

To The Church

Letters from the book of Revelation

Smyrnan Treasure

Context/Introduction

The letter we are looking at this week was written to the church in Smyrna (which now exists in modern day Turkey as the town of Izmir), a wealthy port city, where science and medicine flourished. It was known for its many temples to the different Greek gods, as well as for its commitment to Rome, and the temple dedicated to emperor worship (Longman, 2013). In such a spiritually diverse city, filled with idolatry and spiritual experience, the church stood out as something unknown and totally misunderstood.

Today's Text - Revelation 2:8-11

1. Jesus Tells Us Who He Is, And He Is Who He Says He Is

- Read Revelation 2:8-11, 1:17 & John 14:6

The letter starts by reminding the church that Jesus is the only one – eternal, creator, redeemer (John 14:6).

2. Jesus Knows What You Need Him To Know, And He Sees What You Need Him To See

- Read Revelation 2:9 & Hebrews 4:14-16

Becoming a Christian in Smyrna was exceptionally costly, as Christ called them to live completely counter-culturally. They turned from participating in unethical trade, idol worship and pagan festivities, to worshipping a God who could not be seen or understood. They were considered outsiders and were accused, judged and mocked for their beliefs. They experienced rejection and persecution that impacted them severely. Not only did Jesus see what they were enduring, he also knew and identified with their extreme hardships and suffering, because he had experienced the same kind of pain and persecution at the hands of men.

Q. Why do you think Jesus wanted the letter to Smyrna to start off with the reminder of who he was?

Q. Why was turning to faith in Christ so much more costly for the church then, than it is now?

Q. In what way, if any, have you encountered real rejection or suffering for your faith, and what did that do to your relationship with Christ and with your Christian community?

Q. Has your walk with Christ ever caused you to suffer a financial loss? (E.g. have you had to leave a job because it caused you to compromise on honesty and integrity; have you had to lose business by not taking bribes etc.?)

Q. What do you think would be the toughest cost for you personally to incur, in order to follow Christ until the end? Why? Some examples are: financial ruin; being ostracized from your family; not being part of the crowd at work/sport/socially because you hold tightly to Christian ethics and morality; being seen in your community as the intolerant, narrow-minded, antiquated fool for following an old religion.

3. Although Jesus Is Sovereign, He Doesn't Always Intervene, Yet We Need Not And Must Not Fear

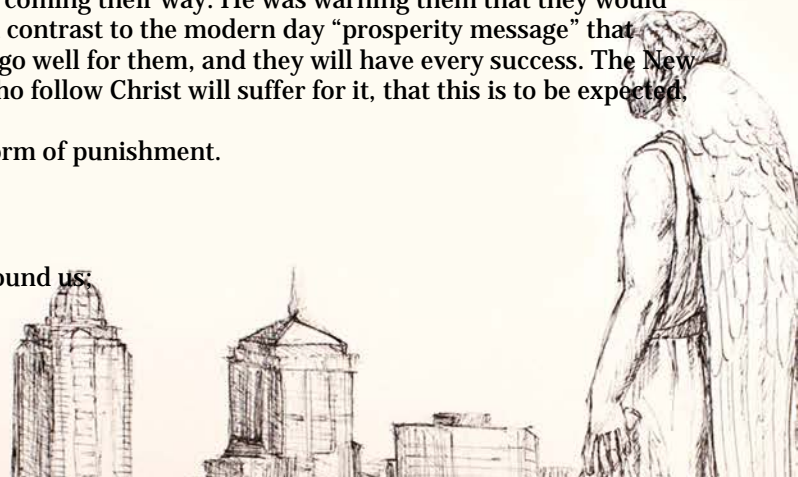
- Read Revelation 2:10-11 & 2 Timothy 3:10-12 & John 16:33

This letter was not a prophecy about how well things would turn out for the church in Smyrna, but instead was an encouragement to endure the suffering that was certainly coming their way. He was warning them that they would soon be punished and hurt for their faith. This is in direct contrast to the modern day “prosperity message” that teaches people that, if they have enough faith, things will go well for them, and they will have every success. The New Testament teaches over and over again that those of us who follow Christ will suffer for it, that this is to be expected, and that we should endure, regardless.

The suffering that we incur because of our faith is not a form of punishment.

We suffer:

- Because we live in a fallen world;
- As a result of sin – both our own and those around us;
- Because we are in a spiritual war.



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Christ could intervene and remove our suffering but he sometimes doesn't because there is purpose behind it. It is very often a litmus test, revealing the true nature of our faith. Faith that is only skin deep won't endure. And so our suffering drives us deeper into Christ's heart, and provokes the real need within us.

Q. Why is it important for us to know that the church in Smyrna was going to incur further suffering for their faith, rather than for some sin they were committing?

Q. Why is it so hard to comprehend that suffering produces more fruit in our lives than living easy, comfortable and successful lives?

Q. What suffering has produced the most fruit of faith in your life? Do you think that depth of faith and a need for Christ could have been birthed in you without it?

Q. How would/could you, through this passage, encourage another Christian who is suffering in some way for their faith at the moment?

4. Jesus Assures His Followers Of 3 Things:

True Riches, The Crown Of Life And Victory Over The Second Death

- Read Revelation 2:9, Matthew 13:44 & James 1:2-12

When Jesus said to the church that they were rich, he was speaking directly into a context in which many of them were suffering poverty. He was painting a picture of an obvious contrast between material riches, which they didn't have, and the abundant riches of being in Christ. Material riches are temporary but the riches of Christ are eternal. When everything is taken away from us, the things that remain are what make us "rich". When tested in our material comforts, most of us totally freak out because all of our hope and security is actually based on our own wealth, rather than in Christ, who is our true provider. Though we think we believe that Christ is enough to satisfy all our needs, we soon realize that we don't really believe that at a heart-level. But Jesus wants us to know that HE IS ENOUGH. In him, we have everything we need.

Q. Why is it so hard to wrap our heads around the truth that in Christ we have all that we need?

Q. Do we really believe that Jesus is the only one who can satisfy and provide for our every need?

Q. How do you think you would react if, all of a sudden, you were faced with absolute poverty, and were forced to rely solely on Christ for your security?

Final Reflection Question: What is the one big take-away from this week's message that you feel God is asking you to take home and apply, in order to grow in him?

Bibliography

(2013). City of Ephesus. In Longman, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 1553). Michigan: BakerBooks.

