

Session 2

June 13, 2021

STEADFAST IN DIFFICULTIES

Revelation 2:8-11

Located north of Ephesus with a deep harbor on the Aegean Sea lies Smyrna, the modern-day Turkish city of Izmir. History tells us the ancient city was settled in 3000 BC, then destroyed in 600 BC. It was in ruins for about 300 years, and then rebuilt by those who succeeded Alexander the Great. That rebuilt city was already 400 years old when John wrote the book of Revelation!

Smyrna was considered the most beautiful city in Asia Minor. It was well designed and efficient; but while it housed temples to the major Greek gods, the city most adored Rome, who rewarded her by allowing self-rule and special treatment.

Smyrna was an educated; a center of science and medicine. But it was a troubled city. What Rome did, Smyrna did. So, when Rome persecuted the early church, Smyrna followed suit. The church of Christ would suffer as a result. Three areas are mentioned:

Deep poverty (vv. 8-9a). Each of the three areas of suffering shared some common characteristics. First, all three were known by the Lord. There are no surprises here. Second, there is always a “but” involved, whether stated explicitly or implied. Third, there are clear applications for the church today. In these first verses, the risen Lord knows the *deep poverty* the church faced. We have no details, but the implication is that the persecution brought against them involved the confiscation of Christian property, a common practice by first and second century Rome. BUT, the Lord recognized and reminded them that not all wealth is held in material possessions (see Matt. 6:19-20). What *material wealth* the city could take away was far outweighed by the *spiritual wealth* the church possessed; a treasure that no one could touch. For reflection: *How often have your church people complained they couldn't do this or that, because they couldn't afford it? How do you think losing everything they owned would impact their relationship with the Lord?*

Devilish people (vv. 9b-10a). The second area of suffering came from vicious attacks from false teachers. Again, the details here are sketchy. *Slander* is the same word as *blasphemy*. While posing under the guise of religious piety, they apparently brought false testimony against both God and the church. The phrase “synagogue of Satan” is particularly harsh. Whereas the synagogue was supposed to be a place of Jewish worship, these false teachers made it a place of Satanic influence and vicious attack against Christ's own. BUT: believers in Smyrna were told not to be afraid. Just as Christ knew of the suffering that awaited, He also knew about the outcome. For reflection: *Can you think of other places in Scripture where those who were considered the most righteous were in reality the most vicious? What effect does such hypocrisy have in the life of the church?*

Determined persecution (vv. 10b-11). Three things are pointed out here. First, as a result of the attacks from the “synagogue of Satan,” some of the church members would be imprisoned. Second, the purpose of this would be to *test* them. On the side of the devil, the test would be to discourage and dissuade them from their faith. But on God's side of things, the testing of their faith would strengthen them (see James 1:2-4). Third, the suffering would be only for a period of

time. The stated *ten days* is likely not to be taken literally, but the implication is clear: the suffering would be temporary, with a definite end. BUT: while the suffering would be temporary, the reward would be eternal. Those who endured it would receive the *crown of life* and immunity from God's further judgement, which is the *second death*. For reflection: *Notice how often the course of human events is interrupted by God's "but." Are there other times in Scripture when this has happened? Are there times in your own life when you can see that the same thing occurred?*