

GROWTH GROUPS
WEEK 3
WEEK OF JANUARY 27TH

Dear Church,
The Seven Letters of Revelation



GROWTH GROUP WINTER 2019 – DEAR CHURCH,
WEEK 3 – JANUARY 27, 2019 - REVELATION 2:8-11

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

1) Is there someone in your life whose faith has been an inspiration to you? Why?

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Smyrna, like the other churches in Revelation 2 and 3, was in Asia Minor, and is known today as Izmir, Turkey. In the 6th century BC, Smyrna had been destroyed by invading forces, and was abandoned for approximately three centuries. Then it was rebuilt and was known for having the largest public theater in Asia and was also said to be the birthplace of Homer.

The city had a strong allegiance to Rome, as well as a large Jewish population that was actively hostile to Christians. Living in Smyrna as a follower of Jesus was not easy. Many Christians were martyred there including Polycarp (who refused to acknowledge Caesar as Lord) and whose story is well documented.

The negative perspective on the Jewish synagogue at Smyrna should be seen as an isolated incident. Jesus is not describing all Jewish people in this manner. He is saying that this particular synagogue was acting in an unloving manner (remember that he also said the same thing about the Christian church in Ephesus). He uses the term Satan in the literal sense which means “accuser.” This particular synagogue is “accusing” Christians of various kinds of wickedness that is not true.

Jesus has nothing negative to say about the church in Smyrna. Instead, he calls them to faithful perseverance in the midst of great intolerance and persecution. Jesus was aware of their afflictions as well as their poverty. Their poverty, though, was a material poverty. Spiritually they were rich, unlike the church at Laodicea who thought they were rich, yet were poor (see Revelation 3:17).

Believers in Smyrna would continue to suffer persecution for a period of time and they were called to persevere. Their reward for faithfulness would be the crown of life. The apostle Paul talks about in Philippians 2:6-7. This crown should be understood as one that is awarded to someone who is victorious. It is not a royal crown that is inherited, but is more along the lines of the wreath or garland that is awarded to the champion of a particular sport.



John brings up the idea of the second death which he discusses again in Revelation 20:14. This second death happens at the end of time when those who have chosen not to believe find themselves experiencing ultimate separation from God. This will not be the case for the believers in Smyrna because they have persevered and kept the faith. Their names will be written in the book of life which is talked about in Revelation 20:11-12.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read Revelation 2:8-11

⁸ *“To 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. ⁹ I 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Whoever 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.*

- 2) Jesus repeats that he is the first and the last. In one sense he is saying our lives should “revolve” around him because he is the first, and that our lives will ultimately “resolve” in him because he is the last. How do you think these words would have comforted and encouraged the church at Smyrna? How do they encourage and comfort you?
- 3) Do you feel as though you have ever been persecuted because of your faith? Have you ever had to suffer for your faith? If you feel like you have never been persecuted or had to suffer because of your faith why do you think that is the case?
- 4) Does it surprise you that Jesus basically tells the church at Smyrna to “resign themselves to suffering” rather than telling them to “fight” against or “resist” what is happening? How does this tie into how Jesus lived his life? What does it say to us about how we are to follow and show our obedience to Jesus?
- 5) The church of Smyrna is a suffering church. One of the earliest and most well-known stories of a Christian martyr is that of Polycarp, who was the bishop of Smyrna. If God seemingly has the power to limit our suffering (in this text 10 days), why do you think he simply doesn’t remove suffering altogether?
- 6) In verse 9 the church at Smyrna is told that they are rich in spite of their poverty. What does Jesus mean by this? See also James 2:1-7.
- 7) In Philippians 2:7-8 Paul talks about the crown of life. Revelation 2:10 talks about a victor’s crown. How would this image have impacted the people in Smyrna? Is this image helpful for thinking about how we are to persevere in our faith?

BRINGING IT HOME

- 8) The church in Smyrna is called to persevere through their suffering. While we certainly don’t suffer for our faith like the Christians in Smyrna did, is there an area in your life or faith journey that requires perseverance? If so, share a little bit about this and pray for each other.