

# **The Old Hickory**

## **Bulletin**

### *Old Hickory Church of Christ*

*841 Old Hickory Blvd.*

**Jackson, TN 38305**

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## **FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH!**

The church at Smyrna stands with the church at Philadelphia in receiving no condemnation from the Lord Jesus Christ in His letter “to the seven churches that are in Asia.” (Rev. 1:4). Their excellence in the faith had been maintained, but they were not without trouble, for they were fighting tribulation and poverty. (Rev. 2:9). The Lord knew about it. And the disciples knew the cost of allegiance to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, as they opposed the “unfruitful deeds of darkness.” (Eph. 5:11). This tribulation and poverty would not have been theirs had they not been Christians.

John penned the Lord’s words to them: “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.” (Rev. 2:10). The Lord’s message admonishing their faithfulness must have been of great comfort, strengthening them for the trials of faith at the hands of the devil!

**Be faithful!** Whatever befalls you, remain steadfast in your allegiance to Christ! The worst that the devil-enemy can inflict upon you is coming. Be faithful! Hold firmly and strongly adhere to faith in Christ; never deny the Lord! The faithful are those who “keep the commandments of God and

their faith in Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). Let nothing disrupt the self-control that you are maintaining in the observance of the doctrine of Christ! Be loyal to God!

**Faithful unto death!** Faithfulness is encouraged to the extent of dying for the faith! Faithfulness to Christ is required until the day you die, but that is not what the Lord is saying here. *The command is to be faithful to the extent that you accept death rather than renounce and deny the faith.* Prepare yourselves to be the ultimate witness, paying the ultimate price for the testimony of the Lord Jesus! John wrote this letter from the island of Patmos, where he was in exile for “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” (Rev. 1:9). Many Christians had been martyred for their allegiance to Christ, and this was to continue (Rev. 6:9). They were to bolster their willingness to sacrifice even their very lives rather than diminish in any conceivable way their loyal dedication to the gospel of their salvation! Be faithful, even unto the ultimate suffering: martyrdom!

**The reward:** “and I will give you the crown of life.” Sometimes the thought of something sweet following the bitter helps people endure and bear up under trials and persecutions. Even a faint glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel spurs us onward. With the Lord, the reward is *great!* Their steadfast continuance in the faith, even in the face of death, would reap the ultimate reward: “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.” (Jas. 1:12). A crown is a token of honor for distinguished achievement, but the important thing is of what this prize consists: life, *eternal life!* The agony of suffering and death of those faithful to Christ stands as a clear witness to the power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16), the power of faith (1 John 2:13-17) and the unfailing promises of God (Heb. 6:12; 2 Pet. 1:4)! Persecutors will cause suffering and loss of temporal life at Smyrna, but the Lord of Glory will crown them with eternal life! The crown is reserved for the victors! The triumph brings eternal life (Rom. 2:5-8)!

**A tall order indeed!** Certainly there would be some who would shrink back from faithfulness, being too weak in faith to endure. The Hebrew writer declared, “*But My righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.* But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.” (Heb. 10:38-39). If your intention is to rise to the

challenge and "Be faithful until death," you will need a strong faith. Friend, what are you doing to build that strong faith? How can we help you to receive the crown of life?

- GFS

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## *The Booing Spectators*

Have you ever noticed who does the booing at a ball game? It is not the players on the field. They have made their own mistakes, and they are not inclined to boo their fellow-player when he makes his. They are pulling for one another, encouraging, helpful. They play as a team, win or lose as a team, suffer together as a team, and rejoice together as a team. It is the spectators who boo. So it is in every walk of life: it is the spectators who, as a rule, do the criticizing, not the participants.

Unfortunately, in every congregation, there are the spectators and the participants. The spectators never teach a Bible class, preach, lead singing, preside at the table, or encourage those who do those public works; they really don't get that much involved in the worship itself. But, more often than not, they are the very ones who are found criticizing the preacher or the song leader or the Bible class teacher. They are the ones who are so embarrassed and incensed when someone commits an "error" in his efforts to lead the group. They come wanting to hear something interesting and that will make the time fly. If they hear, they "cheer"; if not, they "boo."

Not so with the true participants, those who are really involved in the Lord's work. They are the ones "cheering on" that "rookie" who is preaching his first sermon or leading his first song. When a brother attempts to teach his first Bible class, they are looking for ways to be helpful. They are sympathetic; they rejoice in the success of others; they mourn over the sorrows of others; they feel for the one who has failed, make allowance for him to try again, and assure him that he will do better next time. They rejoice especially in the development of the young men and women in the Lord's work. They are just as nervous and excited when the young people make their first attempt at presiding at the table or teaching a class as they would be if they were their own children.

How many preachers have decided to move because of the booing spectators right at the time when the participants were enjoying their greatest spiritual growth? How many elders have planned a work around the demands of the spectators rather than the needs of the participants?

Spectators need to become participants and find out what it's like out there "on the field". Participants need to keep on doing their best, ignoring the "boos" while looking to their all-seeing and understanding "Manager" for approval. All need to be preparing for judgment, where it will be the "doers of the word", not the critics, who will be saved. "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous" (I Peter 3:8).

Christians, like ball-players, make a sad mistake when they listen too closely to the "boo-birds".

- by Bill Hall

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**SUNDAY'S LESSONS:** Sunday morning: *"What is Faith?"* (text: Heb. 10:32-39); Sunday evening: Jesus Christ: A Closer Look – *True Greatness!* (Mark 9:30-37).