



OPENING COMMENT

Smyrna is one of two churches that Jesus addresses that does not have a rebuke or correction attached to the address. Jesus identifies their suffering and calls them to surprising faithfulness through it. As we read his address we can learn that there is so much more to persecution than simply the physical discomfort that comes from it. Since the letters to these churches are representative of all churches in all places at all times, we can begin to open our eyes to the other dimensions of persecution that come on the front lines of Gospel faithfulness.

READ THE TEXT: Revelation 2:8-11

To the Church in Smyrna

⁸“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

⁹“‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Jesus begins each address to the churches with a distinct characteristic of himself. What things of Christ are highlighted in this particular address?
2. What forms of hardship is the church of Smyrna experiencing?
3. What does Christ mean when he talks about their poverty and richness at the same time?



4. Who is behind the persecution experienced by the church?
5. What is the purpose of the persecution?
6. What are the limits put on faithfulness?
7. What are the rewards for those who heed Christ's words?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. Some level of persecution (i.e. Slander, mocking, poverty) should be expected when the Gospel is prioritized in our lives. How does this reality translate into your life? What questions does it raise about faith, God, or our culture?
2. How does the idea that we can be physically poor, yet spiritually rich sit in your spirit?
3. How does the spiritual reality of difficulty and hardship, particularly persecution, impact your understanding and capacity to deal with the challenges of gospel faithfulness?
4. How are you being tested currently? If not, why do you think you are not?
5. There are two deaths to consider in our experience. The first everyone experiences, the second is avoidable. How often do you make decisions based on the second death as opposed to the first? How might we begin to train ourselves to live in light of Christ's promises of conquering the second death and receiving the crown of life?
6. How might we help each other to live under the command to not be fearful and to live faithfully?

BIBLICAL THREAD

1. Matthew 5:11-12 – persecution is not limited to physical pain, but mocking on account of Christ.
2. Romans 5:3-5 – suffering producing hope which does not disappoint.
3. Romans 8:18 – comparing suffering with glory to come.
4. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 – affliction bringing results
5. 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 – how we are treated is not in line with the spiritual reality we have.
6. Ephesians 6:10-19 – our battle defined and tools used to fight it.
7. 2 Timothy 3:1-12 – we should expect suffering as faithful followers of Christ.
8. James 2:5-7 – poor being considered rich.
9. Hebrews 10:32-34 – walking with those in prison and having joy despite poverty.

CONCLUSION

The church at Smyrna reminds us that persecution is not simply a physical pain filled reality, but includes impoverishment or mocking because of faithfulness to Christ. It reminds us that there is also a spiritual reality that places us squarely in the devil's sights the closer we draw to Christ. It reminds us that a life dedicated to Christ is a life of beneficial struggle that will test our faith and refine us for



the life to come. We are called to fearless faithfulness in the midst of potential social consequences, financial consequences, or physical consequences. Yet, this address also reminds us that it is only in light of Christ that we would be able to accomplish any of it. The question is, do we savor Christ above all else, or are we bent on self-preservation and comfort? A challenge we each have to wrestle with personally.

SHARE & PRAY

LIFE GROUP VISION:

The goal to meeting together around the word of God is three-fold. First, we want to more clearly understand what God is saying to us through his Word and apply it to our own hearts and minds. Secondly, we want to build a loving community with each other to disciple one another toward maturity in Christ. Thirdly, we desire each of us, as ambassadors of Christ, to look outwards to our community and ask how we can bring the truth of the gospel to bear on those whom God has placed in our lives.

