

- *Second letter to Smyrna*

#### The greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ (ii)

- *The First and the Last – a title of God in Isaiah*

- *Jesus there at the beginning and the end*

- *Jesus was dead and came alive again*

- *Encouragement for Christians facing the possibility of death*

#### Commendations (iii)

- *He knows about their extreme suffering – likewise today for some*

- *Jesus knows that the church is poor*

- *Yet the church was rich!*

- *The church was being slandered by the nominal people of God*

- *The Jews of*

Jesus' second letter is to go to Smyrna. Again we have (i) and (ii), the command and the description. <sup>8</sup>*'To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The words of the First and the Last, who was dead, and came alive again.'* Let us look at Jesus' words, focusing on Jesus himself.

1. **First, we have a reminder of the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ.** Again the description is taken from the opening vision of the book<sup>1</sup>. It is appropriately chosen since the message to Smyrna will be about the possibility of these Christians suffering to the point of death.

'The First and the Last' is a title of God in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12. Jesus is the divine Saviour who has been present in the universe since before the dawn of creation. He will continue into the eternal future, guaranteeing the fulfilment of the Father's plans and the safety of the church. The church at Smyrna is suffering but Jesus was there at the beginning of their story. Their salvation was planned from before the foundation of the world. And Jesus will be with them to the very end.

Jesus was dead, and came alive again. The Christians at Smyrna are facing the possibility of death. Yet this should not trouble them too much for the Christian lives for what is his destiny beyond the grave. If he loses his life for Jesus' sake, he arrives in glory sooner than he thought, and has a more brightly shining crown of victory. Jesus was raised shortly after his death. The people of God will be raised also. They need not fear. Jesus was dead, and came alive again. If they are killed they will come alive again in glory also.

Jesus speaks to them with great sympathy. Next comes (iii) the word of commendation. <sup>9</sup>*'I know your tribulation, and your poverty – but you are rich!'* He knows about their sufferings. The church at Smyrna was enduring extreme suffering. Even today Christians may well have to face severe persecution. In fact Christians are more persecuted than any other people in the world. The Christians at Smyrna may be called to make the supreme sacrifice of laying down their lives.

Jesus knows that the church is poor. There are several indications in the book of Revelation that the persecution of Christians often took the form of economic hardship. It seems Christians some times could not always get the food they needed, because of their refusal to compromise. Yet the church was rich! The Bible promises us prosperity but our prosperity does not take the form of hard cash!

The church was being slandered by the nominal people of God. *'I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, but they are not. Rather they are a synagogue of Satan.'* In the thinking of the New Testament writers 'Israel' is the name of the true people of God. People who descend from Abraham but have no faith are not true 'Israelites', whereas gentiles who have faith inherit the promises given to Israel and are spiritual 'Israelites'. Apparently in Smyrna the persecution of the Christians was sponsored and encouraged by the local Jewish people, but Christ says they 'say they are Jews but are not'. We must keep in mind this view of what it means to be 'a Jew' as we continue in the book of Revelation. The Jews of Smyrna were in

<sup>1</sup> see 1:17-18

*Smyrna were not spiritually Jews at all*

name the people of God. Yet since they had no faith in Jesus they were not spiritually Jews at all. (We may recall similar teaching to this in Romans 2:29.) When Polycarp of Smyrna was burnt to death, it was the Jews of Smyrna who had 'cried out with one mind that the Roman pro-consul should burn Polycarp alive' (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12:3<sup>□1</sup>).

□1 see also 17:2

**Words of instruction and encouragement (v) – (vii)**

- Do not fear
- A short period of sharp suffering

2. **Jesus gives them words of instruction and encouragement.** He tells them that the situation is about to get worse.

They must be free from fear. <sup>10</sup>*'Do not be afraid of the things which you are about to suffer.'*

He tells them of his loving foreknowledge and concern. *'Look out! The devil is about to throw some of you into prison, so that you may be tested. You will face tribulation for ten days.'* It will not be a long time that they have to suffer – but it will be sharp. 'Ten days' speaks of a short period. It is not literal.

He calls them to be willing to lose their lives for his sake. *'You must be faithful to death . . .'*

**Wonderful promises (vii)**

- A crown of life – visible honour
- They will be entirely free of the second death – no loss of reward

He gives them a wonderful promise: *'You must be faithful to death, and I will give you the crown of life.'* <sup>11</sup>*'He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The person who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'* The Lord Jesus Christ makes promises to his suffering people. Two of them are found here. (i) They will receive the crown of life. A 'crown' speaks of kingship, victory, triumph. It also speaks of **visible** honour. The Christian's reward will be the life of heaven combined with visible glory. One gets the impression that the crown is received immediately after death. (ii) And they will be entirely free from the second death. In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* the death of Polycarp is his being 'crowned with the crown of immortality'<sup>□1</sup>. The person who does not overcome suffers loss in God's judgement. The fire of hell consumes their reward; they are saved 'through fire'<sup>□2</sup>. The one who overcomes does not lose their reward.

□1 17:1  
□2 1  
Corinthians 3:15



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