



## 6. Revelation 2:8-11 – The Letter to the Church in Smyrna

### **Revelation 2: 8-11**

The second letter was directed to the Church in Smyrna. There is absolutely no doubt about who this letter came from. It came **via** John, but it came **from** Jesus. It is a departure from the form of most of the other letters where Jesus gives a Commendation to the Church, then issues His Complaint against it followed by a Correction. In this letter, there is only Commendation and an encouragement. It was written to a suffering Church and to one which was in extreme poverty. Only those who have lived amongst Believers in persecution can possibly understand the problems, repression and financial sanctions that they face. They are

often subjected to long terms of imprisonment, torture and deprivation, loss of family and loved ones, eviction from homes and, because they are regarded as outcasts from Society, anyone who helps them can also be subjected to the same sanctions.

John was instructed to write his letter from Jesus Who described Himself as 'the First and the Last'. He is saying that in all things He is pre-eminent. No-one came or existed before Him. He is the executive Creator of the Universe, **John 1:1-4**. He is God, He is the Son of God and as such, all things were created by Him and for Him.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, <sup>20</sup> and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the Cross, **Colossians 1:15-20**.

What an amazing picture of Jesus from beginning to end and yet thank God He is not finished in all He has to do!

We can remember that Jesus is known as the last Adam. As Paul explained it to the Corinthians:

The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup>The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. <sup>47</sup>The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. <sup>48</sup>As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup>And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven, **1 Corinthians 15:45-49 TLB**

Jesus was crucified at Calvary as a substitute for you and me. We deserved to die legally as the punishment for sin – eternal separation from God. He took the punishment for our sin, paying the price, and allowing us to go free. As a result, our primary desire as Christians is to love Him and to follow Him for the rest of our lives, **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**. Jesus was raised from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, and all authority everywhere has been given to Him. He is known in the Bible as the firstborn of many brothers; you and I are the brothers He is referring to. We also shall inherit eternal life. Death for a Christian is but a transition from temporal life on Earth, into eternal life in His presence, **Romans 8:28-30**

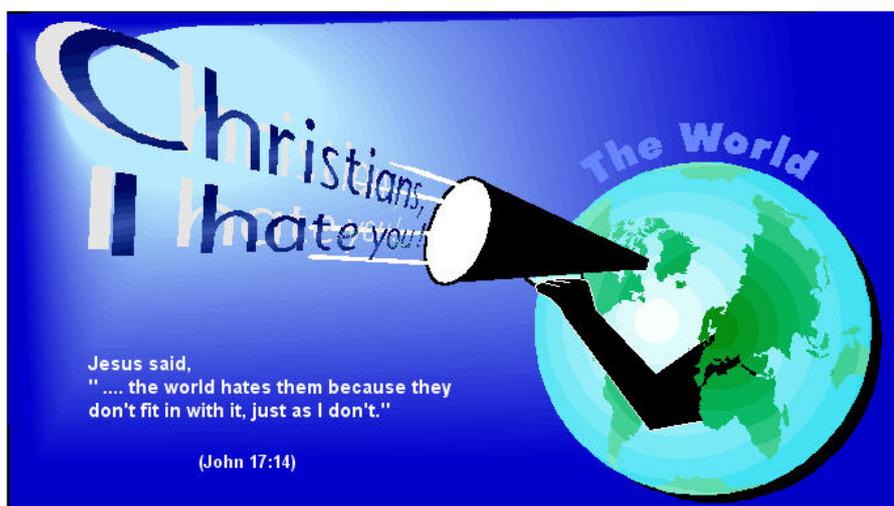
Jesus knows everything there is to know about us. He knows us infinitely better than we know ourselves, and what happens to us never takes Him by surprise or catches Him off guard! Jesus here brings us fantastic comfort with the words 'I know!' It is so encouraging that when we are facing a dark trial, we have our Best Friend take us by the hand and say 'I know; I care; I understand; you can count on Me.' There is no heartache, pain, or fear that the Lord does not share He knows all about it. So when He says that He knows of the afflictions and the poverty under which the Christians belonging to the Church at Smyrna are living, He is telling the truth, but He also knows that they themselves are not their real source of supply; He is! That is why He can say that they are rich (**Revelation 2:9**). Poverty is temporary and is subject to change as is affliction. How can Jesus say that we are rich when we have nothing? He can see things that, just at that moment, we have not yet seen. He sees things so differently from us. He knows what the Word states,

"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus".  
**Philippians 4:19 (KJV).**

God is infinitely rich, and His riches are for us because we are one of His children, but they are supplied in Christ Jesus. The closer we become to Him, the more we will understand His supply line and His way of fulfilling our needs. His supply should never be a surprise to us; the way it arrives may often be! David had this to say about the Lord's provision for His people:

'I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread,' **Psalms 37:25.**

What a wonderful promise. God sees things so differently: He does not want to pamper us so that we become spoilt children. Often the things we have longed for and valued have become an abomination to Him and a curse or an idol to us, consequently we are blessed if we lose them. So He saw the Smyrna believers as rich. You and I may not be millionaires in our currency, but we are rich because we are His children and have all the blessings of heaven. It has been argued that the Believers in the Church at Smyrna did not know what God's Word said about speech, that they were just a spoken word away from their inheritance. However Jesus wanted them to know that despite all the opposition in their Church and their lives, they had what was needed to live a rich Christian life and to have all their needs met.



On the other hand we may be rich. God may have put us in a position where we are earning loads of cash or have inherited money. In those circumstances it is very important for us to learn quickly how to manage our finances God's way. Whilst God has no intention of us going short, He does want us to use our money and our ability to earn it to advance His Kingdom on earth. God's principles of finance can be summarised under sowing and reaping and tithing and giving. A farmer only sows into good ground that has been well-prepared. He

knows the seed he is going to use, so he knows the crop he will reap. It really doesn't surprise him when he gets a return on his investment. Of course, it is God Who gives him this return, and He gives it to him so that he can sow again and reap another and a bigger harvest. So sow your financial seed into ground that you have prayed over and IT will yield a harvest of souls more than the finance for yourself. If we follow God's plan for our finances, don't expect the world to understand what we are doing. The world won't and ultimately it will hate us for it; but don't be deterred, God wants us to follow His Spirit and His ways from the Word, rather than the world and its ways! **Psalms 1:1-3**

The Church in Smyrna looks so like the underground Church in China today which we all see as being afflicted and in poverty; but here Jesus shows us how He sees this underground Church as so rich in Him. We may see examples of the western Church, and God's opinion, which may be so different to ours, in the next few studies. **Isaiah 55: 9.** Being a Christian does not mean that we will have a ticket entitling us to avoid suffering. To be maligned, to be ridiculed and to suffer for our faith is sometimes part of everyday life for a Christian. We attempt to avoid it at all costs and are told that we must be conciliatory at all times, but very often, when we stand up for the Truth, it causes offence to another. We should not go out of our way to provoke another, but we, like Paul have a duty to explain the good news of the Gospel that is Jesus Christ and His salvation to all men.

In the Western world we are sometimes less than happy to preach the Gospel in an outspoken manner, but in other parts of the world it is part of everyday life. People are persecuted for it. In countries like Burma (Myanmar), China, India, Pakistan and some parts of Indonesia, Christians can be imprisoned and even killed for their faith, but even that does not stop them from caring for the eternal welfare of their fellow citizens.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. <sup>14</sup> How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" **Romans 10:13-15 KJV**

We have already seen how Jesus knows us, so it is hardly surprising that He knows about those who oppose us; those who say that they are Believers and yet are not. In other words, those who say that they adhere to the words of the Lord and yet do not. Those who 'do' church for their own selfish motives belong to the church of Satan. Unless they change their allegiance they will end up in eternity with only the opportunities they had to give their lives to the Lord for company in their eternal torment. It is not our responsibility to judge anyone in this position; we are in a position to pray for them and show so much love that we earn the right to speak into their lives when they ask us. Love never fails, **1 Corinthians 13:4-8**. When we live by love, we cannot fail, it is revolutionary. If we fully understood the great recompense from living God's agape love; we'd probably be competing with each other; each of us trying to love others more. Everyone would emerge from that competition a winner! For love is truly the only sure secret to our success.

The blasphemy Jesus is talking about is where the religious people were failing to distinguish between Israel and the Church. Church history is littered with times of where Judaism is being grafted into Christianity. Over all the years we know that religion has tried to push out a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, thus removing the power from the Gospel, **2 Timothy 3:5**. Some of us find it easier to be religious about our walk with God. We are very active 'doing' instead of 'being' His child and allowing Him to have complete control over our lives by giving us His direction. It was the same when Jesus was here on earth and we know how He spoke to the Pharisees, **Matthew 23:27**. He saved some of His strongest words for people who pushed error, 'children of the devil', **Matthew 12:27**; 'wolves in sheep's clothing', **Matthew 7:15**; 'a generation of vipers', **Luke 3:7**. We are not Christians because of good works, but completely by Grace, **Ephesians 2:5**.

These Believers were living in a time of persecution. Smyrna – now modern Izmir in Turkey – was under Roman rule, and the city authorities were keen to gain favour with their occupying government. The Emperor had proclaimed himself a god and as such had to be worshipped. Believers could not be party to that, and so faced a dilemma, to either deny their Lord Jesus and bow the knee to the Emperor, or to stand firm and face the persecution that came to all who refused to obey the 'law'.

The Church in Smyrna was being warned by Jesus to stay strong amidst the persecution, **Revelation 2:10** For many Christians in the world, suffering is part of the life they lead, and it seems increasingly likely that this may be the case for many more of us in the West. It is not God Who puts us in prison for our faith. The Bible is clear that Satan's plan is to place us anywhere that we are bound. He wants to break our love for Jesus, so his plan is to bring us to breaking point. What Satan sometimes forgets is that a Christian who knows his Lord Jesus is very hard to break.

Here, Jesus encourages those who are going through such testing times to persevere! The Lord is saying "Do not fear." He has promised grace sufficient for every need. He does not give martyr grace until martyr time! It is so important we live for Jesus Christ today as He prepares us to die for Him tomorrow! As we have seen, everything that Satan does is temporary – it is subject to change. The keys of death and hell were stripped away from Satan when Jesus rose triumphantly from the dead. Those domains are no longer controlled by Satan. We need to make sure we do not give him any access to our lives and relationships where he has no right to be, although he will tell us otherwise! **2 Corinthians 10:4**.

Jesus' instruction to these Believers in Smyrna is to be faithful. The only way through anything such as persecution on this scale is to remain faithful, yes, even up to and including death. Life on earth is such a temporary affair. Once the key decision has been made to follow Jesus, nothing can separate us from the love of God, **Romans 8:35**. Eternity is ours and death is merely a transition into the full Presence of God, into His Kingdom, and His further promise is that these faithful people would receive eternal life as their victors' crown. Imagine Jesus took the crown of thorns so we could receive this crown of life. What an amazing reward for remaining faithful in such trying circumstances. He has also given us His Spirit to complete the task He started and empower us to walk as He walked. Never ever bow the knee to Satan despite anything that he might promise. His promises are always lies; Jesus saw that in the wilderness, **Matthew 4:1-11**. We must always fix our eyes upon Jesus and make Paul's confession in **Philippians 1:20-26** as our own prayer.

<sup>20</sup> I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me."

**Philippians 1:20-26**

Jesus then makes a promise to those who hear what the Spirit says to the Churches. It echoes down through the centuries and is this:

"Those who are victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death." **Revelation 2:11.**

If we stand firm in our Christian faith, then the second death which is an eternity in Hell separated from God, will not touch us.

"The lake of fire is the second death." **Revelation 20:17.**

Instead we shall live in the earth with full assurance that our salvation is fully paid for and death will not touch us as we move into the Presence of God in Heaven.

**What a promise!**

## **6. Revelation 2:8-11 – The Church at Smyrna – Challenge Questions**

- 1. Read the Notes and the Bible Verses** referred to in them. Highlight the points that 'speak' to you. Be prepared to share in your group.

Try to find a story on the web, of Christians who are suffering for their faith and stop and pray for them. (eg: Gospel for Asia ([gfa.org/](http://gfa.org/)); Barnabas fund. (<https://barnabasfund.org/>))

- 2. Read **Philippians 1:20-26**** as a prayer and write it out somewhere so you can see it on a daily basis. This will build faith in the Truth and give you confidence in God for the future.
- 3. Take time to think about Jesus having a crown of thorns so **we** can have the Crown of Life.**

### **Read Revelation 2:12-17 – The Letter to the Church at Pergamos.**

- 4. What do you think is a sharp, double-edged sword and why would Jesus describe Himself to the Church at Pergamos as having one?**
- 5. Was Pergamos an important city? Explain what went on in that city.**
- 6. Was the Church in Pergamos respected? Explain your answer. Which violent maniac lived there?**
- 7. Who was Antipas and what happened to him? Why did Jesus commend the Believers in this City?**

**8.** Despite His commendation, Jesus said that He had a few things against the Believers. List them.

**9.** Explain the doctrine of Balaam. Read **Numbers 22-24**; and **2 Peter 2:15,16** and **Jude 11,12** Give one reference that backs up your explanation.

**10.** Who were the Nicolaitans and what was their teaching? See **Revelation 2:6**.

**11.** Why was their teaching dangerous for the Believers in this Church?

**12.** Is there any danger that the teaching of the Nicolaitans could affect your Church? Explain your answer.

**13.** Jesus promises to give two things to the one who overcomes. What were they?

**14.** Why would He have given them such things? Would He do the same things for us today?

**15.** What dangers face your Church today that is common with those in the Church at Pergamos? How can you prevent them from causing damage?

**16.** What is the biggest lesson the Holy Spirit is revealing to you from this Church?