

He Knows • Rev 2:8-11

Read Acts 19:8–10 >> [Set Scene]

⁸ And he [Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for 3 months, reasoning & persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them & withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ And this continued for 2 years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews & Greeks.

1. Paul spent over 2 yrs in Ephesus because it was the key for reaching all of Asia Minor.
 - a. This was Paul's **method** of church-planting.
 - b. He has **strategic** in the way he went about his goal of spreading the Gospel.
 - c. He went to key urban centers to people he knew were seeking the Truth.
 - d. Whenever he arrived in a new city, he went first to the synagogue where he knew there were Gentiles who'd renounced paganism in favor of Judaism.
 - e. He preached the Gospel, and while a handful of Jews responded, many of the Gentiles did.
 - f. Then there'd be an inevitable break with those Jews who rejected Christ.
 - g. So Paul would take the new converts to a new location and a church was born.
2. As we saw last Sunday, Ephesus was the premier city of the Roman province of Asia Minor.
 - a. It was a large & influential city and major center of trade.
 - b. It had dozens of schools where philosophy was taught.
 - c. One of them, the School of Tyrannus, became the meeting place for the new Ephesian Fellowship.
 - d. As it grew over the next 2 years, people from the surrounding towns who came to Ephesus to do business or worship at the magnificent Temple of Artemis, heard the Gospel, were converted, and carried the faith home with them to plant more new churches.
3. After a couple years, Paul left. But another Apostle arrived – our friend **John**, the writer of Revelation.
4. Ephesus became John's home; until he was arrested during the reign of the Emperor Domitian.
5. John became the leader of the church in Ephesus before his arrest.
 - a. He carried on Paul's work by raising up new leaders.
 - b. When word reached him a new church had begun in one of the cities of AM, John sent out young men to help out as pastors.
 - c. One of these was **Polycarp** who was sent to the city of **Smyrna**, 35 miles up the coast.
6. Polycarp was young when he began his training under John; in his early 20's.
 - a. He proved himself an apt pupil & gifted teacher.
 - b. When it was clear the call of God was on him, John sent him to the church in Smyrna that was asking for a pastor.
 - c. Polycarp served there faithfully for the next 60 years.
7. Then, as an old man, he was arrested in a new round of persecution.
 - a. You see, while the church in Smyrna was **healthy**, it was **small**.
 - b. And it was small because the **people** of Smyrna took great pride in their identity as **Roman citizens**.
 - c. Smyrna was the first city in the area that many years before, when Rome was just rising in power, to apply to be a **colony**; Rome's foothold in the region.
 - d. Smyrna was the first non-Roman city to build a temple to the goddess Roma, & one of the first in the Empire to build a temple to Tiberius when he became emperor.
 - e. During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a new round of persecution broke out.
 - f. The Smyrnians wanted to show their loyalty to Rome, so they went after the Christians.
 - g. The leaders of the local synagogue ratted Polycarp out & a squad of soldiers went to arrest him.
 - h. When they arrived, Polycarp invited them in, fed them, then after prayer went w/them to the theater where he was to be burned at the stake.
 - i. On the way, the captain of the squad pleaded w/him to recant & say the formula that would release him, "**Caesar** is Lord."
 - j. Polycarp replied, "For 86 years I've served Jesus & He's never forsaken me. How could I now forsake Him? Come, do what you will."

- k. When they arrived at the theater, Polycarp was tied to a post & wood was heaped round.
 - l. The magistrate announced his crime & offered him a last chance. When Polycarp remained silent, the magistrate said, “**Answer**, or I will set the fire.”
 - m. Polycarp replied, “You threaten me w/flames that are quickly put out & can only send me to arms of my dearest Friend. I warn you of **eternal fire** that awaits those who **refuse** Him.”
 - n. The wood was then lit, but the flames refused to catch.
 - o. Polycarp began an eloquent prayer that caused all who heard to be ashamed of themselves.
 - p. Fearing Polycarp’s words, the magistrate took a spear & stabbed him. His blood put out the last of the flames, but caused his death.
8. History says that just as his blood doused the flames, his death brought an end to the persecution in Smyrna.
 9. The church gained many converts as their loyalty to Rome was trumped by Polycarp’s to Jesus.
 10. I tell that true story from the history of the church at Smyrna, because this letter we’re reading, was well-known to Polycarp.

V8

⁸“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:

1. Remember that word ‘angel’ means messenger.
 - a. The messenger to each of the 7 churches was their pastor.
 - b. The pastor of Smyrna was **Polycarp**.
 - c. He received this letter from Jesus not long after he’d been sent there.
2. You see, John was arrested & sent to Patmos where he had the visions that comprise Revelation.
 - a. When the Emperor Domitian died, John was allowed to **return** to Ephesus.
 - b. As soon as he got back, he sent out these letters Jesus had dictated to him.
 - c. Polycarp had only been Pastor at Smyrna for a few years when this letter arrived.
 - d. And though the persecution of Domitian was over, more was on it’s way.
 - e. This was the calm before the storm & Jesus sent them a word of encouragement.
3. He describes himself by titles that would have resonated with the Smyrnians.
 - a. They called themselves the **First of Asia**, because they were the first to throw in w/Rome.
 - b. So Jesus says, “I am the First -- & the Last!”
 - c. The symbol of the city was the **Phoenix**, the mythical bird that rises from its own ashes.
 - 1) They picked this as their emblem because of their history.
 - 2) The city was founded about 1000 BC but was over-run & destroyed 400 years later.
 - 3) It remained a ruin until rebuilt by the Greeks.
 - 4) So it was called the city that was dead but lived again.
 - d. Jesus claims that title as His own.

V9a

^{9a} “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich);

1. Last week, in Jesus’ letter to the Ephesians, He commended all their hard work, moral purity & devotion to truth.
2. The main thing Jesus sees in the fellowship at Smyrna is their **suffering**.
 - a. He uses hard words to describe what they were going through.
 - b. **‘Tribulation’** refers to a crushing weight.
 - 1) They didn’t have **hangnails** – they were being **hung**!
 - 2) They weren’t complaining over **spilt milk**, they were **spilling their blood**.
 - c. And there are 2 words for **poverty** in Greek;
 - 1) I described a lack of **luxury**. Your basic needs are met but that’s it.
 - 2) The other meant a lack even of the **basics**.
 - a) No food, clothing or shelter.
 - b) **That’s** the word used here.
3. The persecution of believers in Smyrna had cost them their livelihood & homes.
 - a. So even when **official** persecution was lifted, it’s effects lingered on.
4. The **cause** of their distress is revealed in the last half of v9.

V9b

^{9b} and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.

1. Like Ephesus, Smyrna was a major port & lay at the end of an important highway to the East.
2. Being a thriving commercial center, it had a large Jewish population.
3. As in so many other cities of the Roman Empire, those Jews who rejected the Gospel became some of the most vicious enemies of the Church.
3. Super proud of their descent from Abraham, they referred to their assembly as the Synagogue of Moses.
 - a. Jesus has a different name for it; it's a synagogue of Satan.
 - b. And while they may be related to Abraham **by birth**, they **aren't** by Spirit.
 - c. Having rejected the Gospel of Christ, they became a tool of the devil.
 - d. He stirred them up to rat out the Christians to the authorities.

V10

¹⁰ Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation 10 days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

1. Please note Jesus didn't promise **escape** from trouble & hardship.
2. He promised them a glorious reward FOR enduring through it.
 - a. That's why they need not be afraid.
 - b. They were to look past the trouble to the reward waiting on the other side of it.
 - c. Story of praying with Scarlett about being afraid of the dark.
3. The Health & Wealth crowd stay a hundred miles away from this passage because it totally messes with their program.
4. Here are the words THEY'd preach at the Smyrnians
Speak to the mountain of trouble. Cast it into the sea.
Poverty **isn't** the domain of the believer; Prosperity is your divine birthright!
Proclaim blessing into your life.
Put forth your faith by confessing w/your mouth a new day of abundance.
Speak no more the negative & faithless words of suffering, trouble, or poverty.
You shall not suffer!
You shall not be thrown into jail.
You shall not die!
5. Jesus will have none of this. He **warns** them of what's coming.
6. Persecution will get **worse**.
 - a. They **WILL** suffer.
 - b. Some of them **will be** thrown into prison.
 - c. And some **will be** put to death.
7. But it **will** come to an end; so they **must hold on**.
8. Jesus says the time of trouble will last **10 days**.
 - a. History tells us there were 10 distinct periods of persecution before it came to an end w/the conversion of the Emperor Constantine.
 - b. And only rarely was persecution Empire wide.
 - c. It was usually regional as different governors decided how to interpret the orders from Rome.
 - 1) Some governors decided to ignore them altogether.
 - 2) While others, sometimes right next door, enforced them with a vengeance.
 - d. The problem in Smyrna was that because of their fierce loyalty to Rome, they always went along with the Imperial edict.
9. So Jesus warns them of what's coming.
 - a. But note who He pegs as the source of persecution **The devil**.
 - b. He says **the devil** is about to throw some of them into prison.
 - c. It'll look like Roman officials, but the real source of their distress is Satan.
 - d. They mustn't mistake the hand for the glove it wears.
10. Christian, We aren't promised a bed of roses & smooth sailing.
 - a. We live in a hostile world that hates God and anyone who love Him.
 - b. We can expect opposition & hardship.

- c. In fact, we ARE to expect it.
- d. A moment ago I mentioned the Prosperity, Health & Wealth teachers.
- e. They love to talk about the **promises** of God.
- f. They conveniently omit **this** from John 16:33 where Jesus says

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

- g. That word ‘tribulation’ is the same one Jesus uses here in v9.

He Knows

1. Look at that v again please . . . [v9]
 “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.
2. Last week we talked a little about those words, “I know you works.”
 - a. We saw how they can be either a comfort or troubling, depending on what our works are.
 - b. Let’s see them for the comfort Jesus **intends** them as He writes to those getting hammered for their faith.
3. Jesus says, “I know what you’re going through!
 I know what following Me costs you.
 I know all about the pain you feel when family & friends reject you because you believe in Me.
 I know you’ve been passed over for promotion.
 I know your room mate kicked you out.
 I know your spouse mocks your faith & calls you a fool.
 I know the names they call you at work / school.
 And besides all that following Me costs you **in terms of the hassle people** give you
 I know all about the battle you have with temptation when giving in is so easy.
4. I KNOW all about you & what you’re going through.
 - a. Remember; I’ve been there! I didn’t just become a man so I could redeem you.
 - b. I became a man so I could identify with you, to feel what you feel.
 - c. They hated & rejected Me. They arrested & tried Me. They beat & killed Me.
 - d. And I didn’t forsake My humanity when I returned to heaven.
 - e. I took it with Me. I’m STILL Human!
 - f. And I’m with you in YOUR tribulation. With you in your poverty.
5. So hear this The world may call it poverty and you feel the lack – but you need to know, in terms of the things that really matter – **You are RICH!**
 - a. You feel like you’re **getting** rocked. In truth **you’re rockin’ it!**
 - b. While the entire world is upside down, you’re right side up.
6. Jesus wants us to know He knows what we’re going through & how hard it gets at times.
7. He’s not some distant & dispassionate deity disinterested in our distress.
8. He’s **with** us; encouraging us, empowering & enduring with us.
9. He says there at the end of v10 –
 Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
10. Hang tough! Even if it costs your earthly life, don’t let go of Me.
11. And when you step thru the portal of death, You’ll find Me waiting to crown you w/eternal life.
12. Those words were especially potent for the Christians of Smyrna.
 - a. The city’s main attraction was a **hill** called the “**Crown of Smyrna.**”
 - b. Visitors arriving by ship saw it as they entered the harbor.
 - c. It rose above the city like a crown of white marble.
 - d. When the Greeks rebuilt the city, its streets were laid out in a neat pattern.
 - e. The streets on the hill above the city ringed it to make terraces on which they built gorgeous temples to the many gods & goddesses they worshipped.
 - f. So when visitors arrived, they made it their aim to ascend to the top and see it all.
 - g. But once they got to the peak, they realized a mistake had been made.
 - h. All Smyrna’s sewers emptied into the sea.
 - i. The wind blows from the sea, into the city & up the hill.

- j. So while Smyrna **looks** good, it **reeks** of filth & sewage.
 - k. The odor is most potent in the Crown of Smyrna.
13. What a great picture of the world!
- a. It makes wild promises it can't deliver.
 - b. It **looks** good, but once you get there you realize it **stinks**.
 - c. The world is a cheat.
14. Jesus is the real-deal Who **always** delivers on His promise.

V11

¹¹ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” ’

- 1. The 2nd death is described later in Revelation as being cast into hell.
- 2. The 1st death is **physical** death, when the spirit is separated from the body.
- 3. The 2nd death is when the spirit is separated from God, the **Source** & **Goal** of life.
- 4. Apart from the Rapture, we'll all experience the 1st death.
- 5. But for the Christian, physical death is only a doorway to eternal life.

Polycarp

Like Polycarp as a youngster, listening to this letter shared in church – it may be years before we have the opportunity to apply its message.

We can build the strength of our loyalty to Christ, so we can follow his example, by being loyal today, in the small things, the lesser challenges.