



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: August 16th - 22nd

Sermon: August 15th



August 16

Hebrews 10:24-25

The narrative of the book of Acts makes it quite clear that the church is to be central to the mission and life of the believer. In Acts 2, we read of the church's initial establishment and the rest of the book details the progression of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the surrounding areas and beyond all through proclamation AND the establishment of the local church. In fact, it would be fair to say that the way the Apostles went about propagating the Gospel is through the local church.

The church exists for many things, but our text for Sunday reminds us that one reason for our fellowship is love and support. As we re-read the text from yesterday, it must be evident that the experiences of Peter and John do not remain isolated to those two men. Instead, the disciples immediately leave the custody of the governing authorities and make a beeline for the community of faith. When they arrive, they proceed to tell the rest all that has taken place and, from that moment forward, the response recorded in Acts is not merely Peter and John's words, instead the narrative tells us how the church, collectively, reacts to persecution.

There are many conclusions we can draw from the narrative but perhaps chief on the list is the need for support and encouragement in difficult times. Imagine for just a moment that Peter and John didn't have their friends. What would they do? Presumably, they would commiserate together but the strength they found in the body of Christ would be sorely lacking. In this instance, the body of Christ existed to support and encourage the faithfulness of two of her members.

Encouragement is not something the church stumbled upon as an unexpected benefit of the body of Christ. No, the author of Hebrews makes it very clear that we unite for the purpose of encouragement. The simple truth is that we have been wired to live in community and this community is one of God's ordained means of sustenance for believers in a lost and difficult world.

To conclude today, I'd like to deal with one objection to the necessity of gathering with the body of Christ. Many people do not like the command in Hebrews 10. They simply do not appreciate the requirement of gathering with a local community of believers for encouragement and because they are predisposed to dislike the command, they often look for a way around the instruction. One method of trying to avoid responsibility to the body is found when people respond saying "well, God doesn't need the body of Christ in order to encourage men." The implication of the statement is that God is not bound by one structure or method of encouragement and, therefore, I do not need to be bound to obey this command.

In one sense, the statement is true! God does not need the body of Christ in order to encourage His children. However, we must understand that it is His Word that gives the command! While it is true that God does not require the body to strengthen the saints, it is equally true that He has ordained the church to play a crucial role in bringing encouragement. If you and I, as believers, forsake the very thing He has given to encourage, what right do we have to expect Him to encourage us in other ways? The answer is simple, God has the right and ability to do as He pleases but He also had the freedom to instruct us in any manner He so desires. His Word teaches us that encouragement comes from the body (amongst other things), therefore we must be active in the body if we expect Him to bless us as He promises.

August 17

Psalm 146:1-7

The simple truth is that all men have their faith in something or someone. For some, the faith for a better future is rooted in science, others might hitch their proverbial wagons to a politician or a philosopher. Multitudes of lost men have anchored their trust in money and still others have ascribed worship and hope to one of the numerous false gods that dot our current landscape. Regardless, mankind who has some vision of a future and some idea as to who, or what, gets them to their desired destination.

In our day to day lives this really might not enter our consciousness even as it subconsciously impacts our actions. However, there are moments in which we must choose. There are times in life in which allegiance to the possessor of our hope requires that we break from the world and other entities that clamor for our devotion. In our text for Sunday, Peter and John had just left such a predicament. The religious authorities (who had the derived ability to inflict harm and imprisonment) have instructed them that there should be no more preaching in Jesus' name. Essentially, the message is "choose whom you will serve" and the temptation was the denounce Jesus in order to pursue temporal security in a realm that seemed to be controlled by the elites of the day.

The quandary that Peter and John landed in was obvious, but it was their response that was telling. When forced to choose, they selected allegiance to Christ over obedience to the government, but why? The answer is found, at least partially, in our text for the day. As we noted in the sermon on Sunday, the first quotation that Peter and John and the rest of the church referenced was taken from Psalm 146. This Psalm is written about the need to choose obedience to God over and against adherence to the worldly authorities. The Psalm tells us to heed God instead of princes but is this wise?

The rest of the Psalm tells us, in categorical terms, that choosing allegiance to God over men isn't just the biblically responsible thing to do, it's the decision that makes the most sense! Why would we choose to obey God rather than men? Well, according to our text for the day, one reason is that God is eternal, and men are not. The simple truth is that regimes change over time. To be an ally to the current president makes one a potential foe to the next administration. When we decide to hitch our wagons to one man and his agenda, we are uniting with someone who is finite and, therefore, whose authority is limited in time and scope. One day, you and I will stand before God, and we fully know and expect that the same God who existed and ruled before time began will still be on His throne when all of human history is complete! Doesn't it make sense to choose this authority to obey? Will we ever regret being found in His good graces?

The obvious answer is a resounding "no!" Nevertheless, it is imperative that we heed the example of the early church here in recanting biblical truth to our own souls. While it is theologically accurate to say that God is eternal in nature, this truth can sometimes escape our minds as we are inundated with the temporal problems and proposed solutions of our day. If we take our gaze off God in His glory and eternity long enough, the temptation to obey men rather than God increases but if we are faithful to reflect and rejoice in God's unchanging nature and rule, we will stand before the other, lesser authorities unfazed in light of our eternal position in God's family.

August 18

Psalm 2:1-6

Yesterday's devotion was about the Christian's responsibility to choose allegiance to God over men and today's devotion deals with a second, related, truth. While it is true that various people, entities and false religions vie for our loyalty, it is equally true that their rebellion against God is both predicted and, eventually, judged.

Notice two assertions in our Psalm for the day. The first is that the world, and its power structures, hates God. The Bible says that the kings and rulers of the world take counsel with one another against the Lord and the peoples plot (against God) in vain. This is a stark reminder that the lost world is not an ally with Christ and, therefore, we should not expect the world to appreciate and accept Christians. The claim to absolute sovereignty and the right to total obedience is a threat to worldly structures. Furthermore, in light of the carnality of all lost men, the law of God and His righteous requirements are vile to a rebellious and sinful world. This means that friction and conflict are inevitable. The general tenor and tone of all worldly regimes is one of antagonism towards Sovereign God.

As the first century Christians are dealing with their altercations with the governing authorities of the day, they appropriately recite this Psalm as a reminder of the battle at hand. They were not surprised that Herod, Pilate, the Sanhedrin and the like were enemies of Christ precisely because God's Word predicted such a circumstance!

While they were not caught off guard, I fear that too many Americans are thrown for a loop when the governing bodies prove to be antagonistic towards our faith and our churches. Jesus has not promised a world devoid of conflict with authorities, in fact the Word of God has provided ample predictions and theological reasons for the strife that we experience in this world.

Second, notice that God will prevail in judgment. The temptation for many today is to think that the lost and rebellious are getting away with their crimes! It feels (that's an important word) like corruption goes unpunished, sin is committed without any consequence and immorality is unchallenged. Nevertheless, the Psalm reminds us that God will speak to these issues in His wrath. There is coming a day when that which is so accepted and even glorified will be penalized and when that day arises those who have chosen to align themselves with the corrupt and worldly will experience the same penalty as the rulers who perpetuated the defiance.

As we close today, it is important to return to the example of the early church in learning how to deal with such situations in our own lives. As these men and women are persecuted and mocked, they recall the Word of God and take their hope in the promises of God's revelation. They were able to withstand the storm because they held onto promises like those found in verse 5 of Psalm 2. They knew that justice would be done, and they were convicted that their decision to stand with the Lord would prove to be wise and, therefore, rewarded in the future. Have you meditated on God's promises to the faithful today? Have you considered His Sovereignty? Have you actively trusted in Him to fulfill all that He has promised? If so, I bet your joy abounds!

August 19

Proverbs 21:1

I realize this is redundant to many of you, but I can't help but take a few moments to point out the truth that the first century Christians provide a marvelous example of a discipline that all believers should undertake day by day. We see this come through in the flow of their response to Peter and John's news of their imprisonment and threatening. As the church hears of all that takes place, their immediate response is to remind themselves of truth! We have seen this play out over the last few days as believers understand what is happening and immediately return to biblical promises (such as Psalm 146 and Psalm 2) which inform them of their setting and remind them of God's glorious power during their difficulty.

Today's text is not explicitly cited by the church members, but I can't help but believe it was on their minds. As they continue to praise God, the believers state that ALL (and important word) that has happened to them is underneath the control of mighty God.

Church family, there are no renegade or out of control rulers... in history! EVERYTHING that occurs takes place with the permission and plan of God undergirding it. This does not mean that all things are "good" in and of themselves, but it does mean that God is willing, able and desirous to use even that which is objectively evil for His good purposes (see Genesis 50:20).

Today's text is a reminder of such a truth. In it, we learn that God is Sovereign not only over the actions of the rulers but also even their hearts. Every fiber of their being is in submission to His Sovereign purposes even if the ones in authority have no clue of their subjection.

We see this play itself out in the biblical narrative in several places including the story of Nehemiah. You will remember that Nehemiah was a fellow captive with the rest of Israel underneath the reign of Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes was a powerful man and not naturally prone to rebuilding previously conquered and destroyed cities! Nevertheless, the Bible makes it clear that the Lord led Artaxerxes to both a favorable opinion of Nehemiah's task and a willingness to assist Nehemiah in rebuilding the city walls.

The point is clear, there is no maverick authority in all the world. While there are many who actively oppose the Lord, they will only be allowed to create opposition as long as God sees fit! In the case of the first century Jews, they had another example of God's Sovereignty over the rulers as they then understood the Lord's purposes in allowing Herod and Pilate and the rest to put their Lord to death. Today, we continue to trust in this God who has proven time and again of His matchless wisdom and might!

Brother and sister, spend less time wringing your hands over the state of the world and more time praising and contemplating the God who transcends all we see. He deserves and demands your trust and His track record is unparalleled and reassuring!

August 20

2 Thessalonians 3:3

An interesting series of events takes place upon Peter and John's return to the church in Jerusalem. They report on what takes place and the people pray but there is literally no strategy undertaken for protection or reaction to the increase in persecution. Sometimes it is instructive to note what we don't read in a text. For instance, the Bible does not say that the people prayed and then created a security team! The Bible doesn't tell us that the people prayed and then commenced working on a plan to create systemic reform of a prejudiced and dangerous government.

No, the Bible teaches us that the people prayed, and they did so with two requests. Over the next three days we are going to deal with those requests beginning with the first which was this "consider their threats". If you read this slowly, it might strike you that this is an odd statement to make. It's obvious that the disciples are placing the responsibility of dealing with the threats of the governing authorities squarely at the Lord's feet. To use a pithy phrase, protection was "past their pay grade!", and they knew it.

They were not interested in spending time and energy formalizing a plan to buttress their congregation against the government, they were committed to obedience to the commission God had given them with conviction that the Lord would take care of the protection piece. Now, this might sound noble, but was it wise? Based on texts like 2 Thessalonians 3, I'd say absolutely!

The context of our passage for today is strikingly similar. In this case, Paul is speaking about the prayer of the saints for the progression of God's Word and that they will be delivered from the wicked men among them. Immediately after these dual desires, the Apostle reminds the people of the Lord's faithfulness to protect them.

While it is abundantly clear that the Lord requires faithful and active obedience to His commission to share the Gospel with all men, it is equally clear that He has promised provision and protection for those who are actively working to fulfill His requirements.

The question is "how"? How will God establish and guard us from the evil one and is this promise one that is always fulfilled temporally? The answer is that God's promise to establish and guard is eternal in nature. There will absolutely be people who die as martyrs for the faith. There will be moments of grave physical danger, but the Lord will never allow one of His children to slip out of His eternal, saving grasp. Instead, we know that as we are faithful to Him, He is faithful to hold onto us and we are assured that no threat will overcome our guaranteed eternity in His midst.

Also, there is a second truth that is implied in this text. The implication of passages like Acts 4 and 1 Thessalonians 3 is that we are not able to fixate on multiple responsibilities at once! The task that God has given us is too immense to divide our manpower and intellectual capacities between His commission and protection. The church must be single-minded and focused on her task. Peace comes as we know that our obedience takes place under His watchful eye.

August 21

Psalm 34:19

The truth is that yesterday's devotion might not have been as comforting as some would have liked! We all are grateful for the assurance of heaven but the promise of protection for temporal undertakings would be nice. The biblical narrative teaches us that those who are faithful to the Lord will suffer personal harm and even potential death. If all we see is the life that is in front of us, this truth of imminent, temporal danger will be enough to knock us off course. However, if we are faithful to focus our attention and hopes on the eternity that is promised us, we will find the strength needed to sustain in the trying times.

Today's text is a reminder of the dual truths of danger and protection. The Psalmist begins with an affirmation that the trials of the righteous are "many". That's not exactly the best news on the surface! Nevertheless, there is abundant evidence that David's assertion is accurate. Those who endeavor to live righteous lives will be mocked, despised, imprisoned, and even possibly killed for their stands.

Folks, the Bible is crystal clear on this matter. Any person or church that would deny such a truth is obviously and intentionally being dishonest with you! There is an undeniable link between faithfulness to Christ and momentary affliction.

So, why would we endeavor to live such a life? The answer is found in the rest of our verse. David reminds us that suffering always results in God's deliverance! David had lived this truth as he fought against the previous King Saul, walked in difficult moments with his son Absalom and fought many battles against various opposing forces. David knew the difficulties of this life and yet he had seen God's provision and protection in their midst. Even more importantly, David repeatedly confessed a hope in eternity and all of God's blessings that would be manifest in that day.

As we wrap up our time for today, I want you to notice one other painfully obvious, but important point. As David teaches us about protection, notice that he ascribes all deliverance to the hand of God. David is echoing the truth that the first believers expressed that it is God who will deliver and God who will protect! Once again, we clearly see the ground of David's expectation of protection rooted in the existence of his God and the promises that the Lord makes.

Do you trust Him church family? Are you satisfied walking into the difficult situations and seasons in life knowing that God has the responsibility to protect you? Are you worried about what you can't control, overcome with anxiety about things you've never been called to oversee and fixated on the safest path forward? If so, I would encourage you to remember that God is our deliverer! Be faithful in what He has called you to accomplish (the Great Commission) and trust that He is faithful in what He has promised.

August 22

1 John 5:14-15

Our passage culminated with a mighty, unmistakable answer to the prayer of the saints. You will remember that the saints asked for two things in their prayer. First, they prayed that God would consider the threats of those who opposed them. Second, they begged God for boldness to speak His Word.

Why would they ask for such a thing? Well, the first reason is simple, we all need boldness in trying moments! Frail humanity is not prone to courage and commitment during persecution. Second, the stated end of their prayer is clearly for the purpose of obedience to the command Christ had given them! You will remember, Jesus ascended immediately after He instructed the disciples to be His "witnesses". It was quite clear to all who were present that the Lord wanted them to continue to spread the Word of God but now, considering current circumstances, it was becoming more apparent that being Christ's witnesses was going to be quite the challenge.

Therefore, the disciples asked for boldness. They knew they needed supernatural gumption if they would be able to obey Christ's marching orders. We could say it this way, the ground of their prayer was faithfulness to Christ's commission and, since we know that this was in accordance with Christ's stated will, the prayer was answered!

Our text for today provides the explanation, in some ways, of the manifestation of God's power in Acts 4. It records a marvelous and amazing promise of God, but it is a promise with a qualification. John (the same John who was present way back on this day in Acts 4) teaches us that those who ask for things, in accordance with Christ's will, can know that their prayer will be answered.

The statement is glorious, if you ask for ANYTHING in accordance with His will, you can know that He hears you and we can know that we have the requests we've made to the Lord. Now, this begs a question, doesn't it? What exactly is in accordance with His will? Well, in some specific situations we may not fully know. For instance, is it in accordance with God's will that someone be healed? We simply have no clue so we ask in faith that God can restore a sick soul and trust that His plan is best. However, there are other requests that are obviously in accordance with the will of God and those submissions will be heard and answered.

Our text for Sunday records one such instance of an abundantly clear request for faithfulness to God's stated will and, just as John later promised, we see that God answered such a prayer... powerfully! Brother and sister, are you praying according to God's will? When was the last time we prayed for faithfulness and boldness in proclaiming the Gospel? When was the last time we begged God for understanding His Word or a clearer comprehension of His Gospel in order that we could share it more effectively? These things seem like layups, but they may not be as prevalent on our lips as they ought to be.