

SEVEN LETTERS to SEVEN CHURCHES



SMALL GROUP NOTES: Sunday 28th June – Week 2 'SMYRNA'

Talk together about times when you have received a text or email and you completely misunderstood what the sender was trying to say.

Can you think of times when people in the public eye have used Twitter and unintentionally got in a lot of trouble for what they have written – especially if they thought they were being funny, only to find out later that the rest of the world thought it was offensive.

Read together Revelation 2.8-11

What aspects of this letter might people want to take issue with as they hear it for the first time?

Where is the language difficult? How does that make you feel?

Life and Death

You might have noticed there's the theme of life and death running through it.

v8 *'these are the words of him who died and came to life again'*

v10 *'be faithful even to the point of death – I will give you life'*.

v11 *'those who overcome will not be hurt by the second death'*

It can be no coincidence that Smyrna itself was a place that experienced death and resurrection – as it was destroyed around 580 BC and then 300 years later rebuilt as one of the very few planned cities of antiquity – its death and resurrection had left the current city in good shape. Resurrection was good news for Smyrna.

All seven letters seem to link an aspect/characteristic of the city to the message of the gospel. Here death and resurrection are of course linked to Jesus and our future hope of life after death.

What aspects/characteristics of the city of Newcastle could be linked to the message of the gospel?

Poverty

You may have noticed that whilst this was a wealthy place, the Christians were in poverty.

V9 *'I know your afflictions and your poverty'*.

It may well be that the poverty mentioned refers to economic and trade penalties - sanctions against the Christians because they would not bow the knee to the emperor.

It is difficult for many of us to relate to a church facing persecution.

Are you reminded of specific places and situations round the world where Christians face great hardships because of their allegiance to Jesus?

You might want to take a look at

https://worldwatch.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/?_ga=2.79998743.1648988018.1592891988-1823879948.1592891988&_gac=1.184339858.1592891992.EAlaIQobChMly5uvhKGX6glVyYeyCh2dMQQSEAAAYASAAEqJtd_D_BwE

Why not spend a few minutes praying for the persecuted church.

Conflict

This letter speaks of the animosity between the Jewish Christians and the traditional Jews. As the new church arrived and grew, it couldn't help but cause conflict around the claims of Jesus as Messiah, but also because it was in danger of upsetting the careful balance in the city between the Jews and the authorities.

The Church has had many moments of stirring things up and at times, causing hurt and animosity because of clumsy language or just through insensitivity – sometimes it is because we live in our own little bubble, sometimes because we are so passionate to communicate our truth, we forget about love.

Can you think of times now or in history when the church has unhelpfully stirred up conflict?

To what extent should the church be a community of truth that is prophetic and challenge those around it?

To what extent is the church called to stir things up and the proclaim Jesus' radical upside-down kingdom values, even in the face of opposition?

How do we do this in ways that keep truth and love in balance?

Satan

The phrase 'synagogue of Satan' is one of the hardest parts of this letter to read for many.

How do you react to this phrase?

The word 'Satan' means 'accuser' and on one level all the letter is doing is saying in a straightforward way that the local Jewish synagogue was the centre of accusation towards the Jewish Christians, and some of the local Jews as slanderous towards them.

A 'synagogue of accusation.'

But it is also a description of who is really behind all the conflict – Satan, who stands against all that God is doing in his world.

What do you think about Tim's take on this phrase:

'This phrase is not the vilification of the local Jews, or an example of hate language, but an uncovering of who is really to blame. Satan, the Accuser is at work – he can use any group in any time – he is behind the bad things happening to the Christians in Smyrna and he is behind the current conflicts and the suffering to come.'

To what extent is it helpful to look beyond those caught up in situations of conflict to the one who might be behind it all – getting to the source of the trouble - Satan?

Crown of life

You may have noticed the wonderful promises that surround these warnings.
v10 *'those who are faithful even to death will be given the crown of life'* – Tom Wright comments that this is 'meaning life as a crown – true, renewed life with God forever who's people would be marked out by it as royalty is marked out by crowns. There's so much more to life than this life!'

**How do these promises offer reassurance to the Christians in Smyrna?
To what extent do they offer reassurance to us?**

**How does this letter speak to you?
What is the Spirit saying to the church right now?**