

The Year of the Revelation

~ The Church of Smyrna ~

I. Most important thing about the letter is Who sent it: Jesus

(His description)

A. "The first and the last" (and every moment in between)

"I am with You." "You are not alone"

The ever-abiding One is with you!

B. "Who was dead"

(How did He die?)

A horrible death of suffering! "I know your pain and suffering."

"And has come to life" - Death for Him and those who follow Him is not permanent! It is not final!

II. The Challenges of the Church at Smyrna

"Smyrna" - (myrrh) - Gift at His birth; Offered at the cross; Placed on His body before being placed in the tomb.

Three things Jesus said about their condition:

(1) Your Tribulation - "pressure" like a large boulder placed on the chest of a man to execute him.

The tribulation because Christians refused to worship Caesar or bow before him.

(2) Your Poverty - (a) Believers in Christ were "poor," a word meaning to be a beggar. (James 1)

(b) Deprived of the right to work. No trade union would have them; no business would hire them.

(3) Blasphemy - "To slander" by professing Jews who were of the synagogue of Satan!

Aliturus - an actor; Popaea - Hero's mistress - both proselytes to Judaism who convinced Nero to seek to wipe out Christians.

"I know" - not an observation, but what Jesus had experienced.

III. Jesus' Word of Encouragement

"Do not fear" - You are about to suffer.

(1) The devil is about to cast some of you in prison that you may be tested.

(2) You will have tribulation 10 days. (Intense, limited time)

(3) Be faithful until death.

The pastor of the church in Smyrna was a disciple of John. His name was Polycarp, and he was the messenger (angel) of whom Christ spoke when John wrote this second letter. Polycarp's ministry ended in A.D. 156 when persecution of Christians increased and they were tortured and thrown to the wild beasts. Polycarp was marched into the amphitheater where a mob was waiting to see what form of ghoulish pleasure they could get from his violent death. As he stood before the proconsul, he was commanded to deny Christ, but he replied, "Eighty-six years have I served Him and He never did me any harm; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"

As the old man stood before the crowd in the stadium, the governor shouted, "I'll have you destroyed by fire, unless you change your attitude."

Polycarp answered: "You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour and after a little is extinguished. But you are ignorant of the fires of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Bring on what you will."

The crowd gathered wood and threw torches on the pyre. Their hatred was bitter and they cheered as the godly man was brought to the stake. As the flames began to curl around his body, Polycarp prayed:

"I thank You that You have graciously thought me worthy of the day of this hour, that I may be a part of the number of martyrs to die for Christ." [from *Escape the Coming Night* by Dr. David Jeremiah]

IV. The Two-Fold Promise of Jesus to the Overcomers!

(1) Shall not be hurt by the second death - eternal.

(2) I will give you the crown of life.

* No Word of Correction to the Church of Smyrna *

The persecuted church is the pure church. The persecuted church is an intimate church. It experiences things with Jesus that most never know of because you learn it in the world of suffering!