

Smyrna: When Christians Are Crushed

Revelation 2:8-11

There is something disturbing about the church at hand this evening, Smyrna. The city was located a scant 30 miles north of Ephesus our church from last week and was a daughter church of Ephesus. Its name Smyrna, means bitter it comes from the word Myrrh. In and around Smyrna grew various fragrant plants and small bushes from which a reddish brown sap or resin was derived by crushing the plants. From that resin products were made that benefitted the living and the dead. It was a major ingredient in the Old Testament anointing oil for the tabernacle and Priest (Ex 30:23); was used in making perfume (Ps 45:8); it was used to make embalming fluids (Jn 19:39); and was given as a pain killer (Mk 15:23).

Most importantly we should note that the word fits the **suffering church** there in Smyrna because it was going through bitter sorrow and crushing persecution and affliction. I said there was something disturbing about this church and that is it. It was going through terrible persecution and Jesus said to them that they would go through even more.

That is a difficult thing for us to imagine in this day in America. We have a very ingrained perception of what God is like and how he will react when his children suffer. We assume that since God loves his children that he will do all to stop pain, problems and certainly persecution and he will do it in short order.

I need to show you a few things that Jesus said.

Mt 10:17 But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. 18 You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.

Jn 15:20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you;

Jn 16:2 They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.

Paul warned of the same thing.

Php 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

2 Ti 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Peter adds:

1 Pe 4:12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Those that deny God's existence say the presence of suffering in the world is proof that there is no God. If God was good and God was all knowing and all powerful surely he would not allow suffering. Really?

The case of Job...

The case of Jesus... Mt 3:17 - 4:1

We are being fed a continual line of fairy tales today. Much of what reports to be Christianity are nothing but self-serving, self-indulgent greed.

The Bible never says that God's will is material prosperity but it does say this. ---- *1 Peter 4:19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.*
Also see Acts 14:22.

Suffering can be a cause for rejoicing when we suffer for Christ's sake.

Mt 5:11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

1 Peter 4:13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

People are suffering today – Egypt, Turkey, India, Indonesia...

You might say, oh well, thank God it is always over there somewhere and that could never happen here in America.

So what were the Christians in Smyrna suffering for in the first place?

1. They were charged with **cannibalism** because of the Lord's supper ordinance.
2. They were charged with **home wrecking** because of the fact that some members of a family might believe while others didn't
3. They were considered **heretics** by the Jews because they would not accept their traditions as binding on them
4. They were considered to be **atheist** because they would not conform to the polytheism of Smyrna.
5. They were attacked because they were so **immoral**. The Agape – or love feast was considered by the Jews to be nothing but some sort of orgy.
6. The Romans zeroed in on the church because the Jews convinced the authorities that they the Christians were **insurrectionist**. Especially in Smyrna this was true. It was here at Smyrna that the loyalists of Cesar forced the issue to the point of huge persecution. Listen to William Barclay's account of Polycarp.

1) Our Lord Jesus is **present** for all (ver. 8.) "*first and last*"

Is 41:4 Who has performed and done it, Calling the generations from the beginning? 'I, the LORD, am the first; And with the last I am He.'

Is 44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.

Re 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Re 1:11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,"

Re 1:17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.

Jesus is present when the trouble **begins**

Jesus is present while the trouble **lasts**

Jesus is present after the trouble **has past**

- 2) Our Lord Jesus **knows** all (verse 9) "*I know*"
- He knows when we **labor** for him
 - He knows how we **suffer** while we labor for Him
 - He knows what we **lack** while we labor for Him
 - He knows who is **opposing us** while we labor.
 - a. The Jews should have been the first to receive their Messiah, their King but they were the first to fight against Him.
 - b. Their synagogue was supposed to be About God but it was about Satan. "Ye are of your Father the Devil and his works you will do."
 - c. Today there are two types of churches. The ones that are doing the bidding of Jesus and the ones doing the bidding of Satan.
- 3) Our Lord Jesus **measures** all (verse 9) (*but you are rich*)
- The poor – rich in faith. Laodicea rich material but bankrupt.
- 4) Our Lord Jesus **foresees** all. "*you will have tribulation*"
- It will happen. But couldn't God change it? The devil will do it.
 - Romulo Sañe.
- 5) Our Lord Jesus is **controlling** all. "*Ten days.*"
- 6) Our Lord Jesus encourages us to **endure** all. "*Do not fear*"
- Do not fear what you are about to suffer!
 - Don't fear him that
- 7) Our Lord Jesus promises life **after all**. "*be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of Life*"

How can I be sure that I will be faithful unto death? People that are not **faithful in Life** will not be faithful in death.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Jesus comes to church. He knows who is suffering. He knows your pain.

The Father Suffers with you as does the Son.

*2 Co 5:18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that **God was in Christ** reconciling the world to **Himself**, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

What about this 2nd death thing?

We have heard the lesson but are we **getting the message?**