



2022 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Jan 17th - Jan 23rd

Sermon: January 16th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
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January 17

1 Corinthians 1:23

Every single one of us is wired to be an evangelist. That might seem like a gross exaggeration, but if you consider the way mankind operates, I believe the statement is quite accurate. Think about all your friends, family members, co-workers and acquaintances for a moment and ask yourself this question: what are they most passionate about? What do they love the most? I am almost sure that you could answer that question relatively accurately in each case, assuming you have had any amount of conversation with the individual. In fact, we are known by our loves and our loves are known by our words. If you asked me to describe my friends, one of the very first things I would utilize in my description was their loves. "He is an avid hunter" or "she loves her family" or "he's a proud veteran" are common refrains and they are almost always largely founded on our words!

So, I have belabored the point but to summarize, I am asserting this truth: we are known by what we love and what we love is made clear by what we say. People who know me know my likes and hobbies because those are the things I speak about, and they are what I clearly enjoy. My words betray my heart...and that isn't a personal problem, it is true of all humanity.

This concept is important for many reasons: it illuminates the possible presence of idols in our lives, and it also provides a great window into our passion and love for Jesus or lack thereof. Those who truly love Christ WILL speak about Him. That doesn't mean that every follower of Jesus is going to stand on a stage and "preach" the way we define it in our churches, but it does mean that every true follower of Jesus should have a transformed heart, with a new passion and love of Christ which compels them to speak early and often of their love... Jesus Christ.

When a person encountered Paul, he or she heard about Jesus. In fact, as you see in our text today, Paul characterized his entire ministry (which encompassed the totality of his life) as one of preaching Christ. He preached Christ regardless of the audience (Jew or Gentile) and he preached Christ regardless of the response (salvation or rejection). To know Paul was to hear about Jesus. Nobody in his presence escaped the Gospel of Jesus Christ and this is one of the strongest pieces of evidence of the salvation that Paul enjoyed.

The point of the sermon was really to demonstrate the results of an encounter with Christ that should help lead us to our assurance that we are indeed saved. It may be easier to point to a day or moment in which a person prayed a prayer, but it is most certainly more accurate and trustworthy to examine the life of a person in the moment, and our lives are most easily evaluated based on the content and quantity of our words. Those who believe should witness to that belief.

That's the foundation of the entire story of the book of Acts (see Acts 1:8) and it should be our story as well. Brothers don't fall victim to the idea that evangelism is some wonderful addition to the Christian life, evangelism is one of the great signs of conversion as it reflects a heart that has been changed. All of us speak about what we love and those who know Jesus love Him.

January 18

Ephesians 3:8

Today's text is very similar to the passage we studied yesterday. Again, we read of Paul's commitment to preaching Christ, but the addition today is that we see his attitude in his commission. As we read these words, I want you to notice the obvious posture Paul has towards his assignment. Sometimes it is helpful to note what isn't said in order to understand what is communicated in a portion of Scripture.

Notice that Paul's terminology here is not one of forced compliance. He doesn't say the Lord demanded that I preach, and I acquiesced! He doesn't say that he dutifully obeyed the Lord's commission, even at great cost (although that would be true). Instead, the Apostle tells us that he was given the "grace" to preach. He saw preaching as a wonderful opportunity, a welcome assignment that allowed the Apostle to make known the One whom he loved and the One who deserved all of the glory mankind could possibly ascribe to Him!

Paul's lifestyle was one of joyous submission to his calling. He saw the chance to speak about Jesus as a glorious blessing and he pursued those chances with all his might. The term "grace" here communicates at least two things. First, it shows us that Paul knew that the strength he needed for the task at hand was not intrinsic to his flesh. If Paul was to be found faithful in his calling, it would be because of the enabling grace of God. Second, it shows his humility in understanding his unworthiness to the calling on his life. How could Paul speak of Jesus? Grace alone! He didn't deserve to know Christ and he, obviously, wasn't smart enough to figure out his message of Christ by himself! Instead, he was saved by grace through faith, not of works (as he wrote in the previous chapter) and his works flowed from the grace that was given to him.

How many of you see the opportunity to preach Christ as grace? Have you considered lately the marvelous blessing of being able to share Jesus? Have you thought about the fact that your knowing Christ is an inestimable fact of grace? Have you seen that partnering with God in sharing the Gospel is not a burden but a delight?

Too often believers view evangelism as a drag. It's something we must do because it is commanded. We act as if it is a great burden, and we do all we can to either: get it over with quickly or make excuses for why we can't. This attitude comes from a heart that must be reoriented around the Gospel. Brother and sister, we GET to share the Gospel of Christ and we are given a front row seat to see God's power, glory, and grace as we do so! May we not run from our opportunities to be reminded of God's might and gracious extension of mercy through Christ, but may we see our chance to obey Jesus for what it is... an act of grace.

January 19

Acts 1:8

By now this is a familiar passage to all of us (at least I hope that it is!) as it really sets the stage for interpreting and understanding the entire book of Acts. Jesus' last Words before His ascension provides the assignment for His immediate audience and the rest of His followers that would be brought into the Kingdom in the age to come. To summarize, Christ's expectation is that His disciples would always testify about Him in all places.

When we read this little verse, we should be struck by how simple and straight forward the instruction from Christ to His disciples is. There is simply no way to misunderstand this text and there is no way to duck the obvious responsibility Christ is giving to us as believers.

Jesus draws a straight line between being His follower and testifying about Him... and we should too. While there are better, more glorious, motivations for a believer to speak of Christ, the ground of our dedication to the task must be obedience. Jesus Christ is Lord of us. He is the head of the church, and this means that our submission to Him is not an option. We don't get to pick and choose what tasks we accept from Christ as if we are attending some cosmic, biblical buffet. Instead, we are the servants, and He is the master and those who shirk the responsibility to obey the master are simply not good and commendable servants!

As we think about the way Jesus' initial followers understood this task, it becomes quite clear that they were collectively committed to obedience, even at great cost. Peter and John stood before the religious authorities and refused to submit to their instruction to stop speaking about Jesus even as their very lives could've been taken from them. Stephen did lose his life speaking about Jesus. Philip traveled great distances to obey the global flavor of the commission. Paul and Barnabas and Mark and countless others were active in their submission to take the Gospel to the nations.

The category that modern Christians have invented for a Christian who is not a witness (or evangelist) simply lacks any biblical warrant whatsoever. It may make us feel better to think that the "professionals" do this kind of ministry but that is simply unbiblical thinking!

Furthermore, when we refuse to obey the Commission of God, we rob ourselves of one great avenue of assurance in this way: as we speak for God, we put ourselves in position to see Him move powerfully and when He moves powerfully through our words, we are affirmed that He is real and that we are children of His. Part of the reason why so many people struggle with the validity of their salvation is that their salvation has never been "worked out" (Philippians 2:12), it has stayed in the theoretical realm and the real substance is left untried.

January 20

Psalm 1:1-2

So, the point of last week's sermon was really to hammer home the truth that we are convinced of Paul's salvation NOT because of his dramatic story but because of the life he lived after the story took place. We ground our assurance not in the momentary encounter with Christ (even though all believers have one) but in the resulting evidence of the transformation that takes place when we have truly met Jesus. This means that our assurance is tied to the quality of our lives as we see the evidence of the Spirit's power to transform our hearts and that power is manifested in several ways.

One way that salvation works itself out in our lives is proclamation. That is what we have discussed for the past three days. Those who truly are saved by Jesus love Him and submit to Him. Furthermore, we believe that love and submission necessarily (very important word) leads to proclamation about Christ because we speak about what we love AND we are commanded by Jesus to evangelize.

Nevertheless, evangelism is not the only reason why we have reason to believe that Paul, or any other believer, was truly converted. Another evidence of salvation in a righteous person's life is spiritual growth. Our text for Sunday said that Paul grew in "strength". The term there does not mean physical strength, based on its context it means spiritual acumen and wisdom. Paul grew in his knowledge of Christ and all saved people should as well. However, that leaves a very important question, how or where do we go to find the knowledge that leads to our growth?

The Bible draws a straight line between our salvation and our spiritual growth. Those who are truly righteous grow in their righteousness, and they grow, chiefly, through a love, study, and internalization of Scripture. Once again, the church has created a category that is hard to find biblically. I can't tell you how many people I've met who claim to have followed Jesus for years and know next to nothing about the Bible. Unfortunately, this is the norm in many churches. People are supposedly "saved" but remain biblical novices for their entire lives. This might be "normal" to us, but it should not be acceptable.

Today's text shows us that the truly righteous man is not a biblical novice. In fact, he stands as a great contrast to those who know nothing about the Bible. Instead of walking in the counsel of the wicked (which is inevitable for those who are not versed in the truths of God), the righteous man "delights in the law of the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night".

You will notice in this text two characteristics of a righteous man as it relates to the Word of God. First, we see his posture towards the Bible. The Word of God is a "delight" to him or her. A true believer should LOVE the Word of God and delight in all that it teaches. This is one absolute, sure fire, indicator of a truly converted person. Second, we see the resulting action of a righteous man as the Bible says he "meditates on the Bible day and night". The Bible is not relegated to some 15-minute reading every day, instead the Bible is constantly on the minds and hearts of true believers. They are thinking about it, considering it, praying to understand it, and memorizing it so that it can assist them in their task of bringing glory to God. Far from being the activity of a few theological scholars, true Bible study is a mark of healthy believers. They desire to know God's Word and apply it to their situations because they believe that God has given it to us for our good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and because they believe that in the pages of Scripture the Savior that they love and adore is more clearly revealed.

January 21

Psalm 119:47-48

Today's text is really meant to emphasize the passage we spoke of yesterday. In this marvelous chapter, the Word of God is front and center. Repeatedly the Psalmist emphasizes his love for the Lord's Word and the way that it helps and assists him as he attempts to live for God's glory.

Briefly, I want you to notice the way that this passage reaffirms what we said yesterday. You will see the word "delight" again in this text. Once more, the Psalm shows us how the Word of God is pleasing and satisfying to a true believer. When one "delights" in something, they love to see it and spend time enjoying it. Second, notice that meditation is once again mentioned. The act of meditation (biblically defined) is not some weird, ethereal experience.

Instead, it is the process of contemplating deeply and seeking to internalize what you have read. There is a grave difference between opening the Bible, reading a line or two and shutting it in order to check it off your spiritual checklist for the day and meditating on the Word of God. Meditation causes us to linger over something. It requires time and energy as we think about what we've read, and we consider how it may apply to us and what it may teach us.

Nevertheless, what I really want to get to today is the connection the Psalm makes between reading and contemplating the Word of God and worship. You will notice in verse 48 that the Psalmist tells us that the result of his reading the Word of God is that he lifts his hands towards the commandments. The term might sound strange to us, but it is employed a few other times in the Psalms (28:2, 88:9) and in both of those contexts the idea becomes clear. What the Psalm means is that reading the Word of God leads to worshipping the God of the Word as we consider His commandments to us.

Literally, the Psalmist teaches us that we are to praise God as we read what He has commanded us. This means that the commands of God are not a burden but a delight. They should evoke praise in our hearts as we consider: his grace in giving them to us, His righteous character, and the way in which His commands guide us down roads that are pleasing to Him and that lead to His glory and our ultimate good.

I wonder how many of us see the Word of God in such a manner? The truth is that those who are truly believers should understand that our gracious God gives us His Word as an act of mercy and love. His commands are not meant to be burdensome; they are intended to shield us from harm and lead us to good and these truths should cause us to want to know what He commands and to praise Him for His mercy in giving us such wonderful guidance.

January 22

Psalm 119:167

So, there is one subset of folks that we haven't yet addressed as it relates to the importance of loving the Word of God. We said that one mark of salvation, and therefore one reason for assurance, is a deep love of the Word of God. Those who are truly saved should love God's Word and demonstrate this by earnest study which brings delight and worship.

However, there is at least one more group of folks that must be considered before we move forward. There are those who seem to really enjoy reading the Bible, perhaps they even have dedicated great amounts of time to studying the Word of God, but in the end, they are not obedient to what it teaches. Some religious scholars are this way, they know what the Word says, when it was said and even how it applies, but they are unwilling to adhere to what was written. Paul addresses this kind of issue in 1 Corinthians 8 when he says that knowledge without love "puffs up". The idea is that is you simply know what is true but refuse to apply it, in love to God and others, you are no better off... in fact you are in worse condition than when you started.

Notice how the Psalm dovetails nicely with Paul's idea in Corinthians. The Psalmist tells us that he loves the Word of God "exceedingly". The idea is clear, his love and affection for God's Word is abundant! However, that love is not theoretical, it is born out in his day-to-day lifestyle. His affection is proved by his obedience!

This obedient and submissive life is contrasted greatly with the kind of faulty spirituality we referenced above. The kind of biblical student who knows so much but does so very little, is foreign to the heart of the Psalmist. While this person might cognitively understand many things about the Bible, the state of his heart has not been transformed by its truths and this is fleshed out in a lifestyle that is not submissive to the Word of God. In that case, it would be better for a person to know nothing at all than to know so much and disobey anyway.

All of this means that you can be a religious expert and not a believer! True belief is not grounded in what you know, true belief is shown when what you know is applied to how you live! When you read the Bible, do you read in order to understand and obey? This would be a mark of a true believer.

January 23

John 15:18-25

Well, we have reached a final point as it relates to pillars of our conviction that Paul was a true believer. As we think about Paul's life and ministry, the first two points (that he spoke of Jesus often and that he grew in His spiritual knowledge and wisdom) are probably obvious. I think most of us have a category for such things as we understand that true Christians should be evangelists and students. However, I'm not sure that our third pillar is all that intuitive. In fact, many of us probably think that this reason for assurance is cause for alarm!

The third reason why we can say with conviction that Paul was a believer is that he was hated by many. That might seem odd to you! Aren't believers supposed to be kind and loving and if one is kind and loving won't they be loved in return? The question is a genuine one, but it ignores the reality that kindness and "love" must be defined, and those definitions are not agreed upon in this fallen world. Many defined "kindness" as merely affirming someone in all their decisions. The kindest thing a person can do, by this definition, is simply support a person as they choose what they want to do or be. Concurrently, many people define love as universal acceptance. We are not to "judge" a person based on their choices, instead our job is to affirm them in all they choose, and this is the pinnacle of true love.

However, the biblical idea of kindness and love are radically opposed. True kindness and love are not understood to be universal acceptance of sin but a real, humble but firm declaration of the reality of man's fallenness and the accompanying truth of grace in Christ. The problem with this kind of kindness and love is that it is not always interpreted as such! In fact, as Jesus came onto this planet, He was despised precisely because He loved the world! In John 3:16, we read that Jesus' mission was motivated by God's love but three verses later we read that the world hated the One who came out of love! Why? Because darkness hated light. The love of God necessitated that light be shed on people's sin and the response of most was not joy but anger.

Our passage for today records Jesus' Words of warning on this topic. Just as the light of the world was despised by men, the light's followers will be disliked as well. If you stand for truth, even in the most loving way possible, there will be those who dislike you and that is unavoidable. We believe that Jesus was perfect and yet, the response to His ministry was largely hateful! In the same way, a sign of true Christian character and lifestyle is the disdain of some in the world.

Now, a few points of clarification. First, we are not saying that EVERYONE will hate you. Indeed, many people loved Paul and celebrated his ministry as the means whereby they were brought into the Kingdom. Second, there is a difference between the world hating someone for their Gospel message and the hate that is brought on by just being a jerk. Some believers have a martyr's complex, believing that everyone hates them because they are standing on the truth when in reality people dislike them because they are mean, arrogant, haughty and the like!

However, the point remains that the true believer's message and lifestyle will be despised by many. This means that those who are really believers will have enemies in their lives and that the very presence of people who dislike them is not necessarily cause for alarm. In fact, it may well be cause for rejoicing that we have been counted worthy to suffer for the cause and name of Christ.

