

◆ "The Church on Trial"

Text: Revelation 2:8–11

Theme: When the church stands trial in the world's courtroom, Christ is the Judge, Witness, and Rewarder.

Main Message: Faithfulness under pressure leads to eternal reward.

Intro:

Is anyone here this morning been keeping their eye on the massive court cases happening. It seems to be that every other week there is some highly publicized court cases happening that grips the nation. We lean into these things with the sense of trying to discover justice for the people involved.

The Church of Smyrna is about to go through a very public trial of their own. This church has zero complaints levied it for Christ but it is still faced with hardship

The Church of Smyrna is a church that is identified in a unique way. This church located on a mountain top (1250 elevation) in modern day Turkey, is located only 35 miles from Ephesus. Smyrna was called the "Crowned City" also located near the Aegean Sea this city was more exclusive with a population of only 100,000.

I. The Supreme Judge Takes the Bench

"The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life." (Revelation 2:8)

Jesus opens this letter by reminding us who presides over the courtroom of our lives:

- **"The First and the Last"** – He holds all authority (cf. **Isaiah 44:6** – *"I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."*)
- **"Who died and came to life"** – He overcame death and brings justice with mercy (cf. **Romans 14:9** – *"For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."*)

I think of the 1920's and 1930's in Chicago, how hard it was to find a righteous judge.



Application: We do not face judgment from a cold or distant power—Jesus, our Judge, is also our Savior who knows suffering.

II. The Evidence is Presented

"I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." (Revelation 2:9)

Slander: a crime of making a false statement that damages another's person's reputation

In this trial, evidence of the church's suffering is laid bare:

- **Tribulation:** (cf. **John 16:33**) – *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*
- **Poverty yet rich:** (cf. **2 Corinthians 6:10**) – *“As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.”*
- **Slander and false accusations:** (cf. **Matthew 5:11**) – *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you... on my account.”*

The plaintiff: the church of Smyrna

The defendant: the false brethren

The judge: Christ



Application: Jesus sees both visible and invisible suffering. He counts faithfulness as wealth.

III. The Cross-Examination is Coming

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer... the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested...” (Revelation 2:10a)

The courtroom intensifies. The enemy presses in, but it's under God's oversight.

- **Suffering as testing:** (cf. **1 Peter 1:6–7**) – *“You have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith... may be found to result in praise and glory...”*
- **God's limit on trials:** (cf. **1 Corinthians 10:13**) – *“God is faithful... he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability...”*

- **Imprisonment as part of the call:** (cf. **2 Timothy 2:9**) – *“I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!”*



Application: The trials may come from the enemy, but they are permitted by God for our refining, not our ruin.

IV. The Verdict for the Faithful

“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10b)

The Judge promises reward to those who stand faithful—even under capital judgment.

- **Crown of life:** (cf. **James 1:12**) – *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial... he will receive the crown of life.”*
- **Faithfulness unto death:** (cf. **Acts 20:24**) – *“I do not account my life of any value... if only I may finish my course and the ministry...”*
- **Jesus’ own faithfulness under trial:** (cf. **Hebrews 12:2–3**) – *“Consider him who endured... so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”*



Application: Christ doesn’t reward *results*—He rewards *faithfulness*. The verdict we seek isn’t acquittal from man, but approval from God.

V. The Final Judgment is Secure

“The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.” (Revelation 2:11)

Though the first trial may end in death, the **final court**—God’s eternal judgment—declares the conqueror safe forever.

- **Second death defined:** (cf. **Revelation 20:14**) – *“This is the second death, the lake of fire.”*
- **No condemnation in Christ:** (cf. **Romans 8:1**) – *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*
- **Security of the faithful:** (cf. **John 10:28**) – *“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*



Application: Earth’s judgment may wound, but heaven’s verdict secures your soul forever.

◆ Conclusion: The Final Gavel

When the church is on trial—mocked, pressured, threatened—Jesus says: *“I see, I know, I reward.”*

The Church in Smyrna didn’t need comfort through escape; they needed courage through endurance. So do we.

If you are on trial today—whether through hardship, rejection, or loss—remember:

- Your Judge is **righteous**
- Your Witness is **faithful**

- Your Defender is **present**
- Your Verdict is **secure**

“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10b)

Are we enduring till the judge can rule!