



# 2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: January 16<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup>

Sermon: January 15<sup>th</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
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January 16

### **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**

Acts 19:11-20 records an amazing story! Its not often that we read of an encounter between a demon possessed man and lost people who are trying to leverage the name of Jesus for their own personal gain. The sheer uniqueness of the account often obscures the real pinnacle of the text which is found after the story is told. You see, the beauty and the point of the passage isn't that the sons of Sceva were beaten until they were naked, the point is that many people in their same locality believed on Jesus and were saved. In fact, the most supernatural and miraculous events in Acts 19:11-20 are found in the salvation and resulting sanctification of the men and women of Ephesus who once dabbled in the same magic and occult practices as the Sceva boys.

There is a very important word in verse 18, the word is "believed". The biblical teaching on the importance and necessity of belief is central to the redemptive narrative that comprises the Bible. If we don't understand what it means to believe, specifically to believe in Christ, then we have missed the very crucial step that leads through the gate of salvation (Christ) and to eternal life.

The question that I want to ask today is simple, what did they believe? When the Bible says that Christians in Ephesus "believed" the obvious response is "they believed in what?". Today's passage answers that question in a succinct and understandable way. To believe on Jesus is to believe the very truths that Paul writes out for us in 1 Corinthians 15.

You will note a few components here. First, we see that a Christian must believe that Jesus Christ died. The significance of His death is wrapped up in the purpose of His death. Jesus died as a way of atoning (paying) for our sins. His death was not the result of His own sin, instead He was dying the death you and I deserved as a way of redeeming us from our sin! The death of Christ is the place where the justice and mercy of God kiss. In His justice, God demands a payment for our sin. He cannot simply look the other way; He must exact the necessary payment for our transgression. In His mercy, God sent One who would be a substitute for us. The substitute is Jesus. Jesus lived perfectly, which means He did not owe His own debt for personal sin, instead He lived in total obedience and submission to the law of God and yet, He came to die for us. In God's mercy, He ordained a plan that did not require us to pay for our own transgression. While justice must be done, God in His love made a way for us to be forgiven and the consequences placed on Another. That other party was Jesus, and His death was the moment in time in which the righteous demands of God's law were met. Christians must believe, therefore, in the death of Christ. We must embrace Jesus' work of substitutionary (He took my place) atonement (He died to pay for my sins).

Second, Christians believe that Jesus rose again. The significance of Jesus' resurrection is multi-faceted. First, His resurrection proves that His payment was enough. When He rose again, He is getting up from His act of dying in our place. His very breath returning to His body shows us that death (the ultimate consequence for sin) has been overwhelmed and defeated. Second, His getting up is a precursor to His ascending to heaven. Right now, our Lord Jesus rules and reigns the universe and, therefore, He deserves our obedience and allegiance. The ground of the faithful

Christian life is comprised of gratitude for what Jesus has done and a clear recognition of who He is as ruler of all creation.

These two truths, that Christ died for our sins and rose in victory over the consequence of sin which is death, are the very foundational convictions and proclamations of the Christian church. This is what we must believe! The sons of Sceva didn't understand or embrace these truths and, therefore, their words were empty. They knew not the Jesus whose name they evoked. However, the citizens of Ephesus who were converted believed on this Jesus and they were transformed. Do you believe in Him today?

January 17

**1 John 1:9**

We answered one question (what do Christians believe) but that answer inevitably leads to another question, namely how do I know if I believe? Christians have asked this question for years and, thankfully, we have biblical answers to ponder.

As we start our journey through proofs or evidences of salvation, I need to say a word about how we are saved. Christians believe that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This means that we do nothing to earn our salvation! If we ground our salvation in our works, meaning if we think that we will be saved because we are a good person or because we have somehow successfully atoned for our sins, we have missed it! Salvation is a gift and that is a good thing because there is no way we could earn it in our own strength.

Nevertheless, we believe that those who truly are saved by grace through faith will evidence the salvation they were given as a gift in their lifestyle. Stated differently (and to paraphrase Martin Luther) we are saved by grace through faith alone but the grace that saves us never alone. If you are truly saved, the transformation that salvation brings will result in actions. Salvation isn't earned by actions, but actions do follow salvation. This means that those who say they have faith and have no works to prove their faith are perilously mistaken (James 2:17).

We see the marriage of faith and works in Acts 19. According to Luke, the people who believed acted in light of their faith in a few keyways. In fact, we would argue that the manner in which the people of God responded to their belief in the Gospel in Acts 19 should be typical of all believers.

One way that the believers demonstrated their faith was through confession. Luke says that many of those who had believed (notice the past tense) came "confessing" their deeds. Their faith in the Gospel of Christ necessitated their understanding that Christ died for sinners like them! To see and understand Jesus' death and to recognize the cause of His death was our sin is to recognize the gross nature of sin. Furthermore, to believe on Christ is to see Him as our Savior and Lord (the One who died to redeem us AND rose in defeat of death to rule all things) which means faith leads to a desire to obey Him and a true sorrow when we are disobedient.

All of this leads to our verse for the day which teaches us that confession is the key to forgiveness. The way that God has ordained for salvation to occur is through a confession of our sin. It is only as we see the ugly and vile nature of sin and confess its presence and its nastiness to our Lord that we are saved. This is why "repentance", which is a confessing and turning from sin, is included in the Gospel invitation. In salvation, we see our sin for what it is, we grieve its presence, and we turn from it to obey the Lord. Additionally, this discipline of confession continues to mark the believer's life as we continually seek God's forgiveness and restoration when we recognize sin in our lives after salvation.

Those who are truly saved are saved "confessors" and this means that one evidence of "fruit" of salvation is confession. Have you ever confessed your sin before God? Do you see Jesus as a help to your otherwise solid efforts or have you recognized the helpless and hopeless nature of your life apart from His grace? Have you come to the point where you've seen the need to confess? If so, you have reason to rejoice, for those who truly confess will be forgiven.

January 18

**2 Corinthians 4:1-6, Luke 5:1-9 & Isaiah 6:1-5**

Yesterday we began to unpack some of the evidences of salvation as demonstrated in the lives of those who were truly saved in Ephesus by exploring the necessity of confession of sin for salvation. Those who have come to know Christ have confessed their sin, but why? Today, we want to explore the question in depth, specifically we are trying to understand why confession is a natural and important component of conversion.

It is important to me once again to state that we are not arguing that confession EARNs salvation. Instead, we are making the case that salvation, true regeneration that is given to us by grace through faith in Christ and therefore not earned (see Ephesians 2:8-9) RESULTS, necessarily and uniformly, in confession. Those who God saves will confess their sins because confession is one of the natural and universal responses of God's saving work. So, to get back on track, our texts for the day show us why confession naturally occurs in salvation. Let's explore them in the order listed above.

First, we see that salvation is described biblically in terms of sight. Paul says that the "god of this world" (that would be Satan) has blinded unbelievers. This means that the lost are lost because they don't see! Furthermore, this means that those who are saved are saved when they are supernaturally enabled to see and savor Jesus Christ. Seeing, spiritually speaking, is a supernatural gift of conversion.

Now, the question of why confession is intricately and necessarily tied to conversion is found in our other two passages for the day. In both texts, we read that the result of man's seeing (comprehending) the identity of God is confession. Confession naturally results from a clear picture of God's Person. Why is this? Because when we see we are able to discern both God's holiness, majesty and righteousness AND our sinfulness and lowliness. Furthermore, seeing allows us to grasp the magnitude of our sin. When we comprehend the One that we have offended, the result is terror and a rush to confess what has become obvious to us.

When a person truly sees Jesus (at conversion), he also recognizes the vile nature of his sin. This means that he has come to see his situation in its actuality and the result of that sight is confession. What else could a person do but voice what is obvious? How else would a person respond but by crying out for mercy and expressing the reality that he or she is in desperate need of grace and forgiveness in the presence of such a holy God?

So, we can conclude that those who claim no need to confess have yet to see and if they do not see God, they have yet to be saved! On the other hand, those who have confessed and who continue to confess give good evidence that they have seen, and this is a wonderful indicator of true regeneration having taken place in their lives.

January 19

**Luke 19:1-8**

You may have observed that I have avoided a term that is often used in the context of discussions about conversion. When we consider the components of salvation, we often summarize by saying one must “repent and believe”. Repentance is a key aspect of conversion, and this means that we would be wise to break down the term and understand its definition and parts if we are going to understand and act.

Repentance is a term that means “turning from”. The idea is that people who repent see the error of their ways and turn away from those actions and to righteousness. Repentance therefore is both an action of words and action. To truly repent is to confess our wrongdoing AND to replace our sinful actions with obedience to the Lord.

This is the reason why I have not used the term “repent” when referring to confession. Confession is certainly a part of repentance but to truly repent is to both confess and turn. We see an example of this turning from sin and pursuing righteousness in the famous story of Zacchaeus. My guess is that many of you have already begun to sing that catchy song about the wee-little subject of our devotion but while Zacchaeus was short in stature, his example looms large in our understanding of true salvation

Zacchaeus was a lost man who was guilty of profound sin prior to his meeting Jesus. This man was a tax collector, which meant that he made his living requiring the people to pay oppressive taxes to the Romans while syphoning off a large portion of the proceeds to corruptly line his own pockets. Stated succinctly, Zacchaeus had an earned reputation of being a corrupt and greedy man who was despised in his community.

Zacchaeus’ job and reputation makes Jesus’ initiated conversation with him quite scandalous in the cultural context. What would a religious teacher have to do with such a pariah? The answer is that Jesus came to seek and to save sinners and Zacchaeus qualified!

What is of interest to us today however is not Jesus’ grace (although it deserves a ton of attention) but Zacchaeus’ response to Christ. We see in Zacchaeus evidence of true repentance. In verse 8, Zacchaeus commits (of his own volition) to repaying those he had “wronged” which alone is a statement of confession. If we boil down Zacchaeus’ words, we see an acknowledgement of wrongdoing and a turning from those deeds with a commitment to pursuing reconciliation and righteousness in the Person of Christ. The Bible reader can rest in knowing that Zacchaeus shows fruits of salvation by seeing true repentance as evidenced by his words and deeds.

We see a similar dynamic in Acts 19 when we read that the people who believed came confessing their sins AND burning their magic books which guided their previously sinful lifestyle. These folks were truly repentant, and this is demonstrated in their words and deeds of confession and turning.

Have you confessed your sin and turned from practicing evil? Now, I obviously understand that no one is perfect. We all still struggle, and we all continue to sin but this does not mean that we make a practice of evil! Instead, we should be constantly seeing, confessing and turning from our sin and the very presence of initial and ongoing repentance in our lives is one of the great indicators of a saved and transformed soul.

January 20

**Acts 19:16 and Acts 19:20**

It is a bit of an odd decision to use two separate verses from the sermon text of the week, but I promise that I have chosen this path for good reason (at least I think it's a good reason). Remember, we are trying to answer this question, how do I know if I truly believe? Thus far, we have seen evidence of belief in confession and turning from sin. These two things constitute biblical repentance, but they don't form the entirety of our reasons for assurance. If we claim that we believe, we should see both repentance and a growing level of obedience in our lives.

In Acts 19, we read of such a phenomenon in verse 20. That precious verse says that the word of God "prevailed" amongst the believers. Interestingly enough, that word translated "prevailed" is jam packed with meaning. I believe that we will learn quite a bit about what biblical obedience, as the product of saving faith, should look like in our lifestyle.

The word "prevailed" is translated in other ways in the Scripture. In fact, the same word is used in verse 16 as Luke tells us that the demon possessed man "overpowered" the sons of Sceva. The connotation of the term becomes clearer in that context. The idea that Luke is putting forth for us is that the Word of God overpowers our previous beliefs and convictions. When the Word of God "prevails" for us, it overwhelms every other impulse, desire and thought we previously cherished. The Bible, and its instructions for us, becomes the irresistible force in our life.

Those who have been truly saved will be obedient to the Lord. This obedience will grow over time. If you are a new believer, there are many things that may still need to be "overpowered" in your life. The process is often gradual, and the journey is often wrought with setbacks but the general trajectory and impulse in your life will be towards biblical obedience, nonetheless.

Notice here one other point for the day, a point that is embarrassingly simple but warrants our attention for just a moment, as we see that the Word of God is the source of their obedience. Folks, there is no way to honor the Lord except through submission to what He has said. The Christian life, in this way, is far less mystical than some think. If one truly desires to follow the Lord and honor the Lord as a saved man or woman, the way to accomplish that goal is through faithfulness to what He has said. God will not change His mind and God has no need to speak further on life's most important issues. The Word of God is unchanging and sufficient for life and godliness, and this means that it becomes our go to resource if we desire to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

Has the Word of God "overpowered" your life? Are you living in submission to God's Word or are there other things in your life that drive your decisions and desires? The degree that you see God moving and working to bring about obedience to His Word is another indicator of evidence to be assured that you do in fact believe.



January 21

**Matthew 9:12**

The Word translated “prevail” is found in our text for today. It may be hard to spot but I think the connection between Acts 19 and Matthew 9 is incredibly instructive. Jesus is teaching here that those who are “well”, meaning those who are healthy, have no need of a physician unlike those who are sick. The parallel in the passage is between physical and spiritual health. Only those who know they are sick seek care from a doctor and this is why the self-righteous Pharisees were so reticent to accept and submit to Jesus. The religious elite didn’t think they needed a physician, in fact they would claim that they were totally healthy or “well”.

What is interesting is that the word “well” comes from the same word root word that is translated “prevail” in Acts 19. The point then is that the Bible prevailing is what leads to “wellness”. Those who are healthy in Christ are those who understand and submit to the Word of God. Stated differently, and to use the same metaphor as above, the prescription that God gives us for our spiritual health is found in the Word of God. Those who embrace its instructions and live considering its precepts and, most importantly, see and savor Christ in its pages enjoy spiritual health.

Folks, this observation is repeated in our ministry at Smyrna. I have yet to meet a spiritually healthy person who is ignorant of the Word of God. In fact, I would argue that a true sign of spiritual health and saving belief is a desire to know and understand and abide by God’s Word. Conversely, what ails most people today is not an unexpected and unwarranted attack from outside sinful forces (although those do occur), instead the primary issue in most people’s lives is spiritual unwellness due to failure to obey God’s Word.

Time and again we encounter people who are living unhealthy lives. Their existence is full of suffering precisely because they have neglected the very source of health! They are enduring difficulty, disease (think consequences of abusing substances, anxiety due to poor choices, etc.) and broken relationships because they have neglected to follow in the ways of the Lord. In stark contrast, those who have experienced the prevailing power of the Word of God on their lives are spiritually well. This doesn’t mean their life is free of struggle, heartache, etc. but it does mean that they have peace, strength, and assurance that the other party knows not.

Oh, dear saints, our hope for you is that the Word of God would prevail so that you would be well. What a marvelous piece of assurance to see the effect of righteous living and to know that you are living in healthy communion with the Father.

January 22

**Acts 6:7**

One last piece of evidence should be seen and savored in our text from Sunday. As we consider the question of our salvation, we should at least pause to ask whether the truth of the Lord spreads through our lives.

Jesus made it clear in Matthew 28 and Acts 1 that His desire for His followers was wrapped up in the spread of the Gospel. These men and women were to “make disciples” and be “his witnesses” in order to spread the truth of the Word of God which terminates on the Person and work of the Son of God. This means that our very purpose in life is bound up in God’s commission to share the truth of what we believe with other people.

The testimony of the New Testament is that true, spiritual life multiplies. Those who are born again are used by God to grow up others in the Kingdom. We see this clearly in our passage from Sunday as we read that the Word of God grew mightily. There is a double sense to this phrase. First, the influence of the Word grew in their own lives. This is emphasized again with the term “prevailed” that follows. The Word grew in its influence and authority in the hearts and minds of the believers in Ephesus. However, there is another sense in which the Word grew through these people and that is through the conversion and discipleship of others.

In Acts 6, we see a similar pattern unfold. The Gospel is made known to a group of people which results in their conversion which results further in the spreading of the truth to others. Folks, true believers preach and embody the Lordship of Christ through heralding and abiding by His Word and when this happens, God uses us to spread His truth to others.

It is a concerning fact that many who claim Christ in our day have supposedly known and followed Him for years with very little evidence of spreading truth. It seems that several have lived for decades without the slightest discernible impact in the community and even in their close circle of family and friends. This is not normative, at least not biblically!

God’s design in saving a people terminates on His glory. He gains glory through our obedience, and He gains glory as we share His truth with others thereby multiplying the people who glorify His name. While we are not responsible for the supernatural work He does in people’s hearts, we must be busy spreading seeds and we believe that the very act of faithfully proclaiming the truth generally results in a harvest.

Our prayer is that the Word of God would spread and grow mightily through the fellowship at Smyrna. May our people love the Word such that it prevails in their hearts and lives and for the purpose of declaring its truths to people who need to hear it.