



An 8-Week Mini-Series on the 7 Churches in Revelation
Wednesday, August 6th, 2025

Sermon #3: 'The Persecuted Church!'

Revelation 2:8-11

Last in our study through Revelation 2-3:

- Last Wednesday we looked at the first Church that John sent a letter to.
 - ***The Church at Ephesus.***
- ***We studied Revelation 2:1-7 with a sermon entitled 'Busy, but not Biblical!'***
 - We looked closely at how the Church at Ephesus lost their first love, prioritizing Jesus Christ!
 - ***Truth #1: Christ is the Protector. (v. 1)***
 - ***Truth #2: Credible Purity. (v. 2-3)***
 - ***Truth #3: Chaotic Priorities. (v. 4)***
 - ***Truth #4: Correct Plan. (vv. 5-6)***
 - ***Truth #5: Cherish the Promise. (v. 7)***

- Based on last Wednesday's message, is Christ your main love in the ministries you led, life you live and in your home?

'The Persecuted Church!'

Revelation 2:8-11

Sermon in a Sentence:

The Church at Smyrna was certainly a persecuted Church and is one of only two Churches that Paul did not deliver a criticism to. We see in this text the sustainer, the slander, the synagogue of satan and salvation!

Intro:

- Tonight we get to look at the second Church that John wrote a letter to of the seven total Churches.
 - ***The Church at Smyrna that we are looking at tonight is known as the persecuted Church.***
 - ***They are one of two Churches who did not receive any criticism from John.***
- ***As I've stated several times from this pulpit, I truly believe the Church in America hasn't experienced persecution hardly any, compared to that across the world.***
 - I try to keep up with and read the 'voice of martyrs' magazine which updates its readers on the persecution and sufferings of Christian believers all across the world.

- 12 years ago time magazine reported that the number of Christian martyrs doubled between 2012 and 2013.
- Dr. Daniel Aiken stated ‘**An estimated 100-150 million Christians have been martyred every year in recent decades.**’
 - Just as the big C Church faces a lot of persecution today, so did the Church back in Smyrna.
 - *But see the Church at Smyrna did not look like much on the outside. It did not have the prestige of Ephesus, nor the wealth and prosperity of Laodicea.*
 - Similar to the Church at Philadelphia, John has no criticism for them.
 - **They had a love for Christ and passion for people, to the point that they had faced heavy criticism.**
 - Sadly in many American Churches today the persecution that we face comes from within...
- Smyrna is the only one of the seven cities in Revelation 2-3 that is still in existence.
 - *It is located in modern day Izmir, Turkey.*
 - *Izmir is the third largest city in Turkey today.*
 - It currently has a population of 200,000 people, and is 40 miles North of Ephesus.
 - *They did not have the programming, flashy Pastor, or busy schedule that the*

Church at Ephesus had, but they had what Ephesus had lost, a love for Jesus.

- Paige Patterson describes Smyrna as ‘in all of asia there was no more beautiful city than Smyrna.’
- The City of Smyrna was beautiful not because of its geographic location, but the pattern of architecture that allowed the ancient city to blend in with the local mountain, Mount Pagus.
 - *Ancient scholars of this region of the world indicate that the city planners of Smyrna were excellently skilled.*
- *Smyrna was also the birthplace of Homer, the ancient Greek poet.*
 - It was also winner (defeating 11 other cities) for the right to build the first temple to honor Tiberius Ceaser in AD 23.
 - **This caused the city to be infiltrated with emperor worship, causing those who were entangled in it to be the potential persecutors of the New Testament Church.**
- A great Church Father, one of the most famous of the early Martyrs for the faith, Polycarp was killed in Smyrna on February 23rd, AD 155.
 - In his writings another Church father, Ireanus, confirmed that Polycarp and John knew one another...
 - Polycarp was later the Bishop (Pastor) at the Church in Smyrna.

- *It is possible that Polycarp was the Pastor at Smyrna when John wrote this letter, in 95 AD, if so, he would've been 25 or 26 years old.*
- The Church at Smyrna was a rock for first century Christianity for a long time. Thanks to men like Polycarp and others.
- Now, let's look at John's letter to them...

Question to Ask:

What kind of persecution did the Church in Smyrna go through?

Truth #1: *The Sustainer. (v. 8)*

- “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.’
 - As I just mentioned, the ‘Angel’ to the Church in Smyrna could have in fact been Polycarp, but we can't know for sure.
 - *The environment in Smyrna was rough because of this:*
 - *The population of the city (150,000-200,000) was full of loyal Roman citizens due to the shrine of Tiberias Caesar being there, (emperor worship).*
 - *But it also had a large Jewish population.*

○ *This undoubtedly created the ingredients for a hostile environment for the Church of Jesus Christ.*

- From the Scripture or Church History accounts, we do not know how the Church at Smyrna began.
 - But, you could reasonably make a case that from what is shared in Acts 19:10, that the Church plant in Smyrna sprouted from Paul's ministry in Ephesus, just 40 miles away...
 - *‘This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.’ Acts 19:10*
- *This was a congregation who regularly received harsh treatment and persecution from the Romans, including potential impending death.*
 - So, John takes them to the vision of the Glorified Christ in Revelation 1:9-20.
 - There are two things to point out that John is seeking to communicate to the Church at Smyrna here in verse 8.
- *The Eternal God. (v. 8a)*
 - “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last,’
 - This is not drastically different from another apocalypse phrase in Revelation when the Lord will refer to Himself as the Alpha and Omega.
 - *They are similar.*

- *The purpose of this statement is clear in context to the Church at Smyrna: **The One who speaks to the angel of the Church at Smyrna is the One who precedes all creation and will remain when all else is gone.***
 - *This is a clear indicator to the suffering saints of Smyrna that whatever happens in life and in death, it is presided over the ONE who knew about it all from the beginning and controls it all.*
- This would have been a huge encouragement to Smyrna that Christ was and is the sustainer!
 - It also left them with a high Christological viewpoint.
 - *John is suggesting with this statement the truth of the preexistence of Christ and the eternity of Christ.*
 - See John 1:1.
- This verse focuses on his *deity*, but He seeks to connect with Smyrna by also mentioning the *humanity* of Christ.
- *The Resurrected Lord. (v. 8b)*
 - ‘Who died and came to life’
 - John is telling them, Jesus Christ was human too.
 - *He experienced a tortuous death, one that no human can ever imagine.*
- *God the Father even had to turn his face away for a moment in time, forsaking the Son as He bore the judgement of the world.*
 - ‘The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ John 1:29
- *Jesus was subject to slander, persecution, rejection and imprisonment!*
 - *To the Church at Smyrna, Jesus went through what you went through and He conquered the grave, He preserved! So that you too might be able to make it!*
 - But, you can only do it in and through Him!
- They are being reminded that the resurrected Lord in His humanity, just years ago, walked this road. You can have hope because of Him!
 - *How often is this what we think about as the Church today?*
 - *Do we think about the suffering of Christ and what He made possible?*
 - Or about the AC?
 - Or about the literature being late?
 - Or about the music?
 - Or about the length of the sermon?
 - Or about the apparel of the preacher?

- Or about the translation of the text?
- Or, I didn't get a one call reminding be about a Church I've been going to for 10 years?

■ *The Church at Smyrna quickly puts into perspective that we have 1st world problems that are nothing compared to that of our brothers and sisters across the world...*

Truth #2: *The Slander. (v. 9a)*

- “‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)’ and the slander[a] of those who say that they are Jews and are not,’
 - The members at the Church in Smyrna were probably persecuted at work, in leisure, and in the city common areas.
 - *More than likely because they would not say ‘Ceasar is Lord’*
 - *At this time in Smyrna they would be denied employment and would have to live a life of poverty.*
 - *They were poor because they would not say that they would succumb to Ceasar. They were unemployed because they were loyal to Christ.*
 - How loyal are we? I’m afraid not near as much as the Church at Smyrna.

- In modern day terms this Church couldn’t afford AC, SS books and devotionals, to pay a preacher, or to have all the great programs that usually cost money.
 - *But John reassures them that they are rich!*
 - But how?
 - They are rich in Christ Jesus .
- What about ‘the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not’
 - *A large jewish community was also in Smyrna at this time.*
 - The Jewish religion was not impoverished because their religion was accepted by Rome.
 - *We must remember, these were the Jews who denied that Jesus was the Christ, so they did not cooperate with the Christian faith. Why would they?*
 - In their minds (like many today) Jesus was a good teacher, but He was not the Christ.
 - They were not messianic Jews, and many who were at the Church at Smyrna and other Christian Churches had left the Jewish faith and were now called ‘Christians’.
 - First being called that at *Antioch*.
 - Acts 11:26.
 - The slander was coming from frustrated and upset Jews that the movement of Christianity was growing.

- *As Paul indicated in the letter to the Hebrews and Galatia, many Jews were leaving and becoming Christians.*
- Slander then wasn't just to 'leave one's Church' but to leave them hungry to the point of death, that the movement of Christianity may end in their minds.
 - *We must redefine slander according to the Bible.*
 - *Slander is not an ugly FB post or rude text, it is to oppress someone because of their faith in Jesus Christ.*
 - Now, to the rest of what John was saying to the saints at Smyrna...

Truth #3: *Synagogue of Satan. (v. 9b-10)*

- '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.'
- *'Synagogue of Satan' has caused much debate in the scholarly world as to what this means.*
 - *Here, it is a reference to the Jews who were not following Christ.*
 - They were staying with the Torah and not believing in Jesus as the Resurrected Lord.
 - This verbiage is similar to that of what Jesus said to unbelieving Jews in John 8:44.
 - 'You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.' John 8:44

- *But I don't think this is just to unbelieving Jews. I find it deeper than that.*

- I believe that John is using the phrase 'Synagogue of Satan' to reveal for the first time in Revelation that the source of the persecution of Christians, is Satan.

- *Whether satan recruits and uses the nicotains, the jews, or the Romans, he is using different people to persecute the Church.*
- So the synagogue of satan would include anyone who is not found in Christ is therefore against Christ and apart of the synagogue of satan. There is no middle ground.

- *Sadly though, for many years in America satan has gotten ahold of many who claim Christ and use them to divide the Church and persecute the Church within the Church.*

- What a dangerous spot to be in...
- *'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.'

- While they get no criticism from John, they may have enjoyed getting criticism more than what they are told here.
- *Notice what it begins with, 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer.'*
 - This may not be what they wanted to hear. But it was what God was preparing them for.
 - The Christian life is never, in Scripture, promised to be easy.
- Then this is said after the comfort of being told not to fear, *'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.'*
 - Through John, the Lord is telling the Smyrna saints that He knows the devil's plans, and that He (God) was in complete control.
 - *They were going to be imprisoned and tried as tractors to rome.*
 - The use of ten days here is argued frequently among scholars. What does it mean?
 - *While we truly won't know until Heaven when we are given the ability to understand the things of God, I do think there's a possible solution.*

- When the number 10 is used in the Bible it regularly refers to a brief amount of time.

■ *That is seen clearly in Genesis 24:55 and Acts 25:6.*

- With the language in the greek text, it does seem to suggest that this would be for a brief time. But, we can't know that for sure. Here's what else is said to them by John...
- *'Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.'*
 - *Whether it's a brief time of imprisonment or a long time, be faithful. I will see you through.*
 - *'The Crown of life'*
 - This is 1 of 5 crowns that are mentioned in the New Testament.
 - This particular crown is the 'Crown of life' the crown that will be given to those who have been martyred for their faith in Christ.
- *This is an encouragement to them that there is a reward for them, you must preserve, you must make it through.*
- Our reward is Christ Jesus, for those who do die for Jesus there is a special reward, the crown of Christ, but we must endure...

Truth #4: Salvation. (v. 11)

- *'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.'*
 - There is something so much worse than physically dying.
 - *Here, it is called the 'Second death'.*
 - In Revelation 20:14 it is called the 'lake of fire', another way to describe hell.
 - The second death is Hell. The second death is separation from Jesus Christ in the afterlife.
 - *Everyone has to experience the first death (other than those who are raptured), but we will not all be hurt by the second death.*
 - *For the Church at Smyrna this is a double edged sword.*
 - They would face physical death, but allude the second and much more painful and eternally separating death.