



March 26/27, 2011

Revelation 2:8-11

"The Fragrance of Suffering" The Church in Smyrna

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The Bible doesn't mention Smyrna outside of Revelation 2, and there is little that is known about this city. Alexander the Great founded Smyrna circa 300BC. It's located about 35 miles north-northwest of Ephesus and, like Ephesus, was a seaport along the Aegean Sea. Smyrna, second only to Ephesus, was one of the wealthiest cities in the region. Today, it's called Izmir (Turkey) with a population of approximately 250,000.

The Christians in this church were afflicted, poor and persecuted, yet faithful and "rich" in the Lord. It's interesting to note that the Lord had no complaints about this church.

The word for Smyrna is derived from the word myrrh. Myrrh was one of the gifts the Wise Men presented to Jesus when he was a child. ([Matthew 2:11](#)) It was also one of the ingredients used in making anointing oil for priests in the Old Testament. ([Exodus 30:23](#)) It was a spice used for embalming the dead. ([John 19:39](#)) Myrrh is the gum resin that comes from a thorny shrub that grows in rocky terrain in the Middle East and Mediterranean regions, and it smells like pine or balsam.

The unique thing about myrrh is that the beautiful fragrance only comes out when it is crushed. Jesus basically said of this church, "You are putting off a beautiful aroma when you are crushed!" Even though their lives were marked by affliction, poverty, suffering, prison, persecution and death, the crushing effect of those things in their lives produced a beautiful fragrance, and Jesus commends them.

Christians today need to learn from Jesus on the subject of suffering. Why, because we don't live in a "suffering-free" world. Every Christian's life is touched by some

form of suffering or pain to one degree or another. Heartaches and disappointments come in all shapes and sizes, so it's important to have the Lord's perspective when we experience difficult days.

God Knows About Our Suffering

1. While it may seem that God is not aware of our suffering, the truth is that he is intimately aware and not only knows about, but understands our troubles.
2. **Isaiah 53:3** - *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering..."*
3. **Psalm 56:8** - *"You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book." (NLT)*
4. **Isaiah 49:15-16** - *" 'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.' "*
5. **Psalm 34:18** - *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*

Present Circumstances Don't Define Our Spiritual Wealth

6. The Bible refers to the riches available to every Believer.
 - a. **Romans 2:4** - The riches of his kindness.
 - b. **Ephesians 1:7** - The riches of his grace.
 - c. **Romans 9:23** - The riches of his glory.
 - d. **Ephesians 1:18** - The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.
7. It's incredible when you think about it, but in even the poorest countries of the world, there are multitudes of Christians who worship the Lord with a testimony that emphatically states that they personally know the joy of his blessing in their lives!

Satan Is Behind Some Of Our Suffering

8. There can be an aspect of spiritual warfare behind our suffering.

9. **1 Peter 5:9-10** - *“Resist the devil, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”*

God Doesn't Always Rescue Us From Suffering - Sometimes He Carries Us Through

10. The age-old question is, “If God sees what I’m going through, and he loves me, why is it that he allows me to go through this?”
- There are times when God prevents us from suffering and difficulties.
 - There are times when God rescues us out of the suffering and difficulties.
 - There are times when God carries us through suffering and difficulties.

Faithfulness Is Always Rewarded

11. **Romans 8:18** - *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*

Discussion Questions

- Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
- Read **Revelation 2:8-11** to provide an overview for this study.
- Allow the people in your group to share experiences they’ve had with various kinds of suffering.
 - When suffering comes, what would people say you “smell” like?
 - Would you say there is foul odor or is there a sweet smelling fragrance?
 - Are people drawn to you because of the way you “smell” when you are dealing crushing difficulties?
 - Were people running for the exits, so to speak, because they “smelled” a bitter, resentful and angry spirit?
 - Would you say that your walk with the Lord was strong and that your story was a wonderful testimony of faithfulness in the midst of suffering?
- Do you think most people believe the Lord *really* knows about their suffering? (Emphasis added)

5. Read and discuss [Psalm 34:18](#).
 - a. Allow the people in your group the opportunity to share their experiences concerning times when they sensed the Lord's presence when they were "*crushed in spirit*."

6. Read and discuss the Scriptures outlined in #6 above.
 - a. Do you have a real sense of the riches you have in Christ?
 - b. Do you think Christians in the United States have a real appreciation for the present and eternal blessings of the Lord?

7. Why is that sometimes the Lord prevents us from going through suffering, sometimes he rescues us out of suffering, and sometimes he carries us through? (See #10 above)
 - a. Do you have trouble understanding who God is because you can't get a definitive answer to this question?
 - b. Do you have faith and trust in the Lord to help you in difficult times, or do you find yourself searching for help from everyone else but the Lord?

8. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: recognize that the Lord has not forgotten them, even though they may be experiencing difficult times; understand that the Lord knows about all of their heartaches, anxieties, worries and fears; be encouraged by the knowledge that they are dearly loved by the Lord; know that they can come to the Lord to find peace, rest, comfort, encouragement and healing; trust the Lord to carry them when they feel like they can't go on; count the "*riches*" and blessings they enjoy that come from the Lord and give God praise for his faithfulness and goodness.



Note: Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).