

Understanding Revelation Part 3
The Church That Needed Courage
Revelation 2:8-11

Smyrna was a wealthy city second only to Ephesus.

It was located about 35 miles north,

It's main product was myrrh, a perfumed taken from tree bark, used in embalming, more notably recognized as one of the three gifts the Magi brought to Jesus.

Its name means bitter, which is a good name for what they faced.

Located on a gulf of the Aegean, one of the great cities of Asia, a seat of emperor-worship with temple to Tiberius.

Some think the present angel or pastor of this church, was Polycarp, the disciple of John, we will see a little about him a little later.

Paul possibly helped start this church on his third missionary journey as seen in Acts 19.

As we approach this letter to the church at Smyrna, we are convinced of the true Author.

In verse 8 it is declared that this message is coming from the one that is the First and the Last. Call Him the Champion, Winner, Master, or any other name you might call one who cannot be defeated, but the best name for Him is God.

He is the first to exist, ever existing and He is not ever going away.

If eternity had a beginning and ending, Jesus would dwell without its boundaries.

This letter was dictated directly from God Himself.

The same title is used in **Isaiah 44:6**, that says, "*Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.*"

You will also read in **Isaiah 48:12**, "*Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last.*"

The first and the last, the one that started it all, it all consist by Him, and it will all end at His will

Another revelation of the Author is that He is the One who died and is Alive. (Rev 1:18)

The resurrection proves it all.

It is Jesus that is proven by the resurrection. All power is His as the Conqueror of death.

(Rom 4:9) "*For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.*"

He is Lord of all and is sending a message to the church.

Sadly, the churches then, just as today, do not listen well, even though there is a clear mandate directly from the throne of God. This letter is coming from Jesus!

The next statement is one that could be seen in a mixed light, yet one that should make us aware of a simple fact.

God knows our works, whether they be good or bad.

Adversity was rampant for this church.

Jesus declared to them that in the midst of what they were facing, He knew their works.

He knew if they were good or bad, real or fake, faithful or half-hearted.

He knew if it was moral or immoral, He knew their works.

In **2 Timothy 2:19**, a simple statement of fact declares to God's church what Jesus knows and expects. It says, "*Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*"

God knows who is His, and those that are His are sealed forever.

He is aware of all of our works, and if we belong to Him, we are to depart from iniquity.

This is an imperative, not a suggestion.

Many that call themselves Christians are guilty of not heeding this command.

It means that we are to shun, flee from, stand off from, remove yourself from any deed violating law and justice or an act of unrighteousness.

Jesus was aware of all their works, good and bad.

***Another thing of which He was aware was that trials and tribulations were abounding for these people.**

No matter what we face, remember that God knows where we are and what we are facing.

Jesus is aware of the pain and trials we face since He was touched with things that we face.

Why do you think that Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus?

It was not that He could not do anything, but rather, He knew the troubled hearts, the pain, and even looked upon the effects of our sin.

No matter what we face, Jesus knows and loves us.

The great security passage, in (Rom 8:35-39)

The storms of this life have come, will come, and are coming.

That is not a very good comfort, but there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that can separate me from the love of God.

With His love comes awareness, and with that awareness I have the assurance of His attentiveness.

*Jesus also notes their poverty.

This is not the poverty of the lost, rather these people had lost all for the sake of Christ.

This loss of substance is Christlike.

(2 Cor 8:9) *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor; that ye through his poverty might be rich."*

Their poverty was also Christ-honoring. Jesus taught in Matthew 19:29 that *"every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."*

They did not regard earthly possessions more highly than their position in Christ.

Jesus comes to declare the real truth.

Yes, they had faced and were living in poverty, but there was a treasure that most would not see.

The wealth was that they were poor on earth, but rich in heaven. That is real wealth.

They were rich in salvation.

Think about this wealth and what it provides.

In John 11:26, before Lazarus was raised from the dead, Jesus declared to Martha, *"And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"*

To know that we will live in Christ forever is a wealth beyond what any other can offer.

They were also rich in heavenly places.

These pilgrims had treasures laid up "somewhere beyond the blue."

There is nothing wrong with earthly wealth unless it controls you, earthly wealth must never come before our relationship with God.

It does not matter if it is a career or hobby, they must never supercede our relationship, stewardship, or fellowship with Christ.

We must live in a way that we can obey Matthew 6:19-20, that says, *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:"*

We are to give God what is rightfully His and be willing to give all to and for Him.

Then we exhibit our riches.

That is how this church was existing as declared by the Master.

They were earthly poor, but they were in reality, rich.

Though poverty was an earthly attribute, the reality was their wealth as declared by Christ.

They not only faced adversity, but they had to deal with the anxieties of their situation.

They had to face the attack of "legalists."

There is much misunderstanding of this word today - some want to call strong standards legalism. Sadly, most that want to cry legalism are only doing so because they want to throw some standard aside.

Realistically, there are some who have taken standards to a level that is ridiculous, but we should never think that we can abuse our liberty in Christ.

Legalism is by definition those that want to mix the law with grace. This was a common problem in the early church.

Many tried to hold on to traditions and rudiments of the time before Christ and mix it with the complete work of our Lord.

We need not add any work to the work of Christ for our salvation

This does not mean we can do as we please.

We must live for Christ because we are saved, not in order to be saved.

The other extreme had already been condemned by Christ in dealing with Ephesus.

The Nicolaitines abused their liberties to sin.

In the church at Smyrna, there were those who wanted to bind the church by the sacraments and traditions of the Law, which Christ had fulfilled and nailed to His cross!

Colossians 2:8 deals with this, *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."*

The law shows us that we need a Savior, we are sinners, but it's ordinances of judgment are no

longer against those that are redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

Colossians 2:13-14 says, *"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, (the Law) which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."*

What is even worse is that this was coming from religious people that were unregenerated.

They were not of a synagogue of God, not in the family of God, but were of the synagogue of Satan.

In verse 10 of our text we see an attack of fear.

The emotion of fear is a normal reaction of our flesh.

If we struggle, it is not wondering if God can do anything or if He is sufficient.

Most of the time we are fearful of circumstances or just the unknown.

Advice is easily given when we are not in the midst of trouble, but when trouble comes we must return to God's Word and remember what we have been instructed to do.

In the case of these that were being martyred, Jesus had taught in Matthew 10:19, *"But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak."*

God is in control.

In the trials of daily life, **fear must be rejected by believing the principle taught in Matthew 6:31-33**, that says, *"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

The preeminence of Christ answers the fears of supply.

And though it is hard, we are commanded in **Philippians 4:6** to *"Be careful for nothing (do not be anxious); but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."*

I must confess this is not always easy, nor was it easy for this early church, but it was possible or Christ would not have told them not to fear.

If Jesus tells us to do it, He will enable us to do it.

Verse 10 also reveals that afflictions are coming. A spiritual attack was coming of great proportion.

The devil was going to attack!

Never give place to the devil, yet we must admit and confess that we face spiritual warfare.

How many times have our hearts been broken because someone has given into an attack.

An interesting passage is found in the tenth chapter of Daniel.

Daniel had been praying for three weeks, and no immediate answer came.

Finally an angel came and picked Daniel up off the floor. (**Dan 10:12-13**)

There was a spiritual warfare concerning Daniel's prayers.

How much more should we pray and seek the face of God.

He will fight for us.

Paul faced similar battles, as he explained in 1 Thessalonians 2:18: *"Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us."*

Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12 that our battle is not of this world, *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."*

We must be prepared for spiritual battle.

Just because we deny a spiritual battle does not remove it or make it non-existent.

We must fight and adorn ourselves with the armor of God as we face spiritual attack.

The church at Smyrna was also facing some coming physical attacks.

Prison and even worse fates were facing them.

Historically we read that their pastor, Polycarp was martyred when he would not recant his Christian faith and before he was burned at the stake.

It has been placed around A.D. 168, eighty-six years after his conversion.

I read that he said: "Fourscore and six years have I served the Lord, and He has never wronged me: How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior."

This persecution was beyond anything that modern American Christians have imagined.

Christians were crucified, burned as street lights, fed to the lions, and boiled in hot oil.

All of these things faced the church of that day.

Jesus did give comfort that the persecutions would not be forever.

He says that their tribulation would be ten days.

Some believe it has to do with the ten Roman rulers from 160 to 313 AD that persecuted the

church beginning with Nero and ending with Diocletian.
Others believe it had to do with the last ruler, Diocletian who reigned for 10 years.
Either way, God told them it would come, but it would end.
*Our troubles may not pass how and when we desire, but they do pass.

Along with all of the trouble that faced this church, they were given some assurances.

It may not seem like a great assurance, but for the early church a confirmation from God that all is well would have been welcomed.

Jesus told them that they would share His cross as they would be faithful all the way to death.

We should beg God to help us be so faithful.

They would also share His crown.

The crown of life is one of five crowns in the Bible.

This one seems to be one given to those that love and look for the return of Christ.

It also is one given to those that face troubles in the Christian walk.

The same crown is mentioned in **James 1:12**. It says, "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*"

John Trapp said of this crown, "Kings' crowns are so weighty with cares, that often they make their heads ache. Not so this crown; the joys whereof are without measure or mixture."

When martyr John Huss was to be burned, a paper crown with painted devils was put on him. He declared, "My Lord Jesus Christ, for my sake, wore a crown of thorns: why should I not wear, for His sake, this light crown, be it ever so ignominious?" Then the bishops said, "Now we commit thy soul to the Devil." "But I," said Huss, lifting his eyes to heaven, "do commit my spirit into thy hands, O Lord Jesus Christ!"

John Huss, as well as these early saints realized that they would only die once.

All of us participate in the first birth and the first death, but if we participate in the second birth, that is we are "born again", we will not face the second death.

Physical death may take these bodies, but because of the Spiritual birth, the saved will never face the second death.

The letter to this church seems to be gloom and doom.

Yes, they were being warned of the rough time that they would face.

Our forefathers in the church faced torment and torture beyond our understanding, but there is a very comforting phrase in verse 9 with which we have dealt, "*I Know!*"

Yes, this phrase could bring conviction with the recognition that God knows all, but it is also a phrase of comfort.

No matter what we face, or where we may be on the journey.

No matter what we do, think, or say, Jesus knows.

2 Corinthians 3:5 says, "*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.*"

We must rest and rely in that sufficiency.

Take the advice in Isaiah 35:4 and "*Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.*"

We may face tribulation, persecution, ridicule, and even death, only God knows. **Whatever we face, He is faithful.**

Years ago a woman, with her little baby, was riding in a stagecoach in western Montana. The weather was bitter cold, and, in spite of all the driver could do to protect her, he saw that the mother was becoming unconscious from the cold. He did something next that was seemingly cruel. He stopped the coach, took the baby, and wrapping it warmly, put it under the seat. He then seized the mother by the arm, dragged her out of the coach and put her upon the ground. He then did the unthinkable. In the cold weather, he drove away, leaving the mother in the road. As she saw him drive away, she ran after him, crying for her baby. Frantically she cried and ran after that coach. The driver was merely saving her life. He watched closely and maintained just the right speed. When he felt sure that the mother was warm from her exertion, he allowed her to overtake the coach and rejoin her baby. The trial had a purpose.

Only God knows what we will face and why, but our trust must be that God knows what is best.

I am sure that mother did not see it was best until she was reunited with her baby and realized that the coach driver had in reality saved her life.

We must live with the acknowledgment that our life belongs to Christ.

One martyr said to his executioner, "You take a life I cannot keep, and bestow a life I cannot lose; which is as if you rob me of counters, and furnish me with gold."

We may not have to die for Him, but will we live for Him with the same passion?
When we need courage we must turn back to the promises of God and realize that He knows.