

06302024. After Jesus ascension, Rome became increasingly hostile toward Jesus's followers. The Apostle John was arrested for preaching the Gospel and exiled to Rome's penal colony on the island of Patmos, near Asia Minor. While there, the Holy Spirit spoke to John and instructed him to record everything Jesus was about to reveal via a vision. John was then to send the divine dictation to "the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea." ([Revelation 1:11](#))

In Revelation 2 and 3, the Apostle John records Jesus's address to seven churches in Asia Minor. Based on His intimate awareness of their spiritual condition, Jesus uses these letters to dig deep into the inner workings of each church and flesh out areas of commendation or correction. Last week the church of Ephesus...today we move to the letters to Smyrna and Pergamum Of the seven churches,

This letter to the church at Smyrna in Revelation 2 is notable for many reasons, **one** being the only place the Bible mentions the [Church at Smyrna](#) is in Jesus' letters to the churches:

2) being that it's one of the only letters that doesn't have a rebuke and it is the only church of the seven that still exists today. And it is the suffering Church and this alone has big implications for us today.

So What Do We Know About the Ancient city of Smyrna? Located just 35 miles north of Ephesus, at the head of the Aegean Sea, the thriving city of Smyrna was known for its beauty, wealth, and achievement. The city rivaled Ephesus in grandeur and influence. Ancient coin inscriptions describe Smyrna as "first of Asia in size and beauty," and "The Ornament of Asia."

- Not only was this bustling seaport considered a center of prosperity, but the city prided itself as a hub of intellect, art, religion, and athletic

prowess, Olympic games were held in Smyrna. Some of the first schools of science and medicine were founded in Smyrna, and on the beautiful slopes of Mount Pagos, the city erected a theater that sat twenty thousand people; the ruins of the theatre are still visible today. Olympic games were held in Smyrna in time Christians will be fed to the lions in that stadium.

- It was home to the Greek poet Homer and [Polycarp](#), a personal disciple of the Apostle John and the bishop of the church at Smyrna, known for his faithfulness to Jesus even to martyrdom.
- In the center of the ancient city, Mount Pagos (modern name: Kadifekale) stood 500 ft. high and was encircled by a garland of architecturally impressive buildings and temples—which was probably why the hill was known as “The Crown of Smyrna.”
- With a population of over 3 million, Smyrna continues to thrive today as the modern Turkish city of Izmir. **The local church still thrives there too. In fact, it has been said that more Christians have lived in this region than any other Turkish city in the world.**

Why Does God Praise the Church at Smyrna? Jesus’s short correspondence with His people in Smyrna gives us incredible insight into this group of believers’ way of life and faith. Christ not only knew their hearts, but He spoke to this flock using language and terms that held deep personal meaning for them.

Even Jesus’s greeting to the church reveals His loving, personal care.

Let get into it. *NLT Rev 2:8* “Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive:

- Jesus introduces Himself as “the First and Last, who was dead and is now alive...,” He is drawing their attention to the power of His resurrection.

- Jesus had a reason for mentioning this fact. He is the sovereign one...power over life and death...first and last...sovereign over the beginning of when something starts and sovereign over when it ends and everything in between!!
- Jesus wanted to remind them that their suffering ... Was absolutely under his control and had a purpose....just as his death had purpose and ended in life eternal...so will theirs

⁹ “I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich! I know the blasphemy of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan.

- Smyrna is the Greek word for myrrh—a sap-like substance extracted from tree bark. The substance was used to make fragrant perfumes and anointing oils and was used in ancient burial preparations
- And just like myrrh requires crushing to release the sweet perfume of its fragrance, the church at Smyrna would continue to be crushed through adversity.
- Jesus praises and affirms the church by recognizing their material poverty in contrast to their vast spiritual prosperity. “
- Followers of Jesus living in Smyrna were seen as a rebellious cult and therefore persecuted by the hostile Roman empire, **they were not just poor they were destitute**, from being persecuted, often prohibited from working, buying, or selling, and many times their property was confiscated. **As a result, the Smyrnaean believers lived in genuine abject poverty for their faith.**

But Not only from the government but the zealot Jewish leaders especially those who claimed the Jewish faith...but did not adhere to their faith.. they hated the Christians and joined in the persecution....**blasphemy and slander by using vicious smear campaigns against the Christians in Smyrna. Lies were being spread about them. Their reputation were also being ruined. They were ostracized and stigmatized ... Yet Jesus only has praise for them!!!**

- Because Christians celebrated Holy Communion, and talked about partaking of the body and blood of Christ, they were accused of being cannibals, of actually eating one another.
- Christians talked about being members of one another of loving one another, so they were accused of engaging in sexual orgies.
- The slander that was the cause of much of the suffering and persecution faced by the early Christians came from false Jews. That is, it came from people who were the physical, genetic descendants of Abraham, who attended a synagogue in Smyrna. They scorned and slandered the truth.
- They hated and persecuted people whose only crime was loving God and loving one another. By persecuting the truth and being far removed from the true faith of Abraham, they were in effect, “a synagogue of Satan.”
- **Jesus says to them , however, you are spiritually, and heavenly “rich”; and that wealth on one could take from them.. wealth that no one could take away ...**

NLT Matt 6:20 Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.

- No doubt, Jesus’s commendation would have been a timely affirmation that their trials had not been made in vain—Their future makes it all worth while

In this same verse, Jesus offers great comfort to His church by assuring them that He is the God who sees, knows, and cares about their troubles. He has witnessed their continual affliction and the slander they’ve suffered ...The fact that these hardships have not escaped their Savior’s attention surely would have strengthened the Body and served as a loving reminder of Jesus’s abiding presence so keep their attention on the eternal life....

And yet he tells them it will get worse....

NLT Rev 2:10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.

- Finally, Jesus warns His people to expect more suffering, persecution, and testing. With the warning comes the exhortation that they should not succumb to fear. Which means they are fearful!!
- **That their suffering will last ten days...or it has a beginning and an end...indicating God is sovereign...**

A couple thoughts... it could be symbolic...the Romans will persecute the church for another 250 years...the ten days could represent the ten Caesars who will participate in the persecution...the days could be their inauguration days....

The Lord has three words of encouragement for those who will endure this severe form of persecution.

First, He says, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you. But God knows their hearts: He knows what we are able to endure before we are subjected to it. The fact is it is not God but we who learn from the testing we go through!

When we go through pressure or persecution it is we ourselves, not God, who learn from the testing. We discover how much we have matured in Christ, and how trustworthy God is in times of trouble.

Second, He says that the persecution will last only a limited time: He says for 10 days. We can be encouraged to know that the Lord sets the limits to our suffering. If the Lord says this test will last 10 days then there is no force on earth that could make it last 11 days!

Third, He assures His people that their continued faithfulness, “even when facing death,” will earn them a reward that far outweighs their earthly trials— **a crown of Life or victor's crown for winning the race of life. A wreath worn to indicate high status or as a reward] of life.a victor's crown.**

- **The Church at Smyrna would have been familiar with the extreme honor associated with a “victor’s crown.” The city was well known for its Olympic-style athletic contests.**
- **Garlands of victory were bestowed only to the highest achieving athletes. No second-place prize existed. The crown of victory belonged to the victor alone, and every other competitor was considered defeated.**

NIV James 1:12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

- We know from historical records that the church at Smyrna persevered in its faithfulness. When Polycarp a disciple who knew John, one of the famous church Father’s who was also the pastor of the church in Smyrna, was commanded to worship Caesar and renounce Christ in 155 A.D., **his disciple another Famous Church Father Irenaeus tells us of his martyrdom.... Read paper**

Lessons We Can Learn from the Church at Smyrna

As with all Jesus’s letters to the seven churches., His letter to Smyrna ends on a note that invites every Believer, to hear and receive these important messages.

NIV Rev 2:11 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

- First, we serve a God who knows, sees, and is with us through every fiery trial and dark night ([Isaiah 43:2](#)).
- He is aware of the enemy’s plans and the afflictions we face
- Absolutely nothing is hidden from our all-knowing, all-seeing God. And He genuinely cares about what happens to His children.

- Jesus is upfront about the fact that we will experience trouble in this world, but He has also promised that His peace, grace, and abiding presence are our refuge during our trials ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

NIV Hebrews 4:5....because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."^(a) So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"^(b)

NLT John 14:And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you.

Lastly a lesson especially relevant for today's Western Christians, Jesus praised the church at Smyrna for choosing poverty over compromise. And Perseverance over ease... These early believers could have participated in a few cultural customs—like sprinkling incense on the fire that burned in front of the emperor's statue. Or they could have agreed to call Caesar "Lord," knowing they could later repent. These actions would have given the believers could a measure of favor with the government and secured a much easier life.

Undoubtedly, the church of Smyrna could have justified any compromising actions to preserve their livelihood and lives by proof texted scripture or by claiming that their compromise was for the "greater good" of tolerance, love, and grace. But instead, through their surrendered lives, the Holy Spirit empowered the Smyrnaean Christians to choose spiritual wealth over worldly gain.

Third, at the end of Smyrna's letter, Jesus makes this promise to whoever has ears to hear: "He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death" ([Revelation 2:11](#), KJV). Most American

Christians today will not be called to die a [martyr's death](#). Nor will we suffer hardships like imprisonment for our faith, and very few of us will face the choice between our livelihood or a life with Christ.

But every born-again Christian is called to die to the faith compromising things of this world and to consider all earthly things are worth losing compared to the worth of knowing Jesus as Lord.

NLT Phil 3:8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ

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