

“The Church in Smyrna” **Revelation 2:8-11**

Introduction: We now come to our second church mentioned in Revelation known as Smyrna. According to Wiersbe, “The city remains a functioning community today called Izmir [Turkey].” This church went through severe persecutions, imprisonments, and martyrdoms, being one of the first churches to experience the fires of persecution. Smyrna is the model church for which others can mimic when they go through fiery trials. Notice what is written to this poor but prosperous congregation.

1. The Announcement v. 8- “*And unto...*”
 - a. A Divine Announcement Revelation 1:11- “*I am Alpha and Omega*”
 - b. A Direct Announcement- “*unto the angel*”
2. The Angel v. 8- “*...the angel of...*”
 - a. The Meaning of an Angel
 - (1) “angel” (Strong’s)- “a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, a messenger from God”
 - (2) “angel” (Webster’s)- “A minister of the gospel, who is an ambassador of God. Literally, a messenger; one employed to communicate news or information from one person to another at a distance.”
 - b. The Message of an Angel- “*write*” Revelation 1:11- “*write in a book*”
3. The Assembly v. 8- “*...the church in Smyrna write...*”
 - a. The Explanation of Smyrna
 - (1) According to Strong’s, Smyrna means “myrrh”. It relates to being crushed.
 - (2) Smyrna was, “an Ionian city of Asia Minor, on the Aegean Sea, 40 miles (65 km) north of Ephesus”. (Strong’s)
 - b. The Era of Smyrna- A.D. 100-300

Body: Why did Smyrna undergo such malicious maltreatment? What was the reason why they had to endure such extreme hardships? Probably the answer to these questions was that they were located at the “center of the Roman imperial cult, and anyone refusing to acknowledge Caesar as Lord would certainly be excluded from the guilds.” (Wiersbe) This act of dedication to the Lord that the saints at Smyrna displayed led to their unemployment and unpopularity. However, throughout the ages, God’s people have always chosen to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as their only Lord. Despite the severe hardships they would have to endure, the believers at Smyrna proved faithful unto death. Observe the message that the Lord had for such a faithful people.

- I. The Overseer of the Church v. 8- “*These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive*”
 - A. He is Ancient- “*These things saith the first and the last*”
 - B. He is Alive- “*which was dead, and is alive*” Revelation 1:18

- II. The Occupation of the Church vs. 9-10- *"I know thy works..."*
- A. Their Pressure v. 9- *"I know thy works, and tribulation"* John 16:33, Hebrews 11:34, 37-38, II Timothy 3:12
1. "First he underscores the persecution at Smyrna and brings comfort with the words 'I know'." (Phillips)
 2. What an encouragement to the believers at Smyrna to be reassured of the fact that the Lord knows what they are going through! (Phillips)
- B. Their Poverty v. 9- *"and poverty, (but thou art rich)"* II Corinthians 6:10, 8:9, Matthew 6:20
- C. Their Pretenders v. 9- *"and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan"*
1. The Pretender's Speech- *"and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not"*
 - a. "A true Jew is not one physically or racially, but spiritually (Rom. 2:17-29)." (Wiersbe)
 - b. "Any religious group, Jewish or Gentile, that does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as God's Son is certainly acting contrary to God's will." (Wiersbe)
 - c. "This statement refers to the Judaizing movement that came into the early church, the mixing of the law with grace." (Horton)
 - d. "It was the leaven of Galatianism that substituted works (keeping the law) for grace." (Horton)
 2. The Pretender's Synagogue- *"but are the synagogue of Satan"*
 - a. Matthew 7:15- *"they are ravening wolves"*
 - b. Matthew 16:3- *"O ye hypocrites"*
 - c. Matthew 23:27- *"ye are like unto whited sepulchers"*
 - d. Matthew 23:33- *"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers"*
 - e. I John 3:10- *"the children of the devil"*
- D. Their Peace v. 10- *"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer"* I Peter 4:12-16, 3:17
1. We can understand why the ungodly would suffer, but why would a godly people like the saints at Smyrna have to suffer? (Walvoord)
 - a. Suffering is for discipline I Corinthians 11:30-32, Hebrews 12:3-13
 - b. Suffering is for prevention of pride and for humiliation II Corinthians 12:7
 - c. Suffering is for teaching and admonition Hebrews 5:8, Romans 5:3-5
 - d. Suffering is for a better testimony Acts 9:16
 2. "Christians were hunted down, arrested, tortured, burned alive, and fed to hungry lions. Roman citizens gathered as spectators at a sporting event to see lions turned loose on Christian families." (Horton)
 3. "By the middle of the second century, Christians in Rome began secretly meeting together in catacombs (underground burial

chambers) for fellowship and worship. The markings on the walls of these catacombs remain today to testify of the persecuted Christians' strong faith in Christ and their love for God's Word." (Horton)

4. There were three reasons why Christians were persecuted:
 - a. The Romans were involved in idolatry. When Christians opposed this, and other practices, they were tortured.
 - b. The Roman economy was being affected because when people would convert over to Christianity, it would hurt the idolatry business.
 - c. The Romans worshiped Caesar (the emperor) as god. However, Christians rejected this practice recognizing only the Lord Jesus Christ as God. Romans accused Christians as being atheists for not worshipping the emperor. (Horton)
- E. Their Prison v. 10- *"behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried"*
- F. Their Persecution v. 10- *"and ye shall have tribulation ten days"*
 1. The Period of their Persecution- *"ten days"* (ten periods of intense persecution)
 2. The People of their Persecution- According to Beka Horton, there were ten Roman emperors that launched merciless assaults on the Christians. The following is a list of these men as presented by Horton.
 - a. Nero (A.D. 54-68)
 - (1) "He was just three years old when his father died. It was little loss to the boy, for his father had been a killer, a bully, and a cheat. His mother took over the family trade and continued the boy's education. She murdered his stepfather with a dish of poisoned mushrooms. He was reared in squalor and proved a notable son to his parents. While still young, he committed his first murder, killing a teenage boy who stood in his way and watching him die with callous indifference. He married at fifteen but soon had his wife killed. He married again and slew his second wife too. In order to marry a third time, he murdered the husband of the woman he wanted. His mother annoyed him; so he arranged her murder, first by guile, but when that was unsuccessful, without pretense. He was an ugly man with a bull neck, beetle brows, a flat nose, and a tough mouth. He had a potbelly, spindly legs, bad skin, and offensive odor. At the age of thirty-one, he was sentenced to death by flogging. He fled to a dingy basement and, in the house of a slave, cut his own throat. He gave the infant church its first taste of things to come. His name was Nero. He was the first of the persecuting Caesars of Rome." (Phillips)

- (2) Refer to *Martyrs Mirror* on page 79 for further accounts of Nero's persecution.
- b. Domitian (A.D. 81-96)
- (1) "He [John] was exiled there [the isle of Patmos] from about A.D. 86 to 96. Patmos was a rugged, volcanic island off the coast of Asia Minor. It was about ten miles long and six miles wide. He was probably put there by the Roman Emperor Domitian. " (Willmington)
 - (2) Domitian was the brother of Titus (who destroyed the city of Jerusalem)." (Willmington)
 - (3) Domitian thought Christianity was atheistic. (Willmington)
 - (4) "Killed thousands of believers." (Willmington)
- c. Trajan (A.D. 98-117)
- (1) Trajan "was the first to pass laws against Christianity" . (Willmington)
 - (2) Trajan "burned Ignatius at the stake" . (Willmington)
- d. Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161-180)
- (1) Marcus Aurelius "thought Christianity an absurd superstition" . (Willmington)
 - (2) "Beheaded the great writer and defender of the faith, Justin Martyr." (Willmington)
- e. Septimius Severus (A.D. 193-211)—Killed Origen's father
- f. Maximinus (A.D. 235-238)
- g. Decius (A.D. 249-251)—determined to exterminate Christianity. (Willmington)
- h. Valerian (A.D. 253-260)—killed Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (Willmington)
- i. Aurelian (A.D. 270-275)
- (1) "Emperor Aurelian commenced the ninth persecution against the Christians. He was by nature inclined to tyranny, and was a furious bloodhound, as Eutropius writes, so that he did not hesitate to kill his sister's son, and finally, through the atrocity of his own wicked nature, and evil counsel suggested to him, he became an enemy and persecutor of the Christians. He sent letters to the Governors of the Roman country, that they should vex the Christians; but when he was about actually to carry the persecution into effect, he could not sign the decrees which were to be issued against the Christians, because God smote him, so that his hand was paralyzed." (Martyrs Mirror)
 - (2) "Through divine judgment he was terrified by thunder, lightning, and fire-darts, at the time that he was

constantly meditating how he might slay and exterminate the Christians; and shortly after was himself killed by his notary.” (Martyrs Mirror)

j. Diocletian (A.D. 284-305)

- (1) “The emperor Diocletian and his co-emperor Maximian proclaimed themselves officially ‘Our Lord,’ and Diocletian demanded worship as Jupiter incarnate, the father and king of the gods.” (Horton)
- (2) “In 303, he outlawed Christianity entirely and ordered all copies of the Scriptures to be surrendered for public bonfires in the city squares. He prohibited all meetings of Christians and commanded that all church buildings be destroyed.” (Horton)
- (3) “The goal was to eradicate Christianity from the face of the earth. Homes of Christians were set on fire, and many Christians were burned alive. In Phrygia, an entire city of Christians was burned along with all of its residents, but not a single man, woman, or child renounced Christ or surrendered to the enemy. Other believers were weighted with stones and cast into the waters.” (Horton)
- (4) “So many Christians were thrown to the wild beasts in the arenas that the animals became sick of human flesh and would no longer attack. Soldiers, too, became weary of killing helpless, unarmed people and threw their swords away.” (Horton)
- (5) “Diocletian's own wife and daughter accepted Christ.” (Willmington)

G. Their Promise v. 10- *“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* James 1:12

1. “Ease and prosperity are nowhere promised the Christian as a reward for his faith. On the contrary, he is warned to expect persecution in this hostile world.” (Phillips)
2. The Lord informed the saints to be faithful “unto” death and not “until” death. “They were not to recant when called upon to face a Martyr’s death, but remain faithful until death relieved them of their suffering.” (Larkin)
3. Ignatius- Ignatius was a pupil of the apostle John that was thrown to the wild beasts in the Roman Colosseum A.D. 111. His last words were, “I thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou has vouchsafed thus to honor me. I am God’s grain, to be ground between the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become a holy loaf for the Lord.” (Horton)
4. Polycarp- Polycarp also was a student of the apostle John. [Polycarp assumed the office of Bishop at Smyrna.—Walvoord] He was arrested and martyred in A.D. 155 at Smyrna. The Roman governor told him to deny Christ while he threatened to burn him alive. His

response was, “Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and He has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me? You threaten the fire that burns for an hour and then is quenched; but you know not the fire of the judgment to come, and the fire of the eternal punishment. Bring what you will.” (Horton)

5. Justin Martyr- Justin Martyr was a Christian philosopher that was beheaded at Rome in A.D. 167. His last words were, “I am a Christian, having been freed by Christ, and by the grace of Christ, I partake of the same hope.” (Horton)
6. Blandina- Blandina was a Christian slave of Gaul that was tortured from morning until night. Her only response before they cut her throat was, “I am a Christian; among us no evil is done.” (Horton)
7. Perpetua and Felicitas- “Two young women, Perpetua and her faithful slave Felicitas were gored to death by wild beasts at Carthage on March 7, 203. Although Perpetua was nursing an infant son and Felicitas had given birth to a daughter in prison, the women received no mercy from the Roman officials and had to appear before a bloodthirsty mob at the games.” (Horton)
8. Tertullian once said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” (Phillips)
9. “The world offers the believer death by torture, death in a thousand fiendish ways. Christ crowns him with life, with a crown that will outlast the universe itself.” (Phillips)

III. The Obligation of the Church v. 11- “*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches...*”

A. The Prerequisites of Hearing- “*He that hath an ear*”

B. The Purpose of Hearing- “*let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*”

IV. The Overcoming of the Church v. 11- “*...He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*”

A. Their Personal Decision- “*He that overcometh*”

B. Their Powerful Deliverance- “*shall not be hurt of the second death*”

Revelation 20:6, 14, 21:8

1. “The victorious believer is promised eternal security.” (Phillips)

2. “The promise here has to do, not with the grounds of eternal security, but with the assurance of it. Death is the gateway to life.” (Phillips)

Conclusion: Out of the seven churches mentioned, it is amazing that the church in Smyrna did not receive any accusations against them. They were truly a church that was being crushed like myrrh, yet being triumphant in the end. The only thing that came from them during their persecution was the sweet fragrances of Christianity. Certainly, the motivating factor that kept these saints pressing on was the comforting words spoken unto them by their Saviour “*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer*”. With the

Lord's help, the saints at Smyrna was able to face any tribulation that came their way, faithfully remaining loyal to their Saviour.