

Daniel and Revelation Series

Sermon 4

Smyrna

Text Rev 2:8-11

In our journey through the book of Revelation we have arrived at certain principles that help us to understand this vital book without getting sidetracked by fanciful and misleading interpretations. In particular we have seen:

1. That much of this book refers to or alludes to, or echoes the OT. This helps us understand the book in its historical context.
2. That the major sections of the book are separated by scenes in the heavenly temple. So far we have seen only the first one in 1:12-16 which led us into the seven churches.
3. The three different approaches to understanding this book, the Historicist, Preterist and Futurist approaches. In that Bible students, including the Reformers, have traditionally accepted the Historicist approach, and that the other two were responses to that approach, I will be assuming the Historicist approach to be the one true one.
4. Then last time we looked at the Church at Ephesus, and saw that it represented the Christian church from the

time of Calvary until approximately the end of the first century. We saw that there is a pattern in each church, starting with an identification of the writer, a commendation, a rebuke, an admonition, a warning, and a promise. We saw that Ephesus means “Desirable”, showing the purity of the church in those early years. We also saw that Ephesus had lost their first love, and we had looked at the importance of our not losing that first love in our relationship with Jesus.

The next church for us to look at is the church of Smyrna. Interestingly, the name means “Sweet-smelling” and is related to the incense known as “Myrrh” which was given by the Wise Men to the infant Jesus. Let’s read 8-11.

The first point to notice that the identification – the First and the Last. Where did we see this? 1:17, 18. As we get further into this church we shall see that there is a reason why Christ chose these words to identify Himself. In fact, the identification in each church is relevant to the message for that church.

Then we come to the commendation: A poor church, but rich. When we come to Laodicean church we will see that it is a spiritually poor church that thinks it is rich. But Smyrna had few material blessings, but was spiritually rich. Indeed we will see that the members of this church had nothing in terms of material goods.

They also had to suffer those who said they were Jews, but were not. Were they literal or symbolic Jews? In Romans 2:28, 29, Paul says that he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but who is one inwardly. In other words a true Jew is one who follows Christ faithfully. The people described in these words

claimed to be Christians, and attended church, but did nothing for the cause of Christ. They were hypocrites.

What about the rebuke? There isn't one. That's interesting! It seems this church had it right. And when we come to the admonition (v10) we find out why. "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer...ten days". God does not rebuke those who suffer for him.

We see then that this church was to be persecuted for ten days. Are these days literal or symbolic? Both Daniel and Revelation are prophetic books dealing with symbols such as beasts, horns, winds, crowns etc. Both also describe time periods in terms of days. Now we know that in the book of Daniel a day always represents a year. For example in the 70 weeks of Daniel 9, the 70 weeks are weeks of years. We also have the 1260 days which we know to be a period of 1260 years. Thus we can know that in the book of Revelation when days are mentioned they are always years. We will see this again in chapters 11 and 12 where the 1260 days are mentioned again. We know then that the church in Smyrna was to suffer ten years of persecution. We will return to that in a while.

Then the promise at the end of verse 10, "Be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life". We see here that members of this church were to give their lives for their Lord. No wonder it was rich spiritually. I often wonder what it would be like to give my life for the Lord. I wonder if I have enough faith. Someone once said that should the time come when we need a martyr's faith, then God will give us the faith to be a martyr. Today though, it doesn't cost much to be a Christian. How many here have been caused any suffering as a result of their faith?

In fact, we have a double promise here because they are also told that those who overcome will not be hurt by the second death. Now we can understand why Christ identified Himself as the One who died and came to life again. It was a sort of reminder to those who would die for their faith that they would rise from the dead in the first resurrection. That the second death, the death of the wicked, would never touch them.

So how do we identify this church? Do we have enough information from these verses? If Ephesus ended about AD 100, then Smyrna must commence at that time. This makes sense because during the second century Christians suffered greatly in the Roman Empire. In fact they suffered persecution since the time of Nero in AD64, when they were blamed for the burning of Rome. But during the time of the Roman emperor Diocletian, during the ten years between AD 303 and 313, they endured particularly bitter persecution.

Only ten years after this bitter time, in 323 AD, the new emperor, Constantine accepted a form of Christianity and all persecution ceased. Therefore we can see that Smyrna represents God's people from the end of the apostolic era until then time when persecution came to an end around 323 AD.

What lessons are there for us in this passage?

1. It is better to be spiritually rich than to be materially rich. It's okay to be both, but God regards spiritual riches as the true riches. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus said, *But seek first...*, and in Luke 18:24, *"How hard it is...It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter heaven"*. Don't seek to be a millionaire by the time you are thirty. You probably won't make it, and if you do, you will

have had to tread on peoples' toes to do it. That is a fool's way. Rather seek the kingdom of heaven.

2. God hates hypocrisy. People who do not claim to be Christians God can work with, but those who claim to be Christians and are not, God says they are members of Satan's church. Expand.

3. The third thing I learn is that when I am suffering for the sake of Christ, He knows that I have enough on my plate without having to additionally handle any rebuke or criticism from Him. During times of suffering the devil does his best to make you feel that God is angry with you – that He has rejected you. Yet we see in this church that God has no word of rebuke or censure for those who are suffering for His cause. So if you know you are living for God, and doing His will, you may rest assured that any feelings of God's being angry with you are not from God, but from the enemy.

In conclusion then, we see that the church in Smyrna was one that was like a sweet incense to heaven – the beautiful fragrance of myrrh that wafted toward heaven in the form of the prayers of those who were willing to give their very lives for the cause of Christ. They had few material possessions, but God saw them as millionaires. This is a church for us to emulate. They were a church of overcomers. Are we a church of overcomers? They were willing to pay any price to remain faithful to God. Are we willing to pay any price to remain faithful to God? Jesus says, *Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.* Do we have that kind of faith? Let us pray.

	Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamum	Thyatira	Sardis	Philadel	Laodicea
Identification	7 stars & 7 candles 1:12,16	The First and the Last 1:17					
Commendation	Perseverance	Spiritually rich					
Rebuke	Lost first love	None					
Recognition	Hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans	Afflictions Slandered					
Admonition	Repent	Not to fear Be faithful even to death					
Warning	Will remove lampstand	None					
Promise	Will give tree of life	Will give crown of life. Will not be hurt by second death.					

	EPHESUS	SMYRNA	PERG	THYATIRA	SARDIS	PHILADEL	LAOD ICEA
Meaning	Desirable	Sweet- smelling					
Dates	33-100 AD	100-323 AD					
Era	Apostolic	Persecution					