

The Letter to the church at Smyrna: The Persecuted church

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Introduction

- Smyrna means myrrh, the substance used for perfume and to anoint dead bodies. The way to get myrrh was by intense pressure being applied to the plant and this beautiful fragrant spice was the result, this same application is true of the church in Smyrna, when intense pressure was applied to these dear people, they were a fragrant offering to the Lord!
- The city was the center of science and medicine in Asia Minor, a beautiful city. It was 35 miles up the coast from Ephesus
- Smyrna's intense loyalty to Rome resulted in strong emperor worship, which led to hostility toward the church; also, a large Jewish community in Smyrna caused the church much suffering. The faithful adherence to the truth of Scripture and Godly preaching brought them great persecution and tribulation.
- In 155AD the pastor of church (Polycarp) was burned alive for refusing to worship Caesar.
- This church was composed of mostly poor and non-prestigious people, unlike the people in Ephesus and Laodicea.
- This church flourished and grew during this time of intense suffering, as was the case whenever the church was severely persecuted. The 4 major types of persecution they faced were:
 - o Poverty
 - o Slander
 - o Prison
 - o Death

Opening Instruction

- To the pastor of the church in Smyrna write.....

Title of Christ used to the church

- "The First and Last who was dead, now is alive". (1:17)
- Jesus knew this church needed comfort, so HE came to them as the ONE who was before all things and will be there after all things and that since HE suffered and died, and rose again,

these dear people can take heart in HIS words of comfort and security! He is the same yesterday, today and forever!!

Commendation of Jesus to the church

- I know your works.....
- Your tribulation or intense suffering
- Your poverty, yet Jesus calls them rich
- Your blasphemy (slander) that you endure from those who say they are Jews and are not but are of the synagogue of Satan.
 - o These people were Jews physically (circumcised) but were not true Jews but spiritual pagans, they taught among other things that new believers were to be circumcised to be true to Christ and to be saved.
 - o The church was being blasphemed by false Christians (wolves in sheep clothes) who are children of the devil (John 8:44). Satan is behind all persecution, even if it is done in the name of religion.
 - o With their rejection of Jesus as Messiah, Judaism becomes just as much a tool of Satan as emperor worship!
 - o Romans 2:29 says that physical circumcision does not make one a Christian.

Condemnation of Jesus to the church

- NONE is given, they were faithful despite suffering, they thought they were poor, but Jesus said they were rich! Let that sink in for a moment!

Correction to remedy the condition

- NONE is needed

The admonition to the church

- They needed comfort, but Jesus told them not to fear any of the things they were about to suffer, so there was more coming said the Lord.
- The devil would have some thrown in prison to be further tested and there would be tribulation 10 days?
 - o This could mean a “short” period of time

- This could mean 10 waves of persecution that started at this time and lasted until Constantine in about 325AD.
- Jesus admonished them to be faithful even if it means death!

The promise of Jesus to the overcomers of the church

- Jesus told them to “be faithful until death” and he would give them the crown of life. This crown is life eternal with Jesus in Heaven, the word crown here is not the crown of a king or a wreath of a victory in the Olympic games and Jesus will give this crown to each Overcomer.
- HE says to them who overcome, the second death will not hurt them. The first death is physical, the second death is spiritual and eternal.

Summary of this church

- The church has always been its purest and most fragrant when it went through times of suffering and intense trial.
- It has been rightly said that those who are born once will die twice and those who born twice will die only once!! There is great comfort in that truth.
- Jesus knows something about suffering and with that, HE can bring comfort to those of HIS who suffer for HIS name on the earth!
- We see here the stark difference between the standards we use for success and that which Jesus uses. He says that this church was rich but they had severe poverty. It is a startling contrast to the church at Laodicea!!
- This church is one of 2 that had no condemnation from Jesus, would it not be wise to study intently these churches and find the qualities that please HIM and then put them into practice??!?!?

The Letter to the church at Ephesus - The Loveless Church

Introduction

- Had a population of over 250,000 which was huge for that day, a major metropolitan city
- There were 4 major trade routes went through Ephesus, the gateway to Asia
- Center of worship of the goddess Diana, whose temple was one of the 7 wonders of the world

- It was 425' long, 220' wide, 60' high, 127 marble pillars, many covered in pure gold
- The worship of Diana was religious immorality at its worst
- Paul had great success in church building in Ephesus 40 yrs before, he was here for 3 years
- There were many small congregations, but one church
- John (the writer) was in Ephesus when he was arrested by Domitian and exiled to Patmos

Opening Instruction

- To the pastor of the church in Ephesus write.....

Title of Christ used to the church

- "HE who holds the 7 stars in HIS right hand, who walks in the midst of the 7 golden lampstands"
- This image of Jesus represents HIS all-seeing and all-knowing power, his control and sovereignty
- HE saw all the things going on and knew what was really happening, "I know your deeds (works)....." is said at the beginning of each letter to each church

Commendation of Jesus to the church

- This was a hardworking, busy church, diligent in service to Christ
 - Works = Programs
 - Labor = hard work of ministry
- They were patient in perseverance, endurance of persecution
 - Christianity was a source of pain to craftsmen (Diana)
 - Much local opposition to the doctrines of the church
- They had orthodox faith or doctrine, they knew what they believed and could not stand evil
 - They exercised spiritual discernment, they knew how to evaluate men who claimed spiritual leadership or heritage by their doctrine and behavior (walk the talk)
 - Paul had warned this church that heretical teachers would come, and this church was ready for them! (Acts 20:29-30)
 - They knew the truth so well that they could spot error miles away, they "tested the spirits, as John would write in I John 4:1.

This was a busy, hardworking, enduring church that stood for the truth of Christ at every point, a splendid church in the Christian community and a success in eyes its peers, what more could be asked of this church? There was only thing Jesus sees and now we uncover what HE sees.

Condemnation of Jesus to the church

- “I have this against you” one thing that Jesus saw in this church to fix, but it was a BIG issue
- “Left your first love”
 - To be a Christian is to love the Lord Jesus with all our being, heart, soul, mind, strength
 - The passion and fervor for Christ had become a cold, mechanical works driven form of service. They forgot what it felt like to be in love with Jesus when they were first saved!
 - They had fallen from the early heights of passion and devotion and had descended to the plains of mediocrity and routine. They were backsliders, still saved but having moved backward in an important area.
 - They were so busy working and serving and doing that they had little time to worship, to connect with and spend time with the Jesus! They were becoming indifferent, and halfhearted in their devotion and were headed in the direction of lukewarmness, but not there yet. Jesus is concerned and points it out NOW.
 - The church is now the “bride” of Christ and Jesus is saying to HIS bride that you have left me as your first love and are looking elsewhere for that love. (II Cor. 11:2-3)
 - Remember that “left” is different than “lost”!
 - If I had left something, I know where it is, it is just not with me now
 - If I lose something, I don’t know where it is.....
 - We can leave our love / passion for Jesus, but we cannot lose it, if we are truly HIS child!

Correction to remedy the condition

- Remember from where you have fallen
 - Memory is a great gift if we use it properly, looking back to recall the way we were when we were first saved or when we were at our apex in devotion to Christ can help us fuel a desire to get back to that pure, wholehearted love for Jesus
 - Looking back along the way that God has led us and to remember the spiritual heights to which we had attained (by HIS grace) is the first step to the next point Jesus mentioned to this church.
- Repent
 - Turn the opposite direction, change course 180 degrees

- It is the complete and resolute turning of my back on all known sin and weights (Heb 12) that are causing this half-heartedness and leaving of my first love for Jesus.
- Jesus does not urge the church to feel bad about their sin or to get emotional about what has happened, but to REPENT, NOW, not later when the “feeling” is right.
- Confession of sin will always precede repentance; it is implied we confess.
- Resume (Do)
 - Jesus is saying to renew your early devotion to ME
 - Resume, repeat what you used to do, get back to John 15:1-5, Abiding in HIM.
 - Jesus is saying also to keep doing the things that I commend you for, just get back to loving ME like you should and the other things will naturally flow.

The admonition to the church

- Jesus said to do what I say, “or else, I will come (not send someone else) quickly and remove your lampstand from its place”.
- Jesus was willing to remove the church for her failure to fall back in love with HIM no matter how many programs they had or how busy they were!! WOW!
- Quickly infers that HE means business, stop wavering and waiting, do it now!!
- Jesus is speaking to the influence of the church more so than the physical building being removed. A lamp was to give light, if the light was gone, then only an empty object was left standing. What good is a lamp without a lightbulb?
- Any church’s light can be extinguished if we stubbornly refuse to love Jesus as HE demands and deserves, we do.
- The church has no light without love, only when its love burns can its light shine. Love for Jesus is the fuel that lights the lamp of the church and keeps it burning on its lampstand!
- “HE who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches”
 - You need to pay close attention to what I am saying to you through the Holy Spirit!
- Jesus also provides a positive admonition, kind of an afterthought of how much Jesus appreciated this church, that after HE ripped them for leaving their first love, HE comes back and appreciates one other thing:

- You hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. If Jesus hates something, we best understand what it is and hate it as well!!!
- The doctrine is a problem in Pergamos, and we will discuss what this means in detail when we look at the letter to that church.

The promise of Jesus to the overcomers in the church

- “I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God”
- An Overcomer is a true believer, not one who professes only, remember what Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-23. Not everyone who claims HIS name belongs to HIM!
- Those who overcome the allurements of false teaching, fleshy indulgence, and worldly attractions for the truth of Christ, will partake of the Tree of Life that is in Heaven as shown in Revelation 22:2.

Summary of this church

- Labor is no substitute for love
- It is not so much what we do for Jesus, but the motive behind it, that counts (I know)
- Many churches today fit this description
 - Full calendars, many programs, weary workers
 - Doctrinally sound but forgetting to love Jesus as they once did!
- Jesus said to do what I say, “or else, I will come (not send someone else) quickly and remove your lampstand from its place”.
- Jesus was willing to remove the church for her failure to fall back in love with HIM no matter how many programs they had or how busy they were!! WOW!!
- Jesus is not impressed by how much we do, but what we do with the gifts and talents HE gave us and the reasons we do what we do.
- They were too busy maintaining their separation they neglected their adoration, they substituted perspiration for inspiration.
- Some people who are sticklers on doctrinal matters are miserable, mean, arrogant and condemning, and there are some who are very loving, caring, and merciful, but have no doctrinal integrity; neither of these is what Jesus expects of HIS church.
- If we can learn to love Jesus with all our heart, soul, and mind, then our lives will find the proper balance!

- Why is it such a big deal to have left your first love? It will lead to a deeper slide, just ask the people at Sardis!