

# Revelation: A Message to Smyrna

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if a dead man. That always strikes me when I look at that passage and look at how Christ is described in Revelations, verse 17, chapter 1.
- I wonder if we see God that way. I wonder if we were in that throne room and God came up, Christ came up to us, what our reaction would be.
- Would we have the same reaction? Often we talk to people and they would say, yeah, I'll just give them a high five and say, hey, dude, it's so good to see you and you're my buddy and you're my homeboy. But the message is a little different in God's word.
- When I come to Revelations, sometimes I just kind of weird out because it breaks down all my stereotypes and all the thoughts and images I think of God and how I expect him to act and what I want from him and what I expect from him.
- It changes all those things. So this week has been a crazy week in the Miller House. Christina is gone, so you can tell by the way I've dressed today. Yes, thank you very much.
- [ 1 : 1 4 ]     So she's gone and I took our youngest daughter with her to visit her sister in San Francisco. And so I have the two older kids and Rebecca's on a mission trip. Hopefully she'll come back today with the rest of the mission team praying about that or Eric is fired.
- And what that usually means in my house when dad is by himself, it means that there's very little rules when it comes to consumption of food or how people dress or the things that we do.
- And so, yes, we've been eating Pop-Tarts and pizza a lot now that Christina has been gone. She's coming back tonight. So we're trying to get our final feel of those things before she comes back.
- One of the things I like to do actually is I like to watch movies that she doesn't like to watch. So we go on a date night about every Thursday and we usually catch the latest movie coming out.
- And we kind of have this balance, you know, that she'll go see some guy movies and I'll go see some chick flicks. And sometimes the chick flicks, it's not always a one-to-one because sometimes the chick flicks, they have to have at least a three-to-one because they are so filled with estrogen.
- [ 2 : 2 4 ]     You know, I come home and I don't know whether I want to wrestle somebody or I want to hug somebody. And so I usually watch movies that Christina doesn't like to watch. They're usually science fiction movies and things like that.
- And so I have this list of things that I say, okay, I'll watch it here and I'll watch it there. And so this week I watched this movie. I hadn't seen it in a long time, but I wanted to watch it because I just think that as we go through the book of Revelations, this movie to me, and I know I think, you know, as a pastor, but it has so much to say for us today.
- And the movie takes place in 1975, so it's an old movie. It's a slow movie. So don't go listen and watch it now because you're going to probably be incredibly bored. But it tells the story of this lady, Joanna.

And Joanna is this well-known photographer. And she actually gets an assignment and her husband, and they move out of New York. And they move to this small little sleepy town in Connecticut.

And Joanna is going around in this small little sleepy town. And it's not too long before she realizes that something's not right in this town. I mean, she looks around, and all the wives are perfect.

[ 3 : 33 ] I mean, all the wives, they look beautiful. They're perfect. All the wives look perfect. All the wives act perfect. All the wives talk perfect.

All the wives obey their husbands. She's looking around, and she's noticing that there's never an argument. There's no one ever gets fussed. The wives never disagree with their husbands.

There's never this tension in the marriages. There's never pain. There's never misunderstandings. And at first, she thinks, okay, they've been drugged. He thinks that somehow the men have put in this drug in the drinking water and has drugged all the women in this town so they can act like that.

And that's just not right. And so she goes and she starts to look into things. And what she realizes is in this small little sleepy town of Stepford, that all the men have replaced their wives with robots.

Men have replaced their wives with robots. And she looks at that, and she's realizing these things, and she's trying to call the police to it and bring attention to everything.

[ 4 : 42 ] But she doesn't. I mean, she can't because there's too many people against her. And eventually, she gets turned into a robot. And she turns into a robot. And the movie ends with her acting perfectly and looking perfectly and cooking perfectly.

And she's perfect. And when I think of that movie, I know this is going to sound strange, but I think, you know, that's how many of us think of God.

I mean, we don't want a God. We want a Stepford God. We want a God that's manageable. We want a God that's controllable.

We want a God that's predictable. We want a God that acts just the way that we want Him to act. We want a God that's focused on Tobin. We want a God that's agreeable. We want a God that brings no pain into our life.

We want a God that brings no surprises into our life. We want a God who makes everything perfect. We want a robot God. We want a Stepford God, don't we? We want a God that's made in our image.

[ 5 : 41 ] And then we come to the passage today, and we realize that God isn't like that. That He's far beyond being a Stepford God. He's so different than what we imagine, and that bothers us.

And I think we have to ask, how are we going to react to a God who's not a Stepford God? We're looking in the book of Revelation. It's the last book of your Bible.

We talked about it last week. We looked at the church of Ephesus, as Alfie had mentioned. Revelation was written by the apostle John. John was a disciple of Jesus. He was the disciple that Jesus loved. He was probably Jesus' cousin.

And now he's an old man. He's exiled on this prison island of Patmos. He's held captive by this emperor that despises him and despises Christianity.

And after all the other apostles are martyred, everybody's dead. Everybody's just taken out. And John's the only one left. We're told in a book that he's taken up in a vision or a dream or his spirit goes up into heaven and he sees Jesus.

[ 6 : 50 ] And Jesus speaks to them, as we saw in chapter 1. And Jesus tells him these visions of the end days and of who Christ is like and what God is like and what the kingdom of God is like.

And he tells them, I want you to write this letter to this church because these churches need to know what's going to happen and they need to know who I am. And last week we looked at the church of Ephesus. Remember the church of Ephesus?

I mean, the church of Ephesus was the perfect church. It did everything perfectly. It was perfect theology and perfect practice, but they didn't love Jesus. I mean, they did everything perfect.

They were the pastor's dream, but they didn't love Christ. They lost their joy for Christ. Their Christian lives had become mundane. Their Christian lives had become predictable.

Their Christian lives, the spirit wasn't in their life at all. They were just rituals and heartless. And Jesus begged them. He begged them, come back. Come back. I want you. I want a relationship with you.

[ 7 : 43 ] I want to be with you. I want to be your God. I want to be your lover. Today we look at the church of Smyrna.

So Ephesus was the perfect church, but without God. Smyrna is the church that loves Jesus. But probably none of us would want to be in that church. None of us would want to be a part of that church.

None of us would want to face what this church is facing. Smyrna was an amazing city. It was an old, old city. It was probably 1,000 years old before John wrote this. It was a port city, just like Ephesus was.

It was about 35 miles north. It's on a Turkey peninsula. And it was this port city, and it was rich. It was rebuilt and destroyed and rebuilt and destroyed over and over and over again.

It was rival for power for Ephesus. And the church we're going to talk about next week, Pergamum. I mean, it was a beautiful city. All the historians say it was a beautiful city. It was white marble everywhere, and gold was everywhere.

[ 8 : 42 ] I mean, it was the home of Homer. Not Homer Simpson. But Homer, the first Greek poet, about 750 B.C., and as he walked into the city, there was a hill behind the city, and this hill is still there.

And on top of this hill, there were these temples. And so you walk into the city, and you see this hill, and when the sun hit it, gold came off of it and glittered everywhere in the white of the marble.

And you looked up, and it looked like a crown. It looked like this amazing king's crown. It was massive, and it was called the crown city of Asia. There were these games, these Olympic games that rivaled Athens, and more people came to these games than came to the Athens games sometimes.

And at the end, the winner got this crown, this garland, this wreath that was put on his head, and it meant basically free food for the year and free housing for the year. I mean, he was the hero of the town, and everybody gave him whatever he wanted, and everybody aspired to that.

Smyrna was his center of science. It was the hub of medicine in that region. So all the new medical discoveries and things that were happening in science came out of Smyrna. It had a long relationship with Rome.

[ 9 : 54 ] I mean, it went back to Rome and to the Roman Empire a long time. There was a reward. It was given out every year for the person who was most loyal to Rome. It was a crown.

It was a gold and silver crown. And so all the citizens vied for that because they wanted to be Rome's friend, and they wanted that crown, and they wanted it to be known for someone who loves the emperor, and they received it for service. I mean, Smyrna, it was this temple city.

The first temple to Caesar was built there in probably about 195 B.C., and there was this huge cult where everybody worshipped the emperor. I mean, it was the center of emperor worship in the whole peninsula.

And there was a saying that everybody said, Kyrie, Caesar. Kyrie, Caesar. Caesar is Lord. Caesar is Lord.

And you could hear it ringing out almost every day in the temple and in the city because it was just a common phrase like, How are you doing? Kyrie, Caesar. Caesar is Lord.

[ 10 : 57 ] And at least once a year, all the citizens, everybody, they had to come together into the temple, and they had to take a pinch of incense. And they had to come into the temple, and they had to throw it into the fire, and they had to say that oath, Kyrie, Caesar.

Kyrie, Caesar. Caesar is Lord. Caesar is Lord. And after they did it, they got a certificate. And this certificate allowed them to live in Smyrna.

The certificate allowed you to be a businessman. It allowed you to work. It allowed you to own property. It allowed you to eat food. It allowed you to survive. And if you got caught without that certificate, it was bad.

I mean, you could be killed. You risked everything. Kyrie, Caesar, give me the certificate. Now I can get everything that I need.

The only people that didn't have to do that were the Jews, because the Jews were this old religion, and mostly because Jews always called a fuss. They always caused fuss. They always caused uprisings.

[ 11 : 55 ] They didn't want to worship these foreign gods. And so the Jews were exempt. And as long as the Christians were seen as a branch of the Jews, they were okay. As long as Christianity was seen as a branch of Judaism, it was okay.

But things were changing. And soon that was not going to be true anymore. The word Smyrna actually means bitter. In Hebrew, it's myrrh.

You know what myrrh is, right? When Christ was born, the three wise men came, and they gave him gold and frankincense and myrrh. And myrrh was this resin. It came out of this thorny bush. It's still there today.

And what you did is to get the resin out is that you would break the branches, and you would cut the branches, and you would just be tough on this bush. And when you were tough on this bush, it would start to bleed, and it bled myrrh. And the people would come, and they would take the myrrh, and they would boil it up in a little ball like a resin.

And it was actually very, very expensive. It was used in embalming and in temple rituals, and it was this amazing thing. And so when you wanted to get what was inside of this resin, you broke it. And when you crushed this resin, this amazing perfume smell came out.

[ 13 : 01 ] It was like a musk smell. It was very, very heavy. You would remember it if you smelled it. But to get it, you had to crush it. And Jesus is talking to this church, and he's talking to his people.

And he realizes that everybody in that church is being crushed because they refuse to save Curie, Caesar.

They don't have their certificate. They can't live life. And the Jews are making things difficult to them. And he tells John to write this letter. He starts in verse 8.

He says this to the angel of the church of Smyrna. He says, Right. Thus says the first. He's the first.

Before all else, before anything else happened, he's the most prominent. He was. He is. He is the I am. Nothing came before Jesus. I mean, Jesus isn't a Stepford God.

[ 14 : 04 ] He's not a God that we create. He was there from the very beginning. He's the first. He says, I am the first. He says, I am the last. The word in Greek is very powerful.

It means the extreme, the furthest. Nothing will last longer than Christ. He will be there. When all other things pass away, before all other things, he will be there. He was before all other things. He will be after all other things.

He was there. He's God. You see what he's doing? He doesn't even address what's going on in their life. He's just addressing who he is. Because he realizes, as God's people, if we don't understand who God is, it doesn't matter what's going on in our life.

Because who he is determines everything. It determines who we are. It determines what our hope is in. Look at what he goes on.

He goes on. He says, he is the one who died. And he came back to life. I mean, he's the God that entered into creation's story.

[ 15 : 04 ] He spoke. He came into our timeline. He was killed. And he rose again. I mean, think about this. He's not a step for God.

He was. He is. He will always be. He came. He died. He rose again. I mean, all the things that we fear, our greatest fear, Jesus conquered those things.

And he's trying to assure the church. He's trying to give them comfort. He's trying to give them his love. And the only way he can do that is by telling them, this is who I am. I mean, what he's saying is that death no longer has power over me.

Because I was. And I died. And I resurrected. Think about that. We live in a culture that is scared to death of dying.

I mean, we live in a culture where people don't even want to talk about death and the unknown. We fear it. It has this huge power over it.

[ 16 : 13 ] It's our greatest fear in Asia and in Hong Kong. We put the dying people away. We put the cemeteries away so we don't see them. I had someone come up to me one time and they said, hey, this is not good.

This is black. When Chinese people come in here, they look at that and they think, death, that's not good. But this isn't black. It's dark blue. I think.

I think. But death rules us. Death drives us. The fear of dying overwhelms us.

And what Jesus says to this church that is dying, he says, I am bigger and I'm greater than anything. Anything you're ever going to face. I'm bigger and I'm greater than God.

I mean, I think he starts this way because he realizes that we don't get this this week. Do you believe that Jesus is greater than anything you're going to face today?

[ 17 : 25 ] I mean, as you think of your problems, your work and your relationships and your health and your family and your kiddos and the government and your bills and your money and your broken relationships and death.

But is the God who triumphed over death? Is the first and the last, is he the person you're clinging to? When you think of all the things that are crushing you right now, are you clinging to Christ?

What are you hoping in? Jesus, through John, wants you and I and this church to understand this primary truth.

This truth of God's word that no matter what happens to us, no matter what kind of trials and persecutions and tribulations, no matter what Satan throws our way or the world throws our way or our boss throws our way or our spouse throws our way, that no matter how much we're being crushed, he wants us to understand that Jesus is in control.

That he cares for us. Do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus is in control?

[ 18 : 45 ] Do you believe that he cares for you? That he loves you? Even when things are really difficult?

Verse 9, he says, he knows. And it's an amazing word in Greek. It's not just, yeah, yeah, whatever, or that's too bad, or bless your little heart. But what he says is, he knows that Christ is in the midst of your life.

Christ is in the midst of the craziness. It means that Christ is with you, that you're not alone. That he's always there if you're his child. And he continually reminds the church that's going through these incredible times of crushing and beating and crushing and beating, crushing and beating.

I know. I'm with you. You're not alone. I mean, think about it.

This church is being crushed by everything. I mean, verse 10 says, they were poor. And it's not like Hong Kong poor, right? I mean, poor and Hong Kong poor are two different things, right? I remember when I was a pastor, like 10 years ago, I went to a church.

[ 19 : 53 ] And I was in another church. And the guy came up to me and said, hey, please pray for me. I lost my job. I don't know how we're going to survive. And I just took it as he's poor, right? And so I said, yeah.

And I prayed with him. I said, I'll be praying with you the next couple weeks. And let's just pray. And we'll get together. And God will provide. And God's going to provide for your family. And about two weeks later, I found out he goes back to America. And he buys like a million-dollar home. And I look at him.

I said, dude, I thought you were poor. He goes, well, I am kind of poor from Hong Kong standards. But, you know, what he's saying to the people here is they had nothing.

The Greek word means they had nothing. They didn't even have food. They didn't even have clothes. They had nothing. They chose to take nothing because they refused to curry a Caesar.

I mean, they were destitute. They were poor. They gave up everything. Have you ever seen that? I remember when I was in China, when I was working with the underground church, and we were ministering to students in the university.

[ 21 : 05 ] And God was doing amazing things in their life. And they were coming to faith. And they were trusting in Christ. And they were walking with the Lord. And then their junior year came. And their junior year came. And they had to take this oath to become part of the Communist Party.

And I prayed with many, many, many, many, many students. And they knew, if I do this, if I swear allegiance to the party, then I swear against Christ.

And I know that if I do this, and I don't do it, and I don't go and be a part of the party, then I sacrifice everything. I give up everything.

Everybody in my village has saved all their money to bring me here. And I'll let not just them down, myself down, but I'll let them down. I'll let generations down. I'm the first person in my family that's ever gone to college. And if I don't become a member of the party, then everybody loses face.

I don't know what Christ has done for me. And I know how much he loves me.

[ 22 : 10 ] I know the sacrifice he gave for me. And how can I swear against him? I walked away after my first year, and I just realized, man, there are people here who are sacrificing more for the gospel than I ever will.

And they're 18 years old. And the rest of their life is going to be affected because they love Jesus.

He goes on and he says, hey, you know, there's this wealth, and this wealth you don't have right now because you have nothing, but this wealth is stored in heaven. And it's waiting on you.

Do you believe that? I remember I was leading a study, and one of the guys who was not a Christian, he was thinking through these things, and he kind of smirked.

And afterwards, I said, hey, what's going on? He goes, well, you know, you Christians say that all the time. You say it's not important now, but later on, that's what's going on. And he goes, I know and you know that all that matters is right now.

[ 23 : 26 ] Here and now, that's all that's important. Here and now, what I have, what I can count, that's all that's important. And I looked at him as a young Christian, and I said, I'll pray for you.

But I wonder, when we get to heaven, Revelations 1, 12 through 19, and we see Jesus as he is, I wonder if the things that we hold on to is precious.

It's going to look like crap. And I wonder if the things here on earth that we think are crap, and not worthy of our time, I wonder if in heaven they're going to be precious, and amazing.

And they were poor. They were slandered. The Jews and everyone, even some Christians, were slandering them. They didn't take the oath, and so they made it known to everybody. And they said, this new sect, this way, it's not a part of Judaism.

It's totally different. And the heat got turned up. And people were facing really difficult times. And the scripture tells us that. We spent the last six weeks studying 1 Peter, right? He says, if you desire to live godly, you're going to be persecuted.

[ 24 : 50 ] If you're part of the family of God, you're going to be persecuted. The persecution starts with the family of God first. And the heat was turning up there. In verse 10, he says that, he says, very interesting, he says that Satan, the devil, he's causing these things to happen.

The devil has come in, and he's putting you in prison. He wants to get your eyes off of God. He wants to make you think less of God's character. He wants to think you less of the cross. He wants you to think just about here and now.

And Satan uses all these things to help us lose our focus. And he says right here, Satan has done it. And then we learn later on that God allows it. Do you know that God allows everything that happens to you to happen?

You're his child. Everything. Even the worst thing that happened to your life, God allowed that to happen. I mean, the passage says that Satan is causing it to happen like Job. You're losing everything.

But in reality, Satan works for God. And God is allowing all those things to happen. Because God knows, unlike Satan, that when persecution comes, it actually makes us stronger.

[ 25 : 58 ] It makes God's children stronger because what God does is he wants to show us what's really in our hearts. God wants to show us what we really love. God wants to show us what we really worship.

God wants to show us what we really smell like under pressure. I sprayed some rose spray when we first came. I don't know if you can smell that. It's trying to do a 4D effect.

You know, I don't know if it worked or not. One guy said, Christina must not be there because you're just too busy with all these other things. I said, yes, you're right. But what I wanted to do is I wanted to have a rose and I wanted just to crush that rose and say, where did that smell come from?

And you're going to say, well, the rose is inside. The smell is there. When the rose is crushed, what's inside of it comes out. Then I wanted to bring a big durian.

You'd never come back, right? And I want to just go, whoa, and just pop that thing all over this place. Cyberport probably never have us back either. And I wanted to say, where does that smell come from?

[ 27 : 03 ] It's inside. You know, there's a lot of us in here who probably stink like durians. The pressure hasn't hit us yet.

And when the pressure does, it's going to go, and you're going to go, wow. Wow, where'd that come from? That's terrible. I can't believe that. But the passage says that God allows these things to come into our life.

He allows us to be crushed. He allows these difficult things to happen so that we can see what's inside of us so that we can understand grace, so that we can understand his mercy, so that we can repent, so that we can be different.

And this church is facing all of these things, and it was really, really, really, really hard. Verse 10 says that the crushing kept happening, and the crushing kept happening.

And he says, when people were crushed, they realized what crown they were living for. Do you know what crown you're living for? In Smyrna, there were three of them that people really wanted.

[ 28 : 13 ] The first one they really desired was the crown, like I said already, the crown of Caesar's friendship. Everybody wanted the crown of Caesar's friendship. Everybody wanted to be everybody's friend. Everybody wanted to be popular. Everybody wanted to be known by everybody. There was another crown.

It was the wreath of athletes. And everybody wanted that because they wanted to be athletic and popular and praised and free food and free housing. Everybody wanted that. And there's this third crown. It was the wealth of the city.

It was the crown when they looked at it, and they saw the city, and they saw everything highlighted, everything that the city represented, the skyline, the temples, the money, everything that Hong Kong had to offer. People wanted that.

And Jesus was reminding them that there's a greater crown for you. There's a greater crown for you.

Hold on. Don't sell out. Remember who you are. So the question is, what crown are we after?

[ 29 : 17 ] Really? God allows these persecutions and trials and terrible things to happen to this church because he wants to show us, he wants to show them, him.

He wants us to love him, not because of what he does for us, but he wants us to love him because he's beautiful.

Do you see Christ as beautiful? It's amazing here.

Satan, pressure, pressure, and God says, okay, go ahead, because my people will persevere. My people will be different. My people will be stronger. My people, in verse 11, they're going to be overcomers.

They're going to survive. And you notice in this passage, this is one of the few passages where Jesus doesn't rebuke anybody. Did you notice that? He doesn't rebuke anybody. I mean, I think it's because the people are already suffering.



[ 30 : 23 ] I mean, the suffering is already happening. And what you learn in suffering is when suffering happens, false Christians, counterfeit Christians, they just, they just leave.

And all the false Christians, all the counterfeit Christians, all the wannabes, all the ones who wanted the popularity or the relationships, they just left because when the pressure hit and people started, the word actually in Greek means you're laying down and there's this boulder placed on your chest.

And there's this amazing pressure that's happening to you. And what you realize is that when the pressure happens, that all the counterfeit Christians, they just leave. They go out. They don't want to suffer. And so all that was left here was true believers.

Those who didn't say Kyrie Caesar, those who didn't have their certificate, those who are living for a different crown. I remember, all my stories are in Asia mostly.

I was working with some pastors in the north and we were talking about the persecution and in the city that I lived in, persecution was really, really hard. I mean, the churches often got shut down for two or three months.

[ 31 : 33 ] Pastors got pushed into prison. They got beat up. I remember I started this fund for beat up pastors. We raised money for the church and all these things.

And so these guys, because they couldn't, they couldn't pastor. They were in a bed for six months because they had every bone in their body broken. And I gave this fund to this guy and said, hey, we want to take care of you. And he ended up just giving it away to other people in his church.

And he said to me, persecution is good. He says, it shows us who's false.

It shows us who's counterfeit. Counterfeit people don't handle persecution. Counterfeit Christians don't give. Counterfeit Christians don't serve.

Counterfeit Christians just think of themselves. It was 25 years ago. I still remember his words.

[ 32 : 39 ] He told me the story of one night they were having this Bible study and there's about 20 of them in a room. And all of a sudden there was a knock at the door and they opened the door and the public security bureau the secret police walked in.

There was two of them. And everybody stood up and the pastor stood in front. And the officer looked at everybody and says, everybody in here who's not ready to go to prison right now, get out of here.

Everybody in here who's not willing to die for their faith, get out of here. The pastor said about a third of the people left. The officer looked around and says, everybody in here is willing to die for your faith?

And they said, yes. They said, good. Because we've heard about Christianity. We've heard about Christ. And we want to learn from true Christians.

Can you teach us what it means to be a child of God? Persecution refines us. Persecution shows us what's inside of us.

[ 33 : 49 ] Persecution shows us Christ. John ends the letter and he talks about discomfort and promises. There's nothing to fear that Jesus is always with us, that the suffering is just for a short time, that whatever we face, even death, it's going to be okay because in the end, our Savior is going to be there and he's going to welcome us.

No matter what you face now, whatever you're going to go through, we have a God who's already faced all of it and he's ready to give us a crown of life and you can trust him. History tells us that right after this letter was written, about 164 A.D.

to about 304 A.D., there was this massive persecution of Christians in the empire. I mean, finally, Christianity was separated from Judaism. They lost all of their protection and the Romans just went crazy.

Accusations, persecution, death, thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of Christians were killed for their faith. They were thrown into fires. They were drowned. They were tortured. They were fed animals. I mean, it was just amazing and what you read about from the Roman soldiers who are doing this and the other people who are seeing these things, they're saying, hey, the more people we kill, the stronger the faith comes.

The more people who die, the more people will stand up and say, hey, I'm a Christian. We can't stop it. Eventually, Christianity takes over the empire because persecution brings strength and the people understood what was inside of them.

[ 35 : 20 ] They understood who they were and they saw Christ for who he was. Do you see Christ for who he is?

Do you struggle with him being a step for God? I do. There are many times I just compromise.

There are many times it's just too inconvenient. There's just too many times I worry about myself. John, Jesus is encouraging us to persevere.

To persevere. To keep going. My study was church history and theology and seminary. I love to read. And you can go on these websites and you can read about these early church Christians who gave their faith.

In your chair, there's these little squares. We made these trading cards in your chair. So every other chair has a trading card of a person who gave their faith for Christ. We want you to take that home. We want you to read about them.

[ 36 : 32 ] We want you to think about them. We want you to understand their story. It's so amazing to see what people do when they're in love with Jesus and how they follow him. Origen. Origen was one of our church fathers.

He was born in Alexandria in 165 A.D. 202 A.D. Right after this writing, there's a huge persecution and his dad, Leonidas, was a Christian and his dad actually got put into prison.

Origen would go there every day to encourage his dad and not to give up on the faith. And this is a 13-year-old boy. Don't give up on your faith, Dad. Don't give up on your faith, Dad. Jesus is it. Jesus is waiting for us. Jesus is there. Don't give up on your faith, Dad.

And when it came time for his dad to die because his dad won Curie Caesar, it said that Origen wanted to go out and Origen wanted to die with his dad. But his mom hid his clothes and he was too embarrassed to walk out naked and say, I'm a Christian.

Kill me. And he survived and he became one of the early church leaders. The governor of Armenia says that he confronted this mutiny of 40 soldiers who refused to sacrifice to the emperor.

[ 37 : 38 ] The 40 stood before him. It was freezing outside. It was winter in the fourth century. He knew that they were strong and they were tough and they were soldiers and they were adamant and they refused to sacrifice.

They refused to betray their faith in Christ. And he asked, but what about your comrades? Aren't you going to bring shame to the legion? And these 40 guys said that the disgrace of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is more terrible than disgracing our work.

He threatened to flog them. He threatened to torture them. The soldiers stood firm and boldly they said, nothing you can do, nothing you can give us will replace what we will lose in this next world.

All your threats, everything that's going to happen, nothing of it will compare to what we will receive when we gain Christ. We're told that the governor finally commanded everybody to be stripped and he drove them into this ice pond and it was freezing and these guys were in there, 40 of them and they were singing 40 soldiers of Christ, 40 soldiers of Christ, 40 soldiers of Christ, what is death to us but entrance into eternal life, 40 soldiers of Christ and it kept happening and the guys just would not die and all the soldiers are watching and the governor is watching and finally the governor says, I got something that will do it.

Set up hot baths everywhere. Set up hot baths outside and when they see the hot water and the boilingness and all the soothing things they're going to get out and they set up the hot baths, 40 soldiers of Christ, 40 soldiers of Christ and all of a sudden one of them says, I just can't do this anymore and he gets out of the freezing water and he steps into the hot water and he basically dies because of shock and the soldiers that are guarding these guys, one of them says, no and he takes off his clothes and he runs into the water with them and he starts to sing 40 soldiers of Christ, 40 soldiers of Christ.

[ 39 : 32 ] the more the church was persecuted, the stronger it became because people weren't worshipping a Stepford God, they were worshipping the God of the Bible.

We're told later, 50 years after this letter, that Polycarp, he was the bishop of Smyrna, he probably helped John write Revelation because John, in the end, his eyes were going out and he could barely see and he's getting old and so this young guy, Polycarp, came alongside and he was his scribe and 50 years after this letter comes to Smyrna, Polycarp becomes the bishop and he's serving in the church in Smyrna and things are really bad, things are difficult, it's incredibly hard to be a believer and one day, the emperor, the leader of the town has enough and he comes after Polycarp and he says, do the oath or die and we're told that Polycarp walks to the Coliseum and there's just thousands of people, Christians there and non-Christians and they're watching what he's going to do and he says, how can I forsake my Lord who's been so good to me these 80 plus six years and the guards came to him and said, you don't have to say

Caesar is Lord, just say that Caesar's cool, literally that's what they said, just say Caesar's wise and if you don't, we're going to burn you alive and he says, you know that fire is just going to last for a little time but I'll be with my Savior forever.

when you're worshiping a God who's not a Stepford God it's easy to go whatever Satan sends against us because we know that God is in there and he's in control.

You know, it's easy to deny a Stepford God some of us are going to do it every day but you and I this passage says we have a Savior who was crushed for us.

[ 41 : 52 ] We have a Savior who became a sweet aroma as his body was crushed on the cross. Because of his fragrance, because of that aroma, you and I can enter into God's kingdom.

My prayer for us as a church as we read things like Smyrna as we think of the saints who've gone before us that we would ask ourselves questions and the biggest question would be what kind of God am I serving?

Is Christ really the first and the last? Is Christ really those who was born and then rose again? Is he really God? what kind of crown am I seeking for today?

I mean, is the God who conquered everything even death, is he great enough to take me through whatever I'm going to go through today? Why am I fearing if I'm serving Christ?

Because he's there. My prayer is that we would be a church that would be different, we would allow the pressure to come into us and to change us and that we wouldn't smell like durian but we would smell like roses.

[ 43 : 19 ] And as this pressure enters into our life that we would be broken and we'd realize that God is doing this amazing work in our life and that he's there and that he's with us and he's in control and that this is not our home.

Hong Kong is not your home. If you're God's child, your home is in heaven with God. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you that your son was crushed so that we might come to you.

Father, we thank you for the message of Smyrna in your word. I realize that there are some of us in here right now who don't know what crown we're seeking or serving.

That some of us in here are serving other gods and other crowns and that's okay because you're big enough to change your eyes. you're big enough to open their hearts.

[ 44 : 26 ] Lord, I pray for those who don't know you yet that they would ask questions and that we as a church living such radically different lives in the world around us willing to sacrifice for the one who is and was who was born who died and came back to life.

I pray that we'd be a church that would act differently amongst the pressure and the fear and the struggles maybe even in the times that our work when we're called to burn incense pledge allegiance I pray that we would realize the Savior who's gone before us and that we would be different.

Father, I pray for those of us who are your children and we're walking and we so easily so easily lose our focus when trials come in and things become difficult and our step for God isn't the God that we expected but he's not a step for God and we can't control life and we just lose it sometimes.

Lord, I just beg for your mercy. May we be a church that would be honest and real with the brokenness in our lives and around us. May we be a church that continually comes to you and repents.

May we be a church that looks at your goodness and your mercy and your grace daily and moment by moment we understand the gospel anew and what it means for us as we walk with you.

[ 46 : 05 ] Father, we thank you for the examples of the guys on the cards in our chairs in the church of Smyrna. Wow, it is challenging. We know we serve you.

I pray as a church as we go out of here that we would be different. Help us not to smell like the world around us. Help us to smell like your son.

So, Father, we come before you and we worship you. We love you. We need you. We pray all these things in Jesus' most precious holy name.

Amen.