The Church of Smyrna

Return Church

John's letter to the 7 Churches

Saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and, What you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. ***Revelation 1:11 NKJV***

- These were 7 literal churches in John's day, but everything in the Word of God is for us today.
- Last week we studied about the church of Ephesus. They had done a lot of great things, but they lost their first love.
- Jesus told them to remember, repent and do their first works.

The Church of Smyrna

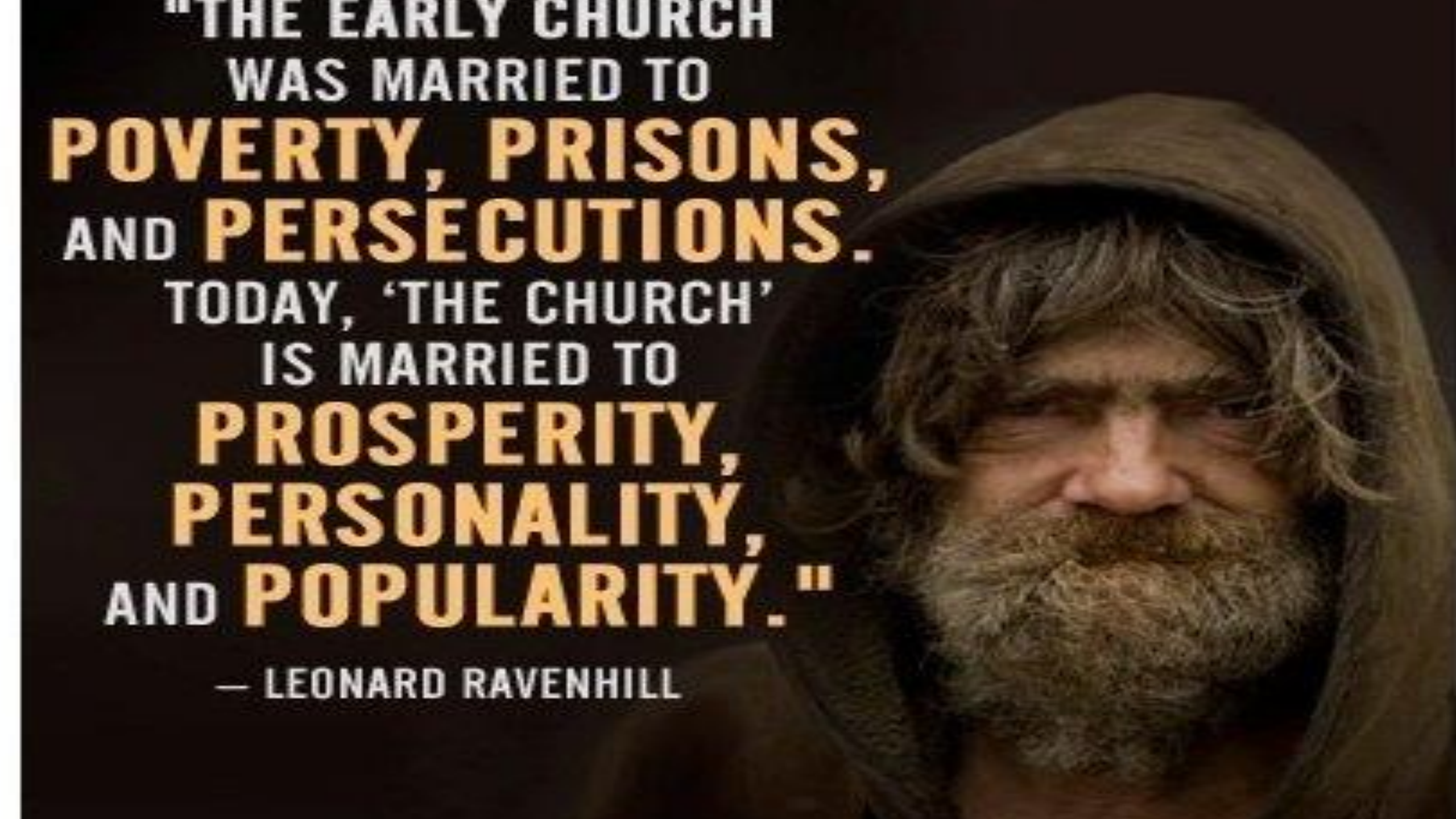
The Persecuted Church

Tribulation, Persecution and Suffering

- Our flesh hates even the sound of those words.
- We want to believe that when we get saved and begin to follow Jesus, that He will bless us and not allow us to suffer any pain.
- But nothing could be further from the truth.
- He never promised believers a pain-free life.
- To further complicate this mis-understanding is the American church-worlds embrace of the false doctrine called “The prosperity gospel”.
- This false teaching has spread throughout the American churches telling believers that if you will trust Jesus, and pay your tithes and offerings, that he will make you rich and prosperous.
- They even take it one step further and say that you will never get sick, but you will always be in great health.
- It’s called the health, wealth and prosperity gospel.
- The Bible teaches the opposite. The early church experienced great tribulations, sufferings and persecution.

"THE EARLY CHURCH
WAS MARRIED TO
POVERTY, PRISONS,
AND PERSECUTIONS.
TODAY, 'THE CHURCH'
IS MARRIED TO
PROSPERITY,
PERSONALITY,
AND POPULARITY."

— LEONARD RAVENHILL



This is for us American's today

You will have tribulation

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. ***John 16:33 NKJV***

Will suffer persecution

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. Yes, **and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution**. ***II Timothy 3:10-12 NKJV***

The Church of Smyrna

This is our text

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: 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. 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 ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 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. ***Revelation 2:8-11 NKJV***

Smyrna

- The letter to the Church of Smyrna is a letter written by Jesus Christ, through the Apostle John to early Christians suffering in the city of Smyrna.
- Ancient Smyrna is now the city of Izmir in modern day Turkey.
- It was a very important sea-port city in its day known for its trade and commerce. It was called the Crown of Asia.
- In 600 BC Smyrna was conquered and destroyed by the Lydian King Alyattes, the city was in ruins. It remained desolate for 400 years.
- Then Alexander the Great came through as he was conquering the world, and he would rebuild it into one of the most spectacular cities of its day.
- In a lot of Smyrna's old literature, they reference it as the city that once was dead and now has come back to life.
- Smyrna's major commodity was the highly valuable and fragrant spice called Myrrh. They were the world largest importer and exporter of Myrrh; hence the name Smyrna.

No rebuke

The church of Smyrna was one of two churches out of the 7 that John wrote to, that Jesus did not rebuke or warn. The other church was Philadelphia.

I know

I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); ***Revelation 2:9 NKJV***

- All 7 of the letters begin with this phrase, “I know.” Jesus is very aware of what sufferings they were facing and going through.
- Jesus is aware of every little detail of your life as well. All of your sorrows, sufferings, pains, persecutions and tribulations.
- He will never leave you or forsake you. He knows exactly what you are going through.

Tribulation

I know your works, tribulation, ***Revelation 2:9 NKJV***

Tribulation – *thlipsis* - affliction, tribulation,, trouble, sufferings, hardships, trials, persecution, distress, anguish, oppression.

- In America we don't often associate tribulation with Christianity, but in the early church they did.
- Also, in countries all around the world where people don't enjoy freedom of speech or freedom of religion, those Christians totally understand this idea of tribulation.

Do Americans even know what persecution is?

- The church of Smyrna was a persecuted church. In fact, many of the Christian churches during the first 300 years of Christianity were persecuted greatly.
- Back then, to be a Christian would cost you something.
- The history books are filled with stories of Early Church Christian martyrs by the thousands.
- When Americans read about persecution, it is sometimes hard for us to relate to.
- I would say that the majority of American Christians have suffered very little if any persecution.
- There are many countries around the world today, where Christians are being persecuted for their faith.

Some countries where Christians are persecuted today

- **North Korea** – Totalitarian state ideology, forced labor camps, and execution for possessing a Bible or worshiping.
- **Somalia** – Extreme Islamic extremism where converts from Islam face immediate execution or public beheading.
- **Yemen** – The death penalty for apostasy (leaving Islam).
- **Sudan** – Severe violence, church bombings, and displacement driven by ongoing civil conflict.
- **China**- Millions of Christians worship in independent, unregistered "house churches". These groups face routine surveillance, harassment, forced closures, building demolitions, and police raids.

Some countries where Christians are persecuted today

- **Syria** – Escalated threats from extremist groups and militant organizations.
- **Pakistan** – Systemic discrimination, severe blasphemy laws, and targeted mob violence.
- **Libya** – Unofficial and underground church structures targeted by militia groups, with strict prohibitions on evangelism.
- **Iran** – Criminalization of house churches and severe prison sentences for converts from Islam

Nigeria

- Today, the cost is being paid most brutally in Nigeria, where an estimated 125,000 Christians have been killed by Muslim extremists since 2009.
- Nigeria is now the epicenter of modern-day Christian Martyrdom.

But, persecution has always been a cost of following Jesus.

Jesus's words from the Beatitudes

Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. ***Matthew 5:10-12 NKJV***

This is the last of the Beatitudes. My Mom hung these upon my bedroom wall when I was a child. I would often read them and think upon them. This final one was always a bit of a mystery to me.

The early Church persecuted by the Jews

- It was the Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem—specifically the Sanhedrin (the Jewish high council), including the high priest and the Pharisees and Sadducees that persecuted the early church.
- They arrested, interrogated, and flogged the apostles for preaching in Jesus' name.
- Saul of Tarsus Led a violent campaign against the Jerusalem church after the stoning of Stephen, going house to house, dragging men and women off to prison, and approving executions.
- This persecution forced many believers to flee Jerusalem, which in turn helped the spread of Christianity.
- Later Saul, who would become known as the apostle Paul, would suffer great persecution from the Jews, of whom he was once a leader.

Through many tribulations

Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and saying, **We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God**. ***Acts 14:19-22 NKJV***

Paul's sufferings

In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, in perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting's often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. ***II Corinthians 11:23-28 NKJV***

Church history

- Throughout church history, believers have suffered persecution and obscurity. They have been beaten, ridiculed, defrocked, and defamed.
- They have suffered poverty, isolation, betrayal, and disgrace. They have been hounded, slandered, harassed, and murdered.
- The heroes of the faith have always been those who sacrificed their lives, fortunes, and reputations for the sake of the gospel.
- Indeed, persecution and martyrdom have been among the church's highest callings and greatest honors.

First 300 years of Christianity

- In the first three centuries of the church, from Nero to Diocletian, Roman persecutions were fierce.
- History tells us of gladiators in the Colosseum, lions and wild animals in the Circus Maximus, and where they would burn people on stakes in the Forum.
- Christians were forced into a precarious, often secretive existence, living on the margins of society and meeting in catacombs, caverns, and thicket of trees. Yet they persevered.

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." ***Tertullian***

The Roman Emperor Nero

- In AD 64, the Great Fire of Rome devastated much of the city. The Emperor Nero blamed and falsely accused Christians for the disaster.
- This began one of the first major waves of persecution in Christian history.
- Christians were; arrested, tortured, executed publicly, burned alive, and thrown to wild animals in arenas.
- Because Christianity was still a small and misunderstood movement, believers became convenient scapegoats.
- The deaths of the apostles Peter and Paul are traditionally associated with Nero’s persecution.

The Roman Emperor Diocletian

- Beginning in AD 303, Diocletian launched what became known as the Great persecution, one of the harshest anti-Christian campaigns in Roman history.
- Under his rule, churches were destroyed, Scriptures were burned, Christians lost legal rights, and believers were imprisoned and executed.
- Authorities demanded public sacrifices to Roman gods, and the emperor wanted to be worshiped as divine.
- Christians who refused faced severe punishment.
- The goal was to eliminate Christianity entirely.
- Yet even during intense suffering, many believers refused to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ.

We glory in tribulation

But we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ***Romans 5:3 NKJV***

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. ***James 1:2-4 NLT***

You will experience both pleasure and pain as a Christian

Pleasure

- Everything will go your way
- You will experience great and high mountain tops
- God will answer your prayers
- Prosperity
- Blessings
- Knowing Jesus as the Resurrected Christ

Pain

- Nothing will go your way
- You will walk through very deep and lonely valleys
- You don’t even feel like God is hearing your prayers
- Poverty
- Sufferings, tribulations persecutions
- Knowing Jesus as the Crucified Christ

Prosperity and disaster

I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness,
I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.
Isaiah 45:6-7 NIV

- God will bring us pleasure and pain.
- The devil may be the one trying to destroy you, but God is allowing it to happen, because He is working His character into your heart.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. ***Romans 8:28 NKJV***

Why do you serve God?

- Do you only love God and serve Him because you want a blessing from Him?
- Are you generous with your money, because you want Him to make you prosperous? Do you sow $10 hoping to reap $100.
- Because you are following Christ and serving Him, do you expect Him to answer your prayers and bless you?
- Are you in a relationship with Jesus only because you think He will make your life better? Is it all about what God can do for you.
- Do you sometimes get angry or frustrated with God when your life is not going well, because you think you deserve blessings because you have been obedient to Him, or because you have given up so much for Him.

God loves you too much to leave you the way you are

- You must understand that God will allow suffering, tribulation and persecutions to come to Christians.
- Christians are not exempt from suffering.
- In fact, God allows it because He loves you too much to leave you the way you are. He is working on all of us to make us more like Jesus.
- He is the potter and we are the clay. He will mold us and make us into His image and likeness.
- In fact, the more you mature in God, the more of His character He works inside of you. The more suffering and tribulation God can put you through.
- The devil wants to kill, steal and to destroy, and God allows Him to come after us, because God will use it to make us into what He wants to make us into.
- There is a great example in the Bible of someone who loved Jesus for who He was, not for what He could do for her. Mary Magedlene.

Mary Magdalene

She was delivered of 7 demons.

Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons; ***Luke 8:1-2 NLT***

She was standing at the cross of Calvary.

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ***John 19:25 NKJV***

She was the first one to go to the tomb.

Now the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him. ***John 20:1-2 NKJV***

Mary Magdalene

But Mary stood outside by the tomb **weeping**, and as she wept she stooped down *and looked* into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? **She said to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.** Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, **Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.** Jesus said to her, Mary! She turned and said to Him, Rabboni! (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and *to* My God and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* He had spoken these things to her. ***John 20:11-18 NKJV***

Mary Magdalene

- At this time, Mary didn't know He was risen from the dead.
- She was not looking for a God to bless her.
- She was not looking for a God that will answer her prayers.
- She was not looking for a God that could meet her needs or could do something for her.
- She was simply in love with Jesus.
- **She was in love with the Crucified Christ.**
- **She loved Jesus for who He is, and not for what He could do for her.**
- She just wanted to know where they had taken His bloody, broken, bruised and crucified body.
- She said, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."
- I want to love Him like Mary did, and not for what He can do for me.

Poverty

I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); ***Revelation 2:9 NKJV***

- Taking a stand for Jesus Christ in the Roman empire and particularly in Smyrna cost the believers something.
- Christians in Smyrna would often lose their jobs. They couldn't be a part of the trade unions.
- Most people wouldn't want to buy from Christians, they were very ostracized as a people. Most of them lived in deep poverty.
- Most Christians were naturally very poor in the early Church, but Jesus is telling them that they are rich spiritually.

How do you define rich?

- Most people in America would define riches as having a big investment account, having your home and cars paid for, or having enough money saved up to retire in luxury. That is not true riches.
- Here Jesus tells the suffering, persecuted, poor Christians in Smyrna that they are rich.

Natural riches are temporal and have no eternal value. Your net worth is not your true worth.

Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses. ***Luke 12:13-21 NKJV***

Rich toward God

- The believers in Smyrna were rich toward God. They may not have had any natural riches, but they knew who they were in Christ.
- They knew that their Father was the creator of the universe.
- They were sons and daughters of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. If all you have is Jesus, you are truly rich.
- You can have earthly riches and be so very poor.
- If you can ever get the revelation of how rich you are ”in Christ”, you will stop pursuing earthly riches and spend your time and energy pursuing the spiritual riches God has given you.
- When you got saved, you went from being a homeless orphan to being an adopted Son or Daughter of the Creator of the Universe. You now have a seat at His table. You are a child of the King, Almighty God Himself.

Rich in Christ

- You have been made righteous, not because of anything you did, but because of your faith in Jesus Christ.
- You are now justified. Your sins have been forgiven, and you are in right standing with God Almighty.
- The judge has pronounced you innocent.
- You were a sinner, out of relationship with God, on your way to hell, and Jesus saved you and not only forgave your sins, but He made you righteous. This makes you rich.
- The moment you got saved, the Holy Spirit placed you “in Christ” and that changed everything. You went from spiritual poverty and death, to eternal riches and life.

A great analogy

- The best analogy I know of is the true story of the west Texas sheep farmer who for many years tended to his herd of sheep, on the land he inherited from his father and grandfather.
- He was very poor his entire life-time, just barely getting by.
- Until one day, when the sheep farmer was in his 80's, an oil company tested for and struck oil on his land and over night, he became a multi-millionaire.
- But he had lived on that land his entire life in deep poverty. The oil was always under his land, he was always rich, but he never knew it, it was not revealed to him until near the end of his life.
- Most Christians are rich in Christ, but they are not even aware of it.

Jesus was rich, but became poor so we who were poor could become rich

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. ***II Corinthians 8:9 NKJV***

- Smyrna was poor in the natural world, but they knew who they were in Christ. Jesus said they were rich.
- This is how someone can gladly, joyfully, and faithfully follow Jesus all the way to a martyr's death, because they realize how rich they are because they know Him.

For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. ***Philippians 1:21 NKJV***

People don't know what true riches are

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil. ***I Timothy 6:6-10 NKJV***

Who switched the price tags?

- It would be like if some boys on night broke into my store and switched the price tags. A $200 name brand coat is now price for .99 cents and a piece of candy is now priced at $200.
- This is what life is like. Satan has put the wrong values on everything. Most people think houses, lands, vehicles, investment accounts are valuable, while most people view studying the Bible, fasting, prayer, and worship as a small thing of value. One man's trash is another man's treasure.

Blessed are you poor

Blessed *are you* poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ***Luke 6:20 NKJV***

Jesus looked at him and said, How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. ***Luke 18:24-25 NIV***

- Not many rich people will ever make it to heaven, because they never see their poverty apart from Christ.
- They think God is blessing them, so everything must be ok.
- They think they are smarter and better than other people.
- Most of them never see their great need for a savior that came and died for them, to buy them out of the slavery of sin.

They were slandered

I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ***Revelation 2:9 NIV***

- Everyone in Rome at this time, had to bow down to Ceaser as Lord and god, but the Jews had an exemption with the Roman government, so they did not have to, because their religion teaches that there is only One God, and they were no threat to the Romans because they were not trying to convert anyone to their religion. But the Christians didn't enjoy such an exemption.
- The Jews didn't like the early Christians, because these early Christians threatened the Jews and their exemption. So, they just made up lies about them to hurt them with the Romans.
- They told the Romans that their allegiance was to a different king than Ceaser and they were planning a rebellion against the Romans.
- They told all sorts of lies on the Christians at Smyrna.
- These slanders caused the Christians to be alienated, despised or marginalized, and thus persecuted. Many of them were arrested on false charges.

Prison

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 ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ***Revelation 2:10 NKJV***

- Prison was not a nice air-conditioned place with 3 meals a day and a work-out room.
- Prison probably was a rat-infested dungeon full of human excrement with very little light and not much food.
- To die probably meant you would be sent to the coliseum and thrown in with the wild animals while the crowd cheered. Or maybe you would be burned at a stake.
- Some of the most famous martyrs of the early church were martyred here in Smyrna.

Polycarp AD 69-155

- The most famous martyr of the early church was Polycarp.
- He was the Bishop of the church of Smyrna and a disciple of the Apostle John.
- He was an amazing hero of the early church.
- He was arrested by the Roman leader who pleaded with Polycarp to deny his faith so he could spare him. Then he made his famous statement:
- *"For 86 years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"*
- The pro-counsel said I will throw you to the wild beast, but he continued saying, I will not deny my Lord. He was burned at the stake.

A short period of time

And you will have tribulation ten days. ***Revelation 2:10 NKJV***

- When Jesus said, you will have tribulation for ten days, that was a metaphor in those days for just a short period of time.
- It's like the scripture in Peter that says "a while."

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, **after you have suffered a while**, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*. ***I Peter 5:10 NKJV***

The crown of life

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 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. ***Revelation 2:10-11 NKJV***

- After this is all over, I have something special for you.
- I will give you the crown of life. Interesting because the crown was the symbol of the city of Smyrna. The crown is what emperors wore.
- Jesus was saying, hang in there, and I will give you a crown that you can wear for eternity.
- Take up your cross now in time, and you get an eternal crown.
- The 2nd death that Jesus is referring to is the Lake of Fire or eternal damnation. Overcome through Jesus Christ, and you need not fear this.

The future?

- None of us know exactly what the future holds for us, but I have a good reason to believe that things are going to get much worse here in America before the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ.
- The world will get darker-and-darker.
- We know that the church world will continue falling away, or back-slide. This will more than likely cause more-and-more wicked people to be elected to government positions.
- Which will probably cause Christians to continue to lose their rights and have to suffer more-and-more persecution.
- Let's get our hearts ready to go through whatever our Lord would ask us to go through. If he asked the early Christians to suffer for His name's sake, He might just ask the same of "**The Church of the End Times**".

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. ***II Timothy 3:12 NKJV***