

March 3rd, 2024  
Revelation 2:8-11 The Church of Smyrna

### Revelation 2:8-11

**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.’

### [Show Revelation Chart]

- We are currently in what is called the “**Church Age**”
- The Old Testament is called the **Age of the Law**. These laws are called the Mosaic Law or the Laws of Moses. So from **Genesis** to the last book in the Old Testament, **Malachi**. Over 600 laws in OT.
- The New Testament, starting from Acts 2. There were 120 in upper room praying and worshipping when the, people encountered the permanent indwelling among the believers at Pentecost. These disciples witness the **birth of the New Testament church**. Jesus commands this expansion of His church:

### Matthew 28:18-20

**18** And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20 teaching** them to observe all that I

have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

So before the end of the age or the 2nd Coming of Christ, Jesus is telling His followers to “Go, **make disciples, baptizing, and teaching them the Word of God**” and the end will come.

Jesus has kept His promise and the church has been growing for 2,000 years.

[\[Show the Chart again\]](#)

The ***Church Age will end*** (meaning no longer will you start a church, or people coming to Jesus) ***when God’s people are raptured out of the world*** and taken to be with the Lord.

**Revelation** is the “uncovering” or “unveiling” of the Person, Power and Plan of Jesus Christ. In other words, the **glory of God** will be revealed. And Revelation is a prophetic book, the second coming of Jesus.

**When will the end come?**

#### **Matthew 24:14**

And this gospel of the kingdom will be **proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations**, and **then the end will come.**

When the “Good News” of Jesus is spread to all the nations and then the end will come.

So God’s desire before His second coming is **John 3:16**

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So here is John the last of the 12 apostles in the book of Revelation receives a vision from Jesus and starts a to hard conversation about all the believers and the people inside the church. Jesus wants to have a heart to ***heart talk about us***, the believers.

You know what is very interesting, is that ***Jesus wants to talk to the churches first*** before He shares about the end times, apocalypse, or the end of the world. Jesus wants to talk to us. He wants to talk to the believers.

So when Jesus is talking to the seven churches in Asia Minor, He is not just talking about these seven churches, but to all churches throughout history and in every country.

And as you read the book of Revelation and you get to the churches, you have to know these two things:

### **Letters to 7 Churches (Revelation 2-3)**

**Literal in Existence:** Each church was an actual church located in Turkey during the 1st Century A.D.

**Spiritual Relevance for Today:** Each church addresses similar spiritual issues relevant to Believers today.

### **[Show the image of the seven churches in Asia Minor]**

Remember, Jesus is talking about all the churches throughout history of time and to all the churches in every continent. And we begin with the very first church called Ephesus.

This is just a short re-cap of the ***Church in Ephesus***: The first church, Jesus was talking about the Church in Ephesus and this was a great church, but **30 years into the future** in the book of Revelation, the church became cold and there was ***no love*** there.

In the beginning, they had passion for Jesus.

### **Acts 19:13-22**

**13** Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure (***command, bind***) you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” **14** Seven sons of a Jewish **high priest** named Sceva

were doing this. **15** But the **evil spirit** answered them, “***Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?***” **16** And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

[“Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, ***but who are you?***” This very interesting, you can do the Lords work and if you don’t know Jesus or have a deep relationship with him or that you have never surrendered your heart to the Lord, then you are open for the demons to attack you.] ***[But here is the turning point of what happens, when you do surrender your life to Jesus.]***

**17** And this became known to **all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks**. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. **18** Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. **19** And a number of those who had **practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all**. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. **20** So the **word of the Lord** continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Here comes Paul sharing the “Good News” of Jesus and people are being transformed, demon being released, and the people are willing to burn their very expensive books. In **verse 20** it says, “***the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily***”: which means that even in their midst of the most difficult times and trials of life, and the adversity that they have faced, they have not forsaken God’s truth. ***They fought for God’s truth***, no matter how difficult their lives were. But yet God has “something” against them:

### **Revelation 2:2-5**

**2** “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. **3** I

know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. **4** But I have this against you, that ***you have abandoned the love you had at first.*** **5** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.

If not, I will come to you and **remove your lampstand from its place**, unless you repent

God is saying, “***You guys have obtained truth, fought for the truth, and held onto the truth but you lost the love you had at first.***” It’s important to have the truth but without love it’s just “***a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal***” (1 Cor. 13:1), it has no power without love.

So, God is telling the Ephesians to “**repent**” or to change your mind or to change your ways back to the love you had with him. So the question, we asked everyone for last Sunday:

### Questions from Last Sunday:

1. If you have been a Christian for a long time, but have lost your first love, then God is wanting you to go back to the first love.
2. Second, if you have never encountered the zeal, passion and love, then the opportunity was given for you to encounter that amazing love of God.

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Now we go to our second church, called “Smyrna”

### Revelation 2:8

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

***“The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life”:***

This is the title for Jesus. Every church has a title, meaning, ***it defines who Jesus is***, He is reminding us that He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the sum of all things.

But something happened with the Christians in Smyrna:

### **End of Christian Persecution:**

A.D. 100 - End of Apostolic Age (John who is the last apostle dies)

A.D. 312 - Emperor of Rome, Constantine made Christianity a **state religion**

So for over 300 years, you had heavy persecution on Christians and thousands of believers died for their faith. So some scholars indicated that ***over 6 million Christians died for their faith***. And then Constantine comes into power and gives freedom to the Christians.

**So, how did this happen overnight?**

**[Show the symbol of Chi-Rho the Greek symbol for Christos]**



**Constantine I vs Maxentius (Battle of Milvian Bridge):** Battle of Milvian Bridge, (October 28, 312 CE), major battle in a Roman civil war between Constantine 1 and Maxentius. After the collapse of the Roman Empire's Second Tetrarchy (joint rule by four governors), Constantine and Maxentius asserted competing claims to the imperial throne. At Maxentius's goading, Constantine invaded the Italian Peninsula. A lightning campaign saw Maxentius killed in battle at the Milvian Bridge on the outskirts of Rome.

***Constantine's victory confirmed his role as ruler of the Western Empire.***

According to ancient sources, Constantine converted to Christianity just before the battle, which affected his decision to end Christian persecution and establish Christianity as the most ***favoured religion within the Roman Empire***.

Constantine's vision of the cross in the sky with the inscription that read, ***"By this symbol you will conquer"***

### **Constantine**

- Constantine supposedly had a dream in which Jesus instructed him to use the symbol he had seen ***as protection in battle***.

- The next day, he had the ***Chi-Rho drawn on the shields of his men*** which he ended up winning the battle.
- He believed it happened thanks to the ***help of Jesus Christ through this symbol*** and Constantine continued to use the Chi-Rho symbol prominently in all his battles.
- Several years later, he declared ***Christianity a legal faith in the Roman Empire***.
- It was this turning point at the Battle of Milvian Bridge was the turning point for Christianity becoming a widespread.
- Listen, if God can use Pharaoh in Egypt, then God can use Constantine in whatever He deems necessary. Just like what He did with the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

### **[Show example of ancient building with Chi-Rho symbol]**

So, if you look at any ancient buildings across Europe, you will see a lot of Chi-Rho symbols everywhere. I want to remind everyone that this symbol has been around before, ***Constantine came into power***. He just used it to his advantage.

You have to remember that during the persecution, many Christians were using this symbol to see if the other person was a fellow believer.

**Chi-Rho** pronounced as “**KEE-ro**”: The Chi Rho is a Christian symbol for “Christ” written by putting together the two Greek letters “**Chi (X)**” and “**Rho (P)**” which are the first two letters in Greek of the name of “**CHRist**” and we see today the usage of “**Xmas**” in our modern day ***Christmas***. [Christmas = Xmas]

X = Chi

P = Rho

[Show illustration of the word Christos in Greek]

Because of the persecution for over 300 years for Christians, many people used Chi-Rho on the symbols to see if other people they meet were Christians or not.

And, what is interesting is that early Christians used another symbol ***fish***. During the early days of Christianity, Christians were often put to death for practicing their faith, so they worshiped ***in secret places***. A fish painted or etched on the outside door of a house let other Christians know that they would be safe and welcome inside.

### **[Show the symbol of the Christian fish symbol]**

Example: One Christian who was uncertain if the other person was a believer of Jesus or not would use his feet to draw half of the fish symbol and if the other person was a Christian, then he or she would draw the other half of the fish.

### **Fish = ixthus / ictus**

Now you got fish symbols in bumperstickers and just about everywhere.

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Now let's go to the second church in Asia Minor Smyrna:

### **Smyrna:**

- Smyrna was founded 3 centuries before Christ by Alexander the Great
- Located about 35 miles North of Ephesus
- Along the trade route from Persia to Rome. The route was a major commercial trade.
- It was a sea port city also and it is second only to Ephesus in terms of wealth.
- Population was about 250,000 people

As a seminary student, I had to learn about a very well known Christian leader by the name of Polycarp, and ***“Polycarp” was a***



***personal disciple of the Apostle John*** and Polycarp was burn to death in public - just because he was a Christian.

Polycarp was the bishop of the Church at Smyrna in Asia Minor. Persecution against the Christians broke out there and believers were being fed to the wild beasts in the arena.

**Polycarp last words:**

“For over 80 years I have served my Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Not once has he denied me and I shall not deny Him.”

***Not once has he denied me:*** meaning, not once has God every failed His promises to His people.

Here is this man who encountered Jesus and fell in love with God. And in his years of experience of knowing God, “***I am good with being burned alive, because I know where I am going after my death.***”

Side Note: ***Smyrna*** was well known for selling the “**myrrh**”

**Matthew 2:11**

And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and **myrrh**.

What is the difference between Frankincense and Myrrh?

Frankincense, is harvested from the ***Boswellia tree***, often **yields a sweet, warm, and woody aroma**, making it a popular choice for incense and perfumes.

**Myrrh**, comes from the **Commiphora tree** and typically presents a more **earthy and slightly bitter scent**.

Frankincense and Myrrh is expensive because it takes a lot of time and energy to take the gums out. And that's why it was only given to people of royalty, kings and queens.

So, if you work or do trade with "myrrh" you make a lot of money. But if you're a Christian during these times in Smyrna, like Polycarp, they will persecute you. And a lot of Christians suffered greatly. That's why you had a lot of people do the Chi-Rho and the fish symbol.

Now, I am going to mainly go over Revelation 2:9

### **Revelation 2:9**

"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**."

### **Synagogue of Satan:**

Synagogue = House of gathering. A synagogue is a place of Jewish worship.

So is Jesus saying the Jews worship Satan?

### **Revelation 3:9**

Behold, I will make those of the **synagogue of Satan** who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

In the early church, those who taught a combination of God's grace and human effort were called "Judaizers." The word **Judaizer** comes from a Greek verb meaning "**to live according to Jewish customs**."

A Judaizer taught that, in order for a Christian to truly be right with God, he must conform to the Mosaic Law. **Circumcision, especially, was promoted as necessary for salvation**. Gentiles (non-Jews) had

to become Jewish proselytes *first*, and *then* they could come to Christ.

**The doctrine** of the Judaizers was a mixture of **grace** (through Christ) and **works** (through the keeping of the Law). This false doctrine was dealt with in Acts 15 and strongly condemned in the book of Galatians.

**The gospel message was very simple**: Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins once and for all on Friday and then on the third day was resurrected on Sunday to give us life. You add anything to this, you have corrupted the gospel message.

What the Judaizers did was to **focus on works based salvation**. That's why you see Jehovah Witnesses knocking on people's doors. You have mormons riding on bicycles with shirt, tie and a name tag. That's why you have Muslims that pray towards Mecca 5 times a day and circle around the Kaaba 7 times and kiss, touch or wave to the black stone that fell from the sky.

Can this Kaaba save you?  
Can the rock of Kaaba give you grace?

### **Ephesians 2:8-9**

**8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Anything and Everything that is outside the gospel message is **inspired by Satan**. Listen, if we say that there is a God and say there is no Satan, what do we contribute evil. But if we say that there is a God then we also have to say that Satan exists.

### **Revelation 2:10-11**

**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**.'

**If you born once, then you die twice (second death)**  
**If your born twice, then your die once**

Let me explain the born twice first.

### **John 3:3**

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Born Twice: First you were born of from your mother. But this first birth, doesn't give you spiritual life. I've met with a lot of people who are alive physically, but they are dead on the inside. [Turn to your neighbor and say, "***Are you dead on the inside?***"]

Listen, anyone can tell, if someone is dead on the inside, right. And you can also tell, if someone is alive on the inside. So when you know Jesus and have a relationship with Him, then you have a **second birth. You are born again.**

### **Romans 10:9-10**

**9** because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

So what is this second death?

**Second Death:** Listen, we all die once, right. All of us have 100 percent guarantee that we will all die. But if you believe in Jesus then death is just beginning to life in eternity with Jesus. So you don't have a second death, you have an eternal life. ***You go from death to life.***

But if you don't believe in God and reject the free gift of Jesus, **then you have a second death** and that's eternity without God.

Remember, God never forces anyone to go to heaven. So you have the free will to choose either 2nd life or second death.

That's why Jesus is saying that you must be "**born again**" to see the kingdom of God.

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### **Revelation 2:9**

"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.

**"I know your tribulation and your poverty":**

- In the 1st and 2nd century and you're a Jew and then on top of that you believed in Jesus, you weren't just poor, you were totally broke, isolated and hated.
- You will get cut off from your family and friends. People will not want to associate with you.
- Your livelihood will go south or bankrupt because you believe in Jesus.

### **But what does it mean to be rich?**

Listen, you might be "materially" be rich, but spiritually, be poor. I've known a guy, who was a multi-millionaire and he was asking for advice about life, because he was in his 4th, marriage and he still wasn't happy with life.

The Bible tells us that we are "spiritually rich." Listen, you cannot buy "**peace**" and "**eternal joy**."

The Apostle Paul tells about many riches that God gives freely:

- Riches of His Kindness (Romans 2:4)
- Riches of His glory (Romans 9:3)

- Riches of Wisdom and Knowledge of God (Romans 11:33)
- Riches of God's Grace (Ephesians 1:7)

There were so many times in my life, where I just messed up. There were so many times, that after I accepted Christ, that I didn't follow God or that I didn't obey God. There were times when I sinned but God in His grace kept me alive.

You have to remember, when God gives you these riches, these "riches" are for you to share, whether it be "kindness," "Glory," "Teaching about wisdom and knowledge of God," and "God's Grace." Remember, it's never about you, but it's all about "through you" God's riches will flow and help others. God says that you are "rich!" Amen and Amen.

### **Revelation 2:10-11**

**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.'