



"8 Great Truths: Snapshots From Jesus in The Book of Revelation"



Teacher's Guide

The Church @ Smyrna - Faithfully Face Fear and Tribulation Week 3 – June 20, 2010

Icebreaker: How do you deal with suffering when you know it shouldn't be happening to you?

Transition: Today we look at the 2nd letter sent to the 7 churches of Asia Minor. The church at Smyrna needed encouragement because things were about to get worse for the faithful.

Read Revelation Chapter 2:8-11

Background: City Tour - Using information from Craig Koester's web tour to provide the following information: <http://www2.luthersem.edu/ckoester/Revelation/main.htm>

- Culture and Government
 - Only one of the cities still in existence
 - Izmir, Turkey
 - Turkey's 3rd largest city
 - More Info: <http://www.allaboutturkey.com/izmir.htm>
 - One of ancient Asia's most beautiful cities founded about 2000BC, conquered in 600BC, recovered prominence about 300BC
 - Birthplace of Homer
 - Deep water harbor - Meles river silted up original harbor in 300's BC
 - Long history of loyalty to Rome (since 190BC)
- Commerce and industry
 - Port city - 2nd only to Ephesus in this region (35mi South of Ephesus)
 - Agriculture
 - Connected western Roman Empire (RE) with eastern trade routes
- Religious practices
 - goddess Cybele was the patron deity, she appears on coins
 - Long history of ruler worship, AD 23 allowed to build temple to Agustus granted by Tiberius, known as "son of god" since Augustus was deified upon his death
 - Demeter, goddess of grain, tied to agriculture
 - Large Jewish population until AD156, the year of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna's martyrdom, in which they were complicit and subsequently purged.
 - Long history of animosity to Christianity.
- **Questions for discussion**
 - What temptations do you believe were present in Smyrna?
 - What challenges, difficulties, tribulations would they have faced?
- **The Letter**
 - 2:8 - Picture the author
 - The First and The Last
 - He is God without limit eternal.
 - The One who died and came to life

- Jesus had obviously died and risen again. Apart from this there is no hope for Christians as Paul points out in 1 Cor 15
- This is also a familiar image as their city had been dead (for nearly 300 years) and came to life
- 2:9 Archival image - What the church originally looked like
 - Afflictions
 - The Smyrnans suffered ongoing tribulation as did all Christians of this era
 - Poverty
 - The church was very likely poor financially
 - These people likely had no standing in society. Something they shared with the Philadelphians of Ch 3
 - Richness
 - They church was rich in respect to heavenly treasure
 - They had the greatest treasure of all, a relationship with Jesus
 - Slandered by the synagogue of Satan
 - This is likely a reference to the privileged position of Judaism in the Roman world as one of the few religions that was allowed to practice and legislate independently of the official Roman religions. However, this only remained in effect as long as they didn't proselytize.
 - It is likely that since the early Christians would have looked very much like Jews in their practice and worship style, that the Jews often reported, often in slanderous ways, them to the authorities as non-Jews in order to maintain their privileged status.
 - In a sense these who called themselves the chosen of God were complicit with Rome in opposing his work.
 - The beast in Revelation, Satan's representative, is identified by the number 666 or 616
 - It is "the number of a man"
 - Letters of the alphabet in Greek and Hebrew were used for numbers as they didn't have Arabic numerals
 - The emperor at the time was Nero
 - Known in the East as Neron Caesar the letters of which make up the number 666
 - Known in the east as Nero Caesar the letters of which make up the number 616
 - The emperor, then, is pictured in the book as Satan the embodiment of the evil that is the Fallen Babylon empire of Rome
 - A church of faithfulness coupled with suffering
 - **Questions for discussion:**
 - What sort of tribulations might they be suffering?
 - How can they be both in poverty and rich simultaneously?
 - Who is this synagogue of Satan?



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- 2:10a - The future of a Focused church
 - Coming suffering
 - This church has already suffered at the hands of the Fallen Babylon World and there is more to come of that.
 - Revelation sees a suffering church as a normal church. What might this say about the "name it and claim it, God wants you to have your best life now" theology of some churches and Christians?
 - Imprisonment and testing for 10 days
 - This is talking about really harsh punishment
 - Prisoners were commonly tortured into confession, as is the case with Paul in Acts 22
 - After the torture, confession, and presentation of evidence by interested parties, the verdict was rendered.
 - **Question for discussion:**
 - If these guys are so faithful, why are they going to suffer and how is that linked to the way they are living their faith?
 - How was imprisonment different in those days?
 - What sort of test are we talking about?
 - Why 10 days?
- 2:10b - A call to remain focused
 - Be faithful to the point of death
 - This is a call to unwavering courage
 - Recall that Daniel's friends were prepared to die for their faith in one of the Bible's great statements of faith they say:

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But **even if he does not**, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Da 3:16-18). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- **Question for discussion:**
 - Why doesn't the American church experience this kind of testing today?
- 2:10c - 11 - Picture the future
 - Given the crown of life
 - James 1:12 is the only other place this phrase is used
 - The crown is a symbol of being restored to perfect wholeness: The life to be found only in Christ and the glory which is a reflection of the nature of God, himself, in the Christian. One who receives the crown of life, is restored to the fullness of the image of God placed within them. They are truly brought to life.



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- The other church that received a crown is the other Focused church Philadelphia
- Not hurt by the second death
 - In Revelation, the first death is physical death of the body.
 - CH 20 tells us that the second death is eternity in the Lake of Fire for those spiritually dead.
 - The first resurrection is those who come to life in Christ, see Ephesians 2:4-10. Recall we are raised, like Jesus, never to die again!
 - However there is a second resurrection is for those who were not brought alive in Jesus and it is for the spiritually dead
- ***Question for discussion:***
 - What is the 2nd death? How about the 1st death, 1st resurrection, and 2nd resurrection mentioned by John in Ch. 20?
- ***Summary discussion***
 - What does it take to be a "citizen of the New Jerusalem in a Fallen Babylon world"?
 - Can you think of any churches like Smyrna in the world today? Is that good or bad?
 - How would you respond if Pikes Peak began to have a Smyrna experience?
 - What would you be unwilling to lose or give up to be a faithful citizen of the New Jerusalem? How far would be too far?
- **Peering Deeper**
 - What constitutes a worldview? And what is a biblical one meant to include?
 - In view of what John says about the lake of fire specifically in Ch 20, what, if anything, does he imply about the proximity of Heaven and Hell?
 - How does John 21 echo the charge to the Smyrnans?