

Session Nine:

Revelation 2:8-11 The Church Of Smyrna

I) History Of Smyrna

- A) The city of Smyrna which today is called Izmir is located about 35 miles north or two days journey from Ephesus. During the time in which the Revelation was written (90-95 A.D.) it's been suggested that there were around 100,000 people there. Today Izmir hosts around 200,000.
- B) Smyrna's population was made up of about 9 urban districts. Today, the city is 99% Muslim and still holds a very small population of Christians. Because the Church of Smyrna loved Jesus and remained faithful to Him, there still exists a small remnant of Christians in an almost fully pagan community.
- C) The city was known for its beauty and not the natural beauty of the city, but the buildings. The Church of Smyrna was a Church that persisted through persecution, pressure and tribulation. It's been said that Jewish leaders officially excommunicated Christians as heretics beginning around 80 A.D. as a way of deflecting from them.
- D) It was around this time that Domitian the new Roman Emperor passed a law requiring people to worship him at the penalty of death. Refusing to burn incense to Caesar made Christians an enemy of the state and they were burned at the stake or killed by wild beasts.
- E) It's also possible that the fragrance of Myrrh had a strong connection to the city of Smyrna. The power of Myrrh is that it usually speaks of suffering. Every verse in this letter speaks of Myrrh, or resurrection, tribulation, suffering and death;
 - 1) **Revelation 2:8** *"...who was dead, and came to **LIFE** (resurrection)..."*
 - 2) **Revelation 2:9** *"I know your works, **TRIBULATION**, and poverty..."*
 - 3) **Revelation 2:10** *"...don't fear...those things which you're about to **SUFFER**..."*
 - 4) **Revelation 2:11** *"...He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second **DEATH**."*
- F) Polycarp, a Church father from Smyrna in the first and second century, who was known to be a disciple of John the Beloved, was burned at the stake for refusing to burn incense and join in emperor worship.

II) Jesus' Address To The Church Of Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)

- A) **Revelation 2:8** *"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..."*
 - 1) Jesus opens the letter to the Church of Smyrna with His Address to the overseer of the Church. This is something that's common in all seven Church's.
 - 2) Following Jesus' Address to the Church leadership, He then gives the Attribute to them.

- 3) **Revelation 2:8** *“...these things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life...”*
- 4) In Jesus' Attribute to this Church He speaks to them from the **Revelation 1:17-18** vision that John seen.
- 5) Jesus is being very intentional about the Attribute He gives to Himself. In the following verse Jesus is going to call the Church into a place of tribulation, suffering and eventual death.
- 6) For a Church who is suffering already, and headed into martyrdom, you couldn't receive a better greeting and reminder from Jesus who also tasted suffering, persecution, pain and death.
- 7) Just like Jesus encourages John in **Revelation 1:18**, He does the same thing to the Church of Smyrna by also reminding them that though He suffered and died, He's also been resurrected from the dead.
- 8) Jesus is acting as the divine Prophet of God by telling them what is on the horizon for their lives and ministry. It's important that we don't silence the voice of God and the voice of His prophets.
- 9) Jesus in great humility reminds this small, struggling Church that though He is First and Last, He also suffered and died under the leadership of His Father.
 1. **Luke 9:23** *“Then He said to them all, if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny Himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”*
- B) **Revelation 2:9** *“...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.”*
 - 1) Jesus continues with His Approval of the things they are doing by saying to them *“...I know your works, tribulation and poverty...”*
 - 2) If there's Anybody who can Approve what this Church is doing, it's Jesus. Jesus' words to this Church are beyond His divinity and speak more to His humanity.
 - 3) Jesus as a Man fully understands their current struggle and pressures. Jesus would say to them *“I know what it's like to be rejected by your own countrymen, by your family and to be persecuted for righteousness sake. I know what it's like to suffer under the will of God. I know the pain of your difficulty, and I fully understand. Not because I'm withdrawn and God, but because I also am a Man like you. I KNOW!”*
 1. **Revelation 22:16** *“...I am the Root and the Offspring of David...”*
 2. **Hebrews 4:15** *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin.”*
 3. **1st John 1:1** *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life...”*

4. This verse also lets us know that tribulation and poverty go hand in hand. Their poverty wasn't linked to the economy but because of their allegiance to Jesus and His Church.
5. Their poverty was the result of looting, confiscation of property and the difficulty of earning a living in a hostile environment. The tribulation was coming from three areas 1) The state 2) Jews (Outward) and 3) Gentiles
6. They were broke physically, but rich spiritually, which is the opposite of the Church of Laodicea.
 - (a) **Revelation 3:17** *"Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor blind and naked..."*
7. We also know that this situation will play itself out not with the Church of Smyrna but with all those that love Jesus and His Church during the great tribulation.
 - (a) **Revelation 13:16-17** *"He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."*
8. In Jesus' approval of them He also has this to say to them *"...and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."*
9. That word blasphemy is better translated as *slander, or that they were being spoken evil of by others*. It's not just by anyone, but by their own countrymen, other Jews.
10. To keep the Roman government off their backs, these Jews who hadn't given their lives to Jesus would deflect the government from them, but turning in these Jews who had become Christians.
11. The idea that it's the synagogue of satan simply means that they are worshipping idols, and demonic things other than Jesus, though they might be doing it in traditionally Jewish fashion.
 - (a) **Romans 2:29** *"...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."*
- 4) **Revelation 2:10** *"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, you will have tribulation 10 days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."*
 1. The Church of Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only ones that receive nothing negative from Jesus in the form of an Accusation.
 2. But in the midst of their suffering Jesus has straightforward and very challenging Advice for them.

3. Under His leadership, Jesus is going to approve the death of His beloved ones as a witness to the Truth of who He is in the midst of suffering. Jesus is going to testify to these Roman authorities through the suffering of His beloved ones.
4. The goal of our lives is to agree with the leadership of Jesus more than we fight against it and question it with our choices and decisions.
 - (a) **Philippians 1:9-10** *"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ..."*
 - (b) **Luke 7:23** *"And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me* (because of My leadership, because of My methodology)."
5. Beloved, offense will be a central issue in the season of the Lord's return.
6. Mark Driscoll says *"the Church shouldn't be tribulation free, but tribulation proof."*
7. Jesus also gives the Assurance to the Church that if they overcome He will give them the crown of life.
 - (a) **1st Corinthians 9:24-25** *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate (moderate, self governed, not in excess) in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus; not with uncertainty. Thus I fight; not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."*
8. Connected with the Assurance of the crown of life, is also the promise that the second death wouldn't hurt them from **Revelation 21:8**.
9. Jesus is telling them that it's better to die in martyrdom in the first death (death of the physical body) than to die in the second death (body and spirit) in the lake of fire. The second death is spoken of 4 times in **Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8** and always refers to eternal separation in the lake of fire.
- 5) **Revelation 2:11** *"He who has an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches..."*
 1. Jesus' final Appeal to the Church of Smyrna is that they would listen, and trust the words of the Holy Spirit in their time of suffering and difficulty.
 2. The temptation is to trust our own wisdom and logic, but it must become subject to the voice and will of God.