

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA – A CALL TO REMAIN FAITHFUL EVEN TO THE POINT OF DEATH (Revelation 2:8-11)

1. As icebreakers you might discuss a) How would it feel to be the church at Ephesus and know that their church neighbors will see the rebuke of Jesus that they have “forsaken their first love” – or even the Church at Laodicea which Jesus basically describes as “lukewarm” and nauseating (See Revelation 3:16-17); or b) In the old days there were telephone “party lines” shared by many neighbors. You could pick up your phone and secretly snoop on your neighbor’s conversations – and they could do the same thing to you! How might that change your use of the phone? Then discuss: Why did Jesus write these letters in a manner that Churches could read not only their own letter, but letters to their neighbors?
2. Consider this seriously: Is there anything or anyone in this life for whom you would willingly give your life? What or whom, and why so?
3. Read out loud the letter of Jesus to the Church at Smyrna: Revelation 2:8-11.
4. In this letter Jesus describes himself as ***“the first and the last, who died and came to life again.”*** Why would Jesus describe himself in this way to Christians who are about to face deadly persecution?
5. Jesus commends the church with these words: ***“I know your afflictions and your poverty; yet you are rich!” (Revelation 2:9).***
 - a. In what sense were they in “poverty”? How does this square with many of the messages coming from American church pulpits today?
 - b. In what sense were they “rich”?
 - c. Do you know any faithful and dedicated Christians who can be described as in “poverty”? How so; and how are they also “rich”? Is their poverty caused by their faith in Jesus?
6. What is the meaning of a ***“synagogue of Satan”*** in Smyrna? (***Revelation 2:9***).
7. Jesus specifically encourages these Christians: ***“Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer.”(Revelation 2:10).***
 - a. How is it possible to not be afraid in the face of unfair and certain suffering?
 - b. Jesus ends each of these letters with this command: ***“He who has ears let him HEAR what the Spirit says to the churches.”***
 - c. What is Jesus telling ***you*** to not be afraid of? Are you hearing his message and taking it to heart?
8. This is what the future holds for the Christians at Smyrna: ***“The Devil will put some of you in prison to test you ...”*** In what sense does the Devil use imprisonment and persecutions to ***“test”*** the followers of Jesus? How might it be a *good* thing to have our faith tested? What is a challenging test of faith you have faced in the past? What did you learn about *yourself* from that test? What did you learn about your *church family* and

fellow Christians? About *Jesus* and the Holy Spirit? Compare Romans 8:28 and Psalm 23:4.

9. What might Jesus mean when he warns the Smyrna Christians they “*will suffer persecution for ten days*”? (*Revelation 2:10*).
 - a. If you were soon to be arrested, abused or even killed because of your Christian faith would you want to receive warning in advance?
 - b. How would you respond (what would you do) if you knew this was about to happen to you and your family and friends?

WRAP IT UP ...

Do we love Jesus enough that you would be willing to go to prison for him?

What are some blessings that might come to New Heights if we went through that kind of test?

Is there a possibility that we (or our children) could face such a test? Explain your answer ...

How should we prepare ourselves for such a test?

How should our church leaders (pastors, elders, and teachers) help our people get ready for persecution?

Jesus ends with this promise of reward: “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.”

What is this crown of life? What kinds of jewels, symbols and designs would Jesus put on your crown to tell the story of your faithfulness?