

Revelation Chapter 2 Continued

Revelation 2:8 "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;"

100 to 313 AD - The Persecuted Church

“Smyrna”: Located about 35 miles north of Ephesus, Smyrna was a rich and beautiful commercial city in Asia Minor and was recognized by Rome as its loyal ally and a center of emperor worship. In His message to this church, the Lord again commended their good works, "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty". These believers were persecuted and often lost their means of livelihood as a result of their commitment to the Lord.

Making a public confession of their faith meant poverty, hunger, imprisonment, and sometimes death. The word "tribulation" used here paints a picture of a huge rock crushing whatever lies beneath it. The word conveys intense and constant pressure. Can you identify with that? Many of you are experiencing "intense and constant pressure". You aren't forgotten! Jesus sees and knows.

It is interesting to me that Jesus calls Himself differently here than at the church of Ephesus. In the Ephesus letter He says, "he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks". Here at Smyrna He calls Himself, "the first and last, which was dead, and is alive"

The designation here is that this message is not from the Father or the Holy Spirit, but from God the Son, Jesus as we know Him. We see from this that God does not deal exactly the same with everyone. He deals with us at the level of our understanding.

You see in the synagogue in Jerusalem, when Jesus called them "whited walls" (Matthew 23:27), clean on the outside and filthy on the inside. Jesus said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!", Jesus called them a generation of vipers (Matthew 23:33).

You see not all those who claim to be Christians are actually Christians. If we are not careful, we will be like these Jews. We may say we are a Christian, and the world might actually believe that we are because of our outward appearance, but Jesus looks at the heart.

Matthew 7:22-23 "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Their Christianity was a front for some selfish motive.

The repentance and salvation that really counts is what goes on in the heart. It is like having a new regenerated heart placed inside of you, washed in the Blood of the Lamb. Being born again is having a brand new heart, having no desire to sin. The heart is either desperately wicked or

clean in Jesus. Some call it a change of heart. Whatever commitment is made must be made in the heart.

- (1) When Jesus speaks of His being "the first and last", He is speaking of His Eternal Spirit;
- (2) When He speaks of "which was dead, and is alive", He is speaking of His body which resurrected from the grave.

Jesus knows all; He was walking, and is walking amidst the churches. These eyes of fire see everything, even in our hearts. He has nothing but good things to say about this church in Smyrna. To know them is to love them. Jesus knows how hard they have worked for the kingdom. He knows that they are rich in service to Him. They are rich in knowledge of His Word. They have diligently sought Him in His Word. They are rich in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They have been through great tribulation. Tribulation comes to make you strong. They are strong, because they have been tried and they have not failed God.

Revelation 2:9 "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."

“Which say they are Jews”: Although they were Jews physically, they were not true Jews but spiritual pagans (compare Rom. 2:28). They allied with other pagans in putting Christians to death as they attempted to stamp out the Christian faith.

“Synagogue of Satan”: With the rejection of its Messiah, Judaism becomes as much a tool of Satan as emperor worship.

Perhaps, their poverty spoken of here indicates that they are not obsessed about having worldly wealth. They are not rich in things the world would class as wealth. Their wealth is of spiritual things. The treasure that we should all be seeking is the treasure stored up in heaven.

If there is a church in this group that we should all want to be like, it would be this church at Smyrna.

This "synagogue of Satan" that comes against them is what we were discussing before. These are religious people with an outward appearance of belief but with no inward conviction. This literal church at Smyrna had many martyrs who stood against the evil, idolatrous people around them even unto the death.

In our day, it is the same situation. If we are in God's army, we must be willing to stand for what is right even unto death. The Spirit and the flesh (world), will be locked in battle until the return of Jesus. The world and its system, and even the idolatrous church is opposed to true righteousness and holiness. Jesus is coming back for a church that is without spot or wrinkle.

Revelation 2:10 "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: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

He said they would suffer. He is letting them know that He and the Father know all about their suffering. They must stay faithful unto the end, and great rewards will be theirs in heaven. Jesus warns them they will be thrown into prison. We know from history that these believers, in the literal church of Smyrna, were thrown into prison. Many in our day are being thrown into prison for their faith. It is becoming harder and harder to be a Christian, and even more difficult to be a minister. The church is under attack of the devil.

The meaning of Christ's words to this church, that they would have tribulation for "ten days", may refer to the fact that the Early Church suffered ten major persecutions under Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Severus, Maximum, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian. There were also some notable persecutions in the local Smyrna Church which lasted "ten days". The meaning of this is that their imprisonment will be brief.

It is very easy to follow Jesus when everything is going good. The true test is, will you stay when all odds are against you? When your friends and relatives have given up, will you stand? If we are faithful and stand, there is a crown of life awaiting us. The crown of life is the one the Lord Himself prepares for us. Crown of life means; "ruling over death". There will be no more death, neither shall there be sorrow.

Revelation 21:4-5 "neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." "Behold, I make all things new".

Many shall be martyred before the return of Christ.

Christ's message to you today, in the midst of your pain, suffering, persecution, and testing is "Fear Not!" No matter what you are facing, sickness, disease, family problems, or even the possibility of death, do not fear because:

2 Tim. 1:7 "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

Over and over throughout the Bible, we are instructed of Jesus not to fear. Fear is not of God. Fear is the opposite of faith. We should have faith in all things.

John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

We are the one who allows fear to come in.

God wants us to have faith enough to move a mountain (Matthew 17:20).

The church is under attack of the devil. If your church is not under attack, check why not. We must be a threat to the enemy before we are attacked. So many churches are so infiltrated by the world that Satan is not even bothering with them.

A church that is grounded on the true Word of God is a threat to Satan and is under terrible attack. What one thing that gives us courage to go on in the face of all of this is the fact that Jesus won this battle for us on the cross. We just need to hang on and receive the victory.

The devil has power on this earth. He is our enemy. It is a constant battle to overcome him. Just remember that the power to rebuke him is in the name of Jesus. Jesus is the rebuker; we are His representatives.

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Revelation 2:11 "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."

“He that overcometh”: This identifies every Christian (see note on verse 7).

We hear again, take out the stoppers in your inner man and receive from God His truths. There is a great promise to the overcomers. The death associated with hell, will not happen to them. They have been crowned with everlasting life.

The greatest gift that we could ever receive is the gift of eternal life with Jesus. To know we would be separated from Jesus for all of eternity would be more hell than I would care to bear. The only life worth having is with Him. I cannot say enough good about this church at Smyrna. There are only two in the seven that God has no reprimand for. Smyrna is one of them and the other is Philadelphia. Under great persecution this church stands, and having even faced death, still stands. If you were to describe this church in modern English, you would just say that the pure Word of God is preached to people who will accept the Truth.

The minister feeds the flock the Word several times a week. The congregation studies the Scriptures, ever eager to learn more so they can be more and more in the will of God. They are not shaken by winds of false doctrine, for they test everything and everyone against the Scriptures. They have on the whole armor of God. They are filled with the Holy Spirit and operate in the gifts of the Spirit. They realize there is a battle going on for the souls of men, and they have enlisted in God's army to fight evil at every hand. They are willing to give up homes, family, whatever it takes to serve God. They count the everlasting life more than the short life here. Just as many were martyred.

“The second death”: The first death is only physical; the second is spiritual and eternal (compare 20:14).

Revelation Chapter 2 Continued Questions

1. What did Jesus call Himself when speaking to the angel of the church at Smyrna?
2. This difference in the way Jesus shows Himself to each church shows us what?
3. The statement "which was dead and is alive" shows us what?
4. What kind of things does Jesus say about the church at Smyrna?
5. What are they rich in toward Jesus?
6. What advantage is tribulation to a Christian?
7. What three things did Jesus know of them?
8. What did Jesus call those who say they are Jews and are not?
9. What does the "poverty" mean?
10. Of all the seven churches, which should be a pattern for all churches to try to achieve?
11. This literal church of Smyrna had many _____ who stood against evil.
12. What will be locked in battle until the Lord comes?
13. What kind of church is Jesus coming for?
14. Jesus told them _____ would throw some of them in prison?
15. What did Jesus tell them not to fear?
16. How long would they be imprisoned?
17. If they are faithful unto death, what shall they receive?
18. What is the opposite of fear?
19. Who is attacking the church?
20. A church that is grounded in the _____ is a threat to Satan?
21. The thing that gives the Christian courage to go on is what?
22. When we rebuke the devil, what must we remember?
23. What does the Crown of life mean?
24. What is the greatest gift that we could ever receive?

25. Which of the seven churches did Jesus say nothing bad about?
26. In this kind of church, what is preached?
27. Is this church at Smyrna familiar to you? Explain.