

The Lord's Message to the Church in Smyrna

Revelation 2:10 – Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

In **Revelation 1**, John saw the vision of the glorified Son of man, walking in the midst of seven golden candlesticks (which represent the seven churches in Pro-consular Asia) (**1:10-20**). Then in **chapters 2-3**, the messages that the Lord has for these churches are given to John. The first message (**2:1-7**) was to the church in the city of Ephesus, and the primary characteristic of the Ephesus' church was that they had left their first love.

In our text passage today (**2:8-11**), the Lord gives the message to the second of the seven churches, this one in the city of Smyrna (about 35-40 miles north of Ephesus). The message given to this church is the shortest of the seven messages (as the message to the church of Thyatira is the longest; **Rev. 2:18-29**). Like the church in Philadelphia (**3:7-13**), so it is the case with this church in Smyrna that the Lord issues absolutely no word of rebuke, censure, or criticism. The church in Smyrna and what the Lord says to it stands in direct contrast to the church in the city of Laodicea and what the Lord says to it (**3:14-22**). Most Bible students believe that the Smyrna church was the very best of the churches of Revelation. As the overriding characteristic of the church of Ephesus was that they had left their first love, the overriding characteristic of the church in Smyrna was that it was the persecuted, poverty-stricken, suffering church.

1. The Command to the Copyist

Verse 8 – And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write... As is the case with each of the messages to the seven churches, John is initially commanded to “write” the message to the angel of the church (i.e., the “messenger”, or pastor, or preacher). We must always remember when reading the book of Revelation (or any other part of the Bible) that what is written isn't something that men dreamed up, but rather it is what God said! In New Testament days, Smyrna was considered one of the most beautiful cities in the Roman Empire, and it prided itself on being at the top rung of Graeco-Roman culture. However, being the great cultural center that it was meant that the city was very wicked and this, in turn, resulted in God's people being persecuted. Three things especially resulted in persecution: (1) Many great temples to pagan gods and goddesses were located in Smyrna; (2) Smyrna was the headquarters for the surrounding area for the “Cult of the Emperor” (which deified and worshiped the Roman Emperor as a god); (3) Smyrna became known for its opposition to the gospel (in the first century). The very name of the city of Smyrna is significant (as is the case with all the seven cities of Revelation). “Smyrna” is a form of the word “myrrh”, which became associated with suffering and death. It was a herb, or spice, which emitted a sweet, perfume-like fragrance and aroma, but only when it was crushed (What a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ)! These Christians in Smyrna, as they were being crushed in the jaws of persecution, poverty, and affliction, were emitting a sweet, fragrant perfume of faithfulness and dedication, and the Lord in heaven smelled the sweet aroma rising up from the church in Smyrna, and commanded John the copyist to write this letter of encouragement to them.

2. The Characteristics of the Christ

Verse 8 - ...These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive. At the beginning of each letter, the Lord has John remind the church that the letter is coming from the Lord Jesus Himself, and in giving these reminders, some various characteristics of Christ are emphasized which are appropriate to the condition and need of the particular church. To this church in Smyrna which was suffering and some of them facing martyrdom and death through persecution, Jesus emphasizes that HE is the eternal One, Who won the victory over death. To these Christians, some of whom didn't have much time left on earth (for they would be martyred), He emphasizes that He is the Eternal Jehovah, **...the first and the last...** To those who were worried about death, He emphasizes that He is the One Who won the victory over death, **...which was dead, and is alive.**

3. The Commendation of the Church (2:9)

Jesus praises and commends this church for their faithfulness and dedication to Him in the midst of suffering, affliction, persecution, and trouble. He declares: **I know...** If this were all Jesus said, it would still be a comfort to these suffering Christians, as if He were saying, "I know your troubles, your pain, your afflictions, your sufferings, and I know your dedication and faithfulness." He mentions 4 specific things that He knew about this church: (1) **...thy works...** (this church was suffering persecution, but they still had some works for the Lord that they were performing, and He takes notice of it); (2) **...and tribulation...** (this church was suffering terrible trials, troubles, and tribulations; the word for "tribulations" refers to "pressure"); (3) **...and poverty...** (this church not only had the pressure of tribulations through suffering persecution, but they were also a poverty-stricken church, but Jesus also puts a parenthesis in at this point, telling the church **...but thou art rich...** they were poor toward men, but rich toward God; poor in material possessions, but rich in the things of God); (4) **...and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.** Unconverted Jewish people in a synagogue in town, claiming to be the true people of God, incited persecution against the Christians in the church.

4. The Challenge of Courageousness (2:10)

Jesus informs this church (which was already suffering) that more persecution was coming. The devil, through his persecutors, would try some of these Christians by having them put in prison (and some might even be called upon to die for the Lord's testimony). He specifically speaks of some being persecuted "**10 days**". Various explanations have been offered as to the meaning of this, but at least two things stand out: (1) intensity (10 is the number of intensification; 4 intensified by 10 becomes 40, etc. These folks would suffer **intense** persecution); (2) limitation (the persecution might last 10 days, but then it would be over and done with). So, knowing that the persecution of these Christians in Smyrna would continue, Jesus challenges these folks to: (1) Not fear, and (2) Be faithful unto death (and the reward would be a crown of life).

5. The Comfort for the Conquerors (2:11)

As in all the letters, Jesus gives special promises to "overcomers" (not some elite group of super-Christians, but simply a term for all God's people). The promise to these Christians in Smyrna was that they would not be hurt of the second death, i.e., the lake of fire (**Rev. 20:14-15; 21:8**). The old adage is true: those who are born only once die twice, while those who are born twice die only once!