

The Church of Smyrna – The Suffering Church

Revelation 2-11: “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: “The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: ⁹‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **He who overcomes will NOT be hurt by the second death.’**”

As usual, the Lord begins by accenting the positive. “I know your afflictions and your poverty,” He says. First, He underscores the persecution at Smyrna and brings comfort with the words “I know!” The Lord Jesus, our Savior, knows every heartache. He knows every pain, every tear, and every burden. It is encouraging, to say the least, when facing some dark hour of trial, to have a friend in a position of high authority to take you by the hand and say, “I know, I sympathize, I understand, I’m standing by you in this. You can count on me.” There is no sob, no tear, no heartache, pain, or fear that the Lord does not share. He has faced life to the full, drunk its sorrows to the dregs. He knows!

Sometimes Christians tend to prosper most in their soul when under persecution

When the church is persecuted it spreads like wildfire. When the church is at ease, God’s work suffers sorely! Paul was given a “thorn in the flesh.” He prayed for God to remove the thorn, but God did not remove it. God promised and gave grace sufficient to bear it—and Paul was the richer for it (2 Corinthians 12:7[6]). The Hebrew Christians rejoiced in the plundering of their goods (Hebrews 10:34[7]). The three Hebrew children knew Jehovah from the historical standpoint; but when they met Him in the midst of the fiery furnace they knew Him as they could never have known Him had they not stood when the king commanded them to bow (Read about it in Daniel 3:1-25).

The “church in Smyrna” was suffering because of persecution, and believers faced “poverty” even in this wealthy city. This probably refers to material poverty because Christ immediately assured them that despite their “poverty,” they were “rich”—referring to their heavenly riches (James 2:5[8]).

The Christians’ “poverty” may have been due to a number of things:

1. It may have come from sanctions against them as part of the persecution they faced.
2. It could have been due to the fact that most of them belonged to the lower classes of society. The gulf between the top and the bottom of the social scale was very wide.
3. Sometimes Christians suffered from being robbed of their goods (Hebrews 10:4). There were times when the heathen mob would suddenly attack the Christians and wreck their homes and take what they wanted. Life was not easy for a Christian in Smyrna or anywhere else in the ancient world.

It is most significant that our Lord spoke as He did to the assembly at Smyrna, for this church was in the midst of bitter sorrow and suffering. This church as we read, was typified by **long-suffering**. As we go through persecution, trials, and troubles, we need to stay strong in the faith as did this example of the church of Smyrna.

In addition to the persecution and “poverty” they suffered, the Lord recognized how they had suffered from the spread of false reports. He said: “I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (2:9). This church was surrounded by foes; and there was a group within the church who claimed to be Jews, but who were not really Jews. They were in the church for what they could get out of it—not for what they could give to the Christ in the midst of the golden candlesticks. They could rightfully say they were descendants of Abraham, but the people of God are those who had accepted Jesus as Messiah as Savior. “And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God’s promise to Abraham belongs to you” (Galatians 3:29, NLT). A true Jew is not one physically or racially, but spiritually (Romans 2:17-29).

Any religious group, Jewish or Gentile, that does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as God’s Son is certainly acting contrary to God’s will. Thank God that people like them (false followers) will be left behind when the true Church is taken out! These false followers were tearing her reputation to pieces. They were “Jews” but they were not worthy of the name (Romans 2:28-29[11]). Rather than representing a true Jewish “synagogue,” they were a “synagogue of Satan” (2:9; John 8:44). The word “devil” means “slanderer.” He is the forger of lies and all manner of false accusations against God’s children (Revelation 12:10[12]).