

# To the Church in Smyrna

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Date: 13 July 2023

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     God's Word, of course, turn into the book of Revelation. Revelation chapter 2. I'm reading this evening in verse 8. Revelation chapter 2 and verse 8.

Let's hear again the Word of God. And the angel of the church in Smyrna write, These, the words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you're rich, and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are 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 will have tribulation.

Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. For one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.

[ 1 : 0 7 ]     Amen. Of course, we said we're carrying on our short series in the book, looking at these seven churches. Now, of course, we can't summarize every week, or else we'll be spending most of our time summarizing as time goes on.

But a quick summary, as we did last time, these are the seven churches which the book of Revelation was primarily written for.

We said that last week. These are the seven churches which first received this letter from John. And, of course, as we'll see and as we know, the letter is also for the wider church, the wider church of the day, and the wider church, of course, today for ourselves.

But in the back of our minds, we have to remember, this is a letter written for a certain time to a certain church, or certain churches. Of course, it has application today.

But like all of Scripture, like all the letters we see, all the prophecies we see, they were written at a time to a person, to a group, for a reason. But also, that doesn't change the fact.

[ 2 : 1 5 ]     It's also written, of course, in God's providence, in God's planning for us today. And as we come to this church in Smyrna, we, of course, had last week the church of Ephesus, a great church which had many things going for us, as we said, but for all of their religious perfection, for all of their right theology, they had lost their love for Jesus.

They had lost their care for their first love. And they had, as right as they might have been, and as right as they were, we see that Jesus warns them that if they do not find once more and repent of their sin, the sin of being right in all things, but in what truly matters, that he will come and remove from them the candlestick, that the church of Ephesus would not exist anymore.

We said, just briefly at the end of last week, that that warning of Christ, it obviously was not listened to. The church of Ephesus did not last all that long in the grand scheme of things, and we'll see that this evening, why that matters.

Well, here we are tonight in Smyrna. And I say it will be a short study tonight. It's not because I'm trying to get on holiday any faster. This study was prepared, of course, a few weeks ago, before we knew our timeline.

But it's a shorter study because this is the shortest address to the church. Out of all the seven churches, Smyrna gets the shortest letter written to them, the shortest address written to them, and for good reason.

[ 3 : 53 ] Smyrna is one of the only two churches that Jesus has nothing to say to them that's a warning. Now, he does warn them of something, we'll see in a second, but he has nothing to say to them that concerns their own sin, their own backsliding.

The church in Smyrna has done nothing to make Christ warn them of their sin. In that, they're unusual.

It's Smyrna and Philadelphia, the two churches where Jesus says nothing against them. And we'll see that, although that's encouraging, I'm sure, of course, for this church, the truth is, Jesus said nothing against them.

Jesus had nothing against them. They served him well. But truly, they served him in a context, in a situation that was horrifying, to say the least.

Of course, Smyrna, a rich town, we'll see this more in a second, like Ephesus, a trading town. We said Ephesus was perhaps the cultural capital of the area.

[ 5 : 01 ] It's where you'd go, I guess, to use modern terms, you'd go to Ephesus for your museums and your wine and cheese bars and cafes. That was that kind of thinking of the day.

And I'm not joking, that was what Ephesus was known for. It was known for its, well, the equivalent of cafes for the day. You'd go and relax and enjoy the fresh wine of the vines there.

Smyrna was much more of an economic area. It was rich beyond understanding. It was an area where the traders would often build their homes.

The traders who worked in Ephesus and who did much business in Ephesus would have their mansions of the day built in Smyrna. It was a rich, rich town, a rich city.

As we said last week, our letter to the church follows the same pattern. First of all, we have who the letter is coming from. It's to the angel of the church. We said last week, that's the minister, that is the one who has been given responsibility over this church.

[ 6 : 07 ] To the angel, to the minister, to the servant of the church in Smyrna. Right. who is saying this letter to Smyrna? Who is sending them this letter?

The words of the first and the last who died and came to life. Last week, we saw that he is the one who holds the seven churches, who holds the seven angels, I should say, who holds the ministers and leaders of the churches, and who walks around among the golden lampstands in verse 1 of chapter 2.

Well, tonight, Jesus, as he addresses himself to this church, he tells them two things about himself. He is the first and the last.

As he begins to address this church, and we'll see in a second, and we know ourselves, I'm sure, already, a church which was facing great trial, which was about to face, as we read, great tribulation, great pain, great suffering, a church which would face almost certain death for some of the members of it.

Jesus addresses this small gathering, and he begins by reminding them that he is the one who is the first and the last. Before time itself, he was there.

[ 7 : 38 ] Before creation, he is present. Before time itself has any meaning, before anything at all is there, he is there.

And before time and creation, he is there. And in his plan, he has planned out the church of Smyrna. He has planned out the existence, they're planting.

We aren't sure, of course, when this church or where this church really started from. We can't say for certain, and we shouldn't. But this small church in this unlikely place, it was planted at some point, and Jesus says that he is the first.

But before time itself, he knew their situation, he knew what they would suffer. Of course, he's also the last. that, yes, they will suffer and go for situations.

Yes, they will be imprisoned, likely tortured and killed, some of them at least. But he will be there. They will come, they will go. The church in Smyrna might well have its time.

[ 8 : 44 ] But at the end of the day, they will face him and they will meet him and they will spend their eternity with him. Their suffering will last. Their pain and anger and sadness and tribulation will last.

But eventually, by being released from prison or by death, it will end. And when that pain and suffering and tribulation for them ends, they then meet face to face with the one who is the last, truly the one who has no end for being very little here.

He's reminding them that he is sovereign, that he has full control over them, despite the panic and fear and worry that they are facing and are about to face, that he has them.

He also reminds them then just of what he has done for them. He's the first and the last. He is fully sovereign and full control who died and came to life.

What a beautiful, simple, one-phrase summary of the whole gospel. But why is it important that he addresses this congregation with this reminder?

[ 9 : 54 ] They knew the theology. They know their stuff. So why is Jesus reminding them that he's the one who died and who came to life? As we said when we sang Psalm 16, that's our messianic psalm, it looks forward of course to the one who wouldn't see corruption, the one who would go to the grave, yes, who would die, yes, but who would be raised from the grave.

But also, as we said, and we ourselves, those of us who know and who love the Lord, when we sing Psalm 16, we sing the words and we apply it to ourselves too, don't we? Because we worship one who went to the grave and who rose again, we can know for full confidence as our brother prayed when we find ourselves perhaps down there facing out to sea, we know that as our dust is laid to rest in the ground, that the day will come and we will be raised up with him.

Why? Because he is the one who died but also the one who came to life and if it sounds a bit strange in English, it's because the grammar isn't good grammar in the Greek and it's not good grammar on purpose because the wording here really is he's the one who died and who came to life but truly the one who died and who now lives forever.

And John words in a way that sounds a bit strange to us perhaps here but to the readers it's this sense that Jesus goes on, the life he has goes on time without end.

There's no grammatical end to that statement. He now lives and lives and lives. It's hard for us this evening.

[ 11 : 41 ] We have to try very hard and I say this carefully almost use our imaginations or use our sympathetic understanding to put ourselves in the place of this church. See as our brothers prayed, we sit here tonight in safety.

Now we have perhaps many personal worries and personal concerns. That is true. but what we don't have tonight is a fear of a knock on that door or that door being burst in or of black government wagons pulling up beside us to take myself and the elders and yourselves as members away.

That's not a fear we have and we can't pretend we can understand that because we can't. The church in Smyrna didn't have to imagine that was their reality.

and as Jesus reminds them that their life may well end soon. They may well be dragged away. They may well be judged as rebellious to the state.

They may well be called haters of the emperor. They may well be called as dangerous elements disrupting the society they live in and that's enough for them to be killed.

[ 12 : 51 ] and Jesus reminds them as you perhaps face a near certain death for some of you remember you worship me who died and who came to life.

Yes you might face your end but because you know me because you love me because you worship me because I now live forever you can have sure hope that if you die at the hands of cruel men because of your faith and love for me you will be raised with me one day.

You will be with me at the point of death and one day you will be raised bodily with me. And we see that's what's going on because we see that here as we come to verse 9.

As he begins to address this church he tells them of their current troubles. We see in verse 9 alone their current issues. I know your tribulation and your poverty but you are rich and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not but our synagogue of Satan.

I know your tribulation. I know you are suffering people. I know you live in a town in a city where you are feared you are hated you are presumed to be something you are not.

[ 14 : 08 ] Of course you have to remember at this time both the Romans and the Jews they were spreading misinformation by the Christians. The Romans were convinced and we can't say for certain if this was true in Smyrna but the local population were convinced that Christians were cannibals.

And we think that's a strange thing and that sounds so silly but that was a common thought of the day. Purposely made up because the Romans would say well and the Jews included that these are people who eat flesh and who drink blood and that's what we do when we gather together.

You can begin to understand how that would snowball and that would grow arms and legs and very soon these are people who meet in locked homes who meet in caves and who are rumoured to be eating flesh and drinking blood and you think so just think yourself you are living a life in Tolstice and you know your neighbours think you are something strange.

You know your neighbours don't trust you because you say that yes I live under Nero or whoever the emperor might be but I follow one who is greater I follow Jesus and he is truly Lord.

So not only are you doing some strange practices for them you also are claiming something which is so wrong to them but there is another God and he's not the emperor I worship the true living God.

[ 15 : 35 ] These are people who faced suffering real suffering real suspicion these are a shaken people they are serving every day in Smyrna they are gathering as often as they gather together perhaps a few times a week and every time they gather together just imagine yourself just now every time we come to our prayer meeting oh so and so is missing tonight are they late at work are they ill are they in prison are they dead and week to week we wouldn't know who'd be here week to week we wouldn't know or perhaps couldn't know what was happening and that was the world of this church that was a gathering of these brothers and sisters who sought to serve their saviour well in Smyrna they were a mistrusted people they were a terrified people a people facing great and constant tribulation we also see there are people who are poor I know your tribulation and I know your poverty but you're rich if you lived in Smyrna the chances were naturally you weren't poor you lived there of course you're slaves they were servants and of course there'd be slaves and servants as part of the church gathering we know that that would have been the case very likely but there's some here who have been from rich backgrounds who perhaps had good jobs and you think well how can Jesus call this gathering poor he says we're in poverty and truly it's not just you're poor the word poverty there it's a word that denotes complete destitution we're not just a bit poor we're not just struggling to get to the payday they are destitute this word implies they are completely bottom level poor why?

well we know from history and our brothers and sisters right now as we prayed for India last few weeks they are experiencing this what happened if you're a Christian in Smyrna what happened if you're a Christian in this part of the world well your property your business your home could be taken away from you by force or by fire you could lose your business that could be taken over by the state by the government you could in a week in a night perhaps in a month lose your money lose your home lose your business lose your status and you become very quickly very poor this is a gathering of Christians some servants some not perhaps but equally they find themselves having faced great persecution great tribulation and are now facing great poverty but don't you love the bracket there don't you your tribulation your poverty but you're rich and this is not just some trite small encouragement our saviour gives our saviour says this knowing these people that they were suffering perhaps starving perhaps struggling to make ends meet in any way they could but also he reminds them to your brothers to your sisters you are rich you're rich why the rich because they're rich because they know the living Lord Jesus because they serve him and because of their undying unending service towards him they will receive the crown of glory they have riches that those who persecute them know nothing about also mentions of course the slander of those who say they're Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan there's various discussion and it's still ongoing as to what this is referring to but quite simply

I think the truth is this is as it says the we know Polycarp a famous church father he was from around this area and Polycarp lived perhaps as this letter was being sent out we think he was about 20 when the letter of Revelation was being read so he's a first century Christian and he wrote many things and he taught many things in accordance to scripture his writings aren't biblical his writings aren't perfect but he was an early Christian he was a brother and Polycarp when he came to the end of his life he lived and died in this area around Smyrna at the end of his life it was not the Romans it was the Jewish leaders of the day who made sure that he was killed as brutally as he was and it gives us a hint a clue here that in this area in Smyrna perhaps itself the Jewish leaders were perhaps just as vicious if not worse than the Romans which is why

Jesus here is saying they're not Jews they don't act like they're fathers they don't act like they're commanded to in fact he calls them we see a synagogue of Satan so they're enduring terrible suffering but we see in verse 10 it gets much worse for them verse 10 do not fear what you're about excuse me to suffer behold the devil is about to throw some even to prison that you may be tested and for 10 days you will have tribulation be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life do not fear do not fear what you're about to suffer how do you say that how do you say that to a group who have just been told that great tribulation is coming your way you will be taken away you will be put in prison

Tolstah brothers and sisters can you imagine ourselves standing in Tolstah and the letter comes from John the letter tells us that in the days to come as you sleep in your beds at night as you worship on your Sundays as you worship on your Thursday you will be taken away you will be put in prison this will take place and some of you as we see in a second probably won't make it out alive and we see the first thing being said here do not fear what you're about to suffer only our saviour can say that and it'd be true if we get this letter pretend we get this letter imagine we get this letter and me as your minister tries to say to you don't worry folks don't fear if that doesn't work that's me Donald 29 years old from Gravert when I say that to you that has no effect this is Jesus reassuring his beloved people being honest being clear pain is coming persecution is coming fear and suffering and great misery is coming but because you worship me the one who's the first and the last who died who came to life because I have you because you're mine

[ 23 : 02 ] I can say to you do not fear yes there is suffering heading your way and it's interesting here note the devil is about to throw some of you into prison now some would argue that's just Jesus using descriptive language to describe those who attack the church I don't think so I wouldn't agree with that myself personally at all I think this says what it says God is sovereign yes God is in full control yes but we see from accounts in scripture from Job for example and from here that the devil is allowed a certain length of leash he's allowed a certain amount of power and he uses and wields that power as he wills and that power is being seen here the devil is about to throw some of you into prison you might be tested now we said last week we come to revelation we come to a book that is of course laden with metaphor and imagery and quite often we see things in revelation which makes little sense to us but when you look to the time it makes more sense perhaps to those it's first written to and there's one example for us here and for ten days you will have tribulation of course there's two views on the ten days here the obvious view is this is talking about ten literal days and that perhaps sounds quite convincing but it's more likely not the case if you go back to this time and if you read literature and accounts from the time the phrase ten days it was a almost a Jewish phrase just to say for a set time it's not ten literal days it's just a set time for a certain time we would use phrases ourselves

I was sharing to Emma I talk about phrases we use spent some time over the years in Hungary and every year I go to Hungary I would say the same phrase to the poor kids and say I'll be back in a few seconds a few seconds of course poor kids are so confused this is a man teaching us English and he says a few seconds but he's a few minutes we think that's silly but for us it's an expression we use but to the poor Hungarian child who's learning perfect English they hear a few seconds and they think well he's a few minutes we perhaps read ten days and we think well it means ten days but to those who read the letter first it meant something different it meant for a set time for a set time for a certain time for a certain length of time you will have tribulation you will face it it will end it won't be indefinite it will end but it will take place church in Smyrna you will face tribulation and again the encouragement of a saviour that only he can save us be faithful unto death no human could say that no human minister could encourage that no brother or sister could tell us that only a saviour who died and who lives again could say be faithful unto death why and I will give you the crown of life we live in peaceful days for our church we know that and it's not fear mongering to say that we know ourselves how quickly things can change it's public knowledge now it's on the website the last general assembly we had a closed session it was closed at the time it's public now but we had a closed session in that closed session there was a discussion on a fund for ministers facing legal battles specifically ministers who would face legal battles for teaching and preaching scripture ministers who are being faithful to

God's word and acting well who did nothing wrong personally but who would face legal trouble for preaching and for teaching and for acting as we're supposed to do biblically even our congregation our own denomination is at this very moment putting plans into place for how we might fund future legal disputes as ministers and preachers get in trouble for preaching God's word this is not just some distant vague thing there is policy being written just now it's not for now it's for the future but it's being written just now because things are tightening up we know that ourselves in our country things are tightening up this is not to fear monger not saying we'll be thrown into prison next week or next year or next 10 years but we're saying our nation is changing our country is changing and the truth is that if I was to preach certain things in certain ways and certain people heard that we could face trouble pretty quickly things change it wasn't all that long ago that we were a pagan island it wasn't all that long ago that we sent missionaries back home missing arms legs and heads we I know think of ourselves and God has blessed us but the gospel hasn't been here all that long the gospel is still quite new to our island and things change and things change quickly we have freedom just now that freedom is not guaranteed forever and the truth is we read

Smyrna we read of these days of testing for Smyrna we think how awful for them how could we do it and often we read perhaps Smyrna we think it's hard for them it's awful for them we think of our brothers and sisters around the world and we can't imagine it but in the back of our minds we must be praying that when a day comes for ourselves we be ready again it's not a fear monger it might be ten years it might be twenty years in the future before we face anything close to this that's not the point the point is we should never presume that what we have is maintained forever that's unwise it's unhelpful it's not God honouring we must be careful to thank the Lord for freedom we have whilst being aware of how we would react with the Lord's help of caution guidance if things did become tighter for us legally if a government did begin to crack down perhaps on our gospel freedoms you'll be tested for ten days for a time you'll have tribulation be faithful unto death only the captain of our souls can usher a command like that you will face situations where some of you might die keep being faithful unto death church of smyrna be faithful unto death and here we see the riches that await them yet they are poor but you are rich

I will give you the crown of life he who has an ear to the one who is truly listening to the word of our saviour let him hear what the spirit says to the churches what does the spirit say to the churches again note the plural here to the churches here's how we know this is not just about smyrna at the end of every letter we see the churches in plural yes it addresses smyrna but the lord knows that this same message is needed for many churches and for all churches the one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death this is the eternal promise for the suffering christian for our brothers and sisters now in place in this world who are facing suffering this is their hope this is their promise lord prevent us but if we ever face days of suffering and days of real persecution this will be our promise for us too to the one who conquers who conquers what who perseveres who maintains who runs that race till the end we could say will not be hurt by the second death the first death will hurt the first death might be brutal might be vicious might be evil the first death and the christians in smyrna would have faced this the first death of the christians and again emma and i were discussing this week but it's not perhaps a discussion to have in a prayer meeting but if you have time this week research just how these christians died research yourself just how brutal and how systematic and how evil the slow murder of christians were at this time the first death will hurt the first death will be grim and savage and evil but the christians hope and we ourselves know that our own first death might be painful disease accident we don't know of course but the christians hope is because we worship a saviour who conquered death because we find ourselves in him we will not be hurt by the second death as horrifying as the first death might be our second death won't touch us we in fact will of course live forever the second death of course refers to hell to eternal death to eternal punishment eternal ongoing consciousness of misery that won't be the case for those who know and who love the lord who serve the lord it will be the case for those who perhaps put the christians to the first death they will face the second eternal death but to those who conquer to those who serve christ to those who love christ to those who in this case would die for christ heaven is certain for them the crown of life is there waiting for them and despite the pain and worry and agony this will be their reality and again we're thinking perhaps ourselves far flung future in tolsta when days of persecution come for us but as brothers prayed there are many at this moment in time and this is not a far flung reality for them there are many just now and many at this exact moment as we sit in this building there are some just now who sit in prison in countries around this world who know the lord who love the lord and who will have this promise in their minds there's brothers and sisters

[ 34 : 25 ] right now who will not see the light of day again who will spend their lifetimes in prison cells if not worse whose only hope at this point is the fact that because they know and worship and are held by a saviour who has conquered death who lives forever they will not be hurt by the second death and one day soon when their first death is passed through they will receive the crown of life perhaps we can apply this section to ourselves in Tolstah quite yet we praise the lord for that but as we think of the church in Smyrna we should be brought to our knees perhaps literally at times perhaps literally as we think of our brothers and sisters who are facing real persecution real pain real suffering and who are willing to give up even their very lives even this evening even this week for the sake of the gospel we praise the lord for the encouragement as we read these verses that we have a saviour who lives forever and because that is true whether we face tribulation poverty or persecution he is with his people he is for his people he keeps his people and one day he will receive his people home to be with himself that's the only word of prayer thank you

I am now that is okay we saw that we can gather together in the name of Jesus we thank you our God We have your promise that Even two or three are gathering your name That you will be there in the midst And we thank you our God this night That we do come in the name We do assemble in his name We seek to worship him We thank you our God for Many gospel blessings that we do enjoy We thank you that you are our God Who has promised never to leave us And never to forsake us



And we cling to your promises this night And we ask our God If you would indeed be near to us And as we look to you And as we call upon you in prayer And as we worship you through the Psalms And as we read your word That you use all these things To build us up in our soul To show us more and more of Jesus To see the one who is altogether loved That we would desire him more and more For ourselves We thank you our God for Your word We are reminded of The solemnity of your word We have been reminded again Our God that Being a Christian is not a walk in a park It's not a picnic It's not a game But indeed our very lives Could be called upon If we profess the name of Christ And we do remember Lord you have persecuted church this night We pray for those Who are suffering For the name of Jesus

We ask our God That we would all See that Our hope is indeed Laid up in heaven Our treasure is in heaven We thank you That Christ has done Everything for us We thank you That Christ will not leave us That wherever we find ourselves Whatever situation Circumstance Christ is there What a great hope we have Our God And although we all look ahead To an uncertain future We do know what Tonight and tomorrow The next day will be We do know that Our Lord will be with us always Even unto the end of the world We pray our God That as we part from here That we would all part With this hope and confidence Of knowing That the Lord Jesus Christ Who sits in glory Loves us Bless us now as we part Pardon and forgive all our sins In Jesus name Amen Let's sing in conclusion Psalm 96 Psalm 96

Sing verses 1 to verse 5 Psalm 96 verses 1 to verse 5 Oh sing a new song to the Lord Sing all the earth to God To God sing Bless his name show still His saving health abroad Among the heathen nations His glory do declare And unto all the people Show his works that wondrous are Psalm 96 1 to 5 To God's praise Amen Oh sing a new song to the Lord Sing all the earth to God To God sing bless his name That ASinch in■ Thank them for leer for new music May the God andiceless God

[ 39 : 58 ] Among the heavenly nations is glory to declare And unto all the people Show His words that one does not For grace the Lord Thou give me Yes, to be magnified Ye worthy to give Careless be And the hope of this night For all the gods Are I lost down Which by death Is come still At our God Is the Lord Thy new Lamb And the The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ And the love of God The Father And the fellowship Of the Holy Spirit Both you now And forevermore Amen