

Rev 25-09-28b

We're ready now to resume our study here in Revelation. We come to the second of the seven churches. This is written in verse eight of chapter two of the Revelation.

The Lord Jesus says to the angel of the church in Smyrna, write, these things says the first and the last who was dead and came to life. I know your works, tribulation and poverty, but you are rich. And you notice I know is in italics.

I know your works, tribulation and poverty, but you are rich. And the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 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 10 days. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. 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. Church in Smyrna. It is next in line as you make the circuit from Ephesus and you travel north.

It is 35 miles from Ephesus to Smyrna. Of the seven church cities, there is only one that still exists today. And you can find it on the map of Turkey if you look for Ismyr, I-S-M-I-R.

Notice the S-M-R portion of that, that's Smyrna. And Smyrna itself, if you take the S off, there used to be an actress named Myrna Loy, but this comes from myr, the word myr. And this is suggestive as we move further into the letter.

But when Jesus speaks, he's not expecting us to know history or geography or a whole lot else. To the angel of the church in Smyrna write, these things says the first and the last who was dead and came back to life. In the same way that in Ephesus, the authority of the Lord Jesus.

You are right to recognize the Lord Jesus and he identifies himself to you as the one evaluating the churches by walking in the midst of the lampstands and holding the communicators in his hand. He's initially standing there and the stars are in his hand, but it's emphasized. It doubles down in the Ephesian introduction.

He holds the stars in his hand and he walks among the lampstands. And this is the testimony that is communicated from the Lord Jesus to those messenger angels, those stars, those pastors, and then the reflected light that comes from that to the community, to those in the vicinity from the churches. They are to be a light.

Let your light so shine. Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles. Now that the Gentiles have gotten that light, they are to shine that light, to be a witness, to bear witness so that people will come and ask us a reason for the hope that is in us and so on.

So the point here, the titles that Jesus chooses for himself as author, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, it bears on what's coming in the letter. Here, the message is the importance of the message, the authority of the message for the Ephesians, and the importance of not just getting the message, but fulfilling that message and applying that message in obedience to the first and greatest commandment. Love the Lord your God.

So here, church at Smyrna, these things says the first and the last who was dead and came to life. Right away, we have two aspects of the Lord Jesus. We saw these, of course, back in chapter one, verse 11, and in verse 17.

If you have been paying attention, you will have marked out the first phrase in Revelation 11 that says, I'm the alpha and omega, the first and the last. We want to look at verse 17. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.

Not accidental language. This introduction to Smyrna harks back specifically to verse 17. Context, context, context.

Jesus says, do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. Notice the combination of ideas here.

John falls at his feet as dead. In chapter four, John is going to ascend to heaven as though raptured. He's not yet raptured, and he's not yet dead in the composing of this letter and the recording of the prophecies and so on.

But notice the combination of ideas that are associated. John specifically, it doesn't say I fell on my face in fear. I fell at his feet, that's how close he is, as dead.

Jesus put his right hand on John, the right hand that had had the stars, the source of authoritative communication and light shed on the path. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Right hand on me saying, fear not, fear thou not.

I am with thee, be not dismayed. I am thy God. I will strengthen thee.

I will help thee. I will hold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Do not be afraid.

I am the first and the last. What is the nature of the comfort, the encouragement, the consolation, the strengthening? Jesus says, you don't need to be afraid. I know it's an imposing vision.

It is frightening to the point of knocking you to the ground, but don't be afraid. I am the first and the last. This is the feet at which you have fallen.

And my right hand is going to strengthen you and raise you up. The power of righteousness is at work here. That is what Jesus selects to introduce his letter to the church at Smyrna.

One other detail, in case I forget to say it later, the name Smyrna comes from the word myrrh. And myrrh, as you know, was used in the embalming process. You can look these things up.

There are scriptures. What were the three gifts that were brought by the men from the East who came to worship? Gold and frankincense and myrrh. We're going to see later on in the revelation when the Lord Jesus is ruling and the glory of the nations is brought to him, they are going to bring gold and frankincense.

What do they not bring? Myrrh, because he is alive forevermore. And the other things are brought, but the notion of his death, he is the first. Now, I also find it sort of symmetrical.

When Jesus was first, this is John chapter one, in the beginning, at first, the word was, the word was with God, the word was God, but the word became flesh and dwelt among us and ultimately died in the flesh, hanging on a tree. It is the tree of judgment, not the tree of life, but the tree of judgment becomes a tree of life. As Moses, remember, John three doesn't just have verse 16, also verse 15 and verse 17.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up so that whosoever believes in him does not perish. Look and live. But myrrh is not only associated with death, which made it significant as a gift at the birth of the Lord Jesus and his very early childhood, when the wise men come to visit, but it releases the spirit of death and releases its fragrance and accomplishes its purpose by being crushed.

For myrrh to work, you crush it. It's, do you want to put raw peppercorns on your food or do you want to grind the peppercorns? Grinding them releases what is inside. Myrrh is crushed before it is used.

And so it is very symbolic of crushing suffering that is unto death in many cases. So that is the idea with which this letter begins. The first and the last, Jesus starts out with divine life and comes, it partakes of human life, loses his human life and then is resurrected to die no more.

So he is the first in divine life and he is the last in human resurrected life. We start out last in human life and pass through death and then we enter into divine life in the eternal future. The last shall be first and the first shall be last.

It's a fun thing to think about that the Lord Jesus has bridged the gap between human life that we cannot sustain indefinitely and eternal life that is divine life. So I am the first and the last who was dead and came to life. If you confess with your mouth, the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you're delivered, you're saved.

This is the introduction and the people in Smyrna can immediately relate in the same way that the Ephesians said, well, I know what you're talking about with doctrinal purity and the need to be careful and to expunge error and focus on truth. The Smyrna folks are in tribulation and poverty. Jesus says in verse nine, I know your works, same word we had in the first letter, Aragon.

I know your works, tribulation. This is Philipian. We've seen this over and over again.

This is the great tribulation is, hey, Philipsis, hey, Megale, mega Philipsis. But this is not the tribulation that Revelation is famous for detailing. This is their current tribulation.

I know your works, tribulation and poverty. This word for poverty without going into great detail is not just being poor. This comes from the Greek word for a beggar.

This isn't, you know, people can say I grew up poor. You know, we barely had enough clothes. The food was simple.

We got by, our parents were ingenious and inventive and managed to, you know, raise us and keep us fed and clothed, but we were poor. We grew up poor. This is not that word.

This is people who have nothing. They are bereft. They are impoverished where they don't have even the bare necessities.

It's the Greek word for destitution. I know your works, your destitution. Write it in your Bible.

It's not, poverty doesn't catch it. We have the poverty line in this country and there's a lot of people driving Cadillacs that are technically below the poverty line. They've got TVs, they've got a cell phone.

They get their hair done. You look at their nails and they're real nice. They're not shopping at Goodwill, but by definition, they're below the poverty line.

This is destitute. I know your works. You are functioning.

You are moving forward. You are doing what you should do despite being destitute. This is the kind of burden that crushes.

Smyrna, myrrh. This is a real situation of hardship destitution. And there's a really famous commentator from years gone by William Barclay.

And I love reading the old guys on some of these because they were working with fewer tools and less resources, and they still had inspired understanding and interpretation. And Barclay on this passage says they were being crushed beneath a weight. And he says the circumstances were trying to crush the Christianity out of them.

That's how severe it was. They're in abject poverty. If you go to Trench's synonyms, this is another old resource that's really good.

Trench says the poor have nothing superfluous. The poverty stricken have nothing, period. So this could in part have been a result of persecution.

And maybe they were being discriminated against and wouldn't be employed and were looked at even by brethren, even by those who should have been sympathetic and worthy of aid. And the people who should have looked after them, who should have cared for them, who should

have remembered their Old Testament scriptures that said to look out for the widows and the orphans and your brother who is in need. Jesus, of course, amplifies this.

And if your brother needs a coat, give him your cloak also, and this kind of thing. That isn't happening even in the community where it should have been taking place. And this is why Jesus goes on to say in parentheses, you are rich.

You are in abject destitution. Let me just tell you now, before I say anything else, you are rich. What's he talking about? They have laid up for themselves treasure in heaven.

Their faith has not been crushed out of them. Their faith is giving forth a sweet smelling savor and a beneficial preserving fragrance. The pressure and the crushing is revealing the quality of what they are made of.

And they are continuing to do the works of which Jesus approves and that he knows about despite these horrific circumstances. You are rich. I just want to tell you now, you think you've got nothing? You think you not only nothing superfluous, but you can't even meet your basic needs? Because you continue the works, you have got treasure that you know not of.

You just got to stick it out a bit longer. But he anticipates that idea here. You are rich.

And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not. Does this have a familiar structure? What did Jesus say to those in Ephesus? You cannot bear those who say they are apostles and are not. Sources of truth and are not.

The Jews as the people of God were to be characterized. How does their light shine to the Gentiles as Jews? The Jews, the people of God, are careful, full of care for widows and orphans. And look out for a needy brother, a needy neighbor.

Love your neighbor as yourself. These Jews are in the vicinity. Not only are they not being good neighbors, love your neighbor as yourself, but they are finding ways to avoid.

Reminds you of avoid being obedient to looking out for the needy and widows and orphans. Reminds you of the Pharisees who had needy parents, but they said, well, the riches and the goods that I've accumulated, I have dedicated them to God. And when I pass away, they're going to go into the temple coffers.

So sorry, mom and dad, I don't have anything to help you with. And Jesus castigated them. Woe to you who declare your stuff to be korban and you're dishonoring one of the foremost commandments, honor your father and mother.

And you have found a way to duck out of it. You're reinterpreted the scriptures by saying, well, I can't use this for my parents because I'm going to go up the chain of commands, plural, to love the Lord your God. Well, I'm going to love God with my goods, meaning I'm going to hang on to them and enjoy them.

And then I'll bequeath them to God and not take care of my parents. It's just heinous self-deception and self-gratification. So I know the blasphemy, notice, blasphemy is twisting reality, twisting scripture, twisting truth to not glorify God.

It is blasphemy to say that Jesus cast out demons by the prince of demons. It is blasphemy to say that Jesus, as he goes about doing good, is an evil man. And that he is, they commit blasphemy in the very act of accusing someone else of blasphemy.

You see this all around us today. The hypocrisy of people who claim to be defending democracy and free speech, and they are out to take away the free speech and the democratic opportunities of others. In the very act of making accusation, they are tenfold the child of hell that they accuse others of being.

We see it everywhere, in our political climate especially. And it is so bleeding obvious. The hypocrisy of it is so blatant.

And the scary thing is these people are genuinely blind to the obviousness of their hypocritical actions and words. They can't see it. And that kind of blindness is just scary.

I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not. They claim an identity. In the first case, the apostles claimed that they were a source of truth for others and had a word from the Lord.

Is there any word from the Lord? Here, they claim identity as the people of God, representing God, living out what will draw others to God and shine the light in the midst of the Gentiles. They're in Smyrna, they're not in Israel. They say they are Jews.

And hereditarily, even culturally, they might be Jews, but they are not functioning as the people of God. They are not reflecting His glory. They are not following His word.

Claiming you're a Jew is to take God's name and they bear it in vain. It's blasphemy. They are a synagogue of Satan, sun agog.

Agog, agora, this is to assemble, to gather as a group or a crowd. And sun means with, gather with, the synagogue. We, as the people of God, will gather with.

They're not gathering with to glorify God and to understand His word better and live it out. They are a synagogue of Satan. When they aggregate, when they get together, this is Satan at work.

They're traitors to the cause. They are doing the work of the enemy and cheerfully, gleefully so. They are a synagogue of Satan.

Jesus goes on to say, remember what we saw in verse 17, do not be afraid. He says the same thing here. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.

Pascho, suffer. He doesn't say because you're impoverished, because you're destitute, because you are being persecuted by people who claim to be the people of God and are not. Instead, they are a congregation of Satan reflectors.

They don't reflect God. It's the opposite. They reflect Satan.

They're a synagogue of Satan. God is not lifted up in their midst. Satanic ideas, satanic principles, satanic pride, the five I wills, that's what is practiced in these assemblies and these get togethers and these mutual admiration societies.

It's satanic in its thinking, in its principles, in its deceit and its falsehood. And it enmeshes them in ways that they can't even see. They're insensible to their own hardness of heart and hypocrisy.

Jesus says, do not fear the things which you are about to suffer. He says, you think things are hard now, there are some things coming that you are about to suffer. And if that's all he said, that would be, really? Think about Job after the sheep and the servants are burned up by fire from heaven, that the Sabaeans come and steal away the camels and one after another.

And Job says, is this not enough? And then the final blow, he hears that a great wind collapsed his son's house and all of his children have been slain. God says, do not fear. If you've been enduring destitution and persecution and hardship, things have been really, really, I mean, severely tough.

God says, it might get worse. It might get worse, but don't be afraid. And the human mind cannot do that.

If things are gonna go from bad to worse, we are immediately struggling to find a solution. I do not want it to get worse. Jesus said, you are going to, you've been suffering, you're gonna suffer some more.

But do not fear, don't be afraid. He put his right hand on John's shoulder and strengthens him and says, don't be afraid. I am here.

I am the first and the last. Anything you think you're gonna experience, I have been there and done that. And I am alive forevermore.

And my life is gonna be imparted to you. So look at the rest of the letter here. I would hate to hear these words.

Don't be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. And Pascho is a strong word for suffering. Only some people have got the spiritual grit to be members of the group at Smyrna.

I've called upon you for a lot. I'm gonna call on you for a little bit more. You've been crushed, but there's still some perfume you can release.

There's still some beneficial oil that will come from you. I've let you be crushed. You're gonna be crushed a little bit more, but don't be afraid.

All things work together for good and so on. Do not fear any of the things and things plural. There are going to be some varieties, some categories, some types of suffering that are about to come.

Indeed, surely, truly, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested. Notice, Jesus could easily prevent this. God has the power to reign in the devil.

Again, go back to Job. I will allow you to do bad things in his life, but you can't take his life. Satan comes back and says, well, let me touch his flesh, he'll curse you.

God says, you can do that, but you can't take his life. And there are limits that God sets, and God will allow the enemy to prevail. Later on in this book, the two witnesses are going to be victorious, impervious, impossible to stop until God removes the enemy.

The boundaries of protection, and they are slain, and their bodies will lay in the street. It is, and God would tell those witnesses, don't be afraid. I am the God of resurrection.

This serves a purpose. Are you able to drink my cup? Are you able to undergo my baptism? Lord, we are able. You will indeed, but think of the glory to follow.

The Lord Jesus, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame. Where is he now? Seated at the right hand of the Father. It doesn't get any better than that.

Don't be afraid. Suffering has a purpose. This particular suffering, it is going to be sourced in the devil.

He is going to be allowed to get you arrested and imprisoned as if it wasn't bad enough to be destitute. Now you're in prison. Maybe they'll give you water.

Maybe they'll give you gruel, or maybe not. You know, bread and water, bare minimum. But don't be afraid.

This is a strong challenge. And you will notice there is no criticism of this group in this letter. Unlike almost every other letter, I have this against you.

Jesus has nothing against the people in Smyrna. They are persevering in tribulation and destitution. Don't fear any of the things you're about to suffer.

I'm telling you, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison. Some of you, not all of you. Some of you into prison that you may be tested, perazzo, James chapter one.

And you will have tribulation, thlypsis. I know your tribulation. You're going to continue to have

tribulation.

How long? 10 days. 10 days. This speaks of a limited amount of time.

There is a biblical precedent for this. Daniel chapter one, verses 12 through 15. That's how long Daniel was tested.

And he passed. They tried to kill Daniel in the lion's den. They tried to get the king to execute him.

But 10 days. Again, I like the idea, and this is another commentator from days gone by named Morris. I like the way he phrased this.

The 10 days will test their endurance. It is a time of testing. It will test their endurance to the limit, but only for a limited time.

A time of testing to the limit, but the testing is for a limited time. We can often get through a procedure, go ahead, I'm not quite numb, but drill away, it'll be over soon. You're telling me to push this baby.

I'm talking about women now, not me. But it's time, push, push, push. Hurts like nothing I've ever experienced, but it's not going to hurt long.

I can get through this because it is for a limited duration, and there's something wonderful at the other end. Healing, restoration, a new life in your family, whatever it may be. So it is testing to the limit, but it's a limited test.

Time of testing for a limited time. So it seems longer when you're in the midst of it, but you have the promise that it will not be unendurable and it will not be unending. So 2 Corinthians 4.17 pertains here.

You go to Romans, our momentary light affliction is working for us in the eternal weight of glory. Branches that are broken out are restored and so on. There's a lot of parallel scripture.

So you go to Matthew 10, verse 28. Don't fear those who can only kill the blind. Don't fear him who can cast both body and soul into hell.

What is the promise here? Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. This letter was introduced with the first and the last, the one who was dead and came to life. Even if you die under persecution, I am the Lord of life.

And if you are faithful, even to the point of death, you may or may not actually die. Some of you are going to be in prison. Some of you may be persecuted to death, but be faithful until death, unto the point of death.

Remember until can mean unto and so on. Unto death, I will give you the crown of life. Quick

review on crowns.

There are five specific crowns mentioned in scripture. The incorruptible crown, that's 1 Corinthians 9.25. There is a crown of rejoicing, 1 Thessalonians 2.19. There is the crown of righteousness. We just saw this in 2 Timothy 4.8. There is a crown of life, the one mentioned here, which we also saw in James 1.12. And we will see it again in chapter three, verse 11.

Hold fast what you have that no one may take your crown. And this appears to be the crown of life as well. So five crowns.

This is the crown of life. And this means faithfulness is not just faith. Our eternal life is based on faith alone in Christ alone.

This is not a diadem. This is not a ruling crown. This is the Stephanos, the victor's crown, the one who runs the race well and crosses the finish line, having done their very best.

The victor in athletic games, it is earned by winning. If we are faithful despite satanic attack, if we are faithful despite human attack, the synagogue of Satan, this is people coming after us, people resisting us, people trying to trip us up, trying to deflect us and distract us and knock us off the narrow road. People testing the synagogue of Satan.

Satan himself will take selected individuals and get them put into prison by people. Be faithful unto death. Jesus says, I will personally give you the Stephanos of life.

Again, this is not just, I will grant you eternal life. If you wilt under pressure, you lose your eternal life. In the same way that you have the tree of life, this is the crown of life.

Do you see a thread here? I will grant to eat from the tree of life. I will give the crown of life. This is bearing the fruit of eternal life in this life, in the here and now, whether it is in a prosperous urban city where you're able to do your work and you're not being opposed, except by those who try to fake you out with false teaching, false apostles telling you lies, but you've purged that out and you're continuing to work and hit on all eight cylinders.

Here, humans have taken your stuff and now they're going to cast you into prison. And it is at the direct behest of Satan. Satan is mentioned in verse nine and the devil in verse 10.

Be faithful unto death, I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, verse 11, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

What is the second death? We know when you go over to Revelation chapter 20, the end of this book has things to say about the second death. This is chapter 20, verse six and verse 14, again, in chapter 21 and verse eight. We need to take a little bit of time on this.

We'll do it Wednesday night when we come back, but look at the encouragement of the Lord Jesus. What is more real to us? His hand on our shoulder, His assurance and promise that He is in control. He is the first and the last.

He has already seen the worst that Satan can do, the worst that death can throw at us, the worst that persecution, rejection, and hardship can accomplish against someone who is a representative of God in heaven. And He says, don't be afraid. I have already cleared the way for you.

You will have the resources. I will give you the strength. You fall at my feet as dead, I will put my hand on your shoulder and raise you up at the last day.

This is Job's great hope. I know my Redeemer lives. He will raise me up at the last day.

Those skin worms destroy my flesh. I will see Him, me and not another. Wonderful recognition by Job.

Probably the oldest book in the Bible. Here's the Lord Jesus. Some of the last words in the Bible, death has lost its sting.

The grave has no victory, so don't fear it. Fear God, love God, not bowing to pressure from men. Wonderful, fruitful source of reflection and application in our individual lives.

If we have an ear to hear, we need to hear what God says to Ephesus. We need to hear what the Lord Jesus communicates from His Father to Smyrna. Well, we'll continue our study this coming Wednesday.

We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the wonderful assurance backed up by your divine sovereignty, your omnipresence, your omniscience, your omnipotence. You know the end from the beginning.

The Lord Jesus, our Savior, is the first and the last, the firstborn from among the dead. We have nothing to fear from death. We have nothing to fear from our earthly possessions being taken away by whatever means and from whatever quarter.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will give us the comfort and assurance of our faith, the inspiration of the example of the Lord Jesus, who will put His hand on our shoulder as the firstborn among many brethren, out from the dead, to give us vindication and confidence, both now and in the ages to come. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.