

**PREFACE**

These notes are to serve as a blessing and help to those studying the word with Pastor Neil Spencer. Pastor Neil does not claim to fully agree with all the thoughts, beliefs, writings, or teachings of every named source/person in these notes. The Bible is the ultimate authority & ALL believers are to be Bereans (Acts 17.10-11).

**INTRODUCTION: Teaching Notes (2 Slides)****1. JESUS LOVES CHURCH**

1. 2nd section of Revelation, Jesus' love to the **CHURCH Revealed (Tough/Tender/Timely/Thorough)**
2. **REVEALED** — the centerpiece of Revelation — revealing JESUS & things that will soon take place (1.1)
2. In chapters 2/3 we see 7 letters/msg's to 7 churches ... 4 things to take note of concerning these churches:
  1. These were 7 actual churches in modern day Turkey that existed in John's day.
  2. These letters give clarity to the LOVE that Jesus has: commending/warning/teaching/critiquing
  3. These letters are universal/personal
  4. These letters follow a a similar pattern:
    1. **Church**—Identification the city where the church resides.
    2. **Characterization** — Insightful/Relevant description of Jesus to that local church
    3. **Commendation**—Encouragement from Jesus
    4. **Critique/Complaint**—Warning of something erroneous or even egregious.
    5. **Command**—Instruction of how do/get/stay right...
    6. **Counsel/Caution** — Exhortation & even warning to all believes
    7. **Comfort**—Jesus offers the genuine believers words of comfort & encouragement for the future.
3. So, let's consider the 2nd church that Jesus wrote a letter to, the church in Smyrna

**REVELATION 2.8-11**

**8** *“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive: 9 “I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich! I know the blasphemy of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan. 10 Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life. 11 “Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death.*

**1. Church: Smyrna****1. What's Smyrna?**

1. Today, Izmir in Turkey // 35m north of Ephesus & was “the crown of Asia” for its natural beauty.
2. In that day it was large, beautiful, proud; & functioned as a center of learning, trade, & culture.

3. Deeply committed to idolatry & the worship of the Roman Emperors.

4. Found this interesting & encourage you to reference [enduringword.com](http://enduringword.com) w/ Pastor DAVID GUZIK

1. In 196B.C. — the 1st temple the spiritual symbol of the Roman Empire was built.

2. Guzik says this: *“In the day days of Jesus, emperor worship was not predominant. Yet, once the “spirit” of Rome was worshipped, it wasn’t much of a step to worship the dead Emperors of Rome. Then it was only another small step to worship the living Emperors, and then to demand such worship as a evidence of political allegiance and civic pride.”*

3. *In a.d. 23 Smyrna won the privilege (over 11 other cities) to build the first temple to worship the Emperor Tiberius Caesar. Smyrna was a leading city in the Roman cult of Emperor worship.*

4. *The Roman Emperor Domitian (a.d. 81-96) was the first to demand worship under the title “Lord” from the people of the Roman Empire as a test of political loyalty. According to ancient church history, it was under the reign of Domitian that John was banished to the Island of Patmos where he received this vision.*

5. *“Emperor worship had begun as spontaneous demonstration of gratitude to Rome; but toward the end of the first century, in the days of Domitian, the final step was taken and Caesar worship became compulsory. Once a year the Roman citizen must burn a pinch of incense on the altar to the godhead of Caesar; and having done so, he was given a certificate to guarantee that he had performed his religious duty.” (Barclay)*

6. *“All that the Christians had to do was to burn that pinch of incense, say, ‘Caesar is Lord,’ receive their certificate, and go away and worship as they pleased. But that is precisely what the Christians would not do. They would give no man the name of Lord; that name they would keep for Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. They would not even formally conform.” (Barclay)*

5. Tough setting for Christians. They were called to lay down their comfort/social status/safety/security in solidarity to JESUS. Yet, this is the very core of our FAITH... JESUS is LORD.

2. Smyrna Church was **P**oor/**P**ersecuted/**I**mPrisoned/**P**ersistently **P**ersevering/**P**romised Life Ever More

3. Whose the Angel/Messenger/Pastor in Smyrna?

1. Reference recommendation: [“What the World is Coming To”](#) Pastor Chuck Smith (pg 30-31)

2. Again, for a fuller context of church history, I want to highly encourage you to reference E.W.

3. Amazing! That statement is also true of Jesus — in v8 — Insightful/Relevant description of Jesus

## 2. **Characterization:** First & Last // Dead, but now Alive

1. Why does Jesus give this description?

2. The name Smyrna means “bitter” and is related to the word myrrh.

1. Do you remember the gifts that were given to Jesus by the Magi from the East?
  2. Gold, Frankincense, & Myrrh (Matt. 2:11).
    1. Gold — Jesus was born the King of the Jews + King of kings — Royalty.
    2. Frankincense — expensive incense, Jesus as our High Priest — Deity.
    3. Myrrh — a spice used in the preparation of a body for burial — Humanity.
      1. The fragrance is produced by crushing the spice.
      2. Jesus is beautiful to us b/c of his death/resurrection.
  3. Smyrna — the name & location reminds us of the suffering & death of Jesus & church at Smyrna.
  4. It's in the crushing, the suffering that the aroma/impact of the church is most fragrant.
  3. Yet, another reference recommendation "[Unlocking the Last Days](#)" *In Isaiah 60, we read a description of Jesus reigning in the thousand-year millennial kingdom on earth, after the tribulation period. Isaiah speaks of people coming from everywhere, bringing gold and incense and proclaiming the praises of the Lord (Isa. 60:6). They'll bring gold, and they'll bring incense, but they won't bring myrrh, because Jesus will never suffer and die again.*
  4. Jesus identifies Himself to this suffering church as "*the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive.*"
    1. *First & Last* — His **POSITION & POWER**
    2. *Dead, but now Alive* — His **PRESENCE & PROMISE**. — He's been there & there's MORE coming!
    3. **Hebrews 4.14** *So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. 15 This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. 16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*
  5. Jesus' **POSITION & POWER** were important to KNOW, b/c of the **POVERTY & PERSECUTION** in Smyrna
3. **Commendation:** (v9) I Know (Poverty & Persecution)
1. Poverty: The poverty described here refers to being destitute.
    1. There's poor & then, there's po'.
    2. Lost property/possessions as a result of persecution.
    3. They were very poor in the material sense but very rich in the spiritual sense.
  2. Persecution:
    1. V9 — *I know the blasphemy of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan.*
    2. A large Jewish community thrived in Smyrna as their religion/practices were permitted by Rome.
    3. But, they certainly were not favorable to Christians, thus not truly following YHWH, but Satan.

4. Thus, from both Jews & Gentiles, the Christians in Smyrna received slander & suffering.

3. Here's the thing I want you to get... the church was **CHALLENGED** & going through **CHALLENGING** times, and honestly, even more **CHALLENGING** times were coming...

1. What does Jesus say... I'm coming to the rescue... I don't want you to be challenged

2. No, he says... I **KNOW**...

#### 4. **Critique/Complaint:**

1. One is not given

2. Lesson in how the Love of Jesus is Timely — we'd do well to learn this — right thing/wrong time

3. **Illus:** One of my children (stole + returned + confessed + next step) — Timely — Retribution/Reward

#### 5. **Command:** (v10) very simple. Do. Not. Fear.

1. Often when faced with challenge we can fall into the **Fight // Flight // Freeze // Fear**

2. Remember the 90's ... No Fear... why... ever heard that statements that **DO NOT FEAR** is in Bible 365x?

3. Article "*Is it true the words "do not be afraid " is in the Bible 365 times?"*"

1. Phrases in the Bible:

1. *Fear not* (302x in 129vs)

6. *I will not fear* (3x 3 vs)

2. *Do not be afraid* (33x in 7vs)

7. *Whom shall I fear?* (1vs)

3. *Be anxious for nothing* (1vs)

8. *I will not be afraid* (2x 2vs)

4. *Do not fear* (66x 20vs)

9. *Do not be dismayed* (99x 16vs)

5. *Do not worry* (24x 7vs)

2. There's overlap, but I haven't every fearless encouragement: *be of good courage, be brave, etc.*

3. It is the most repeated command in all of the Bible & perhaps the easiest to fail

4. In my opinion, often what's needed as Christians is not more insight/information

1. Community + Encouragement + Consistency

2. **Illus:** Rhythms (friend) — Coastline Bi-Fold — **G**ather/**G**roup/**G**o | **G**lory/**G**ospel/**G**rowth/**G**one

3. In your spiritual life you are left w/ 1 of 2 choices — **Random** or **Rhythmic** — *In everything you do, you can choose to be **RANDOM** or **RHYTHMIC**. Random produces irregularity & failure. Rhythms produce regularity & fruit. There's **NOTHING** spiritual about **RANDOM**.*

5. Fear Not — Believe & Keep on Believing — be **Rhythmic** not **Random**...

#### 6. **Counsel:** (v 10 *Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.*)

Here's what's coming for you ... & I will give you the crown of life

1. Here's What's Coming For You

1. You are about to suffer, devil is coming for you, you'll be imprisoned, tested ... you will suffer (in some ways I really appreciate about this w/ Jesus... He's honest.)
2. It'll be for 10 days — what does this mean? Could be, that'll be for a short period of time
3. Interestingly there were 10 periods of intense persecution during the Smyrna period that are known by their Roman emperors (dates are approximate):
  1. Nero (AD 64–68)—burned Rome & blamed Christians; crucified & threw Christians into pits with wild animals; executed Paul & possibly Peter
  2. Domitian (AD 90–96)—killed thousands in Rome; banished John to the Isle of Patmos
  3. Trajan (AD 104–117)—outlawed Christianity; burned Ignatius at the stake
  4. Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180)—tortured and beheaded Christians
  5. Severus (AD 200–211)—burned, crucified, and beheaded Christians
  6. Maximinius (AD 235–237)—executed Christians
  7. Decius (AD 250–253)—tried to wipe out Christianity and executed those he could find
  8. Valerian (AD 257–260)—tried to wipe out Christianity; executed the Bishop of Carthage
  9. Aurelian (AD 270–275)—persecuted Christians any way
  10. Diocletian (AD 303–312)—burned the Scriptures
4. You may say, seems long... perspective matters. *“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (MT 10:28 NKJV).

## 2. I Will Give You the Crown of Life

1. Christians were **P**oor/**P**ersecuted/**I**mPrisoned/**P**ersistently **P**ersevering, yet Jesus urged faithfulness & **P**romised a crown of life to those who stood fast. Many did, even unto death.
2. The Bible speaks of at least 5 Heavenly crowns for overcomers:
  1. The Imperishable Crown (1 Corinthians 9:24–27).
  2. The Crown of Rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19–20).
  3. The Crown of Life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).
  4. The Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8).
  5. The Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:2–4).
3. There are 2 different words for crown in the ancient Greek language.
  1. I described the kind of crown a *king* would wear, *diadem*, a crown of royalty.
  2. Then *stephanos*, used here – given as a trophy to a winning athlete.
  3. Worn at marriages & special celebrations.
4. The promise of a crown was especially meaningful for the Christians of Smyrna.
  1. Pagan worshippers wore crowns + good citizens/winning athletes received crowns.

2. Jesus looks at the Smyrna church, & says: “You are My winners, You deserve a trophy.”

3. And the picture is of Jesus and His bride, each wearing their crowns.

3. Transparently, I don't know why the suffering or all the implications of these crowns, but I do know this:

1. **1 Corinthians 9 24** *Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! 25 All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. 26 So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. 27 I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.*

2. Life is short/Eternity is not. Rewards are real. Don't compete w/ others, but complete your race.

7. **Comfort:** (v11) Victorious = No 2nd Death

1. V11 — “Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death.”

2. The second death is hell, the lake of fire (Rev 20.14/21.8).

1. Though Satan threatened and attacked their life.

2. Jesus promises His overcomers that death is conquered for them.

3. If you're born 1x; you'll die 2x... if you're born 2x, you'll die 1x.

3. Illus: interaction with someone after last Sunday // dynamics of losing/leaving salvation

1. Professing that Jesus is Lord & we'll do that today through communion

2. We do that everyday with our **Attitudes, Beliefs, Choices, Decisions, Engagements, Friendships, Goals, Habits, Interests, Journeys ...**

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. Smyrna Church was **Poor/Persecuted/ImPrisoned/Persistently Persevering/Promised Life Ever More**

2. As we go through challenge in following Jesus may we remember:

1. Jesus Knows — **COMPASSION**

2. Jesus' **POSITION & POWER** — 1st/Last + Dead/Alive

3. Jesus' **PROMISE** — Life is short/Eternity is not. **Rewards are Real. Don't Compete//Complete your Race.**

4. This is **HIS LOVE... Revealed (Tough/Tender/Timely/Thorough)**

**EXHORTATION:** This Winter/Spring, as we **GATHER** on Sundays & **GROUP** together during the week may we continue to **LEARN & LIVE** this truth that **JESUS LOVES CHURCH ...** so may be those who simply **LOVE JESUS and LOVE HIS PEOPLE!**