

The Apocalypse of St. John

Weekly Discussion Group

Discussion Questions Week 5

- 1) What does it mean to you when someone says, "I know what you're going through"? How does it make you feel? What does it mean to you when Jesus says the same thing?
- 2) Why do you think Smyrna's connection to myrrh and suffering might have given its people hope?
- 3) Does the idea of a "crown of life" might help someone to keep going during hard times?
- 4) How does knowing that Jesus doesn't promise to remove our struggles, but to be with us through them, challenge or comfort you?
- 5) Why do you think some Christians today, like the Smyrna believers, feel pressured or persecuted for their faith? Do you see examples of this in your life or community?
- 6) Polycarp remained faithful under extreme pressure. What does faithfulness look like for you, even in smaller everyday challenges?
- 7) How do you wrestle with the idea that suffering can refine or strengthen your faith? Is it something you find easy or difficult to accept?

Sunday's Text

Revelation 2:8-11 (NLT)

⁸"Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive:

⁹"I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich! I know the blasphemy of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan. ¹⁰Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.

¹¹"Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death.



Polycarp Burnt.

Sunday's Message Summary

Smyrna, located in modern-day Turkey, was a city known for its beauty, wealth, and history of resilience. It was also a center of Christian suffering. The church in Smyrna faced persecution from the Roman authorities, who demanded loyalty to Rome and its emperor, and from certain segments of the Jewish community. Christians were marginalized economically, socially, and politically, experiencing imprisonment and even martyrdom for their faith.

The letter from Jesus encourages the believers in Smyrna, reminding them that their lives are under his authority, not Caesar's. Jesus acknowledges their suffering but urges them not to fear and to remain faithful, even unto death. The promise of the "crown of life" and protection from the "second death" offers hope and reassurance to the persecuted church.

The sermon emphasizes that the real enemy is not human opposition but the spiritual forces behind persecution. Pastor Ryan draws parallels to modern challenges, urging Christians to recognize that suffering often accompanies faithfulness to Jesus. He argues that pressure refines the church, stripping away superficiality and drawing believers closer to Christ.

The historical example of Polycarp, a disciple of John and a martyr from Smyrna, illustrates the enduring faith of the church. His unwavering declaration—"How can I blaspheme my King and Savior?"—serves as a powerful testimony of loyalty to Jesus amidst persecution.

The message concludes with a challenge to modern Christians to embrace faithful endurance, trusting Jesus' sovereignty and the promise of ultimate victory. Pastor Ryan warns against compromising faith for comfort, urging believers to remain steadfast like the Smyrnæans, who continue to be a beacon of faith through centuries of trials.

