

## Smyrna and the Prosperity Gospel

Revelation 2:8-11

#5 in our series The Gospel According to Jesus: The Revelation

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*All images by Peter Hiett.*

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you that we can hold on because you hold on to us, and you never let us go. Father, we ask now that you would help us to preach your Word—your Word that is victorious over all darkness, despair, death, and chaos over all this world, your Word that was spoken into the darkness and the void that created all things. Would you speak your Word even through me? It is such a weird thing: to preach, to talk about you seems kind of absurd to me most of the time. Lord, would you send your Spirit to impart your Word to our hearts; cause us to believe what's true, in Jesus' name, Amen.

### Message—

[Clip from the *Twilight Zone*]

[A man (a thief) is walking in the desert with the sun beating down on him. Time lapses. He collapses to the ground from heat exhaustion. The scene changes to him lying on the ground with a man standing above him. The thief calls out to him.]

Thief: *Mister! Mister, this is gold . . .* [He weakly lifts his hand, which is holding a bar of gold.] *Here you can have it. You can have it. Drive me to town. If you give me water...I'll give it to you.* [The thief stops talking and dies. The traveler that was above him hurriedly puts his ear to his chest to see if the thief is still alive and quickly realizes he is not.]

Traveler: *Poor old fella. I wonder where you came from.*

Traveler's Wife: *Who is it George? What's the matter with him?*

Traveler: *Some old tramp, at least he was; now he's dead.*

Traveler's Wife: *What's that?*

Traveler: *Gold...that's what he said it was. He wanted to give it to me in exchange for a lift to town.*

Traveler's Wife: *Gold? What in the world would he be doing with this gold?*

Traveler: *I don't know. He's probably off his rocker. Can you imagine that? He offered this to me, as if it were really worth something.*

Traveler's Wife: *You know, wasn't it worth something once George? Didn't people use gold for money.* Traveler: *Sure but...a hundred years or so ago, before they found a way of manufacturing it.*

[The traveler tosses the gold to the side of the road.]

[Twilight music plays]

Narrator: *The last of four rip van winkels who all died precisely the way they lived—chasing an idol across the sand to wind up bleached dry in the hot sun as so much desert flotsam worthless as the gold bullion they build a shrine to—tonight's lesion in the twilight zone.* [The *Twilight Zone* theme song plays.]

That man threw the gold away as if it really had no value...  
And that woman in the futuristic space car said, "Wasn't it worth something once George? Didn't people use gold for money?"

This is money.

[Peter pulls out a dollar bill and burns it.]

Was that painful for you?

It was painful for me: it set off all these voices in my head:

*"You need to learn the value of a dollar."*

*"You need to learn the value of money."*

But what is a dollar? It's just green paper. It has no inherent value. It only has the value we give it. If you make ten dollars an hour, it represents six minutes of your effort.

If you make one hundred dollars an hour, it represents thirty-six seconds of your time.

So, not only does it have no value—except the value that we give it—the more we get it, the less value it has to us. And yet, the more likely we are to become addicted to it and refuse to let it go. Money is currency. We use money to obtain things of *actual* value. But money has no inherent or real value, kind of like an idol.

Well . . . if burning a dollar is really difficult for you, like it is for me, maybe we're chasing an idol, across the sand, in the twilight zone.

[The *Twilight Zone* theme song plays in the background.]

We want to be wealthy, but we don't know what wealth is.

We want to be healthy, but we don't know what health is.

We want to prosper.

The man weeping and gnashing his teeth alone in the desert in that old *Twilight Zone* episode was a thief. Along with three other thieves, he took gold from a train bound for Fort Knox in 1961. Then he fled to a cave in Death Valley where a scientist had designed suspended animation chambers through which the thieves could effectively travel into the future, where they planned to enjoy the gold long after all their enemies had died. But when they wake up in 2061, they fight over the gold, until only two remain. Then, walking to civilization, one kills the other for the little bit of gold he can still carry and a cup of water.

The man that finds him in the desert is from the future—a future in which people have learned to manufacture gold. And so they use gold, but not for currency, they use it like we use asphalt—to pave roads on which people travel.

Imagine a city with streets of gold—would that be prosperity?

Imagine that you had all the money in the world—would that be prosperity?

Imagine that you were as healthy as Richard Simons or Jane Fonda or Dr. Atkins—would that be prosperity?

Jeremiah 29:11 *“For I know the plans I have for you,”* declares the LORD, *“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

No doubt, God wants you to prosper, but what is prosperity?

Revelation 2:8 *“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life...’”*

We know quite a bit about Smyrna from the writings of ancient history, especially a man named Polycarp and because it's still there. It was a beautiful, well-built, wealthy city with large, glorious boulevards. The most famous of those boulevards was referred to as “The Golden Street.”

But, if you were a Christian it was very dangerous to walk down that street.

Of all the places in the Empire, perhaps Smyrna was the most dangerous place for a Christian to live . . . for two reasons:

First: In 26 A.D. Smyrna won a contest in order to erect a shrine to Emperor Tiberius. Smyrna was a great center for emperor worship, which would soon become a required civic duty throughout the Empire.

Secondly: Smyrna had a very large Jewish population that was quite influential with the Roman authorities. The Jews were exempt from emperor worship because Judaism had become a recognized religion in the Empire.

The early church considered themselves to be Jews. The twelve disciples were all Jews and Gentiles that followed Jesus were grafted into the family tree.

But if the Jews, that rejected the Messiah, also rejected the Jews that trusted the Messiah, that is, the Christians in Smyrna... If those Jews didn't want Christian Jews hanging around the synagogue, all they had to do was say to the Roman authorities, “These guys say they are Jews, but they're not.” Then the Christians would be subject to the confiscation of property, torture, and even death. They'd lose wealth, health, and reputation, as they'd be slandered by people they loved.

*“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

—Revelation 2:8

The Jews are God's chosen people. But the whole point of being chosen people is that you didn't choose, but God chose—long before you were even capable of choosing. God chose you to choose Him. You didn't choose God and so God chose you. God makes that abundantly clear in the Old Testament. And Saint Paul explains it in the New Testament. In Romans 9, He points out that God chose Israel—long before Israel could

choose God—to demonstrate the fact that God will “have mercy on whomever he decides to have mercy.” It’s *His* Choice.

*“So then it depends not on human will (that’s choice) or exertion (that’s works) but upon God who has mercy”* (Romans 9:16).

In other words, God chose to prosper the Jews. Prosperity is a gift. But the Jews were always tempted to think prosperity was their due—that they earned it . . .

And isn’t that the exact temptation of satan?

*“Take the fruit and make yourself in the image of God.”*

*“Take the knowledge of the good and use it to justify yourself.”*

*“Take the law, apply it, and make yourself prosper.”*

*“Prosperity is your due because you’re better than your neighbor.”*

Well, the synagogue of satan would accuse the Christians of being godless. (The word devil means accuser.) And then as they were being persecuted, they’d slander them by suggesting that their sufferings were the obvious result of their lack of faith.

Jesus says, “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” “I know your tribulation.”

It’s interesting that in just the last hundred years or so, many prosperous Christians in Great Britain and America began saying, “Surely God will rapture His chosen people before the great tribulation.”

In the next chapter, to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, Jesus does say, *“Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.”* (Rev. 3:10)

So, we might think, “If Smyrna is experiencing some tribulation, surely a little faith would save them from great tribulation . . .” It turns out that Jesus has a rebuke for each of the seven churches except the church in Smyrna and Philadelphia...

So, unlike most of the churches, Smyrna was a model of faith. And so, we’d expect God to reward that faith with some prosperity.

According to a 2006 pew survey, 46% of American Christians think God grants material possession to believers (that is people with faith), and 56% think rewards the faithful with health. Clearly, all health and wealth comes from God, And before Jesus would heal, He would often ask for faith, but the idea that we can somehow purchase health and wealth, with faith, right now, is a rather different idea. It’s often called the prosperity gospel.

In its current form—it’s relatively new, and yet you’ll find it all over your television set, and even in the White House. In a recent article, *Newsweek* defined it as follows:

*The essence of the prosperity gospel is simple: Faith brings rewards, not only in the afterlife—as taught in all mainstream forms of Christianity—but also in the earthly life. These rewards can take the form of health, career success, and, most controversially, wealth (Conner Gaffey 9-9-17).*

Faith purchases rewards—that is prosperity.

See? that would mean that faith is like a currency...

So, you can use faith to get prosperity like you can use money to get a cheeseburger.

*Newsweek* points out that the prosperity gospel teaches that you can get prosperity now . . . while traditional Christianity says you get it later. So, that means—in the opinion of *Newsweek*—all Christianity is about *using* faith to *obtain* prosperity.

Jeremiah 29:11 *“For I know the plans I have for you,”* declares the LORD, *“plans to prosper you...”*

“Plans to prosper you...” that’s a pretty popular verse down at the Christian bookstore. You see it everywhere. So we naturally think, “If Smyrna is struggling a bit, surely Jesus is going to say, ‘Have faith and it will work out...’”

Next, verses 10 and 11:

*Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days [Ten is the number of the law, and ten is the number of the dragon’s power (without the law it’s pretty hard to accuse)—He is the accuser with ten horns on his head] for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto 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. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.”*

—Revelation 2:10-11

*“Be faithful unto death”... Is that prosperity “faithful unto DEATH”?*

Smyrna appears to be one of the most, if not *the* most, faithful of all the churches, so they get more tribulation and persecution . . . and some get death. And hopefully, you noticed that Jesus didn’t say, *“You’re poor and you’re going to be rich sometime in the future.”*; He said, *“You are rich... already.”*

Do you ever get the feeling while reading the Bible that we really just don’t know what riches are . . . or the Good is? And if we got a notion, we might just not want it . . . the Good or the Riches?

*“To him who has, more will be given.”* Ouch. Sorry about that, Smyrna . . . but meet us in Laodicea and we’ll have a slideshow on the sufferings in Smyrna, take a collection, and say a prayer . . . *“Oh, Lord, help those poor people in Smyrna.”*

But Jesus says that *they* are rich. Who is poor? Who is rich?

Soren Kierkegaard told about a most evil thief who broke into jewelry stores and switched all the price tags. He didn't care about jewels or gold, He just hated the owner and all his customers. Because the price tags were switched, young men gave fake jewels to their brides; poor folks wore diamonds and precious jewels and didn't even know it. Eventually, the cheap stuff was exposed (destroyed in fire or worn out with time), and the valuable stuff was lost through neglect. Kierkegaard's point is that maybe this entire world is like that store, where all the price tags have been switched.

Maybe the price tags have been switched.

Maybe we couldn't read them in the first place...

Maybe we were born without "the knowledge of good and evil."

That's the way Scripture refers to infants—as having no knowledge of good and evil; they don't know the value of things.

One day about twenty years ago, I caught my son Coleman eating dirt. With obvious distress, I said, "No Coleman! Don't eat dirt. Never eat dirt." And then Coleman started eating dirt. He had like a dirt eating addiction. He'd sneak into the backyard, eat dirt, and hide from me. And when I'd ask, "Coleman, have you been eating dirt?" He'd lie to me, trying to justify himself to me, saying, "No Daddy I didn't eat any dirt..." but dirt was caked all around his lips.

We had a house full of great food—a great banquet if you will . . . and Coleman would sneak out back to eat dirt in the dark all alone. Maybe we're all like Coleman. We don't know what's "good," and what's not "good." And then we get addicted to the not good, trying to make our selves "good." And then we hide our not good in outer darkness where we weep and gnash our teeth all alone.

There are an awful lot of wealthy people that feel terribly alone.

There are an awful lot of healthy people that feel terribly sick inside.

There are an awful lot of powerful people trapped in outer darkness.

That's how CS Lewis describes hell in the Great Divorce. It's this place where people get whatever they want... but in getting whatever they want, they become incapable of wanting other people.

So who's poor and who's rich?

Jesus says, "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)."

Why are they rich in Smyrna?

Poverty and tribulation aren't riches... but maybe poverty and tribulation expose riches.

I read about a first-grader coming home from her first day at a newly de-segregated school sometime in the 1960's. If you were alive at the time, you remember the tribulation. Well in this story, an anxious mother met her daughter at the door to inquire,

*"How did everything go, honey?"*

*"Oh, Mother! You know what? A little black girl sat right next to me!"*

In fear and trepidation, the mother tried to act calm,

*"And what happened?"*

*"We were both so scared . . . that we held hands all day,"* said the little girl.

That's rich and they were rich.

Rabbi Kushner told about a Chinese woman that lost her family and went to a wise man seeking wisdom on how to handle the grief. He instructed her to visit every house in the village and obtain a mustard seed from every person that had not known grief. She did, and of course, every person had known grief, yet in the process of sharing in their poverty, she became rich. She gained a family the size of a village; she didn't gain a mustard seed, but she gained faith in Love that grew into a Kingdom.

Tribulation and poverty have a way of breaking the hard soil of our hearts and making way for a seed that grows into a kingdom. They break our egos and reveal the spirit inside. In tribulation and poverty we all lose, and then we all win . . . each other.

Maybe they were rich in Smyrna because they knew each other...  
And maybe they were rich in Smyrna because they knew Jesus...

In Philippians 3:10 Saint Paul wrote, *"—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..."*

That was Paul's greatest wish: "That I may know him..."

An old Hassidic rabbi renowned for his piety was interrupted one day by one of his devoted young disciples. In a burst of feeling, this disciple exclaimed,

*"My master, I love you!"*

The ancient teacher looked up from his books and said,

*"Do you know what hurts me, my son?"*

The young man was puzzled. Composing himself, he stuttered,

*"I don't understand your question, Rabbi. I am trying to tell you how much you mean to me, and you confuse me with irrelevant questions."*

*"My question is neither confusing nor irrelevant,"* answered the rabbi.

*"For if you do not know what hurts me, how can you say that you love me?"*

Do you know what hurts Jesus?

Jesus is a Jew who was betrayed by the Jews. He was betrayed by His family. And in particular, Judas (which means Jew)—who was his friend—was overcome by satan. Jesus was betrayed and slandered by a synagogue of satan. And, He was crucified by Gentiles—that is, Romans.

He says, "I know your tribulation and poverty..."  
Maybe that's because it's His tribulation and poverty...

And maybe all suffering can be, or is, His suffering. Isaiah writes. "*He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows...The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...*" And John will soon reveal that this happened from the foundation of the world. So, Jesus bore it long before you ever felt it.

Maybe all your grief is an invitation to share in Christ's suffering, in order that you might know Him. Smyrna will also know the power of His resurrection. But even now, in their poverty, they know Him and so they are rich; they are prosperous. They know Jesus and they know each other—maybe that's prosperity, and maybe that's Love. Maybe they're rich with faith in Love, and God is Love.

Whatever the case, if they are rich in Smyrna, and they're not rich in places like Laodicea—(We'll read about them in the next chapter: They say that they're rich, have prospered and need nothing, but Jesus says that they're wretched pitiable, poor, blind and naked...)

So, if they're rich in Smyrna and poor in Laodicea, then prosperity isn't gained through a process of addition but through a process of subtraction.

In fact, the Lord's counsel to Laodicea is to purchase from Him gold refined by fire. Scripture says that our faith is like gold refined by fire. Fire burns away the dross and reveals the gold. If it's hot enough, even gold will burn, but faith will never burn. So faith isn't gained through a process of addition, but subtraction. And it appears that prosperity isn't gained through addition, but subtraction.

I had a weird little experience last Saturday while in New Mexico for my mom's birthday. In the afternoon, I went for a little jog down some street near Albuquerque. At one point I just stopped and suddenly realized I was just terribly happy. All I had was a pair of shorts, a t-shirt, and my sneakers.

Nobody knew where I was. Nobody driving by knew who I was. I was momentarily free of the burden that is me . . . or I should say the burden of the *false* me, and I was just me.

It reminded me of a similar experience ten years ago sitting in the parking lot of a Big Lots, or some such store, on Colfax. I had just been defrocked, and I was being slandered. I had just lost my job and lost my reputation, and suddenly I just realized I was just happy and I loved everyone I saw in that parking lot on Colfax.

I shared these weird experiences with Kathleen and she said, "Yeah, I feel happy when I don't feel important." Why do we want money, power, and a reputation? Isn't it so that we'd feel important? But what if we're *already* important...like an infant is important to a Mom or a Dad? Well then, all our efforts to become important might continually block us from the realization that we *are* important... to God.

To the Corinthians, who were arguing over who was important, Paul wrote, “*So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours... all are yours and you are Christ’s, and Christ is Gods*” (1 Cor. 3:21 & 23).

In other words, you are crazy rich and if you don’t know you’re crazy rich something must be blocking you from all these outrageous riches . . . maybe you desire riches that aren’t actually riches. You desire for prosperity that isn’t prosperity.

I think that’s what I momentarily lost in the parking lot on Colfax:

The burden of my desire for money, power, and reputation.

The burden of having to produce health, wealth, and prosperity.

The burden of the “me” that I think I have to create.

The burden of my “self”



Remember this picture? I showed it to you about a year ago.

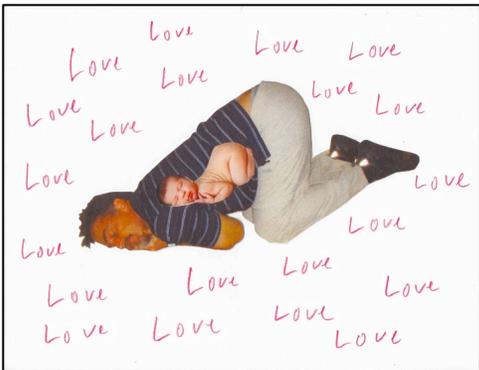
This is me (or a likeness of me). And when I was born, I was surrounded by Love. I’ve never not been surrounded by Love. God is Love and “*In Him we live and move and have our being.*” But I didn’t really know love from “not love,” that is good from evil.

So, I listened to a lie, that I had to make myself good, and so I began to take what I thought was good—to *make* myself good, which isn’t good because Love is good...

To make a long story very short, I grew one of these...



An important grown-up me that I call my “self” that the Bible calls “the flesh.” And by that, Scripture doesn’t simply mean *a body*; it means *an ego*. Maybe it’s my ego, my flesh, my need to justify myself that keeps me from the outrageous prosperity that is God . . . and is all around me.



And maybe that’s why Jesus said, “*unless you receive the kingdom like a child you will never enter it.*” A child has no money, power, or reputation. And maybe that’s why Jesus said, “*If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself** and take up a cross...*” A man who takes up a cross has surrendered all money, power, and reputation. He has denied himself.

The chairman of the presidential board of evangelical advisors is also a well-known prosperity preacher. According to *Newsweek*, and multiple other sources, she once told an audience: “*Anyone that tells you to deny yourself is from satan.*” Now, maybe she misspoke and didn’t realize what she was saying, but that’s profoundly backward . . . isn’t it? And I hope you see why: the problem with the so-called prosperity gospel is that

It’s not the Gospel, and it teaches you to be profoundly poor...

Just like the church in Laodicea, who thought she was, in the words of Jesus, “*rich, had prospered and needed nothing*” when in fact she was “*wretched pitiable, poor, blind and naked.*” All things were hers, just as in Smyrna, but she couldn’t receive all things because she was full of herself or trapped in herself and wouldn’t deny herself.

The problem with the so-called prosperity gospel is that teaches us to eat dirt alone in outer darkness when the doors to the great banquet are wide open in front of us.

At the end of the Revelation, we see the New Jerusalem coming down. The gates of the city, are *never shut by day* and in the city *there is no night*. Outside is *everyone who loves and practices falsehood*. That is everyone who loves to eat dirt when the gates are wide open!

Coleman is twenty-three now. How sad, if I found him out back, all alone on Thanksgiving day, eating dirt and trying to hide it. See? It wasn't hatred that gave him a little tribulation when he was three. It was love and a desire to make him rich with turkey, mashed potatoes, and me.

We love Jeremiah 29:11, but we forget that it completes Jeremiah 29:10, wherein God explains to the Jews that He's sending them into exile for seventy years, where they are commanded to love their enemies... *for God knows the plans He has for them—plans to prosper* (Jer. 29:11).

See? The problem with the so-called prosperity gospel is that it switches all the price tags just like the most evil thief in Kierkegaard's story. Nothing's wrong with gold, it's just not as valuable as people. Satan will teach you to use people to love gold. But God made gold that you might use that gold to love people.

In the New Jerusalem, the main street is paved with gold. But check this out: It's transparent as glass (Rev. 21:21). You won't see it, but you'll see the people walking on it—supported by it. Actually, the city is made of people—the last and the least of these. Jesus said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit in whom the Kingdom of God*" and "*Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness sake (the slandered), of them is the kingdom.*"

Nothing's wrong with gold and nothing's wrong with money.

- Use *money* to *love* people,
- But never use *people* to love *money*.
- Use money to love God,
- But never use God to love money. That's profoundly depraved.

Money is currency. It's a human measure of human effort. It has no inherent value. Faith is not currency. Prosperity teachers teach that we should use faith, to gain things hoped for. But faith is not a payment for things hoped for. Hebrews 11:1, "*Faith is the substance of things hoped for.*"

God is love and faith is the gift of Love. You gain faith through an encounter with Love. Faith in you is the Spirit of Christ Jesus in you. Never simply use faith as if faith were a thing to gain prosperity. Faith *is* prosperity.

Jesus says, "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)...be faithful unto death." Is that prosperity?

Yes it's life.

Life is losing your self and finding yourself.

Life is faith in Love.

Jesus is the Life rising in you from the dead.

*"Be faithful unto 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. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."* Rev. 2:10-11

The second death is sacrificing your self—(your psyche, your flesh, your ego)  
It's losing your self, for the sake of Love, and finding yourself in Jesus.

You are Christ's body. The first death is isolation from His body.  
And the second death is the death of that death; it's communion in His body.

The second death is the death of death and the beginning of Life. You won't be hurt by the second death if you've already been crucified with Christ, for you've already denied yourself and begun to truly live—eternally.

*"The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."*

Well, who is the one who conquers? Remember that the letter isn't written to the Church but the angel of the Church, which appears to be the Spirit of the Lamb, and the Revelation reveals that the Lamb has conquered.

In verse 10 Jesus says, *"the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested (peirazo-also translated tempted)."* Remember that Jesus was tested and tempted right after He was baptized. Immediately after hearing the voice from Heaven say, *"This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:17).

The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, who tempted Jesus with bread, miracles, and political power. He tempted Jesus with wealth, health, and a great reputation. He tempted Jesus to make Himself important. But Jesus knew He already was important. He knew that He was His Father's beloved son in whom He was well pleased. That's faith. And faith in you is the Word of God in you, it's the Spirit of Jesus from the dead in you.

Well, Smyrna was rich. Some of you are rich, but you think you're poor—because you don't have much money, and maybe your health isn't so good, and maybe you're being slandered and rejected by people that you love. You're rich, but you think you're poor... so I just need to tell you that you're rich, so you don't try to make yourself rich and become poor.

Some of you may be poor, but you think you're rich... and I need to tell you that you're poor... and you need to get some wealth in Smyrna. Smyrna is actually all around you.

Smyrna is rich.

Smyrna doesn't just *have* riches.

Smyrna *is* rich.

Sometime around 160 A.D. a letter was written by the leadership of the church in Smyrna and sent to all the churches in Asia Minor. It is a letter of gratitude for all that God had done recently in Smyrna. It recounts how twelve believers had been martyred... eleven scourged and devoured by beasts in the Coliseum of Smyrna, and the last given to the fire.

The twelfth martyr was the eighty-six-year-old bishop of Smyrna, who knew John as a young man, who no doubt had read the Revelation aloud many times in the church in Smyrna. The authorities decided to burn this eighty-six-year-old—Polycarp for refusing to sacrifice to the emperor.

Jews from the synagogue gathered the wood for the fire He prayed thanking God that he was counted worthy to share in the cup of Christ and praying that he would be an acceptable sacrifice. When they lit the fire, it encompassed Polycarp, but it did not consume him, until finally, in desperation, the executioner thrust a spear in Polycarp's side, just as the Romans thrust a spear into Christ's side. While the fire raged around him, witnesses said he appeared "not as flesh that is burnt but as bread that is baked, as gold and silver glowing in a furnace."

[Image of Polycarp and his persecutors]

Maybe Polycarp was gold as refined by fire. He was definitely filled with faith. And faith in us is Christ in us: *"No longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"* (Gal. 2:20).

Money will burn. But faith can't burn! Because faith is the Fire. The old bishop not only *had* riches, he is rich. Smyrna is rich.

### **Communion**

On the night that He was betrayed—by the synagogue of satan, and handed over to the Roman authorities, Jesus took bread and He broke it saying, "This is my body given for you; take and eat, and do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way, He took the cup and He said, "This cup is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, and do this in remembrance of me."

[Peter points to the communion table.] This is the substance of prosperity.

And this is the Gospel.

In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel; receive it. Amen.

*Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.*

