

## Dear Church: Letters from Jesus (Revelation 2:8-11, Smyrna)

09/28/2025 - Andy Deane

The church of Smyrna lived under the shadow of persecution, yet they received one of the most encouraging letters from Jesus. While other churches were warned or rebuked, Smyrna was comforted and reminded of eternal victory. Their story shows us that faithfulness shines brightest in the darkness of suffering. Today, as we listen to Jesus' words to them, we are reminded that He still sees, knows, and strengthens His people in the face of fear and trials.

### What Does the Church at Smyrna Teach Us?

#### Faithfulness shines in the darkness of persecution

Revelation 2:8a, *To the angel of the church in Smyrna write*

- More than 380m Christians in 2025 suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. 1 in 7 Christians are persecuted worldwide. Just last year: 4,476 Christians were murdered, 7,679 Churches and Christian properties were attacked, 4,744 Christians were imprisoned, 209,771 Christians were forced to flee home. More Christians have suffered and died for their faith in the 20th Century than in all previous centuries combined. Visit [persecution.com](http://persecution.com) and [opendoors.org](http://opendoors.org) to learn more about how to pray.
- Out of the 7 churches in Revelation, Smyrna is the only one that had a continuous Christian presence until today.
- Tertullian (c. 155–240 AD), “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

#### The risen Christ speaks to silence our fear of death

Revelation 2:8b, *These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.*

- Jesus is eternal (Isaiah 44:6) and He grants eternal life to His followers (John 3:16).
- He overcame death and gives that same victory to His people (John 11:25-26).

#### Jesus sees our pain & poverty, but calls us rich

Revelation 2:9a, *I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!*

- Jesus sees your pain and even felt your pain when He was on earth.
- Jesus sees your poverty and even was poor Himself on earth.
- Why were Christ followers in Smyrna poor? They were robbed, restricted from marks, and fired (Hebrews 10:34).
- Jesus knows what it means to be spiritually and eternally rich - and gives that to His followers.
- Jesus actually swapped places with us to help us (2 Corinthians 8:9).

#### God defends our name when slander attacks

Revelation 2:9b, *I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

- Jesus hears their slander, but He also hears ours (Matthew 12:36)
- Jesus shares source of slander is Satan, not from true followers of God (James 3:5-6)

#### We suffer with the God who first suffered for us

Revelation 2:10, *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.*

- Suffering is not to be feared, but that is normal to experience as humans.
- Suffering is to be expected for all believers at some point.

- Suffering is sourced in the devil and sin, but allowed by God.
- Suffering is hard, but do not give up.  
Martin Luther, “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.”  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”
- Suffering is a test of our belief and it helps to purify us as we are witness for Christ.  
Richard Wurmbrand, “Persecution has always produced a better Christian — a witnessing Christian, a soul-winning Christian. Persecution has never hurt the church, only purified it.”
- Why does God allow suffering?  
Tim Keller, “We don’t know what the reason God allows suffering is. But we know what the reason God allows suffering isn’t. It can’t be that He doesn’t love us. It can’t be that He is indifferent or detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that He was willing to take it on Himself.”
- Suffering is temporary and limited by God.
- Suffering is to be handled with faithfulness.
- Suffering is a test of our resilience.
- Suffering is rewarded.

### **Eternal victory means death has no sting**

Revelation 2:11, *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*  
*The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.*

- 1 Corinthians 15:55-57
- Justin Martyr (c. 100–165 AD), “You can kill us, but you cannot hurt us.”

### **How do we live out these lessons this week?**

- William Barclay, “For a man to become a Christian anywhere was to become an outlaw. In Smyrna above all places, for a man to enter the Christian Church was literally to take his life in his hands. In Smyrna the church was a place for heroes.” So the question for you to think through today is, why are you at church?
- Polycarp of Smyrna, “For eighty-six years I have served Him, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”
- We may never die a martyr’s death, but we can all live a martyr’s life! Mortify the flesh. Crucify the flesh. Fight sin. Instead of wondering how we’d do when presented with the choice to die for Christ - live for Him today, start there. If there one thing that needs to die today it is our sinful desires.
- John Owen, “Be Killing Sin, or Sin Will Be Killing You”
- Read this book: *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk about the Power and Defeat of Sin* by Kris Lundgaard.
- Text PERSECUTION to (951)425-4425 to receive the World Watch List Map and pray for the persecuted church.