

# Is Christ worth it

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning everyone. Please turn with me to Revelation chapter 2. And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, the words of the first and the last who died and came to life.
- I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich. And the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
- Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested. And for 10 days you will have tribulation.
- Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. Well, good morning everyone.
- [ 1 : 2 8 ]     In my first semester at uni, while trying to find my place in a new city, I moved from Tamworth to Newcastle trying to make new friends.
- I was studying PE teaching, and I had to give a lesson in front of my peers on sexual health. Now, I can't really remember what I said, but I remember in the feedback time afterward, the lecturer challenged me in front of everyone.
- Are you a Christian? Where in the Bible does it say you shouldn't have sex before marriage? I was stunned into silence.
- There was a strong feeling in that moment. It was more than embarrassment. The lecturer had the authority in that situation, and everyone in the room understood the subtext going on.
- He wasn't just claiming I was factually incorrect. He was saying something deeper than that. He was saying I was a fool for my view on sex before marriage, and I was wrong to even mention it to other people.
- [ 2 : 4 3 ]     In that moment, I felt shame. I don't fully belong. For me, the first and second year of university, I wrestled trying to decide, is Christianity worth it?
- Then after uni, after not getting a PE job straight away, my first job was as a high school SRE or scripture teacher.
- Now, the school tried to give SRE a proper classroom and a proper place in the timetable, but there seemed to be a common understanding among the students that SRE just wasn't a real subject.
- Normal classroom rules can be pushed to the limit. The amount of times I ask myself, is this worth it?
- I lost count by the last bell on Monday, usually. A little side plug here, SRE is excellent. I highly recommend it if you have the opportunity.
- [ 3 : 5 0 ]     Talk to me any time. But they're just two examples for me, for my story so far. It would be fascinating to hear how each one of us have been forced to ask yourself the question, is Christianity worth it?

Is it worth the loss and the cost? What have you had to give up or lose simply because you're a Christian?

It could be money, it could be time. What relationships have been strained, not by your arrogance, but because you've decided to side with Christ?

What hardship could you have easily avoided? All you had to do was go with the flow of what everyone else did. We're all faced with this question, is it worth it?

As we come to the letter to Smyrna, which is about severe persecution, we shouldn't think this doesn't apply to us here in Australia today for at least two reasons.

[ 5 : 03 ] Firstly, there is no guarantee that we will continue to be safe in Australia going forward. And secondly, the cost you and I are faced with every day at school, at uni, with colleagues, with our sporting teams and friends and family.

We can be tempted to distance ourselves from Christ bit by bit by bit. So what's going to motivate us to stand with Christ and walk into trouble and not away from it?

We've got to hear what Christ has to say to Smyrna. So Smyrna competed with Ephesus for the title of the greatest city of Asia.

It too was a centre for trade and wealth. It too was full of worship to the gods. The Roman gods. The most defining feature of Smyrna was that it had been totally destroyed about 600 years before Christ.

And it laid in ruins for 300 years before it was raised again. And unlike most cities, it was carefully designed. And so it had this order and beauty to it.

[ 6 : 18 ] And today it still stands. It's Isma, the second largest city in Turkey. To live in Smyrna was to belong to the glorious resurrected city that boasted of its allegiance to the emperor.

And there in the midst of this little, of this city is this little local church, a lampstand.

This lampstand, it's a picture of every Christian being a priest. You might be familiar with the phrase, the priesthood of all believers. To be priest is to be totally dedicated to the service of Christ.

Your allegiance is totally to him. And your role is to represent him to the rest of the world. What will it mean to be Christ's lampstand in Smyrna?

The words of the first and the last who died and came to life. Into this resurrected city speaks one who also died and came to life.

[ 7 : 36 ] These words echo the description of the Lord in chapter 1, as do all the introductions to the seven letters. He is the first and the last, the alpha and the omega, and everything in between.

He is the eternal one who chose to die for his church and who came back to life and now holds the keys of death and hell.

Church in Smyrna, Christians today, to which will you belong? The life and glory of the city you live in? Or the life and glory of the risen Lord Jesus?

This letter is the briefest letter. And because it's brief, it gives a solemn air to it. And when you compare this letter to the Ephesians, something appears to be missing.

The Ephesians are praised for their hard work, their concern for truth, their endurance. But to those in Smyrna, he says, I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich.

[ 8 : 53 ] And the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Outwardly, all this church has going for it is pain and loss.

Is their suffering a divine punishment for their lack of devotion to Christ? Doesn't that thought cross your mind when hard times hit you?

But that doesn't fit here. There's no explicit indictment from Christ. No hint of needing to repent.

And no warning if they don't change. Instead, Christ says, you are rich. Materially suffering loss, but spiritually rich.

In chapter 1, verse 9, John introduces his letter to all Christians saying, I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.

[ 10 : 06 ] Tribulation means great trouble or suffering, and it is the new normal for every Christian. Aligning yourself to Christ when the world wants to live without Christ is going to mean trouble.

Tribulation isn't a mark of God's punishment. It's the mark of faithfulness. It's not the experience of some Christians. It is par for the course.

It's the new normal. We don't experience it in equal measure, of course. For those in Smyrna, the source of their trouble is the slanderous accusations of the Jews who claim to worship God and claim that the Christians are evil.

All the while, these Jews reject Christ. Lying and murdering like Satan. Christianity had no legal standing, and so it made it easy for Jews and others to take advantage of them.

The Roman Empire was very tolerant of all religions, but it was dangerous to believe that only one God exists and rules over all.

[ 11 : 26 ] And when the Roman Emperor himself started to be worshipped as a god, to not worship him was seen as treason. By following Christ, they no longer belonged to their community.

Legally, they had no grounds for rights or freedoms. And perhaps even their own family members, their Jewish family members, would drag them into court, publicly slandering them to the loss of their property or their reputation, even their life.

This is heavy stuff, isn't it? Was it worth it? Do you feel the pressure, the threat to be tolerant of all opinions and all people's choices?

Perhaps we feel it most with those closest to us, the relationships we hold dear, the respect we crave. Into this pressure, Christ says, I know your pain.

More than just acknowledging it, our Lord is speaking as having gone ahead of us, slandered as evil only because he was faithful to his father.

[ 12 : 50 ] He perfectly reflected his father's character. And it resulted in death. Christ says, I know your pain.

And at this point, I want Christ to say, don't worry, your trouble will be over tomorrow. But instead of taking the trouble away, he gives us strength to move into the pain by giving us a bigger perspective to what's actually going on behind what the eye can see.

Look at verse 10. Do not fear what you're about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested.

And for 10 days, you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. Behind the slander of people is the devil himself, whose name means slanderer or accuser.

He is the one who will bring such allegations and injustice and loss. Some of you will go into prison. Some of you will even be killed.

[ 14 : 15 ] Christ doesn't offer them a comfortable life. Whoever wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. And this isn't for a short time.

10 days, 10 represents an extended period of time. What will empower them to move into the trouble?

Not in a cavalier bring on the pain way, but remaining steadfast. They're told, we're told there's a purpose to it all.

The devil will do this to test you. The implication here is that you will pass the test. This sounds a lot like the story of Job.

Job is praised as faithful by the Lord himself. And Satan wants to test his faith, accusing Job that he only serves the Lord because of all the earthly comfort that God provides him.

[ 15 : 20 ] Take it away and Job will curse you to your face. All his children killed, financially ruined and covered in sores from head to foot.

No guarantee of a better day tomorrow. And the story ends with Job counting the Lord as worth it, as all he needs.

Times of testing shows that for God's sake alone, not the extra stuff he gives, for his sake alone, it is worth worshipping him.

And beyond Satan, there is the eternal judge and life giver. Trouble is certain, but just as certain is it's limited.

There will be an eleventh day, so to speak. Most importantly, remember who's speaking. The one who died himself and who came alive.

[ 16 : 28 ] He holds the keys of death and hell and he guarantees resurrection for those who belong to him. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.

He has the authority to give life. After the cross comes the crown. People in this world chase after the glory of a crown like in the Olympic Games of the Roman Empire, a wreath of flowers, a garland around the head, the praise of the world and wealth, but it doesn't last.

Christ offers an enduring crown, eternal life in his kingdom. This is not a special reward on top of your salvation.

This promise is for every person who counts Christ as worthy to endure trouble for, which is every genuine Christian. To conquer is John's way of talking about faith.

When a person is tempted to end the pain of being a Christian by going with the flow of the world, what does that person need to do to stick with Christ?

[ 17 : 51 ] We need to listen to Christ's words and believe him more than the world. Trust that the eternal judgment of the Lord is the only judgment that ultimately matters.

It is judgment that is true. Trust that true life and glory is only found in the resurrected Christ, not in the world.

How we conquer is to use our ears to listen and believe and respond to what Christ says to us.

and Christ has an amazing promise for us. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.

The second death is a picture in Revelation 20 for the judgment of God, the lake of fire where Satan and everyone else who oppose Christ will be thrown. Eternal loss of the life giving presence of God, hell.

[ 19 : 05 ] Brothers and sisters, in times of trial, we need to look beyond the loss and pain. When you stand before the Lord at judgment, which each of us has to, you will have zero reason to be afraid.

You can lift your head assured that you have entrusted your life to the resurrected one, the judge of all the earth.

You already know the real judge's judgment of you. The wording here is certainly not.

You will certainly not be hurt by the eternal judgment. You will have the crown of life. Do you hear the assurance?

As Marty told the story in his intro, sitting in the congregation at Smyrna, where Revelation was first read, could have sat this young man, Polycarp.

[ 20 : 18 ] he became bishop, and in his old age, arrested, taken to the public arena, and he was ordered to offer incense to Caesar as Lord.

Before being burnt, he said those words, let me repeat them, eighty and six years have I served Christ, and he has done me no wrong.

How then can I blaspheme my king who saved me? He was looking beyond that moment. He knew the crown of life that was his by grace through the blood of Christ.

He was more scared, he was more assured that the judgment of Christ is what counts, not what the public thinks, not even the pain.

This perspective turns loss and pain and slander of other people upside down. Or more accurately, it turns it the right way up. Look at what's going on.

[ 21 : 26 ] Whatever loss you face, while remaining devoted to the Lord, you are declaring to people around you and to the spiritual realities, Christ is worth it.

Christ is my life. Not the things he gives me, not the things you can offer me, Christ himself is my life. The church in Ephesus had all the external marks of a healthy church, but in their heart they'd lost their passionate devotion to the Lord who died for them.

And here's Smyrna, looking ahead, and all they see is loss and pain, and all they get for it is Christ.

And they decide worth it. Is there a greater expression of devotion than that?

Is there a brighter light and witness to the truth than faithfulness in the face of suffering and loss? is there a greater word of praise Christ could give them than on the last day at judgment?

[ 22 : 48 ] Well done, good and faithful servant. Having lost everything else, but being close to the Lord, they are rich.

Charles Spurgeon said it better than I can, for the Christian, losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honour, death is his gain.

This can only be true of you if you believe in your heart, Christ is worth it. friends, as we look ahead to our immediate future, as a church family and as individuals, trouble and loss and not belonging in this world is before us.

But we need to look beyond and see him who has gone ahead of us, who has died in our place and has come to life. Don't be afraid.

Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. What a light for Christ in this dark world we will be if when trouble comes we can say Christ is worth it.

[ 24 : 15 ] Will you pray with me to finish? Let's pray. Father, you know our hearts and how we struggle to believe that what this world offers us isn't better than what you offer us.

Forgive us Lord for this. Thank you that it's by your blood alone that we stand secure knowing that judgment has already passed on Christ and that by grace alone we get to share in the crown of life.

Lord, I pray for us as a church that we wouldn't just go with the flow of this world that you would help us to see Christ in all his truth and beauty and count having him as worth it.

Lord, give us ears to hear you. Make us rich. In Jesus' name. Amen.