

Today we continue our study in Jesus' letters to seven churches, kept for us in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Today we study the 2nd letter:

Revelation 2:8-11

Jesus said: Write to the announcer for the church in the city named SMYRNA:

[quote]

I am First and I am Last. I died *[finish!]* and I became alive again *[pah-succeed!]*. I tell you:

⁹ I know your troubles. I know you are poor. But really you are rich! I know the bad things some people say about you. They name themselves Jews, but they are not true Jews. They are the devil's church.

¹⁰ Soon you will suffer. But don't fear. I tell you: the devil will put some of you in prison to *[for]* test you. You will suffer for ten days. But stay strong in faith, no-matter if you must die. I will give you the crown of life.

¹¹ My Holy Spirit now speaks to your churches. Every person must pay-attention. Every person that wins, the 2nd death can't hurt you.

One-week ago we saw in the first letter,
Jesus praised the church in EPHESUS.
Then He criticized and warned that church.
Then He encouraged that church.

We see that same again and again through all 7 letters.

Praise
Criticize
Warn
Encourage

But two churches Jesus gave
no[*none*] criticism,
no warning,
only praise. [Thumb-up!]

We want our church same-as that, right?
We wish our church can become a church that Jesus can only
praise. Good goal, yes. But is that really possible?

Well, two churches in western Turkey succeeded.
Why can't we?

But wait and see if we really want to become as those two
churches.

The first church that gets only praise is named SMYRNA, in
today's lesson.

This letter to SMYRNA begins:

*"I am First
and I am Last.
I died [finish!]
and I became alive again [pah-succeed!]."*

The writer never uses His name in these seven letters, but He makes clear to us who is speaking:

"I am First!"

Who is first? ADAM? No! God alone lives from the past forever, to the future forever. He said,

"I am First!"

"I am Last!"

God alone reigns [*manages*] all history.

But He also says:

"I died [finish!]

and I became alive again [pah-succeed!]."

Jesus Christ, True God, crucified, died, and rose again.

He is Lord over the Church.

His story about His

crucifixion

death

resurrection

that

the Church announces.

And that

the church in Smyrna announced.

Then what happened?

The Christians got heavy persecution.

The city of Smyrna had strong support for Rome.
People living there must worship the Roman emperor as god.
But Christians can't do that. So they got persecuted

Jesus told them:

*"I know your troubles.
I know you are poor.
But really you are rich!"*

Christians in Smyrna are poor... meaning?

They have not enough money.
They have not enough to eat.
Their clothes are old.
Their homes are small.

Christians there are poor... why?

The Bible doesn't say.

We can guess serious discrimination against Christians happened in Smyrna.

But notice, Jesus tells the Christians people:

*"I know you are poor.
But really you are rich!"*

Poor, meaning... What?

not enough world's things.

But rich, meaning... What?

They are rich in their faith
and their connection with Christ.

Remember Jesus said,

*"Save for yourselves riches in heaven,
so-that no robber can take-it-away
and no worms can destroy it.
Because the place you keep your riches,
your heart will be in that place also." (Luke 12:34)*

Everything you have on earth will melt, blow-away.
If you have relationship[connect] with Christ,
you keep that forever!

SMYRNA Christians had no wealth on earth,
but they had much wealth in heaven.
Their bodies were poor,
but their spirits were rich.

The Christians in SMYRNA had another big problem. People
gossiped about them, saying things that were-not true.

People who hated Christ, they spread lies about people who
follow Christ, and discriminators believed those lies.

People persecuting Christians in SMYRNA where who?
Two groups:

First, people in the city that worship Roman gods.

Second, people that say they worship Israel's true God.
Yes, people that have God's Word, the Bible,
Yes, people that should [must] know better,
they persecuted Christians!

Jesus said,

*"I know the bad things some people say about you.
They name themselves Jews, but they are not true Jews.
They are the devil's church."*

Wow, hot words!

The father of the Jewish people is who? Abraham.

Abraham has two different kinds of children.

One group comes from Abraham's body.

The other group share's Abraham's trust in God.

They are the spiritual children of Abraham.

The Bible often says,

which group are true children of Abraham?

The second - the spiritual children

that believe God's promise.

God promised Abraham that

He [God] will bless the world through him [Abraham].

God's promised succeeded when

Jesus was born, crucified, died and resurrected.

Through Abraham,

through Jesus,

we share God's promise and God's blessing.

Christian people in SMYRNA

believed God's promise,

and they received God's blessing.

And for that reason,

the physical [*body*] children from Abraham

persecuted the spiritual children of Abraham.

Sad? Yes.

But if our words we spread about other people hurt them,

we are acting the same-as persecutors in Smyrna, right?

We name ourselves [Christ] Lutheran Church of the Deaf.

But if we act that way, can we really use His name?

If we act that way, we must change our name,
Our new name is "The Devil's Lutheran Church of the Deaf,"
as Jesus' letter explains.

We should[*must*] know better.

Now back to the Christians in Smyrna, and their suffering:

In His letter, Jesus tells them wonderful news! Their persecution
will become worse.

Jesus said:

Soon you will suffer.

Soon!? Christians there already were suffering!

But [Jesus said] don't fear.

*I tell you: the devil will put some of you in prison to[for] test
you. You will suffer for ten days.*

What does Jesus mean "Prison"?

What does Jesus mean "Ten Days"?

If the Christians all go to jail for only ten days, that's not a big
problem, right?

Remember, the Book of Revelation is filled with SYMBOLS -
picture words.

"Prison" can mean that Christians will see their freedom cut.
The government will make strict limits on Christian people,
same-as Communist countries and Moslem countries
have strict rules and limits against Christians.

"Ten Days" can mean

Persecution will a time limit.
Persecution can go for long time,
but the persecution will end.

For some Christian people, their persecution will end in death!

Jesus said:

*Stay strong in faith, no-matter if you must die.
I will give you the crown of life.*

If our bodies die, that is not the end of life.

Jesus said,

*Don't fear people who can kill your body.
They can't kill your soul.* [Matthew 10:28]

All our bodies will die, anyway.

But if we trust God's promise in Jesus Christ,
we will live forever with Him.

Now Jesus closes His letter:

*"My Holy Spirit speaks to your churches. Every person must
pay-attention. Every person that wins, the 2nd death can't
hurt you."*

First death means what? Body [...bent-legs-up]

Second death means what? Later in Rev. we read

Second Death means "Lake of Fire." (Rev. 21:8)

The Bible says clearly,
no-matter that our body dies, our soul lives forever.
Our soul will continue living, either in heaven, or in hell.

Remember Jesus said about Himself: *I died [finish!] and I became alive again [pah-succeed!].*

Every person united [*belong*] with Christ in His death enjoys His forgiveness.

Every person united with Christ in His resurrection enjoys life with Him forever, and hell can't touch you any more.

A few years ago, a Christian reporter visited one African country, and he saw the church there is same-as the SMYRNA church.

The reporter was really impressed that the Christians were really excited for Christ. They were eager to share their faith. They all gave wonderful loving service for each-other.

That reporter told a pastor there, "I wish our church in America could become more like[as] your church. Our churches are comfortable, but not eager. Your church has life! We need that!"

The pastor answered, "Persecution made us this way. Is that what you want?"

???

We pray:

Father in heaven,

Forgive us that we fear the world

more than we honor You.

Forgive us that we pay-attention more to our riches here on earth, instead-of investing our lives in heaven.

Forgive us that when people do bad things to us,

we complain.

Please,

Increase our faith,

Increase our joy,

Increase our zeal [eager].

Amen