Now this usually refers to words against God. It can have that meaning, but it can mean slander. The word referred to here - were the things that were said about them. By false Jews who were of the synagogue of Satan.

Did you know this is one of the tragedies of this universe. And of human history. The way religious people persecute each other. It is a disgrace. You give them an opportunity and practically every major religion that has ever existed will use an iron fist to grind dissenting minds down to dust.

Christians have persecuted the Jews for centuries. It is difficult even to win Jews today to Jesus when they have sought to persecute them. And they have looked and they have taken up persecution.

Back there in the beginning of the Christian world. The Roman Empire, where so many of the Roman authorities - they sought to blot out the infant Christian church. The first Roman Emperor to persecute Christians was Nero. And he listened to some of the wealthy Jewish population. They poisoned the minds.

Now this was brought about by the Jewish people. Martyrdom in all the world happened in this city of Smyrna. One of the greatest.
The pastor there at that time was Polycarp. He was the leader of the Christians in the city. Upon a Festival Day when the crowds were excited and cried out as a mob about Polycarp -- they brought him before the Roman Governor. He was given a choice of saying, Caesar is Lord or Jesus is Lord. He refused to say Caesar was Lord. He (the Governor) said say I swear that I will set thee at Liberty. Reproach Christ.

Polycarp answered this famous of all history: "Eighty and six years have I served him and he never did me harm. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour. When the Governor pressed him -- the aged pastor answered, since thou art vainly urging that I should swear by the fortune of Caesar and pretend not to know who and what I am -- hear me, I am a Christian!"

A little later the Governor threatened him. I have wild beasts at hand. To these will I cast Thee except will thou change. And the Governor said, seeing that you do not fear the beasts, I will cast and cause thee to be consumed by fire. Polycarp answered, thou threatens me with fire, which burns for an hour. And after a little is put out. But thou art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgement. Of the eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. Why tarry thou, bring forth what thou will. Soon after the people led by the Jews gathered the wood, and burned the faithful pastor, in the flames. Polycarp prayed this moving prayer. I thank thee that that thou has graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour. That I may receive a portion in the number of thy martyrs in the cup of thy Christ.

So died the pastor, the angel messenger of the church of Smyrna. I know the pressure and agony unto death. I know thou utter destitution and want. I know thou blasphemy, which say they are Jews and are not. But are the Synagogue of Satan -- I know and I understand.
It is said the King commanded a Christian to recount — if you don’t give up 
Christ, I will banish you. The Christian smilingly said, you cannot banish me 
from Christ. He has said I will never leave Thee nor forsake Thee. The King was 
angry and said -- well, I will take your property. The Christian replied, my 
treasurers are layed up on high. You cannot get to them. The King was greatly 
angered and he said, well then, I will kill you. And the Christian answered, I 
have been dead with Christ in this world for 40 years, my life is hid with Christ 
in God, and you cannot touch it. To which the King said, what can you do with 
such a fanatic.

Studdert-Kennedy, a British chaplain in World War I, 
said that any person who was undisturbed by the pain 
and suffering of others was himself suffering from 
“hardening of the heart or softening of the brain.” Suf-
fering is a universal problem. It confronts us daily, 
brought sharply into focus by one tragedy after an-
other. It is a part of life. Job reminds us that “man is 
born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 
5:7).

“God doesn’t care!”

IV. OUR LORD’S ENCOURAGEMENT

V. 10 — We have come now to our Lord’s words of encouragement. And praise 
and commendation. Found even in the way that he introduces himself.

If we look back to V. 8 — he says to the angel of the church at Smyrna write 
— these things saith the first and the last. Through all the trials that you will 
ever have. I am at the beginning of it and I shall be at the end of it. I shall 
be all the way through. I am the first and the last.

In early days and ancient days when a man made a map — he would write over an 
unknown country. Here be dragons. Over an unknown place — here be burning fiery 
sands. Or over another place — here be the abyss.

Just so the Christian can take the map of his life, the map of the world, the 
map of all eternity. And when he comes to an unknown place — he can write, here
is Christ. Here is my Lord. Here is my Savior, my Redeemer, I am the first and the last. Thous wast dead, and art alive is translated in the present tense, that he refers to his resurrection and great event. When he adds, I am he which was dead and is alive, he came dead, and am now alive. He was referring to his death and resurrection. When he died and was buried and was raised from the dead. Our Lord continues to tell the story of a young woman who suffered in Smyrna. Our Lord continues to tell her story. When he adds, I am he which was dead and is alive, he came dead, and am now alive. He was referring to his death and resurrection. When he died and was buried and was raised from the dead.

Our Lord said, I know thy works - tribulation, poverty, I know is not the "I know" of observation. As he has said. If he had said, if I observe or I see - I know having seen it in you. I know your works, tribulation, and poverty. This I know.

This comes from his own experience -- I know thy tribulation and thy poverty and thou slanders me. They reviled him. Think how this suffering and this persecution brought death to him. He has expressed it all. He has experienced it all. He knew all of this. I know, I know.

V. 10. Our Lord gives encouragement -- fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Satan shall cast you into prison. That you may be tried. And ye shall have tribulation ten days - the number 10 is an intensive number. It refers to fierce and intense persecution. The ten plagues in the Land of Egypt. But the Lord said, fear none of these things. Now the Lord could have referred to ten different periods of persecution. Which some historians have laid out. But one might have expected the Lord to say, fear not. I will alleviate - I will relieve
But the Lord said the contrary. You are to have more of the same. To which the Christian may have cried out — oh Lord, we have so much now, we cannot bear it. Our property has been taken. Our homes removed from us. We live in rags and misery and agony. In hunger and in want. We are outcasts and we are despised.

Yet the Lord said, fear not. There will be more hardships. There will just be more. Is not anything promised the Christian besides suffering. Tribulation, poverty, misery and agony. Is there something else. The Lord never promised them any freedom from this in this world.

Remember when James and John asked if they might have a place at the right hand and one at the left. He asked them, can you be baptized with my baptism. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink. And they said they can. But how little did they understand.

James was beheaded by the sword of Herod.

John, as you know, was left on the Isle of Patmos to die of exposure.

Peter, in the last chapter in the Gospel of John, is called on to be crucified unto death.
You are going to have more trouble - amazing that Jesus said this to these people.

The last thing that he says is to be faithful unto death. But our Lord has something else. When you see the wicked prosper, when you see God's people having a hard time. And some seem to be living in an abundance of things. Some are having all of this. But here you are - you do not have all of this. You have to struggle about your health. You have to struggle about how you are going to live from week to week. And as a Christian, you are suffering these deprivations. At times, you are being persecuted and cast out.

Many times I have said those same words to members of our church and congregation. And to other people. Don't be afraid. When at the same time, their lurks even in my heart the shadow of fear. When I am afraid even to speak - but our Lord gives us complete assurance. I know. And because he knows, he says to these Christians at Smyrna he says, fear not. Fear not. I am the first and the last. I will be there all the way through. I will see you from the beginning to the end. I know all about it.

There is nothing to fear for the Christian. Do not be afraid. Do not hesitate - do not despair. Fear none of those things. Yea, thought I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me. And thou strong arm support me.
Safest of all.

Safe shall be my going
Secretly armed against all of death
Safe though all safety is lost
Safe where men fall
And if these poor limbs die
Safest of all.

John Greenleaf Whittier wrote:

I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air
I only know that I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care.

Paul wrote that I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels,
principalities, nor powers, things present nor things to come, nor height nor
death, or any other creatures shall be able to separate us from the love of
God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Rom. 8:38-39.

Fear not, fear not. There are some of you who are going through trials
right now that only God knows about. There are some of you who are fighting
desperately for life. There are some of you who are struggling with your health.
And the Lord knows, and there are some of you who labor in persecution and God
knows. There are some of you who are depressed in Spirit, and in heart - and
God knows. Fear not. Fear not.

No more wonderful person ever lived than Catherine Booth. She was devoted to her husband, her children.
Yet she found time to go into the slums of the city of London and help the unfortunate, save the sick, the
lost. She encouraged her husband to leave the Methodist Church rather than have his call to serve circumscribed by regulations. She was one of the front-runners in the organization of the Salvation Army. No one can estimate the good she has done. And yet when she came to the day of her death, she said that she could not recall one day when she had been free from pain! Why?

Fanny Crosby had done nothing wrong. In fact, she was a mere child of six when she lost her sight through
an accident. Why?

Dozens of other hymns by that same Christian woman have literally lifted men's souls up to heaven. When we suffer, no matter what the cause, and can have such a faith, we are on the road to rugged good character and everlasting life.
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. No, dramatic experience. He was sitting in the pew immediately behind this father and mother. You will be separated from the source of all blessings. But you will find eternal life. Not only life not earthly life. But you will find eternal life. You will be separated from the source of all blessings. But you will find eternal life. You will be separated from the source of all blessings.