



Frisco First Baptist Church

7 LETTERS TO THE CHURCH LETTER TO SMYRNA REVELATION 2:8-11 5/11/2025

MAIN POINT

Jesus' faithfulness to us enables us to remain faithful to Him through times of suffering.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Share a way, big or small, suffering has touched your life this week. How did you react?

Did your circumstances or your reactions to those circumstances reveal anything about the character of God? If so, what?

During seasons of pain, we can be tempted to turn away from God in anger or despair. But these times are actually meant to have the opposite effect. When we lose everything else, we come to remember that Jesus is sufficient. Further, we begin to realize that even while we are suffering, God is showing love and mercy by working good into our souls. When the Lord is our portion, we can hope in Him even in the most painful places. Because we know He loves us, we can trust in and submit to His work in our hearts.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Revelation 2 begins with the letter to the church at Smyrna, one letter in a series of letters from Jesus to seven churches located in modern-day Turkey (the same region where John, the writer of Revelation, was a pastor). Each message was unique to the church Jesus addressed, but the messages have one central call: to remain true to the risen Christ.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ REVELATION 2:8-11.

According to Jesus' letter to them, what problems was the church at Smyrna facing?

What do Jesus' words to the church in Smyrna teach about suffering?

Jesus commended the Smyrnan Christians for enduring persecution and pledges them eternal life, even though their troubles are about to intensify for a short time. These persecuted believers were not promised escape from tribulation; they were promised instead something far greater: the grace to endure afflictions without fear and the pledge that the one who died and came to life again will certainly bring them through to the "crown of life."

The believers in Smyrna were very poor, but Jesus told them they were rich. What did He mean by that?

How are all followers of Christ rich spiritually? Read Ephesians 1:3-14 to aid in your discussion.

As believers, God has blessed us with the riches of Christ Jesus. No matter what we endure in this life, we have "the victor's crown," eternal life with Christ, to look forward to. For that reason, we are able to hold the things of this world loosely, which means we are in a better position to sacrifice ourselves on behalf of others' needs and endure whatever comes our way with our faith intact. Let's look at two other passages that help us understand how we can model the faith of the Christians in Smyrna.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:1-4,12.

In what circumstances does James command us to be joyful? How is this possible?

How do you tend to respond to difficulty or persecution in your life? How does your attitude compare to the one James commands believers to adopt in such situations?

James did not merely encourage believers to endure trials for the sake of eternal reward; he challenged them to be presently joyful in the midst of them. When Christ is our Lord and treasure, trials become avenues to spiritual growth rather than merely frustrations to be avoided. Perspective is key as James warned his readers against losing sight of their identity in Christ as they face difficulties which leads to sin (vv. 13-15). James' teaching on trials is not intended to encourage believers to seek them out but rather to demonstrate

how life's pressures have a way of strengthening our character and faith. In other words, they help us develop perseverance.

Why is perseverance important? What reward comes with persevering in the faith (v. 4)?

Perseverance or "endurance" is not the goal, but the means of reaching the goal. The goal is to become mature and complete. A physically mature adult who behaves at the level of a young child is not a mature adult. Likewise, a Christian who is mature in the knowledge of Scripture but whose behavior does not match his or her profession of faith is not a mature Christian.

In what specific ways does suffering provide an opportunity for believers to show they believe in Jesus and rejoice? How is Jesus' life a model for this?

How can testing or trials actually strengthen a believer's faith? What is promised to those who "persevere under trial" (v. 12)? How have you experienced this?

Endurance is self-authenticating; we grow in endurance by staying the course of faith and not being swayed by trials. Proven character follows naturally from the believer who has remained faithful through trials. Enduring trials causes us to grow in faith, and such growth is a testimony of faith's authenticity.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 PETER 4:12-19.

Why shouldn't we be surprised by persecution and suffering (vv. 12-13)? What is the difference between "participating in the sufferings of Christ" and suffering as a "criminal"? How can we be sure that we are suffering for the right reasons?

When we suffer for our own stubbornness or stupidity, we are not being persecuted. True persecution arises when believers are mistreated for living out of their identity in Christ. The only suffering that results in blessing is that which is endured according to God's will and for the sake of the name of Christ (v. 14,19). Peter says that such persecution produces joy in the hearts of believers because they are more deeply identifying with their Savior who suffered on their behalf and whose glory will soon be fully revealed (v. 13).

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How has God used suffering and trials to strengthen your faith in the past? To deepen your joy? How might remembering God's past faithfulness in your life help you trust Him in the present?

Read 2 Timothy 3:12 and John 15:18-21. While we do not currently face much persecution for our faith compared to Christians in other parts of the world, why is it important to be ready for potential persecution in the future? How can we prepare for true persecution?

How might we as a group help each other find joy in Christ in the midst of trials? How might we help each other persevere in faith in the midst of trials? What trial are you facing right now?

PRAYER

Spend some time in silent prayer, reflecting on the truths of this passage and how they compare to the perspective you have on life. Pray that God would strengthen the faith and deepen the joy of your group members so that they would be prepared to persevere in faith should persecution or suffering arise.

COMMENTARY

| REVELATION 2:8-11

2:8. Like Ephesus, Smyrna, 35 miles to the north, was a harbor city. Its large Jewish population bitterly opposed Christianity. When Domitian issued an edict declaring emperor worship mandatory for all inhabitants of the Roman Empire, he exempted the Jews from this requirement. The Jews did not want this religious freedom extended to Christians. The church in Smyrna was likely founded during Paul's third missionary journey (Ac 19).

2:9-10. The church at Smyrna, against whom Christ voiced no criticism, was suffering through spiritual warfare. A local synagogue of Jews was engaged in slander that resulted in church members being jailed for a short time (10 days). All of this represented a test of their faith. The phrase those who say they are Jews and are not does not deny the Jewish bloodlines of the persecutors. Rather, it mirrors Paul's assertion that, ultimately, Jewishness is not just outward but inward, related to the "circumcision is of the heart" by

faith (Rm 2:28-29). The crown of life is also referred to in Jms 1:12, where it is received by those who love the Lord and endure trials, probably at “the judgment seat of Christ” (2Co 5:10).

2:11. The second death is the lake of fire (20:14), the place of eternal torment for the Devil, the beast, the false prophet (20:10), and all the non-elect (20:15).

| 1 PETER 4:12-19

Peter declared that believers are to rejoice in the test that suffering brings for being members of God’s household. Suffering for Christ in this world characterizes believers as strangers, with heaven as their future place of eternal residence.

4:15-16. Peter encouraged his readers to live in such a way that their sufferings were caused by their devotion to Christ and not by any evil acts; they would “glorify God” by doing so.

4:17. If even believers in Christ will be judged, then what terrible punishment must surely await unbelievers, who pay no heed to the gospel of Christ?

4:18. Because Christians suffer (v. 16) and will be judged (v. 17), they live out their salvation “with difficulty” (cp. Pr 11:31).