

Speaker: Stefan Duerksen, Lead Pastor

Church-Wide Prayer: 1. Life on Mission: Churchwide commitment to "Each One, Reach One"

- Pray for BAPTISM candidates! Spirit filling, wisdom, encouragement, perseverance, resolve!
- Pray for the Spirit to guide, encourage, & empower the 2600 children at the GS cent. & school
- Pray for mechanic team in Uganda as they repair tractors, wisdom in diag., ability, and Spirit help in keeping tractors & farm running.
- Pray for the Can. Team as they communicate with Uga. Team. Clarity, unity, success.
- Pray for corn planting happening in a couple of weeks! Pray for rain, fertilize, success & big crop!
- Pray for team travelling to Uga. In April. Safety, Spirit guidance, success in meetings, etc.

Intro: Today is BAPTISM WEEKEND – We do baptisms at the end of our service!

We are in the middle of our Letters to the Church series – last weekend – Equipping Conference focused on “things to Come”. IF YOU MISSED – Videos will be available within the month.

QUESTION: Baptism candidates are declaring allegiance to Jesus. **“is it worth it?”**

REMEMBER: Revelation - The letters to the Churches were given to seven real churches.

1. **John is writing these from prison on Patmos.** Jesus gave him the words.
2. **He is writing to Seven Churches in Asia Minor** – Modern day Türkiye
3. **The apocalypse of Jesus – the revealing of Jesus.** FIRST LOVE.
4. **To reveal things as they really are** – giving us the “big picture”. E.g. spiritual reality Eph 6
5. **To show us what’s to come** – Prevent deception, help us persevere & hope!
6. **To keep our present lives focused** – are we living in light of Christ’s return?

A. Letter to the Church of Smyrna

Map: Smyrna – Modern day Izmir (PICTURES BEFORE/AFTER)

- Located 35 miles from Ephesus
- Smyrna still exists, now bearing the name Izmir, the third-largest city in Turkey.
- **After 70 AD and the destruction of the Temple.** And with continued persecution against Christians. The Jews lived in constant anxiety about coming under persecution themselves. Many joined in the persecution of Christians as a result.
- **Smyrna RICH, WEALTHY, ADVANCED, MODERN, ANTI-CHRISTIAN, PRO-EMPEROR & WORLDLINESS.**

Revelation 2:8–11 (ESV) “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 ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. 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.’

- Jesus uses the title, ***“first and the last, who died and came to life.”***
 - On their coins were stamped the words “First City of Asia in Size and Beauty.”
 - Smyrna prided themselves in being FIRST and in having been REBORN. (580 BC – 290 BC)
 - **PERSONAL:** Jesus reminds them. HE is FIRST & LAST. This is a message of HOPE to those who are suffering and feel things are out of their control! GOD IS IN CONTROL.
- ***“I know your tribulation and poverty (yet you are rich)”***
 - The Greek word, ***“thlipsis”*** means “crushing pressure”
 - Jesus says, ***“I know your CRUSHING PRESSURE”*** then doesn’t go on to lift it!
 - Jesus says, ***“YET YOU ARE RICH”*** rich in the things that matter! **FIRST LOVE!**
- **I know the slander** you are receiving from false Jews who are apart of the synagogue of Satan!
 - **One:** Judaizers... gentiles who had adopted Judaism to avoid persecution. Even turning on true Christians.
 - **Two:** Jews who became hostile towards Christians as they were creating trouble for everyone and claiming Jesus was God!
 - **Either way.** Jesus says, “Satan is being the attacks you are experiencing” (Eph 6)
- ***“do not fear what you are about to suffer. The Devil will throw some you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation”***
 - You are going to suffer. Not be taken out of it.
 - The DEVIL is the one behind your imprisonment.
 - Jesus is allowing it... it will test you and refine you... and is TEMPORARY!
 - **Important lesson: Whether we live or die. We do ALL for the glory of God! FIRST LOVE.**
 - **OUR HOPE IS NOT IN THIS WORLD – JESUS SUFFERED TOO!**
 - **Darrell W.J.** *Darkness has two options when confronted with light. 1) become like the light, or, 2) extinguish it. Smyrna tried to extinguish the light!*
 - **Thomas Torrance,** *“A church cannot be a true church without causing trouble.”*

Smyrna is one of two churches that receives NO charge to REPENT or WARNING – only ENCOURAGEMENT! Do not give up! I am with you! KEEP BEING FAITHFUL! KEEP FIRST LOVE!

B. Counting the Cost: “Be FAITHFUL unto death...” Is faith blind?

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.’

Christians in Smyrna were told to be FAITHFUL unto death... this is the CALL to every believer TODAY.

380 million Christians suffer – 310M are in the top 50 persecuted countries. (www.opendoors.org)

Atheists claim, “Faith is believing something despite evidence to the contrary.” Is that true?

If true, the Apostle Paul says “we are fools” 1 Corinthians 15:17–20 (ESV) ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Christians in SMYRNA & TODAY: God is asking us to put our FAITH in Him and to surrender our lives, hopes, dreams, relationships, money, work – **EVERYTHING – even unto DEATH to Him.**

This what the BAPTISM CANDIDATES are saying “YES” to!

Have you considered: EVERYONE already does this?

- **Atheists have FAITH there is no God. They live & die by FAITH.**
- **Christians have FAITH in God. They live & die by FAITH.**

Romans 1:20 (NIV) For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Is faith in God rational? Or blind?

1. **Cosmological** - God is the cause of the beginning of the universe.
 - Everything that comes into existence has a cause.
 - The Universe came into existence.
 - The Universe has a cause.
- **Big Bang** proves the universe is NOT eternal.
 - Time had a beginning.
 - Matter had a beginning.
 - Expanding universe!
- **The second law of thermodynamics!**
 - Energy is running out as the Universe expands.
2. **Teleological (design) God as the cause of the design of the universe.**
 - DNA has information – creator must be INTELLIGENT.
 - “there is enough info in a single human cell to store the Ency. Britannica, 30 vol, 3-4x over” – Richard Dawkins
 - Life requires incredibly precise fine tuning. Even a slight variation means NO LIFE.
 - The chance of Earth existing by chance is, basically, impossible.
3. **Common Morality: God as the Law giver.**
 - Evolution has NO good explanation for why humans all seem to have the same sense of right and wrong.

JOB DESCRIPTION for cause of the above – exist outside of time, matter, must be immaterial (spirit), intelligent, powerful beyond comprehension, possession morality that is contrary to animals, eternal...

You choose. Does it sound like GOD? Or NOTHING?

Is the Bible reliable?

- **Reliability of the OT & NT – 17,000 OT manuscripts. 5,800 NT manuscripts.**
 - **Textual criticism has shown copying was accurate** – we can trust what we have.
 - **Many manuscripts of NT date within 30-100 years** (like yesterday).
 - **Archeology & Science have proven the Bible RIGHT, but never WRONG.**
- **Power of 4** – a study that demonstrated simply reading the Bible 4x or more per week dramatically lowered addiction, improved mental health, and increased discipleship!
- **PROPHECY** –Roughly 2000 of 2500 prophecies have been fulfilled to the letter. Including detailed prophecies.

Is Jesus real?

- **Historicity of Jesus' life, death & resurrection** (more at easter) confirmed.
- **C.S. Lewis, "Lord, lunatic, liar."** He hasn't given us any other options. YOU CHOOSE.

ULTIMATELY: each one of us is going to LIVE & DIE by FAITH.

C. "Be faithful unto death" how will YOU respond?

The Church in Smyrna received a good REPORT CARD from Jesus!

- **Cultural pressure** – conform to the culture – worship the Emperor, it's not a big deal!
- **Church pressure** – deception from within the Church! Adopt the "new way" – avoid persecution!
- **Loss of property, reputation, relationships, freedom, and the right to live.**
- **CRUSHING pressure and tribulation for their beliefs.**

JESUS SAID THEY WERE RICH! Rich in first love, faith, and living for the glory of God! They were told to HOLD FAST – even to DEATH.

Romans 3:23–24 (ESV) ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Romans 6:23 (ESV) ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 14:6 (ESV) ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Revelation 22:12–13 (ESV) ¹² "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Jesus claimed to be God – He said He created EVERYTHING – that ALL humans SIN – Consequence of SIN is DEATH – He LOVES us – He DIED for our sins – HE rose from the dead – HE IS COMING BACK – and when HE DOES – HE WILL JUDGE THE LIVING & THE DEAD – and EACH person will be JUDGED based on WHO or WHAT they PUT THEIR FAITH IN.

Those who say, "YES" to Jesus – are saying YES to loving Him with their whole lives! To being faithful unto death! NOT ABOUT PERFECTION – BUT THEY ARE COMMITTED TO THIS DIRECTION!

EVERY PERSON BEING BAPTIZED HAS MADE THIS CHOICE.

Today is your chance. You can make the same choice. Do you want:

- **Forgiveness** – of all your sins? Mistakes? **Absolution**
- **Purpose** – to live a life of meaning – even within suffering?
- **Identity** – want to know who you are? Are you lost? Stuck in sin? **You will never know who you are until you know whose you are.**
- **Reconciliation** – do you want a relationship with Jesus?
- **Family/Church** – an eternal family where you have a place to belong.
- **Confidence & Hope.** Knowing where you stand when you die.

When we die. Each one of us will stand before Jesus and He will give us our REPORT CARD! You don't have to wait until then to be made right with GOD – You can choose this TODAY.

Revelation 2:10-11 (ESV) *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.'*

TIME FOR BAPTISMS!!!!

AFTER SERVICE PRAYER – PRAYER ROOM – 9AM and 11AM

MARANATHA!! Come soon Lord!

Care@mysouthland.com

SC CHURCH WIDE PRAYER REQUESTS 2024

Cruise ship → → → → → Battleship

- 1. Life on Mission:** Churchwide commitment to "Each One, Reach One"
- 2. Heart of Southland:** 500 people - Prayer Summit, Set Free! & Bible in a year
- 3. Next Gen:** ❤️ Passion for Jesus, memorization & find identity in Christ
- 4. Church Renewal:** Double funding, mentors & CRI Churches in Canada
- 5. Persecuted Church & Israel:** Salvation, hope & perseverance - MARANATHA