

Smyrna: Be Faithful, Not Fearful in Suffering



"Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life" Revelation 2:10 NLT

Polycarp

One of the first accounts of a Christ-follower being martyred for the faith outside the Bible is the story of Polycarp—a leader in the church at Smyrna. Originally, he was a disciple of the Apostle John.

Polycarp became the pastor of the church at Smyrna after John's death. In AD 155, Polycarp was brought before the city authorities and charged with being an atheist. Why charged with atheism when he was a Christian pastor? The issue is that he believed in only one God, the God of the Bible, and he did not believe in multiple gods and goddesses of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Polycarp was found guilty and sentenced to be burned at the stake. He was more than 86 years of age. Some city officials felt sympathy for him and begged him to say "Caesar is Lord," put some incense on the emperor's altar, and be set free. But Polycarp responded with the famous words, "Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and he never did me any harm. How then can I blaspheme my King, who saved me?" Polycarp, as a result of his faithfulness to Christ, was executed.

Revelation 2:8-11 reveals to us that the believers in Smyrna also were persecuted for their faith. Perhaps, the example of Polycarp inspired them to be faithful to Christ regardless of the cost. The church at Smyrna is a congregation of believers who faithfully persevered even to the point of death. Jesus told them to not be afraid, but to be faithful in the face of suffering and death if necessary.

The Point for the Messages to the 7 Churches

The primary key to understanding the purpose of the message to the 7 churches of Revelation 2-3 is not found in Revelation, but Ephesians 5:25-27.

Jesus wants to purify and mature His bride, the universal Church, for the time she will be **united to Him**—whether walking through the door of death OR by means of the rapture (Greek ἀρπάζω—snatch away). The number 7 symbolizes *completion*. He wants His bride to be *complete*, or *mature*. The 7 churches represent 7 qualities for being spiritually complete, or mature.

Central Lesson

A maturing Christian is FAITHful, not FEARFUL in suffering

1. **Church:** The Church in **SMYRNA** (2:8).
"Write this letter to the angel [Messenger; Pastor] of the church in Smyrna...."
2. **Christ:** The First and the Last, who was dead but is now **ALIVE** (2:8).

"8 ...This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive:"

- **The First and the Last** - Jesus is God (2nd member of the Trinity). Important to the 1st century Christians living in a society that believed in multiple gods. Jesus is not just a man, but THE God. Also, it means Jesus is sovereign Lord and eternal.
 - **Was dead but is now alive** - victorious over death by His resurrection.
3. **Compliment:** I know your **SUFFERING** & poverty - but you are rich! I know the blasphemy of those opposing you (2:9).
"9 I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich! I know the blasphemy of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan."
 - **suffering** - This is not general suffering but specific suffering for their identification with Christ.
 - **poverty** - Their poverty may be the result of being boycotted because they did not acknowledge the pagan gods.
 - **Spiritual warfare** - Satan has covert control of some places of worship: cults, false religions, liberal denominations, progressive Christianity, etc.
 4. **Criticism:** **NONE!** Suffering purifies and strengthens the believer. Suffering purifies (1 Peter 1:7). Suffering strengthens (1 Peter 5:10).
 5. **Correction:** Don't be **AFRAID** of what you are about to suffer, be **FAITHFUL** under persecution (2:10).
"10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life."
Since they were purified and strengthened by suffering, Christ does not actually give a word of correction. He encourages them to keep going, and persevere. **Don't be afraid, be faithful!**
 6. **Consequence:** Give you the **CROWN** of life (2:10). **Victors:** not harmed by 2nd death (2:9, 11).
"9 ...But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life." "11 Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death."
 - **The crown of life** - A heavenly reward and recognition for winning in the struggle of life. In Greek, the crown refers to the Olympic athletes' wreath symbolizing being a champion. Believers who are surrendered to Christ and living by the power of the Holy Spirit will win over temptation, sin, and worldliness, and be a spiritual champions. *Are you a spiritual champion?*
 - **Not be harmed by the second death** - Biblically, the first death is physical death. The second death is eternal judgment in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14; 21:8). Being victorious" is being in Christ, one who has accepted & trusts in Christ for his or her salvation. *Have you accepted Christ?*

Conclusion

A maturing Christian IS FAITHFUL, not FEARFUL in suffering

Action Steps: ► Receive Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday's Bible study. ► Attend a small group. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.