

Smyrna

I. Slide1 **Announce:**

- A. *Welcome to those Online.*
- B. **Slide2 Ladies Worship Night:** Thurs night, June 29th, 7:00 pm.
- C. **Slide3 Fellowship Night:** next Wed, June 21, 7:00pm. Where we *showcase our VBS program*. This will be a great evening for all ages. We will begin in the sanctuary with worship, **and** a short message, **and then** head outside for dessert.
- D. **Slide4 Harvest Crusade:** July 1 & 2 at *Honda Center*, beginning 6 PM, for 2 nights *musical performances by Chris Tomlin, Michael W Smith, Passion, Phil Wickham, & Taya*, special guest interviews, & a message of hope from **Greg**.
- E. **Prayer:** we pray for those that are serving you God in hard places. Our church is one little outpost, but keep us faithful both in safe & dangerous situations.

II. Slide5a **Intro:** *Smyrna, The Persecuted Church*

- A. **Last week** we read about *Ephesus*, the *loveless* church. **They had abandoned their 1st love.** They were *good in doctrine*, **but** lost their love. It was the church of loveless orthodoxy.
 1. **And if love** is the **1st mark** of a vibrant church, **then** we might say that *suffering* is the **2nd mark**. **Smyrna** is the *suffering/persecuted* church.
 2. Since **suffering** is the inevitable mark of **love**, **then** one is willing to **suffer** for the one, he or she **loves**.
 - a) The one is *naturally* a **result** of the other. A willingness to *suffer* proves the **genuineness of love**. We are willing to **suffer** for those we **love**. [spouse/children]
 3. Here Smyrna is the church of *impending suffering* precisely because they **love Christ**.
- B. 1 question we must all ask, **Are we prepared to suffer for the gospel? If you hold to the claims of the gospel you will face opposition** at some level.

1. This opposition might be **verbal** opposition (school, work, home), **relational** opposition (disowned), **judicial** opposition (corrupt courts), **or physical** opposition
- C. **Love** is a universal language. **So is music. And so is suffering.**
1. Swindoll, "They speak **a dialect without words** that is heard and understood **by the soul. Suffering, is the broken language of the soul.**"
- D. **Prayer:** Holy Spirit be our translator, *our Rosetta Stone*, in understanding this **language** and **literacy** of **suffering**.

III. Slide5b **SMYRNA** (8a) **READ 8-11**

- A. Slide6 The next stop for *the postman of Patmos* on his circular tour of the 7 churches ... **Smyrna** [the only city of the 7 that still exists today]
1. Slide7,8 Smyrna is still an important seaport city called **Izmir, Turkey**.
 2. Smyrna from *myrrh/a bitter herb*. A suitable name for a church facing persecution. The Myrrh plant when its **crushed** gives off a beautiful fragrance ... **so** this church of Smyrna.
 3. Christian life was the most difficult here *out of the whole Roman Empire*.
 - a) Slide9 The church **Persecuted** has always come out **Pure**. The church **Pampered** has always been **Polluted**. [chart, *World Watch List*, Open Doors]
 - b) North Korea leads the list of the 50 countries in which Christians are persecuted the most at the present time. It is currently estimated that more than 50,000 Christians are locked inside concentration camps because of their faith, where they are systematically subjected to mistreatment such as unrestrained torture, mass-starvation and even imprisonment and death by asphyxiation in gas chambers. The number of Christians who are being murdered for their faith seems to be increasing as time goes on because in 2013 the death toll was 1,200 and in 2014, this figure doubled, rendering it close to 2,400 murdered Christians. North Korea has earned the top spot 12 years in a row.¹

¹ World Watch List, by Open Door Ministry.

B. **Politics** - Long before Rome ruled the world Smyrna cast its lot w/Rome, never to waiver (since 195 bc).

1. Cicero said, *Smyrna was one of our most faithful & our most ancient allies*

C. **Religion** - Across from mount Pagos was a street of gold (from Zeus' Temple to the Temple of Cybele). [it looked like a necklace/crown]

1. **The Jews** were especially **numerous & influential**. They were very **hostile** to Christianity cuz they drew most of their converts from Judaism.

a) They **persuaded** the Roman authorities to persecute them.

b) The most famous was **Polycarp** (Bishop of Smyrna). Martyred on Sat. Feb.23rd, 155 ad.

IV. Slide10 **JESUS (8b)**

A. **First and the Last** - this is a tremendous **promise** to the Christians. Come what will, from the 1st day of life to the last, **the Risen Christ is w/us**.

1. **And if** He **w/us** till the end...**then of whom shall we be afraid?**

B. Since Smyrna was going through persecutions Jesus relates to them as, *the One who died and came to life*, thus assuring them *the hope of the resurrection*.

1. **Also their physical city itself had done the same**. Rt after Alexander the Great, late 4th cent bc, a "**new**" Smyrna was built by the *Seleucids*.

2. No matter **what experience** God's people may have, **their Lord** identifies with them. [death, pain, rejection, backbiting, etc.]

3. The Risen Christ is one who has experienced **the worst** that life could do to Him. *Deaths sting was stolen, and hades victory was vanquished*.

V. Slide11a **COMMENDATION (9)**

A. **Tribulation** - They were trying to crush the Christianity out of them.

B. **I know your tribulation and poverty** - The believers in Smyrna likely faced harsh treatment and scarcity of employment.

1. When cities had large concentrations of artisans and craftsmen, trade guilds or unions were established. These guilds often required their members to participate in certain pagan activities. The believers' unwillingness to participate in these activities resulted in exclusion from the guilds and financial hardship. (Egypt today, shop is marked as Christian)
- C. **Poverty** - *Blessed are you **poor**, For yours is the kingdom of God.* Lk.6:20
1. James 2:5 *Has God not chosen the **poor** of this world to be **rich in faith and heirs** of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*
- D. **Rich** - God wants you to be *wealthy* ... spiritually wealthy.
1. **They were rich** - They lived for **eternal values** that could never change, riches that could never be taken away.
- E. **Slander** (*blasphemy*) - The instigators of persecution was **the Jews**. It was from them the slanders came.
- F. **Slide 11b** 6 slanders the Jews raised so Rome would persecute them:
1. **Accused of being cannibals. Why?** (Communion: eat body, drink blood)
 2. **Accused of having orgies of lust & immorality** (Agape/Love feasts)
 3. **Accused of breaking up the family** (Lu 12:53 *Father will be divided against son and son against father*, etc.)
 4. **Accused of being atheists** (cuz they didn't have any images of their God).
 5. **Accused of being Politically disloyal** (cuz they wouldn't say, *Caesar is Lord*)
 6. **Accused of being Incendiaries** (cuz they foretold the end of the world would be in flames)
- G. **Synagogue of Satan** - John takes a favorite expression of the Jews *& reverses it*. They loved to call themselves *The Assembly of the Lord*. [assembly = synagogue] So he says to them you're of *the Assembly of the Devil*.
1. **John Wesley** said of a certain man who was presenting *a crude, cruel and savage, picture of God* ... Your God is my Devil.

VI. Slide 12 EXHORTATION, BE FEARLESS & BE FAITHFUL (10)

- A. No *Condemnation* here. (nor in Philadelphia church)
- B. The very **trials** that **afflicted** them, assured them of deliverance from any lack of fervency for the Lord, & kept them from any impurity or compromise w/evil.
- C. Do not Fear what you are about to suffer - *would they be Fearful or Faithful?*
- D. Suffer - If you haven't *suffered* yet, cheer up ... *you will*. 2 Tim. 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*
1. Are you **silent** when you should be **speaking**? (speak up for what is right)
 2. Are you **inactive** when you should **act**?
 3. Are you **faithful** under a lil **pressure**?
 4. The best way to **escape persecution, resentment, or criticism** is to **hide** your faith (*light under a bushel, no!*).
- E. Indeed, the devil is **about** to throw some of you in prison (obviously using *human agency* to do this).
1. He knows the Devils plans & was in complete control of the situation.
[some would be imprisoned & tried as traitors to Rome]
 2. God knows **what** he's about to do, **when** he'll do it, **how long** it will last, **what** its extent is (poss death).
- F. Prison - Think of how many prisons have been *sanctified* by the prayers and praises of Christian believers. Their darkness illuminated by the light of God's Word. Their smells are relieved by *the fragrance of Christ* presence. *Prison becomes heaven when Jesus shares it with us.*
- G. Tested - Job 23:10 *When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.*
- H. Ten Days - It was an expression for *a short time*, which was about to end. *Dan.1:12*
- I. Be faithful unto death - (for some, be faithful w/your small acts of obedience for your whole life; for others, be loyal even when death is its price). To which their church knew well. Later in 156ad this was their own Bishop Polycarp's story ...
1. Slide 13 The proconsul sought to persuade Polycarp to deny [Christ], saying, "Have respect to thy old age," and other similar things like, "Swear

by the fortune of Caesar; repent, and say, Away with the Atheists.” But Polycarp declared, “86 years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?”

2. The proconsul then said to him, “I have **wild beasts** at hand; to these will I cast thee, except thou repent.” But he answered, “Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous.”

3. But again the proconsul said to him, “I will cause thee to be **consumed by fire**, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent.” But Polycarp said, “Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. **But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt.**”

J. **Crown** - Jesus Christ is no man’s debtor. Refers to either, eternal life as a reward or a literal crown or wreath.

1. The buildings on Smyrna's Mount Pagos we're said to look like a crown.

2. James 1:12 **Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.** [here the **temptation** is to buckle under persecution]

VII.Slide14a **PROMISE (11)**

A. *They may not have enjoyed the approval of men, but they certainly received the Praise of God.*

B. They trusted in Him so **the one who conquers/overcomers** (Victors in the race of faith) & as **conquers**, they had nothing to fear. [νικάω/Nike]

1. Even if they were **martyred**, they’d be ushered into glory, wearing Crowns.

2. They would never have to face **the 2nd death** (lake of fire).

a) Rev.20:14 *Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death* (sp death). *And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.*

C. **End:** Our parents used to ask us when we were small, *where does it hurt?*
Your heavenly parent asks **you** tonight, *where does it hurt?*

1. **First of all**, the Lord **knows** all about **your** circumstances.
Insert **your** particular suffering in vs.9 **I know!**

a) **I know** your worries about your daughter. **I know** your pain of abandonment & betrayal. **I know** all about you physical ailment. **I know** about your *constant mental attacks* from the enemy. **I Know** your insecurities.

2. **Second**, whether things *get better, stay the same, or get worse*, **Jesus is always with us**. Entrust yourself and your needs to the One who **was persecuted, abandoned, crucified, and raised on your behalf**.
Welcome **Him**, *not fear* into your heart.

D. **Slide14b** Walt Whitman, *I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person.*

1. Step into someone else's hurting world and speak the healing words God has taught you. Be His ambassador to the lonely, to the depressed, to the confused and hurting around you.

E. **Prayer:** **You** said we **will** suffer. **Yet** you're **sovereign** over its *duration*. **And** you're working out **Your purpose** through it. **And** we don't have to be afraid.

F. Keywords: sfdsd