

# REVELATION

The Church at Smyrna:

Faithful, Not Fearful

I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

Luke 12:4-5

## Example of Smyrna:

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. **Do not fear** what you are about to suffer.

Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. **Be faithful** unto 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. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.

Revelation 2:8-11



# 1. Christians faced severe opposition in Smyrna.

A. Opposition came from those committed to the cult of Caesar.

- ❖ Three centuries before, Smyrna built the first temple in Asia for an emperor.
- ❖ Later, Rome chose Smyrna to build a temple to Tiberius.
- ❖ Those in Smyrna were expected to burn incense to Caesar each year.

# 1. Christians faced severe opposition in Smyrna.

B. Opposition came from the Jews.

- ❖ Rome typically gave leniency to Judaism.
- ❖ Often the Jews stirred up the Romans against Christians.
- ❖ Polycarp: faithful leader of church in Smyrna from c. AD 115 to c. AD 155.



“Four score and six years have I served the Lord, and He never wronged me: How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior?”

- ❖ Jewish opposition to him is astounding
  - Numbers 15: A man was condemned for gathering wood on the Sabbath.
  - Luke 13: Religious leaders criticized Christ for healing on the Sabbath, claiming He was working.



# 1. Christians faced severe opposition in Smyrna.

C. This church has already faced struggles.

- ❖ Revelation 2:9: I know your **tribulation** and your **poverty** (but you are rich) and the **slander** of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
- ❖ Refusing to worship Caesar could lead to poverty.

# 1. Christians faced severe opposition in Smyrna.

C. This church has already faced struggles.

- ❖ Even before Polycarp, the Jews opposed the Christians.
- ❖ Like Paul, these Jews likely claimed to be God's people. But in reality, they rejected Christ and were following Satan.
  - 2 Corinthians 4:4: Satan had blinded their eyes.
  - Colossians 1:13-14: They are still in the domain of darkness.

# 1. Christians faced severe opposition in Smyrna.

D. Things at the church will soon get worse.

- ❖ The severity of persecution often fluctuated.
- ❖ Revelation 2:10: Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
- ❖ Persecution will increase, but Christ gives hope.

## 2. The hope Christ gives rests in His revelation of Himself.

A. Christ is truly God (vs. 8).

- ❖ He existed before Rome and will exist long after Rome falls.



## 2. The hope Christ gives rests in His revelation of Himself.

B. Christ emphasized His resurrection (vs. 8).

- ❖ Christ's death/resurrection are encouragement in trials.
- ❖ Those in Smyrna might face death, but Christ has already conquered death.
- ❖ 1 Corinthians 15:19-20: If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

## 2. The hope Christ gives rests in His revelation of Himself.

C. Christ emphasized His knowledge of their situation (vs. 9-10).

- ❖ He knows what they have already faced, and He knows things are about to get worse.
- ❖ He also knows that the persecution has a specific limit. It will not endure, and He will still be the First and the Last when it is over.

### 3. In spite of physical poverty, they have spiritual riches.

- ❖ Revelation 2:9 I know your tribulation and **your poverty (but you are rich)** and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

#### A. Despite physical poverty, Christ emphasized their spiritual riches.

- ❖ Ephesians 2:6-7: And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

### 3. In spite of physical poverty, they have spiritual riches.

B. How should we look at physical wealth compared to spiritual wealth?

- ❖ Certainly spiritual wealth is more valuable and will last far longer.
  - Some say vow of poverty is sign of spirituality.
  - Some say health and wealth is sign of spirituality.
- ❖ Reality: God works differently with different people.
  - Rich: Abraham, Job, Solomon, Barnabas, Philemon
  - Poor: Churches in Smyrna, Jerusalem, and Macedonia
  - Both: Paul



### 3. In spite of physical poverty, they have spiritual riches.

B. How should we look at physical wealth compared to spiritual wealth?

- ❖ **Physical riches** are not an automatic sign of God's blessing, although some with physical riches are spiritually mature.
- ❖ **Physical poverty** is not an automatic sign of God's blessing, although some who face poverty are spiritually mature.
- ❖ Whether God gives much or little, **value** the spiritual more highly.
- ❖ Whether God gives much or little, **be faithful** with what we have.

## 4. Despite their difficulties, Christ gives them two direct commands.

❖ Revelation 2:10: **Do not fear** what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. **Be faithful** unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

## 4. Despite their difficulties, Christ gives them two direct commands.

A. Despite difficulties/coming persecution, they must not fear.

- ❖ Why not? It's easy to fear in trouble.
- ❖ Remember God's promises:
  - Luke 12:4-5: I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

# 4. Despite their difficulties, Christ gives them two direct commands.

A. Despite difficulties/coming persecution, they must not fear.

❖ Christ promises eternal life:

- Revelation 2:11b: The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.
- Revelation 20:14: Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

❖ Despite present difficulties, those who place faith in Christ will be victorious in the end.

# 4. Despite their difficulties, Christ gives them two direct commands.

B. Christ commanded to be faithful to death.

- ❖ Even in great difficulty, God is in control, and He wants faithfulness.
  - Sometimes He gives physical deliverance: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
  - Sometimes He uses trials to bring some to heaven: Polycarp
- ❖ Either way, be faithful!

# 4. Despite their difficulties, Christ gives them two direct commands.

B. Christ commanded to be faithful to death.

- ❖ Smyrna provides a good example of faithfulness.
  - Polycarp (c. AD 155) is called the Twelfth Martyr of Smyrna.
  - Smyrna was one of the last cities to fall to Islam.
  - Today, Turkey is 99% Muslim, but there are still Christians in Izmir.
- ❖ Instead of giving in to fear, we must strive to be faithful to God.

# **Conclusion: What do we do with what God has revealed?**

- We must commit to being faithful.
- We may not face death for our faith this week. But whatever we *do* face, we must be faithful where God has placed us.

NEXT TIME:

REVELATION 2:12-17

- The Church  
at Pergamum