

Messages to Smyrna

Revelation 2:8-11

July 31, 2022

I. Introduction

A. Overcomers: A closer look

1. A term used to describe all believers. Key verse is I John 5:4, 5. They include all believers regardless of their spiritual maturity. This includes “carnal believers” as described in I Corinthians 3:1-3
2. This term is used to describe true believers who persevere to the end. Reformed View. This is similar to the Arminian View that says one can lose their eternal salvation.
3. This term is used to describe all believers in the sense that all believers have overcome the second death through a second birth but have not left their first love. I.e., they have not failed to give Christ first place in everything. – Colossians 1:18
 - a. This is my view.

B. “Some churches today pay consultants to help them evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. But no human being can possibly assess the true condition of a church. Only Jesus can see what is in people’s hearts. That which appears vibrant to us may be dead to Jesus. Only He can tell which churches are alive and which are dead.” Erwin W. Lutzer.

II. The Church at Smyrna

A. The city – v. 8a

1. 40 miles north of Ephesus, 50 miles south of Pergamum, at the mouth of the Hermos River
2. In the first century it was rich, large and in a key trade route location.
3. Known today as “Izmir”, the third largest city in Turkey.
4. Smyrna means “bitter”.
5. Was known as the crown or flower of Asia; rivaled Ephesus as the first city of Asia.
6. Home of Bishop Polycarp, a faithful martyr.

B. The Christ – v. 8b

1. “*The first and the last*”

a. Jesus claims equality with the Father. His eternal nature.

b. See Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 44:6

2. “*Who was dead*”

a. His voluntary (John 10:17, 18), substitutionary death (I Peter 3:18)

b. Literally “who became dead”.

3. “*and has come to life*”

a. His resurrection

C. The Commendation – v. 9

1. They were a persecuted church

a. Nero (54-68 A.D.) – Paul beheaded, and Peter crucified

b. Domitian (81-96 A.D.) – John exiled, Timothy

c. Trajan (98-117 A.D.) – Ignatius

d. “I know” = I know of it and have experienced it personally

e. “Tribulation” = *thlipsis*; pressure or crushing pressure

2. They were a poor church

a. This word means severe poverty

b. Their poverty was most likely related to their stand for Christ

c. II Corinthians 6:10; James 2:5

d. Opposite of Laodicea – v. 3:17

3. They were a reviled church

a. False Jews: Jews by birth but not followers of Christ

b. Synagogue of Satan: those who do his work.

c. Satan always opposes good

d. Satan is behind the persecution. See Eph. 6:12; Rev. 13

e. Death of Polycarp (155 A.D.)

D. The Condemnation

1. Not a word against them!

2. The same is true of Philadelphia

E. The Challenge and Promise – vs. 10, 11

1. Do not fear; are we prepared for tough times? Faith trumps fear.
2. "tested" = to prove, or improve
3. Be faithful until death and you will receive the crown of life (*stephanos*-victor's crown)
4. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.
 - a. A double negative is used. Literally: "will by no means be"; emphatic denial.
 - b. Satan can kill the body, but not the soul.
 - i. See Matthew 10:28

III. Application

A. Prophetic

1. Ephesus: 33-100 A.D.
2. Smyrna: 100-300 A.D.

B. Ten Periods of Persecution known by their Roman Emperors (dates are approximate)

1. Nero (64-68 A.D.) – burned Rome and blamed Christians; crucified and threw Christians into pits with wild animals; executed Paul and possibly Peter
2. Domitian (90-96 A.D.) – killed thousands in Rome; banished John to the Isle of Patmos
3. Trajan (104-117 A.D.) – outlawed Christianity; burned Ignatius at the stake
4. Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.) – tortured and beheaded Christians
5. Severus (200-211 A.D.) – burned, crucified, and beheaded Christians
6. Maximinius (235-237 A.D.) – executed Christians
7. Decius (250-253 A.D.) – tried to wipe out Christianity and executed those he could find
8. Valerian (257-260 A.D.) – tried to wipe out Christianity; executed the Bishop of Carthage
9. Aurelian (270-275 A.D.) – persecuted Christians any way he could
10. Diocletian (303-312 A.D.) – burned the scriptures

C. Personal

1. What will cause one to return to his first love? Persecution!
2. What type of marriage does this church typify?
 - a. A very healthy marriage?
 - b. One headed for tiring times?
3. When you are ready to die, you are ready to live!

