

LETTERS TO THE CHURCH

Smyrna: The Persecuted Church

Revelation 2:8-11

Smyrna: The Persecuted Church

- Smyrna was coast of the Aegean Sea about 25 north of Ephesus
- It was the center of learning, culture
- Smyrna was a wealthy city like Ephesus, with its trade from its seaports, markets, and commerce
- Smyrna was also an idolatrous city with temples dedicated to worship of many pagan gods
- The church at Smyrna was severely persecuted
- Smyrna struggled against two hostile forces
 1. A Jewish population strongly opposed to Christianity
 2. A non-Jewish population that was loyal to Rome and believed in emperor worship
- Emperor worship was a test of loyalty
- The church at Smyrna was persecuted for their refusal to worship Caesar
- Smyrna means *bitter*, it got its name from myrrh, the bitter plant extract that was taken to relieve pain and to make perfume for embalming

To Smyrna; the Recipients of the Letter

Revelation 2:8-11 (KJV) “And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; ...”

- The letter is addressed to the angel of the church at Smyrna
- The pastor is to take the lead in standing in standing against persecution and helping the members of the church to stand against it
- Regardless of how intense the persecution may be, the pastor of the church is to lead the people to hold the banner of Jesus Christ high
- Even if it costs their lives the pastor and the congregation were to do what the letter says

The Speaker

These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

- Jesus is the speaker in this letter, and He has a special message the church that has been suffering severe persecution
- Jesus says two things to the believers in Smyrna
 1. He is the *first and the last*
 - This speaks of Jesus’ eternal character
 - This means believers always have the presence of Jesus with them through all the troubles and persecutions of life
 - Jesus is the authority and ruler over life
 - The titles First and the Last are titles that belong only to the Lord

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- There's only one *First and Last*, only one final authority over life; Jesus Christ
- 2. He is the One who *was dead and is alive again*
 - Yes, Jesus *was* dead, but His death was only *a passing phase*, it was an *episode* He had to go through
 - Now Jesus is alive, forever
 - Jesus' message to the church at Smyrna and to us is as believers, no matter what you experience, it is a passing thing
 - Jesus chose this title to remind the Christians in Smyrna that they serve a risen and victorious Lord

The Commendation

9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

- The first thing Jesus says to the believers in Smyrna is *I know*
 - Jesus says I know because He saw the hardships and sufferings that the believers in Smyrna endured, and He's also saying I know from His own personal experiences
- Jesus says I know
 - Your *tribulations* – literally means pressure
 - Jesus was saying to Smyrna, I know the pressure you're under
 - Smyrna was living under suffocating pressure
 - Smyrna was under pressure to:
 - Say "Caesar is Lord", and if they didn't they may be thrown to hungry lions at the Colosseum, set on fire, stretched un their bones came out of socket
 - worship the pagan gods
 - Your *poverty* – being poor; destitute
 - Smyrna was a "wealthy" city, but the Christians were *poor*
 - Their poverty was directly related to their faith in Jesus
 - Because they were Christians merchants wouldn't sell to them, or customers wouldn't buy from them causing their businesses to fail, if they had a job they would never be promoted, they had no way of making a living
 - But Jesus reminds them that they may be poor on earth, but they are rich
 - Smyrna was *outwardly poor*, but their faith in Jesus made them *inwardly wealthy*
 - The *blasphemy* – slander, evil speaking you've endured

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- The believers in Smyrna were able to stand against the slander of the Jews in Smyrna
- These made false allegations about believers and reported them to Roman government
- They were accused of immorality because they greeted each other with a “holy kiss”
- They were accused of being “cannibals” because the believers were “eating” the body of Christ and “drinking” His blood when took part in Communion
- Jesus called these evil speaking, slanderous Jesus, *the synagogue of satan*
- They were the synagogue of satan because they were attacking the church, they were doing “satan’s will” and not God’s
- They were persecuting the real followers of God, who believed and worshipped Jesus Christ

The Counsel

10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days:

- Jesus encourages the believers in Smyrna not to fear
- Jesus says don’t because fear and faith are *opposites*, you can’t do both at the same time
- The devil may arouse unbelievers to persecute you, but remain faithful to Jesus
- The devil may even have some of you thrown in prison for *ten days*
- Jesus is also saying the devil is behind the suffering go through
- God is not the cause of our persecution and suffering, but God will use our suffering to draw us closer to Him and to strengthen our faith
- Jesus is saying when you go through persecution, don’t be fearful, be faithful!

The Promise to the Overcomers

Vs. 10 “...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

- Even though we face persecution, Jesus says remain faithful, even if it costs your life
- When we remain faithful to Jesus during persecution, we shall receive a crown of life, the reward for faithfulness to Jesus despite persecution is eternal life

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- God takes us home to live with Him eternally
- Notice: Jesus didn't have a single word of correction or rebuke for the believer in Smyrna, all He had was a promise of a crown because they were faithful unto death
- The victor's crown was given to the winning athlete in a competition
- Smyrna was faithful unto death; Jesus calls them *overcomers*; they were victorious despite persecution
- Because Smyrna was an overcomer, they would not be hurt by the *second death*
- What is the second death?
- The second death is eternal torment and separation from God ***Revelation 20:14 and 21:8 (KJV) 14 "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.... 21:8 (KJV) 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."***
- The believer who overcomes escapes the second death, the lake of fire and torment
- He that has an ear let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches
- We must remain faithful despite persecution because the promises are too great to lose