



Smyrna—the stressed church Revelation 2:8-11

Why are these messages to the seven churches a part of Revelation?

Graeme Goldsworthy answers this in his excellent, *Gospel in Revelation*:

The seven messages link the daily existence of every believer, every child of God—never in isolation; but always in the context of a local congregation—to the cosmic struggle between Christ and the devil.

Because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, there can be only one outcome. *But the struggle continues until the final appearance of Christ.* The strengths, struggles, and weak spots of these churches are ours. There is a great mystery going on in Christ's mopping up campaign against Satan. It is actually (and marvelously) being worked out in the front line trenches of local church evangelism, pastoral care, teaching and preaching.

It is being worked out in the Christian home as children are instructed in the covenant privileges and taught the meaning of faith in the doing and dying of Christ. God is using what is foolish in the eyes of the world to shame the wise; weak to shame the strong. The world sees the church at Smyrna as impoverished and dying. Jesus sees the church at Smyrna as affluent and alive! Whose perspective will we choose to believe?

What Rick Steves would say about the city of Smyrna

- Destroyed in 600 BC by the king of Lydia; Alexander the Great came in 334 BC and wanted it rebuilt. Completed in 290 BC—close to the harbor with beautiful architecture—the city which was once dead, came to life! (Revelation 2:8)
- Smyrna comes from the word "Myrrh," a spice used for burial. As it had been used in death and burial, in the expectation of an after-life; so Christ himself had died and lived again. Suffering, death, & resurrection—themes that pervade every verse of this letter.
- Smyrna's ancient beauty celebrated its buildings and the familiar symbol of a crown may have originated in the physical appearance of the city rising symmetrically to its "crown" of battlements. The emblem suggested diverse connotations of athletic victory, festivity, public honor or office, kingship or royal visitation. (cf. "Be faithful to death and I will give you the crown of life!")
- Located 35 miles north of her rival Ephesus, Smyrna was self-described as "first in Asia." (Jesus declared in 2:8 that in fact, He is first!)
- In AD 26, because of its excellent relationship with Rome, Smyrna beat out other cities for the privilege of building a temple to the Emperor Tiberius. Smyrna was known as "faithful" to the empire. (Jesus demands that his followers be "faithful.")
- In AD 155, Bishop Polycarp was martyred at Smyrna for the gospel. "86 years have I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"

Lessons from the church at Smyrna

1. Stop the "Smiley Face" approach to Scripture. Scot McKnight explains.

Some open their Bible looking for a good word, but by "good word" they mean a daily habit of reading the Bible in search of a blessing (a quiet moment of affirmation or a flush of confidence) or a promise (God, tell me something nice and something good about me and my day). So, they read the passage with that end in view. Yes, God is good and God blesses us and God offers us incredible promises in the pages of the Bible. We need this; we need it daily. No, I don't question the goodness of God but I question the goodness of reading the Bible habitually in search of a promise or a blessing.

Here's why: (1) God tends to become our servant and our need provider and the Great Big Blessor. In other words, this approach to Bible reading tends to see God as One who makes us happy. (2) This tends to turn the Bible into verses and lines and statements instead of a coherent narrative that begins with creation and leads us to Christ. Yes, there are blessings and promises along the way -- but they are part of that Story and need to be read in that context. (3) If Thomas Jefferson cut out verses from the Bible, imagine what happens if we read the Bible as little more than blessings and promises! Whoosh, out goes Job. Whoosh, out goes Ecclesiastes. Whoosh, out goes the Exile. Whoosh, out goes the Temptation of Jesus. Whoosh, out goes all kinds of stuff. (4) It turns the Bible into a Hallmark calendar of blessings and promises. The Bible is not that. It is so much more. (5) It turns everything into the quest for happiness and the quest for inner contentment and the quest for self-affirmation. Friends, God is more than your Yes-God; sometimes God is the Naysaying-God. Frankly, some days are good and some days are bad. Some days we sin and some days we do right. And the Bible speaks to and in each of those circumstances.

2. Jesus calls us to trust His version of reality over the world's!

They say that they are "first"; I say that I am the first and the last!

They say you are impoverished, I say you're rich!

They say they are God's chosen; I say they are not!

They say you're in prison; I say Satan is in prison which is why your suffering will be intense but limited ("10 days"). And it will be dwarfed in comparison to the millennium like paradise that awaits the faithful.

They say that you're on death row; I say you're on life row!

They say that the first death is the end; I say that the first death is the beginning!

3. Satan may *launch* the attack. Christians may have to *endure* the attack. But Christ is *monitoring* the attack! Therefore, do not play the helpless victim! **Be fearless and faithful!**
4. Did you notice what's missing in the message to Smyrna? A rebuke! Jesus has nothing negative to say about His church there!
5. You do not need to survive this world. You just need to be faithful until the next world.

"I don't think Christ is glorified anywhere more than when suffering people rejoice in him as their treasure." (John Piper)