



2022 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Apr 25th - May 1st

Sermon: April 24th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus

April 25

Ephesians 2:20, 4:11

Today's point to ponder is written from my conviction that the office of the prophet changed after the completion of the New Testament. Prior to the church having the complete and all sufficient Word of God, God appointed chosen people and assigned them specific gifts to speak into the life of the church. Ephesians 4:11 says, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastor/teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service." Sometimes these people would speak with practical and direct guidance for the church as we read in Acts 11:27-28 where Agabus comes with specific and clear teaching of what was to come. Agabus, like the prophets during this time, was enabled by the Holy Spirit to foresee and foretell things to come.

It appears that the purpose of this ministry was to confirm to the early church the presence of God among them and His teaching as well as to help guide the church in the direction she should go. Agabus also appears in Acts 21:10-11 where he foretells what is going to happen to Paul once he gets to Jerusalem. I believe it is safe to say that what the Spirit was doing through these chosen and appointed men of God was the fulfillment, at least in part, of what Jesus said in John 16:13. There it is written, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." In the case of the prophets, the Spirit was choosing to speak through them to reveal God's will. You can refer to Acts 21:11 where Agabus says "This is what the Holy Spirit says...." A prophet was gifted by God to give revelation to the church.

Now, I do not believe that the office of the prophet is still in effect in the same manner in our day. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:20 that, like the office of the apostle, the office of the prophet was a foundational piece to the building up of the church. Keep in mind that you only lay a foundation once and then build the house or structure on top of it. The foundation is different and distinct from the rest of the edifice. Once the foundation is laid and has accomplished its purpose, you move on from it. The foundation is always important but not the focus once the structure is in place.

Think about it with me today. The office of the prophet was a means by which God spoke into the lives of the people of His church. We know that the author of Hebrews says, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son..." (Heb. 1:1-2). The idea is the same. In the Old Testament, God spoke directly to men like Noah and Abraham. Then He began to utilize men like Moses to be His voice to the people. He then raised up men like Isaiah, Elijah, Elisha, and the prophets. You will notice that as the Old Testament moves along, God is no longer speaking as He did with Abraham or even Moses. His message is coming to His people through the prophets.

Well, that is continuing to a degree through the office of the prophet in the early church *until* the written Word is finished. So, in our day, we have the complete Bible and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the written Word for us. The Bible becomes the "lamp unto our feet and light unto our path." The Spirit impresses God's truth upon our hearts and minds as we read and study the Word which is the "voice" for us today. We with Spirit in our hearts and the Word in our hands, can be prophets to the people as we disclose to them what God says through His Word.

April 26

Deuteronomy 18:21-22; 1 John 4:1

God put prophets in place to speak truth into the lives of His people and the early church. You and I have lived long enough now to know that humanity is sinful by nature and much of what God puts into place for our good gets corrupted by human deceitfulness and sin. How would people know if another person was actually speaking on behalf of God? How would one know if what they were being told was indeed true? People in our own day still manipulate others and use God's Word and Christianity for selfish gain. Times have not changed.

In the Old Testament, God already considered and prepared His people for the likelihood of deceivers misleading and taking advantage of the people. He speaks to it through Moses in Deuteronomy 18:21-22 where it is written, "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the Lord has spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." Jeremiah 28:9 is another passage with the same message concerning prophets. The point I am making is that God knows the possibility exists that someone will falsely speak on His behalf. Are we then off the hook and not responsible because someone lied to us or misrepresented God? The answer is absolutely not!

Brothers and sisters, even in the Old Testament we are taught to be patient and to take our time to be sure what we are hearing is from the Lord. We must know that people are sinful by nature and need to be proven first. This is why God says that we are not to put a novice into a position of leadership in the church (1 Timothy 3). John told us in 1 John 4:1 that we are to test the spirits to be sure they are of the Lord. Paul tells the Thessalonians to "not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast what is good." This simply means that we must know how to examine the Scriptures. Rather than accepting every teaching, discerning Christians are to study the Scriptures so that we spot false teaching or the mishandling of the Word.

The reason we are given these admonitions, and the reason I choose this point to ponder today, is because there are many false prophets in our society today and "wolves in sheep's clothing" everywhere who try to lead Christians astray. There are many who claim to speak for God who are presenting a false gospel that is powerless to save. So, the reason that we are to test the spirits or teachings is to see if it is truly from God or it is a lie from Satan and his servants. The test is to compare what is being taught with the clear teaching of The Bible. The Bible, not the prophet, is inspired and inerrant. Like the Bereans of Acts 17:10-11, we are to examine the Scriptures to see if what is being taught is true to God's Word.

Testing the spirits and what is being taught requires that you and I know how to examine the Scriptures. Do you know enough about what the Bible says to be able to determine if what is being taught is contained in it? That it is true? I think of Paul writing these words to Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The Word is that lamp that we must let shine upon the teachings and doctrines of our day to determine what is indeed true and of the Lord.

April 27

Acts 11:22-23, 25-26, 27

Verse 27 of Acts 11 begins with the words, “Now at this time....” I have learned that God takes His sweet time getting us ready for the events and tasks He sovereignly calls us to in His service. This can sometimes feel tedious, and we often grow impatient, but He knows what He is doing and what must be done in us to prepare us. The principle of God preparing us may seem unnecessary on that hand but we tend not to get upset when He does the same thing in preparing us for the hard assignments. I am talking about the way God grows and develops our faith for the moments in which we will have to dig deep and hold on tightly when the mountain is high and the valley low.

Sometimes preparation for your steps in growth and maturity take longer than you think. Moses was 80 when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt, but this was a task God had prepared him for. The first forty years were spent being raised in the palace at Egypt, and the next forty years were spent living in the wilderness as a Shepherd. Moses was an expert of both environments by 80 years of age, and this was when he started to fulfill his God given calling. I think most of us have no problem understanding that we need to grow and be better equipped to handle larger assignments. The point that I want us to ponder today is the precious and gracious way God grows us prior to asking more of us.

An easy example would be that of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22. How many of us would relish the assignment to kill our own child as a sacrificial offering to God? Since we all know how that story ends, it makes it easier to rejoice in the goodness of God. A truth to that even that I don’t want you to miss is the fact that allowed Abraham to walk with Him for decades before He tested his faith that severely. In other words, God took His time and grew Abraham’s faith to a level at which he responded in faith and obedience even then. I am thankful that God still does that today.

In our passage from Sunday’s message, it may be easy to miss the same truth being demonstrated once again. We need to go back a little earlier in the chapter (11) and see that the Spirit sent Barnabas to rejoice with and encourage the new believers in Antioch. So, the first step was encouragement and strengthening through fellowship and worship (v. 22-23). As we continue through the 11th chapter, we read that Barnabas decided he needed help as the church was growing so he went to Tarsus to bring Paul back to Antioch (v.25-26). Verse 26 says that Barnabas and Saul (Paul) taught the new believers for an entire year. Then verse 27 begins with, “Now at this time....”

See dear church family, God was patiently and slowly working to develop and disciple the young Christians. He did not throw them into the deep in on day one. First Barnabas worked with them, then Barnabas and Saul disciplined them, and then God sent the prophet Agabus to give them more guidance. I stand amazed and thankful that God operates with His children in this manner. It reminds me of how good parents slowly but methodically and with intentionality pour into their kids to prepare them for life. God was about to reveal to the young church that hard times were coming in the form of a famine. Fortunately for them and the church in Jerusalem, they had grown in their faith so that a step of obedience in financial sacrifice was a natural reaction to their circumstances. They were ready for the challenge because God had grown them up.

April 28

Exodus 2:11-15

I enjoy watching football. It always irritates me so much when my team commits a “false start.” That is when somebody on the offense moves forward before the ball is snapped by the center to the quarterback. The ref throws a flag and the team is penalized, and the ball moved backwards instead of forward. Oh boy does that irk me. Well, I have been guilty, and I have seen it many times in people in the church, that we commit false starts too.

In the text that I have chosen for today, Moses commits a false start that cost him dearly. Only God knows how long Moses had observed the awful treatment the Hebrews were receiving at the hands of their Egyptian taskmasters. He probably witnessed Egyptian brutality to Hebrew slaves more than once. Maybe he thought at times about “redeeming” his people. One day he snapped. In a blind rage, he killed the Egyptian oppressor whom he caught mistreating a Hebrew slave. As the victim’s blood ran out into the Egyptian sand, so did his time and opportunity in Egypt.

If Moses thought he would be seen as a hero and praised by his own people, he was wrong. He meant well but everything backfired, and it wasn’t long after that we find Moses fleeing and on the run. We know of course that God had a plan all along for the life of Moses, but we can also assume that Moses killing a man in anger was not part of God’s perfect will. Moses’ outburst and murder had cost him his privileged position in the palace and the opportunities that afforded. It could have cost him his life too.

Now, on a positive note, Moses had a strong sense of right and wrong. This compass propelled him into personal intervention on behalf of others, even when it involved conflict. He cared about the needs of the less fortunate. This is a good characteristic. But this trait exercised out of God’s will and before it’s time, is usually wrought with negative consequences as it was in Moses’ life.

All I am getting at today dear brothers and sisters is the need for patience and God’s timing in your life. As I wrote yesterday, God takes His time in preparing us for all that He calls us to. If we preempt His timing and march forward in our own strength and without proper understanding, wisdom, and maturity we are likely to do as much harm as we do good. I have seen it so many times when a young Christian gets overly zealous in their desire to do good. The truth is, they really need to be put in a cage until they get the maturity to match the passion. When we become consumed by our passion, we tend to overplay our ambition, abuse our position or power, and get into trouble. These early mistakes can threaten to derail our ministries and life missions if God’s grace doesn’t protect.

Friends, let us determine now to remember the lesson of our text from Sunday’s message. God has a plan and a purpose for your life and if it is going to be carried out effectively, we must allow time for the training and equipping before we commit a false start and mess everything up. There are always amazing gifts that God provides in our waiting. The dreams that you have about making impacts are good. Just make sure your timing is too.

April 29

Exodus 18:17-27; Ephesians 4:11

It took me a long time, but I have finally begun to learn the truth of a simple verse like Exodus 18:22 which says, "...So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you." That is given to Moses from his father-in-law Jethro at the end of a long day when Moses and the people he was trying to lead was exhausted. His wise father-in-law realized that Moses was hurting himself and the people he was leading by trying to do everything himself. The task was simply too big, and his efforts were counterproductive.

Yesterday I used an example from football concerning false starts. Today I go back to the idea of sports as it relates to "team." Pastor Aaron and I realize that for Smyrna to be a strong and healthy church, we need a team approach to ministry. For far too long, churches have operated as a one man show with the laity sitting on the sidelines watching the professionals do the work of ministry. Well, not only is that inefficient and ineffective, but it is also completely unbiblical. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that the leadership was to spend a significant amount of time equipping or training the lay people for serving and doing ministry. We can go back to Acts 6 and see that spirit filled men were chosen by the church to do much of the "heavy lifting" in ministry.

Moses was committing the same mistake in his early leadership role and ministry by failing to train and entrust others to share the load of ministry. We have seen here at Smyrna that when the people are raised up to serve, they (you) serve well and are more than capable of handling important tasks. Think about some examples of how God has done this, used a team approach, in ministry. Moses led the Exodus, but he did it with Aaron, Miriam, Joshua and a myriad of others. King David relied on a host of players to rule his kingdom. Jesus recruited a team to help him establish the Christian movement to carry the Gospel forward to the nations. The book of Acts details the efforts of Paul's ministry entourage. He relied upon local leadership consistently.

A huge benefit to ministry as a team, is that it naturally builds community. Team ministry captures the power of community and strengthens the church in mighty ways. Teams encourage and support the risks involved in ministry. Alone, some tasks seem too big and overwhelming. When the load is shared and in essence divided, it becomes lighter and manageable; it becomes doable and usually gets accomplished. A team approach brings multiple thoughts and approaches to getting a job done. In our day we refer to that as synergy. Another important benefit that is often overlooked is the simple joy and fun that community and team brings to a task.

Friends, can you imagine if Agabus had come with the news of the impending famine and gave the responsibility to care for others to one person or family. That would be ridiculous. It would be too much, and it would be impossible. That is not what happened. God raised up a community of believers who were then tasked with an assignment that was doable because they did it together. I often think of when we cut the hill in front of the church. It is so hard when 1 or 2 men try to do it. But, when there are 8-10, we knock it out in no time, enjoy it while we do it, and still have energy left for the next assignment. Thank God for community, for the "family" of God and the beauty of sweet "togetherness" and sharing in the life of the church.

April 30

Exodus 35:21; Acts 11:29; 2 Corinthians 8:14, 9:10-15

It is very important to keep in mind that God does not endow every person with the same gifts, number of gifts, or even opportunities to serve. All of us realize that some people have more resources than others. Some people have been given privileges and seen doors open for them to walk through while others have not. Some people are wealthy, and some people are living check to check. I want us to think about this today from the perspective of God's will for different people. Now, it is important to understand that "to whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). This statement of Jesus has become somewhat of an idiom in Western culture and is found, paraphrased, in Uncle Ben's words of wisdom to Peter Parker in *Spider-man*: "With great power comes great responsibility." The idea of "to whom much is given, much will be required" is that we are held responsible for what we have. If we are blessed with talents, wealth, knowledge, time, and the like, it is expected that we use these well to glorify God and benefit others.

It is easy to assume that only wealthy people have been "given much," but, in truth, we have all been given much (1 Corinthians 4:7). We have been granted the abundant grace of God (Ephesians 1:3–10; 3:16–21; Romans 5:8–11; 8:14–17), the Word of God, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–21; 16:13; Romans 12:6). "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10). But, back to the point I want you to ponder today.

Church family, I have found that a person's sensitivity, responsiveness, and simple Christian love is directly proportional to their level of intimacy with God. In other words, when a person is walking faithfully with God in Bible study, prayer, worship, fellowship, community, etc., they are going to be heavily influenced by the Spirit and bear much fruit for His glory. Serving, giving, sacrificing, and obeying the Lord become so much more natural. Getting a person to respond to ministry needs is easy when they are already loving Jesus well. You see, the heart becomes so sensitive to the Holy Spirit that He holds sway over their lives, and they don't walk under the influence of their own flesh. I wonder how you are doing in this.

In the book of Exodus, it is written, "Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the Lord's contribution for the work..." (Exodus 35:21). This reminds me of what was taking place in Acts 11. Because of the discipleship that had been taking place in the church in Antioch, the people responded to the moving of the Spirit when the needs arose due to the famine. Here is where you must keep in mind what I wrote at the beginning of this devotion. Before you run off and defend your refusal to serve or give, keep in mind that you are to give in proportion to what you have, and we do not all have the same opportunities or resources. You give in accordance with what you have. We cannot all give or respond in the same way.

As a matter of fact, there will be seasons when you can do more than at other times. There will be times when you are on the giving end and other times when you may be the one in need (2 Cor. 8:14). Also, please keep in mind that it is God who will supply your needs and will even multiply your resources on occasion as you sow into the lives of others. As you and I serve the Lord and show generosity and genuine love to others, He is glorified and the kingdom advanced (2 Cor. 9:10-11).

May 1

Acts 14:22; 1 John 2:24

Dear ones, I hope that you will be the kind of person who will be a disciple maker like Paul and an encourager like Barnabas. I want to end this week of points to ponder by encouraging you as Barnabas encouraged the believers in Antioch to “remain resolute in heart and be true to Jesus” (Acts 11:23). Purpose in your heart that you “would cling unto the Lord” because that is how you will remain moldable and useful in His hands. Brothers and sisters, you must practice His presence and stay close to Jesus. Luke tells us in 14:22, “Strengthening the souls of the disciples,” Paul and Barnabas again, “encouraged them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom.” Sure, you’re going to have trouble, but come on, hold on to the Lord, live in close communion.

How do you cling to Jesus, stay close, and remain? The seed is planted in the life. And the Bible says that Jesus says, “The seed is the Word.” Right? And Satan wants to come and do what? Snatch the Word away. So, if you’re going to continue with Jesus, what you must do is take the Word and to hold on to the Word. That’s the key. What are we forever telling you to do? Read the Bible!

Now let me take you to 1 John 2 and show you something that’s very, interesting. It says, “Let that therefore abide in you, which you have heard from the beginning.” What did you hear? The Word. He says, let it abide. Get this now, it’s so important – “If that which you have heard from the beginning shall remain in you ye also shall” – what’s the next word? – “continue” – how are you going to continue? Give it to me. Hold on to what? To the Word! Barnabas, back in Acts Chapter 11, says, “Hey folks, cling to the Lord.” What do you mean Barnabas? “I mean take the Word which you’ve heard, the Word which is available, as taught by the Spirit, and saturate yourself with it.” That, my friend, is the safeguard against drifting away. That’s why the greatest fear that I have for you is that you don’t faithfully study the Bible, because it’s the anchor, it’s the safeguard.

We’ve got a community to reach that is lost. We’ve got a job to do, now what are we going to do? Here come the two biggest guys available of the Spirit of God, Paul and Barnabas, shining lights in the history of leadership, great men of God. What are we going to do? Let’s see what they did. What kind of program did they have? “And it came to pass that for a whole year they assembled themselves together with the church, and they taught. You want to know what the church is for? It’s for teaching. It’s for teaching. If you never learn anything else about the church, if you learn that you’ve learned enough. The church is for teaching. Teaching is the goal and the design of the church.

Well, the end of verse 26, “And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” They had never been called Christians before. You know something people, you and I bear the name that they died to preserve in purity. You know so many people call themselves Christians so glibly. Listen, if you’re a Christian, my friend, wear it well. It was given to the finest. And let me tell you something else, beloved. It’s the name of Christ, Christ one. If you’re a Christian and you wear the name of Christ, wear it well, deserve it or don’t claim it. You know the church not only needed to be sound in doctrine, but they needed to have love. Two things make a solid church, sound doctrine and love, and they had it. I pray we will too.