

UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH

Then and Now
in 30 Minutes



Episode 46 - Reminded

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THE SETTING



We've come to **Smyrna**, the location of the second of the seven churches in Revelation, and to the ruins of the Agora. Smyrna (modern Izmir) had around 100,000 people in apostolic times. Standing 35 miles (56 km) north of Ephesus, it had a port on the Aegean Sea, so was an important commercial centre, and it aligned itself closely with Rome. In 195 BC it built a temple to the goddess Roma, the first city to do so; in AD 23 it built a temple to Caesar Augustus, and another in AD 25 to Emperor Tiberius. So, it was delighted to meet the demands of Emperor worship that Diocletian made, for its motto was "Rome first in all things." This made it very hard to be a Christian there.

Smyrna was known as "The Crown of Asia" and "the Flower of Asia", and its coins had the words "First city of Asia in size and beauty". It was also a city that had experienced 'resurrection' after having been destroyed in 590 BC but rebuilt in 290 BC by Lysimachus, one of Alexander the Great's generals. Both these ideas are picked up in Jesus' opening words. For in a city that loved to think of itself as "first", Jesus declares that he is the first - and for good measure, the last as well. And in city that prided itself on its 'resurrection', Jesus reminds the church that he alone is the one who died and came to life again.



Ruins of Smyrna's Agora, the commercial and political centre, now overshadowed by the modern city of Izmir



This basement level of the Grand Bazaar, running alongside the Agora, had 72 shops on that floor selling things like glass and ceramics - all trades that Christians found themselves excluded from

A horizontal banner with a blue background on the right and a yellow-to-blue gradient on the left. On the left side, there is a stylized illustration of a city with domes and towers. The text "BIBLE READING" is written in large, bold, orange letters with a white outline, centered on the blue background.

BIBLE READING

[Revelation 2:8-11](#)

A horizontal banner with a blue background on the left and a yellow-to-blue gradient on the right. On the right side, there is a stylized illustration of a city with domes and towers. The text "KEY IDEAS" is written in large, bold, orange letters with a white outline, centered on the blue background.

KEY IDEAS

Background to the church in Smyrna

[Acts 19:10](#) suggests that the church here was founded during Paul's third mission trip, possibly through people who had been converted in Ephesus.

The good

Jesus reminds them that he knows everything about them and their situation (always good to remember!) He knows their afflictions (the Greek word 'thlipsis' means 'crushing pressure') and their poverty, both of which came from their refusal to participate in idolatry, thus excluding them from the city's trade - people just wouldn't do business with them, which led to significant economic hardship. And it was made even worse by slander from "a synagogue of Satan" (v 9) - the city's Jews who were doing Satan's work for him by denouncing Christians to Rome as non-Jews and therefore not exempt, like they were, from offering incense to Caesar.

And yet... Jesus says that, despite everything, they are rich (v 9)! For Christian riches aren't measured in material terms but in spiritual terms.

The challenge

While the church in Smyrna isn't rebuked (only Smyrna and Philadelphia receive no rebuke), there is nevertheless a strong exhortation from Jesus; because constant, ongoing pressure can make us weary and careless. Yet Jesus doesn't say that he will lift this pressure from them; in fact, he says that things are about to get worse (v10); for they are about to experience "ten days" of persecution - almost certainly metaphorical, as all the numbers in Revelation are used symbolically, following the well-understood formula of Apocalyptic

literature. And that persecution will lead to imprisonment - the frequent prelude to execution in Roman times, for they didn't have a prison system like us today.

In light of all this, Jesus reminds them - good church though they be - of the importance of staying faithful, even to death. And history shows us that death would certainly follow for many.

Still today, we can experience relentless pressure, simply for following Jesus - doing the right thing, making the right choices, refusing to participate in what the world sees as 'normal'.

Jesus doesn't promise to always lift this pressure from us; but he does promise that he will enable us to endure it.

The promise

Opponents might take our physical life, but they can't take our eternal life. For Jesus says that the one who overcomes will not be hurt at the second death, which is later seen to be the lake of fire at the End ([Rev 20:14](#)). So, don't be afraid, whatever happens; just be faithful, and Jesus will be with you.



1. Are there some challenging areas in your own life where you need to be reminded that Jesus knows your situation and promises to help you get through them?
2. Are there truths about Jesus that you need reminding of in order to strengthen your walk with him?
3. Churches are under great pressure today to conform to society's demands. How can being reminded that Jesus, not "Caesar", is ultimately in control help the Church become unstoppable again?



For a behind-the-scenes glimpse into what was involved to create this podcast series listen to Mike and David recounting their experiences!

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