

### The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Behold I Am Coming Soon

Today's message is from Revelation 2:8-11: The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

But, **first**, we need to conclude the letter to the Ephesian church looking at Revelation 2:7. This lesson will serve us well as we study the other letters to the Churches.

#### I. (2:7) The Counsel<sup>1</sup> and The Promise

##### A. The Counsel

1. "He who has an ear let Him hear what the Spirit says..."
  - a) The Lord counsels each individual to **hear** and **understand**
    - (1) It is possible to read, or hear Jesus' words and teaching but not understand. Why?
      - (a) 1 Corinthians 2:14- "The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God... because they are spiritually discerned."
      - (b) You must be born again
  - b) Remember who the Lord Jesus is addressing. He's addressing people that have forsaken their first love. Therefore, he's **counseling** people who once loved Him. Those who truly love Him have been born again! So it is these, which are true believers that need to "hear and understand what the Spirit says".
  - c) This leads to the question, what are these Christians in Ephesus, what are the churches (plural) in all places and times to "understand what the Spirit says to the churches"?
    - (1) Strong inference: Return to your first love.

##### B. The Promise

1. First, notice, He speaks to, "the one who overcomes".
  - a) Remember, the Spirit is speaking to the Churches (plural). So, not just to the church in Ephesus, but to all.
  - b) Who are the overcomers?

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<sup>1</sup> I chose to follow John MacArthur's lead and use the word "counsel" instead of "reward" to describe the last commonality of the seven letters to the churches because the Lord Jesus, after calling them to repentance, counsels the churches, and in most cases offers a promise for their faithful response to His counsel.

(1) As John MacArthur explains, “The term does not refer to those who have attained a higher level of Christian life, but to all Christians.” He goes on,

(2) “The apostle John defines it that way in his first epistle: ‘For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?’”

(a) If a person is born again that person, because they are born again, overcomes!

(i) SALVATION IS ALL OF GOD!

(b) Because our faith is in God’s grace and power we overcome the world.

(i) The World: The whole system of evil.

(c) All people who truly adhere to or abide in Christ are overcomers.

(i) Rev. 12:11, “And they overcame [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto death.”

c) As we will see, the PROMISES given by the Lord Jesus are only given to the “overcomers”— that is, only those who are born again by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

2. Then, to the one who overcomes (that is, to the “born again”) he

**promises:** “The right to eat from the tree of life that is in God’s Paradise.

a) “The right”. Who has the right?

(1) Those who are born again, the overcomers:

(a) John 1:12: “But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave **the right** to become the children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (Born of God)

b) “To eat from the tree of life...”

(1) When Adam sinned while in the Garden of Eden (The Paradise of Eden), the tree of life (Genesis 2:9) became inaccessible. Adam was cut off from the tree. (See Genesis 3:22)

(2) But here the Lord Jesus promises that each and every *overcomer* has access to the tree of life!

(3) It's the tree in heaven and it symbolizes "eternal life!"

(a) See Revelation 22:2,14,19.

c) "...that is in God's Paradise."

(1) Heaven!

#### C. Conclusion:

1. Jesus is the Life (zoe: Greek: Abundant, eternal life) (John 14:6). The Lord Jesus is speaking to His born-again-ones, urging them to hear and understand this: Return to your first love.
2. It is possible, and most of us know this intimately, that doing the right things in the right way and having the soundest of doctrine cannot ever serve as a substitute for a heart aflame for our God and His Christ!
  - a)
3. He is our greatest reward! No gift or blessing bestowed can ever eclipse the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ.
  - a) "I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things." (Philippians 3:8)
  - b) Genesis 15:1, "After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I Am your Shield, your exceeding great reward!'"
  - c) Remember the book title, "Jesus + Nothing = Everything? Let your heart be zealous for our great God and Savior Jesus Christ!

## II. (2:8-11) What about Smyrna?

### A. The City of Smyrna

1. An ancient city– the archaeological record shows possibly 3000 B.C.
  - a) Destroyed in around 600 B.C.
  - b) Rebuilt by some of Alexander the Great's successors in 290 B.C.

### B. Smyrna at the time of the Apostle John

1. A small port city
  - a) Known for its beauty
  - b) It was the center of modern science and medicine.

### C. The politics and religion of Smyrna

1. The people were loyal citizens of Rome, and faithful to the Emperors of Rome
    - a) In fact, they were so loyal to Rome that when the Roman army was suffering through a terribly cold winter, the people of Smyrna literally gave the clothes off of their backs and sent them to the soldiers.
    - b) The reward for their loyalty was the privilege of having the new temple to Tiberius, the Emperor of Rome, built in Smyrna in 26 A.D.
  2. Smyrna was famous for a street called the "Street of Gold." This street was the most beautiful and was home for temples of the gods of Rome. With Cybele at one end and Zeus at the other, with the temples of Apollos, Asklepios, and Aphrodite in between.
- D. Smyrna was a dangerous city for Christians as we will see.
1. There is no record revealing when the church was founded.
  2. But, because of its location near the church in Ephesus, it is likely that the Apostle Paul ministered there during his third missionary journey.
  3. Their unshakeable faith and singular loyalty to Christ Jesus as Lord undoubtedly was the catalyst for the persecution of the Christians in Smyrna.
    - a) Compromise was not an option for these believers and the Lord Jesus acknowledged this. Therefore, the Lord did not have any words of criticism for these believers!

### III. (2:8-11) The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

#### A. To: The angel / Messenger of the church in Smyrna

1. This messenger may have been Polycarp. He was definitely "the bishop of Smyrna" by 110 A.D.
  - a) Polycarp had know the Apostle John
  - b) Polycarp served the Lord for 86 years and was martyred in 168 A.D

(1) So, possibly he could have been the minister of the church as early as 96 A.D. when John received the Revelation.

2. Polycarp was known for his complete unwillingness to deny the Lord Jesus Christ, which ultimately ushered in his death.
  - a) In 168 A.D. during the “public games,” presumably this is linked to the blood sports so loved by the Romans, the crowd at the games began chanting, “Away with the Atheists, let Polycarp be searched for!”
  - b) Polycarp was taken into custody and despite the threat of execution by burning, Polycarp would not yield to the mantra, “Caesar is Lord.” For Him, only Jesus Christ was Lord!
  - c) At the arena, the Proconsul gave him the option of cursing the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and making a sacrifice to Caesar, or death.
    - (1) He called out loudly, “Eighty-six years have I served Him and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me? You threaten me with fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire that awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.”
    - (2) And with that, and with no more than loose bindings, he stood steadfastly unmoved as they burned him at the stake.
3. To me, this leaves little doubt concerning the faithful loyalty to Christ of the people of Smyrna.

B. From: Jesus, “the First and the Last, who died and came to life.”

1. Jesus emphasizes His *eternality*, and
  - a) His *eternal life*.
    - (1) How fitting and encouraging to this church who is soon to suffer martyrdom. To them He promises the “crown of life.” as we see in 2:10.
2. Jesus was dead and came to life. (Literally, *became dead*.)
  - a) A triumphant promise to the saints in Smyrna.
    - (1) That they would hold fast to the promise of eternal life, which comes through faith in Him.

- (a) In 2:10, He calls them to be faithful to death. They could suffer unto death with confidence!
- (2) Jesus gave similar hope to His followers earlier in His earthly ministry encouraging them (**and us**) that we need not fear them that can kill the body, but do no more!
  - (a) Matthew 10:28: "And do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in Hell."
  - (b) Luke 12:4: "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do."
- (3) Be encouraged to place your soul and body in His care, and endure hardships and pressure even unto death!
- C. (2:9) He knows: "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."
  - 1. Jesus knows! Nothing escapes His omniscience!
    - a) Their tribulation (the word means, *pressure* from persecution.) The church in Smyrna faced great pressure from persecution for 3 reasons. (The following three reason come from John MacArthur)
      - (1) The citizens of Smyrna were fanatic worshipers of the emperor.
        - (a) As a population they demanded that **every citizen of Smyrna** offer worship through sacrifices.
        - (b) The Christians would not. They would submit to the emperor's civil authority, but would not offer sacrifices.
        - (c) The Christians were singled out at rebels and faced the wrath of the entire Roman government.
      - (2) The Christians would not join in the pagan religious celebrations in general. Total rejection of pagan idols!
        - (a) Christians were deemed "anti-social" for their refusal to participate.
      - (3) The Christians were **slandered**, being accused of **blasphemy** "by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan (the ultimate blasphemer!)"

- (a) The Jews had completely “rejected Jesus Christ [and] were just as much Satan’s followers as idol worshipers.”
- (b) NOTE: Jesus’ use of the word “blasphemy” indicates the intensity and severity of the pressure.
- (c) NOTE: Unbelieving Jews routinely accused Christians...
  - (i) ...of **cannibalism** based on their perversion of the teaching on the Lord’s Supper;
  - (ii) ...of **immorality** because of their deep love;
  - (iii) ...of being **homewreckers**, b/c of the conflict arising between a believing spouse and an unbelieving spouse;
  - (iv) ...of **atheism** for refusing pagan worship;
  - (v) ...of **political disloyalty** for refusing to offer sacrifices to the emperor.
- (d) It should be no surprise that Rome encouraged and rewarded the Jewish population for turning in Christians for these blasphemes and more.

b) He knows their poverty (and the reality of their true riches).

(1) Poverty: this kind of poverty is an “abject poverty and destitution.”

(2) “You are rich”

- (a) Pressure and poverty couldn’t collapse this church!
  - (i) **For the faithful, trusting Christian** poverty in earthly possessions is not indicative of spiritual poverty. The Lord says, “You are rich!”
  - (ii) Christians are rich in salvation, sanctification, righteousness, grace, and the fruit of the Spirit! Etc.

D. (2:?) His Concern: Our Lord does not have a word of concern or condemnation!

E. (2:10a) Action The Call to Action couples a **command and warning**.

1. Command: “Do not fear what you are about to suffer.”

- a) They are to act on His command in spite of their ongoing pressure (tribulation) and poverty.

(1) They had been faithful by enduring the tribulation pressure of persecution and poverty.

2. Warning: More tribulation pressure of persecution is coming.

- a) Jesus told his disciples and us in John 16:33, "In this world you will have tribulation pressure, but take heart (be of good courage); I have overcome the world!"
- b) Here is Revelation 2:10 Jesus tells them what is going to happen:
  - (1) The believers in Smyrna are going to suffer;
  - (2) The devil is going to throw some of you into prison;
  - (3) This persecution is a "test" of their faith (to prove to them, not the Lord) to strengthen them
  - (4) The term of the persecution by the devil is limited: 10 days
- c) Paul was encouraged through His persecution: "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.'"

F. (2:10b-11) His Counsel and Promise: Encouraging Counsel! "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear let Him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death."

1. Counsel and promise:

- a) Counsel: "Be faithful unto death"-- Jesus *strongly urges* them
  - (1) "Unto death" can mean literal death, but the meaning is to include the idea of enduring persecution knowing that if we die, we die unto the Lord (see Daniel 3:8-18)..
- b) Promise: "Receive the crown of life" – eternal life! (see 2 Timothy 4:7-8)
- c) Counsel: to listen and understand what He's saying.
  - (1) "Ears to hear..." You and I have a responsibility to the Scripture; to read it, listen to it, and do what it says!
- d) Promise: "He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death."
  - (1) Overcomes: who is the overcomer? (see notes on 2:7 on page 2 of this handout.)
  - (2) "The second death"--
    - (a) These believers may die a martyr's death but will NOT suffer the second death, or "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14)
    - (b) Like those Christians at Smyrna, if you have been born again you have been transferred from the dreaded second death to the category of the "first resurrection!"

G. Application: How have you been loyal to Jesus and confessed Him before men? Will you? If you do, you are proving true faith and loyalty. Jesus will not be ashamed of you.