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The Rich Church

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH
 Smyrna
 Rev. 2:8-11

1st Ephesus - Cold Ch. Lacked Winning Power - Left its 1st love -
INTRODUCTION: Remember Babylonian condition - Repent - Do 1st works
Turn winter into spring
40 miles from Ephesus, still stands City of Smyrna -
We take up where we left off last Sunday morning, and we were discussing

the church that had cooled off. And had left the first love. When they were first married -- everything was sugar and cream. They built a castle to live in. And everything was wonderful. But now, promises have been forgotten and things have changed. Which reminds me - like the groom who was nervous. He shifted from one foot to the other. He buttoned and unbuttoned, and re-buttoned his coat. A friend said to him, is there something wrong. Did you lose the ring. The Best Man inquired. No, he replied, (I have lost my enthusiasm.)

Now the thing that we discovered about the first church was that they had forgotten their first love. And I trust that you will never get over your love for Jesus Christ.

V. 8 -> Unto the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the second church introduced that has meaning in the word of God. This word Smyrna is used in the New Testament three times before.

1) First, the wise men in the Gospel of Matthew opened their treasures and they presented gold, frankincense, and smyrna.

2) At the crucifixion of Jesus, Mark 15, it is described that they mixed wine with smyrna to help relieve pain and suffering that Jesus was bearing.

3 John in the 19th chapter records that when Jesus (died), Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus came, taking the body down from the cross, wrapping it in linen, and folding it up with 100# weight of aloes, and (smyrna.)

In each of these instances, the word is translated in the King James Version, of the Bible - (myrrh.)

Smyrna was a great port city and had traffic in balsam#erbs. It was world famous for fragrant perfume of myrrh. In the providence of God it came to symbolize that era of the story of the Christian church. (Myrrh or Smyrna) is a type of suffering. It was used to (embalm) the dead. It was brought as a (gift) - along with gold, frankincense - a picture of the deity of our Lord. It also pictures his sufferings - as the gold is deity, the frankincense his priestly office, and myrrh his suffering for sins. The name of the city and the church then reminds us of a great tribulation.

It is the (only) church that our Lord has only commendation and encouragement without complaint.

Smyrna was located in a beautiful place in Asia Minor. Today it has a population of 275,000 people. The name of it is Izmir. The Turkish corruption for Smyrna. We know that many of the other great cities and their harbors disappeared -- but not this one. It has lived. (It was a Roman city) - one of the finest harbors in the world. Where they exchanged cargo. There was a great road that poured down from the interior. It was a political center. In fact, the city never lost the cause. It was a place where Roman courts were built. A place where people were proud of this glowing city. Beautiful - (Alexander the Great) conquered the world and he conceived of an idea and added to this city and made it a model Greek city. It was a beautiful lay out

It became a model town. The streets of the city were spacious. The most famous of all was the golden street. It began at the sea side at the harbor and ran the entire length of the city up to the Acropolis. Here was a great temple of Zeus or Jupiter. Along this street were also temples to Homer and Apollo.

They had a stadium in this city at that time -- seating 20,000 spectators.

The church in Smyrna suffered as in a firey furnace. There was heavy persecution because of the poor and the humble members. There were several reasons for this. Because the Christian church displayed before the paganism of those Greek Temples, that were magnificent and glorious. There was nothing to be compared with. Every man that worked belonged to a guild. And every guild had a certain patron God or Goddess. The life of the guild and the merchant man and the working man who organized around a Goddess and a God.

Therefore Christians stood off to the side and were refused to share in such things. Immediately they were marked off and practically alone.

5) Another thing that caused great suffering to this church was the persecution of the church. Due to Caesar worship. This was the center of Caesar worship and they were proud of it.

One of the keys to understanding the book of Revelation is that you study something about the culture and the cult of emperor worship. In that part of the known civilized world, there is every kind of city, language, race and nationality.

Now the only way the Roman Government could unite such elements, and to make things universalized, was by the Roman spirit. They made all sections as Rome.

More than one King (willed his dominion) to the Roman Government and the possessions of the Roman people.

And the Empire enforced Roman peace. Instead of letting their subjects live in constant war - Rome did away with war by their iron hand the Romans made it impossible. The tyrants - to rise and battle one another.

They made it possible for a man to live and provide for his family and to do business. Thus, they built great roads. They cleared the high seas of pirates. A man could do business in the Empire and travel where he pleased. Taking a journey without fear.

Remember, there was Roman law and impartial justice. And the person of the Emperor was the spirit of Rome. He became the leading personality. Thus, developed the Emperor worship. If any man worshipped the Emperor as a God, he could call upon him as deity. He did this of his own free choice. But in the latter days -- the days when Revelation was written, the last steps were taken. And Emperor worship, Caesar worship became compulsory.

A man had to do it in order to show himself a loyal citizen of the empire. It was demanded by law.

A person was given a certificate - or a family received such when they worshipped

the Emperor.

It was by law enforced that they take a pinch of incense and burn it in the Temple, dedicated to the Emperor. By doing this, he had confessed that Caesar was Lord. Now this was a test of his political loyalty. After he burned that pinch of incense and said that Caesar is Lord, he could go his way, and worship any God and Goddess that he pleased.

That was the one thing that the Christians would not do - he would not take that little pinch of incense and burn it and say that Caesar is Lord. He refused to bow down to the Emperor. The Christian was marked out as being a traitor.

This caused the heavy hand of the State to fall on the Christian because it was taking one's life in his own hands. Rather than bow down and burn a little pinch of incense, and call Caesar Lord, the Christians in Smyrna layed down their lives.

The word Smyrna or myrrh has to do with embalming, suffering, with death. So the church in Smyrna is the church of myrrh. Tribulation, suffering, and martyrdom.

I. JESUS SAYS - I KNOW ^{Vc9} BY TRIBULATION

The word tribulation is seldom used - it is a strong word. They say that the actual meaning of the word is pressure. It has as its background, the idea of a Roman whip. Which was of course to be feared.

But it is pressure - like the execution of a man. By placing a heavy rock upon him. The weight of that great rock gradually crushes him to death. It has the picture of a grinding stone. By its pressure and heavy weight, grinds out the wheat into flour. Or the corn into meal. The word also contained here, has the idea that forces the juice out of the grapes. Now Jesus says, I know the pressure

of persecution, and sorrow, and death. Hebrews 4:15 - We have one who shares our weaknesses, experiences - He never sinned - He Himself - Not an Angel, or Ambassador But Jesus Himself - Shared Fully - Not partially, NOT nearly! Entirely! Jesus shared Fully, IN ALL our experience - lack of Hunt, Ache, all stresses, strains. No exceptions

Jesus knows how you feel - Feb 15, 1921 New York City - operation, knee Summit Mount. Appendectomy - Dr Evan Kane, 37 yrs old, 4000 appendectomies - first to use local anesthesia, local application safer, out hosp. 2 days. Dr Kane proved there worked - Patient was Dr Kane! "operated on himself"

II. I KNOW THY POVERTY - V. 9

Now there are several words that deal with poverty. Our English word penury comes from the Greek word. In the Greek, the word is for a man who has to work for a living. And he just barely makes a living. He has nothing left over - he just gets by. He is a poor man and he is forced to work for a living.

But the word here means more - it has a greater application than that. It is actually beggary. It means absolute and utter destitution. I know your poverty, I know your absolute and utter destitution.

Why were these Christians at Smyrna so destitute. Smyrna was one of the richest cities in all of the ancient Roman Empire. And yet, these people lived in absolute beggary and destitution. The reasons are not hard to find.

First, Christians in that day without exception were poor anyways. Most of us count greatness and success in terms of riches. We think of fame and fortune and yet the followers of our Lord who remade this world, are almost without exception

The Scribes, Pharisees, and others were learned doctors of the law - looked upon these people in Jerusalem and they said this -- they are plain, unlearned, untaught, unschooled men of the poor and deprived. There was nothing professional about them. Nothing learned about them. They were the poorest of the poor.

Is that a remarkable thing - one would think that for his work, God would need extra-ordinary personalities. And people not at all, he needs just plain ordinary people. He can fill with his power to do extra-ordinary things. Outside of a few exceptions, all of the New Testament Christians were plain. And very poor.

The second reason they were unusually poor, they were severely persecuted. They were deprived of the right to work, and to make a living. (No trade union) would have them. Business would hire them. In their loss of home, work, and possessions, they lived in beggary. They lived in destitution and utter want.

It would be good for us to remember their plight -- if you have a job today, if you own your home, if you have a few possessions, something that you own - if you have a fairly humble apartment to live in. You might express thanks to him for the bread that you have to eat. And the shelter that you have over your head. Besides some of you have cars to drive. And other extras that God has given you. The members at Smyrna had none of these things. They possessed nothing. So the Lord said, I know thy pressure unto death. I know thy agony under which you live.

I know the destitution and thy absolute want and need.

By way of Parenthesis - a great compliment - He says "Thou art rich" - we one Preacher "we have a whole pew full of Millionaires in the morning service" we call it the Millionaires Row! There is no other, ch. in N.T. described as being rich - There was the tax collector ch in Sadducee that said "I am rich increased in goods & have need of nothing" Jesus, said truth is you are wretched, miserable, Poor, Blind, Naked

III. I KNOW THY BLASPHEMY

gc Where in was Richness in Smyrna ->

It was a slandered church - Ringed By foes - hearing the reputation of the church to shreds, saying all manner of evil against them falsely leads to persecution.

Now this usually refers to words against God. It can have that meaning, but it can mean slander. The word referred too here - were the things that were said about them. By false Jews who were of the synagogue of Satan.

Did you know this is one of the tragedies of this universe. And of human history. The way religious people persecute each other. It is a disgrace. You give them an opportunity and practically every major religion that has ever existed will use an iron fist to grind dissenting minority to dust.

Sept 23, 97

This month you will notice that the 28th is a Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Early in Jesus' earthly ministry, opposition surfaced and, before very long, turned into intense and violent hatred. Experiencially this is foreign to us as Americans and, thus, we struggle to believe that such attitudes and actions still exist. The New Testament is clear, though, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12, NASB). This is not that we resign, but rather that we anticipate it. Persecution of the followers of Christ will continue and likely

Christians have persecuted the Jews for centuries until His triumphant return. As we pray with insight and identifiable intercession for our believing sisters and brothers in places like Sudan, Albania, China, Indonesia and many more

it is difficult even to win Jews today to Jesus. And they have sought to persecute them. And they have looked

