

# Polycarp – Bishop of Smyrna

## His Early Life:

- 1) Birth Date - 69 AD
- 2) Birth Place – Unknown
- 3) Redeemed out of slavery as a young boy in the city of Smyrna by a wealthy woman named Callisto. She was a member of the church in Smyrna (Acts 19:10, Revelation 2:8-11) and noted for her works of charity.
- 4) She taught him the ways of the Lord, provided for his education and adopted him as her son.
- 5) Soon after coming into Callisto's home, he began to show evidence of the saving grace of God in his heart.
- 6) He became acquainted with the Apostle John and studied at his feet for 20 years.

## His Work in Smyrna:

- 1) Became a Deacon in the Church at Smyrna and labored for the care of the poor.
- 2) Soon called to be an Elder in the Church. John may have been present to witness this event.
- 3) His fame and influence extended throughout Asia Minor not only because of his close relationship with the Apostle John, but also because of his godly example.
- 4) He wrote a letter to the Church in Phillipi encouraging them to remain strong in their faith and to flee from materialism. He also instructed them in the matter of financial dishonesty which was creeping into the church.
- 5) He traveled to Rome to seek to resolve a dispute over the date of the commemoration of our Lord's death and resurrection which threatened to split the church.
- 6) He spoke out against the teachings of an influential heretic named Marcion. Among other things, Marcion rejected the Old Testament teachings and believed that there were two Gods, one was the righteous and wrathful creator of the world who was a lesser god and the other was the God of the Gospel who was pure love and mercy. He believed that many of the teachings of Christ were incompatible with the actions of Yahweh.
- 7) He combated Gnostic heresies which were beginning to spread throughout the Christian church.

## His Martyrdom:

- 1) The church at this time was hated in the Roman empire, especially by the Jews and the pagan Romans. Every natural calamity was blamed on the Christians because of their refusal to worship Caesar as God.
- 2) When Polycarp was an old man, severe persecution broke out in Smyrna. Many believers were seized and dragged into a public arena where they were fed to wild beasts.
- 3) Polycarp, who went into hiding at the urging of his flock, was finally found by the authorities and brought before the Roman court. Despite the angry mob, the Roman proconsul took pity on the elderly man and urged Polycarp to proclaim "Caesar is Lord". By offering a small pinch of incense to Caesar's statue and he would escape torture and death. To this Polycarp responded, "Eighty-six years I have served Christ and he never did me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" Steadfast in his stand for Christ he refused to compromise his beliefs.
- 4) Polycarp was thus condemned to be burned at the stake. As he arrived at the place of execution he told the soldiers in charge that they need not fasten him to the stake as he had no intention of fleeing.
- 5) His dying prayer was, "Lord God Almighty, Father of thy beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the grace of knowing Thee, God of angels and powers, and the whole creation, and of the whole race of the righteous who live in thy presence; I bless Thee for deigning me worthy of this day and this hour that I may be among thy martyrs and drink of the cup of my Lord Jesus Christ. I praise Thee for all Thy mercies; I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Son, with whom to Thyself and the Holy Spirit, be glory both now and forever. Amen."
- 6) Polycarp died in the year 155 AD.