

January 17/18, 2009

“Faithful Under Fire!”

Revelation 2:8-11 - Smyrna

Pastor Mark Burch

Revelation 1:18 *“...I was dead, and behold I am alive forever...”*

Job 19: 25-27 *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth...in my flesh I will see God! How my heart yearns within me!”*

The second church on John’s postal route would have been the church at Smyrna. This city competed with Ephesus as the “key” city of Asia Minor and was steeped in deep patriotism and fierce loyalty to Rome. Into this environment steps a marginalized group of Christ-followers declaring that Jesus (not Caesar) was Lord! ...and all hell begins to break loose. As Thomas Torrence says: *“The church cannot be the church, without causing trouble!”*

The key to understanding and embracing this text and this teaching comes in the first phrase: I am the First and the Last, who died and came to life again! Embedded in that statement is the hope these people needed....AND the hope WE need!

Intro: One man’s journey to the fires: Polycarp

History & Overview

Poverty & Slander

Prison & Death

Don’t Fear! – Be Faithful!

The Hope of the Resurrection! Cheating Death!



If we are born just once – we will die twice. But if we are born twice – we will die just once! (E.V. Hill – Pastor)

Home Group Discussion Questions

History (Making it Personal)

1. Has there been a time in your life where you faced pressure or some kind of persecution for your Christian faith....tell the story?
2. What do you think the effect of peace and prosperity has been on our understanding of suffering? Are we more disciplined by our culture – or by the Word? Why do we immediately see suffering as a negative?
3. Facing trials and tests can sometimes be the very best thing for us! Share an experience, where you learned a significant lesson through a painful set of circumstances. What difference has this made as you face day-to-day life?

Digging Deeper (Looking to the Bible)

4. Read Revelation 2:8-11
5. Having viewed the video on Polycarp’s martyrdom, how do you think the church at Smyrna would have read and responded to John’s letter?
6. Jesus lets them know that He sees their afflictions, their poverty, and the slander they endure....How do you feel about Jesus KNOWING but not stepping IN to stop the immediate trial? Read also: Romans 8:18-28 and James 1:2-4.
7. Talk about what “thlipsis” or tribulation really refers to: Consider some other texts that use the same word: Matthew 13:21; 24:19; Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 1:4; Hebrews 10:32-35
8. Focus your discussion on the key personal identifier taken from chapter one. Jesus is the one who was dead, but is now alive! What significance does that carry for them/us? Read also Job 19:25-27.
9. Revelation 2:10 talks about being faithful even unto death – how is this possible? What is the hope that drives us? It must connect to the 2nd death – read Revelation 20:6, 14; & 21:8.
10. Have we lost our vision of the resurrection promise! That death is NOT final – that we will again walk this earth IN THE FLESH? What hope would that give to us when we face trials and suffering?

Taking It Home (Application)

11. The New Testament is so clear, that suffering is part of the journey of the follower of Christ. Have someone read out loud the following quote and then reflect out loud on how you respond:

It seems only fair to conclude by telling you that there is a way out of the pressure. Just don’t get serious about loving Jesus. Just go with the glow of the culture. Just settle for a comfortable, run-of-the-mill, watered-down kind of discipleship. And there will be no pressure. And there will be no passion!
(Darrel Johnson – The Revelation)