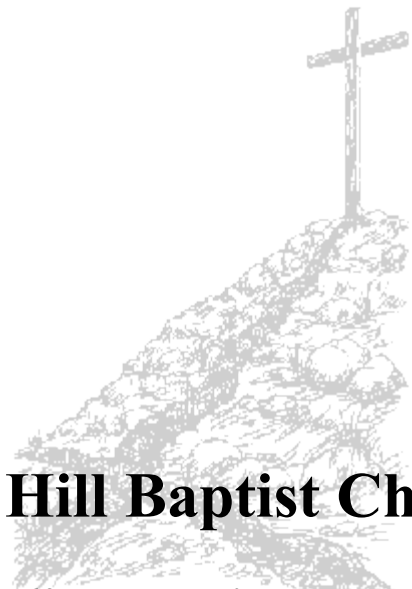


# Unto The Angel of Smyrna

Revelation 2:8-11



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**FOCAL** Revelation 2:8-11<sup>KJV</sup> And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; (9) I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. (10) Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. (11) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

The letter written to the Church of Smyrna is very interesting, especially when you compare it to the letters written to the other seven churches.

Which two of the *seven churches* were never rebuked by Jesus?

Smyrna, along with the *Church of Philadelphia*, are the only local Churches that are not rebuked by Jesus. Only *four verses* of Scripture were written to Smyrna, whereas Jesus spent more time with the other bodies of believers. What does this text tell us about Smyrna, and in particular about *those who are called Christians*?

### **1. True Christians Will Suffer For Jesus**

Smyrna was a Church that was being persecuted for its faith. **Hitchcock's Bible Names Dictionary** tells us that the name **Smyrna** means "**myrrh**". That's very significant! If you remember, when the wise men came from the east to worship young Jesus we read:

What does the word "Smyrna" mean? What was the *city of Smyrna* known for in ancient times?

**Matthew 2:11** And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and **when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.**

that they brought Jesus **gold, frankincense, and myrrh**. Myrrh is a *very aromatic resin* that was mixed with other spices and applied to the dead by the ancient Jews. As a matter of fact, when our Lord Jesus was crucified, His body was embalmed with myrrh:

**John 19:39-40** And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and **brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight. (40)** Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

before He was laid in Joseph's tomb. Getting back to the main point, Smyrna was named *myrrh*. This Church was expected to suffer.

Though it is not a popular idea in America today, the Bible is *very clear* that true Christian *will suffer* for Jesus.

The Church of Smyrna was located in a city that

**"...was renown for its loyalty to Rome and its ritual worship of the emperor. Almost three hundred years before the writing of Revelation the first temple in the world dedicated to the goddess Roma was built in Smyrna. Seventy years before John's banishment the city dedicated a magnificent temple in honor of the Emperor Tiberius. Thereafter it was a center of worship of both Rome and Caesar."**<sup>1</sup>

the local Church of Smyrna was not only *named* for an embalming resin, it was located in a city known for its pagan worship. Jesus knew what this Church was up against - and yet never promised that the persecution would cease. As a matter of fact, Jesus promised that *more persecution* would come. Look at verse 10:

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:10 ... Fear none of those things **which thou shalt suffer**: behold, **the devil shall cast** some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and **ye shall have tribulation** ten days

<sup>1</sup> *Breaking The Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* by Bruce M. Metzger, pgs 32-33, Abington Press, Nashville

Jesus did not promise relief from tribulation - He promised that more was coming.

Our Lord used the *future tense* when He spoke of suffering. He said, **you shall suffer ... the devil shall cast ... you shall have tribulation.**

If you are a Christian the Lord is *very clear* in teaching us that *we will be persecuted* for our faith. Our Lord turned to a large group of disciples who were following Him one day and said to them:

**Luke 14:25-27** And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, (26) **If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. (27) And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.**

Those who are saved need to expect a Cross. When you come to Christ and profess Him as Savior, it *is expected* that Jesus becomes the *most important relationship in your life*. Jesus said "When you come to Me, you'd better **count the cost!** Our Lord went on to say:

**Luke 14:28-33** For which of you, intending to build a

tower, sitteth not down first, and **counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? (29) Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, (30) Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. (31) Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? (32) Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth ambassadors, and desireth conditions of peace. (33) So **likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.****

When you were saved, you were saved by turning away from all else and *turning toward Jesus*. On the day you were saved you saw Jesus high and lifted up for you. You saw Jesus ...

**Up Calvary's mountain, one dreadful morn,  
Walked Christ my Savior, weary and worn;  
Facing for sinners death on the cross,  
That He might save them from endless loss.**

**Blessed Redeemer! Precious Redeemer!  
Seems now I see Him on Calvary's tree;  
Wounded and bleeding, for sinners pleading,  
Blind and unheeding—dying for me!<sup>2</sup>**

You knew in your heart that Jesus died for your sins on that Cross.

You knew that a Holy God had looked at your life *and saw the handwriting on the wall*. Unlike Belshazzar, when you realized that **thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting**<sup>3</sup>, you repented of your life and turned to Jesus, trusting Him for salvation. You knew that Judgment Day was coming, and you wanted to be **on the Lord's side**<sup>4</sup>.

But Beloved, you must make a choice. You are either on the Lord's side, or you are on the devil's side. If you are on the Lord's side, the devil will persecute you. But if on the devil's side, the Lord will one day judge you! **C.H. Spurgeon** wrote:

**"the heart that will not be bent by the love of Christ, shall be broken by the terror of His Name. If Jesus upon the Cross do not save you, Christ on the Throne shall damn you! If Christ dying be not your life, Christ living shall be your death. If Christ on earth be not your heaven, Christ coming from Heaven shall be your hell.**

**O may God's Grace work a blessed turning of Grace in each of us, that we may not be turned into hell in the dread day of reckoning.**<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Daniel 5:27

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 32:26

<sup>5</sup> *Mourning at the Sight of the Crucified*, number 860, delivered on Lord's Day

True Christians will suffer for Jesus. If you have called on the Name of Jesus and been saved, the Lord tells you, like Smyrna, that you are at odds with this present evil world.

I said at the beginning of this sermon, **True Christians shall suffer for Jesus**. There are many in this present age that go by the name "Christian", and yet are mere pretenders to that name. The word **Christian** literally means **a little Christ**, and the word was initially introduced at Antioch (**Acts 11:26**). I doubt very seriously this was an honored name, but suspect that this was a term accompanied by much mocking. True Christians do not bow their knees to the ways of this world. True Christians will not compromise and worship Rome nor Caesar, but Jesus Christ will be the One Who they will do service to.

How was the early Roman Empire like American culture today?

The Roman Empire - like America today - never minded that people worship other *gods and goddesses*, but did require that Rome be worshiped once a year, and that the Emperor be bowed to and acknowledged as Lord. Those of Smyrna would not bow their knees to a false god, even if their refusal led to their deaths. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of old, the Christians of Smyrna

morning, March 14, 1869 by C.H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

refused to worship and God but the One True God. Like the Old Testament saints they said:

**Daniel 3:17-18<sup>HCSB</sup> If the God we serve exists, then He can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He can rescue us from the power of you, the king. (18) But even if He does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up."**

A *true Christian* will stand up for Jesus, not bow down to the false gods of this world.

There is a *spirit of compromise* that has entered many local Church congregations, the spirit of **Judas Iscariot** - a feeling that the word "Christian" may be worn and yet the life of the wearer need not reflect that Name.

Yet Beloved, Jesus was *very clear* that Christians - True Christians - *would* suffer for Him. He mentioned this over and over again in His earthly ministry. He told His disciples:

**John 15:18-19<sup>NIV</sup> "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. (19) If you belonged to**

**the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.**

The Christians in Smyrna - just like you who are Christians today - were *called out of the world by Jesus*, set apart to serve Him.

Saved by faith in the Blood of Calvary the Christian is indwelt by the Spirit of God. If you belong to Jesus you are no longer a part of this world. You are members of the Great Family of God, saved, destined to go into glory with the Jesus Who died for you.

The world does not mind a *professing but not possessing Christian*, for you are no threat to it's evil master. True Christians will suffer for Christ because Satan and this world will continually stand against what Our Lord teaches. Who may become your attackers? Look at our focal text:

**FOCAL Revelation 2:8-9 ... These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; (9) I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ was persecuted from the very start of His earthly ministry by **them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.** The Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees constantly hounded our Lord, looking for ways where they could destroy Him. In the end these pretenders to salvation turned on the Lord of Glory, told lies about Him, and convinced the Roman authorities to crucify Him.

Yet God was still in control of everything that happened. Which brings us to another point:

### **True Christians Are Secure In Jesus**

Our Lord tells the Church of Smyrna:

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:9 ...**I know**<sup>6</sup> thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and **I know** the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

Jesus watches His Church, and was overseeing every persecution that hit His little flock. He said

The Apostle Peter reminds the believer:

**1 Peter 4:13-16 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye**

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6 Perfect Active Indicative G1492, εἶδω, eidō, i'-do, A primary verb; used only in certain past tenses, the others being borrowed from the equivalent, G3700 and G3708; properly to *see* (literally or figuratively); by implication (in the perfect only) to *know*: - be aware, behold, X can (+ not tell), consider, (have) known (-ledge), look (on), perceive, see, be sure, tell, understand, wist, wot. Compare G3700., Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

**are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. (14) If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. (15) But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. (16) Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.**

When the early Church was persecuted for Jesus they kept the attitude of Peter, who told them "if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf". To suffer for Christ was considered *an honor*, not a thing to be dreaded! The early Church knew several things that today's Church often forgets:

- (1) Christians are *no longer part of this world*
- (2) Christians, saved by the Blood of the Lamb and by the effectual work of the Holy Spirit, are *now Children of God*
- (3) As Children of God Christians *walk like Jesus, talk like Jesus, and live like Jesus*
- (4) Christians acknowledge One God, One salvation by faith in One Jesus Christ

- (5) Christians *do not compromise the message of the Gospel*, even if it means our persecution
- (6) Jesus watches *everything* that happens to His Beloved - so we need not fear the persecution of this present Age.

Jesus uses the words **I know** several times in our focal text. This is a word in the Greek that means **I know, and keep on knowing.**

Jesus is watching the Christian, *especially* during times of persecution. He knows what is going on, and is controlling all things - even unto our deaths.

One of the most beautiful illustrations of Christ's oversight of the persecuted Church is found in the *life of Stephen*.

Stephen, a deacon in the early Church, often went apart from the Church fellowship to preach Christ to unbelievers. One day Stephen found himself surrounded by a group of Pharisees - those that Jesus calls

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:9 ...I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of **them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.**

Stephen witnesses to these men, telling them that

salvation is only found by faith in Jesus Christ, but these men will not hear. The Bible tells us:

**Acts 7:54-56** When they heard these things, **they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. (55) But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, (56) And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.**

Why didn't Jesus save Stephen? If He was watching this dear Saint being attacked, why didn't the Master save him from being stoned to death?

One thing that we who are believers need to understand is this: we exist in this life to serve Jesus, to preach the Gospel to those who do not know its saving power.

Jesus did not save Stephen from being stoned to death, but Jesus did take away all of the pain as this dear Saint left this life. It was necessary that unjust men commit this criminal act, stoning Stephen without benefit of a trial. Why was it necessary? We read further in the text:

**Acts 7:58-60** And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and **the witnesses laid down their**

**clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.** (59) And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. (60) And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

There was a man named **Saul** who was standing to the side, watching everything that transpired. This man Saul would meet Jesus on the Damascus Road, accept Him as Savior, and become the *Apostle to the Gentiles*. It was necessary for Saul to see Stephen die courageously for Jesus. This image of a believer going to meet his Lord, I believe, stayed in Saul's head, and became instrumental in leading Saul to become Paul, the greatest Apostle (in my opinion) of the Church Age.

Listen Beloved, true Christians are secure in Jesus. We need not fear the persecution, but just trust and obey the Lord. When persecution comes

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:8-11 **Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer:** behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days; **be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.** (11) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; **He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.**

we are *not* to fear what may come, but just trust Jesus.

He has promised us if we **are faithful unto death, we shall receive the crown of life.** What does this mean?

We may suffer the first death, the loss of this physical frame, but that's perfectly fine! This body is meant to be temporary. We need to trust Jesus, realizing that we are secure *in Him*. Finally, we see from this passage that:

### **True Christians Will Stay In Jesus**

**FOCAL** Revelation 2:8-11 **Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days<sup>7</sup>; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.** (11) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; **He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.**

<sup>7</sup> The "ten days" of trouble may refer to a period of relatively brief duration, specifically the "days" of persecution under 10 Roman emperors (cf. Gen. 24:55; Num. 11:19, 14:22; 1 Sam. 1:8; Neh. 5:18; Job 19:3; Jer. 42:7; Dan. 1:12; Acts 25:6).<sup>98</sup> Other interpreters view the days as symbolic of years,<sup>99</sup> or a longer period of time (e.g., complete tribulation),<sup>100</sup> or a short, limited time.<sup>101</sup> However, John probably intended us to interpret this period as 10 literal 24-hour days that lay in the near future of the original recipients of this letter. There is nothing in the text that provides a clue that we should take this number in a figurative sense. (Thomas Constable's Commentary on Revelation, found at [soniclight.org](http://soniclight.org).)

Jesus makes two *very specific* statements here. He says "**be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life**", and also says "**He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death**". It is clear from these two statements that the Christian - the *true* Christian - is expected to *persevere unto death*.

From the very beginning the Church of Christ has been infiltrated by those whom Jesus calls *tares* or *false believers*. These people may look like you, act like you, profess to be a Christian like you .... and yet their salvation may only be skin deep or pretend.

Jesus told the Pharisees that they were

**Matthew 23:27** <sup>HCSB</sup> "... **hypocrites! ... like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones** and every impurity.

The proof of a *genuine salvation in Christ* is whether you stand under persecution for your faith. The *incidental or nominal* Christian will say he or she is saved, but because their salvation is *surface only* - mere looks - they will not continue to stand for Christ when the heat of this world is applied. Jesus told the Christians of Smyrna "**be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life**". One follows the other. Remain faithful, even unto death, and the crown of life is given. Fail to be faithful, and you may *not* be saved. Persecution for the Christian - especially persecution for

the Name of Jesus - is *a wonderful blessing* for it proves our faith in Him is real. How do I know that I am saved? Do I know that I am saved because I follow the *religious rituals*? No, because the Pharisees and Scribes followed the religious rituals. Do I know that I am saved because I am *socially minded*, tending to the needs of the poor? No, because the Sadducees - the Liberal crowd of Jesus day - often tended to the poor and the widows. The amount of charity we show does nothing to assure us of our salvation.

But if God walks with me - if He lives inside me, and I grow closer to Him even when I'm under trials or under persecution - then I know that the **second death**<sup>8</sup> has no hold on me.

Jesus lives IN me, His Spirit is alive inside me. He **knows and continues to know** the trials and the tribulations His Saints go through, and our Beloved Savior goes with us every step of the way.

If you have never read it, I highly recommend that you read *Foxes Book of Martyrs*. This book - an ancient one - reports on the death of the Pastor of Smyrna. We read from Foxes<sup>9</sup>:

**"The proconsul then urged him, saying, "Swear, and I will release thee; — reproach Christ." Polycarp answered, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I**

<sup>8</sup> see Revelation 20:14 <sup>HCSB</sup> Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. **This is the second death, the lake of fire.**

<sup>9</sup> *Foxes Book of Martyrs*, pages 25-26

blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?" At the stake, to which he was only tied, but not nailed as usual, as he assured them he should stand immovable, the flames, on their kindling the fagots, encircled his body, like an arch, without touching him, and the executioner, on seeing this, was ordered to pierce him with a sword when so great a quantity of blood flowed out as extinguished the fire. But his body, at the instigation of the enemies of the Gospel, especially Jews, was ordered to be consumed in the pile, and the request of his friends, who wished to give it Christian burial, rejected. They nevertheless collected his bones and as much of his remains as possible, and caused them to be decently interred."

There is never a crown without first the Cross!

True Christians will stand for Jesus, for Jesus is in them. One day we who believe shall see this dear saint called Polycarp. We shall see our Lord, **He who was dead and is now forever alive**. We, dear Family, shall be with our Jesus forever.

May God touch your hearts with these words.



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