



Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ, what a joy that we can come together to worship and give thanks and celebrate the 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany.

I know many of you will be watching via live stream, are unable to be here today, and we continue to pray, that we will be able to once again come together each Sunday for worship and fellowship.

I pray, that today's message, will lift all our spirits, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Well, another 'edifying challenge' for yours truly in preparing today's message, however the learning outcomes gave me good food for thought and action!

Today we continue our journey through the book of Revelation, and Jesus's message to each of the seven churches Asia Minor.

Last Sunday, Rev Mel spoke about the church in Ephesus and on how Jesus told them they had lost their first love, despite all their works!

Today we look at the Church in Smyrna.

Have you noticed, as we progress through life, we all become fully aware of the fact, that suffering is an inevitable part of life.

So, the question is what should our reaction be to pain and difficulty?

Well, we can learn so much by looking at the church of Smyrna, spoken to by Jesus, in Revelation 2:8-11. These messages were applicable to every church and even more so to us, today, some 2,000 years later.

But, first, let's look at some interesting facts about Smyrna, gathered from church history, and Dr Google, of course. As follows.

- The city of Smyrna (modern-day Izmir), was located some 50 km north of Ephesus and was established by Alexander the Great.

- Of the seven cities Jesus addresses, Smyrna was considered by far to be the most beautiful. It was known as "the glory of Asia" and was a very beautiful and important city in the Roman Empire, thought by many to be the birthplace of Homer, the Greek poet.
- What I found very interesting is that "Smyrna" is the Greek word for "myrrh" which means "bitter." Myrrh is a small fruit just larger than a pea, and it's known for the fragrance it gives off when it is crushed. We'll recall, myrrh was one of the three gifts that the Magi brought to baby Jesus, along with gold and frankincense.
- It may have seemed completely pointless as a gift for Jesus, but under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Magi gave the myrrh as a symbolic gift, a gift that really was appropriate for Jesus: being crushed and giving off an aroma that would be pleasing to the world.
- How significant! Smyrna was where these believers were feeling the pressure, the squeeze of persecution all around. Many of them would be crushed, but Jesus assures them that their sacrifice is a fragrant offering to Him.
- This brings to mind the references in the New Testament, to a fragrant offering, so check out, 2 Corinthians 2:15, Philippians 4:18, Ephesians 5:2

And now onto our passages from Chapter 2.

In verse 8, Jesus describes himself as "The First and the Last,"

This is like Jesus leading us and saying to us, "I've been through suffering and death, and I'll lead you along the way," and He's also behind us saying, "*You can do it; don't give up!*" or *onwards and upwards, or as we say in Cursillo, Ultreya!*

What an encouragement for all people facing persecution, suffering, pain and even martyrdom! To know that Jesus died and came to life again gives us incredible comfort when we face pain in life.

Another interesting fact is that Jesus has no criticism of the Church in Smyrna !!!

Verse 9, tells us "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

Jesus said He knew four things about them:

1. He knows how they were!

Have we ever wondered if the Jesus knows our works. We all know we do it out of love for Jesus.

All of us here today, have been serving Him for many, many decades. We don't want the recognition from man or from the church; but we just wonder, "Does the Lord see or know or care what I'm doing for His kingdom?"

2. He knows their/our pain.

We need to be reminded that God is sovereign and will work everything out for our good and His glory?

We need to have a Biblical view of suffering. Just consider myrrh, of which the city of Smyrna was named after.

Think about that: *The same oil that was once bruised and crushed ended up becoming something that qualified a man, (Jesus) to stand in the gap for us sinners and intercede for us. If you have suffered, you are now someone who can use that pain as a way to minister to others. Isn't that so true!!*

We are most effective after we have been greatly bruised and broken, and an aroma that is pleasing to the Lord rises from our suffering."

3. Jesus knows their/our poverty.

In fact, Jesus states that they are actually rich. The word for poverty means abject or absolute poverty. They had absolutely nothing. That was because of the persecution they were facing. Jesus is not unaware of our helpless state, both spiritually and otherwise.

4. Jesus knows their persecution.

“And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”

The Jews in Smyrna were particularly against Christianity. Remember, at this time, Christianity was considered a sect of Judaism. The Jews knew the Christ-followers were different, but to the Roman Empire, there wasn't a lot to distinguish Jew from Christian. Eventually, that changed.

Jesus is saying that when you are facing slander and trouble from people, don't forget who is really your adversary. It's not the person in front of you, it's Satan!

Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:12 that, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Sometimes we are surprised by our suffering. It seems to come out of nowhere. And sometimes it seems like it will never end. But we aren't to be surprised. We are to be ready. We are to endure to the end, even if that end includes death.

Why? Because Jesus promises a crown.

For the Smyrneses, it would be the crown of life, to not be hurt by the second death.

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” Amen!

Going deeper into what Jesus expects of his church ...



Look out for Week 3 of the “Journey through Christ’s Letters to His Church” devotional:

This week we look closely at Jesus letter to the church at Smyrna.

1. -Do you test all religious teachings against the Scriptures, whether you hear them at church, on the radio, or on TV? (Meditate on Acts 17:11 and 1 Thessalonians 5:21.)
2. Are you prepared to suffer for being a Christian?
3. In what ways is it hard to stand up and speak publicly about our faith in Christ? Do you need to ask for forgiveness for not speaking about Christ or sharing your faith?