The Church with All they Need
Revelation 2:8-11
11-1-2026

The date was Saturday, Feb. 23, A.D. 155.
The place was Smyrna, called by many, "The crown and glory of Asia."
The city was crowded for the public games and the crowds were excited when suddenly the cry went up, "Away with the atheists; Let Polycarp be searched for."

Christians were called atheists because they did not believe in nor worship the Roman Patheon of gods and goddesses, and Polycarp was their beloved pastor.

He could have easily escaped, but the Lord had told him in a dream just that night, that he would be burned at the stake. So it was no surprise when the magistrate showed up at his door with guards to escort him to the arena. What was a surprise was that when they came, Polycarp gave orders that the guards all be fed and given all they wanted while he had the privilege of spending one last hour in prayer.

With a widely held reputation as being a good and caring man. not even the magistrate wanted to see this godly man die, so all along the way to the arena he pleaded with him, "what harm is it to say Caesar is lord, to offer the sacrifice, and be saved.' Polycarp remained adamant, there is only one Lord and His name is Jesus.

When he entered the arena, the proconsul gave him a choice, either curse the name of Jesus and make the sacrifice to Caesar or death. Polycarp famously answered, "For 86 years I have served him and he's never done me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me?"

When they threatened to burn him at the stake, he replied, "You threaten me with fire that burns only for a time, and is quickly quenched, but you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come and do what you will."

With that, the passions of the crowd exploded. Many came rushing down to the floor of the arena with piles of wood for the burning. As they were about to tie him to the stake, Polycarp stopped them and said, "Leave me alone. God will not just give me the power to endure the fire, but also the power to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you would give by the nails.

Such is the account of Polycarp, the best known and loved martyr of Smyrna.

When Jesus spoke his words to the church in Revelation 2:8-11, I wonder if John could have ever imagined such an end for the one he loved as his own son in the faith. The one he had cared for, trained, and discipled to lead the church.

> **Rev 2:8-11 says, "***"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. 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."

As I mentioned last week, the book of Revelation begins with a description of Jesus and His message to each church then draws on particular traits found in that description.

For Ephesus, it was the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands and holds the seven stars in his hand. 1:20 says the lampstands represent the 7 churches and the seven stars their angel or message to them. Despite what may be going on in the world around them, the Lord assures them that he is right there among them and his message is secure in his right hand.

As we come to the message to Smyrna, the second of the seven churches, it draws on Jesus' words found in **1:17-18 where he says, I am the first and the last, I am the Living one. I was dead and now look, I am alive for ever and ever.**

these words carried significant meaning to people of Smyrna

That Ephesus should be addressed first among the seven churches of Revelation is understandable since it was large and prosperous, the seat of Roman government and therefore the leading city of Asia

But located just 35 miles to the north at what is today the modern city of Izmir in Turkey, was Ephesus' greatest rival, Smyrna.

For the region, it was second only to Ephesus in influence, wealth, and prosperity.
Filled with a fierce civic pride, the two cities vied for preeminence, each seeking to be first and greatest in everything

while Ephesus was called the first and greatest city of Asia, Smyrna was widely regarded as first in beauty
their coins even claimed them to be the first city of Asia in size and beauty.

It was a planned city, well thought out with buildings and roads reflecting a cohesive pattern which blended together as it rose up the sides of Mt. Paugus.
It was commonly referred to in such terms as the crown and the flower, even the glory of Asia.

The 2nd century Roman writer and satirist Lucian called it the fairest of all cities.
The ancient Greek historian Strabo said it was the most beautiful city of all
And the philosopher Aristides said, "Smyrna is a flower of beauty such as earth and sun had never shown mankind."

If Ephesus was the New York of the ancient world, Smyrna was the San Francisco, built around a major harbor among narrow foothills, a natural commercial center for the rich agricultural region.

The city had both beauty and wealth
While Ephesus may have been the political center for the region, Smyrna had a special relationship with Rome which dated back long before Rome's ascendence as a world power.

Which is why the Roman statesman and scholar Cisero, called Smyrna one of our most faithful and our most ancient allies.

In 195 BC it was the first city in the world, before even Rome itself, to erect a temple to the goddess Roma.
And in AD 26, when all the cities of Asia were competing for the privilege of erecting a temple to the emperor Tiberius, it was chosen, above even Ephesus.
As a result of this honor, it became the center of emperor worship.

But there in the midst of all its civic pride and beauty and wealth, lay not a strong and thriving church with almost everything such as was found in Ephesus.
Rather the church at Smyrna was small and struggling church, persecuted and poor, made up of members who were often at the very bottom of society.

It was a city where many were suspicious and deeply hostile to Christianity, hated by the Jews who considered them heretics.
And like Polycarp, persecuted by the Romans for refusing to worship the emperor.
To follow Christ often meant giving up everything they had, their possessions often confiscated by the authorities and shunned by their neighbors.

They might not be a church with almost everything like the Ephesians, but the Lord assures them, because they had Him, they were a church with all they needed.

> **as CS Lewis so famously pointed out, he who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God alone.**

Along with the church at Philadelphia, they were the only other church in Revelations with which Jesus found no fault.

> **And to those who lived in a city which sought to be first at everything, Jesus said, these are the words of him who is the first and the last**

The one they serve, who speaks to them now, was here long before all things were created and will be here long after they are gone
He is the first and the last, the eternal one, and the persecution and pain they, and we, may be going through is but a passing moment.
So he says be faithful, hang in there and I will give you the crown of life.

Furthermore, Smyrna was a city which was totally destroyed by the king of Lydia in 580 BC and was dead for almost 3 centuries. But then it came back to life in 290 BC when it was rebuilt as one of the ancient world's first planned cities.

> **To them Jesus says, I am the one who died and came to life again.**

The one who had gone through the worst life could throw at him and came out victorious, now calls the church to stand with him and share his victory and his glory.

Those who do so, he says in :11, will not be hurt by the second death

For those facing persecution and death, the confiscation of property and hatred of neighbors, what good news this is, even greater than the story of the death and rebirth of their city.

As one commentator said, the city was famous for two things, its beauty and its suffering, both of which figure prominently in the letter to the church

I. **The message to Smyrna begins as did the message to Ephesus, he is not distant nor ignorant of their plight but assures them twice in this short message, that he knows what they are going through**

He had told the Ephesians that he knows all they do and are going through.
Because he walks among them, he knows their deeds and hard work and perseverance, that they cannot tolerate wicked men and speak out against sin, and they test the claims others to protect against false teaching, and all they have endured without giving up or growing weary.

But he also knew that their hearts and their attention had turned elsewhere
They had lost their first love, becoming busy and distracted with other, lesser.
These things were done with severity not love, air of superiority rather than compassion and concern.
Without their first love, these had become little more than going through the motions.

Quite a warning to the church of all ages, which in its zealousness has sometimes gone off track and lost its way, losing sight of the greater issues of Gods great love, mercy, and grace
Without first love all our hard work and effort can be done with harshness and a judgmental attitude towards those who we don't feel measure up

Paul described it in Romans 10:2 as very zealous for God, but as the NLT translates it, it was misdirected zeal

So Jesus said return to your first love, let it be what motivates and guides you words and actions

And now he tells the church at Smyrna, because he was dead, but is now alive forevermore, he knows what they face.

He knows their afflictions; all they have had to suffer
He knows their trials and difficulties and the persecution they face because of him
According to Leon Morris, the term for affliction does not refer to some minor difficulties or troubles, but rather, like grapes in a press, they are being pressed down and crushed because of their faith and faithfulness to the Lord
He not only knows about it, he understands what they are going through because it is what he who shed great drops of blood in the Garden, himself experienced

as Isaiah said, he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised

and he knows their poverty

all they had sacrificed in this life to remain true to Him
this refers not to financial setbacks or problems, but rather extreme poverty, many had lost everything, had it all confiscated because of their faith
he knows and he understands and assures them that they are the ones who are truly rich.

> **he knows and understands because as Luke 14:21 says, though he was rich, he had all the riches of heaven, yet for our sakes he became poor**
>
> **the one through whom all things were created yet pointed out that foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but he, the son of man, has no place to even lay his head**

and he says he knows the slander they faced because of him
the lies and false accusations being spread about them

> **he knows and understands because he himself was accused of being possessed by Satan and when he stood trial before the Sanhedrin many came and made false testimony against him in an effort to have him killed**

AND because he died and rose again and lives forevermore, he knows and understands whatever you and I may be going through as well

- We may feel like we are all alone, that no one knows or understands what we are going through, but he does
- he knows and understands whatever troubles and struggles we may be facing.
- The one who was deserted by all who were closest to him when he was arrested and crucified knows what it's like to be let down by friends
- The one betrayed by a kiss knows and understands what it is like to be let down and betrayed by someone close to you
- The one who stood falsely accused during an unjust and illegal trial knows and understands what it is like to face the lies and slanders of men and rejection
- The one who was in all ways tempted as we are yet without sin, knows and understands the trials and temptations that weigh us down
- The one despised and rejected by the very ones he came to save knows and understands what it's like to be misrepresented and misunderstood and hated without cause
- The one was oppressed and afflicted and led like a lamb to the slaughter, knows and understands what it's like to be weighed down and burdened by the unfairness of life and good intentions spurned

He literally knows and understands what it is to bear the weight of the world on his shoulders, for he who knew no sin became sin for us so that we in turn may become the children of God

He knows and he understands and he cares and tells us just as he did the church at Smyrna, I know what you are facing, the affliction and poverty, the slander and persecution, so stand firm and be true and you will receive the crown of life

For despite how things may appear at the moment,

II. He not only knows our situation, he cares

As :10 says, because knows and he cares, there is no reason to be afraid

With the assurance that he knows and understands and cares about what we are going through, comes the confidence of knowing that He who is the first and the last, who died and rose again, who conquered death and hell can certainly conquer anything this world, the flesh, or the devil throws at us

> **As he says in verse 10 "*Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*" (Revelation 2:10)**

As Hebrews 13:6 puts it, because the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. For what can man do to me?

> **In the early 4th century, there was a church leader named Eusebius. When the Roman emperor threatened to take all his possessions, to torture, banish, even kill him, he replied, "He needs not fear confiscation who has nothing to lose; nor banishment to whom heaven is his country; nor torments when his body can be destroyed at one blow; nor death which is the only way to set him free from sin and sorrow.**
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> **When facing death, the second century saint, Justin Martyr told those who threatened him, "You can kill me, but you cannot harm me."**
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> **In his book, The Insanity of God, Nik Ripken writes, people flocked to Christ in greater numbers during difficult days of persecution because that's when they could recognize how God sustains and strengthens His followers through times of trouble."**

We find our strength in him not the world and our circumstances **BUT** the one who is the first and the last, who died and rose again and is alive forevermore.

With the confidence that as Habakkuk 3:17-19 says,

> **"*Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.*"**

Smyrna was called the crown of Asia and Jesus promises to those who remain faithful, he will give the crown of life.

the one who is the first and the last, who was dead but is now alive, then promises that whoever is victorious and remains faithful, will not be harmed by the second death

They may not have been a church with almost everything like the Ephesians.

But because they had and remained true to him, they were a church with all they needed

That holds true for us as well

Of this passage, G Campbell Morgan said:

> **Jesus declares I was dead and behold I am alive.**
> **I know your suffering! Think of his suffering.**
> **I know your poverty! Think of his poverty.**
> **I know the slander of those who say they are Jews but are not! Think of the slander heaped upon him by those who said they were Jews.**
> **Fear not! Think of his unswerving faith in God.**
> **Be faithful unto death! See him faithful unto death.**
> **I will give you a crown of life! See him crowned with life, on the resurrection morning.**
>
> **This is the heart and center of the great truth delivered to the suffering saints at Smyrna. I am your companion in distress. I am your comrade in darkness. I know and I am with you, and just beyond I will be with you still, leading you to the fountains of living water.**

He knows, he cares, and ultimately, he conquers so stand firm, be faithful, and do not fear

Because as **Isaiah 7:9 tells us, if we do not stand firm in our faith, we will not stand at all.**