

Christ's View of Local Churches-Lesson #2

Week of September 13th

Over the next 6 weeks, we are going to continue to look at the 7 churches that Jesus addresses in Revelation 2 & 3. We often look at church through our "American culture" filter. I would like to encourage us to think differently and ask some probing questions as we study these passages together.

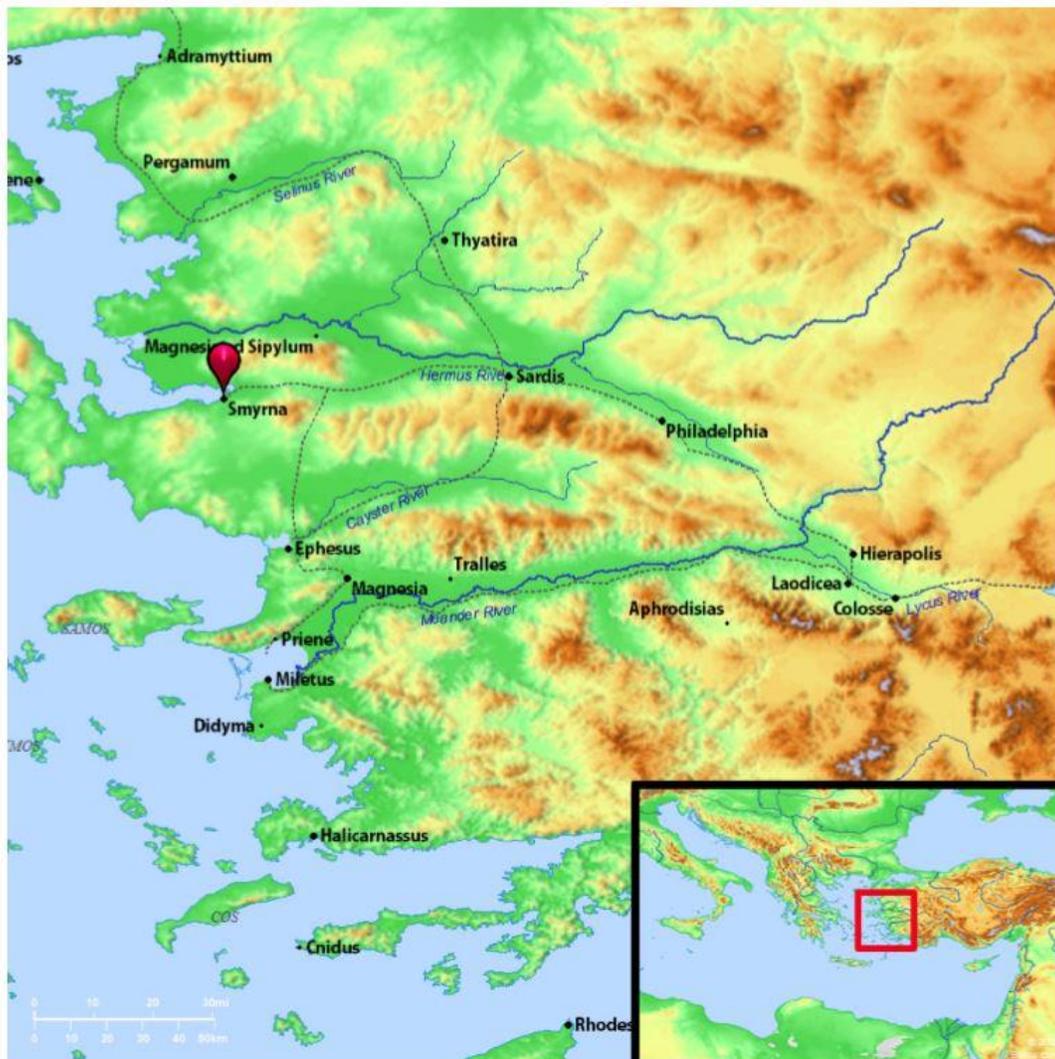
The Message to the Church in Smyrna

⁸ "Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive:

⁹ "I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich! I know the blasphemy of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan. ¹⁰ Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.

¹¹ "Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death.

What did Jesus find right with the church of Ephesus?



Smyrna is the 2nd church listed for a message from Jesus. Although only 50 miles from Ephesus, the message they receive from Jesus is incredibly different. (See Map above) Smyrna is a church under attack and is experiencing suffering, poverty, and persecution. They are told the suffering will get worse with prison time and some may face death.

1. Are you and I prepared to suffer and lose everything in order to remain faithful to Jesus?
2. Satan will bring suffering in various forms—illness, personal loss, loss of loved ones, etc.—Just like he did with Job. Do we remain a witness for Jesus even in all that we suffer?
3. Jesus says nothing negative about this church. He only encourages them to stay faithful, even in the face of death.
4. What do you think the outreach program in the church of Smyrna looked like?
5. What effect do you think this letter had on the church at Smyrna? Below is an account of a man named Polycarp who was a bishop at the church in Smyrna. He was probably 20-30 years old when this letter arrived in Smyrna.

Eighty and six years have I served Him, and he never did me any injury; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior. --Polycarp, disciple of the Apostle John, and Bishop of Smyrna In the Asia Minor city of Smyrna, persecution broke out against Christians and some were put to death for their faith. But the agitated mob wanted to cut off the church there by getting rid of their leader, the now aged Polycarp. The believers hid Polycarp in a farmhouse. (The leaders there taught that one should not seek out martyrdom, but neither should it be avoided if there was no choice and it meant denying Christ). The authorities found the farmhouse and came to arrest the old man. He welcomed his captors as if they were old friends and gave them food and drink. He asked for an hour to pray before being taken to the arena. They relented. The hour stretched into two hours. The officers, overhearing his prayers began to wonder what they were doing arresting an old man like this.

Polycarp was brought into the arena. Instead of Polycarp begging for his life we find the proconsul pleading with this aged bishop to just curse Christ so he would be released. Polycarp's reply--our quote at the top--was loud and clear. He was burned alive. The Christians present said there was a joyful radiance on Polycarp's face as he died. Believers were allowed to bury his remains on February 22, probably in the year 155. Churches near and far from Smyrna observed this date in years to come and drew strength from the testimony of this old, old, man who would not deny Christ, no matter what it cost him.