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Seven Churches, Seven Lenses Part 2

The Church in Smyrna

Text: Revelation 2:8-11

This is the shortest of the seven letters. In our English Bibles, this letter is four verses long. The letter is from the One who describes Himself as the First and the Last. Vance Havner said of Christ: “He is the Alpha and Omega- and all the alphabet between!” (*Repent or Else!.*p.31)

Smyrna was a wealthy city approximately 35 miles north of Ephesus. The name of the city means *myrrh*, a perfume. It has some similarities to Ephesus. Both were seaport cities. Both were commercial and cultural centers. Ancient Smyrna had a stadium, a gymnasium, a 20,000-seat theater, a grain market, a civic agora (for political assemblies) and a commercial agora (a marketplace). [Leonard Thompson. *Revelation*.p. 68]

Unlike Ephesus, however, Smyrna is not in ruins. Today, it is a thriving city whose name is Izmir (the Turkish rendering of the word Smyrna). It is the third largest city in Turkey, after Istanbul and Ankara.

In 2017 the population of Izmir was 4.2 million.

**The Three Knowings of Christ**

1.“I know your works,

2. I know your troubles

3. I know your self-perception. That is, I know what you think of you. You think you’re poor but you are really rich.” That bears repeating. Christ knows what His church does(works) suffers(tribulation) and thinks (you think you're impoverished). The tribulation to which Christ refers is not a mere inconvenience. It is intense suffering and persecution for the gospel’s sake. That is, these people will suffer because they are followers of Jesus. We sometimes use the word tribulation to describe what went on in an annual treatment at Aspen Dental or how we felt when we couldn't get tickets for the play, *Hamilton.* The tribulation to which Christ refers (Greek- *thlipsis*) is *pressure.* That word was sometimes used to describe the pressure of a stone on a person’s body. It describes the pressure one experiences because has said “yes” to the way of the cross.

“You think you’re poor”, says Jesus. In the areas where it matters, we are rich. I speak not of things material. Although, in the larger economy, nearly every person here is doing better than two thirds of the world. The riches to which our Lord refers are of a different kind.

2 Corinthians 6:10 (Paul, referring to himself)

*as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*

James 2:5

*Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*

“I know the way you see yourself. You see poverty, I see riches.”

“I also know the posers in your midst: those who say they are Jews but who are, in reality, a synagogue of Satan.”

“I know your future. It’s going to be rough. Your future contains suffering, testing...and a crown.”

The prosperity movement suggests that your future is bright and has in it only material blessing and victory in every area, and hallelujahs at every turn. I wish that were so. However, the word spoken here, to a first century church, might well be spoken to us. On our way to victory and crowns and overcomers’ status, there may very well be some blasphemers and posers and devils with whom we must deal. Look at this church through the lens of the ordinary, faith-filled life. Jesus is talking to us, as He spoke to this first century church. “I know you”. The Greek word translated *know* refers to a knowledge gained through reflection or thinking. Jesus has analyzed this church. He knows them well- and intimately. He knows you and me the same way.

There is no condemnation of these saints. There are only two churches of the seven to whom Christ does not issue a rebuke or warning (2:4; 2:14; 2:20; 3:2; 3:16). The other is Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13).

These Smyrna saints are going to suffer but they should not be afraid. (v.10). They will suffer for ten days. This probably is not literal, but, rather, refers to a limited, fixed, symbolic period of time (Nehemiah 5:18; Daniel 1:12; Jeremiah 42:7).

Be faithful. Fidelity leads to the crown. Picture the garland/wreath put on those who win at the Isthmian or Olympic games.

Note the call to faithfulness has a hook in it. They are to be faithful how long? Until death. And then?

The crown. I remember the saints singing in my youth, asking the haunting question, Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?

One of the stanzas says,

*The consecrated cross I’ll bear*

*Til death shall set me free*

*And then go home my crown to wear*

*For there’s a crown for me.*

The crown (*stephanos*) is promised to the faithful. That’s the Christ-followers at Smyrna and by God’s grace that you, that’s me.

I see this letter to this church as a reminder that I am intimately known by the One whom I seek to know intimately!! I hear the Alpha and Omega saying to me, as he said to the church at Smyrna, “I know you. I know all about you. I know your works, your struggles and even what you think of yourself.”

**Illus.**

Network World reports:

We’re obsessed with our phones; a new study has found. The heaviest smartphone users click, tap or swipe on their phone 5,427 times a day, according to researcher Dscout.

That’s the top 10 percent of phone users, so one would expect it to be excessive. However, the rest of us still touch the addictive things 2,617 times a day on average. No small number.

The research firm, which specializes in consumer reactions to products, recruited 94 Android device users and installed special software on their smartphones. The tool tracked each user’s “interaction” over five days, all day, the company says in a blog post on its website.

“And by every interaction, we mean every tap, type, swipe and click. We’re calling them touches,” it explains.

Averaging out the numbers, the aforementioned figures mean the heaviest users are touching their devices a couple of million times in one year, Dscout says.

How many times a day do we interact with the risen Christ or with God our Creator? When it comes to communicating with this One who would be known and who knows *us*, are we heavy users? Do we speaking with Him and listen for Him often?

She or he who has an ear, let us hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Amen