

ACTNow! (Applying Christ's Teaching NOW) follows the weekly sermon series of TPMC, and challenges us to apply and put into practice the biblical truths we hear each week. It is the recommended Bible discussion material for TPMC's Cell Groups, and leader's notes are available to all Cell Group Leaders and at the Information Counter.

The Seven Churches of Revelation: Smyrna

Revelation 2:8-11

Ps Eddie Ho

SERMON SYNOPSIS

- In John's message to the church in Smyrna, Jesus, introduced as the First and the Last, who was dead and came to life, tells the Christians that He knows their works, tough times, poverty and unfair accusations by the Jews and Romans. In fact, the city's name, Smyrna, came from the word myrrh. Myrrh is a gum or resin that needs to be pressed in order to bring out its essence used for incense – similar to what the Christians were facing.
- All Roman subjects were required to worship the Roman emperor. Because of their monotheistic stance, Jews were exempted. The early converts of Christians were Jews, but the Jews rejected the Christians. Christianity started to spread among the Gentiles and after a while, there were more Gentile believers than Jews. Hence the Romans saw Christians as separate from Jews and required them to worship the emperor. This resulted in persecution of Christians. The Jews were also slandering Christians, considering them as separatists, and accusing them as savages because they eat "the body" and drink "blood."
- Jesus alerted the Smyrna Christians that the tribulation they were experiencing was the work of Satan – the ruler of this world (Revelation 2:9). The devil is an opponent of God and seeks to frustrate God's purpose. He is the master of deception and attacks man's mental realm with lies (John 8:44).
- Jesus comforted the Smyrna Christians, telling them not to fear the persecution to come, leading to much suffering. He encouraged them to remain faithful even when they are thrown into prison and in the face of death. For He who overcomes will inherit the crown of life and not be hurt by the second death.
- What are the kind of persecution or slander we face today as Christians? Christians are accused of being arrogant because of the exclusive truth that Christians believe and proclaim (John 14:6). In recent times with the rise of the acceptance of LGBTQ, Christians are accused of being intolerant, bigots, homophobic because we believe in the biblical design of one man and one woman.
- We may be misunderstood in this world, but we are reminded that being right doesn't mean we must win the argument now. We should address the false accusations in gentleness and with respect (1 Peter 3:15).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The church in Smyrna faced trials and tribulations due to their Christian practices and values that ran counter to society of the day. While there is religious freedom in Singapore, persecution of Christians comes in subtle ways in the moral and intellectual realms. Have you encountered situations where there was tension with non-believers leading to ridicule and trials when we stand up for Christ in a secular setting?

Writing Team:

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Lye Kuan Loy, Ravi Cuttilan, Sharon Ward

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[Children's Activity: The following shares stories of children/people in various countries facing persecution of Christians. Share the stories with the children and have the children spend time praying for these people in other countries. You're never too young to start interceding for others. <https://www.kidsofcourage.com/>]

2. When we encounter trials and persecution, Revelation 2:9-10 reminds us that it is the work of Satan behind those deeds of men. We need to identify the true enemy in the face of tribulation. How can we toughen ourselves to deal effectively against the deceit and attacks of the evil one? [Verses to help us go deeper: 1 Peter 5:8-11; Romans 8:31-39; Ephesians 6:10-20]
3. Most of us would rather avoid suffering and persecution. But Christ said in this life we will be persecuted. How should we posture ourselves for the trials and tribulations that may befall us? What attitudes should we adopt in dealing with our persecutors? [Verses to help us go deeper: 1 Peter 3:15-17; Romans 12:9-21]

PRAYER POINTERS

- Thank Jesus for setting the example on how to face trials and tribulation, and the suffering that comes along, that He is a God who understands our affliction because He also experienced it.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in identifying the schemes of the devil in trials so that we do not become angry with the people who persecute us.
- Ask the Lord for His grace and mercy to help us face the trials that come our way, be faithful to the end in overcoming suffering and use the armour of God effectively.

MEMORY VERSE

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. [2 Corinthians 1:3-4, ESV]

PRACTICAL HANDLE

There are many Christians in other parts of the world who face constant persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ. You can find some of these testimonies and stories from the Bible Society of Singapore eg, Egypt (<https://www.bible.org.sg/egypt/>), Cambodia (<https://www.bible.org.sg/modern-khmer-bible-at-the-heart-of-the-revival-of-the-cambodian-church/>) or how to pray for various countries from Overseas Missions Fellowship (<https://omf.org/singapore/spidergram/>). Intercede for their spiritual well-being and seek God's help in their point of need as they draw strength from the Lord to be overcomers.

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