

March 4th, 2026

“Stop fearing scary things!” Revelation 2:8-11

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: “The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.””

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

The Book of Revelation. The letters to the seven Churches. That is our theme for this year’s Lenten midweek Services. Why this one? Because those letters are addressed not only to those specific congregations, but also to the Church Universal.

We could say that the Risen Lord Jesus in those letters speaks to us. And why does He do that? Because He wants to warn Christians, His beloved brothers and sisters, of the dangers that we may be facing. Which we are facing from time to time. To warn about situations or attitudes which may endanger our faith and our very salvations.

This week we will meditate upon the letter to the church in Smyrna. And, perhaps, this is the most uncomfortable of those letters, the most frightening warning of all, at least humanly speaking. What is the Risen Lord saying?

First, he acknowledges their challenging circumstances. **“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan.”**

That congregation was poor materially, but as Jesus says, they were blessed mightily with spiritual riches. That often is the case among Christians. And on top of material challenges, they were in a situation where they, indeed, experienced different hardships and tribulations, including slander, attacks, and very real persecutions.

For Christians in Smyrna that was not something theoretical. Something that was happening with other Christians somewhere else. On the other side of the world. Or in some other time, centuries ago. That was their very real concern. They didn’t know what the next day may bring. How do we react when we are in situations like that?

Where the threats are real and likely. Uncertainty reigns. No tangible escape or protection. We fear. Yes, we do. Our minds may be running in overdrive day and night picturing different terrifying scenarios of what may happen, what tribulation may fall upon us, how I may suffer, what it may cost to me, and so on. We do fear...

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Into such a situation Jesus speaks: **“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”** Okay... How does that sound to you? Did you hear what Jesus said?

He didn't say: “Stop fearing, for nothing is going to happen, it is all going to be fine. Trust me!” No! We wish He said that, but no! Jesus acknowledges that they will have to suffer. That some of them will be thrown into prison, that they will be heavily tested, and some of them may even lose their lives, but... on the bright side, sure, all of that will be for a limited time only. How does that sound to you?

Remember when Jesus said a similar thing to His disciples as Matthew has recorded it: **“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”** [Matthew 10:28]

“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” We can presume that John the apostle did send those letters to those seven congregations. That the saints in Smyrna did receive this letter, that they did read it and discuss it among themselves.

Now... It is believed that John the apostles wrote the Book of Revelation sometimes in the last decade of the 1st century. At that time in that congregation in Smyrna there was a young man, in his early twenties. And it is likely that he too heard the words of this letter, and they shaped both his heart and his life. His name was Polycarp.

Later he became a bishop of Smyrna, a well-known, highly regarded and respected man not only among Christians but also their neighbors. Then in 155 AD local level Christian persecutions arose in Roman provinces of Asia, including Smyrna.

Some Christians were arrested and they were offered a choice. To deny the Lord Jesus, to publicly confess that Caesar [that is, Roman Emperor] is the Lord, or lose your life. When elderly Bishop Polycarp was brought before the crowds, even some of the Roman officials who respected him highly tried to convince him: “Just say it publicly and you will be safe. You will save your life...”.

They knew what he believed. They just wanted to save his life. “Just say it publicly and save yourself! What a big deal!” But when Bishop Polycarp was asked to deny His Lord, this is what he said: “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?”

He was executed for his faith. Publicly. Burned. Stabbed.

Do you find this inspiring? Encouraging? Not sure...

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One of my teachers, then in his late 70's, said to a group of students: "There is something that I fear a lot. That if I was in such a situation where I needed to make such a public confession, I am afraid that I would be too weak to do that."

"But then again... [he continued] on the other hand, I believe that if such a situation came, the Holy Spirit would give me all the strength that I may need to do whatever He wants me to do." This is most certainly true. And this is so comforting.

Tribulations and persecutions may come. Some may lose their freedom and be thrown in prison. Some may even lose their life. This has been happening with Christians since the beginning and will continue till the end of this age.

But now remember, who is the one who speaks these words of warning. **"The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life."** It is Jesus, the Son of God, who died and rose again. He has already done it all. He was persecuted, he was arrested, He suffered, He was crucified and He died. And... then He roused again.

He doesn't speak about something unfamiliar to Him. He speaks about something that He has gone through and came out victorious. He endured more pain than any of us ever will. Not only the physical pain of being beaten and then crucified, but far greater pain of being separated from His Father, while carrying the sin of the entire world, including all mine and yours. He did it on His own. Alone. Abandoned by everyone.

You are not alone. He is the One who now cheers you up: **"Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."**

Fear not anyone, or anything that can kill the body. Fear the One who can kill the soul. But... this One, He is here for you. He is the One who has promised: **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."** [Heb 13:5] The Risen Lord Jesus, the first and the last. Keeping His eye on you. Walking with you. Cheering you up!

"Keep up! Endure! A little bit longer! A bit more and you will be there!"

We all are heading to that day when we will meet Him. Face to face. And as you will cross through the doors of death from this life into the next one, the crown of life will be waiting for you. Life everlasting. And the second death won't hurt you anymore.

Be faithful. Let your Lord carry you through.

Amen.