SMYRNA

HARD LOVE

1. BACKGROUND
   1. Geographical/Commercial/Political
      1. Located 35 miles North of Ephesus; the most beautiful city in Asia Minor and one of the oldest in the region. It is believed to have been settled as early as 3,000 B.C. Its streets were wide and paved.
      2. Natural harbor: flourishing export trade
      3. Celebrated for its schools of science and medicine
      4. Extremely loyal to Rome
   2. Spiritual
      1. Cult of Empire/Emperor
         1. 195 B.C. – temple to Dea Roma (Rome personified as a goddess)
         2. 24 A.D. – bid for and was awarded the temple to Emperor Tiberius
         3. Those who refused to worship were considered unpatriotic and potentially treasonous. Annual sacrifices were mandatory. Refusing to offer them was a capital offense. Simply failing to say the words “Caesar is Lord” when prompted could cost a believer his/her life.
      2. Mt. Pagus – a hill that was home to temples in honor of several gods and goddesses, including Zeus, Apollo, Aphrodite
      3. Large Jewish Community

* The Jews were openly hostile to the Gospel
  1. Other References
     1. Smyrna is only mentioned twice in Scripture:
        1. Rev. 1:11
        2. Rev. 2:8-11
     2. Nothing more is known of this Church
     3. Homer (the Greek writer of the epic poems, the Iliad and Odyssey) was supposedly born in Smyrna. A temple was erected for him as well.
  2. The Cultural Reality

Smyrna was awash in paganism. Pagan temples, festivals and rituals of every kind dominated the social life of the city. Thus, Christians in Smyrna were out of sync with the culture in almost every way. Moreover, they worshipped an invisible God – a completely counterintuitive idea in the ancient world, which led to false accusations of atheism.

1. THE LETTER TO SMYRNA – REV. 2:8-11
   1. Who Sent The Letter
      1. Christ
      2. How Christ Describes Himself:
         1. Rev. 2:8 – “…the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.”
         2. It is important for a suffering church to know that its Lord is eternal and conquered death.
   2. Christ’s Focus: SUFFERING

* Christ reviews four trial the Church faced
  + 1. POVERTY: Rev. 2:9
       1. Not simply “not enough”, but “destitute, having nothing”
       2. It doesn’t always PAY to be a Christian in monetary terms
    2. SLANDER: Rev. 2:9
       1. It may have been that the Jews were spreading false rumors about the Church.
       2. Christ refers to them as the Synagogue of Satan
* John 8:44 – “Satan…when he lies he speaks his native language ….”
  + - 1. It is painful to be misunderstood or caricatured
* I Peter 2:23 – No one understands this better than Christ.
  + 1. PRISON: Rev. 2:10
       1. Many of the early Christians were frequent guests in the prisons. An old hymn seems to capture the attitude of these imprisoned Christians:

Best-loved of my soul

I am here alone with Thee  
And my prison is a heaven

Since Thou sharest it with me.

* + 1. DEATH: Rev. 2:10
       1. Martyrdom wasn’t just a possibility, it was a probability
       2. John 16:18-20 – The world hates the Church
  1. What’s A Suffering Church To Do?
     1. Rev. 2:10
        1. Stop Being Afraid
        2. Keep Being Faithful
* Mark 5:36 – Faith banishes fear
  + 1. How Does A Suffering Church Do This?
       1. Look to the Lord. Too often when we are afflicted, this is the last thing we do. Look at Him. When times are tough we can’t afford an experience with Christ that is merely academic.
  1. The Church’s Focus: CHRIST
* Christ reveals seven truths about Himself which aid the suffering Church
  + 1. He is ETERNAL: Rev. 2:8
* when fear grips us it is comforting to know that we are loved by the “First and the Last”
  + 1. He is VICTORIOUS : Rev. 2:8
       1. We can endure suffering because our Lord did. He suffered and through His suffering He conquered both Sin and Death.
       2. Philippians 2:8 – Christ was obedient unto death
       3. Hebrews 2:14-15 – by Christ’s death, He destroyed the one who holds the power of death
    2. He is ALL-KNOWING: Rev. 2:9
       1. He “knows our afflictions”
       2. How does He know? Because He walks among the lampstands.
    3. He has PERSPECTIVE: Rev. 2:9
       1. “I know…your poverty – yet you are rich.”
       2. Christ values things differently than the world
       3. Christ’s main concern is spiritual, not material
       4. II Corinthians 6:10

Hebrews 10:34  
Matthew 10:28

* + 1. He is IN CONTROL: Rev. 2:10
       1. Even when we suffer, Christ is still in control
       2. Notice how He limits the suffering:
* Some, not all
* Ten days, not forever
  + - 1. Can we endure it? Yes. Scripture assures us that Christ will not allow us to be tested beyond our ability to withstand.
    1. He is PURPOSEFUL: Rev. 2:10
       1. Christ can use any event that occurs in our lives to our ultimate benefit or the benefit of others.
       2. James 1:2-4

Romans 5:3-5

Romans 8:28

I Peter 1:6-7

I Peter 4:12-19

* + 1. He is GENEROUS: Rev. 2:10-11
       1. Not a matter of Merit; eternal life with Christ is a gift
       2. James 1:12