

## The Church Under Pressure

**Key Verses:** Rev 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 the crown of life.” – NIV*

**Power Point:** Pressure and persecution have a way of revealing the authenticity of our faith and can bring out either the worst or the best in us.

1. Rev 2:9 Jesus knows every detail about His church.

- What would Jesus say about the way you deal with pressure? Does your attitude and level of commitment change in times of lack or difficulty?

2. Rev 2:10; John 10:10 ~ We do have an enemy, but Jesus admonishes us to stay in faith and not be afraid.

- What do you think about your faith? How do you know when it is real?
- Is it based on outside experience or an inner relationship?

3. Luke 9:53-56; 2 Cor 2:14-17 ~ The Lord wants to make adjustments and changes in us so that we will look like Him.

- When you look into the mirror of the Word of God what do you look like?

**Application:** Times of pressure only serve to remind us of where we stand. Stay in faith and don't be afraid. We have a Lord who walks with us and leads us to the place of victory! John 16:33

# The Church Under Pressure Sunday January 17, 2010

(Read Revelation 1)

If Jesus were to write us a letter what would he say?

- What would he say about the way we deal with pressure?
- What would he say about our attitude in times of lack?
- What would he say about our faithfulness and loyalty?

One thing is for certain, we are content and profess great faith when things are going well but it is only when the pressure is on that we are really known.

Pressure and persecution has a way of revealing the authenticity of our faith. For Jesus the church of Smyrna didn't have it easy but they stood out as one of the most spiritually rich churches. They were a people who were willing to die for their loyalty to Christ alone!

We can learn some things from this letter and the example of one of two churches that knew how to live well and love well even unto death.

Rev 2:8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things say the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9. "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11."He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

Revelations was read to all the church in Asia Minor, today modern day turkey. (MAP)

## Background on Smyrna:

Smyrna was located 40 Miles north from Ephesus and was known for its schools of oratory and philosophy. It became the finest city in Asia Minor and was known as "the glory of Asia".

It was one of the cities, which claimed the honor of being Homer's, one of the great poet's of Greece, birthplace.

The Romans were big into the worship of many Gods (*Poly-theism*). Each of the cities had a specific god or gods that they worshipped. Smyrna was famous for two temples one built to the worship of Zeus and the other erected to Cybele

Politically the city sided with the Romans and became their faithful ally. Already in 195 B.C. it built a temple for Dea Roma, the goddess of Rome. In A.D. 26 it dedicated a temple to Emperor Tiberius and boasted to be first in emperor worship.

(*Bakers New Testament Commentary*)

Imagine that the church was surrounded with heathen worship and festivals. Many of them have been persecuted for their faith and some have even died.

'These things say the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life.'

(Rev 2:8)

### **I. Jesus knew every detail about the church of Smyrna its tribulation and poverty**

(V 9) "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)

- **Jesus knows the genuine!**

Although they were economically poor Jesus refers to them as spiritually rich. Unlike the church of Laodicea, which was economically rich but spiritually, bankrupt.

Smyrna was a poor-rich church and Laodicea was a rich-poor church.

- **Jesus also knows the phony**

(V9b) *...and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

In Smyrna, as in other places, Jews would sometimes take the focus of persecution off themselves by provoking the Romans against the Christians.

*It was in Smyrna that Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, was martyred, though without the sanction of the Roman government. It seems that the Jews of Smyrna were more antagonistic than were the Romans to the spread of Christianity, for it is said that even on Saturday, their sacred day, they brought wood for the fire in which Polycarp was burned.*

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

As Paul was blinded in his passion for Judaism and was working hand in hand with Satan persecuting the church, so the Jews in Smyrna were working with Satan persecuting the church.

*Of course, In God's eyes those Jews were no more His people than were the Christians who, in the Name of Christ, killed Jews and Muslims by hundreds of thousands during the Crusades.*

Times of pressure and persecution have a way of revealing who is real in their faith and who is a counterfeit.

The real looks like Jesus and he didn't come to kill, steal or destroy but to give life.  
(John 10:10) (Luke 9:51-56)

**Listen to some of the words of martyrs:**

*"You threaten me with a fire that will burn for an hour and then go out, but you are ignorant of the fire of the future judgment of God reserved for the everlasting torment of the ungodly. But why do you delay? Bring on the beasts, or the fire, or whatever you choose; you shall not move me to deny Christ, my Lord and Savior." Polycarp - martyr in Smyrna, 168 AD (p.136 Jesus Freaks)*

*"You can kill us, but you cannot do us any real harm." Justin Martyr - martyred in Rome, 165 AD*

*"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Dietrich Bonhoeffer Martyred in Germany during WWII*

*"We shall not end our lives in the fire, but make a change for a better life." Julius Palmer - burned at the stake in England, 1556*

*"A flower, if you bruise it under your feet, rewards you by giving you its perfume. Likewise Christians, tortured by the communists, rewarded their torturers by love. We brought many of our jailers to Christ." Richard Wurmbrand - missionary, pastor, author of Tortured for Christ and founder of Voice of the Martyrs*

Smyrna comes from the word Myrrh which when crushed gives of a great fragrance. (2 Cor 2:12-17)

Under insurmountable economical and political pressure the Church of Smyrna stands out as loyal and committed to the cause of Christ and pure worship.

## **II. Jesus admonishes them to stay in faith and not be afraid**

(V 10a) **Do not fear any of those things, which you are about to suffer.**

Worse things are about to come than poverty and wickedness, perhaps prison and death, for the devil "is about to cast" "is going to cast."

## **III. Jesus makes it clear to the church of Smyrna that they have an enemy.**

(V 10b) **Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days.**

First time Satan (adversary) and devil (slanderer) is mentioned in the revelation.

We have an enemy who loves to strategize and work his plan, not everything that happens is just a coincidence. (Ephesians 6:12; Luke 4)

The enemy wants to deter us from our walk with God and uses multiple means to attempt to do so.

- For the Church of Laodicea he used materialism and power that caused them to lose their spiritual freshness and passion.
- For Church of Ephesus he used business and activity to draw them away from their first love.
- For Church of Pergamos it was compromise

- For Thyatira it was low standards and corruption
- For Sardis it was self-deception
- But for Smyrna and Philedelphia it was all out war and persecution because they refused to bend or bow.

If the enemy cannot draw us away through our own internal carnal appetites he will try to use outside pressure, economical or situational to question or doubt the care of God.

Jesus tells the church of Smyrna...

#### **IV. Jesus also makes it clear that testing has its limitations**

(V 10) **Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

By "Ten days" he means that although persecution would be intense, it would be relatively short. It would have a definite beginning and end, and God would remain in complete control.

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you that in me you might have peace, In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world" (John 16:33)

Paul saw suffering as temporary...For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things, which are, seen *are* temporary, but the things, which are not seen, *are* eternal. (2Co 4:17,18)

Peter saw trials as an opportunity for greater faith and glory for Christ... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ... (I Peter 1:6,7)

**Conclusion:** Although we may not be going through persecution like the church of Smyrna, we do deal with pressure, trials and challenges everyday. Times of pressure only serve to remind us of where we stand. Pressure brings the best or the worst out of us. Lets make sure that we remain loyal and full of faith. Although we have an enemy who would love to see us ruined, we have a Lord who walks with us and leads us to the place of victory!

**LOVE WELL; LIVE WELL EVEN IF IT KILLS YOU!!**

