



2025 Weekly Devotions

Week of: August 18th -24th

Sermon: August 17th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
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August 18

Matthew 6:19-21, 16:26

When I consider the passage that I preached from this past Sunday in context, I must factor in the verses outside of this text that preceded it. For example, today as I consider Paul's admonition in Galatians 6:12 concerning, in essence, living your life so as not to suffer persecution or rejection from people rather than blessing and favor from God, I can't help but think of where a person's heart is who would choose to live in such a way. There can be no doubt that the person who would choose the world's acceptance and approval over Christ's must have a serious, spiritual, heart problem. Let me help you see more clearly what I am getting at.

In verse 12 Paul said that people who want to make a showing in the flesh or much of themselves, are the people who would downplay the necessary salvific accomplishments of Christ. In other words, the gospel says that we are all sinners deserving judgment which is why Jesus, our Savior, had to come and live the perfect life that we could not live and die the death that we deserved. We cannot save ourselves and certainly do not deserve the mercy, grace, and forgiveness of our Creator. Let me make this really simple and contemporary.

It is far easier to speak very little of Christ, to avoid telling people they are sinners deserving hell, and that if they don't admit their helplessness and need for Christ they cannot be saved, than to tell them the truth. Paul was saying that the Judaizers and legalists were attempting to teach circumcision in order to be saved because it kept them out of "how water" with the powers that be. He said, "...in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ" (Gal. 6:12). I think we can all understand the temptation to remain relatively quiet concerning Christ rather than risk being shunned or ridiculed for our conservative, biblical stands.

Friends, this honestly boils down to what is most important to you. Matthew wrote in his gospel, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:19-20). I realize this passage is typically understood as relating to finances and it most definitely is related to that subject. I believe it is also fair to apply it to the treasures of our hearts as it relates to the love of human praise and the avoidance of human opposition. The question that we need to ponder today is: Are we avoiding making much of Jesus and the cross because it has the potential to cost us acceptance, approval, and comfort among our acquaintances? I am certain that we can all understand the pressure to cower to the culture and expectations of our relationships.

The truth is that if we are willing to stand on the truth of the gospel and are willing to communicate clearly the reality of life and death and heaven and hell, we will be storing up treasures in heaven as we will gain the favor of our Lord. We will love people below the surface and will truly have their well-being at heart. What does a man profit if he gains the whole world and loses his soul (Matt. 16:26)?

August 19

1 Chronicles 29:9-18

The Bible is replete with verses that tell us how important the spiritual condition of the heart is. It is the seed bed of all of our emotions. Solomon wrote, "Guard your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the wellsprings of life" (Prov. 4:23). Luke later penned in his gospel, "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). I have heard it said that the heart is a tattletale. It tells on you!

I begin here again today dear ones because it is important for us to honestly consider that our true nature is revealed in what we care about, are passionate about, spend our time and resources on, and what moves us to make the decisions that we willfully make. It puzzles me how people in general will divorce their behaviors, habits, and choices from the condition of the heart. My hope is that as we contemplate our habits and choices, we will realize and admit that we can be encouraged by what we are seeing, or we should be duly warned that we have a problem.

I remember years ago when we began our first capital campaign a couple immediately quit attending Smyrna because they had no desire whatsoever to give to the effort. We were bursting at the seams, in two services because we were forced to be, renting space from the county at the elementary school, and trying desperately to figure out how to handle the situation. It was determined over years of prayer and discussion that it was time to purchase land and build. You folks know that it has never been my habit to talk much about money. I have always hoped that as we preached the word, the hearts of the hearers would simply grow in maturity and "giving" would take care of itself. For the most part it has. The point is that when that couple walked away, they revealed where their treasure was and thus their hearts. It was certainly not "on things above."

I finished reading the books of Chronicles last week and was reminded of something I read in 1 Chronicles on this subject. In the first 5 verses of chapter 29 we read of David giving to the house of God from his own treasure "so far as he was able" (v. 2). It later says, "...because of my devotion to the house of my God" (v. 3) he gave freely. He then asks the people, "Who then will offer willingly...to the Lord" (v. 5)? The people responded beautifully and gave generously. I remind you of this because it was demonstrating and flowing from the condition of their heart. They loved and treasured the things of God and their actions demonstrated that it was so. It says that the "people rejoiced for they had willingly given with a whole heart" (v. 9).

Friend, there is great wisdom in storing your treasures in heaven and not here on earth where it can be so easily lost and destroyed, profiting you nothing. Our contributions into the Kingdom of God will profit you now and in heaven as well. David reminds us in verses 11-12 that everything belongs to God and He is the One who determines how much each of us will ultimately have. Trust God and seek the Kingdom of heaven – FIRST!

August 20

Psalm 98

A question that we all need to ponder today is this: Have I been crucified to the world and the world crucified to me? This is the statement that Paul makes in Galatians 6:14 following his confession that if he is to boast, it will be only in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Allow me to interpret this verse. Paul is declaring that he had determined the only reality in his life that he will boast about is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. This means that he accepts all the implications of that reality.

In other words, if Paul is going to make the crucifixion of Christ the anchor and centerpiece of his entire life, that means the world no longer has access to him. By this, I simply mean that anything the world has to offer him as enticements to abandon the gospel and his complete and utter dependence upon it has been put to death. This is a restatement of his declaration back in Galatians 2:20 where he wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." You see, his passions and his own personal will has been laid aside and it is now the Father's will that he desires to live out.

This means that Paul no longer lives to satisfy man or in accordance with man's expectations or means of approval and acceptance. The world no longer has that hold on him as it has been crucified to him. I ask each of us today, what do you desire and how much of a hold does the world and worldliness still have on you? What lures and tempts you to abandon the cross of Christ and to return as lord of your own life and will? You may wonder how you can know. I would simply suggest that you examine where you spend your money and your time. What do you honestly want to do?

Paul also stated that he had been crucified to the world in Galatians 6:14. How is this any different than the world being crucified to him? I believe the difference is stark. Consider for a moment what it means to be crucified. To be crucified is to be killed. In other words, Paul is saying that to the world he is dead. This surely pertains to their perception of him. Think about what people would think if they considered you dead. It would mean that you no longer exist in this life or that your life has come to an end and is finished. It would mean you are gone, and no one would consider talking to you, asking you for advice, or worrying about what you think.

Paul is saying that because of his total commitment to Jesus and the cross, he had been written off by the world in which he lived. They considered him foolish, crazy, and probably a waste of a good mind. Why did this come to pass? It is clearly because he chose to boast only in the cross of Jesus Christ. Beloved, it is important that we understand the choice that we have to make. There are two roads before us as presented in the book of Galatians. We can either choose works and self-righteousness as our means to worth and value or we can bow the knee to Jesus and live believing that He is enough, and that His finished work on the cross requires no additional "work" on our part for salvation. If you go with Jesus Christ, you must know that taking up your cross is part of the cost. Paul was willing to pay. Are you? Read Psalm 98 today and marvel at who our Lord truly is.

August 21

2 Corinthians 5:17

For many of us reading today's "point to ponder," this is likely a familiar passage. Paul wrote, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). In our text from Sunday's sermon, Paul said, "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gal. 6:15). There it is again – "a new creation." When we are redeemed dear ones, we become new creations. This glorious and amazing truth means that our old self is gone, and our slate is wiped clear and clean. This doesn't mean every consequence of past sins is completely gone but many are.

What it does mean is that we have received a pardon from heaven and the debt of our sins is paid in full by the Lord Jesus. The Father declares us righteous and no longer bound by the penalty of our sins. We have been forgiven and made new in the eyes of God. This is why Paul says nothing else matters except that we have been made new by the divine transforming work of the Trinity.

The fact that we are genuinely new creations is rather unbelievable. People often have a hard time accepting this truth because they can't imagine how someone could simply forgive another person and restore them without more retribution or punishment inflicted on the guilty party. Before you get lost in that unbiblical thinking or fall prey to the lies of the evil one about how you can never be truly forgiven, restored, made whole, or pure, keep in mind that your sin was paid for to the full extent. All the punishment that you and I deserved and all the wrath that should have been poured out on us was instead, poured out on the only One who was truly innocent – Jesus Christ. Please don't offend Jesus by acting as if the punishment for your sin was not inflicted. I believe that He would beg to differ.

I rejoice, and I hope you do to, in walking with Jesus and beholding Him as I go. It is in this relationship that we "behold the glory of our King Jesus and are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18). Oh how sweet it is to walk in the light of Christ and His precious Truth. There is of course a flipside to "walking in the light." It is in this bright light of His glory that as we are transformed a little at a time, we simultaneously see the dirt that remains on us. This is why Paul could say as he aged and the years passed since he was converted, "Among sinners I am the worst" (1 Tim. 1:15).

Dear friends, don't avoid the light or learn to play the game pretending you are always "fine." As we walk in the light of Christ and gaze upon His glory, we will see our sin more clearly and our constant need for the gospel. This is a wonderful extension of God's grace because it causes us to remain "poor in spirit and thus recipients of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). It will also make us less likely to commit the sins of Galatians 5:26. Humility is a good trait and opens the door for more grace in our lives (James 4:6).

August 22

John 14:6

As Paul concludes this beautiful letter to the Galatians, I believe he does so with one final push against works-based religion and confidence in salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone. It appears to me that in verses 12 and 13 we are given a summary of the wrong path to follow. Those who would make much of the flesh and their adherence to the law and those who would downplay Christ and the cross in order to avoid persecution are on the road to destruction and eternal rejection.

On the other hand, verses 14 and 15 offer the God-ordained means of salvation through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the only wise and good way to heaven. As I wrote yesterday, the only way to become a new creation in the eyes of God and by the hand of God is to obey His plan of redemption. Now note what Paul says in verse 16 as a means of encouragement to follow his teaching: "And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." There is a choice to make church family.

The only way to peace with God is obedience to His one and only means of salvation. The way you get this peace is by walking by the "rule" that Paul repeats in verses 14 and 15. Along with this peace is the mercy that we all need as fallen creatures in a cursed world. The question that I believe Paul is leaving them with as well as us is which way will you go?

A couple of weeks ago, Daniel preached about sowing and reaping from Galatians 6:6-10. We were reminded that the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, while the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:8). Do you believe this is true? If so, then leave the foolish path of sowing to self and get on the right path. Do you find it interesting that in Galatians 6:11 Paul says, "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand"? I sense that Paul has been dictating to a scribe to this point. Some say he may have had eyesight problems, which is why he often had others writing his words for him and may be why his letters at the end of Galatians are referred to as large.

Regardless, I imagine Paul being so adamant about his convictions and caring so deeply for the well-being of his Christians brothers and sisters in Galatia that he says, "Give me the pen!" In passion and with pleading, he writes the last few sentences with his own hand in hopes to persuade them to obey Christ and avoid the heresy of the Judaizers set on leading them astray from the one true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Dear ones, when you fully yield to Jesus in obedience, you will find peace, mercy, and grace for the journey of your life. Hard times will come, but with them will be enough grace from heaven for any and every trial that you face. Please commit to walk by the rule that Jesus is the only way. He is the Truth, the way, and the life. No one will ever come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

August 23

Romans 2:28-29, 9:6-8

An interesting phrase is used in Galatians 6:16 that I did not get to say much about in my sermon. As Paul writes about the blessing that will come upon those who walk in victory based solely on the finished work of Christ for salvation, he ends the verse with this phrase, "...and upon the Israel of God." I imagine that enquiring minds want to know who is the Israel of God?

This delineation for the redeemed of God is important and an often overlooked or misrepresented truth. Too often Christians have been misled into believing that the nation of Israel has some extra special place in the eyes of God simply because they are Israel. We confuse the nation of Israel as a country with the chosen people of God. I know that I tread on sacred ground in the eyes of many right now but tread here I will. I have never understood why Bible believing people who see the culmination of many of the shadows of the Old Testament fulfilled in the New Testament, fail to see this same truth when it relates to Israel.

They were certainly the chosen people of God who began with His call of Abraham in Genesis 12. He has always protected His people and maintained the covenant He made with them and ratified Himself. It appears clear to me that the New Testament has shed light and greater understanding on this people of God as it always does in every other arena. For example, the exodus pointed to our deliverance from the sin of slavery based solely on the strong hand of God. The death angel in the 10th plague was kept away from those who by faith put the blood of the lamb on the lintel and doorposts of their homes pointing to what Jesus' blood would do. We could go on and on pointing to the obvious pictures, shadows, or typologies of the Old Testament that found fulfillment and clarity in the New.

God does indeed have a special place in His heart, if you will, for Israel. The question that needs to be asked is, who is Israel or who is the Israel of God? Paul answers this question in the New Testament. First, in Romans 2 he wrote, "For on one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter" (vv. 28-29). He later wrote in the 9th chapter, "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring...This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring" (9:6-8). This is a very serious passage, but I think it is clear.

God is clearly making it known to us through Paul in this later revelation of His word that a person becomes a child of God, an offspring of Abraham, a "Jew", or a part of the chosen people of God by faith and not by lineage. When he uses the phrase in Galatians 6:16, "...and the Israel of God", it must be that he is harkening back to this truth that the true Israel is those who have placed saving faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross and who have abandoned any hope they can save themselves by works of the law. Surely, you can see that this is in keeping with the full counsel of God's Word.

August 24

2 Timothy 3:10-14

On occasion, pastor Aaron and I talk and even lament just a little about a strange phenomenon that occurs every now and then. Praise the Lord it doesn't happen anywhere near as much as it used to. The phenomenon of which I write is the unfortunate moments when people still doubt that we have any idea what we are doing as pastors and leaders. From our perspective, we think that after all these years, consistent growth, spiritual growth, financial stability, and overall health in the congregation, you would think that folks might give us the benefit of the doubt and think it at least plausible that we might know what we are doing. I understand if the church had been poorly led, the fruit was not good, the congregation was unhealthy, the finances were a mess, etc. That, praise the Lord, isn't the case for us.

Now, even as I say that I realize that we are treated so well by a huge majority of the people who make up our church and our community. Please believe me when I tell you I am really not complaining. I start here today simply because of the way Paul ended the book of Galatians. Here we have a man who truly was facing hardships and real persecution in spite of the fact that God was doing amazing things in and through him all across Israel, Asia Minor, and the Mediterranean. I can only imagine how tiring it must have been for him to work his heart out and to love the people so much, all the while being constantly doubted, questioned, maligned, and physically abused. The minor challenges that we have faced at times pales in light of Paul's journey.

Dear ones, I am sure that it is through some frustration that he writes this last statement before his salutation to the Galatians, "From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17). Paul had faced imprisonment, beatings with whips and rods, being stoned, shipwrecks, hunger, cold temperatures, threats against his life, and constant pressures from the churches that he had planted (2 Cor. 11:23-28). It is from this experience and of course the inspiration of the Spirit of God that he wrote to Timothy these words, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). I suppose that isn't really what we want to hear when we think of following Christ.

It is one thing to say you believe in Jesus and another thing to actually follow Him. Even in our relatively easy conditions in which we have lived most of our Christian lives, if we are honest, life could be a little more challenging for us as Christians if we actually spoke truth in uncomfortable places and at times when it might not be well received. I am certain that we have all remained silent when we should have spoken on behalf of Christ and truth. The marks of Jesus that we could carry on our bodies might look like relationships in which you were abandoned because you took a biblical stand on an issue. It might look like loneliness because you were left out of the group or weren't invited to the gathering. It may take all sorts of shapes and sizes dear ones, but the truth is that following Jesus may leave scars, but it will also lead to the most fulfilling and satisfying life you could possibly have this side of heaven. Let's commit to walk it together!