

To the Church in Smyrna

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Revelation 2:8-11

Picture of Jesus standing in the middle of his churches - he knows what's happening in them, he knows what's going on, because he is there!

Darrell Johnson speaks of the message to Smyrna in terms of keeping faith under *thlipsis*, crushing pressure.

Smyrna

Modern day port city of Izmir in Turkey - 3rd largest Turkish city

Known for its beauty: called the "Flower of Asia"

Birthplace of Homer

First:

Rival to Ephesus as the first city of Asia

- "First City of Asia in Size and Beauty" stamped on its coins

Resurrection:

City was destroyed in 580 BC and then rebuilt in 290 BC - it had been dead and came back to life

Smyrna was proud of its "resurrection"

Jesus presents himself to the church in Smyrna as the "First and the Last, who died and came to life again" (2:8)

- This is how God is described in Isaiah (41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12) - so Jesus is telling the Christians in Smyrna who he is
- Jesus is the one that brackets our entire existence; he has the first word and the last
- Jesus is greater than any power, any city, any authority

Smyrna was pro Rome in all things

- Lived by the motto "Rome first in all things"
 - 195 BC - built temple to Dea Roma (goddess of Rome)
 - 23 AD - built temple to Caesar Augustus



- 25 AD - competed with 7 other cities to earn right to build temple to Tiberius; then went and built a temple to Empress Lydia and the Senate too

The Church in Smyrna:

No criticism or correction of this church by Jesus (Philadelphia only other church which Jesus does not correct)

- Why? Because they were doing everything right - they were living out their faith, they were strong and doing well

AND FOR THAT REASON THEY WERE UNDER CRUSHING PRESSURE

“A church cannot be a true church without causing trouble” Thomas Torrance

Thlipsis is experienced where two kingdoms clash, where darkness and light clash - to follow Jesus into the world is to inevitably experience pressure, sometimes even crushing pressure. Jesus' coming engenders resistance.

Opposition from 2 main groups: (1) citizens of Smyrna who were pro Rome and, (2) a segment of the Jewish community

- Christians called into question the things that made Rome great as their allegiance lay elsewhere - Rome was not first in all things for them; Jesus was.
- Jews exempt from emperor worship and military service under Roman law, but exemptions could be repealed at any moment so when the church refused to participate in emperor worship it jeopardised the Jews' privileges. Would inform on Christians to the authorities. Therefore called a synagogue of Satan (2:9b) - they were ultimately working for Satan and against God's church.

2:9 - *I know your afflictions and your poverty*

- Smyrna was a wealthy city; the Christians there should have been wealthy, but they were poor as a result of their businesses being closed down, their homes being ransacked and employment being denied them as a result of their allegiance to Jesus.
- Note use of “I know” - Jesus is not unaware; he is intimately aware and understands very well what his church is experiencing. Why? Because he stands amongst the lampstands.

2:10 - *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.*

- “*What you are about to suffer*”: Jesus does not take us out of persecution, but gives us strength to walk through it. He allows us to walk through it in order to test/prove and



improve us (James 1:2-4). Even though the devil has plans and purposes in bringing persecution against the church it's the Lord's purposes that prevail - he uses that persecution to refine and strengthen his church.

- *10 days*: 10 stands for human completeness so Jesus is talking here of a complete trial. Jesus is in control, even of this persecution. It has a finite end; it will not go on forever, because Jesus has set a limit on it. Jesus is in control of all things.

Two Commands:

1. Do not be afraid
2. Be faithful

Faith and fear are opposed to each other; faith overcomes fear.

Two Promises:

1. ***Crown of life***: unlike the victor's laurel from the athletic games held in Smyrna this victor's crown will not fade and wither; it will endure forever
2. ***Not be hurt at all by the second death***: All men die the first death, but the second death - the ultimate separation from God for all eternity will not hurt those who overcome. "Those who are born once, die twice; those who are born twice, die once" E.V. Hill

Did the church in Smyrna keep the faith? Yes: the church in Izmir is the only surviving church of the seven churches Jesus addresses in Revelation; it is still a vibrant centre of worship and faith today.



