt and say, "Does God know me? Does God love me? How could He let those things happen to me if He loved me?"

God has something more in store for us than just these things. What makes us rich is not how healthy we are or how wealthy we are, how many friends we have or how popular we are. That's not what makes us rich. It's being rich in the Lord and having courage in this life when so many others are fearful. Why can we have courage?

If you notice, right at the beginning of his words to Smyrna, John says this: ***"These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again."*** Why do you think he is going to talk about that? Why does he start out with saying He ***is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again?*** What is the affliction that they were facing? Persecution and some of them are going to be put to death. Jesus died and came to life again. That greatest fear, Jesus defeated. We know that Jesus has defeated our greatest fears so that we can live with courage. This is what He tells him. ***"I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death."***

Is life dangerous? Think about that. Is living dangerous? We run into danger all the time. Also, what is the end for all of us? It's death. That's kind of dangerous. When does that come? Some of us think it's a long ways off. For some of us it may be closer. But notice that's what the result is for all of us. But as Christians, we do not have to fear death, what so many people in the world fear, that they do everything they can to avoid death.

Even today there was the flash of news that came up and said the first pig heart transplant for a human happened. I didn't know that this even happened, but this happened two weeks ago. Guess what? He died. Science gets so far, but what happens? People still die; things that we are afraid of, Jesus has defeated. That's why he starts out by saying Jesus, who died and came to life; death has been defeated. When

we die, we will be given a crown of life. All of us will die, but there is a second death, that eternal death, that death that ends in eternal punishment. But for those who are faithful, those who believe, we don't have to fear that. God has redeemed us and forgiven us. He has forgiven us for the times when we don't trust in Him. He has forgiven us for the times when we look to other things. He has forgiven us for the times when we complain about the things we have in our lives. He took all of those things to the cross and by faith, we are redeemed and cleaned by the work of Christ and He gives us that crown.

But what I think is interesting is the words, when he says ***"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."*** When do we say this or often read this usually every year? Confirmation time; confirmands make the promise that they'll be faithful to the point of death. I sometimes struggle with that because I think of how many of the confirmands, how many people in the United States, are really going to be challenged with death and their faith? Like the people of Smyrna, like the people in other countries right now, maybe even in Ukraine or in China, in places where the people are being persecuted for the faith; where they are saying "If you're a Christian, you're going to die." For many of our confirmands, they aren't going to face that. But are you?

If you think about life being dangerous and the fact that we all face death, it's not so much a thing about when you are persecuted, but it's when that time comes. It's when that time comes for each and every one of us and the truth is that it's easy for us to overlook ***"Be faithful, even to the point of death..."*** because you're not going to be persecuted to death. You're not going to be martyred. But there are many, many who do fall away before their time of death. So, have they remained faithful to the point of death? We are all going to face it. There are different afflictions. There are different things that you are going to face. It's not always that right out front persecution.

Notice that here he talks about that ***synagogue of Satan***, the Jewish people that are attacking them then, these people who say they are Jews. It's really the work of the devil. The devil uses so many things to get us to fall away, to get us to not have courage, to not be faithful, to be distracted. The Lord reminds us that He knows our afflictions. He knows all of the temptations. He defeated those temptations and He forgives you when you have fallen. He welcomes you back. And He tells you that you are loved and forgiven and all of those afflictions, no matter what you are facing—this might be for some of you that this affliction has never gone away or it's lasting so long—He says it will last for 10 days. God knows how long. I'm not going to promise and say this affliction is going to stop sometime soon but the truth is, maybe it lasts until that point of death. But then it is removed and you are given the crown of glory and perfection. You are given a perfect body and you are now with God in heaven forever.

There are many who think that they have everything. They can act out in fear and look at this world and look at Christians and laugh and say "What are you guys talking about?" But we don't have to fear anything. How important is that now, where our world seems to be turning upside down more and more with war and inflation and all the things that can cause you to fear. You don't have to fear. God has given you everything that you need and He is here and knows the afflictions that are coming. He is with you. He has prepared you. He is walking with you. He has given you everything you need to go forward with courage; to go forward and be faithful and to not act in fear but to act in love. In love to spread this message of courage and to show others forgiveness and love so that they too may not be fearful of what is in the world, and not be fearful of death but know that eternal life, the crown of glory, awaits as well. So don't act in fear. Come prepared. Come clothed in Christ and His Word and live with courage. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.