



# 2024 Weekly Devotions

Week of: April 1<sup>st</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: March 31<sup>st</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
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April 1  
**Luke 19:10**

The ground of our celebration on Easter is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I pray that I did a passable job yesterday of connecting the good news of the resurrection to God's larger redemptive work as detailed in the Scripture. The Lord knew from before the foundation of the world that He would send His Son, Jesus, to a created world for the purpose of redemption. All of the covenants that God made up to the New Covenant which was ratified in the blood of the Son and made effective in the resurrection. The ultimate function of all of the previous covenants is only realized when we consider the fact that they are meant to point towards this ultimate act of redemption and, therefore, they are all inextricably connected to the resurrection.

As we consider the reason for the resurrection, we must zoom out just a bit and think about the ultimate ground of Christ's coming. Why did Jesus rise from the grave? The answer is that He rose from the grave as a victor over death. Why did Jesus die? The answer is so that you and I could live. Finally, what motivated Jesus' death? That is the question I want to deal with today.

The verse for this devotion is quite familiar to many Christians. My assumption is that it is well known because it is both powerful and succinct. I know of no other text in the Scripture that is more straightforward and packed with glorious truth than this one! Jesus was motivated to come and die in order "to seek and to save the lost".

There are two distinct yet bound actions in this passage and I want to deal with them in reverse order. Jesus says He came to "save" the lost. The motivation for Christ's coming was salvation. The salvation that He accomplished for us on the cross was necessary. You and I are sinners, we are bathed in our iniquity and there is no personal recourse we can take to overcome our sin problem. The effect of sin is that we are separated from God, the giver of life, and therefore spiritually dead in our trespasses (even while we are physically alive) and careening towards eternal death in hell. We are on a train, destined for the gates of hell, that we cannot get off by our own efforts. We need someone to rescue us and that was the mission of Christ. Jesus died so that we could live, He offered payment for our sins that we didn't possess, and He did so intentionally and willingly as our loving Savior. We celebrate Easter because Easter is the day we have set aside to commemorate the moment that Jesus got up from the grave. If Jesus didn't get up, we would have no reason to hope for our own resurrection but, when the grave was vacated, the cosmos celebrated because the firstfruits of our hope were on display.

Now, that is the Gospel, and what I want to do over the next 7 days is marvel in the attribute of God that motivated Him to accomplish such a marvelous salvation on our behalf. What would cause God to do such a thing? The answer is that God is a loving God, and we see this love in the fact that He is a seeker. Jesus came to this earth to die of His own volition, and He did so even though He knew that the very ones on this planet He came to save would kill Him. The people were looking for a Messiah of their own making, they were not looking for Jesus and, therefore, they never would have found the salvation they desperately needed. Instead, God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were enemies of His and looking for any other means of liberation, Christ still saw fit to seek us. Brother and sister, we serve a seeking God and His ability and willingness to seek sinful and fallen men is one of the most glorious aspects of His being.

April 2

## Genesis 6

Today's text is a marvelous example of our seeking God. The story of Noah is a foundational account to the biblical narrative. It demonstrates many things about God: His wrath, His wisdom and His grace. The grace of God is found, most obviously, in the fact that God chose to spare mankind through Noah in spite of man's blatant and unrepentant sin.

Some may push back here and claim that God's grace wasn't quite so abundant because of the way that the Bible describes Noah's state in God's eyes. Most modern translations state that "Noah found favor in God's eyes". Does this mean that Noah was "favorable" in his own person? I have heard numerous individuals teach that the ground of God's choosing and sparing Noah was his personal morality. According to them, Noah was a shining light in a dark world, deserving of God's pardon because of his morality. This ignores the clear biblical teaching on the topic of man's sinful, depraved nature and it also is not in keeping with the very grammar of the passage in the initial language.

Alec Motyer expands: "Older translations have 'grace' here, rather than 'favor', and the expression that someone 'found grace' in another's eyes occurs frequently in the Old Testament (some twenty-seven times in fact) ...wherever the phrase occurs, it points to the meritlessness of the one 'receiving' the grace. The scriptural understanding of 'Noah found grace' is indeed that 'grace found Noah.'" I suppose that Motyer makes his point very well but, just to be clear, the way that the Hebrew Scriptures frame Noah is not as an exception to an otherwise universal rule instead Noah stands in a long line of men and women who needed grace and who were blessed when the God of all grace came looking for them.

I pray that this illuminates something very foundational about God and, therefore, Christ and the reason for Easter. Just like Jesus came "to seek and save the lost", our God has been seeking and saving those who are lost for quite some time. The only reason why Noah was spared was God's grace. Was Noah obedient? Certainly, but only after God sought Noah and revealed Himself and His plan of salvation to the man. I assume that most of us have "found favor" in God's eyes as well. This is not because we were naturally better, more moral beings than our contemporaries, it is because God, in His mercy, chose to seek us for salvation as well.

Folks, in the biblical narrative and in every moment since the Bible was completed, God moves first. He is the seeker of men, and this magnifies His marvelous grace and helps explain one reason why we celebrate the resurrection on Easter Sunday morning. In the resurrection, the ground of God's saving man through seeking was completed and it is still being applied to us today.

April 3

## Genesis 12

Genesis 12 was the text for Sunday which means that it is a bit unorthodox to utilize it in a devotion. Nevertheless, the goal of this week's devotions is to demonstrate the biblical pattern of God seeking those He will save, and ultimately, use. Today's passage starts so abruptly, and I don't want you to miss this fact. We are first introduced to Abram in the genealogy of Genesis 11. However, the meat of the narrative surrounding Abram begins in Genesis 12 with these words "Now the Lord spoke to Abram..."

Notice here that there is no precursor. There is no description of Abram searching for God, in fact it would be well within reason to think that Abram was living a typical, perhaps even pagan, lifestyle. From Abram's perspective, God spoke out of the blue! God was seeking Abram to do something and be something that he never could have dreamed. He was seeking to save Abram and his progeny which happened as a result of Abram's faith, which was the result of God seeking Abram!

As is often the case in the Scripture, God seeks the least likely candidates for His work and makes them truly amazing, dare I say almost fantastic, promises. God redemptive work included utilizing a man with no children, who was in his 70's, to father a nation of people who would bring forth a Messiah through a virgin to redeem the world. The promise God made to Abram is no more unreal than the promise He made to Noah or the promise He made to David or the guarantee He makes to us who would believe in the sufficiency and legitimacy of His Son's death and resurrection. Our God is a miracle working, all-powerful and totally trustworthy God.

In all these things, the Bible makes sure to show us that God is the initiator or, stated differently, God is the seeker. One of the things that has fascinated me most about this particular narrative in the Scripture is the way that God chooses to bring His children into the story having already worked out the details. This is not a group discussion in Genesis 12. God doesn't confer with Abram to see what he might think best regarding how to save the world, instead God simply ordains that Abram would be a part of the redemptive process and tells Abram where to go and what He will do. This is such a wonderful picture of the way God relates to us. God does not seek us the way a person might seek an expert for consultation. He didn't seek Abram because He needed Abram's insight, He sought Abram because He had ordained that Abram would be His chosen vessel of grace and salvation.

Furthermore, God does not seek us because he needs something from us! Abram had literally nothing to offer God in terms of the redemptive plan. He didn't have a child to offer as the origin of a holy line of descendants. He didn't have a piece of land that God was after to house Israel. He was simply a person that God ordained to use. I end there today because I want to make sure I emphasize the point that none of us is disqualified from being sought by virtue of our lack of resource. In fact, we may be well within our rights to think that those who have the least to offer are the exact ones that God is after!

April 4

**Genesis 28:10-22**

Neither of the two previous examples we have used regarding God's seeking and saving the lost are as difficult to comprehend as today's individual. Noah and Abraham both had their issues (in fact both are demonstrated to be fallen sinners in the very same narratives that we parachuted into over the previous two days as Noah fell to drunkenness and Abram willingly misled Pharaoh about the relationship between himself and Sarai), nevertheless neither strike the reader as altogether depraved. This is not to deny the fact that both were sinners but it is to say that we read of far worse in the biblical narrative than Noah or Abraham.

Today's figure does not meet those qualifications. In fact, Jacob was a true scoundrel in many respects. When we initially meet Jacob, we read the story of his deceiving his father in order to receive a birthright that wasn't his. We go on to read of a man who lived a large portion of his life on the run and yet we also must note that God ordained to seek and to save and to use this otherwise hopeless individual.

God has a history of using some unusual characters. Jesus' disciples were a rag-tag bunch of men. Some of them were involved in questionable businesses, others were political vigilantes and yet Christ set His eyes on each of them. In the same way, Jacob is an example of the lengths God will go to seek and save the lost. Here is a man who was marked by deception and despised by his own brother for theft. He was clearly not a man with an upstanding reputation and yet we have the very same pattern of God's revelation and the subsequent response in Genesis 28.

Once again, we read that God appears and speaks to Jacob and this interaction changed the course of Jacob's life and his relationship with the Father for all eternity. The effect of Jacob's interaction with the Father is clear, whereas before Jacob lived on the run from others and estranged from God, now he would pursue reconciliation with those he harmed and submit to the authority and Lordship of God above.

We see both of these things quite clearly in verses 18-22 whereby Jacob promises that he would return to his father's house (to face Esau) and submit to God as his God as a result of God's being present with him. Stated differently, it was the seeking God, who eventually tracked down Jacob, that caused Jacob to walk in obedience and pursue peace whereas he previously walked in darkness and pursued division.

This is such a marvelous picture of God's grace and the effect that God has on those He came to seek and save. Folks, when God gets ahold of a person, their previous lifestyle has no bearing on their future pursuits. He is able to save and transform even the lowliest of sinners into revered saints. This is why we preach the Gospel with such passion and conviction. We know that the God who saved and sanctified Jacob is the same God who saves and transforms sinners like Jacob today. Do you believe this? If so, I pray that you won't stop praying for those who are strays and that you won't stop believing that our God is able.

April 5

## 1 Samuel 16

Today's text has always been one of my favorites because it demonstrates that God seeks those who not only aren't looking but who also aren't even considered by their own family! The story of Samuel's anointing David is a prime example of God's love of seeking the most unlikely for the most glorious of missions.

I am aware that many of you are familiar with the story but just to bring us up to speed, Saul was the first King of Israel. Saul was wicked before the eyes of the Lord, and this prompted God to tell Samuel to look for another King underneath God's guidance. Through a series of events, Samuel ends up at Jesse's house with news that God had ordained that one of Jesse's sons would be the next King.

The process then begins of Jesse bringing his various sons before Samuel to discern whom God had anointed. The first son, Eliab, was brought before Samuel and he seemed to be a promising candidate! Nevertheless, the Lord informed Samuel (in one of the most beautiful and illuminating passages in the Scripture) that He was not concerned with the outward appearance of a man but with his heart. This is yet another example of the fact that God chooses those whom the world thinks unlikely and, perhaps, even unqualified. Whereas Saul looked like a King, he was a miserable failure and the next King, though woefully imperfect, would demonstrate that far greater qualifications must be met than outward appearances and charisma.

The real pinnacle of the text happens after Jesse summons a few more of his sons to come before Samuel only to recognize that none of those men were chosen for service either. At that point, in a rather exasperated tone perhaps, Samuel looks at Jesse and asks if there were any other sons available. At that time, Jesse informs Samuel that there is one left.

What has always intrigued me about this passage is that Jesse did not think David the prime candidate to be King, even from his own offspring. One would guess that David was not unlike his brothers in any exemplary way, in fact we might be led to believe that his brothers seemed to be more qualified than he was! Nevertheless, David was God's man, and he was sought by God through the ministry of Samuel.

David's story is a reminder that God does miraculous things with otherwise nondescript people. God does not need our gifts or qualifications (although He most certainly does use them at times), God is able to seek and utilize any He chooses for whatever He chooses and David, the great King and man after God's own heart, is a marvelous example of this truth. Perhaps you are plagued by a feeling that you aren't qualified. Maybe you have felt the sting of those close to you not thinking you could live up to your calling. Maybe you've been overlooked and cast out to the proverbial fields. If that's you, be reminded that it is God who seeks and God's power that appoints. While the world might not think you are anything special, God looks upon the heart and uses whom He wishes.

April 6

## Jonah

The Scripture passage for today is not a typo! I really did cite the entire book of Jonah, but I want to be clear that I am using it for two days of devotions. This means that you have some time, but I would really encourage you to read this relatively short little book.

In keeping with our theme for the week, God's seeking is never more evident than in Jonah's book. First, we see that God often seeks and prevails over those who are initially unwilling. Jonah is a most interesting prophet in that he was totally disinterested in his God ordained call! Isaiah famously cried out to God "Here I am, send me" whereas Jonah said, "catch me if you can, please send someone else!" Jonah is perhaps the most unwilling prophet in the Scriptures, and yet the point remains that he prophesied just as God ordained.

The seeking of God is evident from the jump as God appears to Jonah with a mission that was surely out of left field. One can imagine Jonah trying to interpret and process the commission, you want me to go to who?! The Ninevites were not friends of the Jews. In fact, they were sworn enemies and vicious people. They were pagans who hated the one true God and yet Jonah received word from the Lord that they were exactly who He was after.

Both Jonah and the Ninevites are interesting examples of God's power to seek. Today we see that God's seeking us for service will not be thwarted. Jonah did all that he could to avoid the commission that God had given him and yet he ultimately submitted. There is an interesting part of this story in that Jonah is initially given the command, he flees, he ends up in the belly of a fish for three days, he's vomited out of the fish onto the shore and then God gives the very same commission again! Its as if God says to Jonah, "that was cute, now do what I tell you."

The point is that God's seeking won't be overcome by our running. If God sets His eye on a person, He will prevail. Oh folks, I am afraid that some of us give ourselves far too much credit. We are too prone to think that we had more to do in our own calling and salvation and certainly far too apt to think that we have veto power over our great God. nevertheless, the point in the account is clear, God will see to it that His will is accomplished.

Am I saying that there aren't consequences for disobedience? Hardly! I'd have to ignore the entire plot of the narrative which shows us that Jonah truly suffered for his disobedience as he sat in the belly of a fish for three days. Regardless, the larger truth is that Jonah did exactly as God desired... eventually. Many of know what its like to try to run from God when God has His eye on you. Try as you might, the seeker always finds the sought and this is good news and also a humbling reminder of who is really in charge.



April 7

## Jonah

The true twist of the story is actually probably not the call and journey of Jonah, it is found in the fact that Ninevites actually repent, and Jonah is upset! The second truth deserves just a few lines as it really isn't the point of the devotion, but it is interesting, nonetheless. I know of no preacher who has reacted in disdain when the people he commands to repent listen! However, as Jonah comes before the Ninevites, he does so with trepidation precisely because he knew that the God whom he spoke for is a gracious God and Jonah's great fear was that these pagan, rebellious people would be granted mercy in repentance.

That brings us to the larger point of our devotion. The Ninevites were not wonderful, moral people in fact they were enemies of the Jews just like the Philistines and Babylonians and numerous other groups. In the biblical narrative (see Joshua as a prime example), God has a history of wiping out these people. They deserve His wrath, and they often get it, however the Ninevites were given mercy. Why?

The answer is not because they deserved it, nor is it because they were seeking it. There is every indication in the world, based on Jonah's message and the events that led up to his arrival in Nineveh, that the Ninevites were living a totally rebellious lifestyle with no consideration given, whatsoever, to the true God.

Additionally, we must note that others were given the command to repent and didn't listen. What set them apart? The answer is that God had ordained that they would be spared. Stated differently, we could say that God chose to seek these people. While they were busy worshipping their false gods and committing all kinds of heinous acts, God chose to pursue them in the person of Jonah and bring them to repentance through the words of one who hated them as well.

What an unlikely story! What a message of God's grace! What a demonstration of the love of our God who seeks. God sought the Ninevites in commissioning Jonah, He sought the Ninevites in opening their ears and granting them repentance and He sought the Ninevites by refusing to destroy them (a punishment they richly deserved).

In the same way, God sought us by commissioning Christ (a willing prophet), He sought us by drawing us to the truth and giving us ears to hear and He sought us by softening our hearts, granting us repentance, and changing us by His Spirit to love Him and accept Him by faith. In all these things, our great God still seeks. We were all Ninevites, we were all separated from God and deserving of His wrath, but God in His great mercy saw fit to condescend to us. He sent His Son to spend three days, not in the belly of a fish but in the pit of a grave, only to rise again and tell us of His mercy in salvation. What an awesome, majestic, merciful, powerful, and vigilant God we serve. Oh yes, dear brother and sister, God does seek and save the lost.