

SMYRNA

A REBORN CITY | Smyrna was destroyed in 600 BC and rebuilt in 290 BC. Because of this history, Smyrna was known as a city that died and came back to life (see **Revelation 2:8**)

ROMAN ALLEGIANCE | As Rome came to power, Smyrna quickly showed support. It was one of the first cities in Asia Minor to construct a temple to worship the emperor Caesar.

ECONOMY AND CULTURE | Smyrna was known for fine wine, science, medicine and the beauty of its buildings. Its hilltop was encircled by public buildings with elaborate column-laden entrances, famously known as its “crown of porticoes.”

ENDURANCE | Smyrna was the last city to fall to the Turkish Empire and adopt its religion (Islam) showing the people’s strength and endurance.

CHURCH LEADERS | Two of John’s disciples, Ignatius and Polycarp, ministered in Smyrna. Ignatius wrote four letters from here as he traveled to Rome to be martyred. Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna until he was martyred as well.

SUMMARY

This week, we continue our series, *Seven Churches of Revelation* by exploring the letter written to the church in Smyrna. This was the second letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. Smyrna is one of two churches that do not receive correction; instead, Jesus encourages them. In Smyrna, worshipping Caesar as Lord was a way of ensuring favor from Rome. It was patriotic and refusing to worship Caesar was unpatriotic - even treacherous. However, Jesus’ followers in Smyrna claimed Jesus as Lord, not Caesar, and they lost everything in return. They were poor, ostracized, and abused. They knew their faith would cost them their lives.

Their city - the one that had died and came back to life - the one encircled by a famous “crown of porticoes” - rejected them. However, the church grew and flourished anyway. The true Savior, the one who truly ‘died and came back to life again’ promised they would receive their own crown - ‘the crown of life’ (**Revelation 2:8-10**). Notice Jesus gives them no rebuke, only encouragement. The Smyrneans are living in this reality. Hunger, fear, betrayal and the threat of execution press against them on every side.

Into this reality, Christ reminds them their hope is not found in Caesar, Rome or their city; it’s found in Him! They are facing execution, but Christ was executed before them - and then raised from the dead. (**1 Peter 3:21-23**). This will give them eternal hope.

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 2:8-11

⁸To 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. ⁹I 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. ¹⁰Do 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.

¹¹Whoever 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.

EMPHASIS ON THE BACKGROUND

This was the second letter of 7 written to churches located in Asia Minor in the late first century. The Apostle John penned these letters which were delivered to him in a vision from the resurrected, glorified Jesus. In these letters, Jesus uses affirmation, warning, correction, promise and reward

to help these churches stay on track with his mission for them. Smyrna is one of two churches that do not receive correction; instead, Jesus encourages them.

Q: Why is the background information so important to our understanding of the church in Smyrna?

Q: How would a travel guide describe this city?

Q: What would the greatest attraction be?

Q: What do you think it would be like to live in Smyrna if you were a person who believed and declared Jesus as Lord?

Q: What are your initial impressions of the Church?

EMPHASIS ON CHRIST

In each letter, Christ is uniquely described. To Smyrna, Jesus is described as the “First and the Last, who died and came back to life again” (v 8).

Q: *What had Christ done for them?*

Q: *How had they changed because of Jesus?*

Q: *What were they to become as a result?*

Q: *What happens when we forget or lose sight of these critical truths?*

Jesus was raised from the dead; and because of this, we have hope. No matter what you face, the promise of new life in Christ - spiritual and physical - is offered to all who remain faithful to Christ.

Q: *Why was it so important for Jesus to remind them that he is the beginning and the end of everything (the first and the last)?*

Q: *How would that have encouraged them in their current struggles?*

Q: *Twice in this passage, Jesus mentions the resurrection.Why?*

EMPHASIS ON THE CHURCH

“I know of your afflictions and poverty - yet you are rich!” **Revelation 2:9**

Q: *In a political climate that demanded allegiance to Rome and declares Caesar as god, what afflictions would this church have endured?*

Q: *Though Jesus acknowledges their poverty, he still declares them rich. This sounds like a conflict. How could they be rich?*

Q: *What could Jesus be referring to?*

Contrast Jesus’ words to the impoverished Christians in Smyrna, to Paul’s words to Timothy who was serving in a church that had some significant wealth in 1 Timothy 6:6-19.

Q: *How does this passage put wealth and poverty into perspective?*

If you were able to lose all you owned, and perhaps your ability to earn more, how could you find security in this life?

“Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer,” Revelation 2:10.

EMPHASIS ON ME

“I know your afflictions and your poverty...do not be afraid” (Revelation 2:9-10).

In other words, I know what you are going through. You are going to suffer. Do not be afraid. And Jesus was clear that Satan lurked behind these struggles

(Rev 2:10). Satan wanted to tear the believers in Smyrna down so they would no longer trust, obey or turn to Christ; the Evil One wants to devour us as well. **(1 Peter 5:8).**

Q: Financial pressure, relationship breakdowns, overbearing temptations to sin - Satan uses these to weaken our resolve and turn our hearts from Christ. What are you facing that seems to be more than you can take?

Remember that your Savior knows what you are going through. He is with you; he can help you (Hebrews 2: 18; 4:15).

“The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Read Peter’s advice from 1 Peter 5:6-11. Spend a few minutes soaking up this encouragement.

Difficulty, struggle and even crisis can enter our lives at any time. The bad news is that we rarely get to choose when, where and how this will happen.

***** But, we always get to choose how we’ll respond to trials!*****

Smyrna seemed to be a group of people who knew how to respond to trial and pressure with faithfulness and obedience.

Q: Which of the following describes your first impulse or reaction when something bad happens or goes wrong?

- ***Panic Blame Excuse Withdrawal Fight***
- ***Try to fix it***
- ***Complain***
- ***_____ (Do you have another response?)***

Think about the four statements below. Which jumps out at you right now?

- *I need joy while I endure intense physical suffering.*
- *I want to experience a sense of God's goodness in grief.*
- *I need to find contentment in a season of shortage.*
- *I want to experience God's nearness and goodness when I feel abandoned and alone.*

Q: *What place do sufferings play in our discipleship.*

Q: *What good things can come to life when we are asked to struggle?*

- Pray For you to see Jesus in the midst of your struggles and that you would experience spiritual growth during these times.

This simple study compiled by Robert Bradow using the following commentaries:

Matthew Henry (Blue Letter Bible)

Adrian Rogers (The Adrian Rogers Study Bible)

Bible Reference.com. (A study of Smyrna)

Referenced quotes from Charles Stanley sermon. (The Suffering Church)