

## A SERIES ON REVELATION: is this the end?

### Week 4 – Good News?

**Transition:** Early in this letter Jesus tells John that He has something to say to seven specific churches in Asia Minor (the western side of modern-day Turkey). The first, which we covered last week, was the church in Ephesus. Jesus commended them for their works, toil, patient endurance and for not allowing the false teaching of the Nicolaitans to influence them. But He also had one thing against them...namely, that they had abandoned their first love. He then encouraged them to repent and to return to that first love. Since the church there appeared to have carried on for a few more centuries (there was a Church Council there in 431), it seems that they truly did heed the Lord's warning.

**Context:** At the time when John wrote this letter, Smyrna, the second city mentioned by Jesus, was a very wealthy and beautiful city. It was also widely known and revered for its production and exportation of myrrh. Myrrh is a pleasant-smelling spice that was used back then for a variety of purposes, but chiefly, for preparing bodies for burial (see John 19:38-40). It also is well-known for one other unique occurrence: in a sense, the city itself underwent its own death and resurrection. In ancient times, many cities in this area were conquered multiple times. Sometimes the conquering army would let the city remain and other times they would utterly destroy it. In Smyrna's case, it was decimated by Persia in 545 BC. Many years later, however, around the year 300 BC, Alexander the Great chose to rebuild it, and so it was given new life. The city of Smyrna continues to this day and is now called Izmir.

**Scripture:** Revelation 2:8-11

#### Discipleship Questions:

- If you are willing, share a time when you have truly suffered. What happened? What were your feelings at that time? What were your thoughts? How did you get through it?
- How does our culture view suffering? How does God view suffering? Why do you think God allows or even causes suffering? Is enduring suffering for the cause of Jesus different than general suffering that is not for Him directly? If so, how?
- How does Jesus identify Himself? How would this impact the church at Smyrna? How does it impact you right now?
- What does Jesus say that He knows about this church? How would His words encourage them? How do His words encourage or comfort you today?
- One particular form of suffering that the Smyrnan Christians were forced to deal with was not being able to buy or sell freely in the marketplace (because that society scorned Christianity). Cancel culture is not a new thing! How do Christians live godly lives in the midst of a culture that is intent on cancelling them?
- Jesus informed this church that they would be tested by going through a brief period of suffering. Why might God test us this way? What does He say to encourage them? What would encourage you when suffering for Jesus?
- Have you ever been tested by Jesus? Share your story and what you learned.
- How can the group help you to grow in your faith/take your next step with following Jesus?