

When Pressure Comes - Revelation 2:8-11

*Do not fear what you are about to suffer . . . Be faithful unto death,
and I will give you the crown of life.*

Revelation 2:10

Each year the Secretary of State presents to the United States Congress the “Report on International Religious Freedom.” This report tells how nations around the world are doing in their protection—or violation—of religious liberties.

Most recently, Secretary Anthony Blinken tells of the “rise of very troubling trends.” “Governments in many parts of the world continue to target religious minorities using a host of methods, including torture, beatings, unlawful surveillance, and so-called re-education camps.” The report then gives examples of religious persecution happening in Nicaragua, Burma, and China—against Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians.

This report reminds us that Christians are not the only religious group that experiences persecution. Muslims, Buddhists, and other groups are being persecuted as well, and this kind of persecution is just as wrong as any.

The thing that makes Christian persecution unique is this: when Christians are persecuted, they are replicating the pattern Jesus set for them in his suffering of death and triumph over death. In other words, persecution is not a glitch in Jesus’ program. Rather, it is how the program works. This is what Paul was saying when he wrote, “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:10). Far from being alarmed by persecution, Christians should expect pressure as part of what it means to follow Jesus. “If they persecuted me,” Jesus told his followers, “they will persecute you also” (John 15:20).

What does Jesus say to a group of Christians who are about to face a high level of pressure for their faith? He tells them something about **I. THEIR SUFFERING** (to prepare them for it); **II. HIMSELF** (to give them courage in it); and **III. THEIR FUTURE** (so they will see beyond it).

1. **He tells them about their suffering** (to prepare them for it)
 - a. It is temporary (“ten days”)
 - b. It is inevitable (“will”)
 - c. It is purposeful (“to test you”)
 - d. It is limited (“some of you”)
2. **He tells them about himself** (so they will have courage in it)
 - a. He knows about their suffering (“I know”)
 - b. He is in control of their suffering (“the first and the last”)
 - c. His own suffering brought about life (“I died and came to life”)
3. **He tells them about their future** (so they will see beyond their suffering)
 - a. They will live (“the second death will not hurt you”)
 - b. They will be rewarded (“the crown of life”)

Application Questions

1. How should Christians think about the persecution that other religious groups suffer?
2. Based on specific exhortations you read in Revelation 2:8-11, how does Jesus want the believers in Smyrna to approach the pressure they will face?
3. What is your gut-level reaction to the thought that you will face increasing pressure for your faith? How are those feelings different from the way Jesus wants Christians to respond, as evident from Revelation 2:8-11?
4. What is the connection between the Smyrnan Christians' suffering and Jesus' identity as the one "who died and came to life again"?
5. Is it OK to try to avoid persecution? Consider the following passages:
 - a. Acts 8:1-4
 - b. Acts 22:25-29
 - c. 2 Corinthians 11:32-3
 - d. Acts 20:22-23