
The Book of Revelation: Session 4

Revelation 2:8-17

YouTube: “Verse by Verse Teaching | Revelation 2:8-17 | Gary Hamrick”
(42 minutes, taught on March 11, 2020)

Notes:

Smyrna: “The Suffering Church”

- Perhaps represents a time period from approximately 100 AD (the end of Apostolic Age) to 312 AD (when Constantine makes Christianity the state religion)
- Myrrh (fragrant when crushed) was one of its important commodities: (1) perfumes (2) anointing oil used by priests (3) embalming dead body.

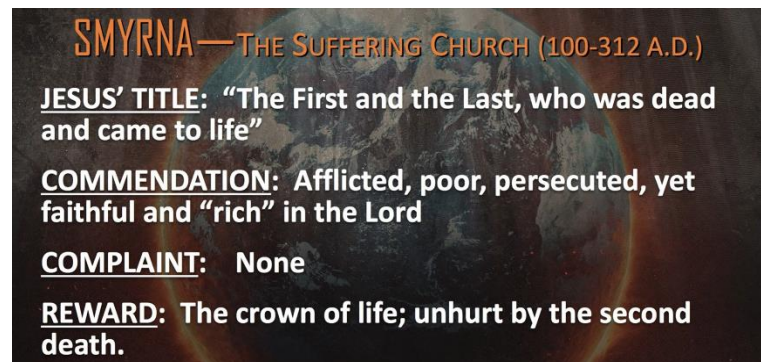
“They were materially poor, but spiritually rich.

The Judaizers added to, and therefore perverted, the gospel.

“10 days”: Perhaps represents the ten worst Roman emperors, who persecuted the church.

Pergamos/Pergamum: “The State Church”

- 312 AD (Christianity made the state religion) to 606 AD (beginning of Roman Catholic church)
- Became self-centred because of their wealth (paper), and their knowledge (huge library).
- Polytheistic (esp. the god Zeus).
- “Gamos”: marriage → The church had married the world (1) prayed for the dead (2) worshiped Mary, saints, and angels (3) elevation and separation of priests



Questions: Read Revelation 2:8-11

1. In verse 9, Jesus says He “knows [their] affliction and [their] poverty, yet [they] are rich.” “Know” is knowing experientially, because Jesus too suffered and, in a sense, suffered with them (because His church is His body). How does it impact you to know that Jesus knows what we are going through and understands our struggles?
2. Myrrh, which Smyrna is named after, is harvested by repeatedly wounding the trees to bleed the gum, which is waxy and coagulates quickly. After the harvest, the gum becomes hard and glossy. “Affliction” (v. 9, “tribulation”) means “pressure,” like myrrh – originally sourced in a wound – being crushed, giving off a beautiful aroma. Who do you know who has gone through hardship or tribulation whose life is/was a fragrant aroma to the Lord?
3. “Poverty” (v. 9) refers not to the working poor, living from day to day, but to beggars, struggling to survive. Why would the church in Smyrna be so physically destitute? Read Ephesians 1:3-14. What are we, Jesus’ church, rich in, according to this passage?
4. Marty Culy writes, “Smyrna was built on Mount Pagus with beautiful buildings on its rounded top and on its sides, giving it the appearance of a crowned head and leading to the expression, “the crown of Smyrna”.” Jesus likely has this in mind when He promises the “crown of life” to those who remain true to Him. How does His title, “the First and the Last” and the description, He “who died and came to life again” connect with Him giving these crowns of life to His faithful ones?

Closing: Read about Polycarp’s martyrdom

Want to dig deeper? Engage with this sermon by John MacArthur, taught in 1992:

- <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/66-7/smyrna-the-suffering-church>

Stories of Christian Martyrs: Polycarp of Smyrna

An elderly man in his eighties sitting at a table eating dinner, Polycarp knew his life was in danger. A group of Christians had just been executed in the arena on account of their faith. But Polycarp refused to leave Rome. The Romans were executing any self-proclaimed Christians, and pagans were betraying those they knew to be followers of the Way. After the recent executions, the crowd in the arena had chanted for Polycarp's death.

A renowned follower of Christ and bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp had become a Christian under the tutelage of John the apostle. Recently, the Roman proconsul had been looking for him for days. After arresting and torturing one of Polycarp's servants, they finally learned where he was staying. The soldiers came into the house, but instead of fleeing, Polycarp calmly stated, "God's will be done."

Polycarp asked that food be brought for the soldiers, and he requested an hour for prayer. Amazed by Polycarp's fearlessness, especially for a man his age, the hardened Roman soldiers granted his request. He prayed for two hours for all the Christians he knew and for the universal church, and the soldiers let him.

As Polycarp entered the stadium, several Christians present heard a voice from Heaven say, "Be strong, Polycarp, and act like a man." Because of his age, the Roman proconsul gave Polycarp a final chance to live. He just had to swear by Caesar and say, "Take away the atheists" (at that time Christians were called atheists for refusing to worship the Greek and Roman gods). Polycarp looked at the roaring crowds, gestured to them, and proclaimed, "Take away the atheists!"

The proconsul continued, "Swear, and I will let you go. Reproach Christ!" Polycarp turned to the proconsul and boldly declared, "Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King Who saved me?"

The proconsul urged him again, "Swear by the Fortune of Caesar." But Polycarp replied, "Since you vainly think that I will swear by the Fortune of Caesar, as you say, and pretend not to know who I am, listen carefully: I am a Christian!" The proconsul threatened, "I have wild beasts. I will throw you to them, if you do not repent."

Polycarp replied, "Call them! For we cannot 'repent' from what is better to what is worse; but it is noble to turn from what is evil to what is righteous."

Then the proconsul threatened Polycarp with fire, but he responded: “You threaten me with a fire that burns an hour and is soon quenched, for you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment stored up for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Do what you want.”

Finally, the proconsul sent a herald to the middle of the stadium to announce that Polycarp was confessing his faith as a Christian. The crowd shouted for Philip the Asiarch to send a lion against Polycarp, but he refused. Then they shouted for Polycarp to be burned. They moved him to the marketplace and prepared the pyre. Polycarp undressed and climbed up. But when they were going to nail him to the pyre, he told them, “Leave me like this. He who gives me to endure the fire will also give me to remain on the pyre without your security from the nails.” So they did not nail him but tied him up. Bravely, Polycarp prayed as the soldiers prepared the wood:

O Lord God almighty, Father of Your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received knowledge of You, God of angels and powers and all creation, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before You, I bless You that You considered me worthy of this day and hour, to receive a part in the number of the martyrs in the cup of Your Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life both of soul and of body in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit. Among them may I be welcomed before You today by a fat and acceptable sacrifice, just as you previously prepared and made known and You fulfilled, the deceitless and true God. Because of this, and for all things, I praise You, I bless You, I glorify You, through the eternal and heavenly high priest Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, through whom be glory to You with Him and the Holy Spirit both now and for ages to come. Amen.

The Romans had threatened Polycarp with beasts and with fire, but nothing would make him turn against Christ. After his prayer, the men lit the pyre, which sprang up quickly. But even the fire wouldn’t touch him as it formed an arch around Polycarp’s body. The Romans didn’t know what to make of this. In the end, the Romans commanded an executioner to stab him. A great quantity of blood put out the remaining fire, and Polycarp bled to death.

“So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1:7