

A Journey Into the Heavens
Smyrna - The Poor, Rich Church
October 7, 2015

We found in our last lesson that the book of Revelation falls into three categories based on Revelation 1:19: the things which thou hast seen, the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter. We are now studying the things which are - the seven churches. These churches were probably chosen because they collectively represent all churches of John's time, as well as subsequent generations. Also, these seven churches represent particular kinds of Christians, so as we study these seven churches, ask the Lord to help you determine which is most like you!

I. The _____ (2:8)

The city of Smyrna was located about _____miles north of Ephesus. Even in John's day, Smyrna was an old city, dating back to the third millennium B.C. Today Smyrna is known as Izmir and with a population around 300,000, is the third largest city in Turkey. Smyrna was a very patriotic city. Each time there was a Roman civil war, Smyrna was fortunate enough to pick the winning side. Therefore, it was made a free city with no Roman garrison, so the people basically had the freedom to do as they pleased.

Because of its patriotism, Smyrna won the privilege of building the first Roman _____ in honor of Tiberius, and quite naturally they readily accepted the principle of Caesar worship. Each year every Roman citizen had to burn a pinch of incense on the alter to the godhead of Caesar and say "Caesar is Lord." Many Christians refused to participate in this act of worship and were thus charged with disloyalty to Rome, which resulted in them being killed at the stake, or by wild beasts in the arena. Therefore, the Christians at Smyrna were suffering tremendous persecution.

II. The _____ (2:9)

Verse 9 begins with Christ saying, I know they works and tribulation, and poverty... and I know the blasphemy... The Greek word translated “know” means fullness of knowledge - a complete knowledge attained by experience. Christ had lived this type of life on earth. (Matthew 8:20; Luke 23:33-34; Hebrews 4:15)

Christ says, I know thy works, and tribulation... The Greek word translated tribulation literally means “_____” or “to be crushed. It is the idea of constant, aggressive pressure, or persecution. Our Lord is saying HE KNEW the pressure of the persecution the Smyrnan Christians were facing. The Lord KNEW every sorrow, counted every tear, felt every pain, and completely understood the physical and mental anguish His people were enduring because of the persecution that He faced on this earth!

Moreover Christ is fully aware of our tribulation today. He takes note of those who are ridiculed at work or at school because they are faithful followers of His. The Good Shepherd knows every wound and every bruise sustained by His sheep as they follow Him.

In Revelation 2:9, Christ also says, I know...thy poverty... The Greek word translated poverty is not the ordinary word for poverty. It is the Greek word that means extreme poverty or beggary. These Smyrnan Christians were probably deprived of the right to make a living because of economic sanctions imposed against those who refused to participate in emperor worship. It is also possible that part of their persecution was having their property confiscated. In spite of all this poverty, our Lord parenthetically adds...but thou art rich... How is this possible that they are rich? (Matthew 5:10-12; II Corinthians 6:10; II Corinthians 8:9)

Our risen Lord also declared in verse 9...I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. There was a large, hostile Jewish community at Smyrna, and from the early days of church, the Jews hated and persecuted Christians.

For example the Apostle Paul was a Jew, and before he was saved he spent much of his time having Christians put into prisons. He even assisted those who killed Stephen. The book of Acts is full of evidence of the hostility of the Jews toward Christians. (Acts 14:2; Acts 14:19). It is clear some in the Jewish community used malicious lies to incite persecution upon the saints in Smyrna. The Jews probably did this at least in part to take some heat off themselves, for all devout Jews would have serious problems with emperor worship.(Exodus 20:3-4).

Concerning those who were bringing persecution upon His followers, our Lord declared in Revelation 2:9 that they... say they are Jews and are not. What are real Jews in God's sight? (Romans 2:28-29) Christ calls these particular Jews in Smyrna ...the synagogues of Satan, which clearly reveals Satan in the author of all persecution of Christians. Evil people are simply his instruments!

III. The _____

Smyrna is one of two churches to which our Lord gives no condemnation. The other is Philadelphia!

IV. The _____ (2:10)

The Christians at Smyrna did not experience the approval or praise of men, but they certainly received both from _____. However, their tribulation was not yet over, so our Lord gives them a command in verse 10. The Lord knew ahead of time of the enemies plans to have some of the believers imprisoned and tried as traitors.

The Lord said this persecution would be for ten days. Some interpret this to mean ten specific persecutions under Roman Emperors, beginning with Nero and ending with Diocletian. However, considering Genesis 24:55 and Acts 25:6, it probably refers to a short or limited time.

Contained in this command is a promise...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life... Some interpret this to mean only those who are faithful unto death will be saved. However, this verse has nothing to do with being saved; it concerns rewards or crowns as the New Testament calls them. There are actually 5 different crowns which are rewards for different and special service to the Lord.

V. The _____ (2:11)

As in all letters, the comfort is given to any individual who will listen and respond to what is being said. For those who overcome, Jesus says they ... shall not be hurt of the second death. The first death is a physical death, however there is a more serious second death. (Revelation 20:13-15).

The lost person lives to die, but the believer dies to live! The second death is the death that no believer in Christ will experience (John 5:24). The second death actually is separation from God and from every good thing He intended for His children. So today if you are struggling in your life with work, people, finances or anything else know that you are not alone and we will be overcome and victorious in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we just have to be faithful to the end!!