

**LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH TODAY ...**

**SMYRNA**



**"TAKE HEART,  
FAITHFUL SMYRNIANS,  
YOUR LORD KNOWS."**

THE SUPERNATURAL BATTLE IN SMYRNA WAS JUST ONE SKIRMISH IN THE AGE-LONG WAR OF SATAN AGAINST GOD.

IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN SATAN'S PLAN TO ATTACK GOD'S CHILDREN AND ATTEMPT TO DESTROY THEIR FAITH.

HIS ATTACKS ON GOD'S TRUE CHILDREN, HOWEVER, CANNOT SUCCEED.

(JOHN MACARTHUR)

**A.D. 96 / To the Messenger of the Church at Smyrna:**

*The words of the first and the last, the One who became dead and came to life. I am the One who was before all creation, and I am the one who will be standing and remain when all else is gone.*

*Understand this first—I know you. You do not hear Me or see Me, but I am in your midst. I know what you are going through. Nothing escapes my notice. I know your story from front to back, beginning to end. I know your story better than you know your story. And I see your life more clearly than you ever will, so it is very important that you listen to me.*

*I know your troubles and your great poverty (even though you are rich in the eyes of God). And I know that you are slandered by those who only pretend to know the Father. I too have felt the brunt of the lies and the hatred of those who profess to be the people of God, but who, in reality, serve Satan.*

*I have conquered death. I won and because I won you will win. But you must listen to the Spirit because you will not hear my words of strength and courage and hope if you do not listen to the Spirit.*

**THE WORDS OF THE FIRST AND THE LAST TO THE POOR BUT RICH CHURCH**

**HEARING WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA (EPHESIANS 2:8-11)**

## 1) KNOW THAT I KNOW, 2:8-9.

- (Revelation 2:8–9 ESV) And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. 9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”

### A) The words of the first and the last.

**Robert Thomas** ... In the role of the eternal and infinite one He launches His word of encouragement to a church exposed to fierce persecution. He was already in existence at the beginning of all things, and will be after all comes to an end. [Thomas, R. L. (1992). *Revelation 1-7: an exegetical commentary* (p. 161). Chicago: Moody Publishers.]

### B) The words of the One who died and came to life.

**Robert Thomas** ... The two characterizations of Christ in 2:8 bring together what Jesus accomplished on earth and what He is by nature. His death and subsequent life as well as His eternal nature are especially relevant to those to whom He promises life subsequent to their death for His sake. [Ibid. (p. 161).]

Jesus Christ is the ultimate “been there, done that” Person. **Knowing that Christ knows** should be of tremendous encouragement to us. He speaks his strong words to us as one who knows from a depth of experience that no one else could possibly possess.

### C) Christ knows who they are and what they are up against as they faithfully serve him.

**2:9 Tribulation**—pressure, anguish, afflictions, suffering, troubles; a state of distress; persecution as in a pressing together; an oppressive state of physical, mental, social, or economic adversity.

#### i) **CHRIST KNOWS THEIR TRIBULATION.**

Being true to Christ is offensive to the world around us. Being transformed by the renewing of your mind and not conforming to the customs and norms of this world will be offensive. The faithful believers at Smyrna were paying the price. “*But take heart, faithful Smyrnians, your Lord knows.*”

- (Romans 12:2 ESV) Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the

renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

#### ii) **CHRIST KNOWS THEIR POVERTY.**

**Grant Osborne ... quoting Robert Mounce ...** comments, “In an antagonistic environment it would be difficult for the Christian to make a living, and thus many were economically destitute. They may also have been the victims of mob violence and looting.” ... Rome was antagonistic toward new religions, especially those that did not deify the emperor; and the Jews, jealous that Gentile “God-fearers” were converting to Christianity in such numbers, were only too happy to inform the Romans that Christianity was not a Jewish sect. [Osborne, G. R. (2002). *Revelation* (p. 130). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.]

#### iii) **CHRIST KNOWS THEIR ENEMY—FALSE BELIEVERS.**

Being true to Christ is offensive not only to the world around us but also to religious non-believers—aka false believers. They were slandered by false believers suffering intense persecution by people who claimed to be Jews—believers in the one true God—but who were not.

- (Revelation 2:9b ESV) ... the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
- (Romans 2:28–29 ESV) For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.
- (Matthew 13:38–39 ESV) The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

**Osborne** ... In other words, the claim of these Jews to be the people of God is [invalidated] by the fact that they are tools of Satan against God’s true people, the church. ... Paul says that a true Jewish person is not identified by outward (national origin) but by inward (trust in God and his Son) ... The Jewish people in their opposition and slander of God’s people **have become one with “Satan.”** [Osborne, G. R. (2002). *Revelation* (pp. 131–132). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.]

- (2 Timothy 2:24–26 ESV) And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 **and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.**

iv) **CHRIST KNOWS THEIR ENEMY—SATAN.**

**MacArthur—spiritual warfare** ... has at its highest level a tremendous conflict between God and Satan. That is the primary level of the warfare. Everything else, in a sense comes, under that. It is a war of the Lord God Jehovah and His truth against Satan and his lies. It is a war between God and His Will and Satan and his will, and such a war is not only fought between God and Satan but between demons and holy angels and between ungodly men and godly men so that this cosmic warfare at the level of God and the highest creature He ever made, Lucifer, filters all the way down to involve every human being—including us. [<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/54-7/fighting-the-noble-war-part-1>]

**MacArthur** ... The supernatural battle in Smyrna was just one skirmish in the age-long war of Satan against God. It has always been Satan’s plan to attack God’s children and attempt to destroy their faith. His attacks on God’s true children, however, cannot succeed. [*MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1999). Revelation 1–11 (p. 77). Chicago: Moody Press.*]

- (John 10:28–29 ESV) I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

**II) DO NOT FEAR WHAT IS TO COME, 2:10.**

- (Revelation 2:10 ESV) Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

**A) CHRIST’S COMMAND: Do not fear what you are about to suffer.**

**B) CHRIST’S WARNING: The devil is going to attack.**

- (James 4:7 ESV) Submit yourselves therefore to God. **Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**

**C) Christ will limit the attack—ten days.**

**MacArthur** ... God, who alone sovereignly controls all the circumstances of life, would not permit Satan to torment the Smyrna church for long. Jesus promised that they would have tribulation for only ten days. ... Satan’s major assault on that local church would be intense, but brief. [*MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1999). Revelation 1–11 (p. 78). Chicago: Moody Press.*]

**D) Be faithful unto death, and Christ will give us the crown of life.**

This is all about having the necessary mindset—the perspective they need to remain faithful. Christ outlines for them the path of the true believer.

- i) **HE IS NOT SAYING THAT THEY WILL DIE BUT THAT THEY MUST BE WILLING AND PREPARED TO DIE.**
- ii) **HE ALSO IS NOT SAYING THAT THEY MUST HANG ON TO THEIR SALVATION.**

Those who are truly saved will be faithful unto death and receive the crown of life. Being faithful means to continue to believe and trust God no matter the circumstances. As we continue to believe, we grow in our trust of who God is and what he is capable of.

**III) HEAR THE SPIRIT AND WIN THE WAR, 2:10.**

- (Revelation 2:11 ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.

**A) The person who hears the Spirit and believes will conquer.**

i) **THIS PERSON BELIEVES.**

The person who actually believes in Christ will continue to believe.

ii) **AND THE PERSON WHO ACTUALLY BELIEVES CONTINUES TO BELIEVE.**

The person who continues to believe (have faith) is the one who conquers.

**iii) THE PERSON WHO ONLY SAYS THEY BELIEVE DOES NOT BELIEVE.**

The person who only says they believe does not truly believe ... and will not continue ... and thus will not conquer.

**iv) THIS PERSON WILL TURN AWAY IN DEFEAT.**

The person who only has an interest, or a curiosity, in the things of God will eventually turn away from Christ revealing his or her true nature as an unbeliever. We have an example in our text.

- (Revelation 2:9b ESV) ... and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
- (James 2:14 ESV) What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

**v) A CHURCH WITH THE PREVAILING SPIRIT OF UNBELIEF IS A CHURCH OF SATAN.**

If a church (or denomination) denies the biblical account of creation, denies the sinfulness of humankind, denies that Jesus is God, denies the biblical account of his virgin birth, denies that Jesus Christ is the only one way of salvation and believes that God accepts other forms of worship, denies the second death—the lake of fire, then no matter what the name is on the sign out front, this is a church of Satan. What else could it be?

WOE TO THOSE WHO CALL EVIL GOOD AND GOOD EVIL

- (Isaiah 5:20–21 ESV) Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!

**B) The person who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.**

- (Revelation 2:11 ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.

**i) THE SECOND DEATH IS THE FINAL JUDGMENT—THE LAKE OF FIRE.**

- (Revelation 20:6 ESV) Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.
- (Revelation 20:14–15 ESV) Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.
- (Revelation 21:7–8 ESV) The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

**ii) THE ONE WHO CONQUERS WILL NOT BE HURT BY THE SECOND DEATH BECAUSE THROUGH CHRIST'S DEATH WE HAVE VICTORY OVER DEATH.**

- (1 Corinthians 15:55–57 ESV) “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**iii) Through Christ's death we also have victory over the fear of death.**

- (Hebrews 2:14–15 ESV) Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.