

# You've Got Mail - Smyrna

Scripture: Revelation 2: 8-11  
Date: September 27, 2020

## **PERCEPTION**

Revelation is a book of the bible that reveals a communication from Jesus through John to angel of churches of Asia Minor that are meant as affirmation and encouragement and a glimpse into the heart of God for His churches.

This week the letter is to the church in Smyrna which was a major city in the Roman Empire. Based on its commerce and access to the sea it was considered the crown city of Asia. The city appeared to have a crown with the upper part of the city on the hilltops. The city was favoured by Rome to build a temple of Caesar and the athletic games held there offered a crown to the victors called a Stephanos.

## **PRESSURE**

The letter illustrates though – that all is not well in Smyrna – as the Christian church is struggling with afflictions. The Greek word here for affliction is *thillipsis*. It can also mean tribulation or troubles, suffering, oppression and distress. Darrel Johnson in his commentary on Revelation (Discipleship On The Edge) speaks of the word *thillipsis* as being *under pressure*. A pressure that weighs down on a person's mind, heart and body. A relenting – never ending – suffocating pressure

## **POVERTY**

A pressure that begins with the economics of the Christian church as the text identifies that the church in Smyrna seeing themselves as in poverty. The geography of Smyrna was upstairs and downstairs with upper class in the hilltop – the crown of the city – and the lower class in the muck and mire near the shore line.

In our culture we are becoming more aware of systemic sin that divides us by the colour of skin, by tribe or culture or by economic status. They are separations that are more than just laws - written and unwritten. They are a perspective that permeates every part of life and they are perspective that separates every part of life.

In Smyrna to be a Jew was less than a Roman which was already lower on the grading system. In Smyrna to be a Christian / Jew was less than a Jew - less than little.

## **PERSECUTION - WITHIN**

The letter to the church in Smyrna recognizes their plight. They aren't just poor - they are made poor and they are kept poor. But the most scandalous part of this is that the major contributor is not the Roman leadership – but the Jewish leadership.

Smyrna amongst all the churches identified in the letters is hard pressed by its own culture. Jewish culture threatened by the Christians and Jewish culture intimidated by the Romans

The text speaks of a Jewish culture that *slandered* the Christians in Smyrna – vs. 10. Slandered is a word translated from the Greek word – Blaspheme. The Christian church was surround by blasphemy. Accusing them of falsehoods of what they thought and how they lived.

The text speaks of those being a part of the synagogue of Satan. One of the definitions of the person and role of Satan is that of an accuser. Satan – the devil – is an accuser to all who walk with God. The Christian church in Smyrna was under constant attack from people who shared a common culture

#### PRISON - WITHOUT

But the church in Smyrna wasn't just poor and it wasn't just persecuted by its own kin. The church in Smyrna was also persecuted by the Romans. There was – the text reveals – pain coming from imprisonment through the contempt that the Romans had for this Christian sect.

Part of the loyalty to the Roman Empire involved a test that every citizen – once a year – had to go to the temple and swear allegiance to Casear. To verbally confess that Caesar was their Lord – their god. Many Christians in Smyrna refused - at their peril. It's recorded that a man named Polycorp - a bishop of the church in 156 AD (less than 100 years later) was martyred in Smyrna for his faith

#### PERSPECTIVE

In our world there is a perspective of many pressures upon us in 2020. Like a pressure cooker with a broken time and temperatures that keep rising and rising and rising. Covid 19 and its protocols and guidelines leave us conflicted and concerned. Do we wear masks or not. Covid 19 is the end of the world – Covid 19 is over blown.

We find ourselves on Facebook or scrolling the newsfeeds - ready to like those who agree with us and ready to punch back to those who don't. We struggle with the uncertainty of leadership in politics, in the medical community. We have lost trust in teachers – bosses – pastors as we are uncertain if leadership is controlling and abusive or if leadership is passive or weak.

These stresses – these pressures – these afflictions have a power of reality in our world - they ARE true. But in the greater scope of the world – in the light of God's vision of creation – perhaps they are not as severe as we think.

526 AD is considered the worst year EVER. A volcano erupted in Iceland and the smoke and ash swept across Europe and made its way to China over the next three years. The amount was so significant that it blocked out the sun making the weather cooler and the crops failed and people literally starved to death.

The stresses – the pressures – the afflictions of Smyrna Christian community were real enough. They were slandered for being a Christian they were slaughtered for being a Christian. There are churches in the world – in the middle east, in the far east and other areas – where the struggle to gather together is hard due to the persecution of life and limb. The slander and the slaughter of being a Christian still exist in the world today.

## PRIZE

### TESTING

We face testing / temptations and trials within and without. In verse 10 the text declares that there will be a testing of the Smyrna church – in their case involving prison. The Greek word for testing is *peristhete*. It is a word that deals with the character of the person. An examination of one's self especially in regard to a temptation to attempt to make on sin.

Darrell Johnson in his commentary (Discipleship on The Edge) speaks of this examination as an opportunity to improve. The testing is to grow one deeper in life and in faith

### JESUS PRESENCE

Jesus reminds the church that He is there - even when everything looks like He's absent. That in the midst of depravity – denial – and death - that He still is there. This letter is meant to be just that – encouragement and affirmation that they haven't been forgotten - that all is not lost.

That even though the hardships of the daily world they face may even take their lives but that Jesus walks with them every step of the way. He offers them comfort from His last days / hours before His own death.

John 17: 15

*<sup>15</sup> My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*

John 14: 27

*<sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

Philippians 4: 9-13

*<sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

### JESUS PROMISE

The text speaks of the victory for these Christians might not be of this world BUT will be in the world yet to come. They will receive not the crown of Smyrna – but one from the Saviour. They will give allegiance not to Rome but to the Righteous One

Christ assures the church in Smyrna – and us – that they are rich in Him. That they are victorious through Him. The second death – the spiritual death – will not harm them and they will be received into glory with Him forever.

Philippians 3: 12-14

*<sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

## **APPLICATION / CONCLUSION**

### **HEAR GOD'S ENCOURAGEMENT TODAY**

The text in the letter – as it does in all the letters – is a challenge / an encouragement. For those who have ears to hear - let them hear. As schools reopen and churches reopen – albeit with a lot of restrictions, guidelines and protocols – there remains a lot of conflict and chaos. This sermon contains a lot of doom and gloom – destruction and death. We need to hear and heed God's word for us to hear.

### **SEE GOD'S CALLING TODAY**

There are afflictions – pressures – upon you as you live your life of faith in this broken, sin filled, pain riddled world. There is a testing within you – to trust in the larger perspective God offers and to run the race as to win the prize.

Jesus reminds you – that He is still here with you. The crown of life eternal in the world yet to come and the life abundant in the world here and now are both held out for you. He encourages you that His presence will comfort you and that His promises will guide you.

In that truth – we are rich and blessed indeed !!