

November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
Pinecrest Baptist Church  
a.m.

Sermon Series: What the Spirit Says to the Churches  
Sermon #3 Title: The Blessing in the Bitterness  
Sermon #3 Text: (Revelation 2:8-11)

As the Lord Jesus makes His way around the mail route of Asia Minor, having written to Ephesus, He now addresses the church at Smyrna, about 50 or so miles up the road. This little church was only miles away from the Ephesian church, but they were light years above it.

When Jesus wrote His letters to His 7 churches in Asia, 5 of them got a warning, and 2 of them got a “well-done.” – And Smyrna was one of those churches. Now if I want could only learn from one of the seven churches, I want to learn something from this one.

When we come to Smyrna – we come to one of the most bittersweet scenes in all of the church scenarios given us in scripture.

- The root word for the name Smyrna is “myrrh” – it means “bitter” and it was an ointment, oil, or spice used in a number of different ways – for perfumes, for anointing; and in the New Testament in particular it was associated with preparing a dead body for burial.

Smyrna was a very wealthy town – like Ephesus it was a Temple Warden for Rome containing a “Temple to the Emperor.”

- the city was a thriving, economic, and cultural success for the public, the province, and for Rome.

- However, the church members there at Smyrna forfeited their place in that society, in order to serve the Lord that saved them, and Jesus Himself addressed His church in the middle of their oppression.

## I. The Calming Reminder of Who Jesus Is – vs 8

“These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive.”

\*Note – In each letter, the Lord identifies Himself in different ways, particular to the condition of that church.

- For example to the church at Ephesus, He identified Himself as the One having Sovereign Authority, Ability, and Awareness over every church that is His.

- 2:1 – “He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.”

- The church at Ephesus had become a Ministry Machine, but were on autopilot, and lost their actual love for Jesus. – It had become more about the Ministry than the Man, more about the Cause than the Christ, and reminded them that without Him, there was no ministry, there was no cause. – He could See the Truth, and He had the Authority and Ability to remove them from His ministry.

\*Note – Now He will do the same with every church identifying Himself in some way particular to their condition.

\*Note – If there is anything, any church needs, it is the clearest understanding possible of who the Lord Jesus Is, and what that means.

- For someone to say, "Jesus is Lord" is the pinnacle of all truth – but what does that mean to us that Jesus is in fact, the LORD God of Creation.

- Therefore, Jesus begins with Smyrna by identifying Himself in perhaps the most soothing and comforting way possible for these dear people.

**A. He is the Omnipresent One** – “the first and the last”

1.) This is the “protos” and the “eschatos”

a.) Before all of history – and after all of history...

\*Note – Not to oversimplify, but to simplify, when Jesus said, “I am the first and the last” – He calmly reminded them of His ever-present sovereign deity over all time, space, and matter!

- 3 Times in the book of Isaiah, the Lord addresses Israel saying, “I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.”

- For every person who knew the scriptures, knew and recognized that Jesus, Who identified Himself as the Lord God of Israel, was also identifying Himself to them as the Head of the First Church of Smyrna . . .

- the truth that our Lord emphasizes to these people, is the fact that As the First and Last watched over and guided the nation of Israel, the First and the Last were watching over, and guiding their church.

- Before all things were, “I am” after all things are gone “I am.”

**B. He is the Omnipotent One** – “which was dead and is alive.”

\*Note – without question, the one thing under the sun that man is totally powerless against, is the power of death. Man has used death as a weapon, he has used death as punishment, he has used death in abuse and degradation, but he is totally and completely powerless to stop it. – As far as man can see, Death is the Sovereign Authority over all humanity . . . except for One.

1.) Jesus was killed, but He is not dead.

2.) Jesus died, but He is still alive. (Physically, not Mystically)

\*Note – Here is the comfort they would need – He outlasts all time, He outlives all death; He is categorically UNTOUCHABLE, and IMPERVIOUS to any and every attack the enemy launches.

\*Note – Now if there was anything this church would need to know about the Savior they were Living for and Suffering for was that He is Alive, He is Aware, and He is Supreme above all Chaos and Confusion.

- Without question, this church had a working knowledge of these things, but Jesus gave them a Reminding Dose of these things, not merely to be Facts in their Minds, but Fire in their Hearts.

## II. The Comforting Refresher of What Jesus Knows – vs 9-10

\*Note – The noticeable thing that is absent from this letter is the fact that Jesus had absolutely no rebuke of them whatsoever. There was nothing to confront, nothing to condemn, and nothing to correct . . . but there was an assembly He wanted to comfort.

- He comforted them, by reciting back to them what He knows about their condition . . .

“I know thy works . . .”

- Like the church at Ephesus, Jesus explains to them that He knows 1.) What they are doing. 2.) What they are intending to do. 3.) And the Eternal Value of what they are doing and are intending to do . . .

- In other words, He knows the actual assessment of their ministry in His light . . .

- But that’s not what He emphasized knowing – He lists four other things that He knew that serve as examples to every

single church of the Lord from then, down through the ages until now . . .

#### **A. The Pressure They Face**

1.) “I know thy tribulation”

a.) thlipsis – it is the word that means “pressure” – like being “pressed down upon”

\*Note – When we compare all of the seven churches together, it seems that Smyrna was the one that was receiving the greatest amount of Pressure – and received no rebuke.

(Philadelphia, the other church that received no rebuke, is also commended in light of their persecution.)

- Some theologians have surmised that while Smyrna, and Philadelphia were not rebuked and the others were, that these two churches refused to compromise with the culture, and refused to bow under pressure. – while each of the other 5 churches to some degree compromised with the culture around them.

- Now this “Pressure” the church faced was both “official” from the government, and it was “social” from the society of Smyrna.

- But not only was it official and social, it was scriptural.

\*Note – Here is the promise to the Christian who takes Christ seriously in this world, is He will Live Under Pressure from the outside world.

- John 16:33 – “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

- that word, “thlipsis”

- There is “pressure” everywhere for the Christian, and for the church.

- Pressure to fit in with society

- Pressure to think normally like the mainstream

- Pressure to parent your children in particular ways -

- Pressure to choose living under the demands of the world, rather than under the demands and doctrines of the Lord.

The bona fide, dyed in the blood, born again, serious saint, will have a conflict with the normal social pressures of this world.

- Everything from Movies and Music, to Money and Materialism, to Politics, Ethics, and Morals.

- Now some people, try to avoid this pressure by compromising –

They both consciously, or subconsciously draw an imaginary line between their “church life” and their “social and home life” and live as though one doesn’t have anything to do with the other.

\*Note – Now all of that being said, There is Permanent Pressure between the World, and the Serious Saint . . . Sometimes and places it is greater than others . . . but it exists nonetheless...

\*Note – Here at Smyrna, that Pressure was amplified and intensified greatly – it was amplified by the Poverty they experienced . . .

#### **B. The Poverty They Have**

\*Note – Their Poverty was the frontline of pressure they were facing.

1.) WA Criswell points out that there are two words in the New Testament for “poverty.” – One is “Penia” and it is where we get the word, “penury” from. – It is used of a “working man who barely eeks out a living.” – He is getting by, by the skin of his teeth.

\*Note – That’s not the word that is used here. The word he uses here is the word “ptochea” and it means “utter and absolute destitution – implying that one is left to “begging.”

2.) The Christians at Smyrna, lived under the same conditions as the Christians at Ephesus, and the rest of the churches – they had the same pressures, they had the same government, they had the same problems, but the faithfulness of these people seemed to incite the passions of their enemies.

- They had two great forces against them

- **Official Pressure** – It was the pastor at the church at Smyrna that suffered one of the most famous “martyrdoms” in all of Christian history after the Bible was written.

- A man named Polycarp who is historically identified as a student of John, who has penned this letter was the pastor at the church of Smyrna, sometime after it was written.

- In about 155 AD – sixty years after this letter was written, he was brought before the Roman governor in Smyrna at the time.

- The Roman governor gave him the chance to say “Caesar is Lord.” – He would not. The governor replied to him, “Swear! I will set thee at liberty. Reproach Christ.” – Here is what is recorded that Polycarp said, - “Eighty Six years I have served Him and He never did me harm. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”

\*Note – It didn’t end there – the governor said to him, “I have wild beasts at hand. To thee I will cast except thou change.” Later the governor said, “I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not change.”

- Polycarp replied – “Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little while, is extinguished. But thou art ignorant of the fire of the coming

judgment, and the eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly . . . but why tarry? Bring forth what thou wilt.”

- As they lit the fire to burn him at the stake, someone wrote down the words of his final prayer in which he said, “I thank Thee that That hast graciously thought me worthy of this day and this hour, that I may receive a portion on the number of Thy martyrs in the cup of Thy Christ.”

\*Note –Now the pressure didn’t being with Polycarp, Polycarp was in the middle of it the entirety of the time.

**Social Pressure** - they were not just punished by the authorities, they were banished from the marketplace.

- the trade guilds of Rome were as powerful if not more so than what we think of in trade unions today.

- if you rejected the state religion, you rejected the public market.

- there was no place for your business, or for you to do business . . .

\*Note – (Mind you this is not in full swing for us yet, but it is approaching – when a Bakery is fined and shut down in Oregon for practicing its Biblical beliefs – when a Catholic was disqualified from consideration for Federal Judge because she believed in the Sanctity of Life, and the Biblical definition of Marriage – when football coaches are fired for praying with their teams, when teachers are told to keep their faith out of the class rooms – we are in small doses, experiencing what the Christians at Smyrna had in total domination.)

\*Note – Now all of that being said, the possibility is not unlikely that these were people who stayed homeless and hungry.

- Being faithful to Christ cost them everything – and the Lord said to them, “I know it.”

### ***C. The Propaganda They Endure***

- 1.) "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the Synagogue of Satan."

\*Note – The Christian church had NO FRIENDS in town, including the Jewish Synagogue.

- a.) typically the word "blasphemy" speaks of words used against God. – Here it is the idea of "slander"

\*Note – one thing that the Roman Empire showed kindness to was wealth. If there was one thing common among the elite Jews of that day was that they were wealthy, and would have the ear of Rome – and if there was anything that the Jews desired to do, it was to annihilate the early Christian church.

- b.) there were influential people who were Jews by race, but not by faith, who used their influence to further oppress this church.

- Jesus referred to them as "The Synagogue of Satan."

\*Note – It is the synagogue of Satan that opposes, fights, bites, hurts and harms, in every way possible the work and the church of the Lord Jesus.

(\*Note – Now here is a beautiful memory – Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 – "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

- As one writer asserts, the "Gates of hell" was reference to the Door of Death

- Here in Smyrna – the Synagogue of Satan was doing all that it could to put this church through the doors of death, and it could not.)

***D. The Problems To Come*** – "Behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation (pressure) ten days:"

\*Note – Jesus didn't just say to them what they were currently enduring, He let them in on the fact that they would be enduring even more.

- 1.) An Imprisonment was coming for some of the church members . . .

- a.) Ten Days – what's that?

\*Note – Biblically speaking that is a euphemism for a short season of time. – Sometimes we might say something about "a few days ago" or "a couple of weeks or so."

- Genesis 24:55; Acts 25:6 – the term "ten days" is used in connection to a short period of time.

- b.) now when Jesus told them that an imprisonment was coming He told them two things: - 1.) it had a beginning, but it also had an end. – It would not be permanent.

\*Note – I want to go back to the word, "I Know" – the phrase that Jesus uses here does not merely mean "He knows by observation of them." – "He knows by Participation with them."

- They were not the only ones suffering – Jesus is too.

- Do you remember when Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the church and Jesus confronted him, what He said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me."

- What is the assembly? It is the Body of Christ – Jesus is the Head

- What does the scripture tell us about members suffering in the assembly? – 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:26 – "Whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it."



\*Note – Now I’m not saying that Jesus is in perpetual pain now, but He had experienced all of these things on the cross and in this life, and we know that His Spirit can be Grieved!

- They were not in this apart from Him
- They were not in this because of Him
- They were in this WITH Him.

- 2 Timothy 1:8 – “Be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel . . .”

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:11-13 – The Apostle Paul most likely experienced what the church at Smyrna was experiencing when he wrote to the Corinthians saying – *“Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.”*

- Now if you’re following that was Hungry, Homeless, and Hated . . .

Welcome to the cost of Christ in the Ungodly World.

- Jesus said, “I know all these things too, and am In this With You.”

### III. The Continuing Resolve for What Jesus Means – vs 10b – (What Jesus means to them, and for them)

\*Note – You may think that after all of that Jesus would say, “Folks, you’ve been through enough . . . you can ease up now . . . you can let go now . . .” or even say, “Here, I’ll put a stop to all of this.” – that’s not what He said . . .

“Be thou faithful unto death.”

#### ***A. The Deepening of Their Faithfulness***

- 1.) vs 10 – “Fear none of those things thou shalt suffer.”

\*Note – Now hear this, don’t read over it. Jesus didn’t say “Fear not, you’re not going through it.” – He said “You’re going through it, but do not Fear.”

\*Note – When you put everything together – men avoid Personal Pain, and Social Shame – which is the only nuclear power man has over another man . . .

- Jesus said, There is something far worse to fear than Personal Pain, and Social Shame . . .

Far worse than hunger, homelessness, hate, harm, and hurting . . . there is HELL.

- a.) With hell out of their future – Jesus said, “These things aren’t worth being afraid of.”

#### 2.) “Be thou” –

- a.) this is the idea to “come to exist as”
  - it was an encouragement to keep moving in this direction . . .

\*Note – It wasn’t the idea of suffering for the sake of suffering – it was the idea of faithfulness to the Lord at EVERY single cost!

- They were faithful to the Lord, because THEY WANTED to be.

- Jesus didn’t mean something to them, He meant EVERYTHING to Them.

- He was the reason, there would be no hell to come!

\*Note – Now when he says, “Be thou faithful unto death” He is speaking, “I believe twofold:”

***B. The Duration of Their Faithfulness*** – “until you die”

***C. The Degree of Their Faithfulness*** – “to the point of dying”

- the word “unto” means both “until” and “as far as”

This precious church Jesus said . . .

Was Rich . . .

Would receive a Crown of Life

### IV. The Concluding Reason that Jesus Gives

\*Note –Now here is our part . . . vs - “He that hath an ear, let Him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches:”

- These are those who are not a part of those churches . . .

- these are the saved not in those churches

- these are the lost not associated with those churches

- these are the whosoever that will”

- Here is the message for us, from them!

“He that overcometh shall not be hurt with the second death.”

(The Gospel of Christ makes no offer, no claim, no promise of avoiding pain, escaping trouble, or missing out on death – it is the **SECOND Death** – the death of the Judgment – the death of Hell that is the ultimate and final issue)

- Who avoids the second death?

- He that overcometh?

As John has already taught us in 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:4 – “Faith is the victory that overcomes the world”

The people of the church at Smyrna

They could not be talked out of their faith by Pressure – They could not be talked into

compromise by Poverty – They could not be talked back from conviction by Propaganda –

They would NOT give in to their culture . . .

they paid a high earthly price, and received an eternal heavenly life.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear . . .