

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED **Revelation 2:8b-10**
THE FIRST, THE LAST, AND THE CROWN !

These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life—

*“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty--but you are rich! And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 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. **Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life!**”*

“Hang in there, you’ll make it! Keep plugging away, you’ll get there.” These are words of encouragement and advice that are often heard. Are they just nice words to say, but really quite empty? Their value depends on who’s saying it, and what basis they have to say it.

On Confirmation Day, it’s obvious that the pastor is going to say, “Don’t give up on Jesus.” But today you hear words from the Lord Jesus Himself. His words have value and basis for real encouragement.

The text says, *“These things says The First and The Last.”* Jesus has the true perspective on all things; He is The First and the Last. One can think of this in terms of **location**. Jesus is the one near at hand and the one far away. He is our Lord. In Him we live and move and have our being. He is also with us no matter how far distant we go—to the North Pole, to the moon, even to the realms of death. He is omnipresent, present everywhere. One can also think of First and Last in terms of **time**. He the one who created life. He was here in the beginning, when life began. He is first. He is also last. When everything fails, when everyone is dead and gone, Jesus is and will still be standing. He is eternal and timeless. He is also First and Last in terms of **rank**. He is most important in your life. He is number One. Put nothing else ahead of Him. But He is also last. What? He is “last” because He was forsaken and abandoned by His Father when He took the sins of the world on His back and died on the cross—for you and for me. Location, time, rank—He has this world covered, He has you covered. He is The First and the Last

How can we be sure of this? As our text says, He “was dead and came to life.” Literally “He came-to-be dead, and He lived.” He didn’t come dead, He shouldn’t have died here at all, but He did. He got dead. He “came-to-be” dead. The Shepherd died for the sheep. The death you deserve because it’s the wages for your sin, He took. He died, because He loves you deeply and cares for you. But that’s not the end. “He lived!” He returned to life on the third day. The wages of death were paid in full, and now the gift—yes, gift—of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. He lived again in victory! In Jesus, you have mercy from the Almighty Judge. You are forgiven! This One who encourages you on Confirmation Day has you covered from first to last—He is the First and the Last. He has walked through the valley of the shadow of death for you for your sins, and has paid that debt in full. And He lives! You are safe. You are saved!

Our verses also say, He “*knows your works, tribulation, and poverty.*” He knows all about you. For a moment that may sound good—He knows what a good Christian I am! But after a bit, that’s quite terrifying—He knows every misstep, bad word, godless thought. He knows your works. He also knows your tribulation—your distress in life. He knows what you’re up against. He knows the bind you’re in. He knows how you’re being squeezed by this and by that. He knows your poverty. Your helplessness. You’re but a beggar trying to make it today and then tomorrow. BUT in Him “you are rich!” What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and yet lose his own soul. In Jesus you are sons of the King! On Confirmation Day the First and the Last, the One who Died and who lives again for you, sees your “lack” and sees your poverty in this life before the Father and intercedes for you. In Him you are rich! Forgiven, righteous, safe!

He knows the opposition you face. *I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.* There are those who mock and blaspheme God, claiming to be sons and daughters of the Truth, but are really tools and servants of Satan. They are part of Satan's synagogue, his gathering place. They stand against you and oppress you. Whether they are strangers, or acquaintances, or even friends, there will be those who do not share your childlike trust in the Good Shepherd, or your love for Jesus who loved you first. In open ways or in secret ways, they will let you know their disapproval. They will let you know that if you want to be "in" with them, you'll have to give up first a little and then a lot of Christian Truth. Conscious or unconscious tools of Satan, they will hammer against you. But the First and the Last, the one who loved you to His death and loves you in His victorious life, knows all about it and encourages you on your Confirmation day, "*Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.*" Don't turn to run, don't melt in dismay, don't fear. I have you.

It is not just blasphemers who are against you. It is the devil. "*Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.*" The devil doesn't just roll over and play dead, the devil doesn't just give up when he is re-buffed one time, the devil doesn't look at you and say, "Oh, hands off—this one has been baptized into Jesus' name." He keeps on the attack, like a lion looking for someone to devour. In our text we see both his labels—"Satan" and "devil." Satan means the accuser. He gets you to do wrong by acting like your best buddy, and then turns around and shows God what a worthless pit you are. He brings his accusations against you, that you are unfit to belong to Him. Nice guy, huh? He is also the "devil"—the diabolical one, the "slanderer." A slanderer mis-represents the truth. The devil is a slanderer—He slanders God to you. He makes God, and God's will, and God's ways, and God's judgment against sin, and God's love and rescue in Jesus, look like a lie and look like a joke. The slanderer is after you and will stop at nothing to convince you of his lies. He will test you. He will try to break you! That is his goal. He will test you and trouble you for "ten days," for whatever period of time he can. You can expect it. He will bring opposition into your life to extinguish your faith in the Lord and Savior. Remember Old Testament Job? The devil took from him his cattle, flocks, herds, servants, children, and health, in order to break Job. The devil will not give up. But, the First and the Last, the one who died for you and who lives for you, has you covered. You are safe.

Indeed, the First and the Last, with the Father and the Spirit—who have brought you to faith—will keep you in faith.. He says to you in this verse "Hang in there. Don't give up. ***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life!***" The crown of Life! Eternal joy in heaven. On your Confirmation day, Jesus says, Be faithful. The crown of life awaits! The crown of victory—the honorable wreath of victory worn on the head in the Greek games. It's His gift to You. It's His gift to bedraggled, struggling, beggars. Be faithful to Him. Stay close to Him. How? By God's strength, work to discipline your sinful nature. No matter how much "fun" it seems to be, stay away from that which your Lord has said is wrong. Get away from temptation and tempting situations. Get new friends if you have to. Get busy with something else in life if you need to. Be refreshed and built up in the Word of God and its wonderful Good News. Be faithful till the day of your death. Be faithful even to the point of death. When faithfulness to Christ means letting go of this life, Jesus is here saying, Then so be it. He's your First and Last, your Life rescuing you from certain Death. Eternal life and holiness awaits in Him. Live for him. Hang in there. Be faithful, in Christ! ***Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life!***"

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach --