

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Church at Smyrna**

*“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write ...”  
(Revelation 2:8)*

The second period of Church history is represented in the short letter to the congregation of Smyrna. Apparently this group of people suffered intense persecution and aptly are characteristic of the period of intense persecution of Christians. Throughout the centuries Christians have always been persecuted in one way or another, whether physically, emotionally or verbally. In many areas of the world (particularly in Communist and Islamic countries) Christians are still under intense persecution. Today we are seeing more and more restrictions put upon Christians in these particular nations. In many Islamic countries to tell someone else about Jesus Christ is punishable by death.

During this second period of Church history Christians were persecuted everywhere they went. They were daily in peril of losing their lives just because they believed in Jesus Christ. There is no rebuke to be found in this letter to the Church at Smyrna and it is largely due to the fact of their persecution. During times of persecution a Christian must be sure of his or her faith. It is not a time to be faltering in our experience with God. Therefore it requires a believer to be certain and secure in his faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no room for doubt. Because of this those who suffer intense persecution have nothing in their lives to rebuke.

In this period Jesus once again describes Himself as “The First and the Last, who was dead and came back to life.” This would serve to be reassuring to those being persecuted. It was important to know that Jesus was there at their beginning and that He would be with them until the very last moment. It was also good to know that He was dead and came back to life because it let those being persecuted even to death, to know that in Christ they would live again.

Jesus told them that He knew of their works, their tribulation and their poverty. Most that live in persecution are extremely poor by this world’s standards because they are not allowed the means to afford the comforts of life. From my contact with people in the Mid-East today, where Islam is the strongest, I am told by them that Christians are not allowed to be educated or hold good paying jobs. They are only offered the worst of jobs – The ones no one else would want. Because of this they are very poor.

But Jesus reminded those of Smyrna that they weren’t really poor. It was placed in parentheses like it was whispered and was a secret. It was an eye wink from God reminding them that in reality, though they had little in human comforts and possessions, they were rich in a way that the world could not understand. And so it is still. Whether we have great possessions, fine homes, or we live in poverty and a shack that’s falling apart, if we have Christ in our lives

and we are dedicated to Him we have riches that this world system could never understand nor comprehend. We have discovered what Ponce de Leon looked for – A fountain of youth. It is not something found in the water, or in a pill that can be swallowed, but in a relationship with God. It is being restored to Him. Because of our faith we have the hope of eternal life. How could any riches to be found on the earth compare to that? How could anything be more precious than to live forever with God? It is riches beyond our wildest dreams!

Jesus told them that He was aware of the blasphemy of those who claimed to be Jews but in reality were of the Synagogue of Satan. He was speaking of false religion. He was talking about those who claimed to know God or be of God but were really representatives of the devil. These were those leading the persecution. Down through history and particularly in the Middle-Ages, it was those who claimed to know God who persecuted Christians the most. If believers did not conform to what those in power believed then they were called heretics and put to death because they believed the truth.

Even yet today, as throughout history, it was those of other religious beliefs, whether pagan or some form of Christianity, which issued the most severe persecution. We can say this in the face of Communism and Atheism because even these belief systems that deny any form of divinity are in themselves a religion. Wars wherein thousands if not millions, have lost their lives have been fought in the name of Jesus Christ. What a travesty to our Lord who came to bring life and peace! Those who persecute torture and kill others in the name of Christ or any deity are really of the devil. They are worshippers of the devil and are in reality soldiers of his vile kingdom.

Jesus did not promise to stop their persecution. In fact He told them not to fear what was yet to come. He told them that they were about to be thrown into prison and be tested. This testing in many inhuman circles meant that they would be tortured. Though mankind in a sense was the greatest of God's creations, he is also the worst. Only man can devise and carry out without conscience, painful, mutilating, horrible things on his fellow man. In his fallen state and under the influence of the devil, man is his own worst enemy. Our Lord also told them that they would have tribulation for ten days. Many have speculated as to what is meant by those ten days. They have been associated with ten periods of time, ten Roman rulers, or even a literal ten days that is yet to come. What the Lord meant by that, I really don't know, so I'm not going to further speculate at this time. Suffice it to say that whatever He was referring to was not a good thing.

Finally Jesus told them to be faithful until death. He could have delivered them from their horrible persecution just like He could to those who are yet persecuted. Why He doesn't can only be answered by Him. Part of the reason is that each man has his own free will and our Lord will not interfere with that. Unfortunately man's free will often results in the pain, suffering and persecution of the innocent. God cries for those victims. He will also keep them in a special place. While we don't hold all the answers, and never will until we reach Heaven and hear the answers from God Himself, we can rejoice in the promise to those being persecuted. Jesus said, "*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*" Physical death will result on this earth, but because of our faith in Christ, neither man nor the devil can rob us of eternal life. The crown of life cannot be taken from us. The only way to lose it is to give it up.

The second period of Church history is marked in blood by persecution. They were hunted by the Romans, other pagan religions, and even the Jews. They were hated because the devil hates Christians associated with God. He carries out his hatred through unregenerate men and will persecute until the death. But he can never take away the riches held by those who are true believers in Jesus Christ.

Finally Jesus makes the promise to those who overcome that they will not be hurt by the second death. What a significant promise! The second death is one of eternal death, opposite of eternal life. All of mankind, unless found alive at the return of Christ, will suffer death once. But those who know Jesus Christ as Savior will only suffer it once and for only a short time. On the other hand, those who don't come to Jesus Christ will suffer death a second time – A death that will never end; one that will be felt and go on forever.