

Revelation 2:8-11 – Study 7
 Church in Smyrna
 Satanic Opposition

Turn in your Bibles once again to the 2nd chapter of the Book of Revelation.

- We are making our way through the book of Revelation, verse by verse
 - And currently find ourselves in a study of the 7 churches listed in chapters 2 and 3
- These 7 churches were historical churches during the time of the Apostle John
 - And though the churches listed were real churches that existed in real cities with real, 1st century Christians gathering
 - The 7 churches also hold symbolic or emblematic meanings as well
- We noted them last week, but as way of reminder
 - As I just mentioned, these are Literal Churches – real cities; real churches; real people; real problems
 - The churches are also considered views of church history – a picture of the complete church age
 - each church representing a different stages, in chronological order, of church history over the last 2000 years
 - The Church of Ephesus representing the Apostolic Church
 - The church of Smyrna here representing the church under the Caesar's
 - The church of Pergmos representing the church under Constantine
 - And so forth..(see bulletin stuffer)
 - The churches are also seen as kind of churches (types of churches)
 - Meaning that at any time, these types of churches are in existence
 - There will always be churches that are Philadelphian who love well
 - Or like Pergamos church that compromise Christ
 - Ephesian churches that are great with doctrine and discernment, but lack love....and so on
 - This view has very practical application for the church as a whole

- Because it teaches us a lot about church life
 - Almost every problem or difficulty or challenge facing the churches today are listed in these 7 letters
- Lastly, these churches represent kinds of believers
 - Our own personal walks are seen here in these 7 letters
 - And the letters apply to us personally as believers
 - Which is why each letter ends with the same admonition:
 - He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”

Now, last week we took a look at the church in Ephesus

- This was the church, that by all outward appearances, would be a great church
 - They were doctrinally sound; they were healthy in their discernment
 - able to recognize evil by testing all things and all teachers
 - They were strong being able to tell what was of the Lord and what was not
 - They had a strong stance of truth and integrity of their infrastructure
 - But it all amounted to nothing the eyes of Jesus
 - because they were missing the first and most important aspect of the Christian life
 - They missed prioritize love.
 - Their love for the Lord didn't override their love for hating evil

This morning we are going to be looking at the 2nd letter written to the church of Smyrna

- And, broadly speaking, we will be tackling the church in three main ways
 - First I want to look at the city itself
 - Second, look at a little bit of its history
 - And then we will move into a verse by verse breakdown
 - Looking at the city and the history will really bring the verse by verse breakdown to life
- 8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of

those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. 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 ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 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.””

The city of Smyrna (MAP of Smyrna) is located 35-40 miles North of the first church – Ephesus

- It was a seaport city that was known for its beauty and wealth
 - It was sometimes called “the Ornament of Asia,” “the Crown of Asia,” or sometimes “the Flower of Asia”
 - Today this city is known as **Izmir** as is still as lovely and vibrant with over 200k people living there
- As a city, it was positioned very well (show screen of Smyrna today)
 - It sat at the end of long road that journeyed Westward across Lydia and Phrygia
 - Kind of like saying Seattle is situated at the end of the only road that stretched across Washington and Idaho
 - Not exactly, but it gives a visual
- In relation to the sea on it’s West side,
 - it stood at the end of a long arm of the sea which ended in a small land-locked harbor in the very heart of the city making it one of the safest harbors.
 - Not only was it well defended, it also controlled the trade of the rich Hermus Valley.
 - One author tells that “The city itself began at the harbor and traversed the narrow foothills. Behind the city rose a hill covered with temples and noble buildings which encircled a hill named the Pagos (Crown of Smyrna pic), but the hill was also called the “the Crown of Smyrna” because of the way the buildings formed a crown around the hill.” (Keathley)

The history of Smyrna is very interesting and knowing some of it gives good insight to why Christ wrote the type of letter He did to this church *(a thank you to Keathley for his historical work)*

- The city had been a Greek colony as far back as 1000BC, but was invaded and destroyed by the Lydeans in 600BC

- There it lay dead for roughly 400 years until 200BC when it had been brought back to life
 - And rebuilt with broad, straight, paved roads
 - The city had died and was brought back to life
 - This is probably why Jesus refers to Himself in verse as He who “who was dead, and came to life”.
- But there were other significant facts about Smyrna.
 - The city was very loyal to Rome. They worshipped Rome
 - In fact, in 26AD, 11 Roman cities competed for a chance to build a temple to the then Roman Emperor Tiberius (some might recognize that name from Star Trek)
 - Smyrna won the competition and built the temple
 - So great was Smyrna’s devotion to Rome that the great Roman philosopher Cicero called it,
 - “one of our most faithful and our most ancient allies.”
 - It was also the first city in the world to erect a temple to the goddess Roma and to the spirit of Rome.
 - Smyrna’s faithfulness and worship of Rome was famous in the ancient world.
 - So again, we see at the end of verse 10 Jesus says to the church, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”
- Other interesting facts: Smyrna was civically vain. They had community vanity – an overly prideful view of their city
 - The people exalted Smyrna
 - Which gives us insight into why Jesus introduced Himself as “the first and the last”
 - As one said “In comparison with His glory, all earthly distinctions are pure emptiness and strife for being first in something pales into insignificance in view of His eternal glories.
- The last historically significant detail that’s good to know concerns the Jews that were there.
 - There were many Jews there and they were very influential
 - And tried everything they could to hurt the church in Smyrna – spreading lies, rumors, murders and so on
 - Again, we see the Lord Jesus speak about this in verses 9 and 10

I hope you can see how important this historical backdrop is to the letter Jesus writes to the church.

- It gives a good canvass to why Jesus introduced Himself the way He did and why He spoke and addressed the things He did
 - So with that backdrop, let's move to a verse by verse study beginning in verse 8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:
- Like all the letters to the churches, this letter is addressed to the church in a specific city
 - and then Christ introduces Himself in a very specific way to that particular church

Couple brief things I'd like to say about the opening address

- First, notice he addresses the letter to the "angel" of the church
 - Now, we talked a bit about this last week giving a few views as to who the "angels" are
 - But what I find interesting, is if we contend that these angels are in fact the pastors or leader within each church (as most commentators do)
 - The name of the pastor of this church was a man by the name of Polycarp (ever heard of him?)
 - The Apostle John had two more well known disciples: Ignatius and Polycarp
 - Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch and Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna
- When Polycarp was 90 year old or so, Caesar sent his soldier after this old man to arrest and kill him
 - Because he refused to worship Rome and the Emperor
 - When the soldier showed up at his home, Polycarp welcomed them, fixed them a meal
 - And then asked for one hour to pray
 - Taken aback by this man's composure and hospitality, the allowed this
- When he had finished praying they ceased him and brought him to the city
 - It's said that a voice from heaven spoke as the guards were taking him saying "be strong Polycarp and play the man"
- Before the tribunal and the crowd in a large amphitheater type setting
 - He was commanded to recant his faith in Jesus and deny Christ

- It's the resin that comes from the tree (show resin pic) and is harvested (show resin chunks)
 - Though it had a bitter taste, the resin of the tree was used in making perfume (Ps. 45:8), was one of the ingredients used in the anointing oil of the priests (Ex. 30:23), and in the embalming of the dead (John 19:39)
- We see it as one of the gifts given to him by the magi a couple years after his birth
 - And also see it offered to Jesus on the cross since it had a kind of narcotic usage in the day
 - And of course we see Myrrh used in the embalming of Jesus as well

The name of the city was Smyrna, which is Ionic Greek for Myrrh and so the city was named after its great export

- One very interesting property about this burial spice, was that it was very fragrant
 - But the aromatics of the resin were released only after it was crushed
 - It needed to be crushed to give off it's sweet aroma
- Such an appropriate name for the church since it was being crushed through persecution
 - And many were martyred for their faith
 - In fact, in one day 1500 were martyred at once and later 800 more
- But, Just as we saw with Polycarp, the more they were persecuted,
 - The more they were crushed, the more they gave off the sweet fragrance of Christ!
 - Smyrna had a witness that would never be extinguished and in fact, only grew in strength through their persecution

What a great witness to both you and me as we face trials and difficulties in our Christian walk

- When we feel crushed, are we becoming defeated
 - Or is it the very fuel propelling us to become more dedicated to Jesus
 - When we are crushed, do we give off the sweet smelling aroma of Jesus
 - Or maybe the stinky stench of the flesh?

- 2 Cor. 2: **14** Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. **15** For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. **16** To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life”
 - Eph 5: **2** And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma”:
 - Phil 4: **18** Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. **19** And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. **20** Now to our God and Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Jesus continues in His letter to Smyrna in verse 9 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.”

- I think the believers in Smyrna may have anticipated their letter from Jesus more than the others
 - Because they were desperate to hear from God
 - Which is what persecution does, doesn’t it
 - It forces us to run to Him and rely on Him
 - To spend time with Him; to need Him above everything else
- When they received this letter and read the words “I know....”
 - I know what’s going on. I know what you’re going through. I see it. I haven’t abandoned you”
 - This must have been like Myrrh to them as well – a sweet aroma of love from the Savior
- I know your tribulation and I know your poverty
 - Jesus knows their tribulation
 - This word <thlipsis> in the Greek means “crushing pressure”. They are crushing pressures from outside – not from within
 - To word is often used of the grinding of wheat into flour by the grinding millstone
 - Or of pressure which squeezes juice out of the grapes

- The point is that the believers in this church were going through it.
- And not only the tribulations, but the poverty
 - There are a few words for poor in the NT and this is the hardest of them
 - It literally means “**abject poverty**”
 - It mean they had nothing and were reduced to beggary to survive
- “The Trade Unions [guilds] were organized around pagan gods and their temples - the people would have had no problem with Christianity if the Christians would have added a statue of Jesus to the Pantheon as one more god.
 - It was the refusal of the believers to do this that separated them from their culture
 - and marked them as anti- social and destructive
 - bringing job discrimination and persecution.
- Also, as we noted earlier, Smyrna was the center of Caesar worship.
 - It was the law that every subject of the Empire was forced to take a pinch of incense and burn it in the temple dedicated to the Emperor.
 - He had to confess, in the burning of that little pinch of incense, that Caesar was lord.
 - The worship was not a test of his orthodoxy; but rather it was a test of his political loyalty.
 - And after he burned the incense and said that Caesar is lord, he could go his way and worship any god and goddess he pleased.
- But this was the one thing a Christian would not do.
 - And thus they were viewed as disloyal traitors to the state, and therefore not afforded work either
 - Their unwavering devotion to Jesus created crushing pressures and abject poverty for the church
 - And Jesus is telling them...”I know”

I am reminded of the grace of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ

- 2 Cor. 8: 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”
 - This is what Jesus reminds them of when he says “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)”

- Eph. 3: **8** Paul says “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,”
 - 2 Cor 6: **10** as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”
 - Matthew 6:19-21 - **19** “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- This is something I am trying to fully attain. Something I think we all struggle with
 - And that is the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus in our walks
 - True wealth is measured in spiritual terms – not materially
 - We are pilgrims on our way home. In this life we are just passing through

I wonder, American saints, if we were to suffer as our brothers and sisters are in the Middle East right now

- If we would survive. Would we, like many Christians sadly did in John’s day,
 - Would we recant our faith in Christ to save our own lives?
 - Or we would be Polycarp and look to the eternal
 - Would we with Stephen **55** “being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, **56** and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”
 - **59** “And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” **60** Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Jesus knew their tribulation and their poverty, and, the end of verse 9 “and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan”

- The first century Jews were the instigators of many persecutions against the church
 - And they were accusing the saint of all kinds of weird things
 - For example: The Christians celebrated communion and spoke of partaking of the body and blood of Jesus.
 - And so the Jews told Rome that Christians were cannibals!
- Christians talked often about being members one of another and of loving one another,
 - and so they were accused of sexual orgies.
 - Another oddity was that the Christians were actually accused of being atheists
 - Since the Christians rejected belief in the pantheon of gods and refused to visit the pagan temples
 - They were accused of not believing in god all together and therefore labeled “atheists”

So, to discredit their testimony, there was a constant smear campaign going on and lies were being told; they were being slandered

- But Jesus rightfully calls out the instigators and identifies them as false “Jews”.
 - When Jesus says that they are calling themselves Jews but are really not
 - He’s not talking about blood or lineage
 - He’s talking spiritually; a true Jew is a Jew of the heart –not of the flesh
- This is what Paul is driving at in Romans 2: **28** “For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; **29** 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.”
 - These blasphemers whom Jesus calls false Jews rejected their Messiah and refused to be circumcised in the heart
 - Thinking that their fleshly mutilation was sufficient in salvation

But Jesus says that they aren’t Jews at all, but are in fact, a synagogue of Satan.

- That’s their true connection. Not to God, but to Satan
 - This is similar to what Jesus told the group of Jews in the 8th chapter of John when He called them children of the devil.

- Physically, they were Jews - the blood descendants of Abraham.
 - But spiritually they were of their father the devil.
 - They were the devil's tool as he sought to stamp-out the testimony of Jesus Christ.
- I think there are some in the churches throughout the world that are like this
 - Saying they are Christians but denying the Messiah
 - And what comes from them blaspheme the Lord and is used of Satan to work against the true believers
 - Much of the liberal churches – those that deny the word of God
 - And deny Jesus is God –would fall under this category

I think at this point, the church in Smyrna was starting to feel a bit of relief. Become a bit comforted and consoled by the words of Jesus.

- “He knows! Praise God. He sees what’s going on! Praise Yeshua!
 - He’s going to do something about it! All these years of suffering are coming to and end!!!”
 - I guess for some this might be true...verse 10
 - 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 ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Notice the progression here:

- What you are about to suffer
 - About to throw you into prison
 - You will be tested and will have tribulation
 - Even death is at the door
 - I wonder if they saw this coming from Jesus
- There is much that is coming there way,
 - but notice Jesus makes it clear that there is a divinely appointed duration and limit to their suffering.
 - “You will suffer 10 days”
- Now I realize there are many differing views on what Jesus meant by 10 days

- But the point I want us to see here is that Jesus gives a limit; He tells the it will be over soon

Whatever you're going through today, will be over one day.

- It may not be this side of eternity, but when we get home in glory
 - It will!
- And Jesus promises that in verse 11 "Look at what he says: 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."
 - Of course Jesus tells the church in Smyrna that if they overcome
 - They will not be hurt by the second death
 - And that promise is to all that have an ear!
- What we face here at now will stay here and now
 - All the suffering; all the pain; all the slandering; all the trials
 - It will be the only suffering we will face
 - And when we pass from this life to the next,
 - We have the promise that what awaits us is Jesus; not judgment

Notice here too in verse 10, the purpose of their suffering – "that you may be tested"

- 2 Tim 3:12 Paul tells young pastor Timothy:
 - **12** Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"
 - It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when
- There's a story about the great evangelist, John Wesley, who one day was riding on his horse through some open fields.
 - As he was riding, he was talking to the Lord, and he said, "**Lord have I backslidden? Its been two weeks since I've been persecuted**"
 - (Note that he saw a direct connection between the quality of his walk and the absence of persecution.)
- He got down off of his horse to pray and to seek God for whether or not something was wrong in his heart between him and the Lord,
 - since there was this absence of persecution in his life.
 - As he was praying, there was a farmer behind a hedge who recognized him as Wesley the Evangelist
 - and he picked up a stone and threw it at him.
 - **Wesley said, "Thank you Lord."**

Suffering can be testings from God.

- And it seems that sometimes God even allows Satan to accomplish His work in you
 - Notice that Jesus says here that “the devil will throw you into prison that you may be tested”
 - I’m not saying all trials are from the devil
 - Certainly man’s sin creates his own trials. We reap what we sew
 - But God will allow Satan to do a work just to accomplish God’s higher work within us

But testing has its purpose. Suffering is often designed for a purpose. It’s not random; it’s purposeful

- First, sufferings **proves our love for the Lord**. It reveals our the reality of our relationship
 - Not to Him; but to US
- Suffering also **provides compassion for us**
 - How many things have we gone through ourselves only to find that later we can love others through the same or similar thing
 - ME and Drugs / Chrones
 - The Lord wants to use us in each others lives – so that we are ministering that comfort to one another
 - 2 Cor. 1:” 3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God
- Third, suffering provides us an **opportunity to present God’s power and provision to the rest of the world**
 - “The way you and I handle our big and little trials makes the world pause in its frantic, headlong pursuits. Our godly response to those obstacles and perplexities in our lives literally kicks the psychological crutches right out from under the skeptic. The unbeliever can no longer refuse to face the reality of our faith.” — Joni Eareckson Tada
- Last, suffering puts us in the **position to see and experience the grace of God**
 - He *wants* us to suffer so that we might lean more upon Him and seek Him as our refuge and hope.
 - In this we are satisfied, and He is glorified.

- As we find our contentment in Him alone, especially in suffering, God becomes a greater treasure to us. He does not *want* us to suffer except insofar as it is used by Him for our joy which He desperately *wants*.

The Church of Smyrna