

Smyrna, The Persecuted Church

I. Slide2 Intro: Smyrna, The Persecuted Church

- A. Last Church *Ephesus*, the *loveless* church. This church the *Persecuted* church.
- B. Is the **first** mark of a true and living Church is **love**, the **second** is **suffering**.
 - 1. The one is naturally a **result** of the other. A willingness to **suffer** proves the **genuineness of love**. We are willing to **suffer** for those we **love**. [marriage/children]
- C. **Love** is a universal language. So is **music**. And so is **suffering**. [love/music/suffering]
 - 1. They speak a **dialect without words** that is heard and understood *by the soul*. *Suffering, is the broken language of the soul. Swindoll*
 - 2. The church of Smyrna understood this language. They were fluent in the dialect of *poverty & persecution, slander & suffering, fear & fire, pain & prison, & even death.*
 - 3. Suffering teaches all its students the same basic alphabet.
- D. **Prayer:** May the Holy Spirit be our translator, *our Rosetta Stone* in understanding this language and literacy of **suffering**.

II. Slide3 DESTINATION, SMYRNA (8a)

- A. Slide4 The next stop for *the postman of Patmos* on his circular tour of the 7 churches...
- B. **Smyrna, The Persecuted church**. [the only city of the 7 that still exists today]
 - 1. Smyrna from *Myrrh/a bitter herb*. A suitable name for a church facing persecution.
 - 2. Christian life was the most difficult here out of the whole Roman Empire.
 - 3. The Myrrh plant when its crushed gives off a beautiful fragrance,...so this church of Smyrna.
- C. The church **Persecuted** has always come out **Pure**, the church Pampered has always been **Polluted**.
- D. Slide5 It is still an important seaport city, *Izmir*. [the only city of the 7 that still exists today]

- E. Smyrna is mentioned *only here* in Scripture. 35m. N. of Ephesus. It was known as the loveliest cities of Asia. It dates back to the time of David (1000bc).
1. It has been called it *the ornament of Asia, The crown of Asia, The Flower of Asia*. Still today the *Pearl of the Aegean* (Izmir wikipedia)
- F. The city began at the harbor, it traveled the narrow foothills, then behind the city there rose the *Pagos*, a hill covered w/Temples & noble buildings. (These encircled Smyrna's hill). They were spoken of as *The Crown of Smyrna*.
1. They had the largest Theater, and an impressive Library.
- G. *Slide6 Trade* - It was in a strategic spot that commanded the trade from the whole Hermus valley.
- H. *Politics* - Long before Rome ruled the world Smyrna cast its lot w/Rome, never to waiver (since 195 bc).
1. Cicero said, Smyrna was "*One of our most faithful & our most ancient allies.*"
- I. *Slide7 Religion* - Across the Pagos hill was a *street of gold* (from Zeus' Temple to the Temple Cybele's). [looked like a necklace]
1. *Other Temples included: Apollo, Nemesies, Aphrodite, & Asclepios.*
 2. The Jews were especially **numerous & influential**. They were very **hostile** to Christianity because they drew most of their converts from Judaism.
 3. They persuaded the Roman authorities to persecute them.
 - a) The most famous was Polycarp (Bishop of Smyrna) - Martyred on Sat. Feb. 23rd, 155 ad.

III. *Slide8 DESCRIPTION, CHRIST (8b)*

- A. *First and the Last* - this is a tremendous *promise* to the Christians. *Come what will, from the 1st day of life to the last, the Risen Christ is w/us.*
1. *And if He w/us till the end...then of whom shall we be afraid?*
- B. Since Smyrna was going through persecutions Jesus relates to them as, *the One who died and came to life*, thus assuring them *the hope of the resurrection*. [also their physical city itself had done the same]

1. No matter *what experience* God's people may have, their Lord identifies with them. [death, pain, rejection, backbiting, etc.]
2. The Risen Christ is one who has experienced **the worst** that life could do to Him. *Deaths sting was stolen, and hades victory was vanquished.*

IV. Slide9 **COMMENDATION, ENCOURAGING (9)**

- A. **Tribulation** - They were trying to crush the Christianity out of them.
- B. **I know your affliction and poverty** - The believers in Smyrna likely faced harsh treatment and scarcity of employment.
1. When cities had large concentrations of artisans and craftsmen, trade guilds or unions were established. These guilds often required their members to participate in certain pagan activities. The believers' unwillingness to participate in these activities resulted in exclusion from the guilds and financial hardship.
- C. **Poverty** - *Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God.* Lk.6:20
1. Poverty has often been part of **the cost** of Christian discipleship.
 2. James 2:5 *Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*
 - a) (msg) *He chose the world's down-and-out as the kingdom's first citizens, with full rights and privileges. This kingdom is promised to anyone who loves God.*
 3. PtoXOS - person with few or no possessions, **but** not yet reduced to begging.
- D. **Rich** - God wants you to be *wealthy...spiritually wealthy*.
1. **They were rich** - They lived for **eternal values** that could never change, riches that could never be taken away.
 2. 2 Cor. 6:4-10 (nlt) *In everything we do, we show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. 5 We have been beaten, been put in prison, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. 6 We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love. 7 We faithfully preach the truth.*

God's power is working in us. We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack and the left hand for defense. 8 We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors. 9 We are ignored, even though we are well known. We live close to death, but we are still alive. We have been beaten, but we have not been killed. 10 Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.

- E. **Slander** (*blasphemy*) - The instigators of persecution was **the Jews**. It was from them the slanders came. *Truly no man can contain the tongue, it is a deadly evil.*
- F. **Slide10** 6 slanders the Jews raised so Rome would persecute them:
1. **Accused of being cannibals. Why?** (Communion: eat body, drink blood)
 2. **Accused of having orgies of lust & immorality** (Agape/Love feasts)
 3. **Accused of breaking up the family** (Lu 12:53 *Father will be divided against son and son against father*, etc.)
 4. **Accused of being atheists** (cuz they didn't have any images of their God).
 5. **Accused of being Politically disloyal** (cuz they wouldn't say, *Caesar is Lord*)
 6. **Accused of being Incendiaries** (cuz they foretold the end of the world would be in flames)
- G. **Synagogue of Satan** - John takes a favorite expression of the Jews & reverses it. They loved to call themselves the **Assembly of the Lord**. [Synagogue = Assembly] So he says to them your of *the Assembly of the Devil*.
1. **John Wesley** said of a certain man who was presenting *a crude, cruel and savage, picture of God...Your God is my Devil*.

V. **Slide11 EXHORTATION, BE FEARLESS & BE FAITHFUL (10)**

- A. **No Condemnation here.** (**nor** in Philadelphia church)
- B. The very **trials** that **afflicted** them, assured them of deliverance from any lack of fervency for the Lord, & kept them from any impurity or compromise w/evil.
- C. **Do not Fear** - Would they be **Fearful** or **Faithful**?

- D. **Suffer** - If you haven't *suffered* yet, cheer up...you will. 2 Tim. 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*
1. Are you **silent** when you should be **speaking**? (speak up for what is right)
 2. Are you **inactive** when you should **act**?
 3. Are you **faithful** under a lil **pressure**?
 4. The best way to **escape persecution, resentment, or criticism** is to **hide** your faith (*light under a bushel, no!*).
- E. **Indeed, the devil is about to...** - He knows the Devils plans & was in complete control of the situation. [Some would be imprisoned , & tried as traitors to Rome]
1. God knows **what** he's about to do, **when** he'll do it, **how long** it will last, **what** its extent is (death).
- F. **Prison** - Think of how many prisons have been *sanctified* by the **prayers** and **praises** of Christian believers. *Their darkness* illuminated by the light of God's Word. *There smells* are relieved by the fragrance of Christ presence. *Prison becomes heaven when Jesus shares it with us.*
- G. **Tested** - Job 23:10 *When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.*
- H. **Ten Days** - It was an expression for *a short time*, which was about to end.
1. Dan.1:12 (context *Dan & the 3 amigos*) *Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.*
- I. **Slide12 Be faithful unto death** - Loyalty even when death is its price. To which their church knew well. Later in 156ad this was their Bishop **Polycarp's** story...
- J. The proconsul sought to persuade him to deny [Christ], saying, *"Have respect to thy old age,"* and other similar things like, *"Swear by the fortune of Caesar; repent, and say, Away with the Atheists."* But Polycarp declared, *"86 years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?"*
1. The proconsul then said to him, *"I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I cast thee, except thou repent."* But he answered, *"Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous."*
 2. **Slide13** But again the proconsul said to him, *"I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent."* But

Polycarp said, *“Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt.”*

- K. **Crown** - Jesus Christ is no man's debtor. Refers to either, eternal life as a reward **or** a literal crown or wreath.
1. Smyrna's goddess Cybele is pictured in coins with a crown patterned after a city battlement. The buildings on Smyrna's Mount Pagos we're said to look like a crown.
 2. James 1:12 *Blessed is the man who endures **temptation**; for when he has been approved, he will receive **the crown of life** which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.* Here the **temptation** is to buckle under persecution.

VI. Slide14 **PROMISE, TRUSTWORTHY (11)**

- A. *They may not have enjoyed the approval of men, but they certainly received the Praise of God.*
- B. They trusted in Him so they were **overcomers** (Victors in the race of faith) & as **overcomers**, they had nothing to fear.
1. Even if they were martyred, they would be ushered into glory, wearing Crowns.
 2. They would never have to face **the 2nd death** (lake o fire).
 - a) Rev.20:14 *Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.*
- C. It **costs** to be a dedicated Christian in some places more than others. (eg. Eygpt/USA)
1. As end time pressures increase, persecution will also increase, & God's people need to be ready.
 2. The world may call us poor Christians, **but** in God's sight, **we are rich**.
- D. **The martyrdom of Polycarp**, written by his church within a year after his death, is the **first** Christian account of martyrdom.

- E. **End:** Our parents used to ask us when we were small, *where does it hurt?* Your heavenly parent asks **you** tonight, *where does is it hurt?*
1. **First of all**, the Lord **knows** all about **your** circumstances. Insert **your** particular suffering in vs.9 **I know...** (2x's). **I know** your worries about your daughter. **I know** your pain of abandonment & betrayal. **I know** all about you physical ailment. **I know** about your constant mental attacks from the enemy. **I Know** your insecurities.
 2. **Second**, whether things *get better, stay the same, or get worse*, **Jesus is always with us**. Entrust yourself and your needs to the One who was *persecuted, abandoned, crucified, and raised* on your behalf. Welcome **Him**, *not fear* into your heart.
- F. **Slide15** Walt Whitman, *I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person.*
1. **Step into someone else's hurting world and speak the healing words God has taught you.** Be His ambassador to the lonely, to the depressed, to the confused and hurting around you.