

A SERIES THROUGH THE REVELATION

SMYRNA: AFFLICTED BUT AFFLUENT | 1.13.22

I. THE CITY OF SMYRNA (Rev. 2:8-11)

- A. The city of Smyrna (Izmir) was located about 35 miles (1/2 day's journey) north of Ephesus. During the time when the Revelation was written (90-95 A.D.) it's been suggested that there were around 100,000 people in this city. Today, Izmir hosts around 2.8 million people.
- B. Today the city of Izmir is 99% Muslim with around 6,000 Christians living there (*1 Baptist Church—40 people*). Through much pressure, tribulation and suffering the Church of Smyrna endured and has left a flickering witness of Christ in a spiritually dark region. This church is only one of two (*Philadelphia*) out of the seven Churches that receives no rebuke or correction from Jesus.
- C. Around 80 A.D. when Domitian became the Roman Emperor, Jews in the city began excommunicating fellow Jews that had become Christians to get the Roman government off their backs so they could continue practicing Judaism. It was also around this time that Domitian demanded citizens to burn incense to him as worship at the penalty of death (*Failure to burn incense meant you weren't offered a certificate of citizenship leaving you exposed and subject to death*).
- D. Polycarp, a Church father, and said disciple of John the Beloved was also the former Pastor of the Church in Smyrna. Polycarp was burned alive at the age of 86 for refusing to deny Jesus and worship the Roman Emperor. He's quoted on the day they killed him as saying, *"These 86 years I have served Him and He has done me no wrong, why would I blaspheme my King and Savior now?"*
- E. Smyrna comes from a Greek word that means, *"myrrh/bitter"* which is often used in the Bible to speak of suffering and death. Every verse from Jesus in this short letter drips with affliction;
1. **Revelation 2:8** *"...these things says the first and the last, who was **DEAD**..."*
 2. **Revelation 2:9** *"I know your works: **TRIBULATION...POVERTY...SLANDER**..."*
 3. **Revelation 2:10** *"...you are about to **SUFFER...PRISION...TESTED**...you will have **TRIBULATION**..."*
 4. **Revelation 2:11** *"...he who overcomes shall not be **HURT** by the second **DEATH**..."*

II. THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA (Rev. 2:8-11)

- A. **Revelation 2:8a** *"And to the angel of the Church in Smyrna write..."*
1. Jesus begins this letter by ADDRESSING the Pastor/Overseer of the ministry first. Jesus' words to this Pastor would have been a huge encouragement in the midst of a challenging Pastorate. *This letter is written to the Pastor of the suffering Church (I Don't know anyone in ministry who'd like to receive this letter).*
- B. **Revelation 2:8b** *"...these things says the First and the Last, who was dead and came to life."*
1. Jesus then ascribes to Himself the ATTRIBUTE as the First and the Last, who was dead and came to life.
 - a. First and The Last = This title is used by Isaiah to speak of the God of Israel. He's communicating His eternality, as the One who existed before and will be around after (**Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12**). As God, He is able to keep His promise because He's knows the end from the beginning.

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- b. Who was dead and came to life = Here Jesus is relating to this Church in His humanity as the One who also suffered, died and is now alive forever.
1. For a Church suffering already, and headed into martyrdom, how encouraging this must have been to be reminded that the One who's leading them, who has no beginning or ending, also suffered, and died. *Jesus never asks us to do anything that He himself hasn't done (Luke 9:23).*
- C. **Revelation 2:9** *"I know your works; tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blaspheme (slander) of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."*
1. If there is anyone who can APPROVE what this Church is doing, it's Jesus. His words to this Church go beyond His divinity and speak of His humanity. Jesus as a Man fully understands their struggle. Jesus would say to them, *"I know what it's like to be rejected by your own countrymen, by your own family and to be persecuted for righteousness sake. I know what it's like to suffer under the will of God. I know the pain of your difficulty, and I fully understand. Not because I'm withdrawn and God, but because I also am a Man like you. I KNOW."*
 - a. **Hebrews 4:15** *"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*
 - b. **1st John 1:1** *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, our hands have handled, concerning the Word of Life..."*
 2. Tribulation = Their tribulation was deep suffering, distress, affliction, trouble and persecution. This has been the common experience of the Church throughout her history; nothing has changed.
 - a. **1st Thessalonians 3:3-4** *"...no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you...know...we are appointed to this. For in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it has happened..."*
 3. Poverty (but you are rich) = Tribulation and poverty go hand in hand. Where you find a people in tribulation/suffering/persecution, you will find a people without wealth or the means to create wealth.
 - a. The two words used for poverty are penes and ptochein. Penes speaks of someone who doesn't have anything extra, and Ptochein speaks of someone who doesn't have anything at all. Smyrna was the latter.
 - b. Smyrna's poverty was linked to their inability to generate wealth as citizens. Because of the oppression of the Roman government upon anything other than Emperor worship, the Jews in the city practicing Judaism would turn in their countrymen who had become Christians so they could continue practicing Judaism without the Roman authorities on their backs.
 1. **Hebrews 10:32-34** *"But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings; partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering (seizure) of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven."*
 - c. Though broke and destitute, and without an ability to generate income, the Lord considered them rich, which is the opposite of what He says to Laodicea.
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1. **Revelation 3:17** *“Because you say I am rich...and do not know that you are...poor.”*
 - d. What happened in Smyrna will play itself out again, not in one Church, or region, but across the whole earth for those that love Jesus both headed into and throughout the Great Tribulation.
 1. **Revelation 13:16** *“He (Antichrist) causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”*
 4. I know the blaspheme (slander) = The Church wasn’t being slandered primarily by outsiders (gentiles), but from their brethren; fellow Jews. These professing Jews, either physical descendants of Abraham, or converts to Judaism, had rejected Messiah and were persecuting those who had received Messiah.
 - a. The synagogue of satan isn’t speaking of a physical building, but Jews (outward Jews) who are gathering together, plotting and scheming against their Jewish (inward Jews) brethren. They might have claimed to be the Lord’s assembly, but in heavens eyes, they were co-workers with satan (synagogue of satan).
 1. This isn’t an anti-Semitic statement, remember both Jesus and John are Jewish.
 - i. **Romans 2:28-29** *“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, not is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is on inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”*
 - D. **Revelation 2:10** *“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation 10 days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you crown of life.”*
 1. The Church of Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only two Churches that receive no ACCUSATION from Jesus. But in the midst of their suffering Jesus has very straightforward and challenging ADVICE for them.
 2. Under His leadership, Jesus is going to lead the Church of Smyrna into *potential* martyrdom (**John 21:18-19**). Through the suffering of His beloved ones, Jesus is going to testify to outward Jews and the Roman authorities that He indeed is the Lord.
 - a. The goal of our lives is to agree with the leadership of Jesus more than we fight against it and question it with our choices and decisions. Offense towards Jesus and His leadership will be a central issue in the season leading up to the Lord’s return;
 1. **Philippians 1:9-10** *“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the Day of Christ...”*
 2. **Luke 7:23** *“...blessed is he who is not offended because of Me (leadership/methodology).”*
 3. Do we have confidence in Jesus’ words over our lives that in the midst of suffering, slander and separation we aren’t offended or afraid? Do we have a theology of faithfulness that leads to lack, poverty, slander, suffering, tribulation and possible death?

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3. The devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested = The idea is that satan is throwing person after person into prison to test their faith with hope that some might renounce Christ.
 4. You will have tribulation 10 days = Up until this point they have suffered, been slandered, and lost their ability to generate personal wealth, but they haven't been imprisoned. Their trouble would still yet increase, but it's not without an appointed end (*10 days—it's short*).
 - a. The word used here for tribulation is the only one used in the N.T. It's Greek word #2347 (*in the Strong's concordance*) and it means *pressure, affliction, anguish, persecution, burdened* and *trouble*. It speaks of a worn, narrow path.
 - b. The Great Tribulation is only a quantitative increase of trouble that's already present. It's a concentrated form of trouble that's already been here happening in a short, intense season of time.
 5. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life = Not all were going to die, but all needed to be prepared to die if need be. Richard Bauckham rightly said, "*The Revelation is a manual for martyrdom.*"
 - a. The imagery of a crown most likely came from the Greek games where contestants competed, struggled, overcame and were crowned victorious.
 1. **1st Corinthians 9:24-25** *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate (self-governed, not in excess) in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but for an imperishable crown. Therefore, I run thus; not as who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it under subjection, lest after I have preached to others, that I myself might become disqualified."*
- E. Revelation 2:11** *"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."*
1. The ASSURANCE Jesus gives to the Church is the guarantee that if they remain faithful to Him through this difficult season, the second death won't hurt them.
 2. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death = The second death speaks of dying not only physically but also spiritually. This phrase appears 4 times in the Revelation and always speaks of eternal separation from Christ in the lake of fire (**Dan. 12:2; Jn. 5:29; Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8**).
 - a. This is an important issue to get clear because it holds truths about the timing of the rapture, Christ's appearing and the resurrection of the dead. The rapture, and the second coming/His appearing are two sides to one coin, meaning they happen at the same time. Christ's appearing in the sky is the rapture and the first resurrection of the dead.
 1. Everyone will live forever; either with Christ, or away from Christ (**Rev. 20:11-15**). Everyone is getting resurrected in the end. THERE IS MUCH OVERCOMING TO DO!
 3. The final APPEAL is given once again to anyone within the Church who will give his or her ear, hear and obey the instruction of the Holy Spirit.
- F.** The temptation is to trust our own wisdom and logic, but it must become subject to the voice of the Holy Spirit.
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