

**REVELATION 2:8-11**

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Revelation chapter 2 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

Last week we began a study in the second division of the book of Revelation, or as Jesus put it in Revelation 1:19, “**... the things which are ...**”

This division of the book covers Revelation chapters 2 and 3 and the focus is the seven letters that Jesus wrote to the seven churches located in Asia Minor or the western part of modern-day Turkey.

And I do understand that most people, when they study the book of Revelation, want to get to Revelation chapters 6 through 22 that deal with the wrath of God being poured out upon a Christ rejecting world, the Kingdom Age, and the Eternal state.

And usually many will focus on Revelation chapters 6 through 19 that deal with the wrath of God being poured out leading up to the battle of Armageddon!

But, as I said last time, for us as Christians, these seven letters written to seven Churches in Asia Minor are for us because we will not be here for the Tribulation Period!

Now I am not saying we are not to study the rest of the book of Revelation, we are, and we will!

The reason that these chapters are so important to us is that these seven churches contain conditions that could be applied to us spiritually and practically in our daily lives and to address His Church as a whole throughout history that would be very beneficial to its purity and growth going forward.

That is why we are taking our time going through these letters, focusing on one letter at a time. I do realize that we usually cover a chapter or two in our midweek Bible Study, but again, these chapters are very important for us to go through and dig all we can from them.

And as we do I pray that we would take a look at our own lives, do a heart check to see what we may need to do in our relationship with the Lord! Make no mistake about it, God is always teaching us, showing us how we are to grow in our walk with Him, the key, of course, is are we listening!

If you remember for our last study, I said that these letters can be looked at three different ways and all are important.

*Historically* these churches existed during John's day, they were real churches with real problems or issues, at least five out of the seven had problems!

*Prophetically* or as you study these churches, the way they are arranged, they seem to give us a picture of church history all the way down to the apostate church of the last days.

*Individually* so that we can examine our own lives to see how our walk is doing, as I have said. A very important aspect of this book.

Remember what John wrote in Revelation 1:3, "**Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.**"

There is a built-in blessing for reading, hearing and applying the lessons that God is showing us in this book.

And I believe that is true of every book in the Bible. You can't go wrong by reading, hearing the Word of God and applying it to your lives. These are not just stories to entertain us, they are lessons for us to learn from.

Remember what Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, “**For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.**”

If you are anxious, if you are not patient, if you have lost the peace and comfort of God in your life because of what is going on in your life, Paul is saying that we need to look at what others have gone through in the Bible and learn from them.

Learn from their success and their mistakes and grow in the Lord and as you do, that anxiousness, that impatience, that loss of peace will be replaced with our hope in God, and He will see us through. Again, the blessings of reading, hearing and applying the Word of God to our lives!

Now, as we did when we looked at the church of Ephesus last week, we will look at the seven key principles of this letter.

First of all, the *destination* or the church that is being addressed.

Secondly, the *title* or the *description of Jesus* that Jesus takes out of chapter 1 and is specific to the church He is writing to.

The third point is the *commendation* or praise for the church, the good that it is doing, expect for Laodicea.

The fourth point is the *rebuke* to each of the churches for the wrong they were doing, except for Smyrna and Philadelphia.

The fifth is an *exhortation* to get right, and for Smyrna and Philadelphia, since they received no rebuke, they are called to forge ahead in the work that they are doing.

The sixth point is a *warning* that if they refuse to obey there will be consequences, expect for Smyrna and Philadelphia.

And lastly, the seventh point is a *promise* to those who listen and are obedient to the commands of Jesus.

Last week we looked at the *historical* church, Ephesus. And we saw that they worked hard for the Lord, to the point of exhaustion but they left their first love, Jesus Christ.

They did not lose the Lord or misplace the Lord, but they walked away from the Lord, they left that relationship with Him, something that Jesus desires with us.

Now I am not saying that they were not active in serving the Lord, they were, to the point of exhaustion. But there was that problem!

They had all the motion without the emotion for Jesus and the Lord warned them that if they did not *remember*, *repent* and *repeat*; if they did not fall in love with Jesus all over again, He would remove their witness of Him to the world.

Today we see the vivid reality of a church, of a people that refused to obey. Their light went out!

In other words, God says what He means and means what He says!

*Prophetically* the church of Ephesus represented the first century church, the apostolic church to about 63 A. D.

Thus, as we will see, Smyrna will pick up where the church of Ephesus closed in the Church Age.

Before we get into our study this evening, let me share these words with you from John Stott. He wrote,

Few men of this [past] century have understood better the inevitability of suffering than Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He seems never to have wavered in his Christian antagonism to the Nazi regime, although it meant for him imprisonment, the threat of torture, danger to his own family, and finally death.

He was executed by the direct order of Heinrich Himmler in April 1945, in the Flossenburg concentration camp, only a few days before it was liberated.

It was the fulfillment of what he had always believed and taught: “Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master. Following Christ means *Passio Passiva* suffering because we have to suffer. That is why Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true Church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the Church as the community of those ‘who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel’s sake’. . . Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer.”

- John R. Stott, *Christian Counter Culture*

As much as the church in Ephesus was called the *LOVELESS CHURCH*, we see that the church in Smyrna is the *PERSECUTED CHURCH!*

One more point and then, I promise, we will get to our study.

I find it interesting that the church that is persecuted the most, that suffered the most, has a letter that is only four verses long!

How can that be?

I think it is something we should take to heart. You see, when you are ministering to those who are suffering, you don't need to say a lot. You need to show them that you care for them. You need to be sensitive to them. You need to listen to them. You need to just be there for them. You need to comfort them.

Too often we have all kinds of words to share with them with pious platitudes like, "***Hey bro, remember that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord!***"

As true as that is, that is not being sensitive to what the person is going through. Be careful and think about what you would want to hear if you were in a similar situation!

With that as our introduction, let's begin reading in Revelation chapter 2, starting in verse 8 and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we look at this letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Smyrna.

## **REVELATION 2**

### **VERSE 8**

First of all, let's look at the *destination* of this letter. This letter was written to the church in Smyrna, and specifically to the pastor of the church of Smyrna.

Why the pastor?

Because he was leading the people, he was their shepherd, and he was responsible to represent the things of God to the people.

And we see today what happens when the pastor or leaders are leading people away from the truths of God found in the Word of God, when they add to the Scriptures or take away what the Scriptures are telling us. The people will follow and that is why it is so important that a Bible believing man is overseeing the church!

Let me share with you what has happened as seminaries have taught these leaders the wrong doctrine and they in turn have taught these things to the people in their congregations and the results are staggering.

This survey is from 2020 and we are told,

While evangelicals have historically affirmed the authority of the Bible and salvation by Jesus Christ, trends in the State of Theology survey reveal that many American evangelicals express erroneous views that mirror the broader U.S. population.

Now, 30 percent of evangelicals deny the deity of Jesus Christ (compared to 52 percent of the general U.S. population), believing instead that He was merely a good teacher.

In addition, 65 percent of evangelicals agree with the heretical statement, “Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.”

The confusion illustrated in these results suggests a dire need for Christians to be taught Christology, the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ. . . .

Chris Larson, president and CEO of Ligonier Ministries, said:

“The 2020 State of Theology survey uncovers widespread confusion in the United States about the Bible’s teaching and the reality of who God is. Many have observed the drift among Americans toward relativism, and this survey helps to quantify how this nation is abandoning objective truth altogether. Sadly, just when the church needs to be clear and bold about our triune God, the Scriptures, sin, and salvation, many evangelicals are evidently being influenced more by this cultural drift than by the Word of God. Christians have an opportunity to bring light and comfort to our troubled times by pointing to Jesus Christ and the authority and sufficiency of the Bible. These survey results reveal that there is much work to do. Let us pray for an awakening to our holy God and to what He has revealed about Himself and how we are to live in this world.”

- <https://prn.to/3y2gLjh>

We need to get back to the basics of the Bible and not listen to the words of men but to the Word of God and not only read it but believe it and apply it to our lives so that we can share the hope that God has given to us with the world. We are to share Jesus Christ with them!

Now let me take a few minutes and fill in what Smyrna was all about.

The city of Smyrna was located some 35 miles north of Ephesus, and like Ephesus, it was also a seaport city, located on a gulf of the Aegean Sea.

But, unlike Ephesus, it was blessed with a good harbor.

Make no mistake about it, Smyrna was a beautiful city as Barclay writes, “*Smyrna was an outstandingly beautiful city. It claimed to be the ‘glory of Asia.’*”

Now being a seaport city, it was very rich. Again, according to Barclay, he wrote, *“Smyrna was a great trade city . . . Smyrna stood at the end of the road which served the valley of the river Hermus, and all the trade of that valley flowed into its markets and found an outlet through its harbor. It had a specially rich trade in wines. Smyrna, like Ephesus, was a city of wealth and commercial greatness.”*

But, like the cities all over the world at that time, and I guess we can even say today, this city was filled with pagan worship.

The most famous of all the streets in Smyrna was the *Street of Gold*, which began with the temple of Zeus and ended with the temple of Cybele.

Other temples they had were the temples of Apollo, Hemeseis, Aphrodite, and to Asclepius.

Also, they loved Rome so much that in 195 B. C. they built the first temple to Dea Roma – the goddess of Rome, which was the spiritual symbol for the Roman Empire.

This opened the door to emperor worship, first to the dead emperors of Rome and then to the living. They even had a temple to the emperor Tiberias.

The next step was to demand such worship to prove your political allegiance to Rome and to show your civic pride.

And so, once a year each citizen was required to burn incense on the altar of the godhead of Caesar and say the phrase, *“Caesar is lord!”*

If you refused to worship Caesar in this manner you could become financially bankrupt, left destitute, or you could even be put to death!

Interestingly enough, at least for a time, Judaism was the only religion granted an exception. The reason for that was the stubbornness of Jews to conform and Rome just left them alone.

Now, for a time we see that the Romans viewed Christianity as just an offshoot of Judaism. Think about it. When the church was started it was all Jewish and thus, Rome did not care to come against Christians, who were basically all Jews.

But, over time it became very Gentile and thus, persecution against Christians, because they would not bow the knee to the Caesar's, they refused to call him lord, grew and grew!

And, as I have said, as you read this letter to Smyrna you will see that they are a –  
***PERSECUTED CHURCH!***

Also, unlike Ephesus which eventually became uninhabited, Smyrna, survived several earthquakes and fires and exists today as the Turkish city of Izmir with a population of several hundred thousand. Not only that, but 1/3 of this population are Christians. Their light did not go out like the church in Ephesus's did!

The next point I want to look at deals with the *title* or the *description of Jesus* that is taken from Revelation chapter 1.

We see that Jesus took the description of Himself as, "**the first and the last, who was dead and came to life.**"

Why would Jesus use that description of Himself when He wrote to the church in Smyrna?

Because, like I have said, the church in Smyrna was known as the persecuted church. They suffered at the hands of Rome for their faith in Jesus Christ. They refused to bow the knee to Caesar or any so-called god except the true and living God, Jesus Christ! And thus, they paid a price for their faith in Jesus.

Let's look at this a little closer.

What Jesus is telling this small, persecuted church is that He is the eternal God who was put to death in the flesh but has conquered death and is now encouraging these persecuted believers that death has no power over them.

Remember what Jesus said in John 14:19, **“A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.”**

And in John 11:25-26 we read these words that Jesus spoke to Martha, **“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”**

You see, He spoke words of comfort and of hope and just what this church needed to hear. The all-becoming One, the One who comes to us in our time of need, comes to this church as the One who has conquered death!

Interestingly enough, the name **“Smyrna”** means ***“myrrh”*** and thus, it carries with it the idea of suffering.

You see, myrrh was used in embalming the dead and it would give off a sweet smell.

But, before that sweet smell could be released it had to be crushed, and that is what we see happen with this church. As they were crushed for their faith, the fragrance of Jesus was released!

Think about this. We see that this played out, *historically* speaking, as this church suffered, it was real, and it was costly.

But not only do we see this played out historically, but we also see this *prophetically!*

Keep in mind that in just over 200 years some 5 to 6 million Christians were put to death for their faith in Jesus Christ! And this suffering went on from around 63 A. D. to around 312 A. D.

Why all this suffering?

One of the reasons was that the enemy was trying to put out their light of witness, but, as I have said, they did not succeed. They are still in existence today, called by its Turkish name, Izmir and Christians are still being persecuted for their faith but not by the Romans but by Muslims!

I pray that God will encourage us as we go through this letter and we face persecution in our own country for our faith in Jesus Christ. And, like Smyrna, Jesus is telling us that even death could not hold Him, and it can't hold His people. Shine brightly no matter what!

#### VERSE 9

Notice what Jesus said to this persecuted church that were going through so much. Twice in this verse Jesus tells them, "**I know . . .**"

Have you ever felt that no one knows what you are going through, no one understands the pain you are suffering? I am sure you have; we all have at one time or another and maybe some of you are feeling that way right now.

Let me say this. You are wrong because Jesus knows everything you are going through, He is there with you and that should bring great comfort to you.

Think about it. It is hard to comfort someone when you don't understand what they are going through. You don't understand their pain, their hurt. But Jesus does understand all that we are going through!

But, if I came across someone who has lost their father, I can tell them that I do understand what they are going through as my dad passed away some fifteen years ago or so. I know the pain, the hurt, how you miss them! ***I KNOW!***

And even if no one knew, Jesus does, and, like I have said, we can rest in that because He can comfort us through it all!

Think about it like this as Jesus is speaking to this persecuted church. He is telling them, ***“Please understand that I know, I know all you are going through, the pain, the hurt, the persecution you are facing because I have felt the same. And I have tasted death and it is not the end because I was dead and rose to life again. So if you have lost loved ones due to this persecution, understand that they are alive and as they have rose and lived again, so too will you one day!”***

And over the years, I can't tell you how many times my wife, and my family here at Calvary have given me the hugs of Jesus as He uses all of us to comfort others as well!

And what we are seeing here is the ***commendation*** or praise for this little persecuted church – Jesus knows all they are going through, their poverty, and how they are handling these difficult times.

The Greek word that Jesus uses for **“tribulation”** is THLIPSIS and it speaks of a ***“crushing beneath a weight.”***

This was not a group of people calling them ***“Bible thumpers!”*** Or maybe ***“Holy rollers!”*** Or whatever!

The persecution that came against them from the Romans was brutal. They would boil them in oil, feed them to the lions, burn them at the stake, behead them, and-so-on. It was a crushing weight upon this church.

Jesus said in John 15:18-20, **“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.’”**

We should not be surprised that the world doesn’t like us, they don’t like what we stand for. You see, if we are standing up for Jesus then the light of Christ will expose their sin, their darkness and many times they will try to put it out, extinguish it so their sin is not seen!

Tragically, what the church is trying to do now is fit in with the world and to do that they must compromise their faith! The church in Smyrna, this persecuted church did not compromise their faith!

Foxe’s Book Of Martyr’s speaks of Polycarp who was a disciple of the apostle John and the Bishop or the senior pastor of the church in Smyrna. He was their pastor for some 50 years!

And the Proconsul gave Polycarp the choice of cursing the name of Jesus and making a sacrifice unto Caesar, to call Caesar **“Lord!”** or death.

Polycarp responded by saying, ***“Eighty and six years I have served Him and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”***

Then they threatened to burn him alive, and he once again responded by saying, ***“You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.”***

And on February 23, 155 A. D., at the age of around 86, they brought him to the stake to be tied, but he refused the ropes. He was willing to stand in the flames for Christ.

And as they lit the fire, the fire encircled Polycarp but it did not touch him. And out of frustration the executioner took a spear and thrust it into the chest of Polycarp, puncturing his heart, and killing him. And the blood that flowed out of him put out the flames!

Can you imagine belonging to that church! That was their pastor who was just put to death for his faith in Christ!

And that just tells me the only people gathering together to worship the Lord were true believers, no unbeliever or fence sitter would be willing to go through all this if they did not believe, if their faith was not real!

Also, we see the persecution in India. We are told,

The persecution of Christians in India is on the rise with a report of one believer being murdered for his faith by Hindu radicals in his own village.

According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), Kande Mudu, 27, was attacked and murdered by a group of armed men in the Khunti district of India’s Jharkhand state on June 7.

He had converted to Christianity four years ago. Mudu’s family were the only Christians living in their village. They had faced threats to their lives and had survived one violent attack on their home two years ago.

Mudu was killed when the mob showed up at his house, broke down the front door, and attacked him with weapons. During the brutal attack, his throat was cut.

Bindu Mudu, Kande's wife, told CSW, ***"After hearing the men at the front door, my husband knew that our lives were in danger and that the men had bad intentions."***

Mudu then reportedly told his wife, He might be killed but assured her to ***"remain strong and never to give up her faith in Jesus even if they killed him."***

- Source Unknown

Make no mistake about it, the blood of the martyrs has always been the seed of the Church. When things are going well the church tends to be fat and lazy. But with persecution, the church grows strong!

Remember what Jesus said in John 16:33, **"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."**

And a verse we don't think applies to us here in America, but it does, is what Paul said in II Timothy 3:12, **"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."**

And please keep in mind that this tribulation is not the Great Tribulation, not at all. You see, this persecution that they were facing was from the world. The events coming upon a Christ rejecting world in the Great Tribulation Period is the wrath of God that is being poured out. And God has not appointed us to wrath, so the church will not be here when the Tribulation Period begins, we will be Raptured unto the Lord!

And for the church in Smyrna, they not only faced this crushing tribulation, but they were also poor.

And folks, that Greek word that is used for “**poverty**” is PTOCHEIA, and it speaks of *“abject poverty.”*

Let me explain it like this so that you understand this word.

Trench makes a comparison of two Greek words that are used for poverty. He said, *“The penes has nothing superfluous, the ptochos nothing at all.”*

Jesus is saying that these persecuted believers had absolutely nothing at all. They were destitute!

How did that happen?

Very simply, when they came to Christ, they lost everything, even their jobs. And Rome had this little incentive program for turning Christians in. If you turned a Christian in, you would be able to keep 10% of what they had in their possession when they were arrested!

Not only that, but there were these guilds, what we call today Trade Unions, and they had their own patron god or goddess in the Greek pantheon that they worshipped, that they relied upon for good fortune.

And thus, they would begin every day pledging their allegiance to this particular deity.

But, of course, the Christian could not do that and thus, they could not be a member of that guild which meant that they could not work. Again, they had absolutely nothing because they could not even work!

Not only did they stand-up for their faith against Rome, but from those who called themselves Jews.

In fact, Jesus goes as far as saying that they are of the **“synagogue of Satan.”**

Why would He do that?

Because these Jews did not have a relationship with Jesus, and they were persecuting those who did. Thus, if they were not working for the Lord, they were working against Him, which means they were working for the Devil!

And this hostile community of Jews in Smyrna were only Jews genealogically because Paul tells us a true Jew is one who trust in God and believes in Jesus Christ. (Philippians 3:3)

Paul, in Romans 2:28-29 tells us, **“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”**

You see, not a natural birth are they Jews, but by a spiritual birth, by being born again in Christ!

Now, if we were to look at this small, beaten up group of Christians today, without any programs, youth group, this program and that program, many would say they lacked faith in the power of God. Many would argue God was not using them.

It is as one faith teacher put it when he said, ***“Not only is worrying a sin but being poor is a sin when God promises prosperity!”***

Was this church in Smyrna unaware of those promises? Maybe this church lacked the faith to be prosperous? No, this faith teacher is wrong with his theology!

And if you doubt that, then look at what Jesus says of this church. Jesus calls this church rich when it had absolutely nothing!

How can that be?

Because He does not look at the material poverty but the spiritual riches that this church has!

It is not that poverty made them spiritual as some may feel, but in their material poverty they trusted in the Lord, they did not compromise their faith!

Compare the church in Smyrna that has nothing material with the church of Laodicea that has everything material and Jesus saw their self-sufficient attitude as a serious problem.

In Revelation 3:17 we are told, **“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”**

God sees things far differently than man; He looks at the heart to see if what is flowing from their lives comes from loving Him or loving something else!

And notice that Jesus had no *rebuke* for this persecuted church; they remained faithful to the Lord in spite of the crushing weight of persecution that was upon them.

And folks, the church at Smyrna is a beautiful example of the spiritual richness of faithful suffering churches throughout history!

And listen to what Jesus tells them next!

#### VERSE 10

As you start to read this verse you may be thinking, ***“Wow, how wonderful that Jesus is telling them not to fear. He is so loving and caring.”***

And then you read why they were not to fear and all I can say is ***“WOW!”***

They are going to suffer, be thrown into prison, some will be martyred for their faith! No wonder Jesus said, ***“Do not fear any of those things . . .”***

And what we see here is the *exhortation* as Jesus tells these persecuted believers, **“Do not fear”** or literally it can be translated, ***“Stop being afraid.”***

You see, we all struggle with fear at times in what we are going through because we take our eyes off the Lord and place them on the situation.

Remember after Moses died as he led the children of Israel for 40 years in the wilderness.

Now Joshua was taking over, he was going to lead the children of Israel into the Promise Land, something Moses didn't do because of their rebellion against the Lord and the failure of Moses to represent the Lord correctly!

Do you think Joshua was a little nervous? Do you think he was afraid?

Now you may be thinking, *“How could he be, he is a man of God? In fact, God called him to lead the children of Israel into the Promise Land, so this should be easy, right?”*

Yes, God did call Joshua to do this, but he too was a man who needed to get refocused.

And you will see that Joshua was not some kind of robot, but he was human and thus, fear was part of his life as it is part of our life. Because of that the Lord tells him in Joshua 1:1-9, **“After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying: ‘Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them - the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant**

**commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”**

The Lord is trying to encourage Joshua, to tell him not to be afraid, to focus on the Lord and His Word instead of the situation he now faces.

What a great lesson for us to learn and apply to our lives, that no matter what we are going through, the Lord is with us and if He has called us, He will see us through! That is what He was saying to these persecuted Christians in Smyrna!

What I also want you to notice here in Revelation is that Jesus does not tell this group of persecuted Christians to flee or hide or even move to another location. I actually heard a Christian teacher, after these last elections, that Christians should move to Republican controlled states! I couldn't believe that kind of mentality. It is not right, not at all and I stopped getting his publications.

Also, He doesn't tell them to water down what they say, what they believe, to compromise their faith so the persecution will stop.

But He does tell them to endure through these times because this persecution was a test of their faith in Christ.

Remember what Job said in Job 23:10, **“But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.”**

God tests our faith not to show Him, He knows all. But to show us what is in our heart so that we may grow.

What is going to get in your way of serving Him?

Now, what do these “**ten days**” mean that Jesus is speaking of here?

There are a few ideas out there.

Some feel it speaks of the ten Roman Emperors and their reign of terror.

“The first under Nero, A. D. 54; the second under Domitian, A. D. 81; the third under Trajan, A. D. 98; the fourth under Adrian [Hadrian], A. D. 117; the fifth under Septimus Severus, A. D. 193; the sixth under Maximin, A. D. 235; the seventh under Decius, A. D. 249; the eighth under Valerian, A. D. 254; the ninth under Aurelian, A. D. 270; the tenth under Diocletian, A. D. 284.” (White, cited in Walvoord).

I personally don’t see that these 10 waves of Roman persecution really fit here; I don’t think that is the point that Jesus is making here.

You see, when John wrote Revelation and thus, these letters that Jesus wrote to these churches, Nero was long gone and yet, Jesus did not say that any of these had passed yet, so it was a future time, when John was writing this book!

I think the point that Jesus is making here is that this persecution was not going to last forever for them, that it would end.

In Genesis 24:55 we are told, “**But her brother and her mother said, ‘Let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least ten; after that she may go.’**”

Also, in Daniel 1:12 we are told, “**Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.**”

So I think the point that Jesus is making is that this persecution would not last forever, which had to be encouraging for this church, that persecution would be limited, as I have said. And that is true for us, whatever comes upon us will be short-lived when compared with eternity!

Now in saying that we also have to understand that the end point may mean death for the believer also!

Also, I want you to see who is behind this persecution – Satan!

If that is true, and it is, why don't they just cast him out, rebuke him so these attacks would stop?

Because God was allowing this persecution against them to help them to grow.

Satan wanted to destroy them; the Lord wanted to strengthen them.

Remember what Paul said in I Corinthians 10:13, **“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”**

God does not want us to fail, He does not want us to fall, but the Devil does. Thus, keep your eyes upon the Lord; trust in Him as you are going through these times because it is the Lord who will lift you up!

And Jesus closes this verse out by saying, **“... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**

Notice, there is no warning to this persecuted church, just a promise and the promise is that the victory may come in death!

The reward is a crown.

There are two Greek words for crown; one is **DIADEMA**, which is a royal crown, the crown of a king. That is not the word that Jesus uses here.

He uses the Greek word **STEPHANOS** for crown, the victors crown. This was the crown that was given to the victor at the Olympic-like games that some of the people in Smyrna were involved in. But the crown that Jesus gives us will not perish because it is eternal! Thus, true Christians will endure till the end, they will fight the good fight, they will not give up because their victory is in Christ.

You see, the crown of genuine saving faith is eternal life, and perseverance proves the genuineness of their faith as they endure suffering.

The Scriptures teach that true Christians will persevere.

There really is no **WARNING** given to this church, but a **PROMISE** is given to them.

The promise is this, victory may come in death, as I have said. Thus, don't give up. Fight the good fight. If you do, you will obtain the crown of life.

Let me share with you some other crowns that are spoken of in the Scriptures. They are,

**A CROWN FOR RIGHTEOUS LIVING - II TIMOTHY 4:8.**

**A CROWN FOR FAITHFUL PASTORS - I PETER 5:4.**

**A CROWN OF GOLD SPEAKING OF OUR REDEMPTION - REVELATION 4:4.**

**A CROWN OF REJOICING - I THESSALONIANS 2:19.**

**AN INCORRUPTIBLE CROWN - I CORINTHIANS 9:25.**

And listen to how Jesus concludes this letter to this persecuted church in Smyrna.

VERSE 11

Like in all these letters that Jesus wrote, He tells them and us, **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches . . .”**

In other words, we are to be spiritually open to what God is saying to us, we need to hear and obey what the Spirit of God is saying. We need to apply these things to our lives.

It is as H. W. Beecher wrote, *“The churches of the land are sprinkled all over with bald-headed old sinners whose hair has been worn off by the constant friction of countless sermons that have been aimed at them and glanced off and hit the man in the pew behind.”*

Funny, but I wonder how true that is!

We also see here the second *promise* Jesus gave to this persecuted church, you don't have to fear the second death, it will have no power over you!

What is this second death?

In Revelation chapter 20 we are told that it is the final judgment, when God will cast all those who have rejected Him into the Lake of Fire, and this is the second death.

It is at the Great White Throne Judgment that all unbelievers' works will be judged, and the degree of punishment will be issued out.

But they go to the Lake of Fire for only one reason, their rejection of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior!

In John 16:8-9 Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit's work in the world, and He tells us, **“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me.”**

You see, their sin is rejecting Jesus, that is what sends them to the Lake of Fire and then the degree of punishment is their works in their life!

It is as D. L. Moody once said, ***“He who is born once will die twice, he who is born twice will die once!”***

The first death is physical and all who are born will die.

But the second death is that of the soul and spirit being cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm does not die nor is the fire quenched!

Not annihilation but an eternity apart from Christ.

But if you are born again in Christ, if Jesus is your Lord and Savior, you are born twice and you will only die once, physical death and then to be absent from the body you will be present with the Lord!

Folks, today more Christians are persecuted for their faith all over the world than at any other time of church history. More Christians have been put to death for their faith in Jesus Christ than at any time in church history. The days of Martyrs is not past and thus, pray for our brothers and sisters who are facing this persecution. And I think that this persecution will grow as we get closer to the Tribulation Period!

As you read this letter, you will find that there is no condemnation for this church. No negative comments for them. No warnings to them. This persecuted church received only encouragement.

We as Christians must be faithful to the end. Yes, it isn't easy, but we are not out there alone. The Lord is with us in all we face as well as our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Keep in mind that persecution didn't hurt this church, but it did purify it and that truly is what persecution does.

G. Campbell Morgan rightly said, *“That the church of Christ persecuted has been the church of Christ pure. The Church of Christ patronized has always been the church of Christ impure.”*

And we will see that more as we read on next time and we look at the church of Pergamos. You see, as the church came out of the catacombs and into the government they were weakened and became impure!

May we listen to the words of Jesus and stand strong in the faith, even to the very end!

Let me give you this example of this godly woman. Corrie Ten Boom said that she was in a Russian church when soldiers came bursting in and told the people they had five minutes to renounce Christ and leave or they would all be shot.

Many of the people got up and left the church, and as the last person left, as the five minutes were over, the soldiers closed the door and said to the people who remained that they too were Christians and they wanted to make sure that only Christians were in the church, it was that dangerous to be a Christian, even for these soldiers!

Let me leave you this evening with these words from Paul as he sat in prison for his faith in Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 1:19-24 we are told, **“For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”**

May you be able to echo Paul’s words, not because they may impress people, but because it is true in your life.

That God is the focus, and your faith is real.

If it is, you too will be able to say, ***“FOR TO ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN!”***