

The Messages of Jesus to the 7 Churches

The Church in Smyrna

"Be Faithful unto Death"

Revelation 2:8-11

Introduction:

Read Revelation 2:1-7 & Review the message to the church of Ephesus.

Emphasize that the love that we had when we first believed was a great love for God that showed itself in a love for God's people and for the lost. We can easily discern if we have abandoned our love that we had at the first if we have lost part of our love for other believers and for those that do not yet know Christ.

Now we will consider the second church that Jesus speaks to, the church of Smyrna. This is the only place in the Bible that Smyrna is mentioned, so we do not know much about the believers there except what this passage tells us.

Read Revelation 2:8-11

The Description of Jesus (2:8-9)

1. Jesus is the First and the Last

2. Jesus is the One who died and came to life

- These two descriptions of Jesus remind us of truths we have already studied in 1:8, 17-18. These two truths are very important to those who are suffering. Remembering how big and how great our God is central to maintaining strong faith in all circumstances of life. He is the source and sustainer of all life. He is the One who paid for our sins in His body on the cross and rose again. He is the Living God.

3. Jesus sees all of our hardship and suffering

- Jesus knew about every time that they suffered for His name. He sees every sin and every word spoken against us. The Almighty & Living God knows our trials and difficulties and He cares for us. He will reward us for each act of obedience in the face of suffering and will judge those who sin against us in perfect justice at the Last Day.

APPLICATION: *These three truths are the truths about Jesus that the believers at Smyrna needed to hear because they were facing great persecution. Many of those studying this passage right now have experienced much persecution. What truths have most encouraged you at those times and have given you comfort? It is these very truths—reminding ourselves of the greatness of God, His death for our sins, His resurrection, and His love and care for us. These are the truths that you must come back to when in the fires of persecution.*

Praise from Jesus to the Church of Smyrna (2:9):

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)”

- The church at Smyrna was a church that not only suffered from intense persecution but was also very poor. Every day was hard for the believers at Smyrna; they had to work very hard to live and provide for their families; they did not have much money to enjoy things; their relationships with their extended family members and others in the community was very difficult because of their faith— Life was hard.
- Jesus saw their suffering and He praised them for how they responded to it. They stood firm in their faith and served God even in their tribulation and poverty. Jesus calls them “rich.” Why did Jesus call them “rich?” They were rich because of their inheritance in Jesus Christ that was promised them, as well as for their reward in heaven which will be great because of their endurance in suffering. Recall Matthew 5:10-12.

Who is the synagogue of Satan (2:9)?

- Those who are of the synagogue/ church of Satan are those that call themselves Jews/ believers in Jesus Christ but really are not. These people claim to know Christ and want to be in our church for various reasons (have them given examples) but they do not share our faith. They want to be “Christians” without living a new life in Jesus. These Satan plants within churches in order to try to destroy them from within. These people greatly slander God’s people when God’s people recognize them and separate from them. The believers in Smyrna were being greatly persecuted by these false Christians.

APPLICATION: *Consider those that persecute the people of our church. How many of them are people that used to profess Christ or still do in a heretical church? Often these people are the worst persecutors.*

- Notice that Satan uses *his* people to seek to destroy *God’s* people. Often we focus on Satan’s powers in the world and forget that the primary way that Satan destroys believers’ faith is through his people, his servants, those who do not serve Christ.

APPLICATION: *Discuss how Satan uses people to try to destroy believers.*

No Rebuke, No Call to Repentance

- There are only two among the 7 churches that receive no rebuke or call to repentance, the church of Smyrna and the church of Philadelphia. God was pleased with these churches and how they were serving Him. Both of these churches were experiencing great persecution. Persecution is used by God to

strengthen His people. Those whose faith is false fall away but those who are true are made stronger. Usually churches that are greatly persecuted love God and serve Him more than churches where persecution is very minimal. The Word of God tells us that being persecuted is a BLESSING, not a curse, to God's people.

APPLICATION: Do you look at persecution as a blessing from God or a curse? The plan of Jesus is that we grow strong amidst persecution and enjoy His grace in a special way so that our reward will be great in heaven. Our faith amidst persecution defeats Satan and shows how weak he is compared to our God.

Encouraging commands from Jesus to the Church of Smyrna (2:10):

1. Do not fear what you are about to suffer

- Jesus knew that the believers in Smyrna were about to experience greater persecution than before and that now many will be thrown into prison. Jesus says that He is allowing this to happen that “you may be tested.” The Devil was going to work hard to destroy their faith. The believers of the church in Smyrna needed to remember the description of Jesus given in vv.8-9 and be strong to face the trial to come.

APPLICATION: We must remember that Satan is our enemy who is seeking to devour us! We will not fear him or his servants if we keep our eyes focused on Jesus and trust in His grace. If we begin to look away from Jesus and begin to look at our suffering and become afraid, we will fall. Recall Revelation 1:17-18.

2. Be faithful unto death

- Jesus commands His people in Smyrna to endure and be faithful even if it costs their lives. Recall Jesus' call to discipleship in Luke 14. True faith in Jesus Christ will remain faithful even unto death. False believers will not confess Christ to the point of death but will recant.

APPLICATION: Are you faithful in the sufferings that you endure for Christ now? If not, you will not be faithful unto death. Would you still believe if your life or the lives of those you love were threatened with death?

Rewards for Conquerors (2:10-11):

1. They will receive the crown of life

- If they remain faithful unto death, it will mean that their faith is true. Those with genuine faith will receive the “crown of life,” eternal life with God in heaven. Death and separation from God and all sin will be no more.

2. They will not be hurt by the Second Death

- The second death is the lake of fire in which all of those who do not have the crown of life will be cast at the Day of Judgment. This judgment will not hurt those who conquer because they have the Spirit of Christ.

APPLICATION: Jesus wanted His people who were going to suffer to keep their minds focused on the eternal life that was set before them. He wanted them to keep their minds fixed on the salvation that they have received from judgment and the lake of fire. If we focus our hearts on the grace of God in salvation and continually keep our hearts on those things, we will endure to the end by faith.

Do these rewards give you joy? Sometimes believers get so far from God in their hearts that they cannot have joy in God's promises. Have you lost your joy in God's promises? If so, what should you do? Who is the One who can teach you what you need to know and help you to see your sin and what is lacking in your life? The Holy Spirit of God. Pray earnestly that God will show you what is wrong and read God's Word, for God speaks to us through His Word and prayer.