

Revelation 2:8-11 - Be Faithful to Attain Crown of Life

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Introduction - Jesus tells the church not to fear suffering or death but to remain faithful and receive the crown of life. Christians endure hardship by setting their faith and hope on Christ and trusting His deliverance from the second death.

Background on Smyrna - Smyrna's name is derived from the name of the perfume, "myrrh." 35 miles north of Ephesus, Smyrna was an important seaport known for its beauty. It's the third largest modern-day city in Turkey.¹ Smyrna competed with 6 other cities to build a temple to Emperor Tiberius and became "temple warden" (see inscriptions describing this). Christians were heavily persecuted during the 1st century. The martyr Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna (killed ~155 AD). Jews gathered firewood on the Sabbath to help burn him.¹ "Eighty and six years have I served the Lord, and He never wronged me: How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior?" -Polycarp¹ Photos: <https://www.bibleplaces.com/smyrna/>
<https://holylandphotos.org/browse/smyrnaizmir> <https://holylandphotos.org/browse/smyrna-artifacts>

v8 - Description of Jesus: The First and the Last and the One come to Life - He always is and forever will be. He's eternal (Rev 1:17-18; Is 41:4). Yet as a man, He died and was resurrected (Act 2:22-33). The church needs this reminder of Who Jesus is and what He experienced. Will they fully identify themselves with His crucifixion and life? (Gal 2:20)

v9 - Commendation: Suffering but rich - The church is enduring tribulation, *thlipsis*, a pressing together or pressure. Even though they're in abject poverty (due to persecution), Jesus says they are rich. Their treasures are laid up in heaven as Jesus has made them heirs of a better kingdom (Matt 6:19-24; Prov 30:7-9; Jas 2:5; 2Co 6:10). Jesus was also impoverished for us (2Co 8:9). They are blasphemed by "false Jews" who lie about their true identity (Rev 3:9; John 8:44). Jesus does not mince words about those opposed to the gospel and church (Mat 23:15-27; Luk 11:44).

v10 - Instruction: Don't fear suffering, be faithful in testing for the crown of life - Jesus gives the church no rebuke in the midst of their persecution (Rom 12:15; Job 16:2). He tells them not to be afraid even though they'll soon be cast into prison like John. He has warned them ahead of time (John 14:27; 15:18-25; 16:1-4). Christians will experience suffering (Job 2:10; Jas 1:2-4; Phil 1:21, 29; 3:10; 2 Tim 3:12). Their instruction is to remain faithful unto death, just like Jesus (Phl 2:8; Rev 1:5; 1Co 15:20-22) and many other saints (Heb 10:32-39; 11). While running the race, we keep our eyes set on the Judge and the prize: eternal life with Him (Heb 12:1-2; 11:6; 1Co 9:25; 1 Pet 5:4; James 1:12). If our lives are truly devoted to Christ, to die is gain (Ps 56:3-4; 1Th 4:13). Jesus offers us comfort in our afflictions. (2Co 1:1-5).

v11 - Promise to overcomers: Won't be hurt by second death - Hell is described as the second death in Revelation (Rev. 20:4-6, 11-15; 21:5-8; 22:14-15). While believers may be persecuted and killed, they know that because they've been born again in Christ, they will only experience a physical death and not a "second death." Everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but faith in Jesus grants salvation, forgiveness and eternal life (Rom 3:10-11, 23; 8:1; 10:8-11; Lu 10:20). Christians should not fear what man can do to them (Mat 10:28; Ps 56:11; 118:6).

So what, now what? This church is giving themselves up in service to Christ in the midst of persecution. Will they live up to their town's namesake as a fragrant offering to the Lord? Jesus comforts them by reminding them of His promise of salvation and eternal life and telling them to remain faithful.

- How is the Christian crucified with Christ but alive? Have you experienced a transformation like that?
- What are the riches in Christ? Do we consider ourselves rich in Christ? How do we store up treasures in heaven?
- What would it look like if we unashamedly lived for Christ? (Rom 1:16) Do we fear rejection by strangers, coworkers, friends, or family members if we share our faith? If so, why? Can we face death like Polycarp?
- Do I accept suffering and let it turn me towards Christlikeness or see it as unfair? How can you comfort others?

¹ Revelation: The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries. John F. Walvoord. 60-61.