

REVELATION

A LETTER TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Session 2: Church of Smyrna - “Persecution Coming”

Ice Breaker (optional)

Go around and have each person share one thing that has encouraged their faith recently (a verse, song, sermon, post, conversation, text message, prayer, etc.).

Sermon Summary

This week we looked at Jesus’ letter to the church in Smyrna — one of only two churches that received no rebuke, only encouragement. Even though Smyrna was a wealthy and influential city, the Christians there were suffering intense persecution and poverty because they refused to worship the Roman emperor. Jesus reminded them that He is “the First and the Last” and the One who “was dead but is now alive,” anchoring their hope in His authority and victory over death. While others saw them as poor and powerless, Jesus declared them spiritually rich because their faith had remained strong under pressure. He warned them that more suffering was coming, including prison, testing and even death, but told them not to be afraid because their trial would be limited. Their suffering was not meaningless — it was a test that would reveal genuine faith. Jesus’ final encouragement was clear: remain faithful even to death, and He would reward them with the crown of life and protection from the second death.

Group Objective

To help us develop a faith that remains steady under pressure, trusting that Jesus sees our struggles, limits our trials, and rewards our faithfulness.

Study Questions

1. Jesus introduces Himself to the church in Smyrna as “the First and the Last” and the One who “was dead but is now alive” (Read Rev. 2:8). Why would those specific truths about Jesus matter so much to believers facing suffering and possible death? How does remembering Jesus is eternal and His victory over death steady our faith today?

Further Scripture: Isaiah 44:6; Hebrews 12:2; Revelation 1:17–18

2. Jesus tells the church, “I know your suffering and your poverty—yet you are rich!” (Read Rev. 2:9). What do you think made this church spiritually rich despite being physically poor? How can trials & testings reveal what we truly treasure?

Further Scripture: James 2:5; 2 Corinthians 6:10; Matthew 6:19–21

3. Jesus makes it clear that He sees the opposition and injustice they are facing (Read Rev. 2:9). Why is it important to remember that Jesus sees what others overlook or misunderstand? How does that truth help when you feel unseen, misjudged, or mistreated?

Further Scripture: Psalm 34:15; Hebrews 6:10; Proverbs 15:3

4. Jesus warns them that suffering is coming but tells them not to be afraid (Read Rev. 2:10). Why do you think courage is commanded so often in Scripture when facing hardship? What fears tend to shake your faith the most?

Further Scripture: Isaiah 41:10; John 16:33; Psalm 56:3–4

5. Jesus says their coming hardship will serve as a test (Read Rev. 2:10). How is testing different from punishment? How can God use trials to strengthen and refine our faith instead of destroy it?

Further Scripture: 1 Peter 1:6–7; James 1:2–4; Romans 5:3–5

6. Jesus calls them to be “faithful, even to the point of death” (Read Rev. 2:10). What does faithfulness look like in everyday life, not just extreme persecution? Where is God calling you to remain steady right now?

Further Scripture: Luke 16:10; Galatians 6:9

7. Jesus promises the “crown of life” and protection from the second death (Read Rev. 2:11). How does focusing on eternal reward change the way we endure temporary pain or loss? What helps you keep an eternal perspective when life feels heavy?

Further Scripture: Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; James 1:12

Polycarp video & questions (optional)



Scan the QR code to watch a 3 minute video on Polycarp. Then work through these questions together.

- Polycarp said, “86 years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong.” How does a lifetime of walking with Jesus build the kind of faithfulness we see at the end of his life? What habits help us develop that kind of steady faith now?
- Polycarp refused to say “Caesar is Lord,” even when it cost him his life. What pressures today tempt believers to compromise their loyalty to Jesus, even in subtle ways?