

How strong is our faith? Has it ever been tested? If we were to be tested, would we be confident and ready to face those challenges, to be faithful to the very end?

Despite experiencing afflictions (persecution and the threat of jail); poverty (trade sanctions against Christian merchants); and slander, the church of Smyrna still stands today. It is the only one out of the seven churches of Revelation that still stands. What exactly did the church do, that helped them to survive?

They persevered. Jesus' message to the church of Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11 is not one of relief, but of acknowledgement and comfort. He knows how much it cost them to follow Him. He knows the struggles they were going through. Unfortunately, things are not going to get better—in fact, they're going to get much worse. But if they persevere, even to the point of death, He who is victorious over death will allow them to share in His victory. He will give them the crown of life.

It can be relatively easy to follow Jesus in our city of Hong Kong. We do not face anything close to what the church of Smyrna went through. But if lived right, the Christian life should be one that invites testing and pressure. We don't actively seek it out, but there should be something that causes curiosity, confusion—perhaps even contempt. For if our faith did not cost us anything, would it be a faith worth having? There is an ongoing pressure and tension present in walking the way of Jesus, but we know that as He shakes those who are comfortable, so too does He comfort those who are shaken.

1. In what areas of life might Christians feel a pressure to compromise? Are there areas where you feel a pressure to compromise as well? Where does that pressure come from?
2. What are the hardships being faced by the church of Smyrna? It can be hard to imagine or speculate, but what would you do if you were faced with a similar situation? Would you be able to stand for Christ under distress?
3. "Jesus comforts those who are shaken, but He shakes those who are comfortable." Do you feel that you are in a "shaken" or "comfortable" state at present moment?

If you feel shaken, what comfort and encouragement does Jesus' message to the church of Smyrna bring you? If you feel too comfortable, what might be some steps of obedience that the Spirit is leading you towards, and how can you carry them out?