

**The Seven Churches – Smyrna**  
**Revelation 2:8-11**  
**ABC 10/3/21**

A woman in India watches as her sister is dragged off by Hindu nationalists. She doesn't know if her sister is alive or dead. A man in a North Korean prison camp is shaken awake after being beaten unconscious; the beatings begin again. A woman in Nigeria runs for her life. She has escaped from Boko Haram, who kidnapped her. She's pregnant, & when she returns home, her community will reject her & her baby. A group of children are laughing & talking as they come to church. Instantly, many of them are killed by a bomb blast. These people didn't live in the same region or even on the same continent but they share something in common: They're all Christians who suffer because of their faith. While Christian persecution takes many forms, it's defined as any hostility experienced as a result of identification with Jesus Christ. This year so far, there've been:

- 340 million Christians living with high levels of persecution & discrimination
- 4,761 Christians killed for their faith
- 4,488 churches & other Christian buildings attacked<sup>1</sup>

It's been this way since the beginning. Read the book of Acts & you'll see this. Things were rough for the Christians in Smyrna as well, the 2<sup>nd</sup> church mentioned in Rev 2. They experienced tribulation, poverty, slander, imprisonment, & even death for their Christian faith. The believers in Smyrna were being persecuted by man yet praised by Jesus. These letters all follow a **similar** format, with some variations, depending on the church. **8-11**

Like the letter to the Christians in Ephesus, this one begins with ...

**1. The Charge** (8) **to the angel of the church in Smyrna.** Again, **angel** means *messenger*, & possibly refers to the leadership of the local church who could be the one who carried the letter from John to the church. This letter is written to a real & specific church in a specific city. What do we know of Smyrna?

**2. The City** (8) was located about 35 miles north of Ephesus on the gulf of the Aegean Sea & is still in existence today as Izmir, the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in Turkey. It was a beautiful city & was called *the Ornament of Asia, the Crown of Asia, & the Flower of Asia*. It was at the western end of a road that

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/](http://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/)

crossed Turkey, had a great harbor, & was a wealthy & important city. Behind the city rose a hill covered with temples which encircled a hill nick-named *the Crown of Smyrna* because of the way they encircled it. It was home to temples in honor of several gods & goddesses, including Zeus, Apollo, Aphrodite, & others. To cover all the religious bases, they had temples for Caesar & Rome as well. Homer was supposedly born there & they had a temple for him as well. Smyrna had been a Greek colony as far back as 1000 BC. 400 years later it was invaded & destroyed. 200 years later it was rebuilt as a planned & well-thought out city. Its streets were wide, straight, & beautifully paved. At the time of John's revelation, it was a free city & was firmly on Rome's side. It was the 1<sup>st</sup> city in the world to erect a temple to the goddess Roma & to the spirit of Rome. Her loyalty to Rome was famous in that day & made Smyrna a natural center for the growing cult of the worship of Caesar. But Smyrna also had a large population of Jews who were influential & who did everything they could to hurt the church. What do we know of this church?

**3. The Church** (8) We have no record of its beginnings but it was probably founded by Paul on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey (AD 53–56). This is suggested by Acts 19:10, which tells us that while Paul was living & teaching in Ephesus, **All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews & Greeks**. About 20 years after John wrote Revelation, the early church father Ignatius stayed at Smyrna & wrote 4 of his letters there. Later still, he wrote 2 letters to Smyrna, one to the church & one to Polycarp, its pastor. Polycarp had been a student of John & could have been an original reader of this letter.<sup>2</sup>

**4. The Correspondent** (8) is the risen, ascended, & present Savior, Jesus Christ. He walks about in the midst of the church (2:1) & as the one whose eyes are like a flame of fire (1:14). He knows every detail & situation of His church, individually & corporately. As He does in each of these letters, Jesus begins by identifying Himself as the author. To the church at Smyrna, He refers to Himself as **the first & the last, who was dead, & has come to life** (8). This is an echo of the Lord's comforting words in Rev 1, **Do not be afraid; I am the first & the last, & the living One; & I was dead, & behold, I am alive forevermore** (17–18). **The first & the last** was an OT title for God Himself (Is

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<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Seven Churches, Four Horsemen, One Lord: Lessons from the Apocalypse*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, p 78

44:6; 48:12). It's an affirmation of Christ's divine nature & authority. Jesus uses this title again at the end of Rev, proclaiming, **I am the Alpha & Omega, the first & the last, the beginning & the end** (22:13). Jesus is eternal & was already in existence when all things were created. He transcends time, space, & all of creation. & yet, for the sake of sinners, He **was dead, & has come to life**. How does an infinite God die? Only in the incarnation as God took on human flesh to die a substitutionary death on our behalf. Peter tells us Christ was **put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit** (1 Pt 3:18). He died as a man for sin & now lives, as the author of Hebrews puts it, **according to the power of an indestructible life** (Heb 7:16). Death couldn't hold Him. The body of Jesus died & went into the grave. But **Christ ... was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay** (Acts 2:31). His resurrection from the dead is the proof that God accepted His sacrifice as full atonement for our sins. The resurrection is also the guarantee of our hope for eternity with Him. These would've been very comforting words to the church of Smyrna. Oppressed & persecuted, there could be no greater encouragement than to hear from Jesus Himself, who suffered far worse than they ever would (Heb 12:3-4). With the Lord at their side, they could face any threat, even death itself. They could cling to Christ's promise, **I am the resurrection & the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, & everyone who lives & believes in Me will never die** (Jn 11:25-26). Death couldn't hold them any more than it could hold Him.<sup>3</sup> Christ conquered death. The risen Jesus has experienced the worst life could do to Him. No matter what might happen to the Christians in Smyrna, or to us, our Savior has gone through far worse. As such, He feels for us in our suffering with special love & compassion & is ever present to come to our aid & comfort (Heb 2:15-18; 4:15). Jesus triumphed over Satan, sin, & death. He defeated all His enemies & He offers His victory to each of us. Jesus' resurrection is precious to the persecuted church & it reminds a prosperous church of who Jesus is & why He came.

**5. The Commendation** of this church is found in **vs 9**.

Note that nothing bad is said about this church. Smyrna was a difficult place to be a Christian. The believers there likely faced persecution on multiple fronts. The city was deeply devoted to the

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<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *Christ's Call to Reform the Church: Timeless Demands from the Lord to His People*, pp 76-77

worship of Caesar & the celebration of all things Roman. They even worshiped Rome itself, as *Roma* was a goddess personifying the city. Eventually, annual sacrifices to Caesar were mandatory & refusing to offer them was a capital offense. In fact, simply failing to say the words, *Caesar is Lord*, could cost a believer his life. While Christians could & should submit to Rome's civil authority (Rom 13:1–7), they couldn't partake in the idolatrous devotion to Caesar. Maintaining that separation made them look like rebels, incurring Rome's wrath. In addition, Smyrna was awash in paganism. They carefully worshiped all the Roman gods & many more. Pagan temples, festivals, & rituals dominated the social life of the city. & Christians avoided it all. They were out of sync with their culture in every way including worshipping an invisible God. Jesus says, **I know your...**

**A. Tribulation** The word **tribulation** means a crushing pressure & was used of crushing grapes for juice, olives for oil, & for executing people by crushing them under a rock or rocks. **Tribulation** doesn't mean mere trouble; it refers to cruel, relentless, grinding pressure, which the Christians in Smyrna were experiencing. In this pro-Roman town, the Christians would've been shunned for their refusal to go along with the emperor cult or participate in the social worship of the city's numerous gods & goddesses. It would have been hard for them even to make a living. Under pressure? Yes, but Jesus knew about their tribulations, just as He knows about the suffering that many Christians endure today. The pressure of persecution is on the church at Smyrna & the force of circumstances is trying to crush the Christianity out of them.<sup>4</sup> But it cannot. Jesus also knew their ...

**B. Poverty** This describes absolute insufficiency or complete destitution. It's not one who has little, but one who has nothing at all, who is totally impoverished. They'd been cut out of the economy of the city &, as a result, had nothing. They were in the most abject poverty imaginable. Yes, they were poor, dirt poor but they were rich in spiritual blessings. They were storing up treasure in heaven (Mt 6:20; 19:21; Lk 12:21; 2 Cor 6:10; Js 2:5). The church in Smyrna is the only church in the NT that's described as being spiritually rich. Its condition was the exact opposite of the church in Laodicea, whose people are said to have been rich in material things but poor spiritually (Rev 3:17). Again, Christ offers no criticism of this church in Smyrna. The saints were faithful in spite of

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<sup>4</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Vol. I, p 95

suffering. It's possible many were slaves & whatever meager possessions they may have once owned were likely forfeited in the persecution of Christians. They were destitute, barely surviving on whatever they could scrounge together. They had nothing physically but they had everything spiritually. Jesus commends them for their spiritual wealth in the midst of their physical poverty & suffering. They were rich in that God had counted them worthy to suffer for Him (1 Pt 3:14-17; 1:6; 4:13-14).

**C. Slander** Vs 9 continues, **I know ... the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews & are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.** The identification of these persecutors as **those who say they are Jews & are not** isn't saying they were pretending to be Jews. It's an echo of Paul's statement in Rom 2:

**For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; & circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; & his praise is not from men, but from God (28-29).**

By birth they were Jews, but spiritually they were blasphemous pagans & enemies of God. The Jewish community in Smyrna hated the Christians. They spread **blasphemy**, slander about the church, poisoning the minds of the people & the government. Why? Because they despised the gospel of Jesus & anyone who declared Him to be the long-promised Messiah. The letter doesn't say how the believers had been slandered, but it's not difficult to imagine what this may have been like. Think of the Jewish leaders' libel of Paul in Acts 17:6-7. Paul was in Thessalonica & the Jewish leaders were jealous of his success & told the authorities that Paul & his companions were guilty of having **turned the world upside down (6 KJV)** & acting **contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus (7)**. The Christians did proclaim Christ as a King but they weren't defying Caesar nor were they causing trouble. They were trying to live in peace with everyone. Probably the same is going in Smyrna. Jesus refers to the Jews there as **a synagogue of Satan**. Whatever lip service they paid to the One true God was worthless after they rejected His Son as Messiah. Their religion was every bit as opposed to God's truth as the emperor worship & paganism that dominated Smyrna, & their synagogues were as spiritually dead as all the other temples throughout town. Here are the major slanders made against Christians in the early church.

1) They were called cannibals because they partook of Christ's body & blood in communion.

- 2) Because they gathered for a common meal of fellowship, a love feast, & greeted one another with a holy kiss, they were accused of holding orgies.
- 3) Because Christianity at times split families, they were accused of being anti-family.
- 4) Because they worshiped a God that couldn't be seen, they were called atheists.
- 5) Because Christians wouldn't say, *Caesar is Lord*, they were accused of being rebels.

You may hear that list: cannibalism, immorality, family destruction, atheism, & rebellion, & say Christians are the opposite of all those things, & you're right. But that doesn't mean Christians won't be slandered & falsely accused & punished & imprisoned & even killed for these supposed crimes. This was the common experience in the early church. The believers in Smyrna not only faced physical pressure & tribulation, they also faced all kinds of false accusations. This isn't unusual. As Paul wrote in 2 Tim 3:12, **all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.** Persecution is the norm for Christians. Jesus blessed those on the receiving end of persecution in Mt 5:11 by saying, **Blessed are you when people insult you & persecute you, & falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.** Jesus' words should've helped the Christians in Smyrna to know what to expect. After all, Mt 5:11 comes after Mt 5:10 where Jesus said, **Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** & then in vs 12 He added, **Rejoice & be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.** This persecution & slander was to be expected & embraced as a chance to be counted for Christ. None of it should've been a surprise if they remembered what they'd been told to expect.

**6. The Counsel** (10) Jesus doesn't rebuke or condemn this church. He had nothing but praise for them & their faithfulness stands as an example to all churches everywhere. This doesn't mean they were perfect or sinless but that persecution has a way of purifying the church & Jesus condemns them for nothing. However, the letter does carry a warning, not one of judgment but of more persecution to come. Jesus encourages them in vs **10**.

**A. Fear Not** Do not fear is literally *fear nothing*. No matter the persecution, the One who has overcome death says, *fear nothing*. Jesus knew the suffering they'd faced & would face was frightening & He didn't diminish that. He was preparing them for more suffering that was to come. This persecution would go beyond vs 9 & would lead to prison & death for some of them. People

were rarely in prison for long periods in those days. Prisons were holding tanks used until the prisoners could be tried & either released or killed. For a Christian to be imprisoned meant he was in danger of death. Notice that this persecution would be caused by Satan & not by mere mortals. This is the 1<sup>st</sup> mention of the **devil** in Revelation, though he appears again many times after this (2:13; 3:9; 9:11; 12:7–12; 13:4; 20:2–3, 7–10). In the grand scheme of things, the **devil** is seen as standing behind all evil & all persecutions of God’s people throughout history. As Eph 6:12 tells us, **our struggle is not against flesh & blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.** Knowing that Christ once & for all defeated Satan, sin, & death at the cross, the believers in Smyrna could take comfort in knowing that God was in control regardless of the suffering they would face. Likewise, we can joyfully endure whatever suffering we may face because God is in control & has something better for us in eternity. We simply need to keep our focus on Jesus & living in such a way that’s pleasing to Him. We need to be focusing on our future in glory rather than fearing the tribulation we encounter now.

Jesus tells them they’ll **have trouble for 10 days**. What’s that mean? There are all kinds of theories. Some offer figurative or symbolic interpretations. For example: *in 10 days there are 240 hours, which make up the number of years from 85 AD, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> persecution began & John was under at this time, to 325 AD when all the persecutions ceased.*<sup>5</sup> Some say it is the 10 Roman emperors who persecuted Christians & others simply say it’s a number of completion, whatever that means. It could be they were 10 literal 24-hour days of intense persecution. But numbers in Rev are sometimes symbolic so it might mean a long time. However short or long it means, the time wouldn’t last forever. The persecutions would end; the people of God would be delivered, either by life or by death. Whatever the specifics, Jesus was preparing these Christians to face persecution & told them to **be faithful until death**. But note this persecution is a continuation of the serpent’s battle with Jesus & those who belong to Him (Gen 3:15; Jn 15:18-21). Human means & men are those we see persecuting Christians, but behind it is always Satan. Thankfully, he’s a

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Poole, quoted by David Guzik, [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)

defeated foe (Rev 20:1-3; Rom 16:20; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14-15). In this suffering, testing, & tribulation, Jesus tells them to ...

**B. Be Faithful until death.** Although the tribulation of the believers in Smyrna would be great, it would also be something ordered by God for their good, just as God orders all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28). Suffering would be used by God to test or purify His people in Smyrna. Job knew the crucible of suffering & said of God, **He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come out as gold** (23:10). There are no records to tell us how this was fulfilled in the church of Smyrna. We don't know who the devil inspired to cast them into prison &/or be executed. Jesus encourages them to keep doing what they'd already faithfully been doing. Of course, in themselves, believers don't have the capacity to maintain or protect their faith. If we could lose our salvation, we certainly would. Instead, it's the Lord who holds us steadfast in faith. Christ repeatedly declared this glorious truth to His disciples. **This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day** (Jn 6:39). **I give eternal life to them, & they will never perish; & no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; & no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand** (Jn 10:28–29). Here He promises the Smyrnan Christians that He will give them **the crown of life**. This crown isn't the crown of royalty but a crown of laurel that was awarded to victors at athletic games. Jesus isn't merely promising these Christians a reward for their perseverance. Perseverance itself is the reward, as it bears witness to the genuineness of their faith. & those whose faith is proven by a faithful life will enjoy the crown of eternal life with their Lord & Savior. One of the things that should distinguish believers from unbelievers is that Christians are sojourners that live with a view to eternity, knowing this life is not all there is (1 Pt 1:17; 2:11; Rev 3:10; Is 24:17). We may suffer upon this earth for our Lord. But we know that is nothing to be compared with our eternal future with our Lord. May we, when faced with affliction & suffering, respond as the church in Smyrna did. May we remember the words of Peter, that **even though now for a little while, if necessary, we have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of our faith, being more precious than gold**



which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise & glory & honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pt 1:6-8).

## **7. The Challenge 11**

The contrast to possessing the **crown of life** is to experience the **second death**. The 1<sup>st</sup> death is physical, the separation of the soul from the body. The **second death** is spiritual, the body & soul being cast into the lake of fire. This is explained in Rev 20 where we're told that those who've died for their testimony return to life & then reign with Christ: **Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God & of Christ & will reign with Him for a thousand years (6)**. Believers may face physical death but because they've had a 2<sup>nd</sup> birth (Jn 3:3-7), no believer will ever face **the second death** (Eph 2:1, 5; Jn 5:24; 11:25). To overcome means to remain faithful to the Lord even if it means death. Jesus was reminding them that though some would die for Him, **the second death** could never touch them. In this light, the statement, **he who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death**, is truly an understatement. The overcomer (that is, the faithful Christian) will be more than amply repaid for whatever sacrifice he may make for Christ's sake. His experience will be truly wonderful & far beyond the reach of **the second death**. In a masterly understatement, Jesus says, in effect, *The first death may 'hurt' you briefly, the second not at all!*<sup>6</sup> Did this persecution come upon the church in Smyrna? We don't know everything but we do know some of what occurred there. Polycarp's story is interesting in view of what Jesus says about the persecutions that were coming to the church in Smyrna. Polycarp was killed for his faith on Feb 23, 155 AD. It happened at the time of the public games for which the city was famous. The streets were crowded. Excitement filled the air. Suddenly someone shouted, *Away with the atheists; let Polycarp be searched for*. He probably could've escaped but chose not to. He was caught & arrested. Many in the city didn't want to see him die. On the way to the arena, the officer who led the arresting party pleaded with him, *What harm is it to say, 'Caesar is Lord' & to offer sacrifice & be saved?* But Polycarp insisted that only Jesus Christ is Lord. When they entered the arena, the story goes, a voice came from heaven saying, *Be strong, Polycarp, & play the man*. Polycarp was

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<sup>6</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *Grace Evangelical News*, electronic version

brought before the highest-ranking officer in the city, who gave him the choice of cursing Christ & making a sacrifice to Caesar, or else death. Polycarp reportedly replied, *86 years have I served Him, & He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?* He was then threatened with being burned. Polycarp replied, *You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time & is quickly extinguished, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come & in everlasting punishment.... Do what you will.* Crowds then surrounded Polycarp with torches & wood. They were going to bind him to the stake. *Leave me as I am,* he said, *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.* So they left him loosely bound in the flames, & Polycarp prayed his great prayer:

*O Lord God Almighty, Father of thy beloved & blessed Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of thee, God of angels & powers, & of all creation, & of the whole family of the righteous, who live before thee, I bless thee that thou has granted unto me this day & hour, that I may share among the number of the martyrs in the cup of thy Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul & body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. & may I today be received among them before thee, as a rich & acceptable sacrifice, as thou, the God without falsehood & of truth hast prepared beforehand & shown forth & fulfilled. For this reason I also praise thee for all things. I bless thee, I glorify thee through the eternal & heavenly high priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Son, through whom be glory to thee with Him & the Holy Spirit, both now & for the ages that are to come. Amen.<sup>7</sup>*

When he'd finished his prayer, the fire was lit. According to *The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp:*

*As the flame blazed forth in great fury, we, to whom it was given to witness it, beheld a great miracle, & have been preserved that we might report to others what then took place. For the fire, shaping itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, encompassed as by a circle the body of the martyr. & he appeared within not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread that is baked, or as gold & silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover, we perceived such a sweet odor, as if frankincense or some such precious spices had been smoking there.*

*At length, when those wicked men perceived that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to go near & pierce him through with a dagger. & on his doing this, there came forth a dove, & a great quantity of blood, so that the fire was extinguished; & all the people wondered that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers & the elect, of whom this most admirable Polycarp was one, having in our own times been an apostolic & prophetic teacher, & bishop of the ... Church which is in Smyrna. For every word that went out of his mouth either has been or shall yet be accomplished.*

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<sup>7</sup>Barclay, pp 76-79

Although the account is surely embellished, the faithfulness of Polycarp seems to have characterized the church in Smyrna & resulted in this church's continuous faithful witness for God after many of the other early churches had long ceased to be. The purifying fires of affliction caused the lamp of its testimony to burn all the more brilliantly. They could be comforted by the fact that their sufferings wouldn't continue forever, & the blessings that were theirs in Christ would last through eternity.<sup>8</sup> When Christianity goes public in a pagan world (instead of remaining in our safe, isolated, comfortable sanctuaries) the opposition labels us as evil & dangerous.<sup>9</sup> We may not have the same opportunity to suffer for Jesus that the Christians in Smyrna had, but we can have their same heart. We may never be in a place to die a martyr's death, but we can all live a martyr's life. Sadly, many Christians avoid persecution of any kind by conforming so much to the world that they're no longer distinctively Christians. This wasn't the case with the Christians in Smyrna. They were tested & they passed the test.

Are Christians in America persecuted for their faith? At times, but nothing like in many parts of the world. Some Christians have said Covid mandates are persecution. For example, there have been a handful of cases where a Christian has claimed religious exemption to wearing a mask. Why? According to Gary Nelson, *The Bible says we're made in the image of God & Satan tries to cover that up. A mask is a sign of oppression.*<sup>10</sup> That's stretching things past the breaking point. He'd be more consistent & might have more of an argument if he didn't wear any clothes at all. Covid mandates might be a persecution of our liberties but they aren't because we're Christians. How should we face persecution for being Christians when it does come? By approaching each day with eternal values & plan with an eternal perspective. Is our life about money, stuff, experiences, entertainment, ease, & comfort? Or is our life preparing ourselves & others for eternity? The key to dealing with persecution as Christians is our reaction to it. Do we react as Jesus did? He didn't seek revenge on His persecutors but prayed for them. We can & must do the same. The followers

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<sup>8</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp 64-65

<sup>9</sup> John Piper, *Things are Worse Than & Better Than They Seem*, [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)

<sup>10</sup> [www.americanprogress.org/issues/ext/2021/08/31/503310/covid-mask-vaccination-mandates-arent-christian-persecution/](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/ext/2021/08/31/503310/covid-mask-vaccination-mandates-arent-christian-persecution/)

of Christ have been persecuted from the beginning, but we can overcome by standing firm on what we know is true, sharing Jesus with others, & praying for those who want to harm us.<sup>11</sup> PRAY

The message of Jesus to the church in Smyrna has a good deal to do with death, which might be expected in light of the persecutions that were coming to them. It's worth noting that *smyrna* is the Greek word used in the Septuagint for *myrrh*, a fragrance used by the Jews to mask the scent of dead bodies. Jn 19:39–40 tells us Joseph of Arimathea & Nicodemus brought myrrh mixed with aloes to wrap Christ's body for burial. Myrrh was expensive & hard to come by. It was made from the resin of shrub-like, thorny trees. Only when it was thoroughly crushed would it yield its pleasing fragrance. Likewise, Jesus was thoroughly crushed for us. He knew suffering & persecution. Isaiah tells us,

**He was despised & forsaken of men, A man of sorrows & acquainted with grief; & like one from whom men hide their face. He was despised, & we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, & our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, & afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities (53:3-5).**

Vs 10 continues, **The Lord was pleased to crush Him.** Every time we come to the communion table, we remember our Lord's death, His crushing, His sacrifice for us which was a **fragrant aroma** to God (Eph 5:2). Jesus, on His last night before His crucifixion, ate the Passover feast with His disciples. He **took bread; & when He had given thanks, He broke it & said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me"** (1 Cor 11:24). Once again, we remember His death in our place for our sins resulting in our salvation. Let's eat of the bread together remembering His death for us.

After supper, Jesus took the cup & said, **"This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as your drink it, in remembrance of Me"** (1 Cor 11:25). Jesus was crushed, dying with the weight our sins upon Him. His death was sufficient & He was raised from the dead & now gives us His life, eternal life, the crown of life, forever. Let's drink of the cup together remembering His death for us.

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<sup>11</sup> Megan Bailey, *Is There Christian Persecution in America?* <https://www.beliefnet.com/news/is-there-christian-persecution-in-america.aspx>