

Speaker: Stefan Duerksen, Lead Pastor **PRAY FOR OFFERING**

Church-Wide Prayer: 4. Church Renewal: Double funding, mentors & CRI Churches in Canada

- Praise! Latin Ame., Africa, Myanmar, India – 1000 stories of changed lives! Set Free! Empower!
- Pray – Pastors, leaders, church members – to walk out their freedom in Christ! Walk in the Spirit!
- Pray – “Timothy” in India – someone to carry the message of Renewal to the Church of India!
- Pray – Willow Park – Set Free! March 7-9! Pray for those with addiction, bondage, etc. – FREE!
- Canada - Equipping Conference: Things to Come! NEXT WEEKEND. Jesus to be glorified! And our hearts to be lit on fire and drawn closer to Him!
- Pray for the Church to ‘stay awake’ as we await Jesus’ return!

Intro: Letters to the Church pt 4 – Ephesus – Jesus looked through all of the busyness and, albeit good activity – and found one fatal flaw – they had lost their FIRST LOVE.

As we continue in the letters today... some important reminders:

1. **The apocalypse of Jesus – the revealing of Jesus. FIRST LOVE.**
2. **To reveal things as they really are** – giving us the “big picture”. E.g. spiritual reality Eph 6
3. **To show us what’s to come** – Prevent deception, help us persevere & hope!
4. **To keep our present lives focused** – are we living in light of Christ’s return?

A. End Times Report Card Rubric

25% of Scripture focuses on Jesus’ return – REAL Kingdom – NEW heavens & earth.

594 of 737 prophecies in Scripture have come true. 80%!

Matthew 24:4 (ESV) And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray.”

One of the greatest deceptions is PASSIVE CHRISTIANITY – hunker down, blend into culture.

Matthew 24:45 (ESV)⁴⁵ “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, ...?”

1. Living UNAWARE vs Staying AWAKE

Matthew 24:37–39 (ESV)³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

- **Are you awake? Or, sleeping?**

2. Living in SIN vs Pursuing Righteousness

Matthew 24:48–51 (ESV) ⁴⁸ But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know ⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- Are you living in unrepentant SIN? Or, pursuing right living?

3. Living for the PRESENT vs the FUTURE

Matthew 25:1–13 (ESV)¹ “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ... ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

- Are you living for the present world? Or, the one to come?

4. Living in FEAR vs by FAITH

Matthew 25:14–30 (ESV)¹⁴ “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ... ²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ ²⁶ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ ... ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

- Are you living in fear? Or, living by faith?

5. Living for SELF vs LOVING people

Matthew 25:31–46 (ESV) “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

- Are you living for SELF? Or, are you LOVING the least of these?

End of the Age Report Card Rubric:

1. Living UNAWARE vs Staying AWAKE
2. Living in SIN vs Pursuing RIGHTEOUSNESS
3. Living for the PRESENT vs the FUTURE
4. Living in FEAR vs by FAITH
5. Living for SELF vs LOVING people

Matthew 24:42–44 (ESV) ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

B. The Church in Smyrna

Map: Smyrna – Modern day Izmir

- Located 35 miles from Ephesus
- Smyrna still exists, now bearing the name Izmir, the third-largest city in Turkey.

History of Smyrna:

- Smyrna was called “The Crown of Asia” and “The Flower of Asia.”
- It competed with Ephesus & Pergamos for being the #1 city in the Roman empire.
- Its streets were wide and paved. ... It was celebrated for its schools of science and medicine, and for its handsome buildings <https://bibleatlas.org/smyrna.htm>
- On the slope of Mt. Pagus was a theater which seated 20,000 spectators.
- In the 23 A.D. year a temple was built in honor of Tiberius, and the Golden Street, connecting the temples of Zeus and Cybele, is said to have been the best in any ancient city.
- The agora and the massive stone arches of its cryptoportico are a highlight of Izmir..
<https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/agora-of-smyrna>
- Much of the city was built on top of the Agora – it was built to LAST!
- Polycarp was a bishop here. 69-155 AD He was the last surviving person who knew the Apostle John.
 - While he was praying, he had a vision of the pillow under his head in flames. He said prophetically to those who were with him, “ *I will be burnt alive.*”
 - They tried to feed him to lions but failed. They burned him alive instead.
 - “*86 years have I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?*” – **Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna**
 - <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/50aa53f4962db8.97516591.pdf>
- 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-EMPERORER & WORLDLINESS.

C. Letter to the Church of Smyrna

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. 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.*”

- 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! We are tempted to think they are out of God's control! JESUS REMINDS US – HE IS SOVEREIGN!
- ***"I know your tribulation and poverty (yet you are rich)"***
 - The Greek word, "*thlipsis*" it is much stronger a word than normal trouble.
 - **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 they are from SATAN – spiritual battles – these false believers, whoever they were, were being led by Satan.
- **"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"**
 - **STOP:** what had the Christians done to deserve this?
 - They passionately followed JESUS! Sold out for the KINGDOM OF GOD!
 - **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 of Edinburgh, Scotland, says, "A church cannot be a true church without causing trouble."**
- ***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.'***
 - **TEENAGERS:** Our current culture is telling you the "good life" is found in living your truth and pursuing immoral lifestyles.
 - Loving Jesus FIRST will cost you in school. With friends. Time. Money. Work. The direction of your life. ALL OF IT MATTERS ACCORDING TO JESUS.
 - **Will you compromise? As the narrative flips on Christians. Where will you stand?**
 - **PARENTS & ADULTS:** the temptation to keep up with the "Jones'" is strong! "you only live once" is a lie. You LIVE FOREVER. What you do today. What you model for the next generation. How you spend your time, money, and how you treat people and handle your faith MATTERS. ETERNALLY.
 - **Will you compromise? As the narrative flips on Christians. Where will you stand?**
 - **PROFESSIONALS: Owners, bosses, workers, teachers, government employees and fast food specialists:** The world will tell you that you should do something that makes you happy and work to live a good life. Jesus calls you to "SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM" and to do "ALL THINGS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD."
 - What are YOU and working for?

- Will you compromise? As the narrative flips on Christians. Where will you stand?

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!

“let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” MESSAGE is for us at Southland too!

REFLECT: In light of, Jesus’ life, death – the blood spilled for OUR freedom, resurrection and His RETURN to END EVIL ONCE AND FOR ALL. **How will you choose to live?**

- Living UNAWARE vs Staying AWAKE
- Living in SIN vs Pursuing RIGHTEOUSNESS
- Living for the PRESENT vs the FUTURE
- Living in FEAR vs by FAITH
- Living for SELF vs LOVING people

Be prepared for your REPORT CARD:

1. **Commit to reading through the Bible.** *Study, memorize, meditate, and meet God!*
2. **Sign up for the next Set Free!** *Deal with your sin. Don’t suffer alone.*
3. **Come to the Equipping Conference next Fri-Sat!** *Jesus said, “Know the season”*
4. **FIRST LOVE** – *deal with sin, fear, stress, and other loves, that keep you from JESUS!*
5. **BRING A FRIEND(S) to ALL OF THE ABOVE** – LIVE YOUR FAITH IN COMMUNITY!
 1. **Collective – Connect Cell – small groups!**

SPECIAL: The King is coming!

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

MARANATHA!! Come soon Lord!

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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