***The Church of Smyrna

RV09-01***

We are at Revelation 2:8 as we look at the letter to Smyrna. This is segment number one. The Lord Jesus Christ is sending a letter. They are receiving an evaluation of the ministry. What the Lord was doing was noting their weaknesses, and he's prescribing corrections and remedies for these weaknesses. He's noting their strong points, and He's commending them. These various letters and these churches also seem to reflect certain periods of church history. As the New Testament church moved from its apostolic era (which is to about the year 100 A.D., which is represented by the church at Ephesus), certain conditions existed, and certain problems were developing.

Then it moved from the era of 100 A.D. to about 314 A.D. This was a period of intense suffering. This was a time when it was not easy to be a Christian. This was a time when death stalked believers everywhere in the Roman Empire, and Smyrna pictures this period in church history when Christians suffered and put their lives on the line.

When you get to 314 A.D., that's when the Roman Empire, under the Emperor Constantine, took over Christianity as the state religion. Then everything changed. It was no longer a danger for you not be a Christian. It was a very healthy and profitable thing to be a Christian. Then the result was immediately the rapid corruption and degeneration of the New Testament church.

**The Angel**

So verse 8 begins with the salutation: "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna." The word "and" is again that preposition "kai." It indicates a continuing discussion to a new letter. The word for "angel" is "aggelos." It's just basically transliterated from Greek letters into English letters. The word "aggelos," however, not only has its technical meaning for an angel being (the spirit beings that we call angels), but it also has the meaning of "messenger," and that is the meaning that is appropriate here. He is writing to the messenger in the local church at Smyrna, and that messenger is the pastor-teacher. He is the executive head, the elder bishop, who is responsible for that local church.

Probably again here in Smyrna, as in these New Testament cities, in time, there were enough believers that they could not meet in one place. They met in different places. They met in homes, and they had, therefore, several elders throughout the city. Each church had one pastor-teacher elder, and the assisting officials of the group, which are known as the deacons. But who the Lord is therefore addressing here is the angel of the church in Smyrna; that is, the pastor-teacher in that church.

**The Church**

Again, he uses the word "ekklesia" for "church." This is the word that stands for the local assembly. In this case, the word "church" is also used for the universal body of Christ. When you use the word "ekklesia" for the body of Christ, you're cutting across all local church affiliations of various kinds. It doesn't matter what the group is. It might be the rankest, liberal kind of church operation. Anybody who is a genuine believer is included in the "ekklesia," the body of Christ, in the universal church. But most of the time the Bible uses the word "ekklesia" in terms of local church organizations, and that's the way it's using it here. It is referring to the organization, the assembly of believers in Smyrna – a group such as this where people gathered. Usually, in those days, they gathered in the evening for fellowship and for the study of the Word of God and for prayer.

**The City of Smyrna**

This is the church which is "in," and it uses this preposition "en." This is a preposition of location, indicating geographic location. Then it gives the name of the city. The city was Smyrna ("smurna"). This is located in Asia Minor. It is located on the Aegean Sea, 40 miles north of the first city that the Lord addressed, the city of Ephesus. It's on the gulf which extended inland 30 miles from the Aegean Sea. Therefore, it was in a very ideal port harbor situation. The city there is in western Turkey, and there exists on the site a Turkish city named Izmir. It has a population of about 250,000. Apparently, "Izmir" there is a corruption of the name Smyrna which originally existed on that site.

The city of Smyrna was founded in the 12th century B.C. by the Aeolic Greeks. It was one of the greatest cities of ancient times. Smyrna was no mean city. It was a place of considerable wealth simply because it had that ideal harbor condition. So it became a trade center between Asia and the West because of its location. It had a good harbor, and it was also on the land road that moved toward the east. Near 688 B.C., the city of Smyrna was taken by another group of Greeks, the Ionian Greeks, and in 627 B.C., it was taken by the Lydians who simply destroyed the city. For 400 years, the city lay completely destroyed. Then along comes the great conqueror Alexander the Great, and he orders the city rebuilt, which was done by one of his generals Lysimachus.

Smyrna was actually built on the slopes of a 450-foot high mountain, Mount Pagus. It's still there to this day. The Smyrnans were very proud of their city. They called themselves First of Asia in beauty and size, and the title had considerable merit. There was considerable reason for calling themselves that. The city had wide paved streets and, interestingly enough, they were laid out in rectangular relationships. So if the streets were at right angles to one another, it was obviously, therefore, a city that had been planned. It had an excellent system of coinage, which was very critical to it as a trade center. It had, consequently, vast trading enterprises. It was also celebrated in the field of education. It had schools of science and of medicine. It was filled with many handsome buildings. It had an outdoor theater on the slope of Mount Pagus that seated 20,000 people.

There were many beautiful groves of cypress trees which adorned the hillside, and Mount Pagus was an ideal acropolis in a setting of beauty, offering an overview of the sea and the city itself. It just stood on an elevated plain. When you came at it from the ocean side, it looked like a citadel, just almost like a temple sitting there. The rounded summit itself contain many stately buildings, and it was surrounded by a defense wall. This wall, and the buildings cropping up within it, gave it the appearance of a crown. So as you approached the city of Smyrna from the sea, it reminded people of a crown. Therefore, it had the connotations of being a royal type of city, and it was actually called The Crown of Smyrna. This referred to the summit of Pagus. This term was widely used. It was a well-known term in the ancient world in reference to Mount Pagus as The Crown of Smyrna. Greek orators described Smyrna as "the flower of beauty, such as earth and sun had never shown mankind."

However, with all its beauty, there was at the heart of it the corrupting influence of the phallic cults. For here was the center of one of the expressions of Nimrod's religion of the mother and child cult, with the mother here, called Sybil. Sybil was considered the guardian goddess of Smyrna. Sybil, you may remember, is associated with another name for Nimrod: Janus. Sybil and Janus are the ones who, in the ancient world, were viewed as possessing the keys to the opening of happiness in the spirit world. The keys of Sybil and Janus were well-known throughout the ancient world. It is this Sybil who possessed these keys that was viewed as the goddess of Smyrna. And it was these keys which were inherited, in time, by the Roman Catholic Pope when the Roman Catholic Church absorbed the Babylonian system. Along with that came these keys which were well-known in the ancient world. They were the keys of authority possessed by the high priest, which was called the Pontifex Maximus (P. M.). When Roman Catholicism evolved, after the Roman Empire made Christianity a legitimate religion by the year 600, the Bishop of Rome had risen to superior authority, and he had assumed the title of Pontifex Maximus. All of the pagans who were coming into the church (a corrupted church now) fully understood what Pontifex Maximus meant. They fully understood that in his hands were the sacred keys which were the opening to eternal happiness.

So it was a beautiful setup that played right into the hands of the corrupting system that was developing in the early years of the first millennium. This title of Pontifex Maximus is still used by the Roman Catholic Pope. If you ever have occasion to visit the city of Rome, and visit the St. Peter's Basilica, you will see everywhere "P. M." You will see it on the pavements: "P. M." You will see memorials with the names of past popes, and you will you'll see after the name: "P. M." What that means is Pontifex Maximus, the pagan title indicating the possession of the keys which once belonged to Sybil and Janus – the very Sybil who was the guardian goddess of the city of Smyrna.

So, Smyrna, I want you to understand, was a hard-core pagan city, as well as a place of considerable material wealth. Smyrna claimed to be the birthplace of the famous Greek poet Homer. There was, therefore, erected the Homerian temple to the honor of this poet.

Smyrna was also a strong ally of Rome. It maintained a firm alliance of friendship and of mutual assistance with Rome. The ties between Smyrna and Rome were so great that in 25 A.D., Rome decided to establish a temple in Smyrna to honor the Emperor Tiberius. And Smyrna became the center of emperor worship in that part of the world. It's important for you to remember that. The goddess Sybil, as the guardian goddess, was very closely allied now with emperor worship. That meant that the people of Smyrna said, "Caesar is lord." And once a year they had to subscribe to that statement, and get an official declaration that they had done that: They had said, "Caesar is lord." When they said, "Caesar is lord," they said, "Caesar is 'kurios.'" And "kurios" meant that Caesar was god. The temple that was built here to honor Emperor Tiberius became the center of emperor worship.

The people of Smyrna were very sympathetic to the military enterprises of the Roman government. On occasion, the Roman army was in need of winter clothing during the war with the Mithridates. When they were in desperate need of winter clothing, the citizens of Smyrna gathered up clothes all over the city, and they sent their own clothing to the Roman soldiers to enable them to carry on in that battle. Smyrna, therefore, was very proud of her loyalty to Rome, and she, in turn, was fully acknowledged by the Roman government as her ally.

So this is the city to which Jesus Christ is addressing this letter. It was a city that was strong in the Babylonian mystery religion and all of its paganism. It was a city centered upon Sybil, one of the possessors of the keys of entrance into eternal happiness. It was a city that had a temple to honor the Roman Empire. It was a city that was viewed by Rome itself as a strong ally. It was a city that enjoyed wealth and prestige.

To this city, the Lord Jesus Christ says to John: "To the pastor-teacher of the local church in the city of Smyrna write." The word for "write" is "grapho." John is recording here simply what Jesus Christ dictates to him. This is in the aorist tense, which means it's referring to the point at which the Lord speaks. That's when John writes. It's active. John is doing the writing. He's the secretary. It's imperative. The Lord Jesus commands him to do the writing.

Then, as in all these letters, Jesus Christ identifies Himself to the church. He says, "These things say the first and the last." "These things" are referring to something which is near at hand. The Greek has this little word "hode." It's a demonstrative pronoun, and it is pointing to the things that He is immediately going to say – the contents of the letter. "These things say," and that's that word "lego" again. This word stresses the contents of what He's saying more than the words that He actually uses. It's present tense. He is giving them something that is always the case. It's a constant message. It's active voice. Jesus Christ Himself does the communicating. It's indicative. It's a statement of fact. He is indicating something about himself. He calls Himself the "protos." This means "the first." He is the first in line of a series of something. Furthermore, the Greek has the word "the" in front of it: "*the* first, which emphasizes it, and specifically applies to Jesus Christ. It means that Jesus Christ is before all, in time, so He is supreme and above all. Jesus Christ is absolutely first in order of anything. The One who's addressing them can call Himself the first.

**The Celebrity**

And He is also something else. He is not only the first, but he is the "eschatos," which is "the last." Again, it has: "*The* last" in the Greek, emphasizing the absolute last. When Jesus says, "I am the first, and I am the last," that is stressing His eternity, and only God has the quality of eternity. He is stressing the fact that He is the eternal one. He is the originator, and He is the executer of all history. Jesus Christ, therefore, as the first and the last of all history is the celebrity. He is the only celebrity in all of the human race. And it is well for you and me to remember that. He is the only celebrity.

It is pathetic how men love to pretend that they are celebrities. There are monuments decaying all over the world to men who erected memorials to themselves because they viewed themselves as celebrities. It always makes me cringe when I see some monument that bears the name of some preacher. Preachers love to do this. They love to gather up sums of money; they love to erect monuments; and, then they love to put their names on them. These are memorials to themselves. It's always a little sad to me to see that because it's sort of an insult to the person of Jesus Christ: very often, the very person that these preachers in sincerity served. They apparently didn't stop to think what it means to have Jesus Christ the first and the last, and that He is the one who is to be exalted. He is the one who is to be honored. It just makes me cringe a little to see that sort of thing happening. I have a problem. I feel uncomfortable myself to read a Scripture like this, and I realize that the Lord is the only celebrity among us.

It makes me uncomfortable sometimes with people who use tapes. I got a letter just this past week. They will write, and they'll say, "Please send us a picture of yourself." That always makes me uncomfortable in itself. They say, "Please send us a picture. We use the tapes, and people want to know what you look like. And give us a little write-up about yourself." I haven't done that yet. I'll go through some pictures, and I look at them, and I'll pick out the best of the lot, and I'll put it out there, and it sits around on my desk, and then I shuffle it back. I play solitaire with my pictures again. But I'm always uncomfortable because my response, generally, to them is that it doesn't matter what I look like. To identify the speaker is to put a dignity upon the message in terms of who is saying it. That's how we are. We want to know what this guy looks like, and who he is, as if that has anything to do with the truth. The truth is the truth, and the truth has to stand on itself. It doesn't matter what the speaker looks like.

One time I went to visit Buddy Rouch in his shop, and he wasn't there, and he had one of his helpers there. I spoke to him, and I said, "Well, I'll check back later." Then Mr. Rouch came back, and his helper said, "There was a fella here looking for you." Mr. Rouch said, "Who was he?" The man said, "I don't know." Mr. Rouch said, "What did he look like?" The man said, "Well, I don't know. He looked sort of like Lucky Luciano." And right away, Mr. Rouch said, "Oh, that's my pastor." So I got a bunch of bad publicity there, just because of what that guy's evaluation was. Who's going to listen to anything that Lucky Luciano has to say?

Well, I happened to mention that on a tape. And we get these people, especially in the summers, who like to visit us. One family came, and as I greeted them at the door before the service, they said, "We came because we wanted to see if you really looked like Lucky Luciano." They came all the way from the north just to find it out.

So this business of making celebrityship, and pictures, and exalting, and promoting: it's a bunch of bunko, because the thing that's important is Jesus Christ. He's the first. He's the last. He's the only celebrity among us. He's the only one that amounts to anything. Anything that's of value is His Word. I don't care who says it. I don't care if his majesty the devil is up here giving you the information, if it's the truth, it's the truth. It's the Word of God. It's alive and it's powerful. It doesn't matter what the source is.

This is one thing that the devil uses, because communicators always lead in one way or another. So the devil likes to always point out the weaknesses of the communicator, so he says, "Are you going to listen to a con artist like that? Are you going to listen to this slob?" He's always got these weaknesses, and that doesn't make any difference. It is the Word of God which is important, not the communicator.

So Jesus Christ says to this church: "Listen, you're a suffering church. You're in for some bad times. But I want to introduce Myself to you, therefore, as the One who is the first in time, and I am the last in time. Whatever monuments men may build to themselves, they're all going to decay into dust. But Me: I'm always going to be there. I'm always going to be the one you can count on. I'm the one who's in charge from the first to the last." The first and last: He has always existed in the past, and He will in the future. Of course, this stresses His deity in a city which is worshiping Sybil as the goddess to whom their loyalty is given, and from whom their blessings come.

"Unto the pastor-teacher of the local church in the city of Smyrna, write these things, said the first and the last who." And then He tells them something more about Himself that's going to be a very great encouragement to these people: "Who (referring to Jesus Christ) was dead." The word "was," as you know, comes from the verb "to be." It's usually the Greek word "eimi." It is not that in this case. It is instead a different Greek word "ginomai." "Ginomai" actually means "to become." It is a very specific word which the Holy Spirit uses here, because Jesus Christ, as the living God, took upon Himself human flesh, and He became something. He was the Son, but he became the God-man. He always was the child of God, but He became the God-man.

The word "become" is in the aorist tense, which means that He became something. He became dead at the point of dying on the cross. It's active. He did the dying. And it is participle – a principal here stated. What He became was not what He, by nature, was. It was something that He became. That is "nekros." He became dead. This word stresses the physical death of Jesus Christ. It's calling to the attention of persecuted Smyrnian Christians that He too faced death. For what reason? Because He held to divine viewpoint truth from God His Father. As the Lord said about Himself: "They hated Me without a cause – without any reason whatsoever. They hated and they despise Me" to the point that they murdered Him.

There was a storm of persecution brewing for the Christians in Smyrna which would bring physical death to some of them. When physical death comes, you know that there are tears and there is sorrow, and there is pain. This is what was in their future: tears; sorrow; and, pain, and the Lord was preparing them for that. Jesus Christ is setting Himself up as the example that they should follow, because He's been there. He has been through the same thing.

We have this beautifully laid out for us in Philippians 2:5, where we read, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." So what He is telling them is that they're in for some very severe persecution, but they have to take it in stride, because it's a direct consequence of the fact that they are faithful to Him; that they are true to the Word of God; and, that they are standing for the truth that He has revealed to them. And because of their destiny of eternal life, the people who do not share that destiny are going to seek to destroy them.

On the other hand, He says, "While that is true, that He has experienced the suffering of death, and He identifies himself as the one who is dead, He also very happily identifies Himself as the one who is alive ("zao"). This refers to the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's in the aorist tense, referring to the point of rising from the dead on that first Easter morning. This is His total status now. It's active. Jesus Christ Himself is the one who is alive. It's indicative. It's a statement of fact.

Again, I remind you that there are many preachers today who say: "This is not true. This was written by John; and, Jesus Christ, while He was indeed executed, never again came back to life." The Lord says, "I'm the one who was dead, and some of you are going to experience the same thing through suffering. But I want you to know that when you follow My pattern in suffering, I assure you that you will also follow My pattern in coming back to physical life. I am the one who is now again alive."

Jesus Christ, of course, is the only one today who has a resurrection body. He is the pattern, therefore, for all these Smyrnian Christians. The martyred Christians of Smyrna will one day enjoy the same triumph over physical death. That's what He's telling them.

So this picture of Jesus Christ, as the eternal one who has forever overcome physical death, comes from the introductory picture that we had of Him in Revelation 1:17-18: "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead, and He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, 'Fear not. I am the first and the last. I am He that lived and was dead. Behold, I am alive forevermore, amen, and have the keys of Hades and of death.'" This picture of Him at the beginning of the book is picked up and used toward the Smyrnan Christians. He has the keys of Hades and of death. He has the keys of where people go when they die – that place of Hades. He has the keys of that experience of death. Why Sybil and Janus claimed to have the keys, that is totally false, and the people who followed them will bear the consequences.

**Christ's Evaluation of the Church at Smyrna**

Now in Revelation 2:9, Jesus Christ evaluates the suffering church. He says, "I know your works." The word "know" is "oida." This is the word for knowledge inherently. In this case, it refers to the Lord's omniscience. He knows this by omniscience. It is in the perfect tense, but in the actual Greek grammar, this has a present meaning. Jesus always knows this. That's what present tense means. It's active voice. This means that Jesus Christ Himself possesses this knowledge. It is in the indicative mood, which is a statement of fact. Jesus is fully aware of what His people go through for His sake. We are never alone in our tears and in our suffering. The blows that we take from the world are always well-known to the Lord. He knows.

Now the King James translation says, "I know thy works," and that is not in the Greek text. It simply says, "I know." And what he knows about them is not their works, because their works are not an issue with this church. What He knows is their tribulation. That's the Greek word "thlipsis." This is a word which means "pressure" – something which burdens the soul. Here it connotes persecution. So we have the idea of affliction (of relentless pressure). That's the context here – relentless pressure. They just cannot find a breathing space. When they are now under the attack of the pagan citizens and of the pagan government, it's the kind of attack that is constant pressure.

It began slowly, but by the time we got to the years 250 to 300 A.D., it was in high gear, and Christians were all the time (constantly) under the severe pressure of the attack of the pagans. They didn't know from day-to-day what was going to happen to them. The tears and the suffering and the sorrow ran in a flood-tide among believers. Here it connotes that kind of relentless pressure. Smyrna was a city of paganism, and not only of paganism, but of antagonistic Jews. They didn't care too much for the Christians either. Both of them sought to crush the testimony of the Christians. They did it to the Lord Jesus Christ, but he says, "I'm alive today. The people that persecuted Me are dead. And the time will come when you will be alive, and those who persecuted you will long be dead."

The Christians for 250 years then were under steady, mounting persecution, and this was true of the church as a whole. Increasingly, to be a Christian came to mean walking through the valley of the shadow of death. It was a constant point of pressure. That's what the word "thlipsis" means. It's a well-chosen word. The name Smyrna itself means "myrrh." The word "myrrh" refers to a sweet perfume which was used in embalming the dead. It is this which was brought by one of the Magi to Jesus Christ, the infant child, when He was in His home. Matthew 2:11 tells us that one of the gifts that one of the three Magi brought Him was "myrrh." "Myrrh" was a symbol of suffering, and it was brought to the child, Jesus, apparently, as a symbol of the death and suffering that was ahead for Him. Isaiah 60:6 tells us that in the future (in the kingdom age), only gold and frankincense will be brought to Jesus Christ, because the time of death will be passed, and that will no longer be brought to Him, but the gold, standing for His dignity, and the frankincense, for the fragrance of His Holiness, are the things that will be stressed.

"I know your tribulation," and something else that they suffer from – their poverty ("ptocheia"). "Ptocheia" means "abject poverty." Destitution is the idea. Certainly the Lord Jesus Christ knew poverty. Matthew 8:20: "And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes; the birds of the air have nests; but, the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." The Lord Jesus Christ was not a rich man. The Bible very clearly says that He became poor for our sake, so that we could be rich. This word "ptocheia" means abject poverty. This is a significant word, here in the city of Smyrna, which was in stark contrast to the general level of wealth that was enjoyed by the citizens of this city – the pagans. Here, the conditions for the Christians were mostly poverty, but it was the result of confiscation by the Roman authorities because the Christians refused to join in the emperor worship which was centered in that city. So it's a word which describes the Christians as stripped of their possessions, though they are enterprising, and though they were hard workers.

The Smyrna letter speaks to us today, for we too may suffer for our faith in Jesus Christ. It's kind of alien to us here in the United States, but who knows what times may yet come upon us? There is a rising resentment of indignation and anger which is developing on the part of unbelievers in this country, and of human viewpoint people, because of the Christian voice which is coming to bear in national politics. You can hear the snide remarks all the time. Why? Because they hate the innards of the Smyrna type believer who is ready to suffer; and who's ready to put his life on the line; and, who's ready to speak out (who has something to say). It didn't make any difference as long as you had a bunch of pulpit-pounding preachers who were yelling and shouting and doing all of the stuff that preachers do. But as soon as you've gotten Christians together, and you've informed them, and you've identified some of the problems and the issues, it has turned these people into raging bulls.

That's what we have in our society today. When believers are not a force in the society, then they are condescendingly tolerated. But once believers become a force in a pagan society such as we live in today, then they are resented; they are hated; and, everything possible is done to bring them down. Divine viewpoint principles anticipate this kind of pressure on believers from the world. We have many Scriptures that try to prepare us for just that. For example, 2 Timothy 3:12 says, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Who of us can relate to that verse? All of us who will lived godly shall suffer persecution. Christians in communist countries know what that is, but we don't know what that is – to suffer persecution. But nevertheless, it is an absolute potential that you and I may someday face.

John 16:33: "These things I have spoken unto you that in Me you might have peace. In the world, you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world."

John 15:18: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you are out of the world, therefore, the world hates you. Remember the word that I said unto you: 'The servant is not greater than his lord.' If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for My namesake, because they don't know Him that sent Me." Those must have been comforting words to the believers in Smyrna, and those who followed them over the early centuries of the New Testament church. Again and again, they faced this. They saw members of their family torn to shreds by the lions. They saw a madmen like Nero take Christians; impale them upon a stake; cover them with tar; and, then set him on fire to illuminate his night games in the Coliseum. It is very impressive to stand in the Coliseum in Rome, and to let your mind's eye run back over the centuries, and strain with your ears to hear those sounds of agony that once resounded on the floor of that amphitheater. It was people like the Smyrna Christians that were doing the suffering and the dying.

**The Spanish Inquisition**

So this letter gives us direction for our mental attitude and for our conduct in facing persecution. Our persecution may be merely nonphysical. It may be harassing persecution. It may be economic type of persecution. It just may be the persecution of being rejected. It may be fiercely hostile and physical persecution as it was in Smyrna. History is filled with believers who were hounded to death for holding to the Word of God. All of you have heard of the Spanish Inquisition. It was purely the result of a Roman Catholic priest Torquemada, who convinced Ferdinand and Isabella that what they needed to do was to gain the favor of God by permitting the Roman Catholic church authorities to bring under arrest those who were biblical Christians; those who rejected the authority of the Roman church; and, those who were Protestants, and to put them under torture and punishment until they changed their minds and became good Catholics; and if not, then to put them to death. And Ferdinand and Isabella, head of a nation which had the blessed privilege and the favor of God to have been permitted to be first in the new world, with all that that meant to the wealth of that country, were foolish enough to listen to that Jesuit priest. The result was that they drove from the country the backbone of Spanish society. They put them to death, and they made them flee the country. When he ran out of Protestants, Torquemada had his heart so sewed into the project, and had hit such a stride, that he convinced the sovereign rulers to let him go after the Jews. So we got rid of them next.

With that, Spain went down in history. There was nothing more to sustain the nation. The nation which stood at the peak of the world became a nobody, because they destroyed the very people who were the backbone of that society. So the Spanish Inquisition is a great example of this.

**The Trail of Blood**

I want to read a paragraph from a little book called The Trail of Blood by J. M. Carroll, reading on pages 11 and 12, about this early period of church history, from 300 A.D. to 500 A.D. It says: "Under the strange but wonderful impulse and leadership of John the Baptist, the eloquent man from the wilderness, and under the loving touch and miracle-working power of the Christ Himself, and the marvelous preaching of the twelve apostles and their immediate successors, the Christian religion spread mightily during the first 500-year period.

"However, it left a terribly bloody trail behind it. Judaism and paganism bitterly contested every forward movement. John the Baptist was the first of the great leaders to give up his life. His head was taken off. Soon after him went the Savior himself, the founder of this Christian religion. He died on the cross – the cruel death of the cross. Following their Savior, in rapid succession, fell many other martyred heroes. Stephen was stoned. Matthew was slain in Ethiopia. Mark was dragged through the streets until dead. Luke was hanged. Peter and Simon were crucified. Andrew was tied to a cross. James was beheaded. Philip was crucified and stoned. Bartholomew was flayed alive. Thomas was pierced with lances. James the less was thrown from the temple and beaten to death. Jude was shot to death with arrows. Matthias was stoned to death. And Paul was beheaded.

"More than 100 years had gone by before all this happened. This hard persecution by Judaism and paganism continued for two more centuries, and yet mightily spread the Christian religion. It went into all the Roman Empire, Europe, Asia, Africa, England, Wales, and about everywhere where there was any civilization. The churches greatly multiplied, and the disciples increased continuously. It is no wonder, indeed, that the phrase was coined: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

The fact that the word "Smyrna" means "myrrh," referring to the sweet perfume, also suggests the attitude that God the Father had toward the suffering saints in the city of Smyrna. The word "myrrh" is used in Scripture to refer to such a sweet-smelling, pleasant perfume odor. For example, in Song of Solomon 3:6, we read, "Who is this that comes out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?" Here, the beloved one is arriving with the pleasant odor of perfume (of myrrh) about Him."

Then there is also a similar reference in Psalm 45:8: "All your garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made you glad." Here again, myrrh is associated with a pleasant perfume.

So the suffering of the Smyrna Christians was a fragrance before God which was reminiscent to the Father of His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose suffering arose before the Father as a pleasant perfume. So it was that the Father was so delighted to be able to proclaim concerning His Son on the amount of transfiguration as recorded in Matthew 17:5, "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. Hear Him."

Years later, Peter, as he wrote his second epistle recalled this incident on the mount of transfiguration, and referred to it in 2 Peter 1:17, when he said, "For He (that is, the Lord Jesus) received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, 'This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'"

So the perfume quality of myrrh suggests the response that God has to the suffering saints in Smyrna. They are to Him a sweet-smelling perfume, even as His Son was in the faithfulness of His suffering in behalf of the sins of the world.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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