

Faithful Unto Death (*Part 1*)

Revelation 2:8-11

Thought for the Day: Jesus Christ is the God of the Old Testament, the eternal God who has always existed in the past and will always exist in the future, our Creator, Sustainer, and eternal Savior.

The letter to the church in Smyrna is the second of seven letters dictated by the Lord Jesus Christ to the Apostle John. John was on the island of Patmos where he had been exiled because of his faith in and testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the shortest of the seven letters (Revelation 2-3) but it is packed with Theological and Practical truth that is as applicable to us today as it was for the believers in Smyrna.

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

- The angel of the church in Smyrna was the pastor, God's primary messenger to the church.
- Smyrna was thirty-five miles north of Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7).
 - An important seaport city located in modern-day Turkey.
 - Continues to exist to this day and is called Izmir.
 - In John's day, it had a population about ½ million people.
 - A beautiful city; a commercial center; the site of many temples, including one erected in honor of the Emperor Tiberias.
- Also a center for the worship of Caesar, who was considered to be the embodiment of the "god of Rome."
 - "A man-god [Caesar] was being substituted for the God-man [Jesus Christ]." (*Charles Ryrie, Revelation, p. 35*)
 - The worship of Caesar became compulsory for all the citizens of the city.
 1. A pinch of incense was offered on an altar and the worshiper declared, "Caesar is Lord." The worshiper then received a certificate which enabled them to go about their daily life in the city. (*ibid, p. 36*)
 2. Once this certificate was obtained, the person was then free to worship other gods, if they wished. But without that certificate, a person was very limited in what they could do.
 3. For the Christians in Smyrna, there was no God and no Lord except Jesus.
 - a) Consequently, they faced abject poverty; they lost their jobs.
 - b) Their houses, properties and material goods were confiscated.
 4. This is what Christians will face in the not-too-distant future under Antichrist. The entire world will be forced to accept the Mark of the Beast. (Rev. 13:11-18)
 - This system is being developed and implemented. (UN Agenda 2030; ID2020). Jesus is coming soon! Are you ready? (Mt. 16:3; 24:33)
- Smyrna had a large Jewish population which was largely responsible for the persecution the Christians were experiencing.

The words of the first and the last...

- Jesus used this title to refer to Himself three times in Revelation. (1:17; 2:8; 22:13)
 - Two synonymous titles: the Alpha and Omega (1:8; 21:6; 22:13); the beginning and end (3:14; 21:6; 22:13). A total of nine times (repetition signifies importance).
 - Revelation 22:12-13 – “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”
 - You can bank on it! Therefore, “Blessed are those who wash their robes [cp. Rev. 7:14], so that they may have the right to the tree of life [signifies eternal life] and that they may enter the city by the gates [eternity in heaven].” (Rev. 22:14)
- An illustration of Jesus as the first and last, the beginning and end, the Alpha and Omega:
 - Smyrna is also translated myrrh. Myrrh is mentioned 16 times in the O.T. and 4 times in the N.T.
 - At the *beginning* of Jesus’ life, the Wise Men brought myrrh as a gift (Matthew 2:11). It was a valuable spice and perfume; it was used in the embalming of bodies. The gift of myrrh prefigured Jesus’ death on the cross as the sacrifice for our sins.
 - At the *end* of Jesus’ life, as He hung on the cross, He was offered wine mixed with myrrh as a pain killer to dull the senses; He refused it (Mark 15:23).
 - *After* His body was taken down, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrapped Jesus’ body with linen cloths with myrrh and other spices and placed it in Joseph’s tomb (John 19:39).
 - Just as myrrh (Smyrna) figured prominently at the beginning and end of Jesus’ life, so He wants to be the first and last (and everything in between) in our lives.

'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.'

- Compare Revelation 1:17-18. This description of the Lord would have been especially meaningful for the believers in Smyrna as they faced persecution, suffering and death.
- What is the meaning of Jesus as the first and last, beginning and end, Alpha and Omega?
 - Compare Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12-13.
 - Jesus was clearly identifying Himself as the God of the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe!
- Jesus was at the beginning of creation as the Creator (John 1:1-3) and He will be at the end of creation (2 Peter 3:10). He has always existed in the past and He will always exist in the future.
- Jesus will be at the beginning of the new creation, of which there will be no end. (Revelation 21:1-8)
- Jesus was at the beginning of our existence, our conception (Psalm 139:13-16), and He will be with us at our death (Psalm 116:15; Stephen – Acts 6:54-55, 59).
- Jesus was at the beginning of our salvation: He is the Author and Finisher, the Founder and Perfecter, of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2; Philippians 1:6).

Where is Jesus in your life? Is He first? Is He last? Or is He the first and the last—and everything in between?