**Revelation 2:8-11**

I. Statistics on the persecuted church:

-Christians are most persecuted religious group worldwide

-Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors simply because of their belief in Christ

-Top 5 most persecuted countries: 1. North Korea 2. Somalia 3. Syria 4. Iraq 5. Afghanistan

-In 41 of the 50 worst nations for persecution, Christians are being persecuted by Islamic extremists

-An average of at least 180 Christians around the world are killed each month for their faith.

-More Christians martyred in 20th century than in all other centuries combined

II. The message to the church of Smyrna

These Christians were facing serious persecution, and Jesus offers them perspectives that are absolutely upside down and contrary to our natural, worldly way of thinking

III. What is true wealth?

 A. “I know your poverty” (v. 9)

1. The Christians in Smyrna were poor materially: they were losing their jobs and incomes due to their faith

2. The Christians in Smyrna were poor circumstantially: about to face prison and even possibly death

B. “But you are rich” (v. 9)

1. Jesus encourages them to see their spiritual riches (forgiveness, adoption, the gift of the Holy Spirit, inheritance in the new heavens and new earth, etc.)

 2. And they are rich in faith because they are remaining faithful to Jesus

C. Notice this is the exact opposite of the church of Thyatira (3:17)

 They saw themselves as rich materially, but Jesus saw their spiritual poverty

D. Jesus challenges are view of true wealth

True wealth is not financial or circumstantial, but rather the spiritual riches we have in Christ, no matter what our circumstances are

E. Persecuted Christians are often more focused on and appreciative of their spiritual riches in Christ

F. Modern story: Susan in Uganda who converted to Christianity and was ostracized and abandoned by her father

IV. What does it mean to truly win in this life?

A. “To him who overcomes” (v. 11)

1. Greek word “Nike” = to overcome, to conquer, to win,

 2. Each message ends with promises “to him who overcomes”

 3. Revelation was written so that we might overcome

B. Overcoming means remaining faithful to Jesus no matter what. It often means winning even when it looks like we’re losing

1. The Christians in Smyrna looked like they were losing from the world’s perspective (in prison, dying) but they were winning from Christ’s perspective (staying faithful)

 2. This is the way Jesus overcame

v. 8: “died and came back to life”: he conquered evil even when it looked like he had been conquered by evil on the cross

3. This is the way Christians overcome (see Romans 8:35-39)

 C. Jesus challenges our view of who is really winning in live

1. Some people look like they’re winning (healthy, successful, comfortable lives, etc.) but they may be losing from Jesus’ perspective

2. Some people look as though life is beating them down (hard circumstances) but they may be winning from Jesus’ perspective (remaining faithful through thick and thin)

 D. Modern Story: pastor Youcef’s letter from prison

V. What is true life?

A. The crown of life is received at death (v. 10)

 B. True life is not just life in the here and now but life for all eternity

C. What death is truly worth fearing?

a. Even though they may be put in prison and killed they are told “don’t be afraid” of that death (v. 10)

b. Instead be afraid of the second death (v. 11)

1) The second death is the lake of fire (see Revelation 20:10, 14, 15)

 2) The lake of fire is the final judgment of God on all who reject Christ

c. Jesus says the same thing in Matthew 10:28

 D. What life are you living for?

 Our tendency is to live for this life only and to try to make this life as happy, comfortable, and enjoyable as possible, but Jesus invites us to focus on eternal life

E. Modern Story: Sway from China

**Discussion Questions**

1. What story or idea from Sunday’s service on the persecuted church struck you and has stayed with you this week?

2. As you consider the persecuted church, is there anything specific God has put on your heart (for example, is there a particular area of the world or a specific group of Christians you have a heart for. Or, do you feel called to do something specific about it, such as pray regularly, or send letters, or give resources, or educate yourself more, or simply be more grateful for the freedom we enjoy, etc.)?

3. Consider Jesus’ statement to the financially poor Christians in Smyrna: “but you are rich!” (v. 9). Consider the spiritual riches we have in Christ no matter what we’re going through circumstantially. Is there a specific spiritual blessing you want to be treasuring more intentionally at this time in your life?

4. Discuss again the meaning of Jesus’ use of the word “overcome” in v. 11. Read together Romans 8:35-39 and discuss what it means to be “more than conquerors” in this life. How might that perspective impact or change how you face your current struggles and challenges?

5. Jesus calls the church of Smyrna to focus on the crown of life (v. 10) they will receive when he returns. Where do you see yourself working too hard to find happiness, comfort, or significance in this life, and where might God be calling you to focus on eternal life more intentionally?