

SERMON NOTES

The 7 Churches of Revelation - 2 Smyrna

BACKGROUND

Around 95 AD Jesus wrote to 7 Churches - to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea

Smyrna or Izmir is now a Thriving city of over 4 mn people, with a vibrant Christian community - and at least 12 thriving churches, while 4 or 5 of the cities / churches no longer have any Christian witness. Smyrna was thriving but the Christians were not - why? The need to certify worship of Caesar every year. Domitian was the emperor that put John in exile on Patmos.

<p><u>Revelation 2:8-11 (NKJV)</u> 8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." "</p>	<p>What was Smyrna like? Big and prosperous</p> <p>Jesus' description of Himself - a part of the whole picture from Rev 1. His Eternity, power, resurrection <u>Rev 1v17</u></p> <p>He <u>knows</u>, is concerned and involved. The world's version is NOT God's version. He knows the opposition.</p> <p>This Church had persevered and worked hard but... they needed Jesus' perspective, His help and His power to get through their tribulations, and they needed the Church's support too.</p> <p>Must have Spiritual ears to hear. Be <u>Overcomers</u>. Overcome means different things in different contexts. For Ephesus who were in danger through losing their first love, overcoming meant getting on fire again, and the reward = "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life"</p> <p>Here, it meant staying faithful through persecution. The SECOND death here is what matters.</p>
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Jesus' resurrection gives us courage and a new perspective and it is a fact we can rely upon:

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (NKJV):

3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

Matthew 12:39 (NKJV) : "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah (the resurrection).

Other verses quoted:

The First And Second Birth - John 3:3-7

The Second Death - Rev 20:6, 14

The power of martyr and suffering as a prayer - Rev 6:9, Rev 8:3-5

John 16:33 (NKJV) - "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Polycarp - 155 AD. 86 y.o.a. Had been discipled by John and was leader of Smyrna

Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will set you free, reproach Christ;" Polycarp declared, "Eighty six years I have served Him, and He never did me any harm: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?"

The proconsul then said to him, "I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I throw you, unless you repent." But he answered, "Call them then, for we don't repent of what is good in order to adopt what is evil;[30] But again the proconsul said to him, "I will cause you to be consumed by fire, seeing you despise the wild beasts, if you wilt not repent." But Polycarp said, "You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why are you waiting? Bring forth what you will."

While he spoke these and many other like things, he was filled with confidence and joy, and his countenance was full of grace, so that not merely did it not fall as if troubled by the things said to him, but, on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his herald to proclaim in the midst of the stadium thrice, "Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian." This proclamation having been made by the herald, the whole multitude both of the heathen and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, cried out with [32] the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods." Speaking thus, they cried out, and besought Philip the Asiarch^[33] to let loose a lion upon Polycarp. But Philip answered that it was not lawful for him to do so, seeing the shows^[34] of wild beasts were already finished. Then it seemed good to them to cry out with one consent, that Polycarp should be burnt alive.

The multitudes immediately gathered together wood out of the shops around; the Jews especially, eagerly assisting them in it. And when the funeral pile was ready, Polycarp, laying aside all his garments, and loosing his girdle, sought also to take off his sandals. Immediately then they surrounded him with those substances which had been prepared for the funeral pile. But when they were about also to fix him with nails, he said, "Leave me as I am; for he that giveth me strength to endure the fire, will also enable me, without your securing me by nails, to remain without moving in the pile."

They did not nail him then, but simply bound him. And he, placing his hands behind him, and being bound like a distinguished ram [taken] out of a great flock for sacrifice, and prepared to be an acceptable burnt-offering unto God, looked up to heaven, and prayed with thanksgiving.

When he had pronounced his *amen*, those who were appointed for the purpose kindled the fire. And as the flame blazed forth in great fury, [41] we, to whom it was given to witness it, beheld a great miracle, and have been preserved that we might report to others what then took place. For the fire, shaping itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, encompassed as by a circle the body of the martyr. And he appeared within not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odour [coming from the pile], as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been smoking^[42] there.

At length, when those wicked men perceived that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to go near and pierce him through with a dagger. And on his doing this, [43] and a great quantity of blood, so that the fire was extinguished; and all the people wondered that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect, of whom this most admirable Polycarp

was one, having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and overseer of the church which is in Smyrna.

Revelation 1:9-20 (NKJV):

9 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet,

11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.

14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire;

15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;

16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.

17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.

18 "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

19 "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

20 "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

The 6 elements in EVERY church letter –

1. **angelos** (messenger),
2. Description of an aspect of **vision** of Jesus,
3. I know your works - He knows intimately
4. Specific guidance / rebuke –
5. He who has ear hear...spirit...ChurchES
6. Overcome!

Angelos - a human messenger:-

James 2:25 (NKJV) - 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

Matthew 11:10 (NKJV) - 10 "For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' See also **Mk 1:2 and Lk 7:27**

Luke 7:24 (NKJV) - 24 When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"

Luke 9:52 (NKJV) - 52 and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDES

Remember that the aim of the small group is to foster discussion and community, rather than for the leader or one individual to preach to everyone.

1 - Often an **Icebreaker question** is a great way to start discussion. You could ask a question like:

- What were the highs or lows of your week?
- What is your earliest memory?
- If you had to describe yourself as one animal, what would it be and why?
- What is your favourite type of holiday destination?

2 - Next, **read the passage**. You can ask various people in the group to help by each reading a portion of the passage.

3 - These are the **main questions** to ask to understand the passage:

- What is the main message of this talk / passage?
Allow discussion and even diverging from the main topic if it is helpful.
- What did you find particularly helpful or challenging?
- What did you not fully understand?
- What can we do **PRACTICALLY** in response to this teaching?

4 - Close by offering **prayer** for each person.

- Ask, "how can we pray for you / each other now?"
- Ask each person to pray or you, as leader, pray for each person's need

The blessing and opportunity in Small Groups is the possibility for...

- Each person to contribute and/or ask questions,
- People to pray for each other and to ask for prayer,
- People to learn to use and grow in their gifts,
- Community, friendship and intimacy in relationships.

God Bless you in this very important ministry.