

Faithful to the End

Smyrna - Revelation 2:8-11

We will be looking at the church of Smyrna. They were tempted to avoid the suffering coming their way, because of fear. It is said both suffering and music are universal language. Neither require words in order to communicate. Both penetrate deeper into our souls than most words ever do. However, they have their differences.

Music can be enjoyed and appreciated by even the hardest of hearts. Suffering on the other hand is rarely welcomed by anyone. In fact, we all go to long lengths to avoid it. However, there is no escaping suffering. One day we will all experience suffering. It is universal. We might go through life without ever hearing a note of music, yet we will all experience suffering.

So how should we handle suffering when it comes? In this passage we are given down to earth answers from the Lord to this question.

Remember that these brief letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor have a purpose.

A Provincial Purpose:

In other words, it is written to an actual church in John's day. The Lord is using John to address real problems within this local assembly.

A Prognostic Purpose:

It deals with the needs of all churches through-out the ages. We can apply the exhortations and see how we line up spiritually.

Today's lesson asks the question – Is the fear of suffering holding you back from being faithful to the Lord?

Personal Purpose:

It is written to Him "that hath an ear" [v. 11a], and to Him "that over-cometh receives a promise" [v. 11b].

THE PROPHETIC PURPOSE:

The book of Revelation describes seven churches that appeared after Pentecost but before the rapture. Furthermore, Revelation 1:19 tells us that the book is broken up into three periods.

"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;"

"The things . . . thou hast seen" are found in Rev. 1:1-18. "The things . . . which are" are found in Rev. 2:1-3:22 and "The things . . . which shall be hereafter" are found in Rev. 4:1-22:21.

Therefore, the “church age” includes the items listed in the “things seen” (Rev. 1:1-20) and the “things which are” (Rev. 2:1-3:22) but does not include the final period found in Rev. 4:1f.

The Seven Churches of Asia

There are four different schools of interpretation of the book of Revelation

1) The symbolic view:

It sees the book of Revelation only as a series of pictures teaching spiritual truths. It sees no prophecy or specific historical events in Revelation [Jensen’s Survey of the NT by Irving L. Jensen, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981.) p. 498].

Chapters 1 and 20-22 in Revelation discredit this view.

2) The preterist view:

They see the book of Revelation as historically fulfilled in the first century, with eternal destinies taught in the last two chapters (Jensen, p 498).

This view falls short in evidence and the holders of this view substitute the literal, historical-grammatical interpretation of scripture for allegory. Hence, they spiritualize many of the OT and NT prophetic passages to make their position.

3) The continuous-historical view:

They apply the prophecies of Revelation to all the centuries since the time of Christ. Only chapters 19-22 foretell events after Christ’s second coming (Jensen, p. 498-9).

This view spiritualizes the text and falls short of a sound literal, historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture.

4) The futurists view: (Entail several closely related views)

First are those who hold to the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 as representative periods of church history up to the time of the rapture.

Ephesus (AD 30 -100) – name means “desirable” The Apostolic Church - Revelation 2:1-7

Smyrna (AD100 – 313) – name means “Myrrh” The Martyr Church - Revelation 2:8-11

Pergamos (AD 313-600) – name means “marriage.” The Compromising Church - Revelation 2:12-17

Thyatira (AD 600-1517) – name means “continual sacrifice.” The Roman Catholic Church - Revelation 2:18-29

Sardis (AD 1517-1648) – name means “remnant.” The Reformation Church - Revelation 3:1-6

Philadelphia (AD 1648-1900) – name means “brotherly love.” The Revival Church - Revelation 3:7-13

Laodicea (AD 1900 – rapture) – name means “people’s rights.” The Worldly Church - Revelation 3:14-22

Ephesus AD 30-100	Smyrna AD 100-313	Pergamos AD 313-600	Thyatira AD 600-1517	Sardis AD 1517 to 1648	Philadelphia AD 1648-1900	Laodicea AD 1900 to Present
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Second are those who hold that chapters 2 to 3 are intended to describe churches in John’s day as well as descriptive of local churches of all ages, up to the end times.

Finally, are those who hold that chapters 2 to 3 generally describe churches in both John’s day and churches through-out the ages, however they also see that each church seems to chronologically represent a period of church history until the church is raptured. This is the view of this author.

THE TRAPPINGS OF SMYRNA:

It was a beautiful city. Today, if you were to visit Smyrna it is a city of 200,000 people located in Turkey. The city is call Anatolia. It is an old city with twisting roads, and disheveled. Yet in the time of this letter, it was a beautiful city. Rich in industry and trade, beautiful in setting and design.

It’s chief product of trade were spices. Myrrh its main product. In fact, that is what Smyrna means, Myrrh. Myrrh is used for indigestion, ulcers, colds, cough, asthma, lung congestion, arthritis pain, cancer, leprosy, spasms, and syphilis. It is also used as a stimulant. It is applied directly to the mouth for soreness and swelling, inflamed gums (gingivitis), loose teeth, canker sores, bad breath, and chapped lips. It is also used topically for hemorrhoids, bedsores, wounds, abrasions, and boils. In foods and beverages, myrrh is used as a flavoring component. In manufacturing, myrrh is used as a fragrance, in incense, and as a fixative in cosmetics. It is also used in embalming.

It was a beautiful city with a bright history. The city was designed by Lydia (an Ancient Asia Minor empire that emerge from the Hittites) in 6 B.C. It was later rebuilt in 2 B.C. by the Romans. Literally, it was a city raised from the dead. It has been a prominent city in trade through the ancient world.

They had bazaar worship practices. Along with the usual pagan worship they built a temple to Tiberius who ruled Rome from AD 14 to AD 17. It was the second such temple built in Asia for emperor worship. From this rose the sinister Caesar-cult which was manifesting under Domitian who demanded to be called master and god. He and others that followed brought years of suffering to the church at Smyrna.

THE TRIALS OF SMYRNA

She had two types of trials

1. **Trials from without** – Rev. 2:10

The pagan cults were well organized, and they caused a great deal of havoc in this church including imprisonment, death and economic havoc.

“I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich)” - Rev. 2:9.

It seems that from long periods they experienced poverty. The term “*poverty*” is not the usual word used for poor. It is a word used to describe abject poverty. (extreme and long-lasting suffering.

Apparently, the pressures from the pagans were extreme. When one became a Christian, he lost his job, his family, his security and sometimes his life. This was compounded by the Caesar-cult.

2. **Pressures from within** –

The inside pressures came from the Judaizers – Rev. 2:9b

“I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.”

The Judaizers were infiltrating their ranks. They were saying they were Christians but were not. It seems Judaizers embraced parts of Christianity but also held to a sacrificial system, a legalistic system of circumcision and more.

They blasphemed God and raised much havoc and confusion. History tells us much about the Jewish and Judaizer population in Smyrna. They caused much havoc and persecution for the true assembly of believers.

THE TRIALS OF THE BELIEVER

Why did God permit the trials to come to this church? Why did they have to suffer years of struggle and death? I can think of six reasons for suffering:

- (1) Suffering eventually comes to all, “for death passed upon all men, for all have sinned.” – Romans 5:12.
- (2) Suffering can point the lost to Christ, because the cross is the only thing that makes sense out of death.
- (3) Suffering sometimes comes to the believer – for correction (1 Cor. 11:30-32; Heb. 12:3-13).
- (4) Suffering can come to the believer as a preventative measure (2 Cor. 12:7 – Paul’s thorn in the flesh; 2 Cor. 1 – We suffer so we can comfort others).

- (5) Suffering can be used by the believer for instruction (Romans 5:3-5 – Tribulation worketh patience; Heb. 5:8 – Even Christ is said to have learned obedience unto death).
- (6) Suffering often bears with it a powerful testimony of Christ’s presence.

Though the suffering of those at the church of Smyrna was severe. It was used by the faithful to spread the gospel.

We are given two exhortations to those who suffer – Rev. 2:10.

1. Stop being afraid

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days.”

2. Be faithful unto death.

“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

Rev. 2:9 – “I know thy works . . .”

No specific works are mentioned – only their poverty. So, I suggest their works were . . .

Endurance: They were so committed, in the face of poverty and death. Eternity with Christ was worth it all. **Steadfastness:** Doctrinally they had to be clear on the issue of the atonement. Seldom does one die or suffer for no reason. They were steadfast against idolatry.

INSIGHTS

How are we with endurance and steadfastness? If we are not committed on the little things, we will never be committed on the big things. If we are turned upside down over a ding on our car door, how will we handle real problems when they come.

One of my favorite pastors in the early church was Polycarp. He pastored this church in Smyrna around AD 100. He was a disciple of John. He pastored this church for 60 years. Remember there was no church building in those days. The members met in homes, in the woods, in caves and on boats. His entire congregation was extremely poor and continually despised. Yet Polycarp continued to pastor them.

During an uproar over Christians in Smyrna they rounded up the believers and placed them in the arena. Soldiers were sent out to capture Polycarp. At first, he hid, but was found and calmly walked with the soldiers into the arena.

He was asked to renounce Christ and proclaim the emperor-cult of Rome as God. He refused by saying, *(So all could hear him)*, “Four score and six years have I served the Lord, and He never wronged me; how can I blaspheme my King and Savior.” They burned him at the stake.

Another story goes along with this. He was a member of this great church. A small boy was led out into the arena with his father to be given over to the wild beasts. As the cages were opened and the animals appeared the little boy said, "will it hurt, Father?" and the father placing his arm around the boy's shoulders while looking off to the invisible and said, "Perhaps for one swift moment, but he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

THE TREASURES OF SMYRNA

They Were Spiritually Rich – "Thou Art Rich" (Rev. 2:9). The treasures of Smyrna lay in a powerful God who knew their trials and needs. Endless times they were protected. Their prayers were answered. They had riches in spiritual treasures that most of us know nothing of.

They are the opposite of the Laodicean church which was 212 miles to their east (as the crow flies). "Because *they said*, 'I am rich and increased with goods: and have needs of nothing.'" But Jesus said, they "knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

I wonder how many of us would sneak off into the woods to worship in order to avoid the eye of the government. How many of us would secretly walk to a small house with no airconditioning or heat in order to worship, knowing that at any minute you could be rounded up and imprisoned for your faith.

They were promised a shortened tribulation – Rev. 2:10

Two views regarding this phrase. Ten days refers to a shortness of time. As in 2 Cor. 4:18, "For our affliction which is **but for a moment**, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." 2 cor. 4:18

But most Christians and conservative scholars believe that this phrase prophetically referred to the ten edicts that the Romans made to persecute the church. The promise was that after the tenth edict persecution would end. The church was plagued with persecution or over 300 years: (1) Nero – AD 64; (2) Domitian – AD 85; (3) Trajan – AD 108; (4) Marcus Aurelius – AD 163; (5) Caracalla – AD 200; (6) Maximins Thrax– AD 235; (7) Decius – AD 249; (8) Valerian – AD 257; (9) Aurelian – AD 270; and (10) Diocletian – AD 303.

Revelation 2:8, 10c-11 promises that they would be cared for by the risen Lord.

"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive. . . ¹⁰ be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. ¹¹ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."