

## The Fruits of Faithfulness

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In the book of Revelation, there are seven letters written to seven churches in Asia Minor. One of those churches was in the town of Smyrna.

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death” (Rev. 2:8-11).

Not many years after these words were penned, a new elder was appointed in the church at Smyrna. His name was Polycarp. As a young man, Polycarp knew the apostle John. In a generational sense, Polycarp was to John what Timothy was to Paul. Polycarp represented the next generation of faith.

Polycarp was a faithful man. He was highly respected as a Christian. He was eloquent in his presentation of the Gospel. He was greatly influential among Christians. Polycarp was once remembered by someone who had known him:

“I could tell you the place where the blessed Polycarp sat to preach the Word of God. It is yet present to my mind with what gravity he everywhere came in and went out; what was the sanctity of his deportment, the majesty of his countenance; and what were his holy exhortations to the people. I seem to hear him now relate how he conversed with John and many others who had seen Jesus Christ, the words he had heard from their mouths.”

Eventually, he became a target of a hostile Roman government. Polycarp was arrested and threatened with death. Statius Quadratus, the magistrate of Smyrna, did not want to harm Polycarp. To appease a mob and offer a way out for Polycarp, Quadratus told Polycarp to curse Christ and he would be released. Much to the surprise of Quadratus, Polycarp refused.

Polycarp famously said, *“Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong... How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that*

*burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked.”*

Polycarp was burned at the stake. While burning in unspeakable agony, he was mercifully pierced in the heart. Polycarp was faithful to the point of death. He gave his life in the hope of a crown of life.

### **The Fruits of Faithfulness**

The sacrificial faith of Polycarp is inspiring. His example begs us to examine the condition of our faith. The determination and loyalty of Polycarp were not gained quickly. His faith was the product of a lifetime of faithfulness. His faith had borne fruit consistently throughout his eighty-six years. To receive a crown of life from our Savior, we, too, must bear fruits of faithfulness.

**1). Loyalty to Christ and saints.** First and foremost, Polycarp was loyal to Christ. His allegiance lay with Him. As a result, he was also loyal to other saints. Polycarp loved the saints. He loved the Church. He lived to strengthen the faith of other saints. Therefore, the life of Polycarp had a purpose.

Our loyalty must be with Christ. If our loyalty is to man, we will be disappointed, deceived, and distracted. Loyalty to man is unsustainable. Loyalty to Christ will give us strength, enable a willingness to sacrifice, and make us servants of other saints.

**2). Courage of conviction.** The letter of Hebrews famously states, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is what one believes. Conviction is the willingness to die for what one believes.

With their lives threatened, Peter and John told the leaders in Jerusalem, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20). Peter and John could have been treated just as the leadership had treated Jesus. Their courageous convictions came from their faith in the resurrected Lord.

Believing in the resurrection of Jesus has the power to produce conviction. Conviction will override fear. If we believe in the God who raises the dead, no one can stop us. Faith is truly liberating.

“Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me” (Psa. 118:5-7).

**3). Hope of being with the Lord.** Certainly, Polycarp died in the hope of being with the Lord. Hope gives us perspective when facing the darker sides of life. Polycarp knew his pain would not last long. Eventually, he would be with the Lord.

We need to remember the hopeful words of Jesus: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

### **Conclusion**

We must learn from the example of Polycarp. He was faithful to the Lord throughout his life. When his greatest test came, he was prepared. If we are to be faithful to the point of death, we must begin in life.