

Jesus' Message to the Church – Smyrna

Rev.2:8-11

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Last week we started a sermon series on the seven churches of Revelation. A lot of times when people read this book, they don't realize it contains seven letters by Jesus sent to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). **(Rev.1:11)** *Each of these seven churches was unique, each had its own struggles and issues to deal with.* For instance, the church in Ephesus Jesus commanded to repent since they had forsaken their first love. The church was not as loving as it used to be.

The church we'll look at today is Smyrna.

What do we know about Smyrna?

Smyrna is called today Izmir (Today, Izmir is the third largest city of [Turkey](#) with a population over 4 million. It's a modern city and one of the main hubs for exporting various [agricultural](#) and industrial products from its port. It was the birthplace of Homer; in the first century this city was very religious, it contained the temples of Zeus, shrines of Apollos. **Caesar worship began in this city in 196 BC.** Each year Roman citizens had to burn a pinch of incense on the altar and acknowledge publicly Caesar is lord. Many Christians who refused to worship the emperor were burned at the stake and fed to wild animals. Polycarp, was a bishop of the Church in Smyrna. He was a disciple of John the writer of Revelation.

Read text Rev.2:8-11

Rev.1:10-11 At the beginning of the letters, Jesus identifies himself as the one sending the message. **“To the angel (messenger) of the church in Smyrna write (v.8)**

These are the words of him who is the First and the last, who died and came to life again.

This is a title of Jesus :the first and the last (Rev.1:8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, v.17-18 Don't be afraid, I am the First and The Last, I am the Living one; I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

The first and the last is like saying the beginning and the end (alpha and omega) The Jewish people were very familiar with this expression used by Yahweh throughout the Old Testament (**Isa.44:6; 48:12**)

Here Jesus speaks of his death and resurrection. **“who was dead and came to life again”**

Jesus knows what is going on in his church. (v9) *"I know your afflictions and your poverty (yet you are rich).*

I know the slander of those who say they are Jews but are not. This church was being afflicted by persecution. The word ***slander is the word for blasphemy***, these people were slandering or speaking abusively against some in the church. The devil had made his way into the church since he is known for slander: ***Slander means to make false spoken statements that cause people to have a bad opinion of someone.***

They say they are Jews, but Jesus said they are not. (In the New Testament being Jewish has to do with sharing Abraham's faithfulness. It didn't simply mean lineage) All Jewish people considered Abraham their father, Abraham is the father of the faith, so to believe is in a sense to be heir of Abraham. Jesus called these malicious talkers, impostors, not Jews because they are not acting as true Abraham's descendants. They were not acting as true believers. In fact, **Jesus called him, members of Satan's church (synagogue).** This group that was doing the work of the devil; Jesus said, they belong to the synagogue of Satan. **In John 8:42-47** Jesus called the Jewish religious leaders sons of the devil because they were trying to kill him and were not listening to God.

Jesus encourages this church to not be afraid. *Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. (v.10)*

-more persecution is coming. But don't be afraid

-imprisonment for some members of the church (Satan will throw some of you in prison to test you)

Things will get tough, persecution for 10 days but don't be afraid. Don't be afraid because Jesus knows what is coming and he is in control; Jesus is with you every step of the way.

Be faithful to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life. How faithful will you be in the midst of persecution and trials? These tests or trying times you are about to experience will test your faithfulness to God.

A Christian will never know how strong his faith is until that faith is tested. It is those trials and testing of your faith that will develop your faith and perseverance in you. **James. 1:2-4**

There are Christians who run away at the sight of any conflict or trial, they give up their faith, they give up on God and the church. ***Jesus said to the church expect trials and persecution, this may not be easy, but be faithful to the point of***

death. Be faithful even if it cost you your very life. We don't know what this means yet in this country. Polycarp knew exactly what it meant to be faithful to Jesus even to the point of death. He died for being a Christian.

Be faithful to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life. Jesus is promising life, for those who died for him. This is what he said in the gospel, whoever loses his life for me will truly find it. **Matt.16:24-25** Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **25**For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. (NIV)

(v.11) HE who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

The overcomers will not have to face eternal death, the 2nd death is a description for hell **Rev.20:14; 21:7-8**

What does Jesus expect of his church today?

-Jesus' church is one who perseveres through trials without giving up.

-To not be afraid of the coming challenges or whatever comes our way.

-To remain Faithful to Jesus until he comes or calls us home. Jesus is saying to his church today, times may be tough tomorrow, but remain faithful to me, even to the point of death. In fact, it will be the trials that will measure your faithfulness to God.

-Jesus' true church overcomes this world. As a church part of running the race includes keeping the faith, fighting the battles without giving up, staying faithful to the course. **Paul said at the end of his life when he knew he had to be faithful to the point of death, writing from a prison cell waiting to be executed.**

2 Tim.4:6-7 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. **7**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. **8**Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Whoever has ears to hear let them hear what the Spirit says to the church.