

# The True Church: Poor, Yet Rich

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] now we're going to turn to Revelation chapter 2 as we continue our studies, our thoughts on the vision to the seven churches in Asia Minor we've reached the second church to the church in Smyrna in Western Turkey modern day Western Turkey just four verses to read from verse 8 to verse 11 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're Jews and are not but they're a synagogue of Satan do not fear what you're 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'll have tribulation be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life he who is an ear to hear he who is an ear let them hear what the spirit says to the churches the one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death amen and let's join together again in prayer let us pray

Lord we're so weak even in our coming before you weak in our understanding of your word but Lord open open our eyes to see wonderful things from your word and open our minds to understand your truth even as you spoke to that church in Smyrna nearly two thousand years ago as you speak to the church today by your word Lord help us to see even in that vision that you gave to John help us to see in that vision the message that you give to us even for this day and age so help us Lord even in this act of worship to glorify your name as we consider your word of truth now hear us as we plead before you for that understanding go before us we ask in Jesus name Amen and so as we've read in that short passage that short word to the church in Smyrna modern day

Izmir we want to look at again three aspects to following the passage this passage that really tells us of well this gives an indication of the true church a true church that was in many ways poor poor in the eyes of the world and yet in the eyes of God rich and we'll look at that whole apparent dilemma that dichotomy that difference between poor and rich as we look through the passage and as we look in the passage as we read there we see that certainly the church was troubled troubled by those from outside the church troubled by those who hated the church and it was a church that was to be tested tested as to its true faith and the one true God and this we'll see and as we read there in the passage the church that would be seen and is seen to be triumphant triumphant in the Lord Jesus Christ the true church poor yet rich and you know when we think of the true church the true church of God in other words the faithful community of believers then that church is going to present a very well we might say a very strange picture to to the watching world outside because the true church will follow the Lord Jesus and will be utterly contrary to to the values of the world the true church will be humble not proud the true church will exhibit selflessness rather than selfishness and the true church will be hungry for the word of God and not satisfied in the offerings that the world seeks to to give to satisfy that are no satisfactions at all and the true

Christ centre church is poor in spirit it's not not rich in in what the world outside of Christ deems to be to be of value the true church of God we might say in many ways in many ways we'll mirror this church there in Smyrna this church that John was given a vision of in fact given a vision of seven churches this church the one church in seven in this whole vision vision of the seven churches that in fact was given fullsome praise no condemnation no censure all the other churches had censures all the other churches had elements of condemnation but this church there's one church out of seven there's nothing to indicate any sense of God being displeased with the work of the church yes of course there were sinners in that church yes of course there were those who needed the forgiveness of God but in their work as a church being troubled tempted tested and in triumph God speaks words of if you like words of praise to that church and what we find then in this this message this vision of this church in Smyrna is so much to teach you teach us about true faithful service for the Lord and true faithful service happening in an atmosphere an environment of a world

that hates the church because the true church loves the Lord Jesus the same Lord Jesus that the world hates and yes as we said the church in Smyrna a troubled church a tested church by a triumphant church and that's surely the case and it has to be the case where the word of God is proclaimed through the means of the church because the church when it is faithful to the word of God the church will be troubled troubled by outsiders and the church in seeking to honour and glorify the one true Lord the church will be tested you'll be tested we'll all be tested as to the genuineness of our faith and the same church will know triumph the triumph over sin the triumph in the Lord knowing that that victory over over sin over Satan and ultimately over death itself as we see promised there to the church there in Smyrna over almost 2,000 years ago so what do we learn then?

[ 7 : 11 ] What does this passage tell us about the true church that's poor and yet rich? Remember this is part of God's word this is part of the divinely inspired word of God so this is God's word for you for me for all of us to know what God requires of his people in every age that the church exists even even in our present age so what about this this place Smyrna as I say it's a modern day Izmir I'm sure you've heard of Izmir but Smyrna at the time 2,000 years ago when this vision was given it was a very beautiful city it was a commercial centre it was second only to the city of Ephesus in fact the people of Smyrna actually thought themselves as more superior to the people of Ephesus it was a coastal city it was a city that certainly materially became very rich very rich through the many business schemes that were happening at that time a very prosperous people that lived there and at the same time a very pagan city pagan worship that predominated in that

Roman of that that city under Roman control part of the Roman Empire but you know amidst all that vast wealth and that pagan environment was a church a church that was there we're not exactly told in scripture how that church had come to be how it come to be there in Smyrna but there's no doubt a vision is given regarding that church that there's a group of people there a faithful group of people certainly a minority in relation to the overall population but a minority a faithful minority could remain faithful in the face of so much opposition surely the case even in today's day and age in so many places the church a minority and yet to remain faithful in the face of so much opposition we'll build on that in a moment but still back to

Smyrna as we notice there in the passage if you're a Christian in Smyrna in the first century AD you'd know it was in one sense no easy matter being a Christian there this was a little community under constant attack and certainly even referencing the church there being poor the suggestion that that church certainly was poor materially because being a Christian and being noticed as a Christian would mean that even employment was very difficult to come by when you wouldn't worship the pagan practices and certainly not to worship the Roman emperor so on a human level this is a minority this is a group that would have been looked down upon a group that would have felt outsiders seem doomed poor slander suffering and as we read there with the prospect of further suffering to come but as this message is given to that church in

Smyrna the words themselves are words of encouragement to encourage that church even as I pray we'll be encouraged in this evening's service as we read through what has to be applied the principles applied even to our church today and you know you can just see these people in Smyrna that little group as they're hearing the word they've been troubled but their fear subsiding knowing that they're safe yes they're troubled yes they're told they're going to be severely tested and put into prison for their faith but they've got that promise of sure victory in the Lord Jesus it's surely the same message that has to be given today you know when we think even of our own land the church itself whether it's north south central belt the church itself is a minority statistically a tiny tiny percentage well in almost we see almost every city or town or village even in our own land but you know you have that assurance you've got that assurance that the

Lord knows and the Lord cares and that the Lord is our keeper even keeping his flock even as he kept that flock there in Smyrna as he keeps this flock and all the flock of the Lord up and down the land even there in Smyrna because as we said it was a troubled church we read that in the first couple of verses from the Lord who spoke to the church the words of the first and the last who died and came to life and he said I know I know your tribulation I know your poverty but you're rich and the slander of those who say that they're Jews are not but are a synagogue of Satan let's just look at these words that are given to the church there in Smyrna who's speaking here it's the Lord Jesus the first and the last Jesus by his spirit he's addressing the church he's the alpha and the omega the first and the last in other words this is the divine the eternally divine son of God and so as the

church hears who's addressing them they have that confidence this is the sure word of the eternal God speaking to them you know they had the old testament just the old testament of scripture at that time and they would know from

[ 13 : 00 ] Isaiah 44 verse 6 that as the Lord Jesus speaking to them of his being the first and the last they know this is the divine God speaking Isaiah 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 God's speaking of himself as Jesus speaks of himself no beginning no end he's the first he's the last he's the eternal one and if he's the eternal one the first and the last you have that absolute confidence that he the Lord is sovereign in control of his church whether of different congregations of the church worldwide the true church of God he's sovereign he's Lord he's with you and yes there will be trouble there will be testing but you have that complete confidence in your Lord and Saviour and even in the word that's given to the church you have that absolute confidence that his word is truth just as the people in

Smyrna there would have that absolute confidence that what God was saying to them was utterly true because not only is the one who's addressing them the first and the last he also tells them that he's the one who died and came to life you know in that little message there to the church in Smyrna they're told that they're going to be tested and they're going to have tribulation they're told there for 10 days it's just a way of saying for a limited time but they're going to be tested they're going to be tried they're going to be persecutions maybe even martyrdom and death so right at the start of this letter there's this message to that church who will face such tribulation that the one who's speaking to them is the one who lived and died and rose again and so yes the church can have that absolute assurance that even when it will suffer and even suffer severely that you know that ultimate victory even even in death because the one who's our

Lord and Saviour is the one the Lord Jesus who rose from the dead the one who's who triumphed and if the Lord Jesus triumphed over death and you have that promise that all who are his even in these times of persecution and tribulation that you will know that triumph over death and even as those in Smyrna heard these great words of encouragement even for you yourselves that you know that you have that promise of everlasting life and the one who gave his life for you well what was the message that the one who was the first and the last and who died and came to life what was the message that Jesus gave to the church well he said I know I know your afflictions I know your poverty yet you are rich I know the slander of those who say they're Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan troubled afflicted poor and yet rich but know as Jesus says I know I know Lord Jesus he knows his church he knows his people inside out he knows you better than you even know yourself he knows everything there is about his church about his flock he knows everything there is to know about you nothing escapes his knowledge nothing escapes that sure knowledge of the all-knowing and all-seeing Lord what does Jesus know here he knows that the church there in Smyrna he knows his church is afflicted and that it's poor he knows that that church there is going through well a particular time of trouble and it's real trouble they're enduring this time of trouble in a sea of hostility they're being faced with this hostility and hatred of those who would seek to have that little church in Smyrna destroyed of course before the world they were deemed to be poor as we said no doubt because of even the appearance that they would give as those who had very little in terms of the world's riches and whatever the real reason for their material poverty yes okay they were a poor church they were afflicted and yet

Jesus tells that church he deems them to be rich and let's pray that the church of today you all who are his all who profess the Lord Jesus as Savior that you know where true riches lie you read elsewhere in scripture in James 2 verse 5 has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom see that's true riches being rich in the gift of faith the gift that God has given you to believe that's richness indeed and to have that promise of an eternal inheritance inheritance in the kingdom of God that's riches indeed and to follow the Lord Jesus to know Jesus as your Savior where else in the world is the richest such as that there's nowhere nowhere else because you're following the one who was rich and yet for your sake became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich

[ 18 : 58 ] I ask you do you know true riches true riches the wealth that truly matters the wealth of faith the wealth of an inheritance and glory do you know the riches of knowing Jesus as your Savior the riches that you know all the money in the world simply couldn't buy even begin to buy well the church there in Smyrna were given that message they were rich and you know to be told there in

the midst of all that they were enduring and suffering to be told that they were rich surely you know transform their hearts enable them to rejoice in the Lord you know and whether you're a church in ancient Smyrna or a church in a congregation in modern day Scotland the same applies because you are rich not by what the world deems to be rich you are rich in the Lord Jesus Christ don't just know that in theory know it in practice apply that riches in your life you are rich in the Lord

Jesus Christ and you're rich even in the face of so much opposition as the church there in Smyrna well as we read there the slander of those who say that they're Jews and are not but they're a synagogue of Satan people who said they were Jews slandering the church there in Smyrna but in fact as we're told there they were from what Jesus refers to as a synagogue of Satan now of course we have to understand the terminology here the true Jew the true Jew is of the true Israel of God the true Jew belongs to the covenant people of God the Christian churches often referred to as the new Israel of God now of course John who wrote this letter he was a Jew by birth Apostle Paul was a Jew by birth but remember what Paul wrote of being a true Jew Romans 2 a true Jew is one who's a Jew inwardly whose heart has been made right with God by the power of the Holy Spirit so those people there in Smyrna who were slandering the church they were slandering the true Israel of God the people there who were slandering the true church of God the true Israel of God they claimed to be children of God by birth but of course unless they knew the Lord Jesus as Saviour they were not true Jews in fact

John describes them as being a synagogue of Satan this group in Smyrna that well meeting together in a place that wasn't serving God they claimed to be but in fact as we're told serving the accused of serving Satan you know these are quite frightening words even the number of times I'm sure you've read that passage to refer to a certain group of people as being a synagogue of Satan these are chilling words but you know the same is happening even today because there's so many who claim who claim to be following God who claim that they know God's will but they're not serving God they're serving the evil one and you know there's nothing more disturbing in all the world to hear those who speak in words that might seem to be plausible who might claim to be the Israel of God but at the same time slandering the true church of God slandering a Christ centre faith those who say good is evil and evil good please be discerning in what you hear in the media please be discerning on what you see and hear every day whether in these various media that we're so accustomed to because we're so awash with so many who in fact say good is evil and evil good who in fact nothing but charlatans nothing but promoters of the evil one because there are many many false prophets in the land and in the world today and there are many who trouble the church many who trouble the church with teaching that's so contrary to the word of God but hold fast to the word of God hold fast to that word that's true yes we'll be troubled troubled by these false teachers but hold fast to the word of God and be encouraged in your faith to stand strong and firm in the one true God and the one true saviour and in your standing firm remember you'll be tested you'll be tested and quite rightly tested as to the genuineness of your faith as we see here in the case of Smyrna verse 10 the tested church don't fear about what you're 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'll have tribulation as we were just saying not so long ago God's sovereign in every aspect of your life he's sovereign in every aspect of the life of the church he's sovereign in every aspect of your life as individuals even when the evil one is permitted to assault you let's think of the case of Job when God permitted Job to be troubled by these many satanic attacks and Job suffered he suffered for a limited time and the church in Smyrna was going to suffer for a limited time ten days it says here it's just a figurative statement it's going to be a set time a limited time under God's permission but in that set time the church there was going to be tested their faith was going to be tested tested even amidst all their troubles their love for the Lord was going to be tested and as we're told they were going to be tested yes but tested as to the genuineness the reality of their faith though now for a little while that's what Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1 6 of those who are tested though now for a little while grieved by various trials as Peter writes so that the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold notice again the riches of true faith more genuine more precious than gold gold that perishes though it's tested by fire that you may be found to result in praise and glory and honour in the revelation of Jesus

[ 26 : 05 ] Christ you know even in our present day and age even in this what this third decade of the 21st century church has been tested tested as to its genuineness of its faith remember any testing is precious that's what Job knew when he was tested when he cried out but he knows the

way that I take when he has tested me I shall come forth as gold and you're going to be tested in so many different circumstances whether these circumstances are personal whether it's congregational denominational and yes tested when you're under attack from Satan tested when life events happen and happen unexpectedly tested when God permits you to have a particular limited time of trial but be tested in that testing knowing that your faith will be proved and that far from being shaken in your faith and trust in

God that actually these times of testing strengthen that faith strengthen your faith in the sovereign Lord your keeper so don't be afraid well don't be afraid these were the words that God gave the Lord Jesus gave to the church there in Smyrna when he told them about their testing he tells them don't be afraid and don't be afraid when times of testing come upon you because the genuineness of your faith is going to be seen yes during these times of testing and even in these times of testing you'll testify to the one true God who never leaves you has never left you and never forsaken you and remember yes when when Satan is given permission even to torment you he's already defeated Jesus has conquered Satan conquered death and it's the same Lord Jesus who promises the church that crown of life that triumphant crown of life as we read there in verse 10 it's the same Jesus the same Lord who inspired James to write in James 1 12 blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him the triumphant church be faithful unto death and I'll give you the crown of life says Jesus Jesus promises the church there in Smyrna this crown of life something we were looking at a few weeks ago when we were looking at the church in Ephesus remember the laurel crown for the athletes who came first in the race well Smyrna actually was famed for its games the victor receiving the laurel crown Jesus is saying here to the church in Smyrna you might know of one kind of crown but there's another crown there's the crown of glory for you who won that victory in me and for the

Christian the Christian who's won his race who's kept the faith there's that crown of righteousness awaiting you awaiting you that crown that never fades that crown that is given an eternal life for all who trust in the Lord Jesus Jesus you see Jesus here promising the church that's the church in Smyrna the worldwide church he's promising that future glory that outweighs any present suffering and any present tribulation salvation because as we read there in verse 11 Jesus promises eternal life to those who've overcome who've conquered who've overcome the evil one because as we read there the one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death that's what Jesus is saying here well as you know the first death is the death that all of us will know at one time whether you're a

Christian whether you're not a Christian that's separation of the soul from the body but there's a future death and that's not a physical death it's a spiritual death it's that absolute separation forever from God and as God's word tells us that that casting of those who have not submitted to the Lord Jesus in life then God's word tells us of the casting of that soul in hell forever but no Christian no one in Christ will suffer that death that second death if you've got a saving relationship in the Lord Jesus you have absolute confidence and assurance that you will not suffer that second death you know one of the best known Christians that time around about that time may well have been sitting in that congregation when this letter was read this was a man called Polycarp Polycarp was actually martyred he was actually a bishop in Smyrna and for his faith he was martyred at this trial he was commanded in fact ordered to curse the Lord

[ 31 : 35 ] Jesus but in his trial he said these words I've served the Lord for 86 years and I've received only good from him how can I renounce my king and you know whether it's the time when Polycarp was martyred whether today in 2022 AD remember you served the same Lord that Polycarp served the church in Smyrna served the same Lord who cares for his church who cares because his church is the body of Christ in earth so Jesus is saying don't be afraid don't fear yes there's going to be these times of trouble and tribulation but look ahead to the glory of heaven look ahead to that crown of life that awaits all all who are overcomers look to where the church triumphant is even now gathered in praising God eternally look to that time when you'll join with the saints in glory praising God for that great salvation that crown of life that awaits you but is this word being applied to all of you this evening do all of you have that assurance of that crown of life is Jesus your saviour do you have confidence in him alone because does anyone for whom these words here to the church in Smyrna seem utterly irrelevant utterly detached then listen again to what what's been said here particularly of this second day because all our time here on earth is

limited there's an eternity awaiting all of us but may you know that prospect of the eternity in the glory of heaven with the

Lord Jesus that's not an eternity that's separate from him I pray that you all will know the one who is the first and the last the one who died and who came to life so that you might have life in all its fullness yes now and the glory to come and so let's give thanks to the one who is the alpha and the omega the beginning and the end amen let us pray Lord may we truly rejoice in that truth and knowledge of that great salvation in Christ alone as we look to the Lord Jesus the one who is the first and the last the one who died and who came to life may all who have gathered and worshipped this evening whether in the building physically or whether from online may each and every one who has worshipped know the promise of eternal life the crown of life may we be those who truly do live as unto the

Lord and not to man and the glory the rejoicing in the presence of God eternally we give thanks Lord for the knowledge of those who have gone before us even family members even friends loved ones who now are in the glory of heaven and so Lord may we truly have that assurance of the eternal glory that awaits all who are yours hear us Lord as we pray these things in and through the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ we pray Lord them