

# A Church Preparing to Fly

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Date: 05 June 2016

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning. And a warm welcome to the service this morning. Especially a welcome if you're visiting with us.

I see a number of faces that we are visiting and it's good to have you. And we pray that the Lord will bless you as we pray that he will bless us and meet with us as we seek to worship him this morning.

One or two intimations to highlight. Some have been around on the screen for the last few minutes. But just to say the evening service will be at 6 this evening and will be taken by myself, God willing.

Deacons Court will meet at the Manse at Kyles tomorrow at half past 7. Ladies Bible Study meets in Tarbert at 8 and the First Fruit Fellowship meets at half past 7 as usual in the Church of Scotland Hall.

Road to Recovery meets on Tuesday at 8 here in the Community Centre. And the prayer meeting Wednesday at half past 7 in the Community Centre. All are welcome to that meeting especially.

[ 1 : 0 6 ]     The engine room of the Church. The services next Sunday will be taken, God willing, by myself. And also if I can remind you that next Saturday, that's the 11th of June, the Congregational Barbecue will be on.

And we meet together with the congregation from Schilaboss, from Scalpy, sorry, and Leaverborough. And the barbecue will be at Schilaboss. And the time will be 1pm to meet.

And it will go on for as long as we're having fun. So, 1 o'clock at Schilaboss. And that's everyone welcome to that barbecue.

One further thing is to remind you that the Congregational meal and the AGM will be on the 17th of June. That's a week on Friday. And if you could put that date in your diary, that's an important meeting.

We go over the accounts just and present them very briefly. And we will eat together. And we'll also have the chance to look at the designs for the church building as we hope it will be.

[ 2 : 1 3 ]     And have comments on these designs. So that's a week on Friday, 17th of June. Do we have a time for that meeting, by the way? Time will be advised next Sunday.

But if we're eating, I guess it will be around about half past six. But we'll confirm that next Wednesday. These, I think, are all the intimations. So let's worship God and sing to his praise.

The first praise from Mission Praise, the black book. Number 496. And the words also will be on the screen. 496.

Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing. My great Redeemer's praise. The glories of my God and King. The triumphs of his grace. And we stand to sing in just a moment.

Let's unite our hearts in prayer. Let's pray together. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this new morning.

[ 3 : 16 ] We thank you for the joy of being able to come into your house, that place, where your people meet in your name. And you have given us that promise that you will meet with us.

We thank you for the opportunity that we're given to sing praise to your name. And Lord, we thank you that we have so much to praise you for.

And as we sing with our voices and as you stir our hearts, we pray that the Holy Spirit himself would inhabit the praises of your people.

And Lord, we pray that he would be the one who would assist us to proclaim, assist us to lift up and to meditate and be in awe and wonder at our gracious Redeemer and our Lord.

We thank you for Jesus. We thank you that he is the one who is gracious. And when we deserve nothing but punishment for our sin, Jesus came to this world to make it possible for us to receive his grace and his blessing.

[ 4 : 27 ] We thank you that we who are sinners and even are aware of the sin that we have sinned against you in the course of these last few days. We thank you that we can come to a gracious Master and a gracious Lord, knowing that if we confess our sin, because you are faithful and because you are just, you will forgive us our sin and purify us from all unrighteousness.

And Lord, we acknowledge as we have sung that that was not something that we could do for ourselves, but it was down to the blood of Jesus, which can make the foulest clean, the blood that was availed for me and for each one of us as we look in Christ, look to Christ in faith.

And so we pray that as we confess our sin, that you would cleanse us in that precious blood. We pray that as we seek to draw near to you, Lord God, that you would draw near to us and that we would know that sense of the love of the Father and the forgiveness and the grace of the Son.

And we pray that the Holy Spirit would move amongst us and within us. Lord, that we would think thoughts, that we would speak words, that we would meditate in a way that is pleasing to you and blessing to us and our souls.

So we commit ourselves to you this morning. We thank you for those who are with us on holiday. We thank you for those who maybe have just been coming for a few weeks now and we ask your special blessing upon them.

[ 6 : 12 ] We thank you for the children who are here with us and we pray that you would bless them. We thank you that Jesus called them to come to him and not to be kept from him. And we pray that the children, having heard all that has been shared with them from the Challenger bus over this week, that they would be given that faith to believe.

And Lord, that we would continue to point them to Christ. And we pray for every other person who is here in every home that's represented.

Bless us, Lord, we pray. Meet us at the point of our need and enable us, Lord, to follow you and to trust you. We pray on for those who would desire to be here but who can't be some who are in hospital.

We continue to pray for those who are in number who are in hospital. Again, thinking especially of Dunda and others like him known to us.

We pray that you would meet with them and the power of the Spirit and that you would, by your Spirit, remind them of all that has been shared with them of your Word. Bless their souls, we pray.

[ 7 : 24 ] We pray for those at home who are unable to be present and we ask that you would bless them. We pray for those tied up with the responsibilities of life and whatever the situation, we pray, Lord, that you would draw near to your people, those who would seek to worship you in spirit and in truth.

And, Lord, we pray on for those who have no desire. We acknowledge that, like them, once we were in that place for us, we look down on no one because the grace that we receive is all of Christ and none of us.

And so we pray for those who have no interest or no desire at this point when we ask that you would draw them. We pray for the world that we live in, a world so broken by sin.

We see natural disasters. We see man's inhumanity to man. We see inequality. We see exploitation near and afar.

And, Father, we pray that you would intervene and that you would enable those who are suffering especially to know your hand upon them.

[ 8 : 36 ] And especially your church, where there is such acute suffering in different parts of the world, we pray that you would bless them especially. As we think of the church in Smyrna, in the text that we will read today, we pray for many places like Smyrna of old, asking that as they know pressure and as they know persecution, Lord, that they would know your presence in a special, supernatural and enriching way.

So hear our prayers and help us, we pray, to look to Christ. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Boys and girls, would you like to come forward, please?

I was at a wedding on Friday night and the band that were at the wedding were playing far too loud. So every time you try to speak to somebody, you're having to shout your head off.

And I really had a bit of a funny throat. And so I don't want my voice to run out. You might want my voice to run out, but I don't want my voice to run out before the end of the day. So I told you, I was at a wedding on Friday and it was a good wedding.

It was in a place called West Co-Bride and we went and we flew to Glasgow and then Mary's staying on till tomorrow. But on Saturday morning, I had to get back to Harris.

[ 9 : 54 ] I had to get back home. So I'm in Glasgow and I need to get back home to Harris. So how can I do that? Can I just put on my walking boots and start walking?

And then get my trunks out and start swimming? Can I make it in time? No. So how can I get home? How do you think I got home, John Roddy? A what?

A plane. Yes. I came on the plane. Is it this? Ah, there we go. It's not here yet. There's a plane, I think. That's the plane.

That's the actual plane. Can you see it? Do you want to go and we look at it? That's the plane that I went on yesterday. I took a photograph of it when I was getting off the plane and I was walking back towards the terminal building two hours later than it was supposed to be arriving.

That was the terminal building. But anyway, if I wanted to get from Glasgow back home, I had to get on a plane. And so there was a plane and I had a ticket. I paid my money.

[ 11 : 03 ] I had the reference number and the plane was sitting in the airport at Glasgow. That was a stormy way, but it was sitting in the airport at Glasgow at half past nine in the morning.

I had my ticket, paid my money. But what did I need to do? Because at half past seven, eight o'clock in the morning, I was still in a place called West Co-Bride.

And I had to. So what did I have to do? Have your breakfast. I had to have my breakfast, yeah. I had your priorities right, John Roddy. You're your father's son, aren't you?

You had to get your breakfast. So I had my yoghurt and melon. I had my bacon and egg and sausage and potato scone and all that stuff.

Had my breakfast, yeah, that was the first thing I had to do. I didn't really have to do that, but I wanted to do that. What did I have to do after that? Johnno? Go on the plane.

[ 12 : 13 ] Go on the plane. Johnno says, let's just cut to the chase. You had to go on the plane. We could have gone through five steps there, but you're straight to it.

You had to go on the plane. It wasn't enough that the plane was sitting on the runway. It wasn't enough that I had a ticket. It wasn't enough that I paid my money. But if I wanted to get home, I had to go on the plane.

I could have done all these things, but if I didn't get to the runway and go on the plane, I would still be standing on a, somewhere in Glasgow direction.

And so, I had to get on the plane. If I wanted to get home, I had to actually get on the plane.

Trust the pilot, follow the instructions, and get on the plane. Listen to this, boys and girls, okay? It is Jesus speaking.

[ 13 : 13 ] And Jesus says, he's telling you and me about our home. All of our souls and our hearts, we long for home.

And it's a home that's not just in this world. We have a home in this world, but there's a home that lasts forever. And Jesus tells us about that home. And Jesus says, do not let your hearts be troubled.

Don't be worried. Trust in God. Trust also in me, says Jesus. In my Father's house, that's home, are many mansions.

If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with you.

Imagine Jesus, this is Jesus speaking to you. Imagine there was no one else in the world. He's just speaking to you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am.

[ 14 : 23 ] you know the way to the place where I am going. And then one of the disciples who always asks questions called Thomas. Thomas said to the Lord Jesus, Lord, we don't know where you're going.

So how can we know the way? And Lois, Jesus, said, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one gets to the Father except through me. No one comes home except through me.

And so boys and girls, just in the same way I had to get on the plane and trust that that plane would take me home. Do you know what you and me have to do?

If we want to go to our heavenly home, it's not enough that Jesus has prepared a place. It's not enough that he's told us how to get there. But we actually have to trust him.

[ 15 : 29 ] We have to get on Jesus. And we do that by just becoming his friends and saying to him, Lord Jesus, will you take my sin away, please?

Will you come into my heart? Will you be my friend forever? Wash away my sin. And then when it's time for me to leave this world, will you please take me home?

So we'll pray now. Lord God, we thank you for the Bible, your word, which is the way that we know how to get home to heaven.

And we thank you that Jesus has paid the price for us to get home. We could never pay it ourselves. We could never take our own sin away and make us ready for heaven.

And Jesus had to do that for us. And we thank you that he did that already on the cross. And we thank you that the Bible tells us that all we have to do is we just have to trust him.

[ 16 : 40 ] And we have to say to the Lord Jesus, please take my sin away. Please come into my life. Be my friend forever and take me home. So we pray now that every one of us here that we would do that.

And Lord, that we would ask you to wash of your sin and come into our lives. Help us every day that you give us in this world to live close to with you as our friend.

And we thank you that when we do that, when you take us from this world, then you take us to be with you at home. And we pray all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to sing now and we're going to sing the words, they're not in the books but they're on the stream. And it's a hymn that is about the many reasons that we have to praise and bless the Lord Jesus.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. And we'll stand to sing this one. It's good to hear the voices of the wee ones. So remember to pray for them. Every time we see them going through the church.

[ 17 : 51 ] We're going to turn now in God's word to Revelation in chapter 2. We thank the diva for the gifts this morning again. So Revelation chapter 2, we'll just do them from verse 19 of chapter 1.

The apostle John is having this vision and Jesus instructs the apostle to write what he has seen. What is now, verse 19, and what will take place later.

The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and on the seven golden lampstands is this. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands and the seven churches.

And last Lord's Day we looked, two Lord's Days ago we looked at the church in Ephesus, to the angel of the church in Ephesus write, these are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men and that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false.

[ 19 : 06 ] You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you. You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen.

Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lampstand from his place. But you have this in your favour.

You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans which I also hate. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches to him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life.

which is in the paradise of God. To the angel of the church in Smyrna write these are the words of him who is the first and the last who died and who came to life again.

I know your afflictions and your poverty yet you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and they are not but are a synagogue of Satan.

[ 20 : 11 ] Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you the devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life.

He who is an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Amen. may God enable us to understand as we come to study just shortly. Father, there's nine going to lead us in prayer. God. and leads us into you how I bring all the day to the heaven■■■■ons, long-term and sometimes by buses gotten miles, I met myself with the idea of an even happy meal.

With the. It is hard to read. If you realize Jesus is the only way toucius, Malcolm's spirits anduins are created orWho famous adds to it.

And Am Simeon.

[ 21 : 50 ] To bring Uncle ■■■■■ and joy into the Mustard.  
a church before the church was sob the breathe the grave Homeroom He Games  
Heades Heades Heades I want to bare works very hard in the .  
. in properaalade.  
700 Owlakas 4 There was real life, and I want to leave thery chain.

[ 25 : 29 ] We have such a cach quarter who réservé un Zenithra. .

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[ 26 : 34 ] assimhaiboddh Right.

Thanks for joining us. We're pushing the friends and meno. há cold loans ■Hz. I think  
we're pushing away our love and■ at the top of this show both on the sky. Hi my face. We  
always want to go home and grab my hands.

Get away with us. I Hassan vs. Vik mogha's hungry last pattern with only essences in  
cancer. We're not playing out again. If I am doing that, I will be Beim Bonaccam vamos  
more to clean the glory, same way, a feeling.

Happy eats, P Voldemort. EVERY Cells say enough. On the road was still here before the  
became more It is good at equilibrium just innen skin, body, Uganda.

When we look finalized up above the klamentos. If we have not flaws, it would be the first  
woman.

[ 28 : 06 ] Everyone illnesses,I frost, sinner, if judge will learn disturbing so vivo. corresponds to  
the■■.

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. in the fruits of Rana that I would like you to raise up a little, but you would like to show  
you the message where you prayed.

See, your presence and I would like you to understand the day-to-daye and tell us Amen.

We sing again to God's praise. We sing from Psalm 127. 127 and the first two stanzas of  
the Psalm. 127, the first two stanzas.

[ 30 : 28 ] We sing this in Gareth. The words will be on the screen and we remain seated to sing this  
item of praise. Except the Lord do build the house, the builders lose their pain.

Except the Lord, the city keep, the watchman watch in vain. Tis vain for you to rise with  
times or late, from rest to keep, to feed, when Saul's bread so gives he his beloved the  
sea.

These two stanzas, we remain seated to sing. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[ 31 : 51 ] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[ 34 : 26 ] Thank you. Thank you. and the Lord if you could turn in the Bible please to the section that I read from Revelation Revelation chapter 2 Revelation chapter 2 and into chapter 3 as I said last or two Sundays ago this is a collection, it's like a box set of letters of Jesus to his church and it's his church back then but this is also a box set of letters which applies not just to the church back then but to the church in every age in every generation not just to the church in Ephesus and Smyrna and Thyatira etc but it's to the church in every place every place in terms of geography, Jesus addresses his church, he speaks to his church, he encourages them, he instructs them he encourages us, he instructs he corrects, he guides us and so we come to this letter from Jesus to the church in Smyrna and again we ask for help let's pray

Heavenly Father we are conscious of the words that we have sung unless the Lord builds the house we labour in vain unless Lord you meet with us and speak to us all that we do here is in vain and so we pray that it wouldn't be in vain but Lord that you would address us as you addressed the church in Smyrna all these years ago that you would apply by the Holy Spirit what you would have us see and hear and Lord as you guide us we pray for that strength that we would not only hear but that we would obey that we would be doers of the word both as a congregation and as individuals as part of a congregation one small branch of your church even in this village so meet with us we pray help us we pray we pray these things in Jesus name Amen you'll all have heard of this character that's called the mystery shopper the mystery shopper is a character it's a profession of person who is employed by shops essentially to check the various branches of their store in different places so the mystery shopper wanders into a branch of a shop and they'll give that shop a review marks out of ten for stock and displays and how friendly the people were and they told what the value for money was etc so mystery shoppers we're fairly accustomed to and if we've ever worked in a shop or any kind of franchise you're always suspicious of people who come and ask a question wondering whether they might be mystery shoppers it's mystery shoppers but

I wonder have you heard of the term mystery worshipper you know there is actually such a group of people who exist I was a little aligned to hear and read of their reports what they do well they travel from church to church some of the reviews are not too far away from from home here they travel from church to church they sit as part of the congregation they don't introduce themselves they just sample the service they review it and then they give a star rating each church it's kind of like you know the tourist information people do for your bed and breakfast but for churches so how do you get a top mark if you're a church according to the mystic worshipper well there's various questions that they have where they ask and they've got to be answered competently you're looking as if I'm making this up

I'm not even making this up this is true here are the questions that they will apply to every church question number one how impressive was the church building you're in trouble already how full was the church how comfortable was the pew or the chair what musical instruments were played how well were they played exactly how long was the sermon were doomed how would you describe the after church coffee did the service make you feel uplifted so that's just a few of the questions that they apply to each congregation and I learned from reading the reviews across the UK that pews are only deemed acceptable if they have good solid cushions on them or soft cushions on them sin systems must not have any trace of a crackle the after church coffee must be piping hot the cakes must be freshly baked and the shorter the sermon the higher the score so we really are difficult but that's the perspective of the mystery worshipper if you want to check that out it's a website called ship of fools it's not even a parody it's real but what I found myself wondering as I read through some of the mystery worshippers reports was how would these two churches that we've looked at already or read about in the book of revelation how would they score if a mystery worshipper came into the church in Ephesus and came into the church in

Smyrna with their clipboard and their tick list how would these churches score well this is speculation but my guess is the church in Ephesus would do well get high school it was a big church it was a busy church it was energetic it appeared to be doing everything right I'm sure if they had their AGM and accounts were presented the accounts would be would be a good news if they had buildings which they wouldn't have had the buildings would have been well maintained but on surface level that church in Ephesus looked to be a good church my guess was it would have at least a score of 8 out of 10 what about Smyrna a little gathering in all likely view a struggling church strapped for cash in the extreme and so if they had pews they would have no cushions in the pews if they had a sound system which they didn't I should have would crackle if they had hot coffee it wouldn't be that hot and I'm fairly sure the cakes would be fairly stale

[ 41 : 59 ] Smyrna I think would be a 5 out of 10 maximum Smyrna using the criterion of the mystery worshipper is not a good going church Ephesus is but what would Jesus say the king and head of the church as he comes among them and he looks in in these congregations what does Jesus say as he addresses the church in Smyrna well actually he gives it top marks there's only two churches in this box set of churches that get complaint free report and this is one of them Ephesus big church lost its first love huge black mark Pergamum is a church that's guilty of compromise

Thyatira allowed the morality to come in and inhabit and be accommodated within the church Sardis shallow superficial Laodicea lukewarm putrid but Smyrna is given a clean bill of health no complaints no non-conformances just a big thumbs up from Christ as he looks in Jesus says this is an excellent example of one of my churches so learn from it so let's just have a look for a few minutes at Smyrna this morning let's think about what we can expect to see what we shouldn't be surprised to see in a church that meets with the unqualified approval of Christ five points very brief five ingredients which make up the mix that is the church and Smyrna five things that we shouldn't be surprised to see in any church that is approved by Jesus point number one pressure point number two poverty point number three slander point number four prison point number five dead it's quite a sales pitch it's quite a set of criterion for a church that meets with the approval of

Christ first point is pressure what we see as we look into the church in Smyrna is there a church under pressure Jesus says in verse nine I know your afflictions and the word affliction there in the Greek literally means I know that you are hard pressed the church in Smyrna was a church that was under pressure because they were a church that was going against the flow of their culture not just the general culture but even as we look at the other churches in part the church culture now in Ephesus things were bad for Christians in many ways it says in chapter 2 verse 3 that they endured hardships for the name of Christ in Ephesus the communities who looked in the church were unhappy because this was a church that said there's only one true God in Ephesus they said no there's many gods and so the eastern magicians were furious at this church that claimed to be the only church and those who worshipped the goddess

Diana who manufactured all these bits and pieces for the ideology they were even more furious at the people in Ephesus but in Smyrna things were worse I suppose in Ephesus if you avoided the right kind of people you could avoid some pressure you kept your head down you kept your mouth closed maybe you would get off scot-free but in Smyrna there was no such opportunity in Smyrna the cult of emperor worship was the dominant cult in that place it was the law to worship the emperor and so every year if you were going to trade as a business you were going to try and make any money in Smyrna you had to get hold of this officially signed certificate to show that you had paid homage to Caesar and what that involved was burning a pinch of incense to Caesar in honour of Caesar and it involved swearing an oath saying



Caesar is Lord and without that you just couldn't trade without that you had no real status and recognition within that place but for the Christians this is something that they wouldn't do and they couldn't do and so they find themselves in a Daniel 3 situation remember Daniel 3 Shadrach Meshach and Abednego they are told to bow down before the statue bow down in honour of the emperor and they wouldn't worship the king because they wouldn't worship they find themselves under huge pressure they find themselves cast into the fiery furnace and the Christians in Smyrna were in a very similar situation and they would not cave under pressure and they found themselves in difficulty because of that

[ 48 : 07 ] I put this in my notes I was thinking of telling the children us this morning but I decided not to but I'll tell you it will stick in our minds perhaps do you know what this is it's actually really difficult to tell this could be any number of things from a docking out of front to any kind of herd it's very difficult to tell just looking at the distance as to what this is but if I apply a bit of pressure to it and I sludge it up a little bit and I let sure the smell it's mint it's really strong I can smell it now already from a distance as it's left alone there's not much to see there's no fragrance but you put that under pressure you put that for a mortal pestle and start to pressurize it there's this lovely fragrance that comes out and the church of Smyrna was recognised to be the church of Christ that had the fragrance of Christ around it and even more so as it came under pressure so this was a church that was under pressure the second thing that we see about the church in

Smyrna is that it was a church that knew extreme poverty Jesus says in verse 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty now why the Christians were poor in Smyrna isn't crystal clear the likelihood is if they wouldn't bow to Caesar they wouldn't get their papers they couldn't trade they couldn't have money and so they were in poverty it might have been that those who were persecuting them were persecuting them in such a way that not only did they hate them not only did they miscall them not only did they try to attack them but they took all their stuff and they stole it from them we don't know what exactly the circumstances were what we do know is that the Christians were cut off like leperage from all social contact and all trade opportunity and it left them in poverty left them destitute is the literal translation of the word not just a wee bit poor but absolutely destitute for Christ's sake pressure poverty thirdly slander

Jesus says I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and they're not but are a synagogue of Satan and probably the most vociferous enemy that the church of Christ had in Smyrna it was it was it was the Jews and yes they were God's people but in reality they were not showing themselves to be God's people so Jesus points to them and he identifies them in this instance because of their behaviour he calls them a synagogue of Satan they felt threatened by the Christians they felt threatened by this Jesus and so they went on the offensive against the church in Smyrna and one of the weapons that they used the maximum effect was was slamming and they took every chance to spread every lie that they could against the church one rumour that went round in that time in that place was that the

Christians were cannibals which obviously was untrue but there was a distortion of the truth they'd heard about communion take the bread this is my body take the blood the wine this is my blood and so what they said was these Christians they're eating bodies they're eating blood they're drinking blood they're cannibals tiny bit of truth twisted into something which is just very intentional slander they also used to love to say that the Christians were actually they looked to be a peaceful group but in reality they were a rebel force they were just gathering a bit of strength and they were waiting for their chance to overthrow the government I saw the Jews slander the reputation of the Christians and that caused the persecution to be intensified and to come from different places and it was all because of their faith in

Christ so already even if we were to stop here you would see that for this wee church the picture is grim they're under pressure they are poverty stricken they are slandered and already we feel something I think of the pain of this church even if we pause here you want to think and if you were sitting in that congregation and you were receiving a letter you would think well surely things can't get worse things can only get better and yet Jesus says to him as he looks ahead press yourselves it's not going to get better pressure prison slander next prison verse 10 Jesus looking ahead says do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer

[ 53 : 49 ] I tell you the devil will put some of you in prison to test you and you will suffer persecution for 10 days and that likely would have come as a blow to the church in Smyrna because it was so plausible the Christians in Jerusalem the Christians in Philippi the Christians in Rome were all suffering imprisonment being thrown into captivity it seems Smyrna was next in line the 10 days is not likely a literal 10 days it's not that you're going to be put into prison for 10 day sentences just the 10 days is a term that indicates to the church in Smyrna this will be a limited period this will not be forever you will be persecuted in prison for a period but it's a period that will come to an end and that was an assurance that would have encouraged them when they were behind bars that this was not going to be forever so prison is the fourth thing that we see in the church in Smyrna and the final thing that they were yet to suffer was death and it says there in verse 10 as Jesus addresses them he calls them to be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life now they were looking forward we can look back and we can check back church history to see what actually happened and we can see that for some this came true think about an old man an old godly man we all know many elderly godly men now let me give you the brief story of one elderly godly man from

Smyrna or Gwyn who was there in that time his name is Polycarp we find him in church history AD 56 he's one example of someone who was faithful even to the point of death in his old age known to be a Christian he was captured and he was charged to recant his faith in Christ he wouldn't and so the case goes higher and higher we can imagine it coming more and more into the public domain and eventually he finds himself in an amphitheatre surrounded by thousands that's the picture that we have and he's addressed by the pro consul on this very public occasion and the pro consul says respect your years he's an old man swear by the genius of Caesar swear and I will release you revile

Christ and Polycarp replied for 86 years I have served him and he has done me no wrong how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me the pro consul persists and his attack swear by the genius of Caesar I am wild beasts if you will not change your mind I will throw you to them Polycarp replies Paul the pro consul comes back since you make light

Roberto ■oso people pray and so history bears witness to the fact that the church of Jesus Christ in Smyrna suffered it was a church that was under extreme persecution they lost their income, they lost their reputation they lost their freedom some lost their lives where was Jesus in all this?

had he forgotten about them? had they dropped off Jesus' radar? had he overlooked what was going on in Smyrna?

[ 59 : 16 ] did he not know? well yes he knew Jesus knew about all of this Jesus says in verse 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty I know the slander of those who say that are Jews and are not but are the synagogue of Satan Jesus knew what they were going through and yet he permitted it he allowed it Smyrna was one of these churches these Christians were a group of Christians who were called to suffer John Stott says suffering is an indispensable mark of every Christian church the question is why?

why was God allowing this? and what was God doing through all this? and the answer is found in an unlikely place it's found in many places scripture interprets scripture this is how we understand what's going on in Revelation we look through scripture go to one passage with me just as we come to a conclusion Deuteronomy 32 Deuteronomy chapter 32 and I just wanted to look at two verses in that chapter this is a song it's a prayer of Moses as he thanks God for his faithfulness and in that prayer in that song Moses speaks about God's protection of Israel in the wilderness and he uses this picture of God's protection of Israel he says in verse 11 like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions the Lord alone led him but I want to just capture that picture of God if I could

Moses he thinks about the eagle like he sees he shielded him and cared for him he guarded him as an apple of his eye another translation says like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions do you know how eagles teach their young how to fly I don't know this but eagles teach their young to fly by making a nest and the nest is on some high inaccessible pinnacle on a mountain it's made of sparse prickly twigs and then when the young come they line that nest with soft animal fur and a thistle diamond and that nest is comfortable then for the young as the young are nurtured and as they start to grow they are in such a comfortable nest but the problem is the nest is too comfortable and the drop out of the nest because of the position of it is so sheer the young eagles are never in a hurry to leave the nest they're never in a hurry to start flying and yet that's what they were designed to do so what does the eagle do well the mother eagle when the time comes she stirs up the nest and the soft fur and the dowel is all stripped out it's removed and the nest is stirred and these sharp prickly branches are jutting out and what was so comfortable and so secure is now that's so uncomfortable and so difficult to live in and so bit by bit the young are forced to move further and further towards the end of the nest until eventually they're standing at the edge of the nest and they get tired fatigue kicks in and they drop out and when they drop out as the winds start to go they discover

I can fly what was going on in Smyrna the church in Smyrna I believe in the light of that passage was learning to fly it was being prepared to fly and soar but before they could fly they needed to leave the nest this lovely united active blessed New Testament church in the early days how tempting it must have been in these days just to always be together and yet this is a church that was being stirred and part of that stirring was a call to suffer last Sunday evening we heard first hand of some who have seen by eyewitness what's going on in the church of North Korea intense suffering acute persecution

I expect that church soon will be flying the church in China for some time now it's been flying it's now so big we don't know how many millions are in membership in that church the last time I checked it was experiencing a growth of 12 million new Christians a year how's life been for the Christians there has it been comfortable has it been cozy it's been anything but they have been called to suffer some of the most horrific persecution and yet that's what's caused them to fly one pastor pastor Yoon from the book the heavenly man he says this or quote in this short quote we have come to understand that the past 30 years of suffering through the past 30 years we have come to understand that the past 30 years of suffering persecution and torture for the house churches in China were all part of God's training for us he says

[ 66 : 25 ] I once spoke in the west and a Christian told me I've been praying for years that the communist government will collapse so Christians can live in freedom this is not what we pray don't pray for the persecution to stop we shouldn't pray for a lighter load to carry but a stronger back to endure then the world will see God is with us empowering us to live in a way that reflects his love and his power what a fragrance of Christ there is about that church crushed pressed and yet so Christ filled the Smyrna branch of the church in China is booming still what about Blackbone to finish what about

Scotland what about England what about Wales what about Ireland the church here was once flying once we were known across the world as the land of the book not now have we retreated back into the nest do we want to fly again do we want to be assured of Christ's approval and Christ's commendation do we want to see the church here in this country grow again do we want to see people in Target saved do we want to see the kingdom of God in Scotland and England and Ireland and Wales advancing and not retreating and cowering as we always hear ourselves well maybe the call that we are under in the light of this passage is not to make the church more comfortable maybe it's not about cushioned pews maybe it's not about hot coffee and freshly baked cakes maybe we need to be ready to be a smirner maybe we need to be ready in a culture that is less and less gospel friendly to take the pressure and not compromise and even be prepared to know affliction and suffering and persecution for Christ's sake that's what he calls us to it's a terrifying possibility but as our culture changes it's a more realistic one and equally it's a thrilling one one one final word about the eagle just to finish no I've said finish three times sorry the stirring of the nest for the young eagle is it comfortable no it's far from it as the eagle drops off the side of the cliff and starts to make its descent that is less comfortable still but what makes it all bearable what makes it safe for you well what makes it safe as

Moses reminds us in that prayer is that the young one's not alone and as the young one falls Moses as he surveys what's going on in this natural encounter he sees that the fallen eagle is accompanied by a watchful parent that hovers over its young that spreads its wings to catch them as it says and carries them on its prince and so it was for Smyrna yes Smyrna suffered much and would suffer more but in their suffering Christ was with he'd been through it all for them before them and now he was going through it with them the risen Christ and so it will be for you and for me through whatever

Jesus permits us to endure for his name's sake he will be with us promising that although we might be hard pressed we won't be utterly crushed although we might be poor in this world verse 10 we will have riches in Christ although we may well be slandered we may be imprisoned down the line we may even face the threat of death for him if it's for him you need not fear because he the first and the last who died and rose again promises the crown of life promises eternal life promises as we said with the children that heavenly home to those who remain faithful to him like Smyrna what will you do what are we doing he who is in ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches heavenly father we thank you for this direct word from

Jesus the son and head of his church to his church then and today give us ears to hear we pray in hearts that we be responsive we pray this in Jesus name Amen Mission Praise 201 to finish guide me oh that I great Jehovah pilgrim through this barren land and I may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all both knowing forever more Amen