

Becoming People that Prevail
A CHARGE FROM THE RISEN CHRIST TO A SUFFERING
CHURCH
Revelation 2:8-11

What happens to a carrot when it gets immersed in hot water? It gets soft and mushy. What happens to an egg when it gets put into boiling water? It gets hard on the inside. What happens to ground coffee when it gets put into hot water? It colours and flavours its surroundings. What happens to us when we experience hardship in life? Do we get soft and mushy? Do we get hard on the inside? Or does it bring the best out of us so that we transform our surroundings.

If there was a community of Christians who lived in a pot of boiling water, it was the church in ancient Smyrna. The pot in which they lived was the Roman Empire. The heat they experienced came from two directions: from Roman society and from religious Jews.



But, rather than destroy them or make them defensive, the heat they experienced brought the best out of these early Christians so that they ended up transforming the entire Empire. In the year 312, the unthinkable happened – the Roman emperor, Constantine, declared himself to be a Christian! How did they do it?

The early Christians, represented by the Church in Smyrna, had a greater impact on their world than their world had on them because they heeded and took to heart the words of Jesus in Revelation 2:8-11.

In these verses, the risen Christ acknowledges three kinds of hardship the Christians in Smyrna were experiencing. But that's not all he does. With each acknowledgement, Jesus also communicates a truth that takes our eyes off our current reality and put our focus on a higher, eternal reality.

If you and I are going to get through life and its hardships in such a way that we have a greater impact on our surroundings than they have

on us, we have to take our eyes off our current realities and put our focus on the realities Jesus talks about in these verses.

WHERE IS YOUR WEALTH? – Rev. 2:9a

- The Christians in Smyrna were poor because their property had been confiscated. Rather than allowing that hardship to destroy them, though, they overcame their enemies by banking on the belief that they had infinite wealth in heaven.

WHOSE OPINION REALLY MATTERS TO YOU? – Rev. 2:9b

- The Christians in Smyrna were subject to endless slander from the religious Jews in their town. Rather than giving in to the slander or becoming vindictive, they overcame their accusers by resting in the belief that Jesus Christ had declared them to be sons and daughters of God.

WHERE IS YOUR LIFE? – Rev. 2:10

- The Christians in Smyrna were threatened with death because they did not worship the Roman gods or the emperor. Rather than surrendering or fighting back, they overcame the Empire by holding their physical lives with a loose hand and by setting their hearts and minds of the life they had with Christ in heaven.

What kind of Christian do you want to be? What kind of church do we want to be? Do we want to be carrot Christians? Soft and floppy when hardships hit? Do we want to be an egg-like church? Hard and defensive in hot water? Or do we want to be the coffee of society? Do we want to colour our world with God's truth and justice? Do we want to flavour our surroundings with his love and grace?

The difference between these options boils down to focus. If our focus is on material wealth, on people's opinions, on the here and now, hardship will destroy us or make us hard. But if our focus is on our spiritual wealth, on God's opinion, on eternal life, the hardships of life will bring the best out of us and make us the salt and light of the world.