



# Letters to the Church

Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church  
Revelation 2.8-11 | May 1, 2022  
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## I. Introduction to this Study

This week we will continue our sermon series from Revelation 2 & 3: Letters to the Church. We are studying the seven letters that Jesus wrote to the seven churches of Asia. This week, we will focus on the second letter to the church of Smyrna.

This is the only one of the seven cities that is still in existence; its modern name is Izmir. The church in Smyrna was one of the two churches that received no rebukes from the risen Jesus. But Smyrna was a suffering church, and this letter is devoted exclusively to an account of their past and present afflictions, a warning of more severe trials to come, and encouragements to endure, even unto death.

## II. Connecting with One Another

In what ways would you say you are spiritually rich?

Have you ever been insulted or mocked because of your faith in Jesus? How did you feel at the time? How did you respond?

## III. Study the Text

- a. **Read Revelation 2.8-11.** What is your initial reaction to this passage? What problems is this church facing? What questions do you have?
- b. How can the church at Smyrna be both poor and rich?
- c. Why is Jesus known as the First and Last?
- d. What does this passage teach about suffering?
- e. **Verse 8.** In the context of suffering and persecution, and the threat of death, how could the reminder that Jesus is “the First and the Last” be comforting? What would this say to the church of Smyrna about God’s sovereignty?
- f. **Verse 9.** The suffering was the result of persecution from two camps: 1) The local Jewish community in Smyrna despised the Christians and sought to make life difficult for them. (This is why they are referred to as “a synagogue of Satan,” because they were—even if unknowingly—serving the purposes of Satan) One way the Jews did this was by reporting Christians to... 2) The Roman authorities. Smyrna was a center for the cult of emperor worship. By the end of the first century, once a year, all citizens were required to burn a pinch of incense on an alter to Caesar and declare “Caesar is Lord.” Then they would receive a certificate proving they had done their civic duty.

What dilemma would this act of political loyalty place before Christians in Smyrna? Try to envision yourself in that context...how would you respond to that civic requirement? What cost might there be?



Do you find it comforting or disturbing to realize that Jesus knows about you and the circumstances of your life so completely? Explain.

- g. Smyrna was a very wealthy city yet the Christians there were very poor. They may have been poor because of the persecution they faced. Their homes may have been plundered; their goods stolen. They may have been prevented from gainful employment due to sanctions and bias. They may have also continued to practice the principle of extreme generosity Christ called them too. Likely their poverty was a result of all these factors. There was a great income gap in the city of Smyrna. Despite their poverty, Jesus called them "rich." What do you think he meant? (see **James 2.5**)

In much of the developed world a growing "income gap" exists between the very wealthy and the very poor. How should Christians feel about this? Respond to it?

- h. **Verse 10.** The phrase "ten days" is not meant to be taken literally; it is the normal Greek phrase for a short period of time. In this context it is almost certainly indicating that some Christians in Smyrna were going to be imprisoned for their refusal to sacrifice to the emperor, and after "ten days" (a short time) they would be killed. In the face of this reality the risen Jesus, through John, encourages them to remain faithful "even to the point of death."

While this extreme type of persecution is foreign to many contemporary, western Christians, some Christians in other countries still face the threat of death for following Jesus. What do you know about such situations around the world?

- i. **Verse 11.** Everyone experiences a "first death," that is, the end of human, earthly life. But the promise here is that for those who remain faithful to Jesus they will not experience a "second death," that is, eternal separation from God. (This is a good definition for "Hell," by the way.)

**Read Philippians 1:21.** This is the attitude the risen Jesus is encouraging the Christians of Smyrna to have. Is it your attitude? Can you say the words that the apostle Paul says in *Philippians 1:21*? How might that attitude change how you approach life?

#### IV. Pray

- Ask God to help you keep Jesus as the Lord of your life; to strengthen you so that you can remain faithful.
- Pray for greater courage as a Christian—not to attack or correct people you disagree with, but to live faithfully for Jesus.
- Pray for friends, family members, co-workers and acquaintances that need the love of Christ in their lives. Ask God to reveal Himself to them in ways they can understand and embrace and release them to God...

#### V. Digging Deeper

- How is this letter to the church in Smyrna, applicable to Good Shepherd in 2022?
- If you could share your heart to the church in Orange/LA counties, what kind of letter would you write?

