



2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Feb 22nd - March 1st

Sermon: February 22nd



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◦ equipping believers ◦ serving Jesus

February 23

Isaiah 6:4

Some might assume that the people of Israel celebrated the prospect of being in the Lord's presence and hearing Him speak. It would stand to reason that God's people would want to be as near to the Lord as possible and yet, Exodus 20 tells an entirely different story. Scripture records for us the description of the events that took place at the tail end of the reception of the Ten Commandments as the people observe the amazing indicators of the Lord's majestic presence which had engulfed and enlivened the mountain in front of their very eyes.

In response to this miraculous, and awe-inspiring, sight, the Bible tells us that the people beg Moses to speak on God's behalf saying, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." What a statement! It strikes me that this is not a description that fits with many people's views of God. Should people really fear for their lives in the Lord's presence? What was it about God that made them so terrified? I want us to try to answer this question by taking a broad survey of the other moments in Scripture in which God appears to mankind. I believe that a survey of the biblical teaching on the weight and severity of the Lord may well help us understand why He is to be feared.

Verse 18 says that the people "trembled" in the presence of the glory of God. The term is utilized nearly 40 times in the Old Testament, but it is employed in a variety of ways. Most basically, the Hebrew word translated "trembled" means to knock something off of its foundation, to cause something, or someone, to shake. Interestingly enough, the same word is used to describe the shaking of the temple when Isaiah saw the glory of God in chapter 6 of his famous book.

The Bible tells us that God's voice caused the surrounding structure to tremble or shake, so much so that the foundation itself was moved. The effect is incredibly instructive as Isaiah saw this shaking and perceived the very glory of God and responded with a cry of sorrow saying, "Woe is me...!" Why would Isaiah say such a thing? After all, he was a prophet of God. He was a man who was called and purposed and gifted and lived in accordance with God's law. Why would a man of God call out curses upon himself when he sees the very God that he loves? The answer is that God's presence is so heavy, it is so overwhelming and illuminating that man has no hope but to be reminded of his sinfulness and frailty.

Isaiah knew that he was in the presence of One who could not be paralleled. He further realized that the righteousness of this great God illuminated both God's holiness and the prophet's sin and this caused Him to cry out his words of confession. As we will see, this response was not isolated to Isaiah, it would happen again to Peter when God in the flesh revealed Himself to the sinful fisherman.

February 24

Luke 5:8

I assume that most of us were tracking with the general thrust of yesterday's devotion but, I'm sure that others may struggle a bit with this idea of an awe-inspiring, frightening God. To be clear, if that is you, you are not alone! Over the years, there have been numerous attempts to try to explain away or blunt the force of the story. Some would posit that Isaiah was just having an emotional day or maybe Isaiah was caught in the act of sinning! Maybe he didn't grasp the mercy of God because Jesus had not come yet. These excuses might appear to hold water, but the reality of the circumstance is that Isaiah's response is not a one off.

Today we see another example of what happens when the glory of God is revealed to a mere mortal. To be clear, the way that God's glorious presence is unveiled in Luke 5 is altogether different than the method used in Isaiah 6. Luke 5 records one of the first miraculous demonstrations of Christ's power as Jesus instructs Peter and the rest of the fishermen to let down their nets for a catch in waters that had already been fished (with little success) at the wrong time of day! Scripture tells us that Peter and the rest were faithful to Jesus' command and the result was such a miraculous haul that the nets began to break when the men attempted to lift the fish in them out of the water and into the boat!

The result (Peter's response) is both astounding and instructive. Instead of begging God in the flesh to perform another miracle or scheming as to how to garner the Lord's obvious strengths into personal gain, Peter immediately cries out, "depart from me for I am a sinful man." Does this sound like Isaiah to you? Absolutely! Peter and Isaiah have the exact same reaction to the presence and glory of God.

Peter realized, in that moment, that he was standing in a place that he didn't deserve to be. He comprehended the fact that the all-powerful, totally righteous, all-knowing God of the universe was interacting with him a fleshly, sinful and fallen man. It was this contrast (God's holiness vs. Peter's sinfulness) that drove Peter to declare that he was unworthy of Christ's company and, therefore, Peter begged Jesus to depart. In his broken humility, Peter had come to see the chasm between himself and the Lord.

Have you? It is ironic that the greatest moments of spiritual renewal are often accompanied by the most profound and deep sorrow. Revivals are begun when people hit their knees, convicted over all that they have done. Salvation occurs when we come to the end of our self-righteous efforts to earn God's grace and instead see that we are hopeless and helpless before God when left to our own devices. If you haven't come to the place that you see God's holiness and recoil in horror at your own depravity, you have reason to wonder how clearly you have seen God at all. When He comes, He will usher in tears but, by His grace, those tears will lead to life.

February 25

Galatians 3:10

I would argue that the very dynamics we see in play in the stories of Isaiah and Peter (glory and repentance) are present in the account of the Israelites at the mountain upon the reception of the Word. Obviously, the story helps us to understand the glory of God which was so evident around them. Can you imagine the sight of the clouds and lightning around the mountainside? These manifestations of the power of God practically scream of His unparalleled glory.

Nevertheless, the context seems to suggest that the presence of their trembling comes as a result of their newfound perception of their guilt. Recall that the first part of Exodus 20 deals with the giving of the Ten Commandments. These commandments form the very backbone of God's law, as such they are instructive and authoritative revelations of the expectations of the glorious God that enveloped the people in the wilderness.

These laws are good and they are to be obeyed but they also are impossible to keep fully. Galatians 3 reminds us that no one can keep the law of God to perfection. All of us always fall woefully short of walking in the commandments of the Lord. Some of us struggle with one commandment more than others but I would dare say that we have violated each of the commandments, multiple times, over the course of our lives. A bit of introspection on this topic will yield the conclusion that the law is both authoritative and impossible!

Consider for a moment these two realities as they converge in the hearts and minds of the Jews. They have just seen the glory of God, and they are receiving His Word in the form of His expectations and all the while they know that they have transgressed the very law they have received. This means that the power of God, which was so undeniably obvious to them, could and should be directed towards them as transgressors! Stated more simply, the people of Israel tremble because God has made known His power and expectations and they have come to realize that they cannot keep up!

It is one thing to know that a law exists, it is another to know the penalty of breaking that law, but it is an altogether different experience to know that you have violated the law and, therefore, should expect punishment! People tremble in the presence of God because they know that He is powerful and righteous, and they further know that His righteousness demands their consequence. Dear friend, God does not look lightly upon transgression. He is not ok with our "giving it our best", He is holy, His presence causes the very foundations of the Earth to shake and, therefore, we have every reason to tremble.

February 26

1 Timothy 1:9 & Romans 13:1-4

I want to utilize our final four devotions to review what we discussed on Sunday morning. The goal in the sermon was simply to help us appreciate the full-orbed purposes of God in giving us the law. My fear is that some of us simply think that because we cannot keep the law perfectly, we should not worry about the law at all! Obviously, we are not consistent in this regard (I've never met a Christian who would affirm that murdering our neighbor is acceptable!), nevertheless, there is a sense in which many believers don't trouble themselves with the prospect of attempting to honor God in His law for the precise purpose that we only view the law through one, particular, lens. Over the next four days, let us consider the fact that the law actually serves in a few, very important and complimentary, ways.

First, may we remember that the law serves to restrain sin in society. Although many people will never come to a saving relationship with Christ, the law still has a function as the guide and governor on society's actions. Obviously, there have been times in which the law was totally ignored in a community (think Sodom and Gomorrah or the French Revolution), however the simple fact is that most society's live by a set of rules that are born out of innate sense of God's presence and expectations (even when He is not acknowledged or known).

Paul says that even Gentiles (i.e. those who are lost) do not have the law but, by nature, do what it says (Romans 2:14). What does this mean? It doesn't mean that the Gentiles keep the law totally! It also doesn't mean that they obey by virtue of a regenerated and faith-filled heart. Instead, what he means is that all mankind has been imbued with an imperfect but genuine understanding of the law and its requirements and this governs their lives together.

To be clear, mankind doesn't generally heed the law because they love the law or the law giver, they heed the law as a function of necessary cooperation, which in and of itself is God's gift to the world. In this sense, the law is a wonderful restraint on evil which is exactly what 1 Timothy 1:9 teaches us. We are reminded that the law is for the "lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane." The law serves to curtail evil, but how? That will be the focus of tomorrow's devotion!

February 27

Romans 13:1-4

We said yesterday that all men have an innate (if imperfect) sense of the law and this works to restrain evil. How is this supposed to work? The answer is that the law of God also has consequences! God has ordained that lawbreakers should suffer for their transgressions. The punishment is chiefly eternal, those who deny or ignore the law of God and do not run to Christ for forgiveness and reconciliation will spend forever apart from Him in hell. However, there are temporal consequences as well and these consequences are a product of God's grace.

God is gracious in giving consequences because these temporary moments of pain serve to call man's attention to eternal punishment save their repentance. Additionally, God is gracious in giving consequences because the prospect of suffering for our actions is often a good motivator for obedience (even if it is not heartfelt!). The question I want to try to answer today is how do these consequences come about? Some of them are more organic. When I lie and get caught in my dishonesty, those around me cease to trust me and may create some distance between us. Nevertheless, there are other consequences that are more formal, or judicial, in our world.

In fact, this is the God-given purpose of government. Government exists, according to the Bible, to reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. This is a straightforward definition, but it begs some very important questions, specifically, this definition forces us to arrive at a conclusion about what constitutes good and evil! The assumption is that governing authorities would know what is good and what is evil but the only way we, as fallen creatures, would have the ability to discern between the two is God's grace in revealing these things to us.

Thankfully, the law of God tells us what is good and what is evil and, to remind you of what we discussed yesterday, all men have a natural sense of these things. This means that a government's job is to be the arm of the Lord in restraining evil by properly and judiciously utilizing the law of God to concoct regulations that reflect God's holy character and honor His image bearers, chiefly by making sure that they are not sinned against and that those who seek to do harm to society suffer a just consequence for their actions.

I realize that some of us might be uncomfortable with this because we have an idea, drilled into our "modern minds" since grade school, that government and religion are to be separated. While this might sound appealing, the result of such thinking is not liberation from religious oppression, it is a world with no rudder, hopelessly drifting along in the sea of carnality without any hope of direction or prosperity. Folks, as simply as I can state it, whether man likes it or not this is God's world. Christ is Lord over the sanctuary, and He is Lord over the courthouse as well! If our ruling authorities do not have proper categories of good and evil, they have no hope of governing well. Conversely, when the state operates in accordance with the moral law of God, society is set up to flourish precisely because the evil that harms us is held at bay.

February 28

Galatians 3:24

Today we will discuss a second use of the law which is instruction. Specifically, the law teaches us both our own sinfulness and, consequently, our need for grace. The concept here is rather simple, when you and I read the law of God, we are reminded of all that God commands of us, but when we attempt to live out the law of God, we are reminded of all that sin that prohibits our obedience.

When we come to the place where we see God's holy standards and our total inability to keep His commandments, we realize that we must have grace or we are destined to suffer the consequence of His righteous rules. Galatians 3:24 has long been one of my favorite verses because of how simply it teaches our truth for today. Paul uses a word to describe the function of the law that is translated in the ESV as "guardian". Frankly, I don't really like that English term because it seems to miss the point of what the Apostle is saying (at least in my estimation).

The KJV uses the term "schoolmaster" which is more in tune with the original language. The original term literally means a supervising tutor. In antiquity, families with means would often employ someone to supervise the children, teaching them what was right and what was wrong and thereby leading them to maturity. This tutor would be responsible for discipline which would lead the child to see their propensity to fall short of the expectation.

In the same way, the law serves as our tutor or schoolmaster. It clearly teaches God's expectations and then shows us how far short we fall in meeting those requirements. This might seem hateful but that is only the case if we short circuit the goal of the law. The endgame of the law is not to humiliate; the point of the law is to show us our need for mercy which leads us to Christ. God desires that we be brought low so that we can renounce all of efforts to earn that which we cannot gain for us to cry out for mercy from the Savior who is our only hope of blessing.

John Calvin summarized this point well saying, "The law orders, that we, after attempting to do what is ordered, and so feeling our weakness under the law, may learn to implore the help of grace". Have you learned to "implore the help of grace" yet? Oh, dear friend, Christianity is not about what you can do in your fleshliness, Christianity is all about what Christ has done for us in His Divine love and power. The law leads us to the place of helplessness and despair so that we can look outside of ourselves for help that God alone can provide.

March 1

John 14:15

The Westminster Catechism begins with this famous, and beautiful, question and answer:

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

If you are a believer today, God has saved you and He has done so for the purpose of His glory. You have been "bought with a price", Paul says, "therefore honor God with your bodies." (1 Corinthians 6:20). Salvation is not the finish line of our pursuits; salvation is the very beginning of a life that lives for the glory of God.

Jesus famously said, in our verse for today, that those who love Him will keep His commandments. Obviously, Christ did not mean that those who love God will keep His commandments for the purpose of earning salvation! Christ came to live and die precisely because we can't earn salvation. Instead, Jesus meant that obedience is the fruit of salvation because as we obey, we demonstrate the power of God to transform our wicked hearts, and we bring honor to the Lord in our new life.

I must admit that today's point is fairly simple, but it bears mentioning. When Jesus says that those who love Him must keep His commandments, He is claiming that there is a place in the Christian life (after all, only Christians love Jesus) for commands!

We must take this one step further, however, if we are going to understand the relationship between Christians and the law. If Christ is extoling His commandments, what commandments is He talking about? Chiefly, He is talking about the very law of God which commands the people of God to faithfully obey for the glory of God. Brothers and sisters, there is no chasm between God's commands and His grace. Instead, the grace of God enlivens us and frees us to follow the commands of God, and this means that there is still a place in our lives for the law today.

I don't keep the law for salvation. I know that only God is capable of doing so! Nevertheless, I know that I am called to mirror God's character (imperfectly but genuinely) to a world that needs to know Him. Furthermore, I understand that I have been given new life, imbued with the Spirit of God and, as Jeremiah said, the result is that the law of God is written on my heart! This means that the law is still very much a part of my life today. I don't worry that I will suffer its ultimate consequence, but I know that it still reflects the character of the Savior I love and, therefore, it is necessary that I keep His commands in order to demonstrate the love I have for Him.