

Fragrant When Crushed

Revelation 2:8-11

- I. The name Smyrna.
 - A. Comes from “Myrrh”, the resin from the Commiphora Myrrh tree.
 - 1. Myrrh is fragrant when crushed.
 - a. Perfume, anointing oil in the temple, embalming chemical.
 - b. Myrrh represents death in the Bible (the death of Christ on the cross, etc.).
- II. The six design elements of the letters to the seven churches.
 - A. Begins with the name of the location of the church: the name of the city is important.
 - B. Each has a different title for Jesus Christ.
 - C. Each church receives a commendation.
 - D. Each church receives a condemnation.
 - 1. Exception: Smyrna and Philadelphia.
 - E. Each church receives a correction.
 - F. Each church receives a promise to the “overcomer”.
 - 1. Smyrna— “the ones who overcome will never be hurt from the second death.”
- III. The state of persecution of the church today.
 - A. The insulation of suffering in America.
 - B. The truth:
 - 1. Christians are slaughtered every day in places like Syria, the Congo, Samalia.
 - 2. According to Open Doors, 100-150 million Christians are martyred every year for their faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 3. The 20th century claims 65% of persecuted Christians for all time.
- IV. Questions:
 - A. Why do some Christians persist in their faith knowing they will suffer because of it?
 - B. What keeps some Christians faithful through persecution to death?

THE KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY OF JESUS CHRIST IN OUR LIFE MUST BE A GREATER REALITY THAN DEATH ITSELF. IT MUST HOLD GREATER VALUE THAN OUR PRESENT LIFE.

- V. Smyrna, the city.
 - A. A most beautiful and prosperous city. A seaport with a vibrant trade.
 - B. Many pagan temples, the most important being the Temple of the god Rome—Caesar.
 - 1. Emperor worship—all had to make Caesar the most important “god”—Along with hostile Jews, the sources of persecution for the Christians.
 - C. The martyrdom of Polycarp—155 AD.
- VI. Christ is the key to the questions.
 - A. **Jesus is bigger than death—V.8**
 - 1. Jesus is the eternal God and the risen Savior.
 - B. **Jesus knows and understands His people—V.9**
 - 1. He knows their tribulation, poverty, and blasphemy.
 - C. **Follow Jesus in suffering and persecution—V.10**
 - 1. “Do not fear”.
 - 2. “Be faithful till death”.
- VII. For the “overcomer”.
 - A. The “crown of life”—eternal life.

**If you are born once...you die twice.
If you are born twice...you die once.**

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Infamously I have been known for one sermon I did on Mother's Day back around 2007... if you've been attending this church that long you most likely know what I preached on that Mother's Day.....nobody remembers the other ones... but this one!...Every Mother's Day since I get texts and emails from people who have since moved away asking if this Mother's Day I'm going to preach on this subject again.

This week a few of you asked me if I was going to preach on it this morning...you see...it was a beautiful May day, the sun was shining, the flowers were blooming the fields were green and Spring was in the air...celebrating our mothers.... And I preached on death!

How could I ever do that again?

This morning we are continuing our study through the book of Revelation... we are in chapter 2... the letters to the seven churches... Last week we began this with the letter to the church at Ephesus... this morning the letter to the church at Smyrna....

Smyrna... the name is important...If it sounds a little familiar it is because another word comes from Smyrna..."Myrrh"...Smyrna was a producer of Myrrh... Myrrh is a resin gum from the Commiphora Myrrh tree... In the Bible, the Hebrew for Myrrh is "mor" which means.... Guess?right ..."Death".

Happy Mother's Day!...

Seriously...

The name Smyrna is important... and so is Myrrh...as I said, Myrrh is the gum from a tree... which is harvested... form small clumps which harden into small balls... they don't have much fragrance until you crush these dried balls of gum... what is released is a pleasing scent...

It is used as a perfume... also an anointing oil for priests...and the "purification of women (Esther 2)... but primarily used for embalming dead bodies (I'm not suggesting you buy your mother some Myrrh for Mother's Day!).

You probably best know about Myrrh from the Christmas story of the three magi...who came to baby Jesus bringing Frankincense, Gold and Myrrh...over the ages a connection was made that Frankincense was used by priest in the temple... Gold was an emblem of royalty... and Myrrh represented suffering and death... all three a picture of Jesus Christ... the king, ultimate high priest who died on the cross on our behalf...

In John 19 we are told that Jesus's body was embalmed with Myrrh after the crucifixion... but remember... **Myrrh was a useless hard little ball of gum until it was crushed**... when it was crushed into a powder, a fragrant aroma was released... a picture of the church at Smyrna.

It refers to suffering under trial... that a sweet aroma.... A sweet smell in the nostrils of God comes forth from those who suffer for His sake...

Before I get into this letter... I want to mention six design elements of each of these seven letters... each of these letters follows a pattern:

1. The name of the city where the church is that city name is important... each city presents a different situation for the church that is there.... So each letter begins identifying the city... **To the church at Ephesus... to the church at Smyrna...**

2. Each has a different title of Jesus Christ... Last week the title of Jesus was **the One who holds the seven stars in His hands. The One who walks among the seven lampstands.**

A picture of Jesus being present among His church and who is in control of all things...

Today's letter **the first and the last, the One who was dead , and has come to life...** The resurrected Jesus... the victor over death has special meaning with the church in Smyrna... These are important titles to the message to each church as we will see.

3. Each church receives a commendation... things that the church is doing right and is pleasing to Jesus... last week... the church at Ephesus did great things for the furthering of the gospel... good doctrine... good discernment... But...

4. Each church receives a condemnation... things that the church is doing that is not pleasing to Jesus... these are serious wrongs with serious consequences...

Last week the church at Ephesus was called out on losing their first love... they did great church things... but Jesus was no longer at the center...

5. Each church receives a correction... an exhortation... a remedy to set the church back on the right path... a church pleasing to Jesus.

6. Each church receives a promise to the "overcomer"... 1John 5:5 **Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

The promise last week in the letter to the church at Ephesus was that *he who overcomes, Jesus will grant them to eat from the tree of life... eternal life....* This letter to the church at Smyrna, the ones who overcome **will never be hurt from the second death...**

There is a design to the letters... but there are a couple exceptions... two of the churches do not receive a condemnation nor a correction... Jesus is pleased with these churches... instead of

admonishing, He encourages... the church at Smyrna is one of the exceptions....as we will see....the other is the church at Philadelphia.

One more thing... every church will be surprised with something in the letter... 1. The churches who thought they were doing very well will be surprised to find out that in the eyes of Jesus, they aren't doing so good...and 2. The churches who didn't think things were going so well, Jesus praises them.

I think that is something each one of us should think about regarding not just our own church but our own individual lives...I'm encouraged by our church... so many great things going on... I'm often asked... *How's things going at Trinity?*...Great!.... but you know... there's sure a lot of people right here in Moscow that needs Jesus Christ!...and

These letters are for us to check ourselves... to reveal our own blind spots... *maybe there are some areas we should take notice in our own lives...*

"No, I'm really doing great in my spiritual life!... OR COULD IT BE... nothing really bad has happened to you lately... life is good... at the moment....what happens when the heat is turned up?

So let's read the passage together and check ourselves out...**READ 2:8-11**

Straight forward and simple... but penetrating...I read this and immediately did ***not*** think of life in these United States as a Christian...where we feel abused if the coffee is too weak or too strong during fellowship time...or the torture of sitting through a 55 min. sermon on any given Sunday...no.

[we Christians in America really have a blend of our privileged nationality...the "American Dream... with the Bible yielding a hybrid gospel...]

I immediately thought of a Newsweek article I read this week... about seventy decapitated bodies of Christians have been discovered in a church in the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo by An Islamist group linked to Islamic State called the AFD.

We watch the news in Syria where Christians are being slaughtered every day.... In recent weeks it is estimated that 1800 Christians have been slain for being Christians...

This led me to dig deeper... *Open Doors*, who keeps track of Christian persecution around the world reports that an estimated 100-150MILLION Christians are martyred EVERY YEAR for the last few decades...

Times reported that in just the 20th century till now... claims 65% of all persecuted Christians for all time.... These are the martyred ones.... This does not take into account all the imprisoned, tortured and persecuted by other means...

So after reading this letter to the church at Smyrna, along with all this... For me it brings up a couple of questions...

- What is it in some Christians in hostile countries who **persist in their faith when surrendering, or denying their faith would save their lives?**...and avoid persecution?...just pull a “Peter” and say “I don’t know this man Jesus!”
- What keeps some Christians faithful until and through death

I think we need to understand this so that we will live and die well for Jesus Christ... I’m going to give you the answer to these questions up front... I think the answer is the main point of this passage... then we’ll work our way through the words of Jesus Himself.

- In order to be faithful till death... in order to persist in faith regardless of what is threatening or happening to US... **THE KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY OF JESUS CHRIST IN OUR LIFE MUST BE A GREATER REALITY THAN DEATH ITSELF. IT MUST HOLD GREATER VALUE THAN OUR PRESENT LIFE.**

To fully grasp each of these letters...it is important to know something about the city that each of these seven churches reside in... Smyrna is about 35 miles north of Ephesus...It is the only city of the seven churches that is still in existence today... it is know today as the city of Izmir... it is a beautiful city in Turkey.... And it was one of the most beautiful and prosperous cities back when this letter was written... some ancient coins were found from this period which said *First of Asian in beauty and size.*

A beautiful pagan city with many pagan temples... of Apollos, Aphrodite, Zeus the chief god... and many more... one of the most important temples was the temple of the god Rome... a temple to honor Tiberius Caesar...who reigned when Christ was crucified and died just a few years later...

It was a time of emperor worship... people of the city would be expected to go to the temple and worship the highest deity... Caesar...if you acknowledged Caesar as being higher than any “god”...you could worship any “god” you wanted....

Of course that would be a problem for the Christian... at least some Christians... many Christians entered the temple and worshipped Caesar to avoid persecution... but others refused and as a result were persecuted... some martyred for elevating Jesus Christ to the highest.

Add to that ...There was a fairly large Jewish presence in Smyrna... these Jews were very hostile towards Christians...Smyrna was a beautiful, prosperous place to live... unless you were a devout Christian...

We know much about this time from the writings of ancient historians...especially from Tertullian, Eusebius and the writings of Irenaeus...Irenaeus tells us about the pastor of Smyrna appointed by John himself... his name was Polycarp...

When Polycarp was an old man, some 60 years after this letter was written...He was loved by the church in Smyrna...But the hostile Jews and Roman officials did not share their affections... in AD 155 Polycarp was arrested, quickly tried, martyred...burned at the stake then stabbed to finish the job.

We have the ancient record of his death written at that time... his death is the oldest account of a Christian dying for the Lord Jesus Christ outside of the New Testament...(of course, Stephen was the first martyr) When Polycarp was arrested for his faith in Jesus Christ...

The chief of police Herod tried to persuade him to deny Christ to save himself... *Swear by the fortune of Caesar, change your mind... have respect to your age...take the oath and I shall release you. CURSE CHRIST!*

Polycarp's words are now famous: *Eighty-six years I have served him and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me? ...The proconsul replied "I have wild beasts. I shall throw you to them if you do not change your mind"... Polycarp said Call them! For repentance from the better to the worse is not permitted us...but it is noble to change from what is evil to what is righteous...I'll have you consumed with fire!...the fire you threaten burns but an hour and is quenched after a little; for you do not know the fire of the coming judgement and everlasting punishment than is laid up for the ungodly...why do you delay!?...Come...do what you will....*

Polycarp burned at the stake.... He got it... THE KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY OF JESUS CHRIST IN HIS LIFE WAS A GREATER REALITY THAN DEATH ITSELF. IT HELD A GREATER VALUE THAN HIS PRESENT LIFE.

You know...these verses are not so much about persecution and faith as they are about Jesus Christ...In the beginning of this series I said that Revelation is all about the glory of Jesus Christ.... We could break down this passage in four headings help us understand that great truth.

1. Jesus is bigger than death. The title of Jesus in verse 8... **This is what the first and last, who was dead and has come to life says...**

The **first and the last** refers to the eternal God... **who was dead and has come to life** refers to the risen Lord... this is exactly what one facing persecution needs to know...this is so important... look at Isaiah 41:4

Who has worked and done it,

Calling forth the generations from the beginning?

'I, the Lord (Jehovah/Yaweah...the proper name of the one true God)), am the first; and with the last, I am He.'"

Isaiah 44:6

“Thus says Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, Lord of hosts:

‘I am the first, and I am the last,

And there is no **God besides Me. (JW’s...Adoni)**

These are two great verses referring to God...the eternal almighty God... Revelation 2:8 uses the same language referring to Jesus Christ... **THE FIRST AND THE LAST**... When the guys in the white shirts and skinny ties come to your door... show them these verses! **JESUS IS GOD!**

The One who was nailed to the cross... who was dead and then came to life... is God!... we already read in chapter 1 that Jesus said **I am the Alpha and the Omega** which is similar... when we get to chapter 22:13 He clarifies...**I am the Alpha and the Omega, THE FIRST AND LAST, the beginning and the end**... **MEDITATE ON THAT!**

He is the first and the last...he has the first say and the last say...Jesus is bigger than our ability to understand...Jesus is all there is to say... He’s eternal God... He’s the resurrected Lord... what great comfort to those who are suffering... *I conquered death everyone! Don’t worry!*

*If they kill you for your faith in Me... don’t worry... that’s not the end!...you will live!...WHO CHRIST IS ALWAYS MAKES THE DIFFERENCE!...Over in John 11:25...Mary and Martha’s brother Lazarus had just died... Mary and Martha are distraught... Jesus says this to Martha...Jesus said to her, **“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?”***

A couple of chapters later...14...Jesus is comforting His disciples because He’s getting ready to leave them for the cross... **After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. Because I rose from the dead... you will live!**

When the reality of Christ’s resurrection and His promises truly sinks in... you look at death in a completely different way... this was so apparent during the Covid fiasco... there was a remarkable difference between those who rested in Christ and those who didn’t... those who feared death and those who like Paul thought **to live is Christ, to die is _____gain.**

You know...if you know the Lord... *the good news is NOT that you might live another twenty years... the good news is you might die tonight!*

2. Jesus knows and understands His people. Read verse 9

Notice Jesus points out three things that **“He knows”** about what His people are going through... He knows: 1. Their tribulation 2. Their poverty, and 3. The slander being thrown at them.

First of all... **“He knows”**... One of the toughest things about suffering is feeling alone...when we are really going through it you might say to others... *You don’t know what I’m going through...you don’t understand what is happening to me*... Jesus begins with **I KNOW**...

1. He knows their tribulation—“*Pressure from without*”... it’s trouble coming from outside the camp...this isn’t internal turmoil.. this is not a personal mental stress... Matthew 5:10-12...Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you **because of Me.12 Rejoice and be glad, for your **reward in heaven is great;** for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Did you get the promise?... *a great reward in heaven...* Jesus is telling the church at Smyrna...*I know what you’re going through... It’s tough...it’s unfair... I know your life is hard... but this is temporary... just you wait until you get to heaven!*

Listen to James 2:5

Listen, my beloved brothers: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

2 Timothy 3:11-12... Paul is writing to young Timothy... this is the last letter Paul would ever write... he’s writing this from the Mamertine Prison...a horrific place... talk about suffering!...

Persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra. What persecutions I endured, and out of them all **the Lord rescued me!12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will be persecuted.****

That doesn’t sound like an option!... it’s going to happen!

2. He knows their poverty—there are several words in the Greek New Testament that we translate as “poverty”... this one is the worst... it means a *destitute beggar*...Smyrna was a beautiful, prosperous city with a pretty high lifestyle... but remember these Christians wouldn’t elevate Caesar to the highest deity... they paid a price!

Jesus says **I know your poverty (but you are rich)...** 2 Corinthians 8:9 **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though being rich,** though Jesus was rich... what did He have.. a Lamborghini?...a house on the lake... I know He owns the cattle on a 1000 hills... (but we don’t really know if there were many if any cattle on the hills we just know there were a thousand hills...)

Lord owns everything and possesses all power, authority, sovereignty, glory, honor, and majesty **yet for your sake He became poor, so that you **through His poverty might become rich.****

The key for all Christians is to understand *the reality of wealth*...Matthew 6:19 **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor**

rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

We know this... we've read this countless times... but do we live it?...Is it our reality?...

3. He knows the slander being thrown at them— the blasphemy

(9b) I know the blasphemy to those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Blasphemy is the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God or something sacred.

1 Peter 2:19

For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unrighteously. 20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure? **But if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this finds favor with God.**

21 For to this you have been called, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an **example** that you should follow in His steps, 22 who did no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 who being reviled, was not reviling in return; while suffering, He was uttering no threats, but **kept entrusting Himself to Him** who judges righteously.

This is so not normal... when Jesus was reviled... abused through language... when pathetic insults were cast at Him... He didn't return the favor...what DID HE DO?... He handed it to His Father... who is the One who JUDGES RIGHTEOUSLY.... He did this as an example for us.

2:9...Interesting verse... this blasphemy came from those who said they were Jews but weren't Jews... Romans 2:17-29

But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God, 18 and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, 19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, 21 you, therefore, who teach another, **do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal?** 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the Law, through your transgression of the Law, do you dishonor God? 24 For **"the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,"** just as it is written. 25 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law, but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 So if the uncircumcised man observes the righteous requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? 27 And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the Law, will he not judge you who, through the letter of the Law and circumcision, are a transgressor of the Law?

28 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 which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Jesus is saying... these Jews who are blaspheming God to you are descendants of Abraham from physical birth... but not spiritual birth... Jesus said something like this in John 8:44 **you are of the father the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires...** Physical heritage doesn't get you into heaven!

So these blaspheming Jews were tools of the evil one...they are a **"synagogue of Satan."**... the true connection of these Jews... is with Satan....Satan is behind all this!...your battle isn't with these Jews... it is with Satan: [Peter nails it: 1 Peter 5:8-11]

Be of sober spirit, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 But resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished among your brethren who are in the world. 10 And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, strengthen, confirm, and ground you.11 To Him be might forever and ever. Amen.]

3. Follow Jesus's commands in persecution. Read verse 10

Two commands... 1. *Do not fear*, and 2. *Be faithful until death*.

Fear—Note that this is foretelling trouble... you ARE going to have trouble...not if or possibly... this is a promise you are going to suffer... we get so surprised when bad things happen to us...suffering for Christ will happen.

What and who is behind this foretold trouble?... the devil!...**Behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison...**now... I'm not saying all our trouble is caused by the devil... many causes:

- Us...our own sin... our fallibilities...
- The curse in the garden.
- God Himself!—God imposed suffering to make us stronger...
- The devil... the devil works overtime....when you suffer for the cause of Christ... it is from the devil.

2 Thessalonians 3

1 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2 and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men, for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, who will strengthen and guard you from the evil one. I will add.... *While you are suffering!*

Why is this happening to me?... you're being tested!... Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith brings about perseverance. 4 And let perseverance have its perfect work, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4

What about the ten days?...many theories... I think it refers to a short period of time... the number ten is used that way in several places in the Bible... Genesis 24, Job 19, Daniel 1... as we go through this suffering we ask *When will it ever end?...*

God comforts saying a *short.... Limited time....*especially when you compare the days of our lives to eternity....**For our momentary, light affliction is working out for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison...**2 Corinthians 4:17....so...don't fear...and

Be faithful until death

Jesus promises a reward when we are faithful till death:

You will receive the crown of life (10)...James again tells us...Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; For once he has been approved, he will receive **the crown of life**

Which the Lord has promised to those who love Him...the crown of life is eternal life! (James 1:12). Don't worry what comes at you in this life! Don't be discouraged people... it WILL be worth it!

*I will give you the crown of life and you will spend eternity in heaven!...*there is NOTHING in your life that is more important than that truth!

Read verse 11

Jesus meets with the inquiring pharisee in John 3... Nicodemus

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which has been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

There's an old saying...

If you are born once...you die twice.

If you are born twice...you die once.

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