

Church under pressure
Revelation 2:-8-11

Warm Up

Who still writes hand written letters to friends? Is there a difference between a personal letter and an email or WhatsApp message? What was the last hand written letter you received?

Background and context

In Revelation ch 2-3, John receives dictated letters to pass on to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Each letter carries a personal description of Jesus and a specific message from Jesus to each church. Whilst these were written to the early churches in Asia Minor, they paint a picture for the Church in every generation. Most of the letters carry both praise and warnings but the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia only contain encouragement. Both were churches under pressure! We know very little about Smyrna except that it was a trading port and fiercely loyal to the Roman Empire. It supported the worship of the emperor and had a hostile Jewish community. Living as a Christian would have been challenging.

Thinking it through: Main discussion/activity

READ Revelation ch 2:8-11. What are the surprising things in the passage? What is new? What don't you really understand?

1. How does Jesus describe Himself to the church at Smyrna? Why might this be an encouragement to a church that is under pressure from the rest of society?
2. **v9.** What daily difficulties do you think the church faced, living in a Roman colony?
3. Jesus knows their poverty. How can He say **"yet you are rich"**? What does He mean?
4. **v9.** Jesus is very harsh with those who are oppressing the church. What might His reference to **"synagogue of Satan"** mean?
5. **v10.** This must have been difficult for the church to read. How does Jesus provide hope for the church?
6. Jesus indicates that some of them will die as a result of the persecution. Reading this passage today, does it fill you with hope or dread? What if you were the Church in Ukraine or Iran reading this? (Or anywhere where the church is persecuted).
7. What two commands does Jesus give the church in Smyrna? How easy is it to obey? Why?
8. **v11.** What is the **'second death'**? Why is this verse an encouragement?

Discipleship and Application

9. How might reading this letter to the church at Smyrna be an encouragement to Churches under pressure today?
10. How can we at VBC practically help our brothers and sisters in churches under pressure?

Try to leave 15-20 mins to talk about prayer needs of the group and to pray.

There are many creative ways of praying together: writing prayers, using candles as a focus, reading prayers or praying for each other in pairs.