

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA  
Message 6  
Words: 6029  
Scripture: Revelation 2:8-11

INTRO: We are in the letter to the church at Smyrna. Smyrna is the counselee in this letter. The counselor is the One described as the First and the Last, which is Almighty God; and He is described as the One who was dead and came to life, and that is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who is also the Almighty or Jehovah God.

This description will have been a great comfort to this church that was suffering tribulation and would yet suffer great persecution. Having been raised in a very ungodly society, these believers of Smyrna had become a very godly people. Without question they lived holy lives in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. This righteous life, included in what the Lord said when He said He knew their works, had been very costly to them. And now they are suffering tribulation, that is various kinds of trouble.

I expect from what is revealed it will have affected their employment and livelihood for it is said they were poor. Not only were they poor, but they were beggarly poor. You see this word tribulation, *thlipsis*, has the idea of pressure. Many people who claim to be Christians will only bear so much pressure, and then they give in.

Turn to Hebrews 10. The book of Hebrews was written, as it would quite obviously appear, to Hebrew Christians, that is Jews who had become Christians. And now after some years of tough going their hands were hanging down and their knees were crooked. And the writer, who I think was Paul said:

*32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:*

*33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;*

*34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.*

35 *Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.*

Christianity may seem wonderful at first, but sooner or later reality sets in and maybe trouble or persecution too. Here is what Jesus prophesied in Matthew 13:20-21 of the Church age in the parable of the four soils:

20 *"But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;*

21 *"yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.*

We will yet learn why they experienced this pressure from the Lord's perspective.

Well, we left off last message in the middle of the Lord's commendation of this church. He said:

2:9 *I know your works, tribulation but we did not look at the words, and poverty (but you are rich);*

We will pick up now at those words:

### 3) The commendation (2:9)

We continue then in the Lord's commendation of this church in verse 9. We left off by looking at the word tribulation. But the Lord adds another words to their works and tribulation. He says:

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.*

The Lord said He knew their poverty. Riches and poverty do two very contrasting things to people. The reason for their poverty seems to be connected to their faith. Jesus said, "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty..." It seems most likely to me that their works produced

tribulation. It would seem most probable that, having come out of a very ungodly society, and having turned to Christ, they became godly and lived according to their newfound faith. This in turn caused tribulation, such as produced, among other things, poverty.

Now the word for 'poor' here is *ptochia*. There was another word that could have been used which is *penia*. We get our word *penury* from this word. According to Barclay, a *penia* person is one who has to work for a living with his own hands. A *ptochia* person is one who, according to Barclay, is in absolute poverty and complete destitution.

Wim Malgo says, "Their poverty must have been very great, because here the Greek word 'Ptocheia' is used. This word was used, for instance, when a person would stoop down and beg for something. Such a miserable description do we find of the church of Smyrna!" (71). Their poverty was real. And may I remind us here of James 2:5 which uses this word and says this: *Listen, my beloved brethren: 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?* And later he says in 5:1-3:

*1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!*

*2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.*

*3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.*

Now the newfound faith of the believers in Smyrna not only flew in the face of ungodly non-Jews, but of the Jews, who claimed to know the Lord God as well. Barclay says it was illegal to be a Christian. But not only were they Christians, but because the Lord commends their works, it would

seem clear that they were a light and a testimony in a dark place, morally. Their lives set up a standard. And it seems to me that these tribulations may have had to do with such things as being denied work, or people would not buy from them, or they robbed them and the law turned a blind eye etc...

They had become, like Paul wrote of himself in 1 Corinthians 4:12-13. He said:

*12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure;*

*13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.*

The offscouring is that which you wipe off. It is as we would say *det aufweshzul*. So you have cleaned some chickens or fish, and now you wipe off the table when you are done, and the stuff you wipe off is the offscouring. I am afraid very few Christians live godly enough life to become the offscouring. Take a stand against sin, and you will soon learn what the offscouring of the believer is, never mind of the world. Some of you know what it is to be made the filth of the world, the offscouring of things.

So they were poor, physically poor. Smyrna was a rich enough city, but because of their testimony they were poor. Wim Malgo, in his commentary on Revelation writes, "The real reason for the fact that the Church in Smyrna was poor must have been the testimony of Jesus, because in this large, rich city the believers could have established themselves and lived comfortably. But apparently they were prepared to sacrifice their position in society as a consequence of their discipleship in following Jesus. Obviously, in this case, it required absolute self-denial. And that was the most important point. Where are those today who will accept social and economic disadvantages for

the sake of Jesus. Unfortunately, it is too often the opposite. Christians of today are determined to be on par with today's society on all levels including luxury and comfort. In our Christianized countries we do not suffer as the poor any longer. But the desiring of economic and earthly riches always results in spiritual poorness. In the Western industrial world, we are all well off without suffering hunger and persecution" (70).

But notice now what our text says next:

*(but you are rich);*

What an amazing statement!!! How can this be? The Lord says, you are as poor as beggars or paupers, but you are rich! Well, their poverty is physical but the riches are spiritual! Is it possible to be physically rich and spiritually poor? It is more than possible, it is most often probable.

Now let me ask you, are we rich or poor? How do you determine who is rich and who is poor? Barclay says the Greeks defined the rich and the poor like this: The poor, *penia*, not *ptochia*, were those who had to work for a living with their hands. The rich did not need to work for a living.

Now the name Smyrna means bitter. It comes from the word *myrrh*. Walvoord makes some interesting points on *myrrh*. Bitter *myrrh* was used to make, anyone know what? Perfume! It was used to embalm people. It helped cover the stench of dead bodies, one of the most potent of all stenches. It was used as holy anointing oil in the OT tabernacle. Psalm 45:8, speaking of the heavenly bridegroom says, *All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia, Out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad.*

Now Jesus said He knew their poverty, but He also knew that they were rich. What a paradox. But they were in the city of *myrrh*, of bitterness,

but they were a sweet smelling aroma, or perfume to the Lord. Paul, writing to the Philippians who had sent aid to him of the kinds of things he needed while he was in prison in Rome said in Philippians 4:18, *But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.*

Now we are not talking about being bitter in soul here. We are talking about experiencing things that are like a bitter taste in the mouth. And the amazing thing is that if we respond rightly to very bitter experiences, it becomes a sweet smelling aroma to God. It is so important that we do not become bitter in our hearts, but that these bitter experiences lead us deeper into the Lord's truths and that we learn to handle them with a sweet spirit and not a bitter soul.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 2. There we have some of the words of the Philippians and Paul says they are an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable and well pleasing to God. But this sweet smelling sacrifice of a godly life has two different results. We read now 2 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

*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. And who is sufficient for these things?*

So what happens to Christians who are an aroma of death to some? Well, chances are big that it will be the same kind of things that happened to the

Christians in Smyrna. So, their commendation by the Lord is that though they are suffering poverty, they are rich!

We go on in verse 9 with the Lord's commendation of this church:

*and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

Let me begin by explaining the synagogue. The word *synagogue* means a *gathering*, a coming together of a group of people. There is not full agreement when the Jewish synagogue began, but most would agree it began in the Babylonian exile, almost 600 years before Christ. The Jews were removed from their temple, where they would normally have gathered. And now they began to gather in all the various locations where they had been spread and the gathering place. This gathering was for religious purposes and became known as the synagogue. It has basically the same idea as a church building in Christianity.

When the Jews were scattered abroad, known as the *dispersion*, synagogues arose in most major cities of the then known world. And so, when Christ came, and after the missionaries went out into the world, the most natural place for them to go was to people already familiar with the OT and who know their own language.

And now our passage says, *and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not*. Now who are these who say they are Jews, but they are not? Turn to Romans 2. I think two possibilities may be suggested. First, they were Jewish by birth, but they were not Jewish because they did not really believe in the God of the OT. They were nominal Jews.

Romans 2:28-29 says:

*28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:*

*29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

In other words, a true Jew was not one who had Jewish blood, but who had the true Jewish faith. If you study the NT you will find that that was a very small segment of Judaism, just as in the church today, only a very small part of them are truly born again believers.

There is a second possibility and that is that they claimed to be Jews, but they did not have Jewish blood. Turn now to Acts 13. Missionaries were first sent out from Antioch and it is recorded in this chapter. They went out and ministered in many places until they came to another Antioch, this one in Pisidia. And Paul preached here and the message is recorded in this chapter. Well, the Jews were not pleased about the preaching of Jesus. This was strange news to them. So we pick up the story in verse 42 of Acts 13:

*42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.*

*43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.*

*44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.*

*45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.*



46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said,  
"It was necessary that the word of God should be  
spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and  
judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life,  
behold, we turn to the Gentiles.

47 "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have  
set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you  
should be for salvation to the ends of the  
earth.'"

48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were  
glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as  
many as had been appointed to eternal life  
believed.

49 And the word of the Lord was being spread  
throughout all the region.

50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and  
prominent women and the chief men of the city,  
raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas,  
and expelled them from their region.

Now notice in verse 50 that the Jews stirred up  
devout and prominent women and the chief men of  
the city. Though the Jews did not like Paul's  
preaching, the Gentiles did and they wanted to  
hear more. Here is what Barclay says of these  
Gentiles he calls 'god fearers' with a small g,  
"These were Gentiles who were not prepared to go  
the whole way and to become proselytes and to  
accept the whole of Judaism; but they were  
attracted by the preaching of the one God instead  
of many gods, and they were attracted very  
specially by the purity of the Jewish ethic and  
the chastity of the Jewish morals as compared  
with the lust and sexuality of heathen life. In  
particular women were attracted to Judaism for  
these very reasons. Often these women were of  
very high station, the wives of magistrates and  
governors, and it was through them that the Jews  
got at the authorities and moved them to  
persecute. The Jews had their ways - and

effective ways they were - of exerting pressure on the authorities to take action against the Christians" (97).

So when Jesus said to the church at Smyrna, "*I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan*" of whom is He speaking? Or does it include both ideas? However it is, it is Judaism that is the problem. Walvoord says, "Thus it has always been in the church; false religion has been the most zealous in opposing that which is true. The Smyrna Christians found few friends among those who were around them."

I cannot resist adding a lot of words to my message, space that I would like to save for other things. It is what J.B. Smith says and I quote:

*"That those which say they are Jews and are not took a prominent part in the persecution of Christians is evident from the account of the martyrdom of Polycarp. They united their voices with the heathen in the first outcry of hate against the martyr as being 'the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods.' In the preparation of the funeral pile, '...the multitudes immediately gathering together wood and fagots out of the shops and baths; the Jews especially, according to custom, eagerly assisting them in it,' the record reads. Concerning the day of martyrdom, we are told, 'the day being that of the great Sabbath.' Seeing the body of Polycarp was not being consumed by the fire, the Jews urgently requested the governor not to give it to the Christians for burial 'lest...forsaking Him that was crucified, they begin to worship this one.. The centurion then, seeing the strife excited by the Jews, placed the body in the midst of the fire, and consumed it" (66-67).*

So our Lord says, *and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.* You see, the source of persecution was the Gentile world. The Jews said the Christians were the overthrowers of, and I quote, "our gods" small g. Not only did they think Christians overthrew Jehovah God, but the gods of the Gentiles as well. And in this way they brought the two powers, Judaism and Rome, against the Christians.

But I want you to notice something most important. Not only did the Lord say these were not Jews, He said they are a synagogue of Satan! All persecution of godliness has one mastermind behind it. It is easy to blame people when persecution comes, and people are to blame, but it is important to see the devil behind it. So Paul says we wrestle not with flesh and blood. No we wrestle against principalities and powers, that is against the devil himself. The devil hates righteousness! He hates godliness! He hates true Christians. He hates those who stand for truth! There is not enough godliness in most churches and missionary societies to cause persecution for the sake of godliness.

Well in conclusion to this point, as then, so it is now. Many claim to be Christians who are not, and they hate standards and speak evil of those who have godly standards. Many evangelical churches today are churches of Satan, not by verbal confession, but because of the state of their spiritual lives.

#### 4) The counsel (2:10-11a)

We have come to the counsel the Lord gives to this church. We begin with verse 10:

*2:10 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.*

First, the Lord says, "Do not fear any of those things you are about to suffer..." What this says first is that there is greater suffering ahead. The most severe testing had not come yet. Second, their suffering that they have suffered so far is not about to end. But the instruction is to not fear those things that lie ahead. Now when the suffering will be worse, and you don't know how much worse, how do you keep fear out? Well, you trust in the Lord. And here the description of the counselor comes in. He is the First and the Last. He knows all things and He is telling them not to fear those things. Second, He is the One who was dead and came to life. He is the first-fruits of the resurrection. He had once been slain, and He was alive and well, and Lord of all. So, though they may end up dying, that is not the end.

I wonder how many of you fear what lies ahead for your children? I wonder, do you hear these words, 'fear not'. You see, there is only One to fear; and that is God. Why? Jesus said in Matthew 10:28 "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

You see, there is one reason we have to fear the future. It is this: will our children stand no matter what the test? May I say this, the majority of this community will not survive the wealth we have in this community, never mind persecution. The children of many in this community will go to hell because their parents are wealthy! It is very dangerous right now! But if one is committed to Christ no matter what the cost, then there is nothing to fear.

There is an amazing thing about persecution. When you are in it, it is not like you would have thought it would be. You can be brought to all kinds of doubts, which bring about fear. You have to learn to think clear and trust the Lord, a thing much easier said than done.

Paul Washer has said this about persecution: "You must settle this in your mind; this is the one thing I want to say over and over. Down through history you have a wrong idea of martyrdom and persecution. You think that these men were persecuted and martyred for their sincere faith in Jesus Christ. That WAS the real reason, but no one heard that publicly. They were martyred and they were persecuted as enemies of the state, as child molesters, as bigots, as narrow minded stupid people who had fallen for a ruse and could contribute nothing to society."

Now look back at verse 9 when it says, *and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.* Lehman Straus says the word blasphemy can be rendered as *slanderer*. Slander is that which is said to tear down someone's character. This always happens in persecution. When those who do not like what Christians reveal in them, and the life of the Christian is above reproach, slander will, I think, always be the recourse. The word 'Devil' means *slanderer*. It is no wonder then that he causes his own people to slander Christians.

So what complaints might the Jews and the religious Romans have brought against the Christians? I have found William Barclay most helpful in this study. He gives the following, and you will note the slander:

*-On the basis of the words the sacrament (that is communion) - This is My body, and this is My blood - the stories went about that Christians were cannibals.*

*-Because Christians called their common meal the Agapee, the Love Feast, it was said that their gatherings were orgies of lust and immorality.*

*-Because Christianity did, in fact, split up families, when some members of them became Christians and some did not, the Christians were*

*accused of breaking up homes and 'tampering with family relationships.'*

*-The heathen accused the Christians of atheism because they could not understand a worship which did not have images of the gods, such as they themselves had.*

*-The Christians were accused of being politically disloyal citizens and potential revolutionaries because they would not say: 'Caesar is Lord.'*

*-The Christians were accused of being incendiaries because they foretold the end of the world in flames and disintegration.*

We see how right Paul Washer was in his explanation of persecution. The real reasons are not given. It is twisted truth or outright lies and we are very familiar with both. Such reasons as living right or having good moral standards, living by truth etc.. are never given. That would not do. Lies that are straight lies, or have bits of truth, or twisted truths are given.

But notice, He says, "Don't fear any of those things you are about to suffer..." They would not suffer just one thing. There would be many things. Persecution is like an octopus. It has tentacles that reach all over, and to many people, those who are persecuted are usually first ostracized, and pushed to the outside. Places get quiet when you enter, behind your back lies are told and retold. People are affected and infected. Liars talk to liars and soon the group is marginalized. If that doesn't bring you back in the norm of things it will get worse. I think that is where Smyrna was at this point. It was not real bad yet. And our Lord says, "Do not fear any of those things you are about to experience." Those familiar with persecution know it is many faceted. It is also true that there are some things you cannot learn about yourself or others without experiencing it. It is a school one would

do everything to stay out of, but this school can teach some things that can only be learned here.

Now I want you to notice something most astonishing and important. The Lord tells them why they are suffering these things. Is it because the people around them are so bad? No! It is, and I quote, *that you may be tested*. There is a Scripture that is sometimes puzzling. It says, and you are familiar with it. Listen carefully now: "All things work together for good to those who love God." I left out some important words. Does anyone know what they are? It says, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God." It does not say, "We think that all things work together for good to those who love God." May I ask you, do you know it?

You see, tribulation, thlipsis, is pressure. And when the screws are tightened down on our lives and we become willing to give up or to compromise, do you know what that pressure has taught us? We are not worthy of the kingdom of God! Now there are some things we cannot learn about ourselves or others except by pressure. And when it says that this tribulation was so that they could be tested, the word to test is *peirazo*.

The Lord said the devil would throw some of them into prison that they may be tested. Who would throw them into prison? Well, probably some neighbor, pretending to want to become a Christian, then went and turned the Christian in. Or some Jew came to the law with false accusations, and the Roman authorities put them into prison. But what is really going on? Behind such people, in the dim shadows, and unnoticed stands the devil. So Scripture says we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.

Turn to the book of James. We want to look at this word, to test. It is the word *peirazo* and it means to test. Now testing can serve for two things. The devil tests us to bring out evil in

us, or to cause us to leave God. God tests us to bring out good in us, or to cause us to stand. We begin in verse 1 in James:

*1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.*

Notice he is writing to the twelve tribes who were scattered abroad. The Jews in all these cities in Asia were those who were scattered abroad. Verse 2:

*2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,*

Now look at the word *trials*. It is the word of our text in Revelation, *peirazo*. And James says to call all these trials joy. Jesus said here, "Fear none of those things you are about to suffer..." Now look at verse 3:

*3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*

Now the testing here is the word *dokimos*. This is a word used to test to see how genuine something is. Money changers would sometimes shave down coins and exchange them as having full weight. But they used the shavings to make more coins. And their money was tested to see if it was *dokimos*, or genuine.

Gold is tested in a crucible which is heated up until the gold runs like water. Then the dross is skimmed off the top. If the goldsmith cannot see his image in the gold, he heats it up even more, and sometimes he has to add other things to bring the dross up. That is what *dokimos* is about. That is what the trials of life are for us. Out of the same trial we can compromise, or come clean.

Now note in verse 3 that the testing of one's faith produces patience. You will remember the word *hupomenee* from a devotional a while ago and



from the letter to the church of Ephesus. It is to bear up under. When we undergo trials we are to bear up under, patience.

1 Peter 1:6-7 says:

*6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,*

*7 that the **genuineness** of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,*

The word test here is *dokimos*. And the purpose is to test the genuineness of faith. May I ask you, what are you going through? The devil may be seeking to destroy you, but God will show you if your faith is genuine. Are you bitter? Do you have to manage and manipulate and control? The fire has to become hotter to see if we are real. When we compromise or lie when we get in a test, our faith is not genuine.

So we go now to verse 12 in James 1:

*12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

When we are tested and we are approved, that is we pass the test and do not compromise or lie or give in or give up, then we are approved, *dokimos*. And only then will we receive the crown of life. We are then the real thing. Our faith is genuine.

Now look at verse 13:

*13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.*

God never tests us with evil, nor is He ever tempted with evil. God tests us that we might be found to be genuine. And without testings, we will never become genuine. May I ask you, have you ever rejoiced in your trials? How about trying that? James said, count it all joy.

We go on in our text in Revelation 2. We note further now that the testing was to be for ten days, and we might say, "Well, that is nothing. Wish we only had 10 days of testing." One thing is certain, we cannot take the ten days as referring to 10 literal days. One commentator said it was a way they used to describe a short period of time (If find this quote give it here.).

Another possible explanation is that the ten days refers to the ten Roman rulers who will rule during this time of persecution. Dr. Harold Willmington lists these 10 rulers.

1) *Nero (64-68) - Killed Peter and Paul*

2) *Domitian (81-96) - Thought Christianity was atheistic. Killed thousands of believers. Banished John to Patmos.*

John would have written to these seven churches at the end of the reign of this Roman ruler or the beginning of the next one who was:

3) *Trajan (98-117) - Was the first to pass laws against Christianity. Burned Ignatius at the stake.*

4) *Pius (137-161) - Killed Polycarp, disciple to John.*

5) *Marcus Aurelius (161-180) - Thought Christianity an absurd superstition. Beheaded the great writer and defender of the faith Justin Martyr.*

6) *Severus (193-211) - Killed Origen's father.*

7) *Thracian (235-2338) - Brutal barbarian. Commanded all Christian leaders to die.*

8) *Decius (249-251) - Determined to exterminate Christianity.*

9) *Valerian (253-260) - Killed Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage.*

10) *Diocletian (248-305) - Last and most severe persecution. For 10 years believers were hunted in caves and forests. They were burned, thrown to wild beasts and put to death by every torture cruelty could devise. But Diocletian's own wife and daughter accepted Christ!*

*Willmington lists the following Christian champions during this time: Justin Martyr (100-167). Iranaeus, pupil of Polycarp (130-200). Tertulian (160-220). Eusebius (264-340).*

Tim LaHaye that during the reign of these Roman rulers, more people per capita became Christians in the world than ever after. One church historian has estimated that during this period, five million Christians were martyred.

CONCL: Well, we have been looking at Smyrna, that beautiful city with a name meaning bitter. We looked at the commendation in verse 9. So verse 9 says:

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.*

The Lord knew their works, which it seems to me, led to their tribulation, and which led to their poverty. There is the bitter, the myrrh. But out of myrrh very expensive perfume is made, and though the Christians of this church were physically poor, they were spiritually rich. They were a sweet aroma to God. To the God haters they were the stench of death, but in fact they were the sweet smell of life.

Then we began looking at the counsel. The Lord said:

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.*

To me it makes the most sense that these 10 days were the days of the ten Roman rulers that would persecute the early church. But if persecution and death are not something to be feared, there is only one thing left to be feared; to be cast into hell for failing to trust God!