Revelation Chapter 2--The Messages to the Churches Part 2

- At Ephesus we saw that all their good deeds did not make up for having left their *first love*--**Jesus**

Revelation 2:8-11 To the Church in Smyrna

- *Smyrna* (myrrh)--the "rich & beautiful city ("crown of Asia") ~35 miles north of Ephesus; very safe harbor on major trade route, easily defended: all stimulated its prominence; named *Izmir* since 1930
  - Founded ~11th century BC; taken over by the Greeks; further developed by Alexander the Great & grew blossomed under the Roman Empire; loyal ally of Rome & a center of emperor worship
  - Renowned for magnificent architecture, many temples, stadium for games, music & the arts
  - Jews were numerous & influential; those that did not accept Christ were particularly hostile
    - When Bishop Polycarp was martyred in the stadium (155 AD) after refusing many offers to recant, many Jews brought wood for the fire even though they were breaking the Sabbath
- *v8 Church in Smyrna*--the "Martyr Church" for their standing for Christ despite persecution
  - *First & Last, died & returned*--repeated from *v1:17-18*; this could only be Jesus!
    - *First/Last*--He has final disposition of all things; those being persecuted need to know He is in charge
      - Many had pride in their city as the *first* in Asia, but any form of pride denies Jesus as the *first*
    - *Died*--His experience with death identifies with the estimated 5 million martyred during this period
    - *Returned*--His triumph over death as the firstfruits of the resurrection hearten all who believe in Him
  - To those that match churches to historic eras it was symbolic of persecution (~100-312 AD)
    - During this period occurred 8 of the 10 major periods of persecution driven by Roman emperors
- *v9* **Commendation:** You are rich in your affliction & poverty; I know you have been slandered
  - *I know*--Jesus knows everything about them--past, present & future suffering for His Name
  - *Affliction/tribulation*--conveys intense & constant pressure, like a huge rock crushing down
    - Their public confession of their faith meant poverty, hunger, imprisonment & sometimes death
  - *Poverty--ptocheia* denotes complete destitution rather than just lack of wealth
    - Many from lower classes, but also likely lost business or jobs due to their commitment to Jesus
  - *Rich*--in the promises Christ had given & in spiritual treasure they were storing up in heaven
    - **James 2:5** Listen, my beloved brothers: Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him?
  - *Jews*--physically yes, but not spiritually; they also allied with pagans to stamp out Christianity
    - **Romans 2:29** No, one is a Jew because he is one inwardly & circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise does not come from men, but from God.
  - *Synagogue of Satan*--by rejecting Jesus & assaulting believers, the Jews became a tool of Satan
    - Jesus often charged the Jewish leaders with legalism & not understanding God's Word
    - Two main heresies then & now: 1) false doctrine of Christ & 2) mixing of law & grace

⇨ Any church that teaches a gospel other than that of Jesus Christ is a 'synagogue of Satan'

⇨ If we are in God's army, we must be willing to stand for what is right & true even unto death

- *v10* **Rebuke: not a word!** Instead, Jesus **exhorted** His church & all of us individually to courage
  - *Do not fear*--Jesus is calling for loyalty & faith but has also promised the Holy Spirit's aid
    - Jesus has already won the battle for us on the cross; we just need to hang on & receive the victory
      - **2 Timothy 1:7** For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control.
  - *Suffer*--Jesus never hid the cost of following Him; faith to the end brings rewards in heaven
    - Many Christians today are facing persecution & showing us true faith even unto death
      - **John 15:19** If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
    - Why should Christians suffer? 1) For discipline (**1 Corinthians 11:30-32; Hebrews 12:3-13**); 2) preventative (**2 Corinthians 12:7**); 3) obedience (**Hebrews 5:8**); 4) providing testimony (**Acts 9:16**)
  - *Devil*--a church that is true to God's Word will be under attack by Satan; if yours isn't, why not?

- *Ten days*--duration will be limited; may also refer to the 10 major periods of Roman persecution
- *Crown of life*--"ruling over death;" eternity, unlike an athlete's or Smyrna's claim of 'crown city'
  - This is not a royal crown (*deiadēma)* but that of joy & victory (*stephanos*), perhaps like a halo
    - **Revelation 21:4** "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things have passed away."

⇨ Jesus gives the same message today amidst pain, suffering, persecution & testing: "**Fear Not!**"

- *v11* **Challenge:** *Overcomes*--those who believe will overcome the world to receive everlasting life
  - *Ear*--per *v1:7* "ear of the heart" by which we hear truth; Jesus is speaking to individuals
  - *Second death*--the first death is only physical; the second is spiritual & eternal
    - **Revelation 20:14** Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire.

⇨ Smyrna personifies Tertullian's statement: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Revelation 2:8-17 To the Church in Pergamum

- *Pergamum*--~60 miles north of Smyrna; wealthy & influential Greek city on land & sea trade routes, built on 1,000-ft high conical hill that overlooked the Aegean Sea 15 miles away
  - Had been a capitol city for ~400 years: Seleucid kingdom, then Roman province of Asia
  - Famous library moved to Alexandria by Marc Antony; *parchment* name derived from city
  - Center of worship for Zeus, Athene, Dionysus & Asclepius & Caesar in the province of Asia
    - Temple to Asclepius (god of healing) was also a hospital & school; treated patients with all sorts of "cures" including use of non-poisonous snakes; rod of Asclepius is today's symbol of medicine
- *v12 Church in Pergamum*--"State" or "Indulgent" Church; lived in wicked & immoral environment
  - *Two-edged sword*--the Word of God: sanctifies, cleans, brings joy & peace to His church
    - Symbolizes the Word's ability to separate believers from the world & condemn the world for sin; the sword of salvation as well as the sword of death
    - The Roman governor in Pergamum had the ius gladii ("right of the sword")--power of life & death
    - Roman sword of conquest & rule was double-edged; but the power of God's Word is far greater!
  - To those that match churches to historic eras it symbolizes doctrinal compromise (313-590 AD)
    - Viewed as Satan switching from persecution to a more effective subversion of believers
- *v13* **Commendation:** They held fast to His name & kept their faith despite their surroundings
  - *I know*--Jesus is well aware of their evil surroundings; Antipas was killed for his great faith
  - *Throne of Satan*--headquarters of satanic opposition & Gentile base for false religions
- *v14-15* **Rebuke:** theological doctrine was correct, but practical doctrine & living was evil/corrupted
  - *Balaam*--advised Balak to entice Israel to sin; prototype of false teachers leading to compromise
  - *Nicolaitans*--most commentators: compromise with pagan morality & pagan doctrine; some also hold that *niko* (to conquer) & *laos* (laity) indicate a priestly hierarchy to rule over the church

⇨ Internal departure from God's Word via compromise is more dangerous than Satan's external attacks

⇨ (IMO) Some compromise in hopes that watering down God's Word will bring more folk to church

- *v16* **Exhortation:** *Repent*--be truly sorry & turn from evil to walk in right standing with the Lord
  - Although not deceived, the majority of the church showed indifference to the sin amongst them
- *v17* **Challenge**: *Overcomes*--as in all the letters, a call to stay true to God & His Word
  - *Hidden manna*--spiritual food the world doesn't see & a reference to Jesus as the Bread of Life
  - *White stone*--<u>assurance</u>; may represent: 1) the high priest's stone with God's name on it, 2) a stone received by a winning athlete that gave special privileges; 3) dismissal of all charges!
  - *New name*--personal message indicating relationship with God or significant rename like Abram

⇨ God never changes; we do. He is still against the immoral things He was against in the OT

⇨ This letter is a warning against compromise in doctrine, morals and/or teaching