



“Restoring the Greatest Thing.”
May 11, 2025
David Hinkle

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: “The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander^[a] of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

Revelation 2:8-11

SUMMARY

In the 2nd letter to the churches in Rev 2-3, Christ acknowledges the tribulation and slander that the Church in Smyrna has already endured. Jesus then encourages the Church to stay strong in the faith during upcoming persecution, and upon death, they will surely receive the crown of life.

Good Morning Tomball Bible Church. My name is Brett Paulk, I get to serve on the elder team here, and it is an absolute honor to be able to open scripture with you this morning. When Pastor David first came to me to ask if I would preach in May, I was excited to do so. He then let me know that my text would only be 4 verses long, and that also excited me. Then he let me know that we would be in the book of Revelation, and just being transparent here, I got a little nervous. You know what I mean??

Revelation, I thought....don't you have to have a doctorate to understand this book? Have you ever felt like that? Sometimes we are so worried about not understanding scripture that we refrain from jumping into it at all.

BUT THEN I was reminded that God has given his word for ALL believers to know, to study, and to learn from. Therefore I am without excuse to dive head first into the Word of God in an effort to know him more, follow his commands, and give him glory. And I'm certain that you will be encouraged by the text that we are studying, as I have been during my preparation for this morning. So why don't you grab your bibles, tablets, or cell phone scripture app, and flip open to Revelation chapter 2:8-11.

You are an early Christian living in the 1st century. The city that you live in has made it practically impossible to freely worship the God of the Universe. Instead, they highly encourage, and even demand the worship of pagan gods. While walking down the most prominent road in town, nicknamed "The Street of Gold", you see at one end the temple of Cybele, a quote unquote "mother god". Continuing your walk, you see another large temple, this one to Apollo. Then to your right, the temple of Asklepios, and to your left, the temple of Aphrodite. Then at the end of the Street of Gold you find the temple to Zeus. However, there is no temple to the true God, the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, in sight.

Traveling deeper into the city, you find that their loyalty to Rome was unmatched by any other city in the region. This is evident by a temple which was built in honor of DEA ROMA, which was the personification of the city of Rome itself. There was even a separate temple dedicated to the Roman Emperor Tiberius. Temples upon Temples. Idols upon Idols. Gods upon Gods. Yes indeed, Rome was a city that demanded to be idolized and the Roman Emperor was a leader who demanded to be worshiped. And your city of Smyrna was playing its part in praising DEA ROMA for its protection, peace, and governance.

You look up to see magnificent buildings that are built on a mountain top, showcasing why the city was called "the most beautiful city under the sun" and are reminded that the locals call this area of architectural beauty the "Crown of Smyrna".

Can you picture it?

The ancient town of Smyrna was not a place that made the Christian life easy. Not only did the government demand loyalty to Rome, most notably by requiring praise of the Roman Emperor, but there was also persecution from the Jewish community towards those who professed Christ as Lord, which we'll discuss a little later.

This morning we will continue in our study of the book of Revelation, and our text will be the letter to the church in Smyrna. Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation are letters, from Christ, to the Seven Churches in Asia

Minor, which are all along a road that travels in a big circle-like shape. You will find that this particular letter is a letter of encouragement and assurance. And it's one of two of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2-3 that contains no condemnation or rebuke from Christ.

Let's read the passage in its entirety together, follow along with me.

8 *"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.*

9 *"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. 10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'*

May God bless the reading of his Word. Pray with me please.

DEAR GRACIOUS HEAVENLY FATHER, you are worthy of all of our praise! You have awoken us to a new day, graced us with the presence of your church, and drawn us to yourself by your Spirit. Lord, as we open your word to hear of your Revelation, I pray that you would give us ears to hear. Stir within us the desire to know you more. Align our wills to yours, and mold our hearts into an image of your own. We need your guidance, your mercy, and your grace. Let nothing be remembered from this morning's service that does not give you glory. This I pray in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

The central theological truth that we see in this text is that we as believers should not fear death, but instead we should look towards the joy of eternal life with our Savior.

Starting out in verse 8, we see that this statement is being sent to the angel of the church, and as we have mentioned in the past few weeks, the term "ANGEL" here can also mean "messenger", so this letter is written to a pastor or an elder of the church in Smyrna.

The author of the message to the church identifies himself in these opening verses. "The words of the first and the last" should have immediately rung a bell to his audience in Smyrna, and it should also do the same for us today. This was the same way that Jesus identified himself to John in Revelation chapter 1, and here in chapter 2 he is once again proclaiming the timeless truth that he was before and he will be after. **Jesus IS God.** The modern day atheistic claim that Jesus never said that he IS God is just downright ignorance. The same title is what the Lord uses for himself in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, as he refers to himself as the first and the last in Isaiah chapter 44.

Isaiah 44:6

"This is what the LORD says - Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty; I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God." NIV

Jesus had no beginning, and he has no end!

The fact that Jesus is eternal, a divine trait that only our God possesses, should remind us that our present life...our present circumstances...our foreseeable future...is all well within the knowledge and understanding of our eternal LORD. He's not surprised about your situation. There isn't anything that catches our Lord off guard.

The way that Jesus identifies himself to the church in Smyrna foreshadows what he is about to speak about: the truth of life after death.

He speaks to it, because he experienced it! As we read in:

1 Peter 3:18

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit..."

And now he is seated at the right hand of God, eternally alive and reigning forever!

Our passage continues:

9 "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."

We talked about how being a Christian in Smyrna was not as easy life, and this could be seen not only in a relational sense, but also a financial sense.

Think about what this would do for Christians from a financial perspective. Job opportunities would disappear because employers would not want to bring focus to themselves due to their "Roman opponent" employee. Not only were Christians seen as Rebels, but they were also categorized as atheist (meaning they did not participate in the pagan worship or all of the gods of the day), they were seen as home wreckers (one spouse disagreeing with another spouse due to their spiritual beliefs), and even Cannibals (speaking to the misunderstood intake of the body and blood of Christ in communion). And when job opportunities are difficult, it's difficult to put food on the table. Persecution not only has a negative social aspect to it, but also an economic impact. It would be easy to see how the Christians of Smyrna were poor in the world's viewpoint.

However, Christ reminds them that "they are rich"! How can this be? Because we have the riches of Christ due to what he accomplished on the cross for our behalf!

2 Corinthians 8:9:

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

When the Lord refers to believers as being rich, he's not talking about dollar signs! It's something much deeper than that.

Paul states in Ephesians 3:7-8

“Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...”

The world would tell us that riches can be quantified, as in, look to see how many commas and zeros are in a man’s net worth. But our feeble minds cannot comprehend the depth of the riches found in Christ, they are endless! Christ speaks to the spiritual riches that every believer has, things such as The Love of God, The Wisdom of God, The Truth of God, The Mercy of God, The Provision of God, and on and on and on. Non-believers do not have these spiritual riches, as they are only found in Jesus Christ!

Back to our text. In verse 9, Christ refers to slanderers that say that they are Jews, but they are not. Instead he calls them a *synagogue of Satan*. But why?

These people were haters of the gospel. They despised the Christians for worshipping Jesus as King, a “crucified criminal” as Messiah, and considered this blasphemy. Jesus calls this group a synagogue of Satan. Those who are opposed to the King of the Jews, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, are not a part of HIS church, and therefore are a part of the church of the ruler of this world, Satan. They are against God, and they are just as satanic as pagan idol worshippers.

What do ill intentioned people do when they don’t get their way? They make up stories, gossip, and seek to cause division. Doesn’t this sound like our spiritual enemy, Satan, who comes to steal, kill, and destroy? Those who seek his will seek to harm the innocent, they seek to damage the weak, and they seek to eliminate anyone opposed to their cause.

It was well known that many Jews of this time would out Christians to the Romans authorities, in order to have the Christians persecuted by relieving them of the Roman protection which the Jewish community had been privy to for years. For example, the Jews did not have to offer yearly sacrifices to the Roman Emperor as Godly **worship**, rather, they could offer their sacrifices to him as an **act of honor** to the Emperor. This was unlike others, where if they did not offer the required annual sacrifices, would be seen by the Roman authorities as a capital offense, and would be punished accordingly.

Moving to verse 10, we read:

”Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

At times we are prone to wonder if the Lord saw our situation coming. Did he not know?? Was he not aware? Does he see?? How could he let this be??

Nothing is a surprise to Jesus. Not only does he know what the church is going through presently, he knows that the church is going to go through in the future. Christ knows of the suffering that his people in Smyrna will soon face. And who will be the one who will bring this suffering? It will be the Deceiver, the Accuser, the Prince of Darkness, the Ruler of this World...also known as the devil.

My lifegroup is currently going through a study on Spiritual Warfare. It's been quite helpful for our group to look at biblical examples of what Satan can do and what he cannot do. What he cannot do is anything that the Lord does not allow him to do. How do we know that this is so? Because the Lord and the devil are not on an even playing field. Satan might be the ruler of this world, **it's Jesus who upholds the world by his own hand!** The Book of Job highlights this by showing that the Lord instructs Satan to what he can and cannot do to Job.

Satan's ability to test us is limited by God's sovereign control.

We also see examples in scripture where God himself tests his children, as in the story of the testing of Abram, whom the Lord instructed to sacrifice his son Issac. But then right at the perfect time, the Lord sends a sacrificial lamb to be sacrificed in Issac's place.

Back in our text, Jesus acknowledges who the testing to the Smyrna church will come from, and he also knows that the testing will be temporary. The text reads 10 days, but I'm interpreting that to mean a short period of time, not exactly a period of ten separate 24-hrs. God will only allow Satan to persecute his church for a short period of time. The persecution will be intense, but brief.

How do we know of the intensity? By reading the end of verse 10:

"Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Jesus gives warning that some of the church in Smyrna will be tested to the point of death. However death is not where the story ends. The Christians who persevere unto death will receive the "crown of life". This crown of life will not be a crown that a ruler would wear, rather it will be an emblem of honor and triumph, similar to what an athlete would be given after their victory.

Jesus refers to this reward in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:10-11

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

James, the brother of Jesus, refers to this crown of life in his New Testament letter.

James 1:12

"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."

But unlike a emblem that a runner receives at the end of a victorious race, the Crown of Life promised by God to his children will be eternal, as we see Paul refer to in

1st Corinthians 9:24-25:

"24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as

to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” NIV

Church, our perseverance until death proves the genuineness of our faith. Our crown of life that we will receive is the eternal joy of our realized salvation by being in the presence of the Lord for all eternity! Paul knew this truth, and highlighted it in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 8:18

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

I can't help but recall the way that Jesus introduced himself at the beginning of this letter in verse 8, as the one “who died and came to life”. For his audience here, some of whom would be killed based on their faith in Christ, the fact that Jesus also died and came back to life shows that death has no victory!

The saying you might hear in Christian circles is that “The moment we take our last breath on earth, we take our first in heaven!”. I like that.

Our text continues in verse 11:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

The letter to the church in Smyrna ends with Christ calling those to listen closely to these words, to take them to heart, and to live by them. To those who do, there will be no second death. We'll read more into the “second death” later in Revelation 20, but know that this refers to the judgement at the great white throne, and the eternal damnation in hell for those who are not covered by the blood of Christ. After the death of a believer here in this world, there will be no second death, for all that awaits them is the eternal joy of living with Christ, forever.

You can imagine what this letter would have meant to the church in Smyrna. Do you think that it made an impression on their lives? Did it give them the encouragement to press onward and stay strong in the faith, even in the crosshairs of heavy persecution? We can look at one of the lives of the leaders of that church. You might be familiar with the name of their bishop, or pastor, at the time of this letter. Polycarp was one of the Apostolic Fathers of Christianity. He studied under the teaching of the Apostle John. He would have been in his late 20's or early 30's when John penned Revelation. Then, sometime around 150 A.D., Polycarp would be burned at the stake because of his devotion to Christ.

After his death, the church in Smyrna wrote a letter to neighboring churches which gave testimony to his martyrdom. This letter, which is now called the “The Martyrdom of Polycarp” is still circulating around churches today. It was written in an effort to highlight a life well lived for Christ!

The following excerpt is from GotQuestions.org, which our leadership here at TBC would encourage you to use as a reference for theological study.

“Church tradition tells us that the Roman proconsul took pity on Polycarp and urged him to recant his devotion to Christ. All he had to do was say, “Caesar is Lord,” and offer a little bit of incense to Caesar’s statue, and he would live. Polycarp’s loyal response: “Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” So he was taken to the place of execution. One tradition states that, when the guards realized they had no nails or rope to affix him to the post, Polycarp assured them that no restraint was necessary—that Jesus would empower him to bear the flames. Another account says that the flames avoided his body, arching over his head. When the guards realized that Polycarp could not be burned, they stabbed him with a spear—and the blood that ran down extinguished the flames.”

Polycarp was faithful unto death. And his faith, as shown by the fruit in his life, gives us the reassurance that he received the crown of life from his creator, Jesus. The testing of his faith proved that no one could snatch him away from his Father’s hand.

Don’t you desire faith like this?

Sometimes you might find it hard to read letters in scripture that are written to a specific church and then apply to our lives today, however, I see that the truths in the letter to the church in Smyrna are easily applicable to our church here in Tomball in the 21st century.

We should remember the truth that Christ speaks to the church

Our PASSAGE PRINCIPLE that we can take to heart today is this:

The Lord knows past, present, and future trials, and He promises to never leave or forsake us.

Do you feel as if the Lord has abandoned you? Hear the words of Christ today as he speaks to us - he knows. He cares. And he’s secured the victory.

Our CALL TO RESPONSE as a church should be to:

Remember that our trials are temporary, even up to death, and that our eternal hope is secure in Jesus! Keep our eyes on the prize - Jesus Christ!

Does your present situation make you feel that hope is lost? Are you so overwhelmed by your circumstances that you lose sight of the beauty of the gospel? We have to remember who is in control, who will never let us go, and who holds the keys to our salvation! Unlike the people of Smyrna, who had to look up to the mountainside to view their cherished singular “street of gold”, followers of Christ are promised to walk along the **STREETS of gold**, as far as the eye can see, which words will be unable to describe. The Crown of Life will be much sweeter than the image of the Crown of Smyrna. In Christ’s presence, there will be no more tears, no more heartache, no more sorrow, and no more persecution.

Our EXHORTATION:

Live with the assurance that persecution is temporary, but the crown of life from Christ is forever!

How we can live out this exhortation is by doing the following:

- - humbly rejoice in persecution because it builds up our faith
- - pray that during this time the Lord would be exalted in with your words and deeds
- - remember that others are watching how you respond to trials, and our witness can point others towards Jesus.

This week, as you might find yourself in the midst of persecution or a trial of some sort, would you remember to lift it up to the Lord in prayer? Jesus knows, he cares, and he's secured the victory. Would you pray with me?

Lord - you alone are worthy of our praise. Because you have justified us by the blood of Jesus, we are able to keep our eyes on the prize, which is eternal life with you. Help us during our times of troubles to remember to look to the Prince of Peace, the Author and Perfector of our Faith, the one who died and came back to life! Father receive our worship, in Jesus' holy name, Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you were rich, what would you like to do?
2. What problems is this church facing? How can they be both poor and rich?
3. Why is Jesus known as the First and Last?
4. What does this passage teach about suffering?
5. Has it been harder to live out your faith when you've been poor, or when you've had enough money? Why?
6. In what ways do you feel spiritually rich?
7. What is your take away from this week's passage?

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*Discussion Questions adapted from The Serendipity Bible.

