



# SEVEN SEARCHING LETTERS REVELATION 1-3

**Week Commencing 11<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

*Notes for next Sunday's sermon on Revelation 2:8-11, "To the church in Smyrna."*

Welcome back! I'm so glad you've joined us again to use these notes for your devotions for at least 4 days throughout the week. Remember what we saw in week 1? That if you read this revelation and take it to heart, you will be blessed!

Last week as we began to explore the first of the 7 letters, I pointed out there is a predictable pattern and outline in the letters, with a couple exceptions. So our letter this week, to Smyrna, is one of those with exceptions, in that there is no word of admonishment or rebuke for this church. As a reminder, here's the typical pattern once more:

1. **Recap** – picking up one of the descriptions of Jesus from ch 1
2. **Commendation** – what the church is doing well (missing from Sardis and Laodicea)
3. **Admonishment** – where the church is breaking God's heart (missing from Smyrna and Philadelphia)
4. **Exhortation** – how to put things right and get back on track (including a warning about implications if they don't); and a repeated phrase "whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
5. **Promise** – there is a specific promise pictured for the church who overcomes their trials and challenges – drawn from the imagery of chapters 21-22.

## **DAY 1: Read Revelation 2:8-11**

Thriving today as the city of Izmir (second largest city in Asiatic Turkey), ancient Smyrna rivalled Ephesus for its beauty. Located on a magnificent harbour, Smyrna stood at the end of the Hermus valley and had a population of 250,000. It was known as the 'glory of Asia' and was famous for its town planning and architecture. "It boasted a stadium, a famous library, and the largest amphitheatre in Asia. There were impressive temples of Apollo, Asklepius, Aphrodite and for the Cybele mystery cult. It competed with and defeated Sardis for the honour of erecting a temple in honour of the Roman Emperor." <sup>1</sup>

In the opening recap, Jesus is described as *him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again* (see Rev 1:17-18). So the church in Smyrna is immediately reminded that the Jesus who stands among them, was there at the beginning, will be there at the end; had died for them and conquered death! That's a great encouragement at the outset! If you're undergoing persecution but you know (or are reminded) that Jesus stands with you as one who has always been there and always will and has conquered death – there's great comfort and encouragement.

Also, in the opening verse, they're reminded that the words they are about to read are not from John, but from Jesus! When Jesus speaks directly to your situation – then surely – you listen! Someone may wish Jesus would speak like that to us today! Answer? As what we read in the Bible is God's word to us, then the words of this letter to Smyrna, are also Jesus' words to us today! How good is that! Yes, the letter will need some interpretation, but we will see truths here which will apply to us and our situation 2,000 years after these words were conveyed from Jesus to John. Each time we read this letter this week, remember that these are the words to *us* from the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.

## **DAY 2: Read Revelation 2:8-11**

*I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich!* Have you ever wondered whether Jesus knows what's going on in your life? Many people feel that no one really notices them – or cares. Yet in each of these letters, Jesus assures us that he knows all about what is going on! Take that to heart today. Jesus knows. Jesus cares.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Barnett, *Revelation: Apocalypse now and then (Reading the Bible today)*

Why were the Christians in Smyrna facing poverty? It may well have been that they were shut out from business by *those who say they are Jews and are not*. Says Michael Wilcock: “The persecution at Smyrna was made especially poignant by the fact that the great enemy was the local community of Jews. These were God’s people racially, but not really (Rom 2:28), and were in fact blaspheming God as they persecuted his church under the guise of doing him service (Jn 16:2). Perhaps it was economic pressure from these Jews that brought the church to poverty and slanderous accusations by them (for ‘Satan’ means ‘slanderer’) that led to imprisonment and death’.<sup>2</sup>

Why does Jesus add *yet you are rich*? Surely he means that whilst they may have been struggling financially, they were in real terms rich, because (as we saw over summer from Ephesians 1:1-14), they have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm. We who live in Australia in 2018 – by any world comparison – are rich. We have food, shelter, clothing, transport, education, health services. We are rich financially – even if you are currently struggling to make ends meet! Yet, we are reminded again of the wealth of our spiritual blessings. Do you recall? We have been chosen to be holy and blameless, adopted as God’s sons and daughters, redeemed – rescued from sin and death, informed of God’s great plan to bring everything into unity under Christ and sealed with his Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Rich beyond compare. Jesus knows your afflictions today – whatever they may be – including any financial struggles. So remember that he knows! And remember that you are in fact, rich!

### **DAY 3: Read Revelation 2:8-11**

There are loads of different ways people suffer today. And many in our congregation who have known great suffering over a long time. Whether it be making a mistake at work and the fall out that follows; or losing a loved one, or having a stroke, or having a serious car accident, or having been abused in one way or another or know the debilitating effects of a chronic disease. But friends, we need to be clear, none of those forms of suffering – as significant as they are – are on view here when we speak of suffering. No, the suffering the Bible more readily speaks of, is that which arises specifically from staying true to the Lord Jesus. This is the suffering I was referring to in the first sermon in this series, experienced by 215 million Christians around the world, each and every day!

Jesus exhorts us not to be afraid of such suffering. It is an exhortation not to be afraid in the face of something small like ridicule, or being overlooked for a work promotion, or being ostracised by your kids because they don’t like that you trust in Jesus; or something way more serious which we may never face here – like outright persecution, torture or death! Considering what small impact we will face here in Noosa, I think we need to step up and speak up for Jesus!! But the reason Jesus says *do not be afraid* is because our exposure to such suffering will be limited: limited by him. It may go for 10 days – but not 11. These numbers are almost certainly not to be taken literally, but indicate that Jesus himself will set a limit on the persecution we will face. And when Christians die for following Jesus; as hard as it is for the church left behind, that is God’s way of limiting their exposure to persecution as he takes them home to himself – as he ‘promotes them to glory’! Which takes us right to the amazing promise – *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life*. Death for Jesus, means receiving the crown of life. What glorious things await us all!! We must therefore, not be fearful, but faithful. We must look not at the suffering, but beyond it to the all-controlling God who sees, and knows and has overcome!

### **DAY 4: Read Psalm 13**

This a Psalm of absolute honesty before God. David obviously felt utterly abandoned by God – forgotten. He felt that his enemy would triumph over him; he had great sorrow in his life and calls out desperately to God. He is anxious that not only will his enemy triumph but boast in so doing. How long before God will answer and decisively intervene?

I’m sure you’ve had moments like this. This is a permission giving Psalm. We learn by example that we are free to approach God with our honest thoughts and feelings. Why aren’t you doing anything God – about my cancer, my pain, my family, my finances, my....?

But note the important change of tone as v5 begins. It’s as if he’s gone away and taken some time to reflect on and recall the very character of the God to whom he speaks. He has realised that he has nowhere else to turn but to the unfailing love of God and his salvation. He realises how good God has been to him in the past and is therefore able to trust him in the future. Bring whatever concerns you have to God today and then rest in his unfailing love.

*References: Paul Barnett (see p1) and Michael Wilcock in ‘The Message of Revelation’ in the BST series*

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Wilcock *The Message of Revelation*, in the Bible Speaks Today series.