

There's A Storm Coming

Long Beach Alliance Church • September 30th, 2012 • Pastor Chris Lankford

***Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you;
not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not
let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.***

~John 14:27 (NASB)

1) The Pretentious City Of Smyrna

- A) The city of Smyrna distinguished itself among all the cities of Asia Minor for its “municipal vanity.” Local coinage would often read “the first in all of Asia,” and including victor’s wreaths (crowns), self-rewarded for beauty and the distinguished civic pride of the citizens.
- B) Smyrna prided itself as the birthplace of Homer (*The Odyssey*), and like Ephesus, its rival city forty miles South, had a highly lucrative port for its over 100,000 citizens, which funded sought after wines from vast local wineries.
- C) Because of its wealth and civic pride, Smyrna was particularly well-known for its two temples erected to Caesar’s (one was also for worship of the Roman Senate). This imperial cult* was a key economic feature of Smyrna.

*The imperial cult permeated virtually every aspect of city and often even village life in Asia Minor, so that individuals could aspire to economic prosperity and greater social standing only by participating to some degree in the Roman cult. Citizens of both upper and lower classes were required by local law to sacrifice to the emperor on various special occasions, and sometimes even visitors and foreigners were invited to do so. It was almost impossible to have a share in a city’s public life without also having a part in some aspect of the imperial cult. Pressure on Christians to conform to such participation would have increased during Domitian’s reign (81–96 A.D.). Those refusing to participate were seen as politically disloyal and unpatriotic and would be arrested and punished according to Roman law (e.g., exile, capital punishment). But genuine Christians could never call anyone Lord except Christ. *New International Greek Commentary, The Book of Revelation*, by G.K. Beale, pgs. 240-241.

2) The Church In Smyrna

- A) Judaism was a recognized religion by the government in Rome. This allowed the Jews to avoid all aspects of the imperial cult, as well as worship of other deities in the other numerous local cultic temples (e.g., temple of Asclepius).
- B) Christianity was considered a Jewish sect, protecting Christians from cult taxation (financial advantage), cult/idol worship (religious purity advantage), and relationships with Jewish friends (social/financial/religious advantage).
- C) But in Smyrna, things changed quickly for local Christians as Jews began reporting Christians to local Roman authorities as non-Jews, and thus subject to all the local laws requiring full participation in idol worship.
- D) True Christians could never offer cult sacrifices, which often led to imprisonment. Prison usually resulted in stiff fines, severe inquisition beatings, and capital punishment.

3) The Eternal Crown Of Life

- A) Jesus writes the Smyrnian Christians (Revelation 2:8) addressing their “tribulation and poverty” (2:9), brought on by faithless Jews, who were fulfilling Satan’s purposes.
- B) Jesus emphatically commands His followers to FEAR NOT, despite increasing persecution (2:10). The text indicates a foreboding future at the hands of the devil for a short time.
- C) However, it is also revealed that the impending persecution is not simply Satan’s temptation to deny Christ, but also Christ’s “test” of faithfulness, meant for our success. Followers of Christ look exclusively to Jesus for vindication!
- D) The reward of the eternal crown of life is for those who persevere, perhaps even until death. For the faithful overcomer (2:11), no further pain from the “second death” will occur, a clear reference to eternal death in Hell, the lake of fire (cf. Revelation 20:14, 20:6, 21:8).



There's A Storm Coming
Week of September 30th – October 5th, 2012

Growth Group Homework



Powering Up

1. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend's message on "*There's A Storm Coming*" did you find to be the most helpful, surprising, or challenging? Explain your answer.
2. ***The Lifetime Achievement Award Goes To...*** Who is the person (not including Jesus Christ) who you would give an award for being the "most influential person" in your life? Share who this person is/has been in your life, and why they made such a significant impact on you.



Digging In

Have someone in your group read the short letter to Smyrna found in Revelation 2:8-11, and answer the following questions.

1. Why do you think the letter recognizes Jesus Christ (from Revelation 1:17-18), as "the first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life?" Do you find any special significance for the use of this specific title and the church in Smyrna?
2. The human agents of trouble for the Smyrnan Christians are the Jews who "blaspheme" or "slander" their name (Revelation 2:9). Blasphemy means "any kind of speech that is defamatory or abusive against someone." How did this kind of speech by the Smyrnan Jews make them a "synagogue of Satan?" Why was "blasphemy" a particularly bitter accusation from Christians against the Jews?



3. The Christians in Smyrna chose to reject the secular cult practices (worship of other gods) and “the imperial cult” (worship of the Caesar’s), which was extremely damaging both economically and socially.

Since secular cult worship was required by local laws, all businesses associated their success with deities, and met together for partnerships, associations, and social connections and making simple loyalty sacrifices to deities. Not sacrificing to these deities would completely remove you from the common life of the city, and often meant losing most/all of your friends, simply because you were a Christian.

Imperial cult worship, which was a huge aspect of civic life in Smyrna, included drinking a wine sacrifice and making some sort of an offering to the Caesar (either dead or living) to express your allegiance to Rome. Not sacrificing to the Caesar’s was considered dangerous, since rejection of Caesar worship could bring the attention of Rome, and her armies for those lacking in loyalty. You can imagine how this went over with people in Smyrna, and why many Christians were killed there, less than 10 years after John wrote Revelation.

In what ways do modern Christians face persecution of the “Smyrnan flavor?” Do you feel the church would be helped or hindered by the kind of life/death persecution which faced Christians in Smyrna? How would your family be impacted if you had to make a choice to either “go with the flow” of the culture, or “take a stand” against a secular culture because of loyalty to Jesus?



Connecting To Life

1. Smyrna’s civic pride led them to crown themselves as the best city in all of Asia, even putting crowning wreaths on their coins to express their convictions. How does the modern Christian genuinely “stand for Jesus Christ” in a secular culture rapidly moving away from Christian morals and/or principles?
2. Read Revelation 2:10-11 aloud in your Growth Group. John seems to connect “being faithful” as a condition for receiving a “crown of life,” and then being an “overcomer” with avoiding the “second death” (“Lake of Fire,” 20:14, 6, 21:8). Note, this doesn’t mean your works earn you Heavenly reward, but it does beg the question, “how are faith and eternal life connected in our lives?”