

# To the Persecuted Church

Today we continue in the series “To the Church” as we look at the letters that Jesus spoke to John regarding the seven churches in Asia-Minor. We must remember that these letters are just as relevant today as they were the day they were spoken.

In these letters we find characteristics of the Church, our local church, as well as of individual believers. This letter to the church in Smyrna is the letter “To The Persecuted Church”.

Now the global church is certainly persecuted today and we will see that correlation, but even consider today how THIS church may be persecuted and how we individually may be persecuted.

## **Revelation 2:8-11 (NKJV)**

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.”

This letter, like the previous one to the church in Ephesus begins with a description of Christ, continues with a commendation or praise, but then this one does not have a criticism or rebuke for the church. This is one of the two letters that Jesus does not include a rebuke. Then like all the others He does end it with a promise.

There are a few things we need to know about Smyrna. Smyrna was a beautiful city and was called “The Ornament of Asia, The Crown of Asia, The Flower of Asia” Because of its position on the sea it had a small land-locked harbor in the heart of the city making it one of the safest harbors. It controlled the trade of the rich Hermus Valley and was a great, wealthy, and important city.

So Smyrna was a very wealthy city but it was also very loyal to Rome. It was the first city in the world to erect a temple to the goddess Roma and to the spirit of Rome. Smyrna’s fidelity to Rome was famous in the ancient world.

The city also had a large Jewish population that was very influential and did everything they could to hurt the church in Smyrna. So keep these things in mind as we go through this letter to

the church in Smyrna. The city was rich, but loyal to Rome and the church was persecuted, especially by the Jews.

**Revelation 2:8 (NKJV)**

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:

This description of Jesus tells us so much about the church in Smyrna. Jesus declares that He is the First and the Last

**Isaiah 44:6-8 (NKJV)**

6 “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel,  
And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:  
‘I am the First and I am the Last;  
Besides Me there is no God.  
7 And who can proclaim as I do?  
Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me,  
Since I appointed the ancient people.  
And the things that are coming and shall come,  
Let them show these to them.  
8 Do not fear, nor be afraid;  
Have I not told you from that time, and declared it?  
You are My witnesses.  
Is there a God besides Me?  
Indeed there is no other Rock;  
I know not one.”

When other gods are exalted, our God Yahweh says, there is no god besides Me! There is no reason to fear, there is no reason to be afraid, Jesus reigns.

The church of Smyrna existed in a city that exalted the god of Rome, but Jesus declares to them, “I am the First and the Last, there is no other god.....don’t be afraid, what can men do to you?

This applies today as well. When the Church is persecuted by governments, other religions, and false gods.....fear not! Jesus reigns.

**Matthew 10:28 (NKJV)**

28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

It doesn't matter what scare tactics are used by men or organizations....imprisonment, death, abandonment....Our God is the First and Last.....He is the beginning and the end! Jesus was dead and came back to life!

Jesus Christ passed into death, through death, and out of death. He triumphed over pain, the cross, the Devil, sin, and death. He is the Conqueror! No matter what might happen to the Smyrna Christians or to us, our Savior has gone through the worst life can bring.

We are reminded that Jesus faced this persecution even to death, even as you might but He came to life just as you will. Death is not the end, because of Jesus!

Jesus has power over time (first and last) and over sin (died and came to life), and this is exactly what is needed to carry on in times of persecution. He says to not fear.....only trust.

**Revelation 2:9 (NKJV)**

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.

Here again like the letter to Ephesus, Jesus sees what Smyrna is going through, just as He sees what you are going through.

In this commendation He lays out three ways they are being persecuted.

1. "I know your tribulation" - this is government persecution

As governments take away the rights of Christians, it's important to remember that they are in authority because the Lord has allowed it.

**Romans 13:1-7 (NKJV)**

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. 5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

They are to be honored even if they don't deserve it. This is why we shouldn't talk ill of our President, mayor, boss at work, church leaders, school leaders, etc. BUT....

**Acts 5:29 (NKJV)**

29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.

Once someone in authority commands you to do something that is contrary to the Word of God.....YOU OBEY GOD.....remember to do so in love!

2. "I know your poverty (but you are rich)" - this is economic persecution

Regardless of our financial status, we are rich in Spirit!

**Ephesians 1:3 (NKJV)**

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

**1 Peter 3:14-17 (NKJV)**

14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 17 For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

3. "I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" - this is religious persecution

Just as in the days of this letter when the church in Smyrna was persecuted by another religion, Christians are still today. It should be expected. God is Love. The REAL God, Jesus, is Love, this means any other god is not....of course they are against us!

Have you ever wondered why all other religions are ok and accepted and can't be talked about but it's ok to do it to Christians? People who live in lies and deception HATE TRUTH!

But take heart, Jesus sees all of these areas of persecution, and He has good news!

**Revelation 2:10 (NKJV)**

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.

Jesus again reminds us to fear nothing. It's all about trust. We either have faith in Christ that He is in control and He is with us, or we have faith in the devil, that he will overtake us.

This is why we are to be men and women of FAITH, believing in things not as we see them, but as God says they are or will be!

No matter what the devil throws our way, the call of God upon our lives is to be faithful until death. What's required of you? Faithfulness....

God doesn't require us to be successful, to be perfect, to be faultless.....He only requires us to be faithful....that just means believing and trusting Him!

**2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV)**

7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

A sound mind is a disciplined mind, we have the power to exercise a sound mind placing our trust in the Lord instead of in fear....If a believer....you possess this power right now...today!

And when you are faithful until death, Jesus will give you the crown of life! That's a promise!

Now don't confuse the Crown of Life with eternal life. or salvation. That is a gift given to us by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus. If Jesus is Lord and Savior of your life, you have eternal life....

The Crown of Life is a special reward. It's a reward given to a victor! It is for those who show endurance under persecution, those who endure the trials and tests of life, the affliction of the enemy. Those who are faithful until death, they receive the Crown of Life!

**Revelation 2:11 (NKJV)**

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."

Who here desires to be an overcomer? Right now, I want you to write down a couple things on a piece of paper that you need to overcome.

To overcome does not mean "to just get through it". To overcome means to conquer, to come off victorious!

**Romans 8:37 (NKJV)**

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

**1 John 5:4 (NKJV)**

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

**Romans 6:14 (NKJV)**

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

**Philippians 4:19 (NKJV)**

19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

**1 John 4:4 (NKJV)**

4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.