



Empowering People to Change the World

The Church at Smyrna: A Crushed Fragrance

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The Church of Smyrna-A Crushed Fragrance Revelation 2:8-11

- The only book that promises a blessing to those who read it.
- We are studying the 7 churches in Asia Minor.
- These are very exciting chapters, chapter 2 and 3, because they are so applicational to our lives today.
- We see the heart of God and what Jesus really cares about in the churches: the heart of the church, not the programs of the church.
- Several levels of meaning with these 7 churches:
 - Local meaning what was happening at that time in Asia Minor under great persecution and danger.
 - Translocal meaning in that these are written to churches for all time throughout history.
 - Personal meaning to all of us who have ears. I counted before the service and found that everyone here has an ear “He who has ears to hear.”
- In these letters, Jesus will give a commendation and then a criticism, but this letter has no criticism! Jesus is so proud of the church in Smyrna.

Revelation 2:8

***“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write,
‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:***

- The Greek word translated Smyrna means “myrrh.”
- Myrrh is frequently used in the Bible in connection with the embalming of the dead.
- Myrrh represents death...Death, death, death, persecution is all over this admonition.

- Myrrh had to be crushed for it to emit its fragrance.
- Smyrna is being crushed under great persecution and affliction.
- The iron heel of Rome was never harsher as it was now...Smyrna was fully committed to the worship of Domitian.
- No city in Asia was more loyal to Rome and to Emperor worship.
 - When the Roman general Sulla's ill-clad army faced a severe winter, the Smyrnians sent their clothes to him.
 - The city was rewarded with a new temple dedicated to Emperor Tiberius in AD 26.
- Smyrna was the crown jewel of Rome in Asia Minor.
 - The most beautiful city in all of Asia. Alexander had it built hundreds of years before.
 - Called the "crown" of Asia for its beauty.
 - It was the center of science and medicine.
 - Deeply loyal to the Caesar's of Rome.
 - Strong Emperor worship...the temple of Zeus and Aphroditus was there.
 - Under Domitian it was a capital punishment not to offer a yearly sacrifice to the Emperor.
 - Annually, everyone had to throw a pinch of "manna" or incense upon an altar and received a certificate.
- The church in Smyrna is being crushed under the persecution of Rome, but she is also suffering under the persecution of the Jewish community.
- What a fitting name! These are believers that are being crushed and yet the fragrance they are producing is beautiful.

- Jesus loves this church. Besides the church in Philadelphia, it is the only church that is not critiqued of the 7 churches.

Vs. 9

“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

- Jesus knows our suffering!
- The persecution in Smyrna was not just from the Romans but also from the Jewish community in Smyrna.
- To the Jews in Smyrna, it was more important that they were “Roman Jews” than that they were “Jehovah’s Jews.”
- Persecution of His children never escapes the gaze of the Lord.
- Tribulation...The Latin is “tribulum” was the part of the sled that drag over the grain on the threshing floor that would separate the wheat from the chaff.
- Scripture actually links persecution and spiritual strength.
- **James 1:2-4, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” NKJV**
- **Peter encouraged suffering Christians with the truth that “after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you” (1 Pet 5:10)**
- The church at Smyrna was suffering for doing the right thing! Remember that! We can tend to look for some sin in our life when we are suffering, but often God is allowing difficulties because of your faithfulness.
- Pushing back Satan’s kingdom will mean warfare.

- When you start doing the right things in your family, it will get harder before it gets easier.
- Fathers, when you taking the leadership in your home, you will be resisted.
- Mothers, when you start learning to yield to husbands in love, he will not know what to do with you at first.
- Singles, when you choose a life of purity, you won't get invited to certain parties anymore.
- When you learn to start letting your wallet match your commitment to Christ, you will be challenged.
- Jesus is saying, "the world see's you in tribulation and poverty, but YOU ARE RICH."
- You are gaining eternal riches!
- You are playing for an audience of one!! It is all for Christ...and He notices, even when the world doesn't.

I know the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

- The ultimate blasphemer is Satan!
- This shocking statement is that the Jews who were not worshipping the Messiah were just as much worshipping Satan as the idols and emperor worshippers.

The Jews and Romans in Smyrna accused the Christians of:

- 1) "cannibalism" because of a misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper.
- 2) "immorality" because they administered a "holy kiss" in greeting to each other.
- 3) "breaking up homes" because if one spouse became a believer and the other did not, it often created conflict.

- 4) “atheism” because they rejected the Pantheon of Dieties that everyone else worshipped.
- 5) “national disloyalty and rebellion” because they refused to worship Domitian.
- The Jews, who would turn in the Christians to the Romans, are called here a “synagogue of Satan.”
 - “synagogue of Satan” is a powerfully damning statement.
 - They were being used by Satan for his purposes.
 - They were not worshipping the true God and thus, just as blasphemous to God as those who worshipped the emperor.
 - A Jew can be a Jew physically, ethnically, but not spiritually...
 - The true spiritual Jew is the one who worships the Messiah Jesus.

 - Paul affirmed this in Romans.
 - **Romans 2:28-29, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”**
- God is not finished with the Jews yet...a great revival is coming to the Jews in the last days, but it will be the completion of the Jews: ethnically and spiritually.
 - This persecution continued for another 200 years.
 - 50 years later, Polycarp, one of the great church fathers, who was the pastor in Smyrna was burned alive at the age of 86.
 - We have a description of Polycarp’s martyrdom in a second century document...

Polycarp's martyrdom

EIGHTY-SIX YEARS HAVE I SERVED HIM

Warned that his arrest is impending, elderly Bishop Polycarp has left Smyrna and hidden in a farmhouse. The threat on his life is real; Smyrnans have recently executed several Christians for their faith. Now a pagan mob is demanding the bishop's life. Smyrnans are fiercely loyal to Rome and to the old gods. "Kill the church leader," they reason, "and his church will die."

The governor dispatches soldiers to track down the old man, who has the distinction of being one of the last churchmen who actually studied at the feet of one of the Lord's apostles—the long-lived John. The soldiers care nothing about this. Intent on locating him, they torture witnesses, who reveal Polycarp's whereabouts. His hiding place betrayed, Polycarp moves to another. One must face martyrdom boldly when it comes, he believes, but no one should seek it. The authorities discover where he is hiding, and soldiers arrive to arrest him. He welcomes them as if they are old friends and asks that they be served food and drink, requesting only an hour to pray before being marched to the arena. They agree. Overhearing his godly prayers, the soldiers wonder why they are arresting him. Surely this is a good man! They allow the hour to stretch into two.

Finally, they can delay no longer. They haul Polycarp in. When he nears the city, a heathen magistrate approaches in a chariot and takes Polycarp into it. The magistrate tries to persuade the Christian to sacrifice to the gods, but finding that he can make no headway with him, pushes him out of the conveyance so roughly that he falls and scrapes open the flesh on his shin. Showing as little pain as possible, the elderly bishop limps behind the soldiers into the amphitheatre where great numbers of people are gathered.

At sight of him, the mob sets up loud cries of rage and savage delight, but Polycarp hears a voice telling him, "Be strong and play the man!" Consequently, he does not allow the spite of the crowd to trouble him. The governor asks him to deny Christ and promises that if he will, his life will be spared. But the faithful bishop answers, "**Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has never done me injury; how then can I now blaspheme my King and savior?**"

When Polycarp rejects further pressures to deny Jesus and save himself, the governor threatens to burn him. Polycarp turns the tables and warns him of eternal fire. The governor ignores the warning and orders the execution to proceed. The soldiers prepare to nail Polycarp to the stake, but he assures them

nails won't be needed, so he is tied instead. The fire is lit, and the flames rise around him. But what is this? The fire parts around Polycarp! It is as if the flames avoid him; eyewitnesses will claim his body glowed like gold in the fire. Finally a soldier, whose usual task is to put wounded animals out of their misery, executes the bishop with a sword. The good old man is dead, an inspiration to others who will perish in similar circumstances for centuries to come.
—Dan Graves

Vs. 10

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.

- **Satan's Greatest Weapon is Fear.**
- The battle in Smyrna is the age old battle we all fight...it is battle of fear!
- Satan is constantly accusing you, to create fear.
- **Revelation 12:10, "Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.'"**

NKJV

- **Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."**
- Fear is Satan's greatest weapon against the Christian.
 - The Bible says "fear not" or "do not be afraid" over 100x.
 - "I am with you" follows 16x.
 - Do you realize how much fear incapacitates us?
 - We don't put our faith fully in Christ because we fear what our friends or family will say or do.
 - We don't do the right things with our kids because we fear their reaction.

- Men, we don't lead our homes out of fear.
- We don't obey the clear dictates of scripture in tithing, giving 10% of our income out of fear.
- FEAR is Satan's greatest weapon! Are you walking by faith or fear? It is one of these two choices.
- I am willing to wager that many of you will not obey God in your life because you are fearful of something.
- Remember Jesus' words... "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." John 16:33
- Jesus is with you! Jesus will give you courage, but you must step out!

Vs. 10-11

"Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'"

- Those who prove the genuineness of their faith by remaining faithful to the Lord until death will receive as their reward "the crown" (stephanos: the victor's crown) of life.
- He is saying: FINISH WELL!
- So few finish well in this life.

Why do so many drop out of the race? 4 Things that destroy our walk with God:

- 1) Dry Up. Quit being a self feeder from God's Word and start to dry up.
- 2) Drift back. Fall back into old sin habits and can't get out.

- 3) Doomed Relationships. No bloodstained allies to fight with. Don't maintain strong relationships and fellowship with those of the same sex who will hold you accountable.
- 4) Disappointments. Don't process disappointments biblically-instead of trusting God we start blaming God.

You are an Overcomer!

You are more than a Conqueror!

Turn in your Bibles to Romans 8

Vs. 36

“For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

- I want to challenge many of you who have lived in fear all of your life to begin to step up your faith:
 - 1) Rather than dry up...Drink up. Drink from God's Word.
 - 2) Rather than drift back...Drive forward. Deal with problem areas. Face the issues, be courageous!
 - 3) Rather than doomed relationships...nurture bloodstained allies in your life.
 - 4) Rather than wallow in disappointments...start to believe God causes all things to work together for good.
- God wants to set you free from the fear of not having enough.
- But God's ways are counter intuitive and take faith:
 - 1) Jesus said if you want life, you must die.
 - 2) If you want to lead, you must serve.
 - 3) If you peace, you must go to war.

- 4) If you want to receive you must give.
- Why? Two reasons:
 - 1) He wants all of the credit, because you can't naturally do this.
 - 2) He wants all the glory, because it is only through His power that it can be done!
 - 3) Most importantly, He wants to have a love relationship with you.