

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 18 February 2018
Services: 730, 930 Tewantin, 930 Peregian
Series: 7 searching letters
Passage: Revelation 2:8-11
Title: To the church in Smyrna
Outline: Authority
What's good
What's not
Action
Encouragement

Ridicule... that's the worst I've known for following Jesus.

Richard was in my economics class in year 11 and 12.

He used to give me such a hard time for being a Christian. He was very critical of Fred Nile – just when he was starting to get famous... and just lumped me in with him...

It was **awkward**... I felt **belittled**... but that was all...

And then in my first work place I was given a hard time... especially after putting a Christian fish sticker on the back of my car... the only other worker at work with a fish sticker on the back of their car was known as lazy and a liar... so I got lumped in with him....

It was **awkward**... I felt **belittled**... but that was all... //

How would you feel if your church was bombed last week and several of your church members killed... people you knew and loved?

How would you feel if your friend became a Christian on Friday and was killed by his boss on Monday *because* he'd become a Christian?

How would you feel if you had to meet in a different place and at a different time each week as a church just to escape detection by the authorities...?

Oh friends – may we never actually know what all that feels like – but can you **imagine** for a few moments??

And it's into that type of situation – *and* into our lesser situation of *ridicule*, that these 7 letters – in fact the entire book of Revelation – speaks. //

If you were there in the middle of such a situation... you would want to hear God speak wouldn't you...?

What are you **doing** God?

Why is this **happening** God?

When will this **stop** God?

How **long** O Lord??

You remember over the last two weeks, that what we read here is a vision of **Jesus** given to **John**...

And in these 7 letters – we're looking at the 2nd this morning – the letter to the church in **Smyrna** – we hear from **Jesus**...

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...and we see that he has

1. **authority** to speak into the situation of persecution...

he tells that them

2. what's **good** that he sees in their life as church...
3. What's **not** – now – this step is in fact **missing** in the letter to Smyrna – there's nothing in that church that receives rebuke or admonition....

But we do see a call to

4. **action**

And a word of

5. **encouragement**...

first let's see the basis of Jesus' authority to speak:

1. AUTHORITY

Have a look with me at v8 *To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.*

So remember – these are the words of Jesus...

And Jesus has authority to speak to the church because – he is the **First** and the **Last**... ie – he was there in the beginning – he will be there at the end... he has pre-eminence over all things... there is no one **before** or **above**... or coming **after**... he's it!

...and in speaking to Christians late in the 1st century who were in a life and death situation... he has authority to **address** life and death situations because he **himself** died and came to **life again**... reminding us of ch 1 v 5, that he is the firstborn from among the dead! //

If you were competing in the winter **Olympics** this week? – you'd want as your coach – someone who had been there done that – who had experienced the challenges you'll be facing...

...when you turn up to the **gym**, you want as your trainer, someone who has done what you're trying to do... get fit... loose weight... tone up....

In your **work-place** – as a mentor – you want someone with experience...

And when you're facing **death** for following **Jesus**... or even a little ridicule... you want someone with you – speaking to you – assuring you – who has been there done that... who went to death at the hands of persecutors – but rose to life as conqueror, and on the basis of HIS resurrection is able to promise you, **yours!** //

Well, what does Jesus have to say in commendation of the Christians at Smyrna?

2. WHAT'S GOOD?

Have a look with me at v9 - *I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich!!*

Remember the power of those opening two words again? – *I know!*

He **knows** about what is happening in his church... in this church!

And here in Smyrna? – he knows the **afflictions** they are undergoing and the **poverty** they are experiencing.

Where are the afflictions coming from and why are they in poverty?

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Back to v9 because I think we're told the answer – Half way through – *I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

There were **Jews** present in Smyrna who **weren't Jews**.

That is, they may have been Jews **racially**, but if they rejected Jesus as Messiah? – they forfeited all the blessings of being God's people.

And like the Apostle Paul before his conversion – these people were making life difficult for the Christians there... they were **slandering** the Christians...

...and this in turn meant – they would have been shut out of **business deals**... people wouldn't sell **food** to Christians; they were **marginalised** in society... **socially** and **economically isolated**...

Hard to buy **bread** when no one will **sell** it to you!

Hard to build up your **business** when no one will **deal** with you!

...so the **believers** faced **poverty**... //

There are Christians facing just **this today**... pushed to one side by other **religious** groups...

Side-lined by secular **humanists**...

Overlooked for **employment** or **promotion** because they trust Jesus...

Even treated shamefully by other supposed Christians today...

We're sobered as we remember the Apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 11 - *for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.*

We must remain alert today for people who are **masquerading** as servants of righteousness...

...for Christians who are not **Christians**... but who lead others astray....

But just before we leave this section... did you notice the bit I haven't commented on?

V9 again – *I know your afflictions and your poverty – **yet you are rich!***

Two possibilities – the Apostle Paul speaks in 1 Timothy 6 of being **rich in good deeds** – so maybe he's commending them Christians in Smyrna for that – they continue to do good despite their physical afflictions and material poverty....

OR - If you were here over summer you'll remember what we saw in Ephesians 1? – that we have **every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm...!**

Riches... riches... - **chosen, adopted, redeemed, informed, sealed...!**

The most **impoverished Christian** anywhere in the world... is still **rich** beyond compare with heavenly spiritual blessing...

And as for us? Friends – let's face it – we're not **impoverished** by those persecuting us for our trust in Jesus...

...in fact – by any world comparison – materially speaking – we're among the most well off people in all the world...

So friends – we need to count our blessings – we are twice rich – **materially** – **and spiritually**...

...and the **ridicule** we cop for following **Jesus**...? it's not causing us to be **impoverished**... its barely an **inconvenience**... compared to what these people were facing – compared to what 215 million persecuted Christians around the world are facing even as we meet here in air-conditioned comfort this **morning!**

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3. **What's not** – as I said – missing in this letter...

4. Call to action

Have a look with me at v10 *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.*

That's it... that's the call to action.

Do not be afraid.

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 (topical!); 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 Jesus speaks of suffering.

This is not what Jesus refers to when he says '*Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer*'.

No, the suffering the Bible more readily speaks of, is that which arises **specifically** from staying true to the Lord Jesus.

Jesus exhorts us not to be **afraid** of such suffering.

Doesn't sound very realistic does it?

You are on a beach with some 20 others – an executioner with a sword standing behind you about to take your head off...

And Jesus says '*do not be afraid*'?

Gunmen walk into your church and just start spraying bullets

And Jesus says '*do not be afraid*'?

Or you're in a prayer meeting at your church in the USA and someone sitting next to you just starts shooting?

And Jesus says '*do not be afraid*'?

We want to scream back don't we? – "don't be afraid! Are you **kidding**"?

Why does Jesus say this?

Well the text tells us... **two** reasons – back to the text – *I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days...*

First reason not to be afraid? Their exposure to persecution will be limited...

The 10 days here – not to be taken literally – but to show that God will set a **limit**... **Satan** might put you in **prison** – but **God** is still calling the shots... that's so important to get **right**...

There may be **10 days** of persecution – or **10 months** – or **10 years** – but there won't be an **11th**!!

God is still in **charge**...

2nd reason not to be **afraid**... end of v10 *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Remain **faithful** – pass the **test** – and you'll receive the **crown of life**!! //

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Do not be afraid... persecution will be **limited** – and on the **other** side...? – the **other** side of the **test** or the other side of **death** – **LIFE!!** Life in the **presence** of **Jesus** for all **eternity!**

You feel the sword running behind your neck before the executioner draws back to remove your head? And you know that within **moments**, you'll be in the **presence** of **Jesus**...!

DO NOT BE AFRAID...! //

Jesus said – “take up your cross and follow me...” that is – lay down your **life** in my **service**... and when and if that means **literally** lay down your life – then because you've already laid down your life in your **head**... your **heart**... // then **literally** laying it down is only **one small step further**...!

It makes our being afraid to speak up because that family member **ridicules** us... **laughable** doesn't it?

it makes our keeping **quiet** because someone at work might give us a **hard** time... it seems like a **joke**...!

here is what Jesus said - *If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.* Mark 8:38

friends, **stand up** for Jesus – and the most you'll cop here in Noosa/Peregian – a good old Aussie **ribbing**; maybe some **isolation** out of a **friendship group**; maybe someone won't invite you to their **next party**... maybe you'll miss out on a **job**... maybe someone will accuse you of **bullying** or **discrimination** if things get serious...

but – **don't be afraid**... Jesus **stands with** you – Jesus will **limit** your **exposure** – he'll set a **time limit**...

we need to be **FAITHFUL** not **FEARFUL**... and when you've been **faithful** – even to the point of **death**, you'll receive the **crown** of **life**...!!

finally, there's a word of

5. ENCOURAGEMENT

this is consistent with all the other letters... have a look with me in v11 – right at the end ...*To he who overcomes...* (**PEREGIAN** 2011 NIV – *The one who is victorious... will not be hurt at all by the second death.*

Our immediate question... what does he mean by 'second death'?

We don't have to guess – later in Revelation we're told **exactly** what it is – it's not easy reading – **Revelation 21: 8** *the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.*

Remember the **political cartoons**? – the **picture** language - it's graphic... but this is – **eternity** without **God** – **away** from his presence – out of the sphere of his goodness and influence...

And the promise to those who are victorious in staying **faithful**... **this is not for you**...!

The second death POSES NO THREAT FOR THOSE WHO TRUST AND FOLLOW JESUS! //

Let me finish with a **story** – which arises from **Smyrna** some **60 years after** this letter... but a story perhaps influenced heavily by what Jesus says in this letter...

Polycarp was a **bishop** in **Smyrna**. He had been a student of John to whom this vision in Revelation was given.

He was arrested on the charge of being a Christian. They wanted this “cult” stopped!!

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Amidst an angry mob, the Roman proconsul took pity on such a gentle old man and urged Polycarp to proclaim, "Caesar is Lord".

If only Polycarp would make this declaration and offer a small pinch of incense to Caesar's statue he would escape torture and death.

To this Polycarp responded, "**Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?**"

Steadfast in his stand for Christ, Polycarp **refused** to compromise his beliefs, and thus, was burned alive at the stake.

He died for **one** reason - his **unyielding faith** in the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Polycarp, like many other Christians to this day, was only able to **die** for Christ because he **lived** for Christ.

His life was radically transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit -- the desires, worries, pains and fears of this world no longer bound him.

Polycarp's life and death provides an inspirational example for all Christians.

He gave his earthly life for Christ, and in the midst of his sacrifice, he gained **eternal life!** //

"Do not be afraid" Jesus says to us... of suffering for Christ - of **standing** for Christ - of **living** for Christ - of **speaking** for Christ....!!

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.