



2025 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Dec 29th - Jan 4th

Sermon: December 28th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
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December 29

Luke 12:4-5

I feel certain that we can grant the Israelites some grace when we read that they grew fearful in the moment their backs were up against the shore of the Red Sea and the Egyptian army of soldiers, horses and chariots, and the pharaoh raced towards them. Pharaoh rightly described it in Exodus 14:2 when he stated that they were “shut in.” Humanly speaking, they were in a no-win situation and there was literally no way out of their predicament. They stood no chance in battle with the experienced and well-equipped Egyptian army, and I am certain they knew they could not walk on water. As far as they could tell, they were stuck.

I know that you might think they should have remembered all that God had recently done to Egypt through the ten plagues. I agree that they had plenty of evidence that God is powerful and not limited by the natural laws of His own creation. Surely you would agree that in our flesh and in our humanity, it would be easy to at least think for a moment that this situation might turn out differently for the Hebrews. So, God had done all of those things, did that mean He was good for yet another unbelievable miraculous feat? It may be true that they shouldn't have been afraid, but we can understand why they would have had to fight for faith to believe and not to be afraid.

The Bible says that as Pharaoh and the army drew near, the people looked up to see them approaching, and they feared greatly (Ex. 14:10). Moses, standing in as a type of Christ, stood before the people and shouted, “Fear not.” I will deal more with this admonition and our need to learn to fear not later this week, but for now I want to turn your attention to the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 12:4-5.

Luke recorded the words of Christ that were spoken to allay our fears when a formidable enemy stands against us. Jesus said, “I tell you, My friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him?” If you keep reading that passage of Scripture, you will find that some of the reason that Jesus tells them not to fear is because God loves them deeply. This means that His love will always be the motivation for the good that He extends in our lives. He loves us so He will do what is best for us, which includes glorifying His own Name.

That means that when it is best for deliverance, healing, or provision then we can count on Him to do whatever it takes to bring His desired will to pass. On the other hand, when He wills that it is a situation in which dire straits, disease, or even death will be the outcome, we can rest assured that He will grant all the grace, strength, and faith to endure until He calls us home (2 Cor. 12:9). We must learn not to fear what man can do to us because he can only do so much and then no more. For most people, the fact that man can kill the body is enough to cause tremendous fear. God is telling us that if that's all a person can do to you, there is no need to fear. Isn't it interesting that evidently in the eyes of God, death is a simple thing. To Him, it is simply our doorway and opportunity to get to heaven. That must be worth more than life itself. May God grant us faith to believe that is true.

December 30

Isaiah 26:3

The prophet Isaiah wrote, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts You.” Oh how I love the promise of that verse. He wrote a few verses later, “O Lord, You will ordain peace for us, for You have indeed done for us all our work” (v.12). One that I use at appropriate times for elderly folks who have passed away is found in Isaiah 32:17. There it says, “And the effect of righteousness shall be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.” These are precious verses dear ones. Commit them to memory and seek to experience these realities in your own life.

Before I get back to the main point to ponder today, I want to remind you of what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:9. “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” The things we must practice in order to experience the very presence of God with us is to keep our minds on things above and pleasing to God by praying in the hard places rather than worrying (v.6). Friends, we all know this is not easy, but that is why Paul said in verse 9 that we must practice these things. We are to work at being people of peace by abiding and resting in Him. As we do, the Holy Spirit will produce peace in you as fruit of His presence. Back to our text!

Moses said to the people, “Fear not!” It never fails that as soon as a new believer is set free from the bondage of sin and experiences a type of exodus, the devil unleashes his fiery darts. A new believer is tempted in those early days to run back to the life she knew in bondage. The roaring lion is scary and causes us to doubt, to give up, and to lose sight of God’s truth and the promises that come with freedom in Christ. In those moments, a new believer can wonder if God is going to deliver or will Satan regain possession of their soul. After all, things didn’t look very good pressed up against the Red Sea with the Egyptians bearing down.

Moses intended to quiet their hearts just as Jesus did in the New Testament. God told Abraham in Genesis 15:1 to fear not. Joshua was told to fear not and to not be dismayed (Josh. 8:1). Gideon and Solomon, Daniel and David were told the same. We are told not to fear death because our Shepherd is there with us (Ps. 23:4). How are we to accomplish this nearly impossible task in the face of danger, uncertainty, and scary things? Isaiah gives us the answer as mentioned above.

To maintain peace in the midst of chaos and frightening circumstances, we must keep our minds and our focus on God. By this, I am sure it means the truth revealed to us in the Scripture, including His faithfulness, His history of deliverance, His power, and all His precious promises granted to His children. Peter was doing well when, by faith, he stepped out of the boat onto the unsettled waters of the Sea of Galilee. It was only when he took his eyes off Jesus and was consumed with his circumstances that he began to sink. The same is true for us today dear ones. We must keep our focus on Christ and all that is true according to Him. Moses said, “Fear not!” The Lord Jesus uses that phrase many times when He was here. Now the Spirit reminds us to trust God, don’t worry, and fear not.

December 31

Psalm 46:10

Once we have learned to practice focusing on God and all that is true about Him and His nature causing us to fear not, we can move on to the next admonition that Moses gives the Israelites as they stood afraid of the obvious insurmountable danger facing them in their current situation. He follows his admonition to “fear not” with “stand firm.” The Psalmist who penned the 46th psalm wrote, “Be still and know that I am God.” When I think of standing firm, I see the picture of being dug in, grounded, and still as I face the pressure of the moment that I am in.

This all begins by calming my heart and mind with the promises of God and His proven faithfulness. At the moment that I have reminded myself that He is my refuge, strong tower, and shelter in the storms of life, I can stand confident and resolute that I am okay; you can do this too. Think with me for a moment today. What could the Israelites do in their own strength anyway? Jumping into the Red Sea with hope of swimming all the way across was ridiculous. So, we can toss that option out. Charging the Egyptian army with their 600 chariots and horses, trained soldiers, and military superiority would have been suicide. Thus, we can scratch that off as a possibility too.

The truth is that they had no options which left them with nothing but fear and panic. It is important to remember that they were in this predicament because God providentially led them there. This was all God’s fault. He prevented them from going other ways so that this moment would materialize. God set this whole thing up. This thing, for His chosen people, was set up by Him for His glory and their growth. It is written in Exodus 13:17 that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. We must always rest knowing that God has good purpose for the direction that He leads us, but the path that He leads us on is not always easy.

Proverbs 3:5-6 is one of my favorite verses. Johanna and I have it printed on a picture that hangs on our bedroom wall to remind us of this beautiful truth. Within that beautiful truth is the fact that sometimes as we “lean not on our own understanding and choose to acknowledge Him, and He directs our paths, our paths don’t always end up being smooth. It certainly did not appear that God’s directions set the Israelites up very well; yet here they were. By now, we should know they were in this place by the sovereign plan of God so that He could take them to a new level of faith, understanding, and confidence to become the people whom He wanted them to be for the advancement of His redemptive plan.

Friends, the proving and/or testing of our faith is necessary for us to be transformed into the image of Christ. God led them to their predicament so that in their weakness and inability, He could show them His strength and unlimited ability. This is why Paul could rejoice in his trials because He knew God was growing him as a follower and ambassador of Christ. The same is still true in our lives today. God’s will for us is our sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3). Sometimes we willingly pursue Him and other times He sets the stage to make sure we do.

January 1

Hebrews 11:29

Have you ever seen the Charlie Brown Christmas special? I am thinking today of the little fellow in the show known as Pigpen. Remember, Pigpen was a dirty little guy. I always used to wonder why his parents didn't make him take a bath. Pigpen was known for all the dust and dirt that he stirred up every time he moved around. The more he moved the more dust rose up around him. I mention that today because I think it fits with our journey through this part of Exodus 14.

Moses had instructed and encouraged the people to fear not, be still, and now to see (Ex. 14:13). Get the picture in your mind of little Pigpen stirring up a whirlwind of dust that caused him not to be able to see beyond the haze. Dear ones, we often create an environment in our own lives in which we can't "see" God. We wonder where He is, we can't hear Him, and we grow increasingly more fretful, doubtful, worried, and afraid. The point that I want to make today is that what we need to learn to allow the Spirit to calm our nerves, to help us to be still, and realize that when the dust of our anxiety settles down, we see more clearly the presence and power of God.

In our hustle and hurried lives, we often are too busy to even notice the hand of God moving all around us. Having no fear comes as a result of remembering all the reasons for faith in God. As faith rises, fear wanes, stillness follows, and visibility improves. Note that in response to a heart and mind that has found peace in gazing on and trusting God, we can see the Lord fighting for us and providing deliverance, a way out, and ultimately salvation. Verse 14 ends with this statement, "You have only to be quiet." I can hear God saying, "Stop worrying, quit fidgeting, and for goodness sakes, stop talking!"

Unbelief tends to create and magnify difficulties and causes us to expend all sorts of energy and time to resolve them in our own strength and with our limited capabilities. That typically just creates a dust storm around us preventing us from seeing God. Faith on the other hand, raises our souls above the difficulties and straight to God who enables us to be still and to see Him. When worry and fear are driven away, then we can get a proper view of His dealings in our lives.

We fear not, we get still and quiet, we see clearly, and now we exercise faith to step into the sea. Hebrews 11:29 says, "By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land." It was faith exercised that they stepped forward. They trusted God to keep the waters back and that the ground would be safe. They could "see" with the eyes of their hearts as a result of faith in the Word of God. Faith must be based on the divine promises and obedience springs from the faith produced. Before we can go forward, faith must "see" that which is invisible but certain.

January 2

John 16:13; Romans 8:14

I assume you have already realized the truth of today's point to ponder, but in case you did not, I want to highlight it now. Moses wrote in Exodus 13:21 that it was the Lord who went before the Israelites as they began their exodus from Egypt. The presence of God in the midst of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night was none other than the Holy Spirit Himself. The same is true for us, brothers and sisters. Paul wrote in Romans 8:14, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

I found it absolutely exhilarating when I learned that all three Persons of the Trinity took part in delivering the people of God from bondage and slavery in Egypt. It was God the Father who heard the cry of the people at the end of Exodus 2. It was of course God the Son who was present in the Passover as the blood of the sacrificial lamb averted the death angel from each home and satisfied the wrath of God. Now, we encounter the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, in the pillars leading the Israelites in the wilderness.

He was present with them to guide them through their wilderness wanderings just as He is present to guide us through life as well. Friends, consider for a moment the incredible pictures painted so clearly and brightly for us in this Old Testament record of history that points with incredible perspicuity (clarity) to the New Testament fulfillment of the same. What do I mean? Meditate for a while today on this – first the slaying of the sacrificial lamb and then the giving of the cloud. This looks ahead to the salvific truth that before we got the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus had to shed His blood and die first. The Day of Pentecost followed the cross.

This part of Exodus is filled with incredible "types" that point to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. We can continue with the reminder that the pillar was the visible sign of the Lord's presence with His people just as the Holy Spirit is a down payment, a seal, and a reminder that God is with us now. Here are some more examples of what I want you to see in Exodus 13 and 14. God gave the Spirit to guide them not at their request but at His good will, pleasure, and wisdom as a gracious gift. I am reminded that the apostles upon hearing of the imminent death of Christ, did not ask for another Comforter to be sent to them. No, it was God's design and grace to them just as the pillar was to the Israelites of the Exodus (John 14:16). It was God's idea and His grace.

At night the pillar of cloud was seen as a pillar of fire. This was intended to illuminate their path. Hundreds of years later Nehemiah reminded his contemporaries of this beautiful truth of how God led His people. He wrote, "By a pillar of cloud You led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go." Isn't that just what we learn of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the life of believers on this side of the cross? John 16:13 certainly tells this truth as does Isaiah 11:2 in the Old Testament. Dear friends, pray that God will give you eyes to see below the surface as you work through the book of Exodus with us. The shadows and types given cause me to worship and trust God even more as I see the continuity of His Word and the incredible wisdom of the Alpha and Omega demonstrated through His omniscience. The Bible is clearly divinely inspired.

January 3

Psalm 99:7, 105:39; Proverbs 18:10

Today we will look at a few more ways that the pillars represented the Holy Spirit for the people of God during the exodus. It is written in Psalm 105:39, "He spreads a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light by night." I want to take a moment to consider the ways in which the Holy Spirit is a covering for us. It is also written in the 46th Psalm, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." He was indeed present, a help, strength, and a refuge for them as they walked through the hot and dry conditions on their journey.

Most of us know what it feels like to be outside on a hot, bright, sunny day with no shade or sunscreen. I imagine the heat was scorching as they went through the arid desert. I think of a rainless area, like Egypt often is, and can imagine the need for water, shade, rest, and so forth. Can you recall the moments when you felt the distinct difference between standing in the direct sunshine and standing under a shade tree? Oh, it feels so much more refreshing to have a covering from the heat of the day. The pillar of cloud was that for them.

To travel under that covering of the cloud as it provided some shade and relief must have been a reminder to them that the Almighty was with them. He could provide a covering where there was nothing in nature to do so. He could provide a shelter for His people in the very presence of the normal and natural challenges of the day. The Holy Spirit still does that for us today. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 18:10 these words, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe." To know that we can walk in the shadow of the Almighty is a comforting reality for those who know Him well.

Psalm 99:7 says, "In the pillar of the cloud He spoke to them...." It was of course through Moses that He spoke to His people. For us today, it is through Christ and His Word that He speaks to us directly (Heb. 1:2). The point that I want to make by highlighting this is that as the pillar of cloud represents the Holy Spirit, it is good for us to know that He speaks. As the Holy Spirit brings to our minds the truth of God's Word and literally impresses particular verses on our minds, He is speaking to us! John wrote in Revelation 2 and 3, "He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

I will close with another lesson we can learn from the Exodus as to how the Holy Spirit relates to us today. Nehemiah wrote, "You in Your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them" (Neh. 9:19-20). Isn't that a wonderful truth. Dear friends, the Holy Spirit indwells us permanently when we are born again. He came to stay and the Bible says in Hebrews 13:5 that "He will never leave us nor forsake us."

Despite all of their failures, He remained faithful and true to guide them safely through. John said in John 14:16, "He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever." You are not alone dear ones as you make your way along challenging paths.

January 4

Joshua 2:10-11; Isaiah 51:10

Time and time again we have read throughout the plagues and the exodus that God did these miracles so that all of Egypt, the Pharaoh, other nations, and His own people would know that He is God (Ex. 14:4, 17-18). You might wonder why God would be so consumed with people knowing the He is and that there is no other like Him. Always remember the greatest good the He could possibly give us and the world is Himself. He is adamant about humanity knowing Him because He is the source of life, peace, purpose, contentment, and so on.

The events that took place during the plagues and the subsequent exodus were to become an ebenezer for all of Israel and for God's people forever. After Moses had died and Joshua was given the responsibility of leading the people across the Jordan and into the promise land, he was often reminding the people of what God did. These reminders were to serve as reasons and encouragement for continued faith in hard places. It is written in the book of Joshua the words of Rahab, the harlot who hid the Israeli spies and was later spared when the walls of Jericho came down, these words: "For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites...And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was not spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth below" (Josh. 2:10-11). The actions taken by God against the Egyptians to deliver His people became well known in other nations too.

That may not seem all that amazing as Joshua was a contemporary of Moses himself. Surely the people would not have forgotten already what God had done. Keep in mind though that it was the foreigner Rahab who was prompted by the historical record of God to obey as well. The news of the mighty power of God had reached through the thick walls of Jericho.

Even more convincing is that some 800 years later we read in the book of Isaiah words recalling the miracles God performed during the deliverance of His people. Isaiah wrote, "Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over" (Isa. 51:10). If you keep reading in that same chapter of Isaiah, you will find that the purpose of recalling the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea was to encourage the people of God to take up the mantle of faith once again and learn to trust Him and to obey.

Throughout the contest with Pharaoh, God intended that His name be known as Almighty, as powerful, and as deliverer. Family, we need to recall these truths in our day as well. He is still the same God and still reigns in power from on high. There is no foe too formidable for Him and nothing that can thwart his purposes and His plans. We can praise Him today for His power to save and rest in His love for us as He makes Himself known. Let us do our part in making Him known too.