

Revelation 2:8-11

Σμυρναῖος

Outline:

- I. SALUTATION AND NAME OF CHURCH IDENTIFIED
- II. IDENTIFICATION OF CHRIST AS SENDER
- III. ASSERTION OF KNOWLEDGE
- IV. COMMENT AND CONCERN
- V. EXHORTATION
- VI. PROMISED BLESSING
- VII. ADMONITION TO HEED



- I. SALUTATION AND NAME OF CHURCH IDENTIFIED. Verse 8

A. "Unto the angel of the church in Smyrna" The persecuted Church

1. **Angel** is aggelos in the greek. It means messenger. It can refer to a human (in this case the pastor of the church) or it can (and does most frequently in it's usage throughout the Bible) refer to an angel. Which ever it may be what we do know is that this messenger is representative of the whole church and therefor this letter is to the church in Smyrna.

2. Background of Smyrna

a) **The word Smyrna** (Smurnaios) actually means myrrh. This word has a hebrew root (Mur) which means death.

(1) Myrrh is an aromatic oil which was used for

(a) Perfume, Psalm 45:8

(b) Holy anointing oil for priests, Exodus 30:23

(c) The Purification of women, Esther 2:12

(2) It's primary use was for embalming, John 19:39

- (3) Myrrh is a bitter gum and costly perfume which exudes from a certain tree or shrub in Arabia and Ethiopia.
- (4) Myrrh gives off its scent by being crushed!
- (5) Myrrh was one of the three gifts given to our Lord at his birth.
 - (a) Gold = Royalty
 - (b) Frankincense = deity, priesthood
 - (c) Myrrh = suffering, death

b) **The City**

- (1) To get to Smyrna from Ephesus one would have to travel 55 km to the north.
- (2) Smyrna was a great trade city because of where its location. It was located at the end of the road which served the valley of the river Hermus (Turkish: Gediz Nehri, the ancient Hermus, is the second largest river, after the Menderes, flowing from the Anatolian hinterland into the Aegean Sea) and all trade flowed from that valley towards Smyrna and then out from its harbor. It had a double harbor then, one is silted in today.
- (3) It is one of the chief cities in South West Turkey today known as Izmir. It is a thriving city and is the 3rd largest city within Turkey.
- (4) During the times of John the apostle Smyrna was “a wealthy city, second only to Ephesus in the entire area¹”.
- (5) Strabo, a historian and geographer who lived between 63 BC – AD 23, described Smyrna as the most beautiful city in the world².
- (6) Others have said that “Anciently it was one of the finest cities in Asia, and was called “the lovely-the crown of Ionia-the ornament of Asia³.”
- (7) Smyrna was “a city deeply committed to idolatry and the worship of the Roman Emperor. On one famous street in Smyrna, called the “Golden Street,” stood magnificent temples to Cybele, Apollo, Asklepios, Aphrodite, and a great temple to Zeus. But the worship of those pagan gods was dying out. The real focus was on the worship of the Roman Emperor⁴.”
- (8) This city readily accepted Caesar worship. In 196 B.C. the Smyrneans erected a temple to Dea Roma, the goddess of Rome and from there it was a small step to worshipping the emperor. And so later on they

¹ John F. Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ, Pg. 59

² Chuck Missler, Commentary on Revelation

³ Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, Pg. 1033

⁴ http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=2&contentID=8104&commInfo=31&topic=Revelation

built a temple to Tiberius Caesar in A.D 26. This privilege was granted in A.D. 23. Over 11 other cities attempted to get the privilege to build the first temple to worship the Emperor Tiberius Caesar but Smyrna won. Consequently Smyrna became a leading city in the Roman cult of Emperor worship.

(9) During Polycarp's time the worship of the Emperor was compulsory. Each year every Roman citizen had to burn a pinch of incense on an altar and acknowledge publicly that Caesar was the supreme lord. Those that completed this act of veneration would receive a certificate stating that they had done so.

(10) This mandated worship proved to be a very real test for Christians in this city. Many who refused to worship this Roman emperor would be burned at the stake or be eaten of wild beasts in the arena.

3. **The church** within Smyrna

- a) Polycarp was the Bishop of this church and he was raised up by John the apostle. In fact he was one of John's converts and he served as the pastor of this church until his martyrdom in or around A.D. 155⁵
- b) Due to emperor worship Polycarp and the church of Christians in Smyrna were heavily persecuted. It was for refusal to burn a pinch of incense and confess that Caesar was lord that Polycarp died a martyrs death
- c) Polycarp refused to worship Caesar and was burned at the stake. He was most likely 100+ years of age when this happened.
- d) His last words before they lit the stake on fire were "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong. How can i now blaspheme my king who has loved me so?"
- e) He was burned at the stake on the sabbath day and was subject to both Jewish⁶ and Roman hatred.
- f) According to some the Jews "were directly instrumental in persuading the Roman officials of the city to execute Polycarp. The records say they even carried logs to the pyre on which he was burned."⁷

II. IDENTIFICATION OF CHRIST AS SENDER. Verse 8

A. "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;"

1. Jesus Identifies Himself as the the first and the last

⁵ Henry Morris, The Revelation record, Pg.53

⁶ Alford, IV, 566

⁷ Henry Morris, The Revelation record, Pg.54

- a) He is the eternal one. He has stood and always will stand outside of time. No one or thing is outside the scope of His existence.
- b) This would remind the Christians in Smyrna that though it seemed as if God had lost control of their current situation the fact was that God was and would remain in control. He is eternal and therefore unchanging. He loved them no less than when times were good and life a lot easier.

2. Jesus identifies Himself as the one “which was dead, and is alive”

- a) He reminds the Christians in Smyrna that though their future looks bleak and that many of them will die a martyrs death He has conquered death and lives for ever.
- b) When Jesus said of himself that he was “was dead” He literally said “the one who became dead.” And He was referring to His death on the cross.
- c) And when Jesus said of Himself that He “is alive” it literally says “and lives.” He was referring to His resurrection as the eternal resurrected one⁸.
- d) Jesus wants them to know that the one who was and is eternal entered time and became a man. And even though He was the only true innocent man to have ever lived on the face of the planet He suffered and died at the hands of wicked men.
- e) He understands what it is to be persecuted and put to death for living a life devoted to God. He understands what it is to feel defeated or forsaken. He even cried on the cross “my God, my God, *why* hast thou forsaken me”.
- f) But Jesus also wanted them to realize that ultimately, victory was his crown to wear. He did not stay in the tomb but he rose from the dead boasting that victors crown as He abolished sin and conquered death once and for all.
- g) And because Christ has gotten the victory over death and the Christians in Smyrna are in Christ they too have victory over death. The situation at present doesn’t seem so victorious but ultimately they had the victory!

III. ASSERTION OF KNOWLEDGE. Verse 9

A. “I know thy *works*, and *tribulation*, and *poverty*, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are *the synagogue of satan*.”

1. “**Works**”

- a) this speaks of all their works in general. The Lord was familiar with all of their service.

⁸ John F. Walvoord, the revelation of Jesus Christ, Pg. 60

b) So too with us the Lord “knows” all our works. Not one thing that we do for him is unknown or goes unnoticed.

(1) “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” Hebrews 6:10

2. “**Tribulation**” = thlipsis

a) A pressing together, pressure

b) metaphor for oppression, affliction, distress or to be in straits.

c) Not the specific time period of the great tribulation. See John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12

3. “**Poverty**” but rich

a) There are two words in the greek for poverty

(1) Penia = the state of having nothing in excess

(2) Ptocheia = the state of one who has nothing at all; beggarly.

(3) The second word is the one that is used here.

b) This church thought they were poor but Jesus says “but you are rich”. They were better off than they thought they were. This is in contrast to the church of Laodicea which thought they were rich but really were poor. Sometimes what we think of ourselves is not a true assessment of the way things really are

c) That is not say that their poverty truly was real. Though some in the church might have come from a poor class of people it is very likely that the most of them had become poor as a result of persecution. Perhaps loss of jobs, proprietorships forced to shut down, being robbed of money, homes, and lands were all a result of this persecution. They truly were poor in this world

d) But Christ says something so astounding after affirming that they are abjectly poor. He says “but thou art rich”! From the outside they truly were poor and their circumstances were definitely not to be coveted after, however, they were rich in faith toward God.

(1) “They were wealthy because they were laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20) and possessed “the true riches” (Luke 16:11).”⁹

(2) “Paul also also noted that true “ministers of God” would be “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing;

⁹ Henry morris, The Revelation record, Pg. 54

and yet possessing all things” (2 Corinthians 6:10).”¹⁰

(3) And it says in James 2:5 “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”

e) The amazing thing is that their poverty or suffering could have been avoided and or alleviated by offering a pinch of incense to Caesar. But they were Christian and “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” 2 Tim 3:12

4. “**The synagogue of satan**” (those that said and thought they were Jews but really weren’t)

a) There was a group who called themselves Jews but were not at all either physically or spiritually.

b) These were out and out liars. Jews are Jews by blood and need not follow the law of God to be a Jew. The only prerequisite to being a Jew is if you are of the seed of Abraham. Jews don’t become Jewish because they are also spiritually inline with the Lord. Therefore these that were saying that they were Jews but weren’t were simply, as the Lord says it, liars. See revelation 3:9 “I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie”

c) Even as Ephesus had to deal with those that called themselves apostles but were rather found to be liars and False apostles who are really ministers of satan (2 Corinthians 11:15), so too Smyrna had to deal with those that called themselves Jews but were rather found to be liars and of the synagogue of satan.

IV. COMMENT AND CONCERN

A. None.

V. EXHORTATION

A. “*Fear none* of those things which *thou shalt suffer*. behold *the devil* will cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation *ten days*: be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a *crown of life*.”

1. **Fear none**. The first in the list of those cast into the lake of fire are the fearful\ Fear is the opposite of faith.

a) Literally this should be translated “Stop being afraid”. We need to remember to pray for strength for those who suffer persecution. Fear will destroy the strongest of believers because it takes focus off the hope we have in Christ and “hope deferred maketh the heart sick” (Proverbs 13:12). Therefore fearing is possibly the greatest battle for those who suffer persecution. Remove fear and the person’s spirit is strengthened so much so that he/she

¹⁰ Ibid

is able to endure the gravest of persecutions! Lord Help us not to fear and strengthen those that are fearing in this very moment!

2. **Thou shalt suffer.** The Lord doesn't put it in a way in which he might be misunderstood. He levels with them and clearly tells them that they will suffer!
3. **The Devil.** Satan is the one who is behind this persecution. Little did or does he know that the blood of the martyr is really the seed of the church.
 - a) "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." 1 Peter 5:9
 - b) "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" John 10:10
4. **Ten days.**
 - a) Held by some scholars to be only an idiom or expression of speech carried over from Hebrew which simply means a short period of time. A short period of time in contrast with the "crown of life" (i.e. eternal life) that shall be inherited once leaving this world.
 - b) Some Scholars believe that these ten day refer to ten emperors of Rome

Ten Emperors	Name	Years of Rule	Those put to Death
1	Nero	54 - 68	Paul beheaded. Peter crucified upside-down.
2	Domitian	95 - 96	Exiled John to Patmos
3	Trajan	104 - 117	Ignatius burned at the stake
4	Marcus Aurelius	161 - 180	Polycarp burned at the stake (Bishop of Smyrna)
5	Septimus Severus	200 - 211	Killed Irenaeus
6	Maximinus	235 - 237	
7	Decius	249 - 251	
8	Valerian	257 - 260	
9	Aurelian	270 - 275	
10	Diocletian	303 - 313	The worst of the bunch

- c) Some think the ten days are referring to ten persecutions of secular history during which time a great deal of christians were imprisoned and slain.
- d) Still some think that this ten days would point us to the book of Daniel 1:12, 14, 15, where we learn that Daniel and his three Jewish friends went through a ten day period of testing which in the end produced very fruitful results and landed Daniel in over seventy years of uniquely effective service for God. The point is that what ever you suffer in this life for Christ will yield incredible fruit for the sufferer's good (both here and, by way of reward, in heaven also) and for the glory of God

VI. PROMISED BLESSING. Verse 2:11b

A. "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

- 1. if you are born once you will die twice
- 2. If you are born twice you will only die once.

VII. ADMONITION TO HEED. Verse 2:11a

A. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"

1. Salutation/ Name	Ephesus Ἐφεσῖνος	Smyrna Σμυρναῖος	Pergamos Πέργαμος	Thyatira Θυάτιρα	Sardis Σάρδεις	Philidelphia Φιλαδέλφεια	Laodicea Λαοδίκεια
2. Identification of Christ as Sender/Title of Christ	He that holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks 2:1	These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 2:8					
3. Assertion of Knowledge/ Commendation	I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my names sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. 2:2,3 But this though hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate 2:6	I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blaspheme of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of satan. 2:9					
4. Comment and Exhortation/ Concerns	Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 2:4	none					
5. Promised (or Threatened) Coming/ Exhortation	Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. 2:5	Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life. 2:10					
6. Promised Blessing / Promise to the Overcomer	To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. 2:7	He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death 2:11b					
7. Admonition to Heed/ Common Closing Phrase	He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches 2:7	He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith to the churches 2:11a					