



October 19

Conquer Series: Crowned Church

Revelation 2:8–11 (ESV)

To the Church in Smyrna

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. **9** “ ‘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. **10** 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. **11** 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.’

What happens when we’ve been good, but life goes bad?

We come to Jesus’ second letter to the church in **Smyrna**. A pattern in these letters that Jesus uses:

- **I am.**
- **I know.**
- **I have.** (Smyrna is one of the two churches that does not have anything negative said about it.)
- **I will.** There’s an **I will** for these Smyrnians. But not before the **I knows**. Let’s look at a few of them here, and then we’ll get to the **I will**.

Jesus says, **I know your trouble.**

- Smyrna, like Ephesus last week, was a proud and beautiful city. It was called the Crown of Asia. Today it's called Izmir, and it's in Turkey.
- It was not only magnificent, but phenomenally wealthy.
- The most important part of Smyrna we need to know is that *it was intensely loyal to Rome*.
- It was the center of Ceasar worship. It means they worshipped the **Ceasar as a god**.
- Under the Emperor Domitian, Emperor worship was required by every Roman citizen.
- And you can see the trouble these Christian had in Smyrna. They're not about to blaspheme God and say *Caesar is Lord* when **Jesus is the one true Lord and God**.
- They're in tribulation. The Greek word here means *intense pressure*.
- Our word *tribulation* comes from the Latin *tribulum*. A **tribulum** was a huge stone wheel that was used for crushing wheat to separate the kernel from the shell.
- This church is being crushed and ground to the kernel just like that. They're being pressed to worship a man as god. And when they did not cave, but remained devoted to Jesus, they suffered for it.
- Jesus says, **I know** your trouble. I'm aware.
- You have to know that. You're not alone. **Jesus knows**. Don't ever forget that he does.

And what was the trouble? A couple of things.

Jesus says, **I know your poverty.**

- Refusal to worship Ceasar would mean loss. They were impoverished because they followed Christ.
- No doubt there's something all of us can point to and say, *I've lost out, I'm poor, because I love Jesus the most*.
- But what does Jesus say here? *I know your poverty (but you are rich)*.
- It's a great reminder from Jesus to be sure and get our definitions straight.
- Don't ever mistake material things for true wealth.
- You're not even being close to rich in this world if you don't have Jesus. And even if you don't have anything in this world, but you have Jesus? You're astronomically rich.

Jesus says, **I know your enemies.**

- Look at verse 9. *I know the slander of those who say they are Jews, but are not. In fact, they are the synagogue of Satan*.
- Jesus knows the ones who oppose you.
- Probably what's going on here is that the Jewish people, who are hostile to those who abandoned Judaism to follow Jesus, have gotten the attention of the Romans and pointed their fingers at these Christians.
- These Jews didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah. They don't believe he's God. So Jesus says, *They're not real Jews like they think. And in fact, they're not even on God's side. They're in Satan's hands*.

Jesus says, **I know the end.**

- And...you're not going to like it. What is it?
- Revelation 2:10 (ESV) *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....*
- What's his message? It's, *You're going to suffer more.* But **I know the end.**
- But at the end of verse 10 Jesus says, *...Do not fear what you are about to suffer.*
- What happens when we pray for suffering to cease, and Jesus comes in and says, *No. The suffering you have is what you have. In fact, here's some more.*
- Look at what comes after the *do not fear...* it's just *be faithful.*
- Following Jesus likely means your signing up for suffering. There should be a warning: *Things could go wrong. You could lose. You could end up poisoned. You could end up dead. You could end up being burned at the stake.*

In this very place, Smyrna, in 155AD, there was a man named Polycarp. Polycarp was a disciple of John. Undoubtedly, Polycarp read Jesus' letter. Maybe Polycarp was the one to read the letter out loud to the whole church?

- But on Saturday the 23rd of February in 155AD, the public games were going on in the stadium in Smyrna. And suddenly everybody started shouting "*Away with the atheists! Let Polycarp be searched for!*"
- His location was given away by a tortured slave, and on the way into the city, not even the officials wanted to see Polycarp die. The captain in charge said to him, "*Just say Caesar is Lord. You don't even have to mean it. Say it. What harm is it to say it and sacrifice to Caesar?*"
- But Polycarp didn't budge.
- He was given one last chance to worship Caesar. He said, "*Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?*"
- They started to nail him to a stake so they could burn him alive. He said, '*Leave me as I am, for he who gives me power to endure the fire will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by the nails.*'
- It is said that the flames left Polycarp untouched. In the end, an executioner stabbed him to death to do what the flames could not.
- Jesus says, *Don't fear what you are about to suffer.* Those words were for many, but no doubt they were explicitly for Polycarp. Polycarp did not fear.
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- And why? It's in the **I will** of the passage. **I will give you a crown of life.**
- That's the end that Jesus knew. *Stay faithful Polycarp, and you'll be crowned.*
- And if crowned, you will have conquered. And you'll never be hurt by the second death.
- See that at the end? What's that? The second death Jesus is talking about is the judgement of God.
- If a person doesn't know Jesus, then he'll be born once and die twice. But if a person knows Jesus, they'll be born twice and die once. And they will be crowned with glory and honor as they arrive home.

- That's the end. That's the end for you! Just be faithful to Jesus. Your crown is waiting.

God, give us ears to hear today what the Spirit is saying to our church. Help us to not fear. Help us to be faithful. Help us to conquer, and not be hurt by the second death. It's only in Jesus that these things are possible. Jesus, we love you the most. Amen.