

Sermon Mark S. Aites
SERIES: THE 7 CHURCHES OF ASIA
#2: THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

TEXT: REV. 2:8-11

INTRODUCTION:

1. Continue series: last week we introduced our series with a look at the church in Ephesus.
2. Tonight we turn our attention to the second of the seven churches; the church in Smyrna.
3. Smyrna was an inland seaport about 50 miles north of Ephesus.
4. It was located in Ionia, a place so named for the Ionians who captured the city approx. 688 B.C.
5. The city had a turbulent history, having been destroyed once by the King of Lydia in 580 B.C.
6. It wasn't until almost 300 years later the city was rebuilt by Lysimachus in approx 200 B.C.
7. Rome acquired the city as it was ceded in 133 B.C.
8. "During Roman times it surpassed Ephesus both as a seaport and trading center, disputing with that city and Pergumum the claim to "the first city of Asia." Many considered it to be the most brilliant city in all of Asia Minor. Its streets were wide and paved. It was widely celebrated for its schools of medicine and science." (James Tolle)
9. As with Ephesus, the city was known for being a center of emperor worship.
10. Temples were found in this city erected to Roma, Tiberius, Julia, Zeus, Dionysus and others.
11. The city had a couple of claims to fame:
 - 1) They claimed to be the birthplace of Homer the poet.
 - 2) They erected a number of buildings on top of Mt. Pagus which overlooked the harbor with a great citadel called "The Golden Lined Palace."
 - 3) Also on the mountain's slope was their great theatre which seated 20,000 people.
12. Of interest, history notes that Smyrna had a fairly large Jewish population.
13. Today: the city is Izmir, and is Turkish with a population of approx. 2 million.
14. The message delivered to them was from the Christ:
 - 1) The Lord was the first and the last: alpha and the omega; the 1st and last letters in the Greek (**Rev. 1:11**).
 - 2) The Lord had been dead, but came to life through His glorious resurrection and now is "*alive forever more*" (**Rev. 1:18**).
15. This same One, as we noted last week, knows the thoughts and intents of all men's hearts.
 - 1) On one occasion when Jesus was charged that He was casting out demons by Beelzebub, and others were testing Him. The Bible states that He knew their thoughts (**Luke 11:17**).
 - 2) The Lord "*had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man*" (**John 2:25**).
16. Remember as we look at Smyrna, these are just congregations of the church, like us.
 - 1) Many had their good and bad points.
 - 2) The record on Smyrna is unusual in that no bad points are brought out.

DISCUSSION:

I. THE PRAISE (2:9).

- A. **2:9** *"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."*
- B. The Lord **knows** their works.
1. Evidently their works were accepted works. Peter noted: *"...in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him"* (**Acts 10:35**).
 2. Perhaps like Thessalonica, theirs were works of faith, and labors of love (**1 Thess. 1:3**).
 3. They were doing the works of God: **Eph. 2:10** *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."*
- C. The Lord also **knew** their tribulation.
1. One writer noted: "Intense suffering: indicates outside pressure which threatens to ruin."
 2. Many of the early Christians suffered greatly for the cause of Christ.
 - 1) Paul even admonished Christians at Corinth to remain unmarried if possible, for it was better under what he called, the *"present distress"* (**1 Cor. 7:26**).
 - 2) Peter encouraged the early persecuted Christians, *"arm yourselves with the same mind"* (**1 Pet. 4:1**).
 - 3) Peter even warned the early Christians of persecution: **1 Pet. 4:12** *"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you."*
 3. The church at Smyrna was coming under the fiery persecution.
 - 1) **vs 10** even indicates that the situation in Smyrna is about to take a turn for the worse.
 - 2) While we don't face these dangers today in this country, do face other forms of tribulation.
 - 3) The Lord reminds all who would follow Him: **Matt. 5:10-12** *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
11 *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*
12 *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."*
- D. The Lord also knew their poverty.
1. Their poverty was only financial in nature.
 2. They know doubt to the persecution of the day had lost property, jobs, and other earthly securities.
 3. Domitian, the reigning Roman Caesar, was reported to have confiscated property and possessions of the Christians.
 4. To have been a Christian under such conditions would truly have been a challenge.
 5. Although the Christians in Smyrna were poor in the world's goods, they were rich in other ways.
 - 1) They were seeking the things which are above.

Col. 3:1-2 *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.*

2 *Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."*

- 2) **James 2:5** *"God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith."*
- 3) Our riches are in the grace and mercy of God which Paul refers to when he speaks of *"the unsearchable riches of Christ"* (**Eph. 3:8**).

II. THE PROBLEM (2:9).

- A. *"I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."*
- B. The blasphemy of professed Jews.
 1. The Jews claimed to be the people of God.
 2. True, at one time they were the chosen children of God: **Deut. 7:6** *"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."*
 3. God made His covenant with them (**Deut. 5:2**).
 4. They were indeed the Israel of God in that day (**Gen. 49:28**).
 5. They were the descendants of Abraham (**Gen. 12:1-3**).
 6. But the Jews of 96 A.D. were not the chosen children of God.
 7. Christ took the old covenant out of the way *"nailing it to His cross"* (**Col. 2:14**).
 8. In turn Christ made it possible for all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike, to be saved: **1 John 2:2** *"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."*
 9. The Lord conveys that the Jews under consideration in Smyrna were not worthy to be called Jews.
 - 1) Although they claimed Moses and Abraham, they did not honor them nor follow their teachings.
 - 2) They were in essence doing as many Jews of that century had done, riding on the coat tails of the past.
- C. The Lord speaks of the *synagogue of satan*.
 1. This is a derogatory reference to the Jews of Smyrna, implying that they were not of God's synagogue (assembly or congregation).
 2. By their manor of life and actions, as bro. Robert Taylor, Jr. put it, "Satan held their title of ownership."
 3. They apparently were like those with whom Jesus dealt, when He said: **John 8:44** *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."*
- D. Those who were the true Jews, were circumcised in heart.
 1. **Rom. 2:28-29** *"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;
29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."*
 2. **Phil. 3:3** *"For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in*

Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

3. Paul of the church as being the true Israel of God (**Gal. 6:16**).
- E. As many then professed to be Jews, there are many today who *profess* to be Christians.
 1. **Acts 11:26** *“And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”*
 2. Unfortunately, the term has become greatly abused.
 3. The name Christian is to be such that it honors Christ every time it is spoken.
 4. But those who wear it falsely dishonor the name of Christ everytime it is spoken in reference to them.
 5. There are those today who profess to be Christians apart from the church (**Eph. 5:23**).
 6. There are those who wear denominational names, who dishonor the Lord by following man’s doctrines; of such the Lord said that their worship is in vain (**Matt. 15:9**).
 7. There are those who dishonor the Christ through unholy living bringing shame and reproach upon the Lord.
 8. Such are of the synagogue of satan.

III.THE PROPHECY (2:10).

- A. *“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*
- B. We focus again on the promise of suffering.
 1. Of interest: Christ reveals the impending increase of persecution, but He does not promise to take it away.
 2. Often when people become Christians, they have a delusion that all of their problems will go away.
 3. What Christians do have is one to help them with the problems that they face: **Phil. 4:13**.
 4. *“The Lord stood with me and strengthened me” (1 Tim. 4:17).*
- C. *“Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.”*
 1. Sometimes one wishes that he knew the future, but this is one of those cases in which those in Smyrna didn’t want to hear such news; but clearly the Lord intended it for encouragement to endure.
 2. They thought it was tough, but it was definitely going to get worse.
 3. It reminds me of Jeremiah’s statement: **Jer. 12:5** *“If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, Then how can you contend with horses?”*
 4. What they were about to face was the direct onslaught of satan.
 5. At times in our own lives, we think things are rough, but rougher days could be ahead.
 6. The mark of a Christian is to stand under the pressure thru the help of Christ.
- D. The tribulation mentioned here is to last for 10 days.
 1. Scholars mention that they believe this number to be symbolic.
 2. Summers in his works states: “A number symbolizing extreme, complete tribulation.”

3. One of the things about this number is that it suggests that the suffering would be for a period of time, but would end, the key being that they endure to its conclusion.
- E. The admonition is *"Be faithful until death..."*
1. In the face of persecution, death may come much sooner than we expected.
 2. The danger that comes in persecution is that the persecuted may loose heart, get discouraged and give up.
 - 1) Getting discouraged and giving up happens all too often to Christians today.
 - 2) **Gal. 6:9** *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*
 3. They may even be fearful in facing death, but the Christian has nothing to fear.
Phil. 1:21,23 *"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."
23 For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."*
 4. One can only imagine what it must have been like watching your loved ones, your brothers and sisters in Christ being tortured and killed and wandering if you are next.
 5. This encouragement from the Lord was necessary to help them not lose heart.
- F. The reward for endurance: *"I will give you the crown of life."*
1. **1 Cor. 9:25** *"And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown."*
 2. As Paul was about to part this life: **2 Tim. 4:7-8** *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."*
 3. **James 1:12** *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."*
 4. And what of Peter's encouragement to elders:
1 Pet. 5:4 *"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."*
 5. The crown of victory for the athlete was the wreath, worn about the head; the crown for which Christians seek is eternal life itself; the promise of heaven with God for all eternity (**Matt. 25:46**).
- G. **Rev. 2:11** *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."*
1. The second death is in fact a reference to Hell.
 2. **Rev. 20:14** *"Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."*
 3. **Death** - from the Greek word *thanatos* is a word which lit. means *separation*.
 4. The first separation is when we die a physical death.
Rom. 5:12 *"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."
James 2:26* *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."
Eccl. 12:7* *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."*

5. The second death or second separation is eternal separation from God.
- H. What the Christians are admonished to do is *overcome*. But what is the key?
 1. **1 John 5:4** *“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”*
 2. Faith is the key to endurance, the key to overcoming the second death.
 3. We place all of our hope, our faith, and our trust in God to help us to persevere to the very end.
 4. If in faith, we love and obey God until our last breath, we need not fear eternal punishment:
 - 1) **1 John 1:7** *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”*
 - 2) It is a continual cleansing, one which can be available to us all the days of our life.

CONCLUSION:

1. In this lesson we have talked of suffering, faith, and endurance.
2. One of the things that we noted that needs emphasis is that there is not a promise to remove pain and suffering.
3. At times we may question God and want to know why an all powerful God would permit the things to happen that do happen?
4. Critics will charge that if we truly have an all powerful and loving God, then why is there evil and pain and suffering in this world? They use it to attempt to disprove God’s existence.
5. The more generic question is: “Why do bad things happen to good people?”
6. When God created the world, he allowed sin to enter the world that man might have the choice, to choose good over evil.
7. The consequence of evil being present in our world means that pain and suffering will also be present.
8. In fact pain and suffering help us to make the choice to turn to God.
9. If we never faced pain and difficulty in our lives we likely would not have a reason to turn to God.
10. This is why Jesus said concerning those who are rich: **Luke 18:25** *“For it is easier for a camel to go through a needles eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”*
 - 1) The eye of the needle in Luke’s writings is that of a surgeon’s needle, which follows since Luke was a physician.
 - 2) The eye of a surgeon’s needle was extremely small.
 - 3) Now not all rich men go without problems, but the more wealthy one is, with fewer problems. the less the need or interest in God.
11. Sometimes it is hard for us to understand that suffering can be a blessing in disguise.
 - 1) Years ago a dear preacher friend of mine had difficulty with a man who had been a brother and turned from God.
 - 2) The man suffered the misfortune of a heart attack, an event which led to his restoration.
12. None of us likes to face the prospect of pain and suffering, but if such things help us to put a greater faith and trust in God it may actually be working to our good.

13. **Rom. 8:28** *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”*
14. It hurts to read of Christians, like those in Smyrna, whom the Lord has nothing negative to say about them, but who we realize faced a horrible persecution for following Christ.
15. In honor to them, how can we say today that what we are facing is worse than what they faced?
16. If something this evening is amiss in your life, turn to Him who is the source of all strength and comfort.
17. **Psa. 46:1** *“God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.”*
18. **Psa. 23** *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his names sake.
4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”*