

# To the Church in Smyrna

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[0:00] Bring them to me. Bring them to me. That's what I felt the Lord remind me I was like, no, I don't want people coming here and seeing the curtains or seeing the lights or seeing the band and going, oh, I'm at church now.

Bring them to me is all he said. When you walk in here, the only hope, the only prayer is that you meet Jesus. You know, we're trying something different here.

We're trying something maybe a little bit strange to all of us. It's just, we're still figuring it out. And you know what? There's so many ways to do church, but there's actually only one way to be the church and that is to keep our eyes on him.

The thing that I'm most terrified of is that we get so good at doing church. We have a great team of people. Even when I got here, the chairs were all done, the stars were out, the sound was on, people playing and it's all great.

It all feels like church. There's so many ways to do church, but there's only really one way to be the church because the church is looking at Christ. Can you believe this is only week three that we're here?

[1:40] It's only the third week. We've got so many things to figure out. Actually, those of you who even shared before it, who were serving before at KFCI, ambassadors and all these other teams, hey, we're trying to figure out what that looks like.

Give us a few weeks just to figure out what actually we need here and how you can serve because actually you're absolutely here for a reason, which is for him. We're here to gather and then we're here to scatter to actually use our hands to serve each other as well.

That's the second one that we read, right? So just give us a few weeks and we're going to figure out what that looks like. But can we keep our eyes on him? That's my hope. That's my prayer because it is so dangerous.

Even today I felt it. Even as we were praying in there, I was like, man, this could just start heading off in a direction and it will be too late to catch.

Then we'll be back to just doing normal church in the normal way. And people can come in through the doors, have a great time, sing a few songs, play a bit of ping pong and then leave and not have met Jesus at all. That's what scares me the most because Christ didn't ask us to build the church.

[2:45] Christ asked us to make disciples. If you're here for the first time, I welcome you. But also then ask, actually, why are you here? Or those of you who have been here a lot, why are you here?

I hope it's not just to attend church. I hope it's simply just, you want to become a disciple of Jesus and you want to figure out what that means to do it together.

Okay, so let's have a think about that as we go. We've been going through the book of Revelation, which is a crazy one to do. But for me, it was actually, how do we start with the end in mind?

Jesus has some pretty damning words to say about the church. If we're starting something here, let's figure out what it is we're actually doing. Because I want to know what Jesus says about the church because I don't want to be guilty of getting to a place where at the end, I've been doing church for 50 years and Jesus comes and says, you were doing church, but you weren't the church. Does that scare you? That scares me. That really scares me. So we're going to carry on. We're going through the seven churches in Asia and we're going to be going through the second one today.

[3:55] Are we okay with the sound? Can you guys hear me at the back? Now you can. Do I just need to speak louder or? Okay, okay, good. Jesus, John's praying.

John's on the island of Patmos. He's praying because the church is going through all kinds of trouble. And then Jesus opens up the curtain and we actually have curtains now. Jesus actually

reveals the curtain and that's his response. He's saying, actually, John, you're so worried about the church.

Let me tell you who I am because when you know who I am, you won't have to be worried about anything else. So Jesus peels back the curtain and shows the real Jesus right now. And then he talks to the church and he talks to the seven churches of Asia.

Of course, there aren't just seven churches in Asia, but these seven churches represent the whole complete church. And last week, we went through the letter to Ephesus. So he starts from Patmos and then he heads to Ephesus first.

It's the first place that he goes to and it's the metropolitan. And he's saying, you guys are doing the most amazing church. You are doing church very, very well. But, but what?

[4:59] What was the problem? What was the problem with that church? You've lost your first love. You've lost the butterflies. You've lost the reason why you're even doing it. You're an A-star pupil, but you've forgotten the name of the class that you're on.

The name of the class that you're on is love and you've forgotten it. And because of that, even though you are an A-star church, I will shut you down. That is what he says.

I will come to you and I will remove you from your lampstand. That should send shivers down our spine. When you're thinking about what church is, you're like, wait, I could go to the most perfect church and the person that that church is trying to worship is willing to shut it down.

And I said last week, some of us turn up to church with the heart, more like a memorial service. Doesn't it feel like that sometimes? You turn to church, you sing songs about a guy, you talk about a guy and then you leave and you never really talk to and meet or hear from the guy at all.

It's just a memorial service you've just been to. Yet Jesus says, I am the first and the last. I was dead and now I am alive forevermore. Even more so, I am walking among you.

[6:06] I am here right now. I will sit on a beanbag if that doesn't freak you out completely. But I'm here. Jesus is here. I'm trying to convince you of that today.

That as you gather here, Jesus himself is among us. And we should treat that with a bit of, well, a lot more reverence than maybe we already do. So then after the messenger passes it to the church in Ephesus, he then goes 30 miles north or so to the next place.

And then he writes to the church in Smyrna. Now, these seven churches, he's basically going around Asia Minor, which is modern day. Do you know where Asia Minor is? What is it? Modern day Asia Minor now?

Does anyone know? Turkey. Put your hands up if you've been to Turkey. So has anyone been to this next place? It's Smyrna. Modern day is called Izmir.

Put your hand up if you've been to Izmir. A few of us. Out of the seven letters that he writes, this is an interesting one because one, Smyrna Izmir is still standing right now. And two, it's the only church out of the seven churches which is still also remaining.

[7:13] So this is fascinating. I don't know if it fascinates you. It fascinates me. And this one is interesting because last week to Ephesus, he was like, you guys are A-star, but you've done one mistake and it's a major one.

In England, when we had driving tests, you can have up to 15 minors. Right? But then if you have one major, you're out. You're done. Yeah? So he's like, you're A-star in everything else, but you have one major problem.

No love. So I would wipe you out unless you repent. Smyrna is interesting because he actually doesn't give them any problems. They actually don't have almost a threat or an ultimatum.

They've actually done everything right, but what's the problem here? So we're going to read that now. Hey, for the gathering, normally we have actually asked people to stand. I know that it's getting a little bit harder and harder now, but you know what?

Bear with me. I just want to keep going with this. Can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? Also, we have a very dear brother of ours who I hope you meet one day. He's our social chair of the gathering.

[8:13] And now you're all standing up. You might not be able to see him, but he's quite tall. That's Kubon over there. Kubon, wave to people. That is Kubon. He is our social chair. He's the one who helps us organize even something like the volleyball this afternoon. And Kubon's brother is here to visit us who is just as, if not taller.

Are you taller than Kubon? So I want to ask Qjoy to read to us because I have a fairly high voice. I thought it would balance it with someone who actually has a very manly voice. So we're going to invite Qjoy to read Revelation chapter 2 verse 8 to 11 for us.

All right. Revelation 2. You said 8 to 11? Yes. All right.

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.

[9 : 27] 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.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you. Thank you, Qjoy. Oh, I can have my Bible. Take a seat. Thank you. So, he's writing to the next church.

So, this messenger takes this letter up 40 miles from Ephesus and he ends up in Smyrna. And maybe, similar to this, a group here would stand and listen to this letter being read out.

I need you to understand the seriousness of this because this church is going through some serious problems. But maybe just a little bit about Smyrna. Smyrna is a very interesting place. Some people have been to Izmir. It's a beautiful city from what I hear.

And actually, it was known to be a beautiful city. It was known to be the ornament of Asia. So, it's the third biggest city now in Turkey completely but it used to be the ornament of Asia or the flower of Asia.

[10 : 33] Known to be a beautiful city and it had a lot of pride in itself. There were two main kinds of people in Smyrna. There were one, a group of Jews and two, a group of very, well, they were called loyalists, people who really, really wanted to impress the Roman Empire.

So, these were the kinds of people that were there. And the city was interesting. It had the exclusive rights to myrrh. Okay? The fragrance of myrrh. So, actually, because of that, it had a lot of people going in and out and it took a lot of pride in itself.

It's the fragrance, the flower, the ornament of Asia. Actually, on its coins, it would actually write the first city of Asia in size and beauty.

So, it wanted to be number one. It wanted to be known as the best place in the world and also most loyal to the Roman Empire. So, that's the kind of context that he's writing to here and it's also very famous for athletic games.

Okay? So, a lot of contests happened in Smyrna. It was a key port. If you just drew a line straight towards the west from the port of Smyrna, the first city it would hit is Athens.

[11 : 44] So, you can imagine the access that this place had and the beauty that it had and it still stands today. You can actually go and see this place. At breakfast, I was talking to my father-in-law about this because they'd taken a whole trip around Turkey, Asia Minor in the Bible and this place is beautiful, he says.

And so, this is what Paul's writing to now and, sorry, what John's writing to and Jesus himself introduces as, these are the words of the first and the last who died and came to life.

Again, Jesus said this already in chapter one. I am the first and the last. I am the Alpha and Omega. So, this church that is suffering through this kind of persecution, which by the way has been happening throughout the history of Smyrna, it was only even in the early 1900s, Christians were still being killed.

My father-in-law was telling me about these tunnels that would be under, these underground tunnels that were just complex and complicated that were under the city where a lot of the Christians were running away from the persecution.

So, it was that kind of place. And can you imagine hearing the words of Jesus? A messenger comes and says, Church in Smyrna, I have a message for you from Jesus himself.

[12 : 56] And Jesus says, hey, Smyrna, I am the first and the last. The one who died and came back to life. What's he saying there? He's saying, I know what you're going through, but let me tell you something.

I'm going to have the last word. I'm the Alpha and Omega and the first and the last. So, whatever you're going through in the middle, it's not the end. I'm coming back to have the last word. And I died and then came back to life.

Those in Smyrna would have really understood this because one of the reasons why this city was so proud was in 600 BC, it was completely flattened. It was completely destroyed. And then it was Alexander the Great that actually built it back up again into this beautiful city.

So, the city was known to be the city that resurrected, that it was completely destroyed and dead and now is now back to life with all its beauty. Now it's the first city of Asia in size and beauty. Jesus knows this.

He walks amongst this church and he says, 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.

[14:04] So this church is going through some stuff. It's going through persecution. It's going through, it's going to be put in prison. We're going to read about that in a bit and it also is in poverty. So we're going to break these down a little bit and we're going to ask ourselves, actually, how did this church survive till now?

What did they do that was so right that they didn't get any criticism from Jesus? He just gave them an encouragement because I want to know. I want to know why that gathering managed to survive. So he starts off by saying this, I know your tribulation. Again, I know. I am Jesus. I am walking amongst you. I know. That should bring great comfort.

You know, when you're going through a challenge and someone just puts their hand on your back and shoulder and just go, I know what you're going through. Wouldn't that have been of great comfort? When someone was reading this letter out to them, they would have been on the edge of their seat going, what's Jesus going to say?

He knows we're going through all this trouble. What's he going to do? Maybe now he's going to come back and he's going to help us overthrow the room. What's he going to do? Maybe we don't have to be so scared for our lives anymore.

[15:06] Maybe our children can live knowing that they don't have to be scared every time they go out because they're associated with us. He says, I know your tribulation. The word there is, I know your pressure.

I know the pressure that you're under. I know what you're going through. I know the pressure that you're under. You see, why? Those two groups, there were the Jews and then there were the loyalists to the Roman Empire.

At this point, as I told you a couple of weeks ago, the emperor was starting to persecute Christians, really, really raising the heat to these people and really trying to hunt the Christians down.

The Jews, on the other hand, actually got exemption. They actually, they explained to the Romans that, hey, we worship Yahweh and we can't worship Caesar and all these other things. So they were actually given exemption from doing the worshiping of the Caesar at the altars, in the temples. But the Christians were not because the Christians were seen as this cultish small group that could threaten to cause problems in the Roman Empire. And so therefore, the Christians were getting persecuted.

[16:10] They were getting killed. They were getting dragged away and murdered. Even worse so, the actual Jews and the loyalists were actually basically grassing them out, starting to point where they are, starting to snitch on them.

So that was the pressure they were getting under. You and I, we all gathered here in Almutti this Sunday morning pretty free of pressure. We just, we woke up, we got out of bed, we just figured out how we're going to get here and we got here.

Imagine that church, imagine a group of this size, but every single person who came here was under pressure because they know that by coming here, by being here, they might actually end up either killed or dragged into prison.

That changes things completely. Right? We have no threat of why we're here right now. Jesus says, I know your tribulation. I know the pressure that you're under.

And I want us to be able to feel that. You know, when you've been under pressure and someone just assures you, I know the pressure that you're under. He also said, I know your poverty.

Something else about these Christians in Smyrna, they were poor. They were poor.

[17:17] Because of the persecution, because of the Jews, because of the loyalists, they were being discriminated against. There were sanctions on them even when they were doing business. Imagine a Christian running a stall, but people wouldn't go to them because they were Christians.

So they wouldn't be able to sell. They wouldn't be able to make profits. So all these Christians were known to be poor. Forget being invited into trade unions. So this group were completely sidelined from society.

So Jesus says, I know the pressure that you're under. I also know that you are poor. I know your poverty. Do you know what Jesus is saying here? Jesus is saying, I know how much it costs you to be here.

I know how much it costs you as a businessman trying to follow the way of Jesus in this city and all the discrimination that you receive because of it. I know that you're poor. I know that you're not only worried about your children's safety, you're also worried whether you can even feed your children or not.

Jesus says, I know. I know. Brackets then, he says, but you are rich. He says, I know your poverty, but you are rich. He reminds them actually that riches are not just on this earth here, but there are heavenly riches that far outweigh, far outweigh what they can accumulate on earth because from dust you came and from dust you will leave.

[18:33] And so he says, hey, I know that you are poor here, but know that you are actually rich. the spiritual blessings that you have far outweigh the earthly riches that other people have.

Have you met people, I mean, in Hong Kong, it's the kind of place where there is just so much wealth and there is such a big gap, but you know what, sometimes, not sometimes, all the time, we're reminded that actually just because we have money it doesn't mean that we're completely happy.

Right? Have you met a rich person who's really poor? I have. A rich person who is really poor. Actually, I had a friend of mine who's a CEO of a big bank and he said, you know what, it's interesting, the more money you get, the more poor they feel.

The more money people get, the more poor they feel. People who have loads of money, somehow when he's talking to them, it still sounds like they're poor. Have you met people who are rich but actually poor?

I've also met people who are poor who are actually rich. Last year, I went to Nairobi in Africa and I was just blown away by the joy that these kids have because one kid got handed down a hand-me-down pair of rollerblades and the joy that the whole community had for that one kid, I'm like, you can't, there is no price you could pay for that.

[19:56] The joy, I've met rich people who are poor and I've met poor people who are rich. Jesus says, I know your poverty but remember, you are rich because you have every spiritual blessing because you know you need me and you know that I am all you need.

That's what he's saying. Again, imagine yourself being in that church. You're going through all this pressure. You have no money. You don't know what you're going to eat tomorrow and you get this letter from Jesus and Jesus says, I know, I know and I am with you.

The encouragement that he would have got from that. And then it says something interesting and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan. You're getting slandered.

People are spreading rumors about you. You're trying to run an honest business here and people are spreading rumors about your business. You're trying to run an honest gathering here and people are spreading rumors about what is happening at this gathering.

And Jesus says, I know and these people, they're pretending to be Jews so they get the exemptions from the Roman Empire but they're not. They're a synagogue of Satan. Whoa. Stop right there.

[21:03] Jesus introduced himself in chapter 1 and now he introduces the main villain in chapter 2. They're a synagogue of Satan meaning the adversary, the enemy.

A synagogue of Satan means these people, they say they're Jews but they're fake. Instead of serving God's purposes, they're actually serving the devil's purposes. and throughout the whole history of mankind we see the devil working, stirring up the hearts of men to fight against each other, stirring up the hearts of men to turn away from God.

We see the main villain in the story now and it is the devil. It is Satan. It brings me something that actually brings me encouragement when I feel as though I'm fighting and losing battle. Man, there's something, Paul talks about this.

What we fight against isn't just against flesh and blood. It isn't just against what we see. There is a force behind that we can't see that we're up against. The church in Smyrna, sitting where you are

right now almost and sitting the way you are would have heard this and would know exactly what he's talking about.

Man, Jesus knows the pressure that we're under. Jesus knows that we are struggling from day to day, that our businesses are really struggling. In this city, this first city of beauty and size, this fragrance, flower of Asia, we are suffering and Jesus knows.

[22 : 29] The question for us is, do we have any of that kind of pressure? Jesus then carries on. He says, I know all these things and then he says, don't be afraid of what you're about to suffer.

And then he says, behold, some of you are going to be thrown into prison. The devil is going to throw you into prison. 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.

He's saying, some of you are suffering right now and you're going to be thrown into prison. The main enemy here is the devil. And you're going to be thrown into prison so that you may be tested. Now, nothing happens to us without God's say so.

I mean, that song that we sang, that he's sovereign over us. He's completely in control here. And Jesus says, hey, I know the struggles that you're going through and I'm about to, what I'm about to say is that actually it's about to get worse.

You're going to be thrown into prison. Some of you are going to be thrown into prison and you're going to be tested because when you're going to be tested, that's when you know whether this is something real or not.

[23 : 30] My question is, how many of us have been tested? So, the missions organization I work for here in Hong Kong is called Young Life. Young Life is in 104 countries around the world.

And a couple of weeks ago we met some of the colleagues that we have from different parts of the world. Some of them can't call themselves Young Life. They have to call themselves something different because the countries that they operate in don't allow Christians to work.

There are others who are very scared and weary of even Zoom calls that they can jump on. There are so many things that they have to consider. This isn't that far from home, people. It reminds me that actually I don't think I've ever gone under that kind of pressure.

I grew up in England, same place as Gab's grew up. Did you go, did you have any pressure going to church? Apart from just mum forcing you to church. That was the only, that was the only pressure you got, right? Like, you don't wonder, oh, if I make this choice today, this could be my last choice. We don't, we don't really have that. We don't have that in Hong Kong right now. But it's something interesting. When you are threatened, when you are tested, that's when you know it's real or not.

[24 : 44] I mean, we all hate tests, right? Students, who loves tests? No one loves tests. Florence, dentist, does not like tests. But have you had tests? Lots of them. You see, Florence is a dentist, by the way.

But if I had a dentist or a doctor that I go and visit and they say, James, sit on this, sit on the chair and open your mouth. And if I ask them, oh, have you ever gone through any education or been tested? They're like, no. I would not feel confident in opening my mouth.

There's something about tests that are actually good. There's something about tests that actually show whether someone actually knows what they're talking about or not. I had a bad back the other week and I went to Damo here, who's, again, I've said this before, he's the best chiropractor I know. He's the only chiropractor I know. And he sits me in these big machines. It's literally like they're time machines. And I'm like, Damian, where am I going to wake up?

Can it be ancient? I'd be really worried. Some of the stuff he does to me, if he wasn't ever tested, then I'd be really worried. But because he is tested, because he has been tested, I'm like, okay, he knows what he's doing.

[25 : 53] The question I have to ask to you is, has your faith ever been tested? How strong is your faith? If someone comes against you and your faith right now, will it completely will or will it still stand strong?

What Jesus seems to be saying here is that, guys, you're going to end up in prison that you may be tested because when you're tested, we're going to see whether your faith is real or not. When the going gets tough.

When the going gets tough. See, Jesus knows this is not going to happen. The problem is he's not bringing relief. He's not saying, hey, I know you're going through your pressure.

I know the poverty, but don't worry. I'm coming. I got your back and soon you're going to be king. Soon you're going to rule with me. No. He's saying, hey, don't be afraid of what you're about to suffer. Some of you are going to be thrown into prison so that you may be tested. And then he says, and for 10 days you will have tribulation. 10 days. What they would have understood that to mean is this will be a short amount of time. You're going to be put in prison. [26:56] You're going to go through all the trouble. But let me tell you that it's 10 days in the sense that it is a limited amount of time. There will be an end to it. Do you know when you're sick or when you have COVID?

Well, before it was like, oh, you're going to be pretty much out for about 10 days. And in those 10 days it is painful. You've got your sore throat, you've got your fever, all the stigma so you're not allowed to see anyone, do anyone, you can lock yourself in the room, but it's 10 days. If you've had COVID you'll understand this in the sense that it's really bad when you're going through it but you look back now and it's like, oh yeah, it really was just 10 days. Don't we have that? That's exactly what kind of Jesus is implying here. He's saying, don't be afraid of what you're about to suffer. The devil's going to throw you into prison so you're going to be tested and you're going to be there for 10 days and you're going to have tribulation. What that means is it may feel quite a lot in those 10 days but when you look back in the future it's going to be okay.

It was only a short amount of time. What it's saying is it is capped. The suffering is capped. It is limited. Why? Because he's the first and the last. Because he will have the final say. [28:00] That's what he's saying here. He's saying, don't worry, it will happen. But it's okay. Don't bow under the pressure. So the questions that I have as I got through this is actually, does my life have any pressure?

Does my faith ever get tested? Now, I'll say coming to Hong Kong was probably my biggest test. It challenged the way I thought about God. Challenged the way I thought about what churches. I think I'd go as far as to say that maybe I didn't really understand what it meant to follow Jesus until I actually followed him to a place that I didn't really want to go.

I asked this question two weeks ago. Is Jesus your Lord and Saviour? Then I asked you if your answer was yes, show me which part of your life where Jesus is actually Lord.

I think I only really learned that recently. But if you're going to follow Jesus, you're basically saying I'm going to follow you wherever you want me to go. Here's the problem.

The Christian life when lived properly invites pressure. The Christian life when lived properly invites pressure.

[29:13] Why? Because the way of Jesus is by definition going against the way of the world. Romans 12 is do not conform to the patterns of this world.

So if you're going to live this life properly, it does invite pressure. Let me just pause there for a second. for those of us who don't experience any pressure, that should give us some food for thought.

Are you tracking with me here? Does your life have any pressure because of the faith that you have? If it doesn't, in the politest way possible, my question is why not?

the Christian life when lived properly invites pressure because we are counter-cultural. I've often said this, if the Christian life doesn't cost you anything, it's not worth anything.

If the Christian life that you live doesn't cost you anything, then it's not worth anything. The Christian life when lived properly invites pressure. These people will have had to make choices.

[30:31] Some of them, he says, they're fake Jews, right? That means some of them had decided, you know what? If it's easier to pretend to be a Jew so I can avoid some of the issues, I'm just going to do that. If it's easier for me to do this or not talk about Jesus, then I'm going to do that because that will help me have an easier life.

And so people started making compromises. That's what was happening. But then the ones that were remaining was, Jesus says, hey, I know what you're going through and you will have pressure but I want you to know that pressure is good because that means your faith is real.

The last thing I want is to make compromises that do not really have a real faith. And when I get to the author of all of this, the creator, he's like, hey, what you had wasn't real.

Does your life invite any pressure? If you're living your life exactly the way you want it to, I'm happy for you, bro, but I don't know if it's Jesus you're following.

If you're doing exactly what you want to, of course there's things that you don't like. You don't like floods, you don't like typhoons, you don't like tests, you don't like taxes, I get all those things. But if on the whole your life is going how you want it to, maybe you're the Lord of your life.

[31:44] Maybe Jesus isn't Lord because when it's lived properly, it should invite pressure. There should be people who look at you and go, oh, why is your day living like that?

Like, that's, that's not normal. Shouldn't we be in control of our own destiny? No, not when Jesus is your Lord. Does your life invite any pressure?

And I'm not saying we should go out and look for trouble right now. That's not what we're saying.

Like, you don't need to go and find a big wooden board and stand outside in the street and go repent for the kingdom of God is near. You don't need to do that.

You can if you want to. But, but actually, if you're living for Jesus, it should go against the way of the world and there should, there should be pressure. There should be a way of, actually, you do things differently.

Not just for the sake of it, but because your Lord demands it. I was listening to a sermon earlier this week where the guy was saying, Jesus, do you recognize, do you realize that Jesus died for you?

[32:47] I mean, I know it's that, okay, everyone's like, yeah, yeah, I get it, I get it. Jesus, someone died for you. Do you think the most appropriate response after that is, oh, go to church on Sunday for two hours?

Is that it? Is that what Jesus wanted? I wanted to lay my life down for these people just so they make sure they can carve out their Sunday mornings for me and so long as they don't come to church too late, it's going to be okay.

Jesus laid his life down for us. Is there any pressure in our lives? Maybe another question that we have is, what are the pressures that we face in this society?

I don't think we are persecuted in business for being Christians here, but what are some of the pressures that we face in society right now? Any thoughts?

I'm going to start putting people on the spot here just to keep us awake. What are the pressures that we have in Hong Kong right now that you think? JP, anything?

[33:51] Rent. Yes. That is a pressure. Let's unpeel that a bit more. What does that represent or what does that cause after that? The pressure of rent leads to the pressure of...

Rent leads to the pressure of working to get more money so you can pay your landlord and that then leads pressure onto something else.

What would that lead onto? Having to work lots means then there's a pressure of time. One thing I've got to say is when I met those poor kids who were rich in Africa, I was like, at least one thing they do have that is the most valuable thing.

Time. The kids in Hong Kong, some of them that I meet, they have everything but time. And time is the most valuable thing. So yes, the pressure of rent leads to this and so therefore you have to work.

So therefore you have to use all your time to get that so you can pay for rent, pay for someone to live. What if the pressures are there? Graceful pressures are there in Hong Kong. You have to look like you're successful.

[35:04] You have to appear to be successful. You have to appear to be ambitious. You have to appear to know what you're doing. To be attractive in the way so people can look at you for attention.

And we all know that that's just a facade and this is where social media is the biggest problem, right? I mean, social media itself is a neutral thing but what it lends itself to is everyone just showing their most successful side and then completely filtering out everything else.

And then now we're all comparing everyone, like their successful side to our ugly side and then we feel worse and worse. And I've said this to a lot of young people recently. So actually, we were just talking about this the other day.

I don't have Instagram and Facebook on my phone. The director of Young Life with young people does not have Instagram on his phone and I was laughed at yesterday and I'll tell you why. I realized when I was on my phone scrolling, zombie scrolling through Instagram, I was feeling FOMO.

Like, fear of missing out. I was feeling like, oh, wait, they're at a party. Why aren't I invited to that? Oh, they live there?

[36:15] That's super nice. Look at that matcha latte that they're drinking in Bali. Oh, that's so nice. That barrister, seriously. I found myself grown-ass man James with a wife and two kids whom I love in a beautiful home that I have.

I have everything that I could possibly want. I'm scrolling on Instagram and I'm like, but I need more. Literally. And I'm like, you know what?

This ain't good for me. Now, I still need to be somewhat connected to the world so I choose to go there only when I'm on my laptop and I'm going to decide, okay, I'm going to spend a little bit of time to go and check out what's actually happening in the world.

And then I realize that nothing is happening in the world. It's the same thing every time. It really is the same thing. I'm like, I've been on social media for Lent sometimes and I come back and I'm like, oh, nothing has changed. I didn't actually need to know about everyone else's holidays and everyone else's plans.

But the pressure of just getting attention from people, from presenting ourselves in the right way so other people will like us, that's a huge pressure.

[37:22] What other pressures are there? Maybe one more. Anything else? Can anyone think of anything? Job title?

Absolutely. It's part of this. It's like, oh, what's your name and what do you do? What's your name? Oh, what do you do? What's your name and what do you do? Why? Because we, well, one, we profile people ourselves.

We find out the name. We almost don't even need to know the name. We just need to know what they do because then we need to decide whether we want to hang out with them or not, right?

When you meet someone, John, you meet people all the time.

Like, actually, I know you have this because I know I have this. When I'm speaking to people, I'm like, I need to quickly profile whether this person deserves my time or not. So it starts up, hey, what do you do? Oh, actually, forget the name.

Just, what do you do? Job title. We hold that in such high regard here. But I'm like, there's so many other parts of it. That's why I hate being called Pastor James because I'm like, I don't come and call you by your job title and then your name.

[38:26] Hey, hey, event manager, Gabs. How are you doing today? Hey, dentist flow. Hey, back genius demo. No, it's just demo.

But somehow, our job titles, somehow what we do put so much pressure onto us. Sometimes, it's not even from other people. We just have it ourselves.

What am I doing with my life? Why aren't I a C-suite member of the team? Yeah. Why aren't I a director? Why aren't I this? Why aren't I that? Why don't I have all these followers?

The pressure of job titles. I've got to say that, I mean, those are all very real things. Those are all very real things that actually cannot just derail our life here on earth. It can threaten whether we actually end up in eternity or not.

I don't want to belittle them. But I've also got to say, they don't really weigh up to some of the pressures that the church in Smyrna had. It's different. None of us right now, right here in this moment, are going to be thrown into prison by the devil.

[39:32] Well, unless you're about to do something illegal, then don't do it. Don't do it. Whatever you think you're doing, don't do it. The Christian life, when lived properly, invites pressure.

I encourage you. I invite you. If your life has no pressure, if your faith doesn't cause you to rub against the world in any way, I don't know. I think you need to have a think of what that faith is. If your life, if your faith doesn't cost you anything, I don't know whether it's worth anything. I'm trying to say that in the nicest way possible. But it's important for us to remember that.

Conforming to society is the biggest thing. I'm trying to beef up past EVs, but whereas that song that we sang, I think it was last week or two weeks ago, I've decided to follow Jesus.

No turning back. The cross before me, the world behind me. No turning back. That's the hard thing. Anyway, just about that test.

[40:31] I think all of us are going through tests to some degree. What is that bringing out in you? Tell you what it does in me. Whenever something doesn't go my way, and I've got kids, so things rarely ever go my way, it actually exposes how I feel.

It exposes what my God is when I'm not able to do the things that I want. Or when even just doing something like this, I'm like, oh, this is this. It exposes my heart, my pleasure.

Sorry, Florence. I keep moving this around. The test that you're facing, sometimes it helps just to remind yourself it is a test.

Whatever you're going through right now that is not good. Maybe you've got a child that's really giving you lots of problems. Maybe you have a spouse. Maybe you have a girlfriend. Maybe you have a job that is causing you lots of problems.

I find it helpful sometimes just to remind myself this is a test. Through this, I can see whether my faith actually stands up properly or not.

[41:32] Whether it's actually a real deal or not. Whether it actually means something or not.

Remind yourself, whatever you're going through, this is a test and you will go through it for 10 days for a limited time.

But Jesus does not give relief to those things, not on this side of heaven. Because then he says, don't fear what you're about to suffer. Be faithful unto death.

He says, I know you're going through all this trouble. I know that you're poor. I know that you have no money. I know that you're about to be thrown into prison. I'm here to tell you even if you die, it's okay.

That's basically what he's saying. Be faithful unto death. Now this concerns me because most of us are most afraid of dying.

I mean, why do we have the pressure of paying rent? I guess it's because we don't want to live, have nowhere to live. I mean, if you keep tracing all of the fears back, it's this ultimate fear of death. And Jesus is kind of challenging it straight on and saying, be faithful unto death.

[42:38] There is no relief coming right now. Be faithful unto death. This attempt to crush you to death is going to release a fragrance of life.

That is what he's saying. These attempts to crush you to death, Church of Smyrna, will release a fragrance of life that cannot be defeated.

Can you imagine if you were in that place, going through the trouble that you're going through, people outside slandering you, sharing gossip about you, telling their other people not to come and visit your shop so you have no money to feed your kids so they don't go to the school that you want them to go to?

And Jesus is saying, be faithful unto death. That attempt to crush you, the devil is going to try and drag you into prison. Even if you die, be faithful unto death.

That attempt to crush you to death will release a fragrance of life. Wouldn't that lift you if you were in that position? And he says this, and this is where his encouragement comes because it's not all bad news.

[43:43] Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. So the symbol of Smyrna was a crown and not a crown as a king but like a victory wreath that you'd see for let's say the Olympic Games.

It was that kind of crown. And bear in mind that these Christians in Smyrna would never be entitled to anything like this. They were the bottom of society. They were sidelined completely. So no crowns, no victory wreaths around their heads.

And yet Jesus is saying if you be faithful unto death I will give you the crown of life. Why? What is that? That is the victory. I said at the beginning if you were to sum up this whole book of Revelation which is massively confusing and we're going to try our best to go through it to learn as much as we can about Jesus but if you're going to take away one thing in this whole series it's that two words. Jesus wins. Jesus wins. And he says if you are faithful unto death I will give you the crown of life. Why? Because I win.

And then he tells you a little bit more verse 11 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. He's saying just imagine we're all the church in Smyrna.

[45:00] He's saying I know that you're going through all the stuff that you're going through. I know that despite all that pressure you've not folded. you've not compromised. You're still here and you've got your poverty to show for it.

And it's going to get worse but be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life to the one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. Wait. There's a second death.

What's the second death? The first death is the one that we will all face. Of old age whatever it might be an accident whatever it might be we all die.

That's something that we all have to come to terms with. Something that sometimes is very hard to come to terms with. Maybe if you know someone that you've loved who has anyone put your hand up here if you know someone who you've loved who you've lost.

Does anyone? Okay. If you've lost someone that you've loved then you know what death is. you know that that person was here and then that person was gone. And you'll have heard Joe and I share our story about how that happened with our dad.

[46:12] And the grandparents and the uncles and aunties it's a part of life. But for those of you maybe fortunate if not yet to experience it maybe this isn't on your mind.

Maybe you don't think about this that much. So you don't even think about the first death let alone the second death. But I want you to know that the people in this book they're thinking about both of those deaths because this could happen to them.

We don't experience this so it's very hard for us to understand what this even means and feels. But he's saying here you will be hurt by the first death just like all of us here we will all die.

But to the one who conquers you will not be hurt by the second death. The first death is the one where we leave this planet. The second death is the one where we are separated from God forever. The first death is the one where we leave this planet. The second death is the one where we are separated from God forever. But you will not be hurt by it if you hang on. If you are faithful unto the end if you trust me.

[47:17] There's a quote from a theologian who says those who are born once die twice. Those who are born twice die once. Let me just say that again. Those who are born once die twice.

Those who are born twice die once. Jesus is talking to a Pharisee called Nicodemus and he was telling him hey if you want eternal life you're going to have to be born again.

And this old man is like what do you mean born again? That's impossible. You want me to climb back into my mother's womb? But the truth is when you decide to follow Jesus what you're saying is I'm going to die to myself.

It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And I'm going to be born again and I'm going to live completely for him. And those who are born twice die only once.

You will then die only your earthly death but your eternity will be with him. But those who only are born once then you will have the second death. The death where you will be separated from the creator from love himself for eternity.

[48:19] Church in Smyrna if you are faithful and to the end doesn't matter if you're being thrown into prison doesn't matter if you're super poor you cling on I will give you the crown of life because I've won Jesus has won and I'm going to give you this crown of life and if you conquer you won't be hurt by the second death.

And this is where I'll finish. Like what authority does he have to say that? For someone to come up to you and go hey don't be afraid of dying. Like I don't know one day you'll die like you Joy as will I but you're a lot younger than me so you'll probably be a lot later.

If I say hey don't worry about dying and you won't be hurt by the second death you'll be like oh that's kind and nice but you have no authority James to say that. Why does Jesus have that authority?

Why does he say that? Where did he even get this crown of life from? Of course he got it from the cross. When he died and then resurrected again he says all authority in heaven and on earth has now been given to me.

Why? Because I defeated death itself. And that's why he said that's when he introduced himself when he pulled open the curtains he said I am the Alpha and Omega I am the first and the last I hold the keys to death and Hades.

[49:37] That means no one dies without my say so. I have the last word. So long as you believe in me. Because if you believe in me if you follow me you won't be hurt by the second death because you win.

Because I win. Because I was faithful unto death for you. Even death on a cross. But now God has exalted me to have the name above every name so that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that I am Lord and you share that with me so long as you follow me.

I don't know about you and I'm finished now but I hope those words that he spoke to Smyrna encourages you. The Christian life when lived properly invites pressure.

We're not looking for trouble but there's something about the way we live that is different to the way of the world. When the world says payback we say turn the other cheek.

When the world loves only the people that love you Jesus says love those who hate you. Love those who despise you. All those who utter all kinds of evil against you who slander you.

[50:56] I think there's something that we can do right now. There is someone in your church sorry in your church well yes in your church in your office in your family in your friendship group that is slandering you that is doing something that is not kind to you.

If you follow the way of Jesus it should look different. It should change the way you respond. We're no longer offended because Jesus took on the ultimate offense for us. We're no longer afraid of death because he died for us and rose again and we're with the guy that died and rose again. That should mean something. And as we were worshipping I was just praying that we would all understand that. Actually there's nothing that I can say that will help you. Only the Holy Spirit can really reveal that to you.

My prayer for us is are we prepared for any kind of test? Or when we face challenges or we face pressures from this society can we be faithful to the end?

Or do we veer off? Last week's church in Ephesus just 30 miles south of us they had a first love and then they started flirting with other things. The church in Smyrna doesn't have this problem and it goes faithful to the end and Jesus promises the crown of life.

[52:15] That's what we should be aiming for. But I'll tell you one last thing. It's not easy. Running a long distance race is not easy. Fighting a long battle is not easy.

That's why we gather. That's why we do it together. Because if you do it on your own there's a high chance you don't get there. Again that African proverb if you want to go somewhere fast you go alone.

If you want to go somewhere far you go together. Hebrews 10.25 Don't stop meeting together and encourage one another until the day draws near.

Let us hold fast to that confession. That's why we gather. We have so many things still to figure out. I don't even know if the TV was tall enough today for you to see the lyrics.

There's so many things. I heard the chairs aren't comfortable. Thank you for sitting there for so long. But my hope is can we be brought to Jesus together as a family?

[53:18] That's the only way we keep this going. Keep ourselves going. We're in week three. I wanted to share something just before we finish here. Maybe we won't have quite time for the response.

As we're trying this for these next three months I encourage you come and test out. I know some of you are visiting. Welcome you again. But actually as we get to the point where we're more comfortable I'm going to start asking you to actually if you want to be part of this gathering we want to know you.

We want to know who you are. Because if you're going through pressure if you're going through tribulation if you're going through poverty if you're going through slander we want to know what you're going through.

And so we have a few months here where we're trying to figure out and I know people are coming from different congregations within the same church that's completely okay but what we're hoping for is as we start to settle as a congregation is that we start getting to the point where okay these are my people.

Because if it's just a service we want to attend there are plenty further down the road. There are plenty who are more gifted who are more entertaining who are better at teaching. If there's better songs that you want there's somewhere else but this is not a service.

[54:39] I hope that we are people who look at this book and go man I need to figure this out and I need people to help me figure this out together. I need to be known. I want to know. So I invite you if you're one of those people who are on the edge keep joining us but at some point we're going to want to know you.

My hope is that if we get to a point maybe by Christmas any person that we ask who is here hey who are your three people that you know here I would love for us all to be quite confident in saying who some of our people are within this gathering.

It's not just a service. The stakes are too high. The challenges are too tough to do it on your own. Let us be faithful unto death and let us do it together.

Thank you.