

# To The Seven Churches

## Smyrna



## **To The Seven Churches Smyrna Revelation 2:8-11**

*Describe your immediate reaction to "be faithful even to the point of death."*

The Church in Smyrna was no stranger to suffering. The church was in the midst of profound religious persecution for those who sought to follow Jesus Christ. Christians would not follow the synagogues who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ and even approved of the martyrdom of some of the earliest church fathers (Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna being the first recorded martyr outside of the Bible). Nor would the Christians engage in the type of worship of Caesar that would have been mandatory for Roman worship. Beyond that, there was the profound misunderstanding of Christian doctrines. As they talked about the body and blood of Jesus Christ, people assumed they were cannibals. This is just one of the misunderstandings.

The church in Smyrna had to withstand afflictions of beyond just mild pains but instead an intense trial and difficult beyond mere annoyance. Furthermore, the church of Smyrna went through poverty. The poverty described goes beyond not having money for the non-essentials but required that they lacked even the most basic of needs and necessities. Finally, the church in Smyrna found themselves commonly receiving slander. Their surrounding community spoke poorly and unjustly of them. Yet, despite these things, the church in Smyrna persisted. It is this persistence to remain true and steady that Jesus praised. No matter what the church in Smyrna would face, their God would be their guiding star and their foundation of strength.

### **The Inevitability of Suffering**

It is interesting to note that, while Jesus had nothing negative to say about the church in Smyrna, He did not tell them what they wanted to hear. Surely the church would have loved to hear that the cultural pressure and suffering they face would come to a close. Yet, Jesus prepared them for the opposite. Their suffering

would continue and they would endure difficult times. The previous suffering would continue. Some of them would be thrown in jail. Others would be killed for their cultural insubordination and dedication to Jesus Christ.

As members of the church in the end days, we must be prepared to endure the same. It is a rather new phenomenon for Christians to think that we would be immune from persecution. The foundation of our faith Jesus Christ was martyred (for our benefit nonetheless) and promised that we too would face trials and suffering. As the world swirls to its conclusion, as Christians, we must be willing to be faithful even to the point of death. There is nothing that the world can offer us or supply us with that would make a good trade for our faith, not even our own lives. What is worse is that, sometimes, the persecution will come from those who allegedly claim the same faith. There is a form of Christianity that is completely removed from Christ. They claim the name of Jesus Christ but know nothing of Him or His heart. Things will be done in the name of Jesus Christ that are foreign to the nature of God. During those moments, however strong the persecution, the church should stand strong as a shining example of the power of God.

## **An Eternity Secured**

For all the suffering the people endured, they were continually faithful to God even until the point of death. They did face everything that Jesus mentioned. It persisted and grew worse. Yet, they gladly grasped stood strong during the face of whatever the world had to throw at them. Their strength was rooted in the unending and supreme nature of a victorious Jesus Christ. Jesus opens his remarks to the church in Smyrna with the assertion of who He is. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He died and conquered death, rising again. This is how they would be able to be faithful, even to the point of losing their own life. They understood that they could not lose their life because their eternity had been secured by Jesus Christ. The joy of this victory permeated to every ounce of their being. When Christ becomes everything, the world cannot take away anything.

Furthermore, for whatever sufferings that Jesus was aware, He

reassured them that they would not persist and had no eternal significance. They may be afflicted and poor, yet they are rich in the eyes of God, claiming the inheritance with Jesus Christ. They may be slandered by the world, but the Jesus Christ testifies on our behalf that we are united with Him. Remember, the world is openly hostile to the message of Jesus Christ. It is incompatible to the lifestyle of self-gratification (a lifestyle that leaves a person empty eternally). In the final days, the church will be persecuted and our basic needs threatened and taken. During those times, the church should lift our eyes to heaven and given glory to God in all circumstances. Whatever may occur, the grace of God has been given to us and by the strength of Jesus Christ and His victory over sin and death, we can stand firm and be faithful, even unto death.

## Discussion Questions

1. In Verse 9, Jesus says he understands what they are going through in three ways. What do these terms mean and how are they different from one another.
  - Tribulation - \_\_\_\_\_
  - Poverty - \_\_\_\_\_
  - Slander - \_\_\_\_\_
2. Why does Jesus start off his address to the church in Smyrna the way He does? Why is this significant for what he is saying to them?
3. How would our actions during persecution be a testimony to our God? What does our reaction to that say about the nature of the God we serve?
4. How are obedience to God and faithfulness tied to one another? What fuels our ability to obey God and to be faithful to Him?
5. What does Jesus say are the consequences for those who are following Christ?

6. Where would you struggle the most in being obedient, even until the point of death? What temptations or sins do you cling to instead of laying them down and following Jesus Christ?
  
7. Ultimately, we all must decide which God we serve and who we are chasing. The church during the end days, of which we are living through, must decide as a whole and as individuals, whether we will pursue the standards and supposed safety of the world or the eternal security of Jesus Christ. What is preventing you from standing firm in your faith and laying down our old life?