

Revelation 2:8-11 – The Church in Smyrna: Faithful Under Pressure

What can we do to help a fellow Christian who is ready to cave in under pressure? Usually we wouldn't say that things are going to get worse before they get better! But that's what Christ does in several of his letters to churches in Asia. He confronts believers who have compromised morally and spiritually. But he also encourages them. This kind of commendation and critique is essential for spiritual health.

Warm Up Question(s) – choose one

- What kind of pressure have you been under lately? What is the most (or least) helpful wisdom or advice you've received on how to handle the pressure?
- What different kinds of “riches” are there? When have you felt very rich one of these ways?

Discovering the Word

- 1) **Read Revelation 2:8-11.** Describe the situation of the church in Smyrna. How do you think they felt when, as they gathered together to listen to Revelation read, they heard Christ address them and say, “I know the extreme pressure¹ you are under”?
- 2) Smyrna was a beautiful city and was often called “The Crown” or “The Flower of Asia”.² Yet it was also a city with people that displayed ugly hostility towards Christians. What does he who knows the pressure they are under say to them (any commendations or critiques³)?

Why is there no promise to lift the pressure? What promise(s) does Christ give them?

- 3) How does Jesus introduce and describe himself to the church in Smyrna (v.8; cf. Is. 41⁴; 44⁶)? Why do you think he drew their attention to these particular features?
- 4) Jesus tells the church not to be afraid of suffering and promises they will not be hurt by the second death. What fears are most common in your spiritual life? How can God's promises strengthen us in those moments?
- 5) How might the church's poverty in Smyrna have been caused by economic persecution (cf. Heb. 10³⁴)? How would it feel to be told by Christ that they are “rich”?
- 6) Over 380 million Christians are facing persecution today.⁴ Watch the 4-minute story about pastor Kham from our global mission agency Multiply (<https://multiply.net/story/the-cost>). How does hearing this story affect the way you think about your own faith or freedoms?
- 7) In Revelation 2¹¹, Jesus tells the early church they will be victorious. What are some practices in our spiritual growth that help us stay connected to Jesus so we can experience this victory in Christ?

¹ The word translated “afflictions” is the Greek word *thlipsis*, which has the idea of extreme or “crushing pressure”.

² Smyrna rivaled Ephesus as “the first city of Asia”. On their coins were stamped the words “First City of Asia in Size and Beauty”. It was the birthplace of many great writers, chief among them Homer. The city had many magnificent temples and was known as a city of culture.

³ Notice that this is the only one of the seven letters that mentions no problem and gives no warning.

⁴ See <https://www.opendoors.org/> and this 4 minute video <https://vimeo.com/1154078106?fl=pl&fe=sh>



Many members of the early church paid the ultimate price for following Jesus. History is filled with stories of their courageous and costly witness for Christ. But being a martyr (Greek for “witness”) is not just a thing of the past. According to Open Doors, more than 380 million Christians are currently facing persecution for their faith (www.opendoorscanada.org)

This can take many forms—legal discrimination, job loss, excommunication from family, and even physical assaults. In February 2025, for instance, a savage attack in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) resulted in the beheading of seventy believers. In June 2025, at least 218 Christians were killed and more than 6,000 displaced by Islamic attacks. In September 2025, nearly one hundred more believers were killed in the DRC.

The Mennonite Brethren family has not been exempt from this growing wave of opposition. Earlier this year, we received word from one of our MB pastors that soldiers had come into his village in Rakhine State, Myanmar, and stolen everyone’s possessions. The soldiers then set fire to all the houses, and confiscated the pastor’s motorcycle.

“We grieve with our Myanmar brothers and sisters who have lost so much but we also thank God that no one was killed in the recent attacks,” a Multiply leader says. “Everyone arrived safely after walking for three days to the next village. When the traumatized villagers arrived, our MB family in that village was ready to welcome them in, feeding them and praying for them.”

Myanmar’s treatment of Christians has become increasingly violent. A military coup in 2021 and ongoing political turmoil have resulted in surging waves of persecution. Believers make up less than 10% of the population, yet last year 40,000 Christians were forced to leave their homes.

As the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar worsens, pastors report that there is an unprecedented open door for believers to share the love of Jesus Christ with Buddhist people. “Thousands of internally displaced people are discovering that Jesus is the Living God who answers prayer and brings hope to those who have lost everything,” a key national leader shares. “Even though our Myanmar pastors and evangelists live in constant danger, they are praising God that more than one hundred Buddhist and Animist people responded to the Good News of Jesus Christ over the last few months, and have chosen to be baptized! Hallelujah! The love of Christ really is good news!”

Following Paul’s example, we can remember our brothers and sisters as they face persecution, making mention of them in our prayers (Ephesians 1:16). Please join us in lifting up this Multiply leader’s prayer:

Father God, thank You for Your amazing grace that comes to those who are poor in spirit in Myanmar and throughout our world. Our eyes well up with tears of joy as we see so many hopeless people receive forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ and the gift of eternal life.

Jesus, we intercede for those who are fleeing war and violence every day. We pray especially for those who are without medicine, doctors or clinics. Where can people go for healing and comfort except to You?

God of all compassion and love, we pray for mothers, young women, and children. Protect them from the violence and terror of the evil one. Send Your angels to protect them.

Holy Spirit, we ask that You would help Your disciples to be a beacon of hope and courage, providing protection to the vulnerable in a land torn apart by hatred and violence. Thank You, Lord, for the love and generosity of the church, for the boldness of our Myanmar evangelists, and for helping the church provide food and shelter to desperate people fleeing the violence of war.

In Myanmar, in DRC, and in every corner of the world where your disciples are paying a severe price to follow You, may Your Kingdom come and your will be done, just as it is in heaven. Amen!

By Christopher Lane <https://multiply.net/story/modern-day-martyrs>