

sermon study summary

September 9 / 10, 2023

Revelation Part 3 – Smyrna

Speaker: Dr. Ashwin Ramani

As Pastor Henry said in the first two parts of the Book of Revelation series, this Book offers a future hope, and also speaks powerfully to us in our present circumstances. Pastor Darrell Johnson stated: If it became illegal in our part of the world (as is the case in many places), to own a complete copy of the Bible, and we had to choose just one book for personal use, I would, unhesitatingly, choose Revelations, because it has significant relevance in any and every era we have ever lived in. He says that no other book presents the Gospel as powerfully as Revelation, which reveals Jesus in all His splendor and glory, and the triumph of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God – against the forces of evil.

Revelation 2:8-11, is Jesus' message to the Pastor of the Church of Smyrna. Persecution is very relevant to us today since millions of Christians currently live in nations with high levels of persecution or discrimination. As 2 Tim 3:12 says: Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. We are called to deny ourselves, take up the Cross and follow Jesus. Smyrna's persecution was caused by their value system, the Truth of God, which clashed with the values of the world under the rule of the Roman Empire, requiring everyone, except the Jews, to worship the emperor Caesar as lord. As long as the Christians were regarded as an 'off-shoot of the Jews', they were safe. However, the Jews got upset with the Christians, reported them to Roman authorities, and because the Christians refused to compromise their faith in Christ, they were persecuted in several ways. The consequent strict sanctions placed against them resulted in the loss of lives, jobs, businesses, and they became very poor; there was growing anxiety over their future.

Jesus – the One True God who is the first and the last – acknowledged their dire predicament, told them that they were rich in His eyes despite the cost of their discipleship, and that He had nothing but praise for them! What an amazing blessing and comfort to them. We are defined ONLY by Jesus, and nothing can thwart His purposes. He tells us not to fear suffering or persecution, even to the point of death, but to be strong in Him and that our reward will be Eternal Life with Him in Heaven.

Our value system as Christian believers is very different from the rest of the world, inevitably causing opposition, pushback, pressure, turmoil, etc. This could apply to our commitment to a life of purity, our time, values, etc. and we will feel extreme pressure as the world attempts to conform us to their way of thinking. Our reward will NOT be in this life but in the next one – with Jesus. In Revelation 2 we are reassured that when we stand strong in our faith, despite suffering and persecution, we will not be harmed by the second death, which is separation from God eternally. Instead, we will be resurrected and live in the presence of God forever!

All people will be resurrected – but the resurrected Christian believers will be in the presence of God and the resurrected non-believers will be banished from His Presence eternally. The motivation to endure is the rewards that await us when we meet Jesus face to face. Let us choose to run, with perseverance, the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, our PERFECT LORD AND SAVIOUR!

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IN – PURSUE RELATIONSHIP

1. If persecution arose here and you could keep only one book of the Bible, which would you keep? Why that one?
2. What pushback, ridicule, or animosity have you faced for following Christ? How did you respond?

UP – PURSUE GOD

Read Revelation 2:8-11 in 2-3 different translations.

1. From the message and the text what was the situation in Smyrna and what was the Christian church there facing? What were Jesus' promises to them? What did He not promise?
2. What does it mean to be a synagogue of Satan? How does it contrast with the fact that believers are to be temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19)?
3. From the description of Jesus in Chapter 1, what feature(s) of Himself did He give the church in Smyrna? What is its significance? What was the intended result of this description?

OUT – PURSUE MISSION

1. 2 Tim 3:12 implies faithful Christians will be persecuted. How would you encourage someone who is facing persecution to persevere, rejoicing in the Lord (Phil 4:4)? How can you prepare yourself now so that you can be faithful during persecution?
2. How is your lifestyle grating against the values of this age? Where is the world pushing you to say, 'Caesar is Lord'? Take some time to pray for one another from what is shared.

For Personal Reflection / Prayer:

Think on your past – at school, work, with friends, etc. Did you tend to 'go with the crowd' when group actions or opinions went astray, or did you speak up? What about now? Give careful thought to your ways, repent if necessary, and resolve to persevere in the Lord no matter what. Consider memorizing 2 Cor 4:17-18 or James 1:12.

THE WORD

Revelation 2:8-11

⁸To 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. ⁹I 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. ¹⁰Do 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. ¹¹Whoever 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 Tim 3:12

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

2 Cor 4:17-18

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

James 1:12

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

This week's writers: Asha Phillips, Elsa Henderson, Gene and Karen Gibbs, Sandi Somers, Jared Harrison and Jorel Quemuel

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