

## Jesus Wants a Faithful Church

(Revelation 2:8-11)

The Church at Ephesus (The Apostolic Church, A.D. 30-100)  
The Church at Smyrna (The Persecuted Church, A.D. 100-312)

Revelation 2:8-11 (NKJV) – Bible passage [my explanatory notes]

**8**“And to the angel [“angelos” or “messenger”, that is the pastor] of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: [the death and resurrection of Christ may be hearkening to Smyrna’s historic decline and resurgence. The main point is that Jesus is declaring His Deity with these statements.]

- “‘dead’ in the Greek is the word ‘corpse’. So, He is saying, who was a corpse and is alive. The reason Jesus identifies Himself this way is because He knows that this is a suffering church, and that people are literally being put to death. He is reminding them that He is the One who has gone down into death, conquered it, and has risen; He is victorious over death.”<sup>1</sup>

**9**“I know [Greek word “oida” which means “know by experience”] your works [“works” is not in the oldest Greek manuscripts, though Jesus certainly does know their works], tribulation [“thilipsis” which means “extreme crushing pressure”], and poverty [“ptocho” which means “a total pauper and totally destitute.”] (but you are rich [He uses the supreme Greek word to express wealth meaning “plutocrats.” They are spiritually wealthy]); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not [see Romans 2:28-29], but are a synagogue of Satan.

- People were being murdered, disowned and disinherited by their families, thrown out of jobs and living in abject poverty. Though economically bankrupt due to persecution, they were rich spiritually. Persecution and trials are an inevitable and essential part of the Christian life (Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12)

### Extra Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Bill Bennett, *Satanic Reverses*, note on Revelation 2:8, unpublished manuscript.

<sup>10</sup>Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life [a special victor's crown to those who are faithful in times of extreme persecution and martyrdom].

- The reason the persecution in Smyrna was so severe was because this was the first city where it was required by law that the Emperor be recognized as divine. MacArthur writes, "Under Domitian it became a capital offense to refuse to offer the yearly sacrifice to the emperor. Not surprisingly, many Christians faced execution. The most famous of Smyrna's martyrs was Polycarp, executed half a century after John's time. The Greek word translated 'Smyrna' was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to translate the Hebrew word for 'myrrh,' a substance used as a perfume for the living (Matthew 2:11) and the dead (John 19:39). Its association with death perfectly pictures the suffering church at Smyrna. Like myrrh, **produced by crushing a fragrant plant, the church at Smyrna, crushed by persecution, gave off a fragrant aroma of faithfulness to God.**"<sup>2</sup>
- Jesus said in **John 16:33**, "These things have I spoken unto you that in Me you might have peace but in the world you're going to have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world."
- As predicted by the Lord Himself in **verse 10**, "You will suffer persecution for ten days," this church age saw eight of the ten periods of persecution under Roman emperors:
  - Nero - A.D. 54-68 (Paul beheaded and Peter crucified)
  - Domitian - A.D. 81-96 (John exiled)
  - Trajan - A.D. 98-117 (Ignatius burned at the stake)
  - Marcus Aurelius - A.D. 161-180 (Justin Martyr killed)
  - Severus - A.D. 193-211
  - Maximinius - A.D. 235-238
  - Decius - A.D. 249-251
  - Valerian - A.D. 253-260
  - Aurelian - A.D. 270-275
  - Diocletian - A.D. 284-305

Photo: Jean Leon Gerome, *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer*



"Diocletian is considered the worst emperor in Rome's history and the greatest antagonist of the Christian faith. He led a violent attempt to destroy the Bible from the face of the earth. Under his leadership many Roman cities had public burnings of the sacred Scriptures. ... During the second

and third centuries this persecution age saw hundreds of Christians brought into the amphitheater of Rome to be fed to hungry lions while thousands of spectators cheered. Many were crucified; others were covered with animal skins and tortured to death by wild dogs. They were covered with tar and set on fire to serve as torches. They were boiled in oil and burned at the stake, as was Polycarp in the city of Smyrna itself in A.D. 156. **One church historian has estimated that during this period, five million Christians were martyred for the testimony of Jesus Christ.**"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>11</sup>"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes [See 1 John 5:4-5] shall not be hurt by the second death." "

- If you are born twice (physically and spiritually – see **John 3:3**) you die only once (physically), If you only are born once (physically), you will experience death twice (physically and eternally – see **Revelation 20:14**).

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Because the Time Is Near: John MacArthur Explains the Book of Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 57.

<sup>3</sup> Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 52.