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THE SEVEN CHURCHES – LESSON 3

SMYRNA

The Apostle Paul had gone to Ephesus on his second and third missionary journeys and to Smyrna on his third missionary journey. Paul did not go to any of the other five cities of Revelation 2 and 3, but obviously others had planted those five churches. We read of Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11 and the message given to them during John's time. (c. 95-96 A.D.).

Smyrna, like Ephesus, was a port city on the Aegean Sea. It had been a prosperous trade center during Jesus' time when Tiberius was the Caesar of Rome. Tiberius ruled from 14 A.D. to 37 A.D. and was revered as a god. The Sea of Galilee was renamed the Sea of Tiberias. There was also the city of Tiberias that bore his name on the N.W. coast of the Sea.

In 26 A.D. the city of Smyrna was granted their petition to build a temple to Tiberius in recognition of his deity. Smyrna was also famous for science, medicine, and the majesty of its architecture.

It appears that the city may have fallen on hard times by John's time as its "poverty" is mentioned in verse 9. Also mentioned are their works, **"...but thou art rich,"** which seemed to be good and also was mentioned was their tribulation.

Emperor Tiberius had not been heavy in persecution, but he did set many precedents which were later used by many other Roman Emperors (Caligula, Nero, and others) to bring severe persecution to Jews and Christians. During John's time, Domitian was Rome's ruler. He insisted on being addressed as "master and god" (dominus et deus). He was a harsh ruler.

The church at Smyrna was told they would suffer persecution, be cast into prison, and be put on trial (and condemned) for their stand for Jesus Christ. Verse 10 says, **"Ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death."** (Including martyrdom.) The "ten days" does not mean ten 24-hour days. Ten is the number of completion. So, "ten days" means until your days of tribulation are over (completed). The Spirit goes on to say, **"...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."** This is an eternal crown. Other scripture also speaks of the great reward for martyrs of the faith.

What can we take from this for today? There are coming times where even in America we will be persecuted for our faith on Christ. (It will be world-wide.) You might have to make the choice yourself of whether to "back off" from your faith or choose to be tortured and be put to death.

Do not rely on the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture to "get you out of here" before this happens. If that "rapture" does happen, that would be a great, "ideal" solution. But if it does

not happen the way some teach, are you truly resolved that you would suffer in the cruelest manner of torture, pain, agony, and execution by standing up for Jesus?

Think about it. What might it be like? What if they threaten to kill your children or grandchildren? Would you still be faithful all the way to execution? If so, a crown of life is waiting for you and every other martyr. If not, then awaits the eternal torment of hell for denying Jesus.

Make sure your resolve is solidly based on the Rock, Christ Jesus. That was the message for the Church of Smyrna, and also for us today.