

**Slide 1**

# Semper Fidelis

## REVELATION 2:10

### Introduction

1. Many of you may recognize this Latin phrase.
2. It means "always faithful" or "always loyal."
3. Since 1883, it has been is the official motto of the United States Marine Corps.
4. For them, it represents their eternal and collective commitment to their critical mission, to their country and to each other.
5. We often hear it shortened to *Semper Fi*, but please know that every U.S. Marine takes it seriously.
6. Those of us here tonight who wear the name of Christ are called to a life of faithfulness, but it is a faithfulness not to our country, but to our God.
7. Tonight, I would like for us to look at our call to faithfulness as followers of Jesus Christ and our response to that call.

**Slide 2**

## I. The Church At Smyrna

### A. SMYRNA, A PROUD AND BEAUTIFUL CITY

1. Built more than 1000 years before Christ, Smyrna was a proud city of the Ionians.
2. However, around 600 B.C. the king of Lydia, a man named Alyattes, destroyed the city.
3. For all practical purposes the city was dead until it was rebuilt in 290 B.C. by Lysimachus and Antigonus.
4. Smyrna had a famous thoroughfare known as the Street of Gold which

curved around Mt. Pagus like “a necklace on the statue of a goddess”.

5. At each end of the street was a temple:
  - a. One to Cybele, the Great Mother — believed to be the mother of the gods — goddess of nature and fertility
  - b. The other to Zeus — believed to be “father of gods and men”
6. In New Testament times the population of Smyrna was believed to be approximately 200,000.
7. Coins from the city describe it as “First of Asia in beauty and size”

### Slide 3

## **B. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH**

1. We do not know when the church at Smyrna was first founded.
2. It is reasonable to assume, however, that it was begun during the three years that Paul was at Ephesus on his third missionary (Acts 20:31; cf. Acts 19:8,10).
3. It was during this time that, according to Luke, “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).

### Slide 4

## **II. A Suffering Church**

### **A. OUR LORD WAS FULLY AWARE OF THEIR STRUGGLE**

1. “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)”
  - a. Jesus reminded the church at Smyrna that its tribulation and poverty had not gone unnoticed.
  - b. He is fully aware of the pressures they had endured.
  - c. As a result of their persecution the Christians at Smyrna had found it difficult to make a living and were thus economically destitute.
  - d. It is also possible that they were victims of mob violence and looting (cf. Hebrews 10:34).

"For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one." (Hebrews 10:34)

- e. However, their poverty was a material poverty — spiritually they were rich.
- f. Several years earlier, James had written to a similar group of people and said, "did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5).

**Slide 5**

- 2. "The blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not"
  - a. The Jews who were blaspheming there in Smyrna in John's day were not real Jews.
  - b. Some 35 years earlier, Paul had written to the Christians in Rome about true Judaism, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly . . . but he is a Jew who is one inwardly . . ." (Romans 2:28-29)
  - c. The Jews in Jerusalem who were challenging Jesus in John 8:31-47 claimed to be descendants of Abraham, but Jesus told them they were of their father the devil.
  - d. Here, Jesus tells John that the hostile Jews of Smyrna were, in fact, a synagogue of Satan.
    - 1) Satan is from the Hebrew and means "adversary"
    - 2) Devil (*diabolos*) is from the Greek and means "false accuser" and "slanderer"
  - e. Regardless of their national heritage, by their bitter opposition to the church and its message, these Jews had become a synagogue carrying out the activities of God's supreme adversary, Satan.
  - f. Those of us here tonight who are Christians can take heart in something which John wrote later in Revelation:

“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.” (Revelation 12:10, NASB95)

- 1) While Satan continues to accuse us before God “day and night” we can take great hope. Why?
- 2) It is because “the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come” and Satan our accuser has been thrown down.

**Slide 6**

3. “Do not fear what you are about to suffer” (Revelation 2:10a)
  - a. Jesus once exhorted his disciples not to fear those who could kill the body but not the soul.

“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28, NASB95)
  - b. Paul informed the Christians in the churches he established on his first missionary journey that “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).
  - c. He also reminded Timothy that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).
  - c. However, as these times of tribulation and persecution grew near, the Christians at Smyrna needed to be encouraged not to become fainthearted or give up their faith in Christ.
    - 1) While the Roman authorities would carry out the persecution.
    - 2) It was the devil himself who was responsible for their situation.
    - 3) He is the one who would try their faith through imprisonment and

tribulation.

- d. Even here in this country, all efforts to silence the gospel and prevent the free exercise of our faith have behind them the same accuser who worked to persecute the church in the days of Paul and John.
- e. In spite of the fact that those Christians in Smyrna were “tested” with “tribulation” Jesus told them not to be afraid.

### Slide 7

## B. CHRIST’S PROMISE

- 1. “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (*Revelation 2:10b*).
  - a. Jesus isn’t saying ‘be loyal until you die’, but ‘be faithful even if it costs you your life.’
  - b. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refused to worship the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar even to the point of being cast into the furnace of fire (*Daniel 3:16-18*).

“O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. “But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”” (*Daniel 3:16–18, NASB95*)

- c. When Peter and the apostles were confronted by the Jewish Council in Jerusalem for refusing to obey the order to no longer teach in Jesus’ name, they responded, “We must obey God rather than men” (*Acts 5:29*).
- d. Crowns were a familiar symbol to the Christians in Smyrna:
  - 1) The pagan worshipers in Smyrna each wore a crown of flowers.
  - 2) The coins of the city portrayed the patron goddess, Cybele, adorned with a crown.

- 3) The city of Smyrna was known for the silhouette of buildings atop Mt. Pagus which resembled a crown.
  - ❑ However, all these would fade away.
- d. In contrast, the faithful Christian would be given a crown of life.
  - 1) Paul called it
    - a) “an incorruptible crown” (1 Corinthians 9:25),
    - b) “the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8).
  - 2) James called it “the crown of life” (James 1:12).
  - 3) Peter called it “the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4)

**Slide 8**

2. “He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.” (Revelation 2:11b)
  - a. This is a most appropriate promise for any church that is entering a period of severe tribulation.
  - b. The second death is described later by John as . . .
    - 1) The lake of fire (Revelation 20:14)
 

“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:14, NASB95)
    - 2) The destiny of the wicked (Revelation 21:8)
 

“But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”” (Revelation 21:8, NASB95)
  - c. “The unbeliever dies and finds another ‘death’ awaiting him; the believer dies and finds eternal life” (Ray Summers, *Worthy Is The Lamb*, p. 113).

## Conclusion

### Slide 9

1. In God's Word, there are so many calls to faithfulness.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58, NASB95)

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9, ESV)

### Slide 10

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,” (Hebrews 10:23–24, NASB95)

2. If we do this, if we remain ever faithful, then at the end of our lives we can say with the apostle Paul,

### Slide 11

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7–8, NASB95)

3. Is there a crown of righteousness awaiting you?