

Smyrna

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Preacher: Rev Murdo Alex Macleod

[0 : 00] We continue our studies of the messages of our Lord to the seven churches in Asia by looking at this second church, that of Smyrna. Remember that the book, the Revelation, was given to John in the Isle of Patmos where he was exiled during the persecution that broke out against the church in the first century. The Revelation was given to him to encourage the persecuted Christians, the persecuted church. And he received, as we have it in the first chapter, a vision of the ascended, glorified, and reigning Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns, having a glorious purpose for his church. And the message that he is, the message is given to be sent to the churches referred to in chapter 1, verse 11, are churches which are today in the area of western Turkey, rather which were, though very few of them remain there today, very little of a witness. It is said that in that land there are 46 million people, of whom 99% are Muslims. And as the various messages are given to the churches, we notice that the message is prefixed with a self-designation of our Lord. There are special characteristics of our risen Lord, prefixing each message to the churches, manifestation, and characteristics which are adapted to meet the condition of each church. In other words, there is an inseparable connection between the way in which our Lord is designated and the particular condition of the church to which he sends the message. He is brought to the church. He is brought before us, of course, as the one who is in the midst of his church. He is ever-present.

Present not only to encourage and to inspire, but present also to warn and to counsel. And therefore, each letter refers to our Lord's knowledge of the circumstance in the church, our Lord's knowledge of the strengths and the weaknesses of each church. Tonight, we turn to the second one, Smyrna. This is claimed in the area of modern Izmir in West Turkey, an area the church here was slightly north of Ephesus.

Now, we read here that the church was both poor and persecuted. And together with the church at Philadelphia was the only one which did not receive censure or condemnation from the Lord. It was in this church that the bishop of the church was martyred towards the middle of the second century. And what we have here, together with the account that we have of the history of the churches in that area, tells us that this church really did suffer because of her allegiance to Jesus Christ.

And it was probably because of that steadfast allegiance that she was also known for her material poverty. I know thy works and thy tribulation and poverty, but thou art rich.

[4 : 42] You know that to be a Christian in these days really meant something. It meant that in many cases you were both socially and economically ostracized.

Just as the Jews were socially and economically ostracized by the Nazis in the late 20s and the 30s in Germany, so Christians were socially and economically ostracized, strange enough, and the case of Smyrna, by the Jews, as well as by the Roman authorities.

But though they were poor materially, we read here that they were rich spiritually. Rich in faith and all the good works that flow from faith, rich in all the blessings wherewith Christ had blessed them in heavenly places.

Rich in grace, rich in love, rich in Christian patience and Christian perseverance. Rich in grace, rich in grace, rich in all that mattered.

And the Lord recognized that. Persecuted, impoverished, but yet commended because of the steadfast allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 20] Now it is to that church that this message is directed. And we look, as last week, in the same way roughly at this message.

We look first of all at Christ's self-designation. These things say the first and the last, which was dead and is alive, I know thy works.

Now I mentioned earlier on that each message is prefixed with this self-designation of the risen Lord. And in the way in which he is brought, the way in which he is brought before us, it is done in that way to meet the particular situation or need in the church that is addressed.

So that in each situation, he accommodates himself so as to be with her and so as to communicate a message which will be meaningful to her.

And in this case, the disclosure that he makes of himself to the church in Smyrna is meant to inspire her. And because, as we see, this is a church which was threatened with both imprisonment, with suffering, imprisonment and death.

[7 : 55] And to inspire her, he presents himself as the first and the last, the one who was dead and is alive.

He brings himself to her attention as the one who has overcome the very problems and the very difficulties which confront her.

And therefore, fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.

When he comes with this message, for us in a minute, the message, don't be afraid. He gives her good ground on which to build her hope and on which her faith will be strengthened and encouraged.

He gives her good ground for that. He is well qualified to address these words of counsel to the church.

[9 : 16] Now, there are times when you and I have reason perhaps to address our fellows and to be addressed by our fellows in language somewhat similar to this.

Don't be afraid. But unfortunately, we tend to deliver that message like that without having grounds for saying these things.

But our Lord has the best grounds possible for saying to any individual or to any church, don't be afraid.

Fear not. Fear none of these things. What are these grounds? They are two. I am the first and the last. I am he that was dead and is alive.

The first and the last. What does this mean? But I think that as you look at these words, both in the context here and in the context which they are given to us in verse 1, in chapter 1, that they undoubtedly refer to the eternity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 34] He is the beginning and the end of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the beginning and the end of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the sum and substance of all that can be said.

You know, there are two ways which he says this in chapter 1. I am Alpha and Omega. The first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. I am the first and the last.

I think it speaks to us of the eternity, the everlastingness of this person who speaks to the church.

The one who was before all things. The one who, this is a problem. We know that there are children here tonight.

And very often I know that you children have a real problem with that question. That you grapple with at a very early age. Where did God come from? When you are told where you come from yourself, you try to grapple with this great question.

[11 : 40] Where did God come from? Did God have a beginning? How could God be without God having a beginning? Well, of course we know that this is one of the things which sets God apart from every other being.

That he had no beginning. He is from everlasting to everlasting. He is from eternity to eternity. He is eternally God.

He was before all things. And we know the Bible speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ like this. The epistle to the Colossians. He was before all things.

John in the first chapter of his gospel. He was before all things. And it is on his glory that all things that were created by him and for him and through him.

It was for him that all things were created. This world. This creation in which you and I have our being. As it moves on towards the end of all things.

[12 : 43] It's moving on to that end which will terminate on the glory of Jesus Christ. The first and the last. Before all things and for him all things exist.

And to his glory and for his glory all things will terminate. In creation. In providence. The unfolding of providence. Is to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You and I may not see that. There are times when we may not even believe it. But it is fact. It is fact. It is the same with reference to the redemption that he purchased.

It was he who has redeemed his churches. We read in Peter's epistle. By his own blood. And he has his people in this world.

The people who were given to him from all eternity. For whom he came into the world. And for whom he died. For whom he lives now to intercede.

[13:41] He has a glorious purpose. For his people. He was before them all. And yet he redeemed them all.

And all the redemption will accrue to his glory. He is the first. And the last. The one who was from eternity.

Who is unchanging in his being. Unchangeable in his purpose. I am he. He says to the church in Smyrna.

Who was also secondly. Dead. And is alive. This is the one who took out Nolan. He who was from eternity. This is one of the great teachings of the word of God.

Precious. Precious teaching. He who was from eternity. God. In the course of time. Took to himself our nature.

[14:39] So that in that nature. This could be said of him. I was dead. There was no way. In which he who was from all eternity.

Could become dead. Without taking to himself a nature. In which he could die. This is what we speak of as the incarnation. God.

Becoming man. And in that nature. Die. Our death. But the gospel doesn't end there. He who died. In our nature is alive. It either means. And I'm not going to go into that. It either means. That he was alive. In death.

As he was. He who was from all eternity. It either means that. That he was alive. Even in death. Or. I shall take it here.

[15:36] He rose. From. The dead. And he is alive. Forevermore. Remember this church was facing. Many of them.

Facing. The certainty of death. And he writes to assure. Them. That he is alive. With power from the dead. Alive to save.

Alive to intercede. Alive to keep. And to protect. Alive to dispense his gifts. His grace.

And the sufficiency. Of his grace. He speaks as the conqueror of death. And he speaks to a church. Which would have to give its life. For him. And he encourages them. To think of him. Awaiting them. Beyond death.

[16:32] As the. Ever living one. And he says this to them. You may contemplate your life. As a Christian. Suffering.

Unto death. For me. Who myself. Had to live. Suffering. Unto death.

For you. But I am alive. Forevermore. As the. Ever. Living. One.

Clothed. In your nature. As the. Reigning. Lord. And savior. Who can enter into your experiences. And who can have sympathy with you.

In. Your. Need. That is a self designation of our Lord. And then secondly. He. Is designated. In this way.

[17:31] As. Knowing. That works. I know your works. Now we saw last week. What this means. Works. It's not just what people do. It also means.

It also means what people say. But it means one of that. It's not just activity. Physical or verbal. Well. It also means the spirit. In which you do a thing.

Or say a thing. Why you do what you do. And why you say what you do. The motive behind. Your actions. It also means something else. It means the circumstances.

In which you have to act. You see. Here was a church. Persecuted. Fiercely persecuted. And it wasn't easy. To be a Christian. In these circumstances.

And the Lord. Takes account of that. I know your works. I know your problems. And your difficulties. I know your circumstances. I know the danger. To which you are exposed.

[18:27] I know the problems. That you have to grapple with. When you do these things. In. My. Name. It means. Far more. Than.

Activity. It means the temptations. To which people are exposed. As they live. In this world. And here is one. Who presents himself.

In the very midst. Of the church. Who knows absolutely. Everything about her. Everything she does. And everything she says. And everything she thinks.

And everything that she doesn't think. Why she is what she is. At any. Given. Moment. And you know that.

It may be a. Question for you. And for me tonight. Of course. In one sense. The Lord knows us all. He knows every one of us. In this building tonight.

[19 : 24] He knows our thoughts. As we sit in this church. But this is the question. Does he know you. With this particular affection.

And knowledge that he has. For his own people. I know. Thy works. Here is someone. Who has a loving concern. And a loving interest.

In all. His people. Better said someone. Better the eye of fire. Than the averted face.

Does the Lord know you tonight. As one. Whom he loves. And one who loves him. Thirdly. We look now.

At the church's condition. And there are two or three things here. That we're told about this church. She was suffering. Persecution. And tribulation.

[20 : 22] But. Two kinds. Are particularly. Brought before us. Blasphemy. And. Imprisonment. Unto.

Death. And the interesting thing is this. As he brings before us. This awful condition of the church. So he tells her.

That wash. Awaits her. Behold. He says. Ye. The devil shall cast. Some of you into prison. And ye shall have tribulation.

Ten. Days. Now this is. Very. Interesting. Because it doesn't. Square. With the idea. That some people have. Of. A God.

Of love. Let us look at. What happened to this church. She was suffering. We read here.

Blasphemy. In chapter. In verse nine. I know the blasphemy.

[21 : 19] Of them. Could say they are Jews. And are not. But are the. Synagogue. Of Satan. Now you know what. Blasphemy. Means here. It's a reference. To what the Jews. Were doing to many. Christian communities.

At that time. We have accounts of that. Frequently. In the book of Acts. The Jews. Very often harassed. The Christians. Saul of Tarsus.

A classic example. Of what the Jews. Were doing to the Christians. He tells himself. What he did. I thought. He says. It was a right thing. In accordance. With my religious principles.

To persecute. Christians. That's what it means here. They were being persecuted. Maligned. Misrepresented. By.

By the Jews. By the Jews. Who be referred to as. Of the. Synagogue of Satan. They say they are Jews. But they are not real Jews. At all. They are of the synagogue.

[22 : 15] Of Satan. These people. Who were persecuting. The Christians. Thought. That they were. The people. As Saul of Tarsus did. But. Says.

Says the Lord here. To a John. They are not worthy. The title of Christian. Of Jews. At all. They are forfeited. All the spiritual. Privileges.

And instead of belonging. To the synagogue. Of God. As they ought to. They belong. To the synagogue. Of Satan. Instead of gathering. Around the Lord. To worship.

And to do his will. That's what a synagogue was. Where people came. To worship. In the name of God. And according to the will of God. These people. Congregate. Under.

Another flag. They may not think that. But this is the fact. This is a fact. They are. Motivated by. Satan. Himself. The synagogue.

[23 : 10] Of Satan. It is he. Who is. Steering them up. It is his. Will. That they are doing. It is on his.

Side. That they are. Satan. Is using them. Not God. And as I said earlier. This is the.

Awful discovery. Discovery. That Saul of Tarshish. Made himself. I thought. I was doing. God's service. When I persecuted.

The Christians. But he was. Started to discover. That he was on the side. Of Satan. May I ask you. In the passing.

One. Simple. Question. Here. This evening. What is your own. Attitude. To a Christian. Or to the Christian.

[24 : 06] Community. Or. To the Christian. Church. What is your attitude. To it. You know. There are many people. And you don't need to go. Beyond our own.

Shore. There are people. In this island. And there are people. In this town. Who delight. If I may use the word. In harassing. The Christian.

Community. Whose side are you on? Are you on God's side? Or on. Satan's side? Oh I know. That some people. Hold up their hands. And hurl.

At the very thought. Of being told. That they are on his. On Satan's side. But these. Are the facts. That those.

Who are. With him. As the accuser. Of the brethren. Are on his side. They are the synagogue. Of Satan.

[25 : 01] But what was to befall. These people. I tell you. He said. You are going to suffer more. The devil isn't finished yet. He will use other people.

To. Imprison you. And. To. Bring you through. That. To death. Now this is. An example. Of the circumstances. Which existed.

In that particular church. I mentioned already. What happened. To the leader of the church. Later on. Polycarp. He was martyred. Because. He refused.

To renounce. The Christian. Faith. And the devil. Will use agents. Not only. To harass. Christians. But also. To imprison them. Now fortunately. We.

Are. Spared. This. Persecution. In our islands. There are Christians. In the world. Tonight. Who aren't. Spared. This.

[25 : 57] Persecution. There are many. Imprisoned. Tonight. For their faith. In Jesus Christ. And we should not. Forget them. But the Lord.

Here brings two things. To their attention. Through John. There is a limit. To these sufferings. The. You shall have tribulation. Ten days.

And also. God has a purpose. In the sufferings. Of his people. It is that they may be. Tried. Now I don't know exactly.

And neither does anyone else. I'm sure. What this note means. That ye shall have tribulation. Ten days. Except this surely. That. It sets a time limit.

To all. That the church. Has to endure. Now this is true. It is true. Even today. If you are a Christian. Here tonight. And you find. That going rough.

[26 : 52] And that it's difficult. And you're meeting. With opposition. Either at home. Or at work. Or in school. Or somewhere else. If it is difficult. For you to be a Christian. To hold up the flag. As it were.

You may very well wonder. How long is this going to last? No one knows. The answer to that question. Except this. There will come. There will be an end.

To your troubles. The troubles. The troubles that afflict the just. And number many be. But yet at length. At length. Out of them all.

The Lord hath set them free. And again Paul says this. O light affliction. Which endureth but for a moment. You see.

The troubles that afflict the Christian. Endure for a short time. And. It is short. In reference to two things.

[27 : 49] Compared with what each one of us deserves. It is short. If God were to give each one of us. According to our deserves. Tonight. We would suffer.

On. And on. And on. And there is something else. It is short.

In the light of eternity. This is. This was what Paul was contrasting. In second Corinthians chapter four. The present he says.

Is difficult. But then what is that? When you compare it with the glory. That is to follow. And therefore.

God encourages the church. In this connection. He gives her grace. To bear her problems. Grace to persevere.

[28 : 47] And this is where the love of God. Comes to light. I mentioned earlier. It doesn't square this picture. Of a suffering church. It doesn't square. With a picture that many people give.

Of a God of love. And they argue like this. If God did love his people. Why does he allow them. To suffer like this. If you love someone.

I am sure that one. One aspect of your love. Or one expression of your love. Is this. You love that person so much. That if you had your way. They would never be exposed.

To any problem. Or any difficulty. Or any danger. Or any opposition. You will protect them. Because you love them. Because you love them so much.

And some people find it difficult. To think of. How can God. Why can God not do that. For his people. And this is the answer to that question. It is in circumstances.

[29 : 42] Which are most distressing. And most perplexing. And most difficult. That people come to know. How much God does love them. These were the circumstances.

That gave birth. To words. Which have encouraged many. A Christian. For many an age. In many an age. God is our refuge. And our strength.

In straits. Our present aid. Remember how Paul put it. He who was buffeted by Satan.

The messenger of Satan. And Satan wouldn't give up. Raining blow after blow upon him. And it was in that circumstance. He discovered how much God loved him.

My grace is sufficient for you. And my strength. Is made perfect. In weakness. But there is something else. God is a purpose.

[30 : 40] And a glorious purpose. In allowing people to suffer for his sake. You will be. You will be. Put into prison. That ye may be tried.

No this is not a reference. To a civil trial at all. At the hands of their enemies. That's not the reference here at all. The reference is to the.

What Peter speaks of. As the trial of their faith. In these circumstances. And this is the wonderful thing. That in control of all these things.

Is God. And the purpose that God has in view is this. He is going to bring. To the light. And bring. To the fore. The genuineness. The reality. The reality. Of. Their. Faith. The devil on the one hand.

[31 : 36] Using the Jews. And using the Roman authorities. To persecute. And to destroy. Christian faith. God. Overruling both devil.

And Jew. And Roman. To prove that these people. Have real faith. And have you ever noticed that? It is in a furnace.

Of affliction. That the genuineness. Of what you and I possess. Comes to light. It is these.

The things. That would normally. Naturally. Destroy faith. These are the things.

That highlight. The reality. Of faith. How often have you heard. The blood of the martyr. Was the seed.

[32 : 33] Of the church. People have been trying to destroy. The church. And the Christian witness. From the beginning of time. And they failed. Why?

Because the church. Is the product. Of God. God. In the midst. Of her doth dwell. Nothing. Shall her. Remove.

And that leads on finally. To the encouragement. That he gives her. Fear. None. Of these things. Be faithful unto death.

Overcome. And I will give you the crown of life. And you will not be hurt. Of the second. Death. Hear now. Is the voice. Of one who loves the church.

One who is. Powerfully. Enthroned. In the interests. Of the church. A promise. Which is grounded. Upon his own.

[33 : 31] Character. Who is in control. Of all things. And who has promised. To carry. Them through. He hasn't promised. Exemption. From difficulty.

But he has promised. Grace. To bear. The difficulties. And the problems. Maybe you are here tonight. For all I know. And maybe one of the great.

Problems. That you have. In committing your life. To Christ. Is. Your inability. As you see it. To cope.

With the difficulties. Which will inevitably. Crop up in your life. And maybe you think. That if God. Would remove the difficulties. Then.

You could take that step. In the Christian life. But God has never promised. To take away difficulties. But what he has promised. Is this. He has promised you.

[34 : 29] Grace. To overcome them. Grace. To bear them. The shoulder. The strength rather. To shoulder them.

As you soldier on. In the name. Of Jesus Christ. That's what he says to the church. Be faithful. Unto death. Be faithful.

Unto death. Be trustworthy. Even though the life. That the path. That you are on. May cost you your life.

You be faithful. To him. To him. Who has called you. Don't deviate. To the right. Or to the left. I tell you.

He said. Worse may befall you. It may happen. That you will be imprisoned. But you be faithful. Be faithful. To me. And then.

[35 : 27] Overcome. He that overcometh. To him. To him. To him. Will I. Give. He shall not be hurt. Of the second death.

This is almost. Something similar to. Being faithful. But with this. With this. With this. With this. A difference. It emphasizes. The responsibility.

Of the Christian. To keep on going. In the face. Of the most awful. Difficulties. Don't compromise. Your position. Persevere. There are awful.

Obstacles in the way. But you be prepared. And determined. To overcome. These. Obstacles. You can't circumnavigate them. But you can.

Survived them. You can. Overcome them. Show the right. Spirit. Don't. Give up.

[36 : 23] Know my friend. There are times. When you and I need that counsel. Because you are sorely. Tempted. I know. To do just that. To give up.

Don't. Persevere. Grit your teeth. In the face. Of the most. Awful. Difficulties. And look at the encouragement.

That it gives you. I will give you. The crown of life. And you will not be hurt. Of the second. Death. So there are two ways.

Which the Bible speaks. Of the crown of life. Two pictures. That were given of it. We are reminded. Sometimes. Of the athlete. Running the race. Breaking. The tape. And being garlanded. With flowers. A wreath of flowers.

[37 : 20] Hung over his shoulder. It happens. Even in some. Sporting. Circles. Today. That the victor. Is given. A garland of flowers. Of the fruit.

Of the fruit. I think. That's the idea. That. That's what's at the mind. Behind Peter's mind. When he says. That we. Are on the way. To an inheritance.

Incorruptible. Undeified. That fadeeth. That fadeeth not away. You see. When the victor. Was given. A garland of flowers. Beautiful. And fragrant. Though they were.

At the time. They would fade away. They would fade away. But here. Is a promise. Of life. That will never fade away.

Life. As the Bible. Tells us. That will never end. The Christian. Has it at the moment. He is the possessor. Of life. In Christ.

[38 : 15] Who is alive. From the dead. He has eternal life. Just now. He lives. By faith. In Christ. The life of God. Flows. Into his soul.

Through faith. And that life. Will never end. It will never end. And you know. That even as you live. In the face.

Of the most awful. Difficulties. God. By his grace. And in his mercy. Sustains. That spiritual life. In your soul. And there's this encouragement.

The best. Is yet to be. There will be a day. When there will be no problems. No difficulties. And no obstacles.

Where everything. Will be all joy. And all gladness. And all satisfaction. You know the athlete. He disciplines himself. He trains.

[39 : 11] Day in. Day out. The other way. In which the Bible. Uses. Uses this idea. By the way. In case I forget it. Is speaking of the king. Who is crowned.

At his coronation. At his coronation. At his coronation. But I think the idea here is. I prefer to think of it in terms of the athlete. Who breaks the tape. Who wins the race.

And who's given this garland of flowers. For many a day. He's trained for this day. He's disciplined himself. He's gone through all these rigors. He's. He's got rid of all that would impede him in his progress.

He set his heart. On this prize of all prizes. And now his life is filled with joy and gladness and satisfaction. He's achieved.

What he purposed to do. And this is the encouragement that God holds out to the Christian. Of course you have set your heart. On the goal. Of course heaven.

[40 : 06] Heaven is your destination. Heaven I'm sure is the destination of all tonight. That's the hope that everyone here entertains. Unfortunately. Some have no ground for their hope. But the Christian has.

He has been saved by the grace of Christ. He's meeting problems he never knew that he would counter. But the Lord encourages him. You be faithful.

Even if it means death. Because there is life. In all its blessed. Uninterrupted fullness.

Beyond. I am the living one. On the other side of death. And I promise you that. And then finally. If you persevere.

And if you keep on going. You will not be hurt. Of the second death. In keeping going as a Christian. It may mean death. It may mean being hauled before the authorities.

[41 : 07] And being sentenced to death. As a Christian. Where the soul is severed. From the body. That's the first death. But the second death.

Is a thought. Which is too awful. To contemplate. The second death surely. Is in soul. And body. Being separated.

From the Lord himself. And that's the awful punishment. That awaits the person.

Who doesn't love. And who doesn't serve. And who doesn't honor his Lord. Nothing awaits him. But complete. Separation.

From Christ. Especially. At the day of judgment. And throughout the ages. Of all. Eternity.

[42 : 04] Now he says. If you persevere. As a Christian. You will not suffer. You will not be hurt. That experience.

Will not be. In your life. When you're hurt. It's an experience. Something which you feel. And this is something which. Every lost soul.

Will feel. Throughout the ages. Of eternity. Being severed. From all time. From the life. And the favor. And the fellowship.

And the blessedness. Of the Lord. Jesus Christ. He that hath an ear. Let him hear. What the spirit saith.

To the churches. You have an ear. Tonight. And so have I. And once again. The Lord. Counsels you.

[43 : 01] To give an ear. To the message. That he sends. To the church. In Smyrna. A message. Which he sends. To us here. Tonight. In Stornoway. And it is simply this.

It costs. To be. A Christian. Are you prepared. To count. The cost.

Knowing. What the encouragement. And the reward. Will be. Not only in time. But throughout the ages.

Of eternity. Let us pray. Bless to us. The word of thy grace. And help us. O God.

To treasure it. In our hearts. And to take for us. And go before us. And be our guide. And our shield. For giving sin.

[43 : 59] For Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.