

Hymns:           12 I'll Fly Away                           31 Victory in Jesus  
                      Because He Lives                        This World Is Not My Home  
Scripture:       Psalm 16

Big idea: Smyrna the Resurrection City

Today we're continuing our **trip** through the fascinating book of Revelation. We learned that this final book of the Bible sometimes called *the apocalypse* unveils or reveals Jesus **not** in His humanity as shown in the gospels but instead it reveals Him in His glory. The imagery of Christ in the first chapter of Revelation describes a person of great majesty and power.

Yet despite Jesus having this frightening appearance, His demeanor towards His own is tender and gracious. We learned that we who know Him will receive a perfect, immortal body like His that can float through the air, pass through walls, materialize, dematerialize, and even fly through the clouds and beyond.

Last time we learned about the first of the seven churches of Revelation -- Ephesus. This large, prosperous port on the Aegean Sea and transportation hub featured the temple of Diana, the pagan goddess of fertility. While that church did many good deeds, its heart was not right. It had lost its first love of the LORD and was **just** going through the motions. How ironic that a city consumed with *sensual* love would have a church whose prime weakness was its *spiritual* love.

Now we're moving on in our travels to Smyrna, a city that lies 30 to 40 miles to the north of Ephesus on the western tip of what is now Turkey. The city today, called Izmir, is the third largest in Turkey with a population of around four million. Ruins of Smyrna seem to be almost an afterthought as the development around the site overshadows what seems more like a city block. Many of the ruins remain buried and may never be excavated. Others are stacked carefully still awaiting organization and re-assembly.

In ancient times, Aeolian Greeks established this port city of Asia Minor around 1100 B.C. The name Smyrna means myrrh. We'll look briefly at that connection in a few minutes. The city served as a transportation hub from its seaport to roads that led into the interior of Asia. That, its mild climate (similar to ours), and picturesque setting at the foot of Mount Pagus, fostered a prosperous and vibrant place to live and work.

A stadium that seated 20,000 spectators lies in ruin on the slope of Mount Pagus. Smyrna also boasted schools of science, medicine, and culture. Among other buildings, the ancient city had a large library which also served as a museum.

A Homerium was built there to honor their favorite son Homer, the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey among other famous works of poetry. Somewhat like the state rivalry that claims Abraham Lincoln in our country (birthplace vs. boyhood home), Smyrna rivaled the claim to Homer as their own with other cities. There they also built temples to Roman Emperor Tiberius, his mother, and the mythical Zeus and Cybele among others.

A severe earthquake in 178 A.D. destroyed the city, but Smyrna arose anew from those ruins. Wars also took their toll on the ancient city. That in part explains the limited size and scope of what remains today. Fertile soil and favorable climate fostered agricultural production and trade.

Polycarp, the bishop of the church at Smyrna, studied under the apostle John who wrote the book of Revelation. Local Jews burned Polycarp at the stake around 155 A.D. His grave still remains in a cemetery there today.

The Bible itself has very little to say about Smyrna. It's mentioned only in the list of the seven churches in Revelation 1:11 and here in chapter 2 verses eight through eleven. Many Bible teachers attach significance to the possible link between the name *Smyrna* and the word *myrrh*. The Bible **does** speak of myrrh. Let's explore that for a few minutes.

There's one book of the Bible that contains eight of the eighteen references to this word. Can you guess which book that might be? It's the Song of Solomon. Here's one example from Song of Solomon chapter 5 where Shulamite speaks of her beloved:

*[13] His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling **myrrh**.*

Other notable references to myrrh are:

Exodus 30:22-33, the LORD specifies myrrh as one of the ingredients in a holy anointing oil to be used to sanctify (set apart as holy) instruments of the temple, Aaron (the high priest) and his sons. This holy oil was never to be used on anything or anyone else.

In Esther 2:12 we learn that oil of myrrh was used for six months before another six months of other sweet spices were used to prepare new concubines to be presented to King Ahasuerus.

Then there's that most familiar Bible reference to myrrh. With **the** Christmas season rapidly approaching, do you remember the wise men from the east (Matthew 2:1)? What gifts did they bring? Sure, they brought gold, frankincense, and **myrrh** (Matthew 2:11).

In Mark 15:23 myrrh was in the drink offered to Jesus on the cross which he refused. This drink would deaden the pain and consciousness during crucifixion (Bible Knowledge Commentary p. 188).

And finally, in John 19:38-40 we find Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus using a hundred pound mixture of myrrh and aloes to prepare the body of Jesus for burial.

So we see that while myrrh was used for burial, it had many other uses including adding sweet fragrance and as a drug.

Smyrna is usually called the suffering or persecuted church. While the church certainly did face trials, persecution, and suffering, we need to see something else here. As we work through our scripture for

today, be sure not to miss the many references to **death** and **Satan**.

Just last week, a godly friend was talking to Betsy about death. She made the comment that God is the creator of life – and of death. While there's no question that God is the creator of life (Colossians 1:15-17) and it is true that God created death, the death angle is a bit more nuanced. Let's see what the scripture says:

### Origin of Death

I Corinthians 15

*[21] For since **by man came death**, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.*

You may recall that death came as part of God's **judgment** of man for his **sin** against God. This came **after** God's perfect creation was finished.

Genesis 2

*[17] But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely **die**.*

... the first mention of **death** in the Bible.

Genesis 3

*[19] In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and **unto dust shalt thou return**.*

... another reference to **death**.

But where did sin originate?

### Origin of Sin

Romans 5

*[12] Wherefore, as **by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin**; and so **death** passed upon all men, for that all have **sinned**:*

That one man was Adam. So sin came into our world by man, but was sin in God's creation before that? Who was the author of sin?

Isaiah 14

*[12] How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!  
how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!*

*[13] For thou hast said in thine heart,*

***I will** ascend into heaven,*

***I will** exalt my throne above the stars of God:*

***I will** sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:*

*[14]*

***I will** ascend above the heights of the clouds;*

***I will be like the most High.***

Ezekiel 28

[13] [Y]ou ha[ve] been in Eden the garden of God;

We know Satan was there of course.

every precious stone was [your] covering, ..., and gold:

[14] [Y]ou ar[e] the anointed cherub that cover[s];

Satan was a four-winged creature (Ezekiel 1:23) covered with jewels and gold.

and I have set [you] so:

[y]ou w[ere] upon the holy mountain of God; [y]ou ha[ve] walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.

[15] [Y]ou w[ere] **perfect in [your] ways** from the day that [y]ou w[ere] created, till **iniquity** was found in [you].

[16] By the [abundance] of [your trade you were] filled ... with violence, and [y]ou ha[ve] **sinned:**

therefore I will cast [you] as profane out of the mountain of God:

and I will **destroy** [you],

O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.

[17] [Your heart was lifted up because of [your] beauty, [y]ou ha[ve] corrupted [your] wisdom by reason of [your] brightness: I will cast [you] to the ground, I will lay [you] before kings, that they may behold [you].

The point is, sin originated in heaven with Satan. Satan tempted Adam and Adam committed sin also. The result of sin is death. God made both Satan and Adam perfect. Each had a free will. Each chose to turn from God. This resulted in God cursing each. So death, which is the result of sin, first came from Satan's sin.

This death theme in Jesus' message to the church at Smyrna is a key but is not the end of the story. Now let's go through the passage slowly and find Jesus' point to all these references to death.

### Revelation 2:8-11

[8] And unto the angel

We learned last time that this word *angel* means *messenger*.

of the church in Smyrna write;

We just learned about Smyrna.

These things sa[ys] the first and the last,

As discussed back in Revelation 1:8, this refers to the eternal nature of God and Jesus Christ – the first and the last.

*which was dead, and is alive;*

Jesus was born in the flesh (John 1:14; Galatians 4:4), died, was buried, and rose again the third day (I Corinthians 15:3-4), ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven (John 3:13; Acts 2:32-33)

Note that each of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation begins with a description of some aspect of the glorified Christ. To the church of Ephesus (Revelation 2:1) Jesus empowers and leads the church (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18). Here in the letter to Smyrna, He declares His eternal nature.

Note too that the letters to five of the seven churches in Revelation contain a message of some area where they need to improve and the judgment they will bring if they do not repent. Only the letters to this church, Smyrna, and Philadelphia contain no words from Christ highlighting any faults.

*[9] I know [your] works,  
and **tribulation**,  
and poverty, (but [y]ou ar[e] rich)*

...poor physically but rich spiritually.

*and I know the **blasphemy** of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of **Satan**.*

These self-proclaimed Jews blasphemed Jesus Christ just like Satan does and persecuted Christians – including martyring Polycarp of Smyrna.

*[10] Fear none of those things which [y]ou shal[l] **suffer**:  
behold, the **devil** shall cast some of you into **prison**,  
that y[ou] may be **tried**;  
and y[ou] shall have **tribulation** ten days:*

Ten is a metaphor here. Just as your fingers are limited to ten. So their days of trial and tribulation will be also numbered.

*Be ... faithful unto **death**, and I will give [you] a crown of **life**.*

Just make it through this temporary trial. You have the gift of God which is eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23b; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9).

*[11] He that ha[s] an ear, let him hear what the Spirit sa[ys] []to the churches;*

Notice this common phrase **with** which Jesus ends each of these seven mini-letters to the churches (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) telling them to pay attention.

*He that overcome[s]*

He's referring to Christians here (I John 5:4-5).

***shall not be hurt [by] the second death.***

The second death refers to the judgment of the wicked in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8). Christians will not face that judgment as Jesus Christ paid the penalty for their sins (Isaiah 53:5-6; I Peter 2:24) and will bring them home to Him (Revelation 21:6-7) in the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6).

### Application

So there we have it.

Hebrews 9

*[27] ... it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:*

Those are sobering words. But they do not tell the complete story. The expression “Born once – die twice; born twice – die once” is claimed to be found in the margin of Martin Luther’s Bible. Regardless of who wrote it, the words ring true.

Everyone is born physically. And everyone must die physically. That’s one birth and one death. But Jesus spoke of being born again. That’s the second birth – a spiritual birth. Those who are born again (born twice), will **not** face the wrath of God. They will die only once: physically. But those who are born only once (just physically) will face the wrath of God in the second death. They will have a physical death followed by a spiritual death.

We who are born again have a precious promise, and that’s **the** same promise that Jesus gave to the church at Smyrna. Jesus defeated death at the cross and proved it three days later as He was the first to conquer death and rise from the dead. The apostle Paul said it best in the great Resurrection Chapter:

I Corinthians 15

*[53] For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

We reviewed that new body at the beginning of this message.

*[54] So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

*[55] O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

*[56] The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.*

*[57] But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**Benediction**

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (Revelation 22:21).*

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