

Introduction: Kids. Greetings (Connect Card) Proud of You! You got up! Jesus is so good, you could throw the clock ahead four hours and we'd show up! Am I right? Revelation 2:8-11. Pg. ____.

**“Be Faithful”
Revelation 2:8-11**

As we continue our time in this final book of the Bible, there is a touch of irony that will help us not only understand what's going on but also help us live in the way Jesus modeled and desires for us.

The Book of Revelation records a historical event in which Jesus came to one of his closest disciples, John, to reveal what was about to take place. *Read 1:1-2*

So Jesus was helping John see what he could not otherwise see, so that he could pass this message on to followers of Christ scattered across modern day Turkey.

Now, as we move through each of these seven letters Jesus penned for these seven churches, the key for each one lies in what they see. Each letter begins with a vision of Jesus and it ends with a vision of what he has promised us! Do you see that? :)

These letters teach us that the key to living lies in where we fix our eyes! This is why Jesus said in another place: “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy your whole body will be full of light!”

This is true every day of our lives whether life great or life is really, really hard.

As we're going to see in Revelation 2, Jesus writes to Christians in Smyrna who were experiencing how difficult life can be because of the evil people around them.

- Last Friday morning, as we were praying for people who are hurting in our church, God gave me a picture of hope...
- (FCF) So often, we live life, especially in times of difficulty and suffering as if we are walking through the February ice and snow left after a winter storm. How do we do that? Our eyes are down, focused on each step at a time, so we don't slip and fall. We only see what is immediately in front of us. We can't move past the circumstances of today.
- That's really smart in the winter, but that's not the way Jesus wants us to live the Christian life. Jesus wants us to lift our eyes, like a runner coming down Boylston Street on the third Monday of April with their eyes on the finish line, because they know the reward coming to all who complete the world's greatest Marathon.

Throughout Revelation, Jesus is saying LOOK UP!! See who I am. Look at what I've promised!

It's by looking up that we will be able to carry out the essence of his letter to Smyrna. Jesus calls us to . . .

The Point: Be faithful until death, and you will receive the crown of life.

Jesus is at once an idealist and a realist. He knows how astonishingly good the future will be, but does not ignore how hard today could be. Jesus is a faithful Shepherd. His wise words guide us in the journey.

Read 2:8-11

1. Be captivated by a vision of Jesus when you suffer. (2:8)

In verse 8, Jesus reveals himself as “*the* First and Last.” That’s Capital F. Capital L. This is a title he deserves.

- What does it mean?
 - It is another way of saying. There is no one before him and there will be no one after him. Jesus is the Creator of all things, and everything will culminate in him.
 - This is exactly what God the Father says about himself in 1:8 – “I am the Alpha & Omega.” (First letter of the Greek Alphabet, Last letter of the Greek Alphabet).
 - Do you see the connection? Not only is Jesus claiming to be divine, but he is helping understand what it means to be God.
- Just ask yourself, how much bigger could he be? What other qualifications would look nicer on his resume?
- As the Psalmist says: “from everlasting to everlasting [he is] God.” (Psalm 90:2)

T: not only that... These are the words of him...

“Who died and came to life.”

- We don’t have to wait until Easter to celebrate resurrection. It’s every Sunday and EVERY DAY reality!
- Here’s the really cool part for us... IF you are in Christ, you are a walking picture of resurrection.

Why did this matter for the Christians in Smyrna and why does it matter for us today?

- If your God can conquer death, your God wins. HA!
- If Jesus conquered death, we can run to him in EV-ER-Y SITUATION and EV-ER-Y MOMENT of our suffering.
- There is nothing we will face, that this one, single, life-changing, cosmos altering truth will not get you through!

T: Do you believe that? Jesus wants to raise your hope here this morning!

2. Do not fear. Jesus is present when you suffer.

In verse 9, Jesus addresses their present suffering...

- His first two words are, ONCE AGAIN, “I know.”
 - Remember: each individual letter is for the benefit of all the churches. The fact Jesus “knows” reminds us of the truth highlighted in the first letter to Ephesus, namely, that Jesus is the one “who walks among the seven golden lampstands.”
 - He is present among his people, by his Spirit.
- “One of the most discouraging effects of suffering is that we feel alone.” (Hamilton)
 - Which is why we NEED ONE ANOTHER...
 - Get in a GROUP.
- But in Christ we are never alone! He says, “I know. I’m with you. I understand.”
 - This knowledge should bring both comfort and gratitude.

- Hebrews 4:14 - "For we do not have a high priest...."

T: There are three things he knows.

- Jesus knows their tribulation.
 - This is also translated as "affliction" or "pain." It points to their suffering and experience of persecution, not only at the hands of the Romans, but also the Jews.
 - They were going through it. These were really hard times, and the next two terms describe what this tribulation looked like.
- Jesus knew their poverty.
 - This is not a bad jobs report and exports falling leading to a bearish market. The followers of Jesus in Smyrna experienced economic hardship because they were persecuted. Don't give those weird Christians that job. Exact a higher tax from them. Charge them a different rate. Marginalize the minority culture whenever you get a chance.
 - But let's consider a few things about poverty.
 - 1. Poverty is a reality. It is not going away. Jesus even said in Mark 14: "You will always have the poor among you."
 - 2. Poverty is not part of God's design. It is a result of the fall. Therefore, we should always work to help the poor and alleviate all human suffering.
 - 3. There is something worse than material poverty, something infinitely worse: spiritual poverty.
 - I met a man who did not have much on Friday morning. God led me to buy him breakfast. We got to talk. He believes in Jesus!!
 - I showed him these words ("I know your poverty (but you are rich!), and he was overwhelmed.
 - We were the two richest people in the room!
 - Paul talked about this paradox in 2 Corinthians 6:10: "We are treated as . . . poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything."
 - Don't you love how Jesus, encourages us! You're rich! Filthy rich! Stacks on stacks on stacks.

Finally, he says...

- I know how you are slandered.
 - People were speaking falsely against them to ruin their reputation.
 - But notice who is slandering them. It's not the "pagan Romans," but the religious Jews, who not only had major theological differences but were also driven by jealousy and hate. They could turn them under the bus to the Romans. "Hey, they're not with us. You should make them worship Caesar like everyone else."
 - And Jesus is straight up. He says they are not really Jews, because being a Jew was never solely about bloodlines but a matter of the heart, sharing the same faith, which included faith in God's coming Messiah (you know, the one "who died and came to life.")
 - By the way, your family tree will not save you. Only your relationship to Jesus.
 - Jesus goes on to call them "a synagogue of Satan." Wow. He boldly says, "If you are not for me, you are working with my ultimate adversary and enemy."

APP: It was not popular, nor easy to profess one's faith in Jesus. Perhaps you feel this today.

- Maybe it's from your family. Maybe it's colleagues at work. Maybe you get marginalized or stereotyped in conversations. We can expect it.
- Paul said it in 2 Timothy 3: **"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12)**
- But Jesus says, in verse 10, "DO NOT FEAR."
 - He puts his hand on our back (like he did John in chapter 1:17) and says, "Do not fear. I am with you."
 - That's a very loving command from Jesus.

T: We need to remind one another during times of trouble.

3. Be faithful to Jesus until the very end.

Jesus moves from their current suffering to what they are about to suffer in verse 10.

- He says that behind the work of evil people is the evil one. God's greatest enemy and ours.
 - The devil is a liar and a murderer. He doesn't play nice. He can't take our salvation, but he works to discourage and trip us up any way he can.
 - Ephesians 6:12 tells us about the spiritual war going on in unseen realms. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers..."
- The devil is about to ramp up the opposition in the form of imprisonment. Thankfully, it seems that this intensifying persecution will only last for a short season. "For ten days you will have tribulation."
 - This could refer to a literal 10 days, but Jesus is probably saying it will only last for a short season. Why do I think that?
 - There is a clear echo to the Book of Daniel, where Daniel and his friends abstained from the king's food for 10 days to be tested to see whether it was better to obey God rather than the voice of the King, just like the Christians in Smyrna would obey God rather than the voice of the Roman Emperor.
 - We need to hear that. Life is hard. Trouble will come, but it usually only comes for a season. Remember that when the weeks seem long and you're experiencing your own challenges.
- But in our darkest moments, we need to remember: it's only for a season and God is at work in our suffering. Jesus says there is a purpose for their "testing." What's happening here? God is using Satan to accomplish his purposes.
 - When we are tested... when we go through difficulty, we are proving the genuineness of our faith! 1 Peter 1:3-9
 - Don't YOU LOVE THIS! God uses the exploits of the enemy to reveal who really belongs to him.
 - But the question for us is: Will you stand strong under duress? Will we persevere?

Will we BE FAITHFUL until the very end!

- To be faithful means to remain loyal to God no matter the circumstances.

- This is our call as Christians: **“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)**
- William Carey, “The Father of Modern Missions” summed up life and ministry in this statement: “Only let us be faithful.”
- Philip Doddridge, 18th century hymn writer once confessed, “I am more afraid of doing what is wrong than of dying.” Wow. Would you rather die than dishonor Christ?
- Wrapped up in this command to be faithful... is...the responsibility we have to be courageous in the face of opposition. Where do we get this courage?
 - From a conviction that Jesus is better than life itself. Yes! “To live is Christ; to die is gain.”
 - But also from remembering the one “who died and came back to life.”
- Jesus is the one who was faithful until death. He is the one who “for the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising it’s shame,” so that through his death we might have life and be able to live our lives just like him, through his power!
- This is a blazing love... a love at the first. (Rw)
- [??Revelation 12:10-11??]

T: Finally...

4. Take hold of Jesus’ promise of life.

Verses 10-11

Last week I encouraged us to “chase the promise.” (Why? We go after it... It’s out there, and we’re running toward the reward!

But today, let’s think about taking hold? Grab it! Hold on!! How do we take hold? BY FAITH!

Immense reward IS COMING!

1st: “I will give you the crown of life.”

- “Don’t quit, even if it costs you your life. Stay there believing. I have a Life-Crown sized and ready for you.
- And verse 11 really restates verse 10

2nd: “The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.”

- The one who conquers is the one who is faithful!
- And they will NOT be hurt by second death.
- If you are in Christ, death cannot touch you. You can stare in the face of death and say: “Kill me, but you can’t kill me.”

Conclusion:

Keep your head up! Lift your eyes. Be faithful to him!

Response: Bear a burden. Pray.