

Theme: The church must be faithful, even when persecuted and killed, knowing that God is Sovereign and eternal life awaits His people.

I. Intro - Paradox - Hobbit & LOTR

- A. One of Tolkien's ideas is paradox
- B. Hero is not great wizard or warrior, but little hobbit
- C. He was us to know things are not always as they seem
- D. Paradox is key in letter to Smyrna - poor but rich; God's people but synagogue of Satan; killed but get life
- E. Let's hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches

II. Jesus Speaks To His Church In Smyrna

- A. The church in Smyrna
 - To the angel of **the church in Smyrna** write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. Revelation 2:8
 - 1. Only one of seven cities to survive to today (Izmir)
 - 2. 40 miles or so north of Ephesus; rival in many ways
 - 3. Claimed "First of Asia in beauty & size"; 200,000
 - 4. Great seaport; wealthy; very loyal to Rome (195BC)
 - 5. 1st city to have Temple to goddess Roma; 26AD selected by Tiberius for imperial cult temple
 - 6. Under Domitian (81-96) yearly incense worship to godhead of Caesar on threat of death
 - 7. Smyrna is zealous to enforce emperor worship

B. Jesus the Sovereign God speaks to his church

To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: **These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.** Revelation 2:8

- 1. These are the words - speech of king of kings (see teaching on Ephesus)
- 2. First and the last - Jesus is the Sovereign God
 - a. Claim to eternity - same claim in Rev 1:17-18; 22:13
I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Revelation 22:13
 - b. Same words spoken by Yahweh in OT
This is what the **Lord** says— Israel's King and Redeemer, the **Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.** Isa 44:6
 - 1. Yahweh is the First and Last; He alone is God
 - 2. Jesus is claiming to be none other than Yahweh
- 3. Who died and came to life again - conquered death

C. The One Who speaks to the Church is none other than Jesus - the Eternal God, Who has conquered death and lives forever!

III. The Persecuted Church in Smyrna

- A. I know your afflictions and poverty
I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Rev 2:9
 - 1. They are afflicted - trouble that inflicts distress
 - 2. There are suffering deep poverty - πτωχεία
 - a. Strongest word for poverty in Greek

b. Trench - The πένης has nothing superfluous, the πτωχός nothing at all.

3. They are suffering & live in poverty in the midst of wealth

B. The cause of their affliction and poverty - persecution

I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:9–10

1. Believers are being slandered
2. They are suffering (pascha) - word for Christ's death
3. Will be put in prison to be tried -it will test their faith
4. They will suffering persecution (same word as afflicted in v9)
5. Some of them will be put to death

C. The process of persecution

I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:9–10

1. Smyrna zealous for mandatory emperor worship
2. Jews were exempt from this - but not others

3. Synagogues were putting Christians out and reporting them (v9)

4. Christians were then forced to offer incense to Caesar as God - and they refused

5. Pressure was put on them in increasing degrees

- a. Economic restrictions if they won't participate (v9)
- b. Eventually they were thrown in jail and tried (v10)
- c. If they wont recant, they might be put to death (v10)

6. The ultimate source of all this is the Devil Himself (v10)

7. It appears that they had already suffered economic persecution, but jail and death were about to begin

8. We see a similar process later in nearby provinces under Pliny the Younger (112AD)

9. Same process happened in Smyrna to Polycarp, disciple of John, in 155

10. Learn more about these persecutions in AfterHours

IV. Jesus' Word of Encouragement

A. A series of paradoxes

I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:9–10

1. Persecution has made you poor - and rich!

2. They claim to be God's people - but actually serve Satan
3. They will put you to death - but only give you everlasting life!
4. Jesus is Sovereign and uses what Satan and other people mean for harm to bring good to us, now and eternally!

B. A word of encouragement

I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. Revelation 2:9–11

1. I know - Jesus sees & knows their suffering, and is near
2. Do not be afraid of suffering to come - I am in control
3. Ten days - a limit is set for persecutions test
4. Be faithful even to death - and eternal life awaits!
5. You can overcome - & eternal death can't touch you
6. The external, temporal sufferings of this life can not compare to the eternal glory and joy we receive from Jesus

V. Applying the Word

A. Do we see persecution is usually the lot of the church?

1. There is no word of correction for Smyrna
2. They were suffering for being faithful, not because they had been unfaithful!
3. Faithful believers have often suffered through the ages - and will in the future
4. We are seeing the early parts of this process now - economic pressure to conform
5. Are we willing to suffer economic poverty to remain faithful to Christ?
6. If the heat of persecution grows hotter, are will ready to remain faithful?
7. Can we remain faithful - even to death?
8. Are we raising the next generation with this mindset - or the American dream?

B. Do see true life and riches as Jesus does?

1. He said the worlds assessment of Smyrna was upside down
2. Very often what is esteemed by the world is despised by God, and what is esteemed by God is despised by the world!
3. Does my assessment line up with Jesus - or the world?
4. Do I live for eternal reward - or temporal success?

C. The Table of Life

1. At this Table we are reminded of True Life - Jesus
2. At this Table we are reminded He was faithful to death for us
3. At this Table we renew our vow and desire to be faithful to Him - even to death
4. At this Table we are reminded of our heavenly reward that is more sure than this whole world

Smyrna - The Persecuted Church

Revelation 2:8-11

March 5, 2017

Communion

Revelation 1:4-6

Teaching keywords: persecuted church; suffering; sovereignty of God; encouragement; Deity of Christ; Satan and demons; perseverance; faithfulness

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Revelation 1:4–6

To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. Revelation 2:8–11