

NOTES TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

Just 4 verses, but it punches way above its length and brings up some huge issues. We will see that the message here is a matter of life and death.

Pictures showing geography, location and how Izmir looks today. Ancient ruins are a few square blocks in the middle of Turkey's 2nd largest city.

About Polycarp 69-155 A.D. Bishop of Smyrna and important early church leader
A "hearer of John". He knew John and exhibited the kind of hold endurance and steadfastness that John wrote about.

- A "hearer of John". Taught by John. Important for apostolic succession
- Bishop of Smyrna
- His letter to Philippians quotes scripture
- Visited Rome
- Considered a godly saint beyond reproach
- Willing to die, rather than deny Christ

His martyrdom matters here because it embodies what this section of Rev 2 tells us about Smyrna.

a manuscript written in the form of a letter that relates the religious martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (the site of the modern city of Izmir, Turkey) and disciple of John the Apostle in the 2nd century AD. It forms the earliest account of Christian martyrdom outside of the New Testament. The author of Martyrdom of Polycarp is unknown.

Polycarp is brought to a stadium in Smyrna and encouraged to swear by Caesar and thus affirm that the emperor was a god. Polycarp declines, and the officials attempt to burn him alive. However, the fire miraculously avoids him in a circle, merely giving him a heavenly glow. Instead, Polycarp is stabbed; his blood goes everywhere, extinguishing the fire, similar to Jesus's sacrifice. The Jews influence the governor to burn the body so as to remove all evidence and avoid his body becoming a shrine.

In the Martyrdom, Polycarp is recorded as saying on the day of his death: "Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong."^[3] Polycarp goes on to say: "How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked."

- Prosperous Jewish community in Smyrna in ancient times
- Some were "a synagogue of Satan"
- Tolerated in the Muslim Ottoman Empire
- Thousands came to escape persecution in Europe
- Beautiful synagogues today
- Izmir one of the most diverse and tolerant places in modern, Islamist Turkey

Read and comment of Text of Revelation 2:8-11

2:8 Angel=messenger. Thought to be the bishop or overseer

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness of what lies beyond death for us, because he has gone through it and conquered.

2:9 What a blessing for these believers in poverty to have the Lord say they are rich.

The Jewish community had prosperity and power and they did not.

2:10 Do not fear prison or death??!! They may have been held for 10 days while being pressured or tortured to worship the emperor or to deny Christ. Perhaps if they didn't capitulate they would be killed. The crown of life is worth far more than trials or death.

James 1:2. Endure with divinely empowered endurance.

Col 1:11, 1 Cor 13:7

Rev 13:9-10. Believers are empowered and expected to endure under the persecution of the antichrist.

2:11 Whoever has ears...! What a promise not to be hurt by the second death! This is not a threat to those worried they might not endure. It is inspiration and encouragement to endure.

Rev 20:14-15. The second death is to be cast into the Lake of Fire. Everyone will be resurrected, every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father. Those who rejected him will not be in the book of life.

Rev 20:4-6. Believers, martyrs coming to life and reigning with Christ.

If you are pre-trib, then you believe this is a separate event, after the rapture, to raise those who died for Christ "during the tribulation". Since I believe the church will face the antichrist until the 6th seal, I see this as including born-again believers in the body of Christ. Either way, look at the beauty of the promise.

Most of the teachers whom I have read who are not pre-trib believe that the righteous before Christ are raised with the dead in Christ. I'm not sure whether their resurrection is the same as the rapture or a separate "resurrection of the just". Either way, we and they are not subject to the 2nd death.

Conclusion

- Jesus Christ is the faithful witness of what lies beyond death and he has the power of resurrection.
- Though they experienced poverty— he assures them they are rich.
- God allowed the devil to threaten, persecute and kill them. That will also be true when the antichrist reigns.
- Jesus Christ will grant the crown of life to those who are killed.
- The second death has no power over the overcomers.

