

Small Group Discussion

Week of October 22, 2017

[Revelation 2:8-11](#)

"Do 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."

[Revelation 2:10](#)

The Romans viewed Christianity as a politic and philosophy rather than as a religion, setting up Christ as a political opponent to Caesar. While Rome didn't require a belief in their gods, they did require an exclusive loyalty to their "lord" and their political system.

The church at Smyrna was told to "be faithful, even if it costs you your life." This meant never denying who Jesus is, and never giving to Caesar a title ("Lord", "Savior", "Liberator") that he doesn't deserve. Jesus is the only source of eternal bliss, and the only one who brings peace to the earth. The Romans were right to see that their quest for world domination was in competition with Jesus.

Smyrna knew the consequence of its faith. Do you? Are you ready to die for this?

Questions

- Consider our church's economic position. Is our spiritual condition the same or different than our financial condition? What makes you say that?
- How do you answer someone who accuses Christianity of being anti-semitic? How would you address this passage of scripture to a Jewish friend?
- How does this text speak to the "health and wealth" gospel?
- Are you ready to die for your faith?

Raw notes

We've always been out of step with our culture.

Church of Smyrna: *incredibly* out of step with its culture, and suffering because of it.

Revelation 2:8-11

Smyrna still exists today (as Izmir). It was rebuilt after lying fallow for centuries and was known as being very loyal to Rome, then destroyed again by an earthquake before being rebuilt by Marcus Aurelius.

This letter is one of only two that has nothing bad to say about the church.

It's important to know that Jesus is "the First and the Last", and that he "became dead" and lived.

The word "tribulation" has been used, particularly in the past hundred years, as more than it was originally intended. "Tribulation", in this context, is chronic rather than acute. It's a daily crushing with no end in sight. The difficulty is in the *wait*, not the *weight*. "If I could just have a day off." Tribulation doesn't give a day off. So when we hear this word, don't think of a Big Bang traumatic event but an ongoing struggle.

One of the crushing items was poverty, true poverty where not even the "daily bread" was a given. Yet they are told they are rich. God has not moved away from them, and their suffering is not a reflection of their relationship with God. This is no "health and wealth" doctrine.

"Synagogue of Satan". It may be that the Jewish people are calling the Christians "satanic", drawn away by the devil. "By the power of the devil he's casting out demons." Maybe there are people in the synagogue who sincerely believe that the followers of Christ are being misled by lies and misconceptions. It also may be a synagogue of "slanderers" or "accusers" (the word "satan" can be translated as such).

Polycarp - the Romans viewed Christians as less of a religion and more of a philosophy and a politic. Christians didn't have anything to do with the Roman gods, so they were seen as atheists. We had another "philosophy", not another "religion". They thought we were setting up Christ (even sounds like Caesar) as a political opponent to Caesar.

Rome says “you don’t have to share our religion”, but they did require obedience to Caesar and the Roman political system. They mostly left the Jewish religion alone as being ancient and not worth bothering about.

The Jews are kicking out the Christians to purify their synagogues, and we were no longer treated by the Romans the same as they treated the Jews. We lost the religious “cover” of Judaism.

We have to be careful of pulling out “synagogue of Satan”. This wasn’t a Christian vs. Jew statement. There is no place for anti-semitism.

Let’s not read these verses as Christians being nasty to Jewish people, and let’s not use them as an excuse for being nasty towards other Christians with whom we disagree. There were people who were deceived by Satan but that didn’t make them Satan.

“Be faithful, even if it costs you your life.” Being faithful in this context means never denying who Jesus is, and never giving to Caesar a title that he doesn’t deserve (“Lord”, “Savior”, “Liberator”). Jesus is the only source of eternal bliss, and the only one who brings peace to the earth.

The Romans were right to see that their quest for world domination was in competition with Jesus.

Are you ready to die for this?

