

Christ's Letter to the Church at Smyrna

The Church of Smyrna

- Smyrna was a thriving harbor city located 35 miles north of Ephesus
- Smyrna was a proud city that boasted in its relationship with Rome
- As a result, Smyrna became the center of the imperial cult
- Smyrna also had a large Jewish population that was violently opposed to Christians
- The church in Smyrna was likely started by the Apostle Paul
- In AD 155, the bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, was executed because he refused to call Caesar "Lord."
- The city endures today as the modern town Izmir.
- Smyrna is one of only two churches for which Christ has no words of rebuke

Encouragement in the Sovereign Christ's Resurrection

- Christ begins his letter to this suffering church by emphasizing His sovereignty
 - He is the first and the last.
 - All things, from the beginning to the end are directed by Him
 - The suffering of the believers in Smyrna was not outside of Christ's control.
 - Their suffering and, even their deaths, were serving to complete God's plan
- Christ also begins by emphasizing the Resurrection
 - The difficult reality that was facing and would continue to face these believers was martyrdom
 - Christ encouraged them by reminding them of the enduring hope they had
 - They were Christ's and were in Christ!
 - Not only did Christ control all things, he also had conquered death.
 - As they were about to be called on to be faithful unto death (vs. 10), Christ's resurrection needed to be their hope!

Encouragement in Christ's Knowledge of their Suffering

- The believers in Smyrna suffered on various levels
 - They had tribulation
 - They were impoverished
 - They were slandered (13:1, 5-6)
- Christ was not unaware of their suffering!
- He knew what they faced and sought to comfort them.
- The Risen King who controlled all things knew what they faced.
- Their King saw their loyalty

Warning of Continued Suffering

- In the backdrop of encouragement, Christ warns them of continued suffering.
- Things would go from bad to worse
 - For a period of 10 days, there would be an intense persecution of this church
 - Many of them would be thrown in prison
 - Some would even die
- Christ reveals the dark powers behind this persecution
 - The Jews are being led by the devil as they come from the Synagogue of Satan
 - The Roman Authorities will arrest and imprison them through the influence of the devil
 - This church is suffering just as Christ did!
- Christ is still the ultimate power behind their tribulation and works it for their good (17:17)

Instead of Fear, Faith!

- Christ gives two commands to this church
- The first is to not fear what will happen to them
- Instead of _____, Christ calls on them to be _____ with _____.
 - That faith is built on the substance of His encouragement.
 - Instead of fear of their _____, believe that God is in _____.
 - Instead of fear of _____, believe that Christ gives _____ beyond _____.
 - Instead of fear of _____, believe that, in Christ, they are truly _____. (James 2:9)
 - Instead of fear of _____, believe that Christ will _____ His people!

The Believer's Crown

- The New Testament speaks of a crown or crowns that believer's will receive as a reward
- These Crowns Stand in Contrast to the First Crown our Savior Received (Matt 27:29)
- The Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8)
- The Crown of Life (James 1:12)
- The Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4)
- We are crowned because we share in Christ's rule (Rev. 20:4)
- We are crowned, not because of us, but because of Christ (Rev. 4:4 & 10)