

## **Smyrna: The Suffering Church Revelation 2:8-11**

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

**Intro: Shortest of the letters: The Suffering church - The most persecuted**

**A)I find it interesting that the letter with the most continuous tone of praise from the Lord**

**B)Is addressed to those who suffered the most and possessed the least.**

**C)What amazing contrast to the last church, the church of Laodicea,**

**1)my friend Cody took you through on Sunday.**

**D)Laodicea had the most physical wealth but they were spiritual paupers,**

**1)blind, naked, and destitute of any true substance.**

**This should speak volumes to us today regarding what the true value of the church is.**

**A)Today in many respects the Church has become about being the biggest and the greatest.**

**B)It’s become about possessing material affluence rather than spiritual influence,**

**1)worldly riches rather than heavenly resources,**

**C)and leading people to be impressed with the church**

**1)rather than leaving them with a lasting impression of Christ.**

**It's not in our buildings or bank accounts.**

**A)It's not in our ability to wow a worldly crowd or impress the movers and shakers of society-**

**B)that Jesus takes note of**

**1)The Church in Smyrna is a great reminder of that**

**The City**

**A)The city of Smyrna was a coastal trading hub located in the Roman province of Asia.**

**B)It is known today as the city of Izmir located about 35 miles north of Ephesus.**

**C)It was an area that was heavily populated by Jews (who hated Christians)**

**1)and Romans (who also hated Christians and blamed them for everything),**

**D)which made Smyrna a very difficult place to be a Christian.**

**The City was founded 1,000 years before Christ walked the earth**

**A)it was destroyed around 600 BC by the Lydians**

**B)and then around the time of Alexander the Great, one of his generals decided to rebuild the city and make it the greatest city in Asia Minor**

**1)it was really the first planned community in the world –**

**C)With streets designed to funnel wind, and convenient water sources –**

**1)It was a well thought out city and very beautiful**

**By the first century Smyrna was a great ally to Rome**

**A)In fact, it was also the center for Caesar Worship**

**B)Though there were many temples in Smyrna, to all types of Greek and Roman gods**

**C)The largest was the temple built to Caesar the ruler of Rome in 26 AD - during the Life of Christ**

**It was in Smyrna that it was first a capital crime to not worship the current ruler of Rome as a god**

**A)And so it is not hard to imagine what the Christians of this city were facing**

**B)Already on the outs of society because they did not worship other gods that all of their neighbors did**

**C)But now their jobs, homes, possessions, and soon their very lives would be taken because they would not say, “Caesar is Lord”**

**D)To these people living in these conditions, Jesus writes a letter that deals directly with suffering and persecution**

**1)and that makes this letter important to all of us**  
**Outline:**

- **The Revelation of Jesus to the Church in Smyrna**
- **What Jesus Knows**
- **What Jesus Exhorts**
- **What Jesus Promises**

### **The Revelation of Jesus**

G. Campbell Morgan once said, “The supreme need in every hour of difficulty and depression is a vision of Jesus.”

**‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:**

**A)HIS NATURE - THE FIRST AND THE LAST**

**B)We see this title used by God in Isaiah 44:6.**

**Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,  
And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:  
‘I *am* the First and I *am* the Last;  
Besides Me *there is* no God.**

**C)You and I might not catch the significance of that statement at first -**

**1)but I can guarantee you that the Jewish mind would understand Christ’s claim immediately.**

**D)This is one of many places that we see Jesus establishing Himself as the eternal God. -**

**1)A clear declaration of His Deity**

**who was dead, and came to life: - Alludes to His Resurrection**

**A)In this little revelation of Jesus, we have the gospel**

**B)God, the eternal, took on the form of a man, and then died for our sins,**

**1)except He didn’t stay dead, He came back to life – what victory!**

**C)So in this letter, He introduces himself as the ETERNAL GOD and the one who holds POWER OVER DEATH.**

**D)This is such a great picture for those who are in trials**

**Jesus is eternal God**

**A)He transcends time and space**

**B)He is greater than anything you are going through**

**C)He is able to overcome what you are up against because He is the one who overcame sin and death**

**It is also comforting to know that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is alive and working in and through us today.**

**A)The power of the Holy Spirit gives us life and victory over this world.**

**B)We, too, can live the “resurrection life,” dead to sin and alive to Christ.**

**C)In other words, we have a Savior who can identify with us in our suffering and give us hope for future glory.**

**D)So the Revelation of Jesus - the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:**

### **What Jesus Knows**

**9 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**

**A)He knew their WORKS**

**B)Once again this speaks of the practical things they were doing in their church and city in the name of Jesus**

**C)Sometimes the practical things we do for Jesus can go unnoticed by others**

**D)Jesus always sees- He rewards - cup of cold water to a child ....**

**E) Jesus takes personal interest in everything his people and that churches do in his name:**

**1) Blessed to be a blessing!**

**There is a mind set in ministers today that implies to be busy is somehow sinful**

**A) Now neglecting your families, yes that is sinful, or neglecting your love relationship with Jesus, - wrong**

**B) But being busy as a Christian for the Kingdom of God, 1) friends there is nothing wrong and certainly nothing sinful about that**

**C) Jesus commends hard work - right motives**

**D) knows the quality, quantity, and value of our works - he sees what we do and he looks most at the Motive -**

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation [with] gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on [it] endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

**Jesus knew....**

**#1 - Their works**

**#2 - TRIBULATION**

**A) Now this is not referring to the great tribulation,**

**B) The word tribulation here means "crushing or pressure" "Pressing together"**

**1) You could say that choosing Jesus added pressure to their lives on every level.**

**C) Because they would not say "Caesar is Lord"**

**1) They were putting their lives in danger - And many of them losing jobs and positions and land**

**We Experience this to a lesser degree today here in America - but following Christ naturally causes tension**

**A) Because now Christ is leading you contrary to a world constantly trying to press you into its mold**

**2 Timothy 3:12 - All who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**

**GK Chesterton once said, "Jesus promised His disciples three things - that they would be completely fearless, and absurdly happy, and in constant trouble."**

**B) When you make a decision to live for Jesus, there will always be pressure coming from somewhere**

**1) for you to compromise your beliefs.**

**C) You will find pressure and trouble when you stand up for truth, light, and righteousness**

**1) in an environment that hates all of the above!**

**Application: Could our convictions of righteousness get us in trouble in courts?**

**A) Or our stand on the right for the unborn to live**

**B) or our unwillingness to acknowledge the secular culture's definition of gender, sexuality, and marriage?**

**As we make a stand on those type of things:**

**A) Trouble in the work place, trouble in our neighborhoods - families - friends**

**B) The Mayor - I will just tell my daughter you hate her - Not the case.**

**C) Speak the truth in love**

**But we are living in a culture that is becoming more and more hostile to the truth of God's word**

**A) Could result in trouble for us on many levels - Are you ready for that?**

**B) Corrie Ten Boom - Doubting if she could stand - When do I give you the ticket? Weeks of the day of?**

**C) For the believers in this church - the Tribulation resulted in Poverty -**

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Thing Jesus Knew: Their Poverty**

**A) Jesus tells the church that He knows they are poor but in parentheses, he states, "But you are rich!"**

**B)It's interesting how God's economy works. You can be the poorest people on the block,**

1)but if you know Jesus, your riches are beyond compare.

**C)The faith and commitment of the church in Smyrna were not dependent on their wealth or the ease of their life.**

1)On the contrary they were poor and persecuted, but their faith increased all the more!

**D)Jesus says you are rich in my eyes! Rich in Faith - Rich in Works**

1 Timothy 6:17 - "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

**If you're not rich in Christ, you'll never be rich with anything else, regardless of what you physically possess. Being Rich toward God**

**Jesus knew....**

**#1 – Their works**

**#2 – Tribulation**

**#3 – Their poverty**

**#4 – They were being persecuted by the Jews**

Jesus says, "I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan"

**A)In first century, Judaism was an accepted religion by Rome –**

**B)However since 70 AD when Rome burnt Jerusalem to the ground,**

1)the Jewish people were being persecuted by the Roman population as well

**C)Some Jews in Smyrna saw the Christians as an opportunity to get some pressure off their backs**

1)So they would accuse the Christians of horrible things,

**A Real smear campaign**

**A)Lies were being told about them**

**B)We know from early literature that, because the Christians talked about eating/ drinking the body and blood of Christ,**

1)they were accused of being cannibals-

**C)You can imagine the reaction that brought upon them**

**Also, because they refused to visit the pagan temples, or to acknowledge the gods of the pagans,**

**A)They refused to participate in Emperor Worship**

**B)they were called atheists.**

**C)Christians talked often about being members one of another and of loving one another,**

1)and so they were accused of sexual orgies.

**D)All of these type of lies resulted in great disdain and persecutions on the Christians from the world**

**In Smyrna It came from these false Jews.**

**A)These were physical descendants of Abraham and they had a synagogue there in Smyrna,**

**B)But Jesus referred to them as being from the "synagogue of Satan" –**

1)although they professed faith in God / really instruments of the Devil

**I find it interesting though, that Jesus says, "those who say they are Jews, but are not."**

**A)Jews or Israelis were supposed to be a set apart people**

**B)The name Israel means "governed by God"**

**C)However these men who were doing these horrible things,**

1)though they were physically and ethnically Jews, Jesus says, they are not Jews at all

➤ They are not really "governed by God"

**Paul taught in Romans 2:28, where Paul says, "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but one inwardly" – Romans 2:28**

**A)You see it is a matter of the heart**

**B)Those whose hearts were governed by God were Jews, not those who simply had Jewish parents**

**C) So too - Christian = Christlike - Antioch**

**D) Coming to Church doesn't make you a Christian - Believing in Jesus**

**1) True Christians are going to want to be like Jesus**

**What Jesus Exhorts**

10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.

**Do not Fear**

**A) 129 times in the Bible we have the command to "Fear not".**

**B) The natural human reaction to suffering is, of course, fear! I mean, who wants to suffer?**

**C) To know suffering is coming and imminent would bring forth fear in any human being.**

**Fear wants to make us think that it must call the shots;**

**A) That our ultimate goal must be the avoidance of suffering.**

**B) But Jesus says, "You can tell your fear to get in its rightful place"**

**B) Because although the subject of your fear is a reality, YOUR Savior is the greater reality.**

**C) Jesus flat-out tells them, "The devil is going to throw some of them into prison, and some of you will die."**

**D) Just the thought of this causes a sense of fear to well up within us, but here's the thing about following Christ.**

1) He will never allow something to happen to you through which He will not give you the strength and grace to endure.  
Corrie Tin Boom

**and you will have tribulation ten days.**

**A) 10 days – Whether this is a literal ten days or not is unsure.**

**B) Some believe it refers to a limited predetermined time only known by the Lord.**

**C) "10 days" is an OT phrase meaning a short period of time. – Genesis 24:55 - I Samuel 25:38, Jeremiah 42:7**

**Others believe the 10 days might refer to 10 periods of persecution the church went through under the reign of Rome**

**A) There were 10 Roman emperors who persecuted the church for about 200 yrs beginning with Domitian in 96AD -**

**B) Ending with Diocletian in 303-313 AD - Diocletian was the worst Emperor of all**

**C) The whole period has been termed the "Age of the Martyrs."**

**The Church suffered greatly -**

**A) Christians were Crucified - torn apart on racks. - Their fingernails were pulled off.**

**B) They were hung by their thumbs, oftentimes for days.**

1) They were wrapped in animal skins and thrown out for bulls to gore & Lions to Devour

**C) They were covered with tar & set on fire as human torches to light the gardens of the pagans for their festivities.**

**D) That period of Persecution claimed the lives of close to 6 million Christians**

**E) But it was also during that time that the church grew and gave off a sweet aroma of Jesus**

**1) Singing before entering the Coliseum**

*Amazing True story about the pastor of the church in Smyrna a few years after this letter was written by Jesus*

**A) The pastor's name was Polycarp, the last to be disciplined by John the Apostle, and Polycarp was 86 years old**

**B) He knew they were coming for him, but he was not afraid, yet at the urging of friends he fled the city of Smyrna**

**C)The men caught up with him at a nearby town and when they saw he was 86, they did not want to kill him –**

1)they said, “just say Caesar is Lord”, He would not – and he knew it meant his death

**Polycarp asked if he could pray before they arrested him and took him in to kill him, and they agreed**

**A)And Church history records Polycarp spent many hours praying for all those he ministered to,**

**B)He even for the men who would take him captive –**

**C)They then brought Polycarp to the arena and because again he was so old and loved, they ask him to simply say Caesar is Lord,**

1)“you don’t even have to mean it, please just say it.”

Polycarp responded to the governor, “**The Lord has been faithful to me for 86 years, how can I deny Him now**” –

**Angered the governor ordered him to be set on fire**

**A)But an amazing thing happened, after they tied him to wooden post and set the wood ablaze - the fire arched around him and did not touch him**

**B)The governor then ordered a guard to stab Polycarp with a sword, and as he did,**

1)blood came shooting out, extinguishing the flames

**C)Outraged the govern said, “I will feed you to the beasts” – Polycarp responded, “Bring on your beasts”**

**The governor said to Polycarp, “don’t make me reignite the fire.”**

**A)And Polycarp said, “you threaten me with fire that burns for a moment, and yet you forget the fire of Hell that never burns out.**

**B)As they moved forward to light it again**

- Polycarp prayed, thanking the Lord that he was accounted worthy to be a martyr and asking that he would be “faithful until death”

**C)The exhortation written to the church he pastored**

- What a testimony – the effects were huge upon the city and many came to Christ because of the witness of Polycarp’s life and death

**What Jesus Promises**

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

**A)If Smyrna had a church website, its slogan under their name would be this line, "Faithful until death."**

**B)Or The church that is ready to die for Jesus.**

1)I wonder how many new members they would get? I wonder if that was an effective evangelism strategy.

**C)The word Crown is Stephanos – victors crown.**

**D)This is not the diadem or the crown of royalty,**

1)but a victory crown that would have been awarded to athletes upon victorious competing.

**E)It says, “You endured and have overcome.**

1)Or as Paul put it...

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:6-8

20 “According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Philippians 1:20

**A Crown of life**

**Promise to escape the 2<sup>nd</sup> death**

**11 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”**

**THE 2<sup>ND</sup> DEATH**

“Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no

power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

Revelation 20:6

V.12 “And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

<sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them.

And they were judged, each one according to his works. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. <sup>15</sup> And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:12-15

**It has been said: “If you are born ONCE, you will DIE TWICE. But if you are BORN TWICE you will only DIE ONCE.”**

**Will YOU escape the second death? Are you sure that if you died today that you would go to heaven?**

**The only way to escape this judgment is to come to Jesus Christ.**

A) He took God’s judgment upon himself for us so that we might be saved from God’s wrath and given the gift of eternal life in heaven with Him.

B) If you don't want hell to grasp you for eternity, then you must place yourself within Christ's grasp now.

**What times of Tribulation do for us?**

- We see Jesus in a fresh way.
- We comfort each other. - Root Canal - Cancer - Long Labor

**Opportunity we have to defuse the fragrance of Christ.**

Myrrh - Crushing -