

Study Questions
Week Three: Revelation 2: 8-11
When we feel vulnerable

Smyrna: Early Christians faced persecution across the Roman Empire due to their refusal to honor Caesar as “Lord and Saviour” and insist that Jesus was Lord of all. This stance put them at odds with the cherished values of their culture. However, only two of the seven Revelation churches receive mention of current persecution. Smyrna is one of those two.



Smyrna boasted of its renowned thinkers, like Homer, along with the temple of Athena and a beautiful, bustling seaport. The city was called, “The Flower of Asia”. Unlike Ephesus, Smyrna still exists today but under the name Izmus (one of our daughters has a friend whose mother lives there). But the believers were facing “afflictions” and “poverty”.

The best-known example of specific hostility to Christianity took place in Smyrna some years after John wrote this letter (Re 2:8-11). In A.D. 155 the famous bishop, Polycarp, was burned alive for refusing to call Caesar "Lord" during an extensive persecution instigated by religious leaders who ironically gathered the wood for his burning on the Sabbath. The story is told in "The Martyrdom of Polycarp" (available online at www.earlychristianwritings.com)

When soldiers brought Polycarp into the stadium, the proconsul pressed him to recant. Romans called the Christians "atheists" because they refused to worship the Roman gods. *But when the magistrate pressed him hard and said, "Swear the oath, and I will release you; revile the Christ," Polycarp said, "Eighty-six years have I been His servant, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"* Upon which Polycarp was burned at the stake

Globally, most Christ-followers today face tribulation and poverty. Although our current nation tolerates followers of Jesus, some of you may be facing individual intimidation from family, co-workers, and neighbors. Jesus brings words of hope to those persecuted. He begins the letter by identifying himself as the “First and the Last, who died and came to life again.”

Jesus assure those under persecution that he sees their afflictions and poverty. But then, he surprises them by telling them that his view of them is different from how the world views their status. Others see them as poor, but Jesus sees them as rich.

Discussion questions:

1. Open with prayer and sharing. Then read the letter...perhaps several times over.
2. How is Jesus described in the passage (vs 8)? Has this description appeared anywhere else in the book? Why is this description important to them and us?
3. What does Jesus know about this church (9)? How does His opinion differ from that of those around them? Why do you think He describes them as “poor”? (compare for example Hebrews 10:32 ff)
4. What does He tell them is about to happen (vs. 10)? What two clear instructions does He give them to prepare for the future? How are these applicable to us?
5. There remains an intense spiritual battle not always evident to our human eyes. How is this hidden battle described in vs 9-10?
6. Sometimes, western world Christians bring on persecution by behaving foolishly. At other times, some cower in the face of persecution. How do followers of Christ wisely navigate those two extremes and still stand for His name?
7. Application: According to one author, "There are four responses to persecution that apply in our society where we live relatively free of toxic persecution:
 - a. We can identify with and pray for the many Christians who are suffering around the world (cf. Rom. 12:15; Heb. 13:3);
 - b. We can realize that such persecution could happen here and be ready for it;
 - c. We can ask ourselves how many compromises we have made to avoid any persecution at work or in secular society;
 - d. We can endure general trials that draw us away from Jesus and closer to the world (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*)
8. Close by praying for the persecuted church and any family/friends you know who currently face trials and poverty because of their walk with the Lord. Especially pray for our children and teens.