

"THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA"

Rev. 2:8-11

INTRODUCTION:

Smyrna was the (most afflicted) and oppressed of all the churches mentioned in the New Testament. This is the (briefest) record or address given to a church in the book of Revelation. There is (not one) thing to condemn them for. There is nothing wrong.

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I. Testimony Presented - V. (8)

Here our Lord speaks to his church, and gives a testimony to them. The (name) of this church is translated in the New Testament myrrh. And is only mentioned three times. Once when the Magi came from the East and brought gifts to Jesus, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

When Jesus was crucified, they offered him wine mixed with myrrh.

When they took his body down from the cross, they wrapped it up in linen and we ready that Nicodemus brought along some myrrh to embalm the dead. It was a spice, an herb. (Smyrna or myrrh). And it all had to do with embalming, suffering, and with death. Hence the church at Smyrna is a church of myrrh, or the church of suffering. And in his testimony there was not one word against them given. They were the most oppressed. Some of its members would face death.

In his testimony, he begins -- the (first and the last). His having died and yet being alive again and living forever. He thus proclaimed himself to their confidence as an enduring one with great power. In his testimony, Jesus said he had gone through similar experiences himself. And that he was able to sympathize with their griefs. He had gone through heavier sorrows, far deeper than death, with the nail prints in his hand

and Jesus presented himself and his testimony here to these suffering saints at Smyrna. He speaks to the angel. Who was that angel? They tell us that the pastor of that church was Polycarp. And that he was put to death under the rule of Marcus Aurelius - the Roman Emperor. And this happened about the time he was 86 years of age. So the testimony in this letter awakens much interest. As the Lord comes and speaks as an advocate. And he speaks to this angel - this pastor - who will be tempted to deny Christ.

Fix in mind that the testimony is by Jesus who is (eternal) - the first and the last.

Jesus who is (resurrected) was dead and is alive.

And that he speaks to the church and the angel Polycarp. And keep this in mind, that the pastor of this church will be put to death. And they will urge him to deny Christ. And this man will say, 86 years have I served Jesus Christ, he has been a good master to me all of these years. Shall I forsake him now. He was one of John's converts - and following his conversion - he was installed as pastor of this church. And according to what historians say, he was converted at the age of 14.

Now Jesus understands what it is ^{to} resist unto blood - unto death. And that is exactly what his testimony is as he presents it to the angel and to the church.

II. Troubles Predicted - V. 9

First, he says, I know your works. He says I know the endurance and the form of service that you have stayed on the job. That you have continued to try to sow and reaps while the fields were white unto harvest. Now their works may not have been many, nor great. But they were people who were poor, oppressed,

feeble, and afflicted. They could not do any great things. But the smallness of their works did not exclude them from this remark from the Saviour.

Remember the widow who gave her mite - it was a little costly to her. But it was not very rich. I think Jesus estimates men according to the grace in their hearts. And not always according to the strength they might have in their hand. It is not so much the brilliance, but is the cheerfulness, the willingness of a soul to do what he can. It is not always the outward greatness of a movement that counts, but it may be the inward devotion of love.

Now great things are expected of those who have (ten talents.) And what their works are supposed to do - is come up to faithfulness, employment. But the one talent, if that is all you have, may count for little - but it is precious in the sight of our Lord.

The penny of the little child put in the offering plate. The prayers of the helpless invalid. I think these are dear to Jesus and rise as high in Heaven as some great showy work.

When people have it not in their power to do, and yet with earnest and devoted heart, do what they can. And out of their weakness show that the living power of grace is in them, even their little works rise up and find commendation from our Lord.

To the poorest and the weakest, as well as the richest and the strongest, Jesus says, I know Thy works. And whether we do much or do little. If we stretch our full ability, or if we lag behind, we need not think that our Lord, the Judge, is not taking note of it. He says I know thy works.

2 - Second, I know thy tribulations. Christian suffering, like Christian rejoicing is something of a mystery in the world. The carnal mind cannot understand it. And it takes little or no account of it. The world does not enter into a Christian's experience or a Christian's tribulation. A true child of God grieves over things which the world cares nothing for. And he rejoices in things which the world sees no happiness in. The Lord said, I know thy tribulations. Now this is a very strong word here. And is best that I can interpret it - it means pressure. The idea of a Roman whip that is very thorough. And it is like pressure - the execution of a man by placing a heavy rock on him. The great weight of the rock gradually crushes him to death. The pressure of persecution unto death.

Another way to picture this is the grinding mill stones - pressure of the great weight grinds the wheat into flour.

Another idea is the pressure that forces the juice out of the grapes.

Now Jesus, in talking about the tribulation is not saying this as a spy. But this is something he says that he knew all about. It is like a mother who tries to protect her child. She does not want to leave anything to chance. She knows that trouble and tribulations are on the way. And this is what Jesus is talking about. He knows all of this. He knows your bereavements, he knows your persecutions, he knows the temptations. And he knows the serious misfortunes which you have. Whether it be sickness, bereavement, losses, reverses, disappointments, and suffering. Jesus knows that you are going to have these.

One of the most prominent things in this message is that I know about your sufferings, your troubles, your tribulations. And there is not a tear that falls nor a glow that is unnoticed by our Lord.

There was (already a storm) of persecution as the Christians lived in this pagan society. There was no lack of persecutors - they were of all sorts, and they had deep hatred for the Christians. And of course, this is true today. There are all sorts of people who would persecute the Christian.

3- Third, poverty. This was another thing that Jesus said that he knew. These things here suggest to us that these people barely made enough to live. He just gets by - he is a poor man - he is forced to work for a living. Really that word means, beggary. It means absolute and utter destitution. I know thy poverty. Your absolute and utter destitution!

Now why were these Christians so destitute. The city was one of the richest in the Roman Empire.

First reason is that the Christian in that ancient day were almost without exception poor anyway. Now we account greatness and success according to riches and social acceptance, and fame and fortune. Yet, these Christians, the followers of the Lord, who remade this world were the poorest of the poor.

When the Scribes and the Pharisees and the doctors of the law looked upon the Apostles of Jesus in Jerusalem, they said, they are plain, unlearned, untaught, and unschooled men. Deprived. There was nothing professional - they were the poorest of the poor. And that was a most remarkable thing.

You would think that God, for his work, would need extraordinary personalities. Not at all. He just needs plain ordinary people who can be filled with his power to do extraordinary things.

In the New Testament, outside of a few exceptions, all were common, ordinary, and poor people.

Second reason they were poor is that they were persecuted in Smyrna. Plundering, they were deprived of the right to work and make a living. They had no trade unions. No business would hire them. There was loss of home, work, and possessions. They lived in destitution. You might remember that when you have a job. You might remember that if you own a home or a few possessions. Something that you own. In gratitude to God you should express thanks to him for the bread you eat, the house you live in, the clothes you wear, the car you drive. The Christians in Smyrna had none of them. They possessed nothing. And they were under serious pressure.

Therefore their poverty may be traced directly to the fact of them being Christians. They were shunned and disliked. It is easy to see how they would fall into poverty. And this is the thing that Jesus knows, that they have been willing in order to follow Christianity and Christ - to enter into this kind of trouble.

4 Fourth, blasphemy. Jesus said that I know the blasphemy which has been against you by the Jews - but they are not Jews but of the (synagogue of Satan.) The attitude of the Jewish religion toward Christianity - the synagogue of Satan. It is those who say that they are Jews and are not. That is, they claim to be Jews because of their fleshly decent from Abraham - but they are not the spiritual decendants of Abraham. That the Jewish Church existed there as the bitterest enemy of the Christian church. They are the people who accused Polycarp. They are the ones who brought the wood to burn him at the stake. They helped build the pile and set it a fire.

You will note it makes no difference as to the form of an organization whether Christian or Jewish. It is the Devil who is the real author of the evil. And hence he said here, that Satan shall cast many of you into prison. Satan can work just as well, or maybe a little better, through one who claims to be religious and is not - than through an outsider.

Blasphemy usually refers to words against God. It can have that meaning. But here it means slander. The things that were said about them by false Jews who were of the synagogue of Satan.

This is a tragic thing and is one of the darkest things in all the pages of history. The way religious people persecute each other. And practically ever major religion that has ever lived has used an iron fist to put down descending minorities. The Christian has persecuted the Jews for centuries. And that is the reason, for one thing, that it is very difficult to reach a Jew for Christ. The Christian people have reviled him, persecuted him, until the name Christian is synonymous to the Jew as an enemy.

Back there in the beginning, it was the other way around. In the Roman Empire where so many of the wealthy Jews had the ear of the Roman authorities - they sought to blot out the infant Christian Church. The first Roman who ever persecuted the Jews was Nero. And he listened to slander and out of this came the first terrible Christian persecution. It was like this here in Smyrna - where wealth flourished. It poisoned the minds of the Christians. Through the oppression brought by these Jews and the slander placed against them, by the Jewish people.

The government of the day accused them of disloyalty.

In society and in the festivals and gatherings - the Christians would have nothing to do with the idols that were worshipped.

Third, as for morality. They slandered their assembly by saying they met at night for the purpose of vice or crime and they put bad charges against them.

In the fourth place, they charged them as Christ was charged. Matt. 10. Anybody who slew them, thought they did God a service. The foul mouthed Jew, the synagogue of Satan, Children of Abraham. Therefore we note that the Devil has his synagogue, those assemblies set up in opposition to the truths of the Gospel. To promote error and go in opposition to the purity and spirituality of the Gospel. And they set out to revile and persecute those who are Christians.

These who are of the synagogue of Satan recommend as being the church of Israel - or of God. Therefore suffering is going to come through extreme pressures, tribulations. And suffering is going to result as being evil spoken of. And this is something we need to note in the day in which we live - there is so much slander and blasphemy in the world. In fact, (religion) may become a hiding place for these people who work for Satan rather than for God. And he will tell us what this group will do. Polycarp, the pastor, was brought under persecution. At last his enemies seized him to torture him. And they were determined by saying, the will of God be done. History tells us that he came from the upper story of the house to meet his captors. He ordered them as much refreshment that they might desire. And he only asked of them (one favor). That they might grant him one hour of undisturbed prayer. In the fullness of his heart, he prayed on for two hours. These heathen people were touched by the sight of the old man's devotion. He was conveyed through the city of Smyrna.

The officer before whom he was brought - persuaded him to yield and made a small demand. What harm he said, could it do you to offer sacrifice to the emperor. Now this is the test that is commonly applied today.

They used rougher measures on him - he was cast from a carriage from which he was being conveyed. And a magistrate appeared before him and said swear, curse Christ, and I will set thee free.

But the old man answered - 80 and 6 years have I served Christ and he has never done me wrong. How then, can I curse him, my king and my Saviour.

In vain was he threatened of being thrown to the wild beasts or burned. At last the fatal proclamation was made - Polycarp confessed himself a Christian. This was the death warrant. He was condemned to be burned alive.

Jews and Gentiles, the whole synagogue of Satan alike. Hastened in rage to collect wood for their funeral pile. The old man laid his garment aside and took his place in the midst of the fuel. When some of those kings who would have nailed him to the stake - he said - leave me thus unfastened. He who has enabled me to brave the fire will give me strength also to endure its fierceness. He then uttered his brief prayer. Oh Lord, Almighty God, the Father of thy beloved son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received a knowledge of thee - God of the angels and of the whole creation and whole race of man. And of thy saints who live before thy presence - I thank thee that thou has thought me worthy this day and this hour to share the cup of thy Christ among thy witnesses.

The fire was kindled and the wind drove the flames on each side - prolonging his suffering. At last an executioner dispatched him with a sword. So here one of Christ's poor saints at Smyrna died faithful unto death.

Polyarp, the pastor, the aged man - preacher and man of God had been brought out and put to death. He had been given a chance to get his liberty. If he had said Caesar is Lord - he would have been set free. And they mentioned the wild beasts - but he still refused. And in the flames he prayed a wonderful prayer. So died the pastor - the angel of the church in Smyrna. And Jesus said I know thy troubles, tribulation, poverty, blasphemy, etc.

III. Termination Prophesied - V. 10

Jesus now said - fear not - do not fear what you are troubled about. Things are going to come to an end.

1 - He says, first, fear not the things you suffer. Fear not. Now these are going to be words of praise and commendation. Now Jesus knew these things by observation - having seen it in the church. This comes from his own experience. Jesus knew about the slander. And those who reviled him. He had experience and he says, fear not first of all the things which thou shall suffer.

2 - Second, he says Satan shall cast you into prison. That is, the Devil is going to come and tempt you. Some of you may be put in prison for your faith. Brethren, the adversary of the Devil is going to give you trouble. And Jesus here is talking about the troubles and is going to tell them that this is going to be terminated after awhile. The Devil will see that some of you will be cast into prison. The people of God must look for a series of successions of troubles.

*Spain - suffered extreme trials. Christians imprisoned, churches closed.
Communist China - Christian suffer -*

You must observe here now, that it is the Devil who stirs up wicked men to persecute the people of God. The tyrants and the persecutors are the Devil's tools. So Jesus is giving insight here - fear not, the evil ones. These people were great sufferers and the heathen were very adverse to them. Their enemies

would even give them a problem. Because Jesus was acquainted with grief, he was a man of sorrows, troubles, and Jesus is acquainted with the home where bereavement today, where there is mourning, where there is poverty. There are reverses - he was familiar with the situation.

3 - Third, there was the promise of 10 days. The pressing troubles and tribulations were to be terminated so Jesus prophesied here. That they were to take the form of ten days and then they would end. Instead of gathering and worshipping in magnificent buildings, the Christians were in caves, catacombs, and other hiding places with men posted to warn them of the approach of their foes. They were despised of the world - condemned as enemies of the empire - because of their faith. Now this tribulation will last for 10 days. Now historians tell us that it is significant than in the 2 centuries of Roman persecution which began with Nero and terminated in 312 A. D. - there were 10 distinct edicts - demanding that governors seek out Christians everywhere and put them to death. The last was under diocletian. He was the 10th persecutor. Now the early church believed that he was the last, and he was. Satan's effort to destroy Christianity by persecution seemed to be in vain. But they were days that it meant something to be a Christian.

God's people were being crushed by myrrh, with that sweet fragrance, given out because of their love and devotion to him.

Satan shall cast you into prison, some of you, but then this 10 means that it will be intensified in number. It refers to a fierce, intense persecution.

This is like the ten plagues in the land of Egypt. Fear none of these things. In all the words of our Lord - you wouldn't have thought that he'd have said, fear not. You would have thought that he would have said, I will shorten the days.

I will destroy those who persecute you. But the Lord said that just the opposite - you are going to have more of just the same, Jesus said. And the early Christians perhaps said, we have so much now Lord, we cannot bear it. Our poverty, our homes are taken away, we have to beg, we are despised. And he says there will be just more of it. And of course he promises them suffering.

But there isn't there something else that he promises. When he says, that at the end of 10 days, he predicts the termination of this persecution. Under dominican, there were Christians who were banished and put in exile. John was put on the Isle of Patmos. You remember that these people were suspected on every hand, the churches of Christ. And the emperor set himself up as a God and had images even in the temple. And when he gave an order it was as God and Lord. When he would write a letter, make a command, or send out a law - it would begin our Lord and God demands thus and so. Everybody that referred to him must do so as God and Lord even in writing or in speaking. Now this led to the slaughter of countless number of victims of people who refused. And the empire of Rome looked as though it would never fall.

Hence the Christians were persecuted because of their faith and their missionary zeal.

Second, they were persecuted because they refused to bow down to Caesar - they gave universal obedience to Jesus Christ.

Third, they refused in public to worship an idol. They did not follow this order.

Fourth, they were persecuted because they were looked upon as cannibals. They said they meet at night in the catacombs. They eat flesh and they drink

blood. They did not understand the Lord's supper as they spoke of the blood of Jesus Christ.

In the next place they were persecuted because they offended the educated philosophers. That knowledge was the thing instead of truth.

In the next place they were persecuted because they were against the buying and selling of idols.
David Livingstone - Miss who laid down his life to open Dark Continent - "Difficulties? What are difficulties? Just things to be overcome" - words of a man with faith to overcome.

In the 7th place they were persecuted because they were able to recruit the poor and the slaves that were looked down upon by the rich, respectable, and the powerful. Jesus knew their enemies, the load they were staggering beneath, and the blasphemies. And he said that there would be 10 days - the term. The period of time. You know great trials seldom last a long time. We cannot really stand many of these crucial crushing things that come to us like a storm. It must be sharp. So Jesus commented that there would be a termination of this and that it would pass away.

4
Fourth, he said, be faithful until death. This was exactly what Polycarp fulfilled. He had opposition - just like Alexander the coppersmith. And his companions at Ephesus - who waged war against the Christians and those missionaries of the cross. Here was a man who stood by faithfully. He was an extremely old man - 86 years. Many years he had known Christ but he was to be faithful until death. Jesus said that these sufferings would not be universal and last forever. They were going to be cut short - there was going to be a time limit. There would be those who would try to destroy them and he was going to cut it short for the elect sake - and they would have patience and be faithful unto the end. Paul said I will show them what great things they must suffer for my name sake.

When Jesus called him, he told him that. All that the Lord said, you are going to have more trouble - more suffering.

Wm Carey Miss. Burma - 7 yrs - returned before was 1st convert

When you see the wicked people prosper and God's people are having a hard time - it is very difficult. For the Lord said when you are a Christian you will know what it is to suffer and to be deprived and to be persecuted. But the Christian is not going to be free from agony, he is not going to be free from disease, free from death - he is going to have to suffer. These Christians met beneath the city in the catacombs, the burial place of many of the martyrs. He said there are carvings even as fresh as yesterday of affection - speaking of love and hope, and it is very remarkable that the Christian art had it's birth in such a place.

5 In the fifth place, he promises a crown of life, to those who endure and are found faithful to the end. So he says, fear not - things are going to come to a completion. There will be tribulations for a 10 day period. When you over-come these, I will give you a crown of life--glory and righteousness, one of splendor. Now our position may not be one of ease - but it can be one of faithfulness, in which we shall receive the well done, good, and faithful servant.

IV. Tidings Proclaimed

V. (11)

In closing our study - we consider verse 11.

1 - First, he says, all with ears hear.

Then he says, he that overcometh - those that are going to be victorious. And this is really good news. It is very precious - these tidings that are proclaimed.

There will be no second death. That is, there will be no hurt to you - and this is a timeless thing which he is promising to those which are his. A day shall not go by when they are hurt by the second death, they will not be cast into the lake which burns with fire. Rev. 20:14-15. Now this is something that has to deal with the condition of the lost. You remember Lazarus - Luke 16. The soul is going to come into judgement. And there will be that suffering - but he promises this church - these who hear at Smyrna - this precious godd news - those who have been faithful and careful in their walk.

What if our Lord should ask you or me to walk through the fire as he asked these people to walk through suffering. What would we say.

You remember those - the three children who walked through the firey furnace of Babylon and they were not touched by it. And so his promise is very sure - when though passeth through the fire though shalt not be burned and neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

It is like the bush at Horeb - the church may be burned but it will not be consumed for Christ is in the midst of it. They may kill the body but they cannot kill the soul.

It is like the fire in which the prophet ascends to Glory. And so the flame of persecution may come close to each of you and your suffering. But this will not harm you, he says, in the tidings he proclaims. Don't be afraid. Because I know. Yea though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil.

You remember Paul said, I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor

powers, nor principalities can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Rom. 8:38-39. Fear not, fear not.

There are some of you who are going through trials. And God knows what those trials are even this hour.

There are some of you who are fighting for life and for health and the Lord knows.

There are some of you who labor in persecution and suffering and God's knowing all of this.

There are some of you who are depressed in spirit and in heart, in your homes, and God knows that - fear not. Here is a marvelous Christ if only you will be faithful unto death - you are going to get a crown of life and the second death will never touch you.

Now the man of the world lives to die. But the Christian dies to live. For beyond death, lies life. Don't be afraid for the Lord has been through all of this. And he is going to give you a crown. All those today who live in this weary world - what a blessing and what a comfort this will be for you. The Lord himself is looking down from Heaven.

A poor dying girl said once to a preacher, I like to lie here and look at that. And he noticed that there was a little porcelain cast representing our Saviour bearing his cross. And this was hanging at the side of her bed. And she said it helps me - I can bear my pain better. Yes, that Christ has born his cross does help all that trust him to do a better job with theirs. Accept these tidings and be transformed, and triumph.