

Text Revelation 2:8-11

Intro. In the pictures of ancient Rome, the method of threshing grain was to have one man stir up the sheaves while another rode over them with a crude cart equipped with rollers instead of wheels. Sharp stones and rough bits of iron were attached to these cylinders to help separate the husks from the grain. This simple cart was called a tribulum – from which we get our word “tribulation.”

Prop. The Church at Smyrna was One which underwent Tribulation and Suffering

Smyrna was in a protected coastal harbor on the Aegean Sea, just 35 miles from Ephesus. Because of its location on the Aegean Sea and the Hermes River, Smyrna was a major commercial center that brought great wealth to the area.

The city was noted for its art, education, philosophy, science, school of medicine and large library. Temples to pagan gods occupied the city. In 26AD, Rome granted Smyrna the right to erect a temple in honor of Tiberius Caesar and his mother Julia. A golden street extended from the temple, connecting it with the others in the city. – **Education, wealth and social advance do not guarantee spiritual life** – Many times the opposite

In the midst of this gross idolatry stood the church of Smyrna during years when Christians would be severely persecuted for the faith

Smyrna was named for the word Myrrh, an aromatic gum resin that is bitter to the taste, but sweet to the smell. It was used to embalm the dead. – “And Nicodemus came also ...bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight . And they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.” (John 19:39-40)

I. The Lord’s Knowledge

A) The Lord knows what is going on in Smyrna (v. 9) – Not the deeds like Ephesus, but their lives

1) Jesus knows their Tribulation

a) They were persecuted politically because they would not accept Caesar as god –

Faithful Romans had to swear to

2) Jesus knows their Poverty

a) They suffered the loss of their personal property and their status in society because of their faith in Christ

Yet the Lord said that they were rich – Rich in that which is really important – Their relationship to God

3) Jesus Knows the Blasphemy

a) They suffered religious persecution through “blasphemy” which means slander

b) This came from the “Synagogue of Satan” – Who is this? – Devil worshiping Jews?

c) Synagogue means “gathering” and Satan means “The Adversary”

These were Jews who did not accept the Gospel and persecuted the Christians for teaching that Jesus is the only way of salvation – Not the Keeping of the Law

This is precisely what the Apostle Paul did before his conversion – As Saul of Tarsus – Until he met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and heard Him say, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4)

4) Jesus Knows their Physical Persecution (v. 10)

d) The Lord tells them in advance this persecution that Satan will bring against them

This tells you that Jesus knows the future and what is coming before it happens – He knows all things of all time and what is going to happen to you

He also warns in advance so that you can be ready for it – Because God has everything under control – Including the lives of His people and the evil powers that work against them

He also sets length of time that this is going to happen – 10 days

This coming testing would take the lives of some of the Christians at Smyrna

B) Notice that the Lord doesn’t always deliver His people from death

1) We hear the account of Shadrach, Mesach and Abednogo being rescued from the fiery furnace and Daniel being rescued from the lion’s den

- 2) We somehow come to the conclusion that God will ALWAYS deliver His people from death – **Not So**
- 3) There are far more examples of Christians who have to die for their faith than times when God delivers them
- 4) Rather, the Lord’s exhortation to us is:

“My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” (Lk. 12:4)

In 155 AD, Polycarp, the pastor of the this church, was burned alive at the stake. At age 86, he refused to recant his faith and is reported to have said, ‘Eighty and six years have I served [Christ], and He has done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King who saved me?’”

II The Lord’s Encouragement

A) Remain faithful unto the death (v. 10)

- 1) This is the direction given by the Lord that can overcome even our fears of the physical death
- 2) Because even in death, the Lord is still Master and Lord of Death and the Grave
- 3) Your faith in Jesus is the most important thing in your life – Period
Because everyone is going to die anyway – So this exhortation is to us as much as it is to those facing persecution

B) Because Jesus will dutifully reward every Christian who does not abandon their faith in Him

- 1) For these people, He promises a **Crown of Life (v. 10)**
- 2) This is First and foremost eternal life in heaven with God forever and ever
 - a) Free from all sin, death, condemnation, fear, hurt, worry, pain, death and all manner of degradation
This is the greatest thing that we will ever have – And will last for eternity!
- 3) Secondly, there is a special reward that Jesus promises to those who stand true to death in the face of persecution
“And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God ...and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:4)

C) The Lord has made way for everyone facing death (v. 11)

- 1) Those who are faithful in the first death (Physical) won’t be touched by the second death (spiritual)
- 2) All of us will see the physical death – But we don’t have to have spiritual death (Condemnation)
At the Great White Throne Judgment – “And death and Hell were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.” (Rev. 20:14)
- 2) This letter comes from “The first and the last, **who was dead**, and has come to life” (v. 8)
 - a) Each letter to these churches is addressed specifically by the Lord in what they need
 - b) He who conquered death is addressing those who are facing persecution and possibly death
 - c) This tells you that Jesus is Lord of Life and Death and stands true to you even in your hour of death
He has promised NEVER to leave you or forsake you – Even in your darkest hour!

This exhortation is given to the **churches** – All of them – Including us here today

Christians today can glean encouragement, strength and comfort from the testimony of the believers at Smyrna

The Lord doesn’t have any words of condemnation for this suffering church