

Revelation 2:8-11
Smyrna: Fear not. Be Faithful.

Introduction:

- I. Good morning!
- II. We are continuing our series of messages looking at Jesus' seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation.
 - A. Each letter contains a different and unique message to a church in a unique context.
 1. Sometimes Jesus has a rebuke to give. . .
 2. Other times he has a word of encouragement.
 3. And then again, other times he has a combination of the two like we saw last week at Ephesus.
 - B. The letters all follow a similar format or outline. And this provides a simple guide for us as we study these letters.
 - C. The letters help us ask four simple questions:
 - a) What truths about Jesus are being revealed?
 - b) What does Jesus commend the churches for doing/believing.
 - c) What does Jesus condemn/rebuke for doing/believing?
 - d) What instructions are given?
- III. This week we will study the second of the 7 letters. . . the letter to the church in Smyrna.
 1. As we will see the church in a moment the church in Smyrna is enduring intense persecution.
 2. And of the 7 letters, only two of them do not contain a rebuke of some sort. And this is one of them.
 - a) The type of persecution this church is experiencing is two fold.. . one is imprisonment and death. . . and the other is economic suppression.
 - (1) And Jesus speaks into their suffering and speaks this word of encouragement.

IV. So, let us now turn to Revelation 2:8-11, to hear what the Spirit has to say to the church in Smyrna and to each of us this morning.

A. 8 “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

1. These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty— yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
2. 10 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 life as your victor’s crown.
3. 11 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.— Revelation 2:8-11

V. PRAY

VI. TOday, some of you find yourselves going through a tough season.

- A. Perhaps your marriage is in turmoil.
- B. Or you are sick, perhaps like our brother Rodger, you have received a daunting diagnosis.
- C. Maybe you have lost your job due to the economic effects of corona.
- D. Maybe you are walking through a deep valley of depression or an instense season spiritual doubt.
 1. What ever it may be for you today. . .you would be hard pressed to find yourselves in a worse situation then the persecuted church in Smyrna.
 - a) So, this letter to the persecuted to church contains deep truths. . . specific instructions for us as we endure not just persecution, but ANY type of suffering. . .
 - (1) Whether it be as extreme as life-threatening persecution or any other type of trial or turmoil you may face.

(2) It is significant to stop and realise these are Jesus' words speaking into the lives of a suffering community. . . .

(a) Perhaps you may wonder what would Jesus say to me in the midst of my suffering, in the midst of my trial, in the midst of my crisis?

i) Well, let us sit up and listen to the words of our lord together this morning.

VII. Let's begin with how he addresses the church in vs 8:

A. 8 "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 came to life again. — Revelation 2:8

1. What does Jesus begin this letter with. . . a statement about himself. . . What do we learn about Jesus from this opening to his letter?

2. Perhaps you remember from last week that Jesus begins each of these 7 letters with a revelation about himself. . . a self-disclosure. . . an unveiling of his true identity.

a) And each of these truths go back to the way Jesus revealed himself to John in chapter 1.

(1) So, let's go back to Revelation 1:17-18 as Jesus reveals himself to John he says these words:

(a) "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. - Revelation 1:17-18.

3. This truth about Jesus will be the basis for Jesus words of encouragement to the church in Smyrna for the things they are about to suffer..

a) In order to have courage to face an unknown future. . . we always need to go back to what we know to be true about God.

(1) Here, Jesus reminds these suffering Christians that He has the first word and the last word . . . he has conquered the

grave . . and Jesus says “Look”! I was dead but I am alive forever and ever.

- (a) His future is our future. . . we can bank on this. . . so no matter what lays ahead even the worst possible scenario has been overcome. . . death itself has no power over us.
- b) In order to have courage to face an unknown future. . . we always need to go back to what we know to be true about God.
 - (1) When we face the uncertainty of suffering, we tend to forget those things we know to be true about our God.
 - (a) He is sovereign. . . he is good. . . he always means good for us . . . he is sufficient. . . God’s eternal future is greater than our present circumstances. . . these are the truths we tend to forget.
 - (2) So, the first thing we can recognise in this passage and in our own suffering is that Jesus comes to us and says to us in midst of our trials in our suffering:
 - (a) “These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again”
 - (b) Jesus has conquered the grave. . . and so will we.
 - i) So, Jesus calls us to faith. . . to trust the truths we know to be true about God.
 - ii) The first question we need to be asking ourselves when suffering hits is this: What Truths about God do I need to remember?

VIII. Then in vs 9, Jesus proceeds to commend them. . . he acknowledges their pain her recognises their suffering. . . he builds them up:

A. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. — Revelation 2:9

1. Jesus knows their afflictions and he knows their poverty. . .

(1) In contrast to the church in Ephesus. . . The church in Smyrna was suffering a particularly harsh and unique round of persecution.

(a) Which included financial/economic hardship.

i) Probably excluded from deals. . . and customers on account of their faith.

ii) We know from ancient accounts of the early church that a common form of persecution at this time was would be to boycott doing business with Christians.

b) But Jesus flips their poverty upside down. . . much like in the beatitudes.

(1) From a heavenly perspective they are rich. . . their poverty was in fact a blessing!

(a) Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

(b) 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. — Matthew 5:10-11.

c) So, the **second** thing Jesus does is to help the Christians in Smyrna to see their situation with Kingdom eyes. . . to see the hardships they are experiencing through the lens of what God is doing eternally.

(1) To look past the physical and look into the spiritual.

(2) The upside down kingdom. . . what the world calls good, we call evil and what the world calls rich, we call poor.

(a) Jesus reminds us that suffering helps us shed our attachments to the current order of the world. . . instead of celebrating the trinkets of this fallen age. . . he sets our vision our eyes on the treasures for us in the age to come.

(b) So, suffering is a very meaningful and rich experience for Christians. . . it is redeemed for our good, so that our

hearts are drawn towards the world to come rather than be content with the fallen world that is here and now.

(3) The second question we need to ask ourselves when suffering hits is this: what perspective needs to change? How can I see this through God's perspective.

(a) They were poor, but rich. . .

B. Now, I have to make a brief side-note to address a confusing comment at the end of vs 9, where Jesus says: *"I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."*

1. Sadly, many Christians over the millennia have misinterpreted and misunderstood this verse to justify anti-Semitic sentiments.

a) And when you take any verse out of context you can twist anything in scripture to say anything you want.

b) ironically, those that do that are doing exactly what Jesus is rebuking.

2. The historical context here is very significant.

a) Revelation was composed at the time when it was becoming more and more clear that Christianity and historical Judaism were not the same thing.

(1) This is where the parting of the ways really solidified between these two great world religions.

3. At this time in history, the Jews were probably the only monotheistic religion in the world. . . besides Christianity of course.

a) And because of Judaism's unique belief in ONE God, Judaism actually had an exception to making sacrifices to the Ceasars.

(1) We actually have historical records of an emperial edict which excuses Jews from making the obligatory sacrifice to Ceasar which all those under Roman occupation were required by law to do in order to demonstrate loyalty to Rome.

(2) The Jewish people still made a sacrifice, but not to the Ceasar as if he were God, but to Yahweh on behalf of the Ceasar. . .

so under this stipulation. . . they were excused from the public sacrifice to Ceasar.

b) Well, obviously Christians would have also refused to do this sacrifice to Ceasar. . . and seeing themselves as the fulfilment of Judaism, they would have naturally used this exemption clause so as NOT to make this sacrifice.

(1) Therefore what is most likely happened here in Smyrna is that the Jewish synagogues has said to the authorities that the Christians are NOT jewish. . . and therefore would not fall under this exemption clause.

4. So, the phrase “Synagogue of Satan” is connected to Jews who had aligned themselves with the State’s efforts to suppress the Christians.

a) If you look down to vs 10, we see that Jesus says in a few short days “The devil” will throw some of you into prison. . .

b) So, here Jesus connects Rome with the Devil. . . so, what Jesus is critiquing by this controversial phrase is when one religious group aligns with the state to persecute another religious group.

(1) Jesus himself is Jewish, so we cannot read this as an anti-Semitic sentiment, rather Jesus is against State-sponsored suppression in any form and against those who would align with the state to suppress the church.

(a) It is akin here in Germany during the 2 world war, where the German national church imprisoned those who belonged to the confessing church who opposed to hitler.

(b) Or when Christians oppose minority groups in other lands. . . orthodox church in eastern europe

(c) The principle is not **specific** to Judaism, but it is at its essence about the basic right of religious freedom. . . here Jesus condemns those who would align with the state to suppress another religion. . . particularly his beloved bride the church.

i) Ok, so that was a long-but necessary side note. . . but shows the danger of taking one-verse out of context.

IX. Let's go back and review where we have been before as we follow Jesus' next points.

A. Vs. 8: Stand on Revealed Truth:

1. Go back to revealed Truth: I was dead and now I am alive again.
2. Jesus calls us to faith. . . to trust the truths we know to be true about God.
3. In order to have courage to face an unknown future. . . we always need to go back to what we know to be true about God: What truths about God do I need to remember?

B. Vs. 9: Look at circumstances through eyes of faith.

1. Look for deeper meaning in our suffering. .. the church in smyrna was poor yet rich.
2. He calls them to look past the physical and look into the spiritual.
3. The upside down kingdom. . . their worldly poverty has made them spiritually rich. . . but it takes faith to believe that, to trust that is really true.

X. Now, in vs 10, Jesus will give them two exhortations. . . two commands.

A. These I find particularly fascinating. . . What would Jesus tell us to do in our suffering? How would he guide us and teach us and encourage us?

XI. Let's see in vs 10:

A. 10 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 life as your victor's crown. - Revelation 2:10

B. Fear NOT. . . and Be Faithful.

C. Here Jesus gives two commands. You have to read commands given in this context like a coach giving instructions in the locker-room.

1. These are exhortations. . . words of encouragement and inspiration to persevere through the coming trial and suffering.
 - a) Notice that these commands speak more to an inner disposition, rather than outward behaviors. . . Obviously, these are not commands we can just simply check off a list of “to do” items.
 - (1) Jesus is not giving us a two-step process to deal with anxiety in the face of trials. . . do this and then do this.
 - (2) No Jesus is giving words of encouragement that speak to the hearts of those who suffer. . . because he knows the two great temptations in the face of suffering is: fear and doubt.

D. Fear and Doubt are conjoined twins. . . they go together.

1. When we trust or believe the lies that fear whispers into our ears, doubt is the product of this misplaced faith.

E. NOw, don't misunderstand me, fear is a natural reaction to any type of trial or suffering.

1. It is ok to experience fear and anxiety. . . but fear and anxiety can also overcome us. . . enslave us. . . and begin to control our behaviours.
 - a) Think about those sleepless nights of anxiety we have all had at some point or another.
 - (1) When fear/anxiety begin to overcome us, this is where we have to say “no” to the lies that Fear will shout into our hearts.
 - (2) Fear will tell us a 1000 lies about all the possible outcomes. . .
 - (3) Fear will blind you to seeing things with the eyes of faith. . .
 - (a) instead of seeing the riches of God grace to us, we will only see the poverty of our circumstances.
 - (b) Instead of seeing the awesome grandeur of God, we will only see the size of our present suffering.
2. And when we believe the lies fear whispers into our ears. . .this is when fear will naturally lead us to doubt God's character.

- a) We will doubt God's goodness to us. . . we will doubt God's sovereignty over our situations. . . we will doubt God's eternal plans and promises to us.
 - (a) We forget what we know to be true about God and we become blind to His good promises to us.
 - i) Fear and doubt go together. . . if we listen to the voice of fear we will not be faithful. . . but give in to doubt and despair.
 - (1) And once doubt has taken root in our hearts. . . giving in to sin and temptation is the result.
 - (a) Remember eve in the garden, when satan put doubt into her heart. . . doubt about God's goodness, doubt about God's commands. . . doubt about God's truthfulness. . .
 - (b) she believed the lies of satan and gave in to the temptations around her.
 - (b) Fear leads to doubt and doubt leads to sin.

3. Now just as Fear and Doubt belong together. . . Faith and Courage go together.

- a) The antidote to fear is faith.
 - (1) This is why Jesus begins and ends this letter with two things:
 - (a) Truths about himself — vs. 8: "him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again."
 - (b) Promises for the future— vs11b: "The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death."
 - i) It is in these twin pieces of revealed knowledge in which we are to place our faith. . . what the Spirit has revealed to us to be true about God and the world around us. . . and the promises we have in Christ.
 - ii) That is the substance of our faith. . . this is what produces love and hope.

iii) When we go back and place our faith in the truths and the promises we find in scripture. . . then we will have courage to face any trial.

(1) Fear will make us forgetful about the past and blind us to God's future.

(2) Faith on the other hand confirms what we know to be true and empowers us to place our hope in God's future promises.

(a) Jesus is not calling the Christians here in Smyrna to do a list of things. . . he is calling them to trust Him.

F. **Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown. - Revelation 2:10**

a) What is the victor's crown. . . what is the reward laying ahead for those who have faith?

b) "i will give you LIFE as your victor's crown. . . eternal life with Jesus, life without evil, life without suffering, life without poverty.

(1) Be faithful unto death. . .

(2) The worst thing in this life that can happen to us is death. . . to die.

(a) But even this . . . even death that touches every human being has no power over us.

(3) What can we say to the face of death:

i) **Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. — 1 Cor 15:55-57.**

ii) So, the third question we need to ask ourselves when suffering hits is this: Am I listening to the voice of Fear or Faith (truths and promises of God)?

XII. And so just as Jesus began with a truth about himself, Jesus closes this letter with a promise for the future.

A. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.—
Revelation 2:11

B. Everyone dies. . . there is a 100% death rate we live under.

1. But not everyone will spend an eternity in hell. . .
2. Here Jesus refers to the future judgement where everyone will be resurrected from the dead. . . and some will enter into eternal life and where that victors crown, which we learned today is life.
3. . . . and some will enter into an eternal suffering in hell, separated from all that is good, just and beautiful.
 - a) Rather than consuming ourselves with the fear of our first death. . . Jesus reminds us to rejoice and have confidence that we need not fear the second death.
 - (1) Jesus: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.
 - (2) Rather than consuming ourselves with the fear of our first death. . . Jesus reminds us to rejoice and have confidence that we need not fear the second death.
 - (3) The last question we need to ask ourselves when suffering hits is this: What promises do I need to place my hope.

Conclusion:

XIII. So as we wrap up today, I think there are many things we can apply to our context today.

A. One: Pray for the Persecuted church.

1. The reality is, our situations for the most part, pale in comparison to what the persecuted church is enduring at the moment.
 - a) Currently, there are 200,000 million persecuted Christians in the world today. . . 2.5x the population of germany.
 - (1) **Every Month:** 105: churches attacked, burned or vandalized

(2) **Every Day 11** Christians killed

(3) To pray for our brothers and sisters across the globe, puts **our** trials and **our** suffering in perspective.

(4) I'd encourage you to inform yourself about the persecuted church and pray for them. . .

(a) You can go to two websites: Open doors and voice of the martyrs are two organisations i would endorse.

2. Here is just a glimpse of a community touched by persecution. . . see how their faith mirrors, what we have spoken about today.

(1) VIDEO— OPEN DOORS

B. Secondly, although we are not facing persecution, we can take Jesus' counsel and encouragement to the church in Smyrna and apply these truths to our own trials and suffering we endure.

path to faith. . . follow the way to peace. . .

1. So, let's review:

a) **Vs. 8: Stand on Revealed Truth:**

(1) In order to have courage to face an unknown future. . . we always need to go back to what we know to be true about God.

b) **Vs. 9: Look at circumstances through eyes of faith.**

(1) Look for deeper meaning in our suffering.

(2) He calls them to look past the physical and look into the spiritual.

c) **Vs 10: He calls us to Faith NOT Fear**

d) **vs 11: Hope in the Promises we have in Christ.**

Spirit and Word working together. . . is where we find these truth and promises working on our heart!!!

Pray

Application slide:

1. Take time this week to pray for the persecuted church.
2. As you face suffering. Ask yourself some diagnostic questions:
 - A. What Truths do I need to remember?
 - B. What Perspective needs to change?
 - C. Am I listening to the voice of Fear or Faith?
 - D. What Promises do I need to place my Hope?
- B. Pray for the Spirit to give you faith to trust in God's truths and promises to us in Jesus Christ.