

What Jesus says to a Suffering Church

Seven Letters to Seven Churches, part 2
Rick Flanders, September 15th, 2019

A letter to the church in Smyrna: Rev. 2:8-11

Three encouragements to 'look up and ahead' when facing suffering:

1. **F** _____ **on what God knows and sees. (v9)**

"I know your tribulation and your poverty ... and the slander ..."
Revelation 2:9a (ESV)

(Hebrews 4:15)

- **"your tribulation" (9a) = pressing together**

(1 Pet 4:19, John 15:18, James 1:2-4, 1 Pet 4:12-16)

- **"your poverty" (v9b) = utter destitution**
(Revelation 3:17-18, 1 Peter 1:6-7)

- **"your slander" (v9c) = abusive language**
(Matthew 23:34-35, 1 Peter 3:14-17)

2. **Don't let F** _____ **fill you. (v10a)**

"Do not fear what you are about to suffer ..."
Revelation 2:10a (ESV)

(Hebrews 2:14-15)

3. **Be F** _____ **to the finish line. (v10b)**

Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
Revelation 2:10b (ESV)

(Matthew 7:24-27, Romans 8:35-39)

This Week's Discussion Guide:

Welcome to week 2 of our Fall small group season at GPC. It is our prayer for our Sundays and small groups to provide the encouragement we all need to support each other as we desire to grow closer to God and build friendships in the coming weeks. This small group season will be for 7 weeks and wrap up the week of Sunday October 20th. In the weeks ahead, we will continue to discuss some insights from the first few chapters of the Book of Revelation where seven letters are written to seven different churches. These letters can provide insights in helping us grow closer to God and to each other and make a more positive impact with our lives in the world around us.

Getting Started:

The first point of last Sunday's message related to what Jesus says to a suffering church is to focus on what God knows and sees. To get us started, share something about you that you didn't know about you 5 or 10 years ago. What have you learned about yourself lately? (what you like, what you don't like) ... In one of life's circumstances, what has surprised you ... about you?

The second point Rick shared with us last Sunday was "Don't let fear fill you." Was there ever a season in your life where you had a lingering fear? What was it? (death, worry about kids, rejection, bankruptcy, illness, failure ...) Has it stayed the same? If not, why? What were some of your biggest fears as a child? What has helped you grow out of them?

Part of the suffering of the church in Smyrna was that they were ridiculed for their faith. What is a hurtful or teasing thing that someone has said to you because of something you stood for? How long did the hurt linger? What is your tendency when ridiculed or harassed or made fun of?

The last point of the three main points from Sunday was an encouragement to be faithful to the finish line. When have you been faithful to complete something or not quit something that looking back ... you are glad you stuck with it?

Digging Deeper:

What insights or questions do you have from listening to Rick's message on Revelation 2:8-11? If you were part of this church in Smyrna and about to suffer more for your faith, how would this letter impact you? What encouraged you or helped you knowing that you are not immune from suffering?

The topic of suffering (why does God allow it and how can we grow through it and not get lost in it) is not a pleasant one but essential for a Christ follower to understand.

How would you answer someone who asks you, "Why does God allow suffering?" "Why doesn't God end suffering?" "Why do bad things happen to good people?"

What does this letter to the church in Smyrna teach us about the power of the devil? What should our response to the reality of evil and the devil's influence?

Paul, James, and Peter all commented on endurance through suffering. Read the following passages and point out some principles that are helpful to us when experiencing periods of tribulation.

- Paul wrote, Romans 5:3-5
- James wrote, James 1:1-12
- Peter wrote, 1 Peter 4:12-19

People, like plants, survive dry and difficult seasons because of their roots. What insights are found in the following two passages regarding how to grow through difficulty?

- Colossians 2:6-10
- Jeremiah 17:5-8

Last Thoughts and Applications:

The letter to Smyrna is one of only two letters of the seven letters in Revelation 2-3 that gives no warning or correction. No church is perfect and without need for improvement. Rather than including something for them to work on, this letter is all about encouragement. What does that tell us about the need for encouragement (and not necessarily improvement) when someone is hurting?

Who do you know that can use some encouragement? What specific truths or encouraging words would be helpful for them to hear? When might you share these words with them?

The church of Smyrna was encouraged to be faithful all the way to the finish line ... and God will be waiting for them with a crown. For some of them, things were going to get even harder for a season. (Re-read Revelation 2:10)

What has God called you to be faithful to, even if things might get harder before they get better? Who can you ask to pray with you while the path is uphill?

One of the last passages Rick read on Sunday was Matthew 7:24-27. It is a comparison of two houses that experience the same trials. One fell ... one didn't. What point was Jesus making?

An old hymn says, "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." What are some practical applications we can do to build our lives on the solid rock of Jesus Christ?

Before we wrap up, let's share some prayer requests and pray for each other. We are better together!