



2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: January 2nd - 8th

Sermon: January 1st



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◦ equipping believers ◦ serving Jesus

January 2, 2023

Acts 19:1-10

Disclaimer: this is going to be a multi-day devotion... hold on tight 😊

Acts is a book that records a monumental transition in human history. The transition is rooted in the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and the inauguration of the New Covenant which took place in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Christ, the demands of the law (the foundation of the Old Covenant) were met and the offer of reconciliation to God through Christ is made. Jesus died to absorb the consequences of our sin, as demanded by the law. As He did so, Jesus took our sin upon Himself. God's wrath was poured on Christ for us. Conversely, Jesus offers those who believe upon Him righteousness. This righteousness is not intrinsic to us (it doesn't originate in us), instead the righteousness of Christ is imputed (an accounting term that denotes placing funds from one account to another) to us from Jesus. Jesus took our sin and gives us His righteousness and He does so in the New Covenant that God made and ratified in the death of Christ.

That is a brief description of the Gospel (the "good news") that is the core of the New Covenant and now the hard work of understanding the implications of this truth for believers in the time of the book of Acts must be done. You see, Jesus really died at a moment in history. The New Covenant was made upon His death and resurrection, and this had immense ramification for people who were alive in that period of time.

Think of it this way, prior to Christ, the Old Covenant was in effect between God and His people. If you asked a true believer how they were to worship and interact with God in 4 BC, their answer would be the law and its instructions! This would have been the correct answer, but the reply would necessarily change some 40 years later as Christ by that time would have satisfied the demands of the law, the Old Covenant, and begun a new one.

All of that theoretically makes sense, but when we root it in history, we see how the book of Acts is so unique. You see, Paul is interacting in Acts 19 with a group of people who weren't yet fully aware of what Christ had done to institute the New Covenant. They had believed all that they were given prior. Presumably, they understood and embraced the Old Testament and, therefore, the law. They explicitly are referenced as believers in John's ministry of preparation for the Messiah, but they still needed to know how the Messiah had saved them! They weren't living with a New Testament, and they weren't aware, until Acts 19, of all that Jesus had done.

This is why Paul calls them "disciples" even before they knew about the finished work of Christ! They were disciples because they had followed all that God had given them to that point and this is honorable. Now, we have been given far more than they were, and we are living thousands of years after Jesus finished His work on the cross, instituting a New Covenant. The point I am making is that we aren't living when they lived. Nobody on the planet has lived underneath the Old Covenant and, therefore, no one has rightly believed God without embracing Christ. This is true because the New Covenant had been instituted centuries prior to our birth.

January 3, 2023

Acts 19:1-10 & Ezekiel 36:27

Yesterday's devotion began to dive into the transitory nature of the book of Acts. Acts records events that took place in a time of change. Specifically, the book of Acts records the going forth of the Gospel which is the foundation of a New Covenant that God made with His people. Jesus satisfied the demands of the Old Covenant and instituted a new one that would radically alter the way people related to God and the blessings that God's people would enjoy in Him.

The New Covenant brings with it many marvelous gifts. One of the best gifts is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Prior to the New Covenant, God's people were not indwelt by the Spirit. In the Old Covenant, God dwelt among His people, but His people were still marred by their sin. The Lord instituted a system of sacrifice that would allow His people to continue to relate to Him, but this system was not adequate to atone for their sin and, therefore, there was a degree of separation between God and men (as demonstrated most clearly in the separation between God and man in the Holy of holies).

Christ atoned for that sin, satisfying all the righteous demands of God to assuage His anger and reconcile us to Him forever and the marvelous result of this work is seen in the opening of the door for the Triune God, in the Person of the Spirit, to dwell within us. Never before would God dwell within all His people for all time but now, in light of what Christ has accomplished, the Spirit resides in every believer. Ezekiel prophesies that this coming of the Spirit would take place in the New Covenant era. There was coming a day, says the prophet, in which the Spirit of God would raise the dry bones (see Ezekiel 37) of previously dead individuals through the power of God which is available to mankind by faith in Christ. One day, the Lord would not only dwell among His people, He would dwell within His people, breathing life into their previously dead souls. That day had not arrived in Ezekiel's lifetime, but it dawned prior to Acts 19 and its coming caused quite a bit of change.

We see the change in Acts 19. In this passage, Paul asks the disciples if they have received the Spirit. The reason, as Ezekiel explained, is that the Spirit is the indicator of salvation in Christ. Those who believed in Jesus would be indwelt by the Spirit, without exception! When he finds that they believe but haven't been indwelt, he pokes deeper to find that they had believed all they were taught but had yet to understand and embrace the work of Jesus on the cross. They had heard John's message preparing their hearts for Christ by repentance, but they didn't yet know that Jesus rose again and all of the ramifications of the resurrection.

This means that they rightly believed what they had been given but needed more and the reason why they could really believe and yet be indwelt later is because they lived in a transitional time. When John came, Jesus had not yet died and rose! The New Covenant had not been ratified and, therefore, believers were those who embraced all that God had revealed to that point.

Now, we need to bring this to a close with a bit of application. Folks, many people in our world would like to teach that this subsequent "baptism of the Spirit" is normative for believers. The idea is that you can believe, like these disciples in Acts 19, and then later, through an extra move of the Spirit be baptized into the power of God. This is heresy and its nonsense. What is taking place in Acts 19 is the crossing over of true believers from an embrace of all they knew in the

Old Covenant and in the preparatory ministry of John to an understanding and vibrant faith in Christ. They have believed God in all that He revealed but to that point, but they are just now believing in Christ crucified because they didn't know about all that He had accomplished until that moment. There is no person in that boat today. Jesus finished His work well before any person on this planet was born. He ratified the New Covenant before our ancient ancestors dwelt on this planet and He proclaimed, quite clearly, that He is the way to salvation. God has spoken, its finished, and the news is now out. You cannot believe today unless you embrace Christ and all who believe in Christ will receive the Spirit, just as these folks did some 2,000 years ago.

January 4, 2023

Genesis 15:6 & Romans 1:17

Acts 19:1 presents an interesting problem for the reader. In that text, the Bible calls the men that Paul encountered in Ephesus “disciples”. Now, there is a generic use of the word that just means “learner”. In that sense, many people are disciples! However, the Bible uses the term in a more specific, and positive way in many contexts. For instance, Christ calls His followers to “make disciples” in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). Surely, He meant more than just learners! He would claim that no one could be His disciple unless he gives up everything he has to follow Jesus (Luke 14:33). In my reading of this text, I believe that Luke is referring to the men in Ephesus as this kind of disciple. They were true followers in light of the way they embraced John’s ministry and Paul’s further illumination, but how can this be? How could they be called “disciples” without yet knowing about Christ?

They were disciples in that they were committed to what they knew. They believed in the revelation that they had been given. This is what set them apart from the rest of the world. Stated differently, faith in God is what caused God, through Luke, to describe them as disciples and this is what always marks a true, saved disciple. In fact, throughout redemptive history, it is faith that causes God to look upon a man favorably. Some would quibble here. Isn’t the Old Covenant entirely different than the New? How could you equate the two? While it is true that the Old Covenant had demands that were different than the New and it is also correct that the Old Covenant has been called a “covenant of works” it is equally true that no mere mortal could satisfy the demands of the Old Covenant.

The blood of bulls and goats was not enough to take away sin and no one could totally and finally even know the level of sin in their own heart (see Jeremiah 17:9). So, how would a person be saved by God in Old Covenant days? The answer is faith! They believed in what God had revealed to them to that point. Those who truly believed were those whose works in obedience to the law were grounded in faith.

We see this in our verses for today’s devotion. Abraham is a hero in the Scripture, but this is not because he was perfect. We read of a few of Abraham’s sins, and we can rest assured that there were many more that God graciously chose not to record! Nevertheless, the Bible says that God counted him as righteous... how? Did God simply overlook his sin? Hardly! Instead, Abraham believed God in what God revealed to him and this was the means whereby God counted Abraham righteous. Old Testament believers and New Testament saints have always come to God through faith. They have always placed their faith in the power, grace, mercy, and faithfulness of God. They have believed in His Word and His righteous character and, therefore, have entrusted their lives and souls to His purposes believing that He would deliver them... and He always has. Abraham was justified because he believed God and we are justified because we believe God as well.

Folks, if you believe that you will somehow commend yourself to God by your actions, you are hopeless. There is simply no way for you to earn your place before the Lord but there is another way! The righteous shall live by faith. Specifically, faith in the promise of God which is clearly

revealed in the offer of salvation in Christ. God promises that those who would forsake their efforts to earn salvation, confess their sins against Him and place their faith fully in the finished work of Jesus (the One who atoned for your sin, offers you His righteous standing before God and rose from the grave) will be saved. The world looked at Abraham and scoffed at the idea that an old man and woman could have a child, but Abraham believed. The world looks at Christians and scoffs at the notion that a man could die and rise again but we believe and both of us will be counted as righteous for it!

January 5, 2023

Hebrews 1:1-2

Yesterday, we drew a straight line between Abraham and New Covenant believers. That line connects all the people of God as men and women of faith. God's work of salvation always coincides with genuine faith. Stated differently, people have always and only been saved by faith. This is true but it begs a question... faith in what?

It would be valid to state that our faith today is grounded in something more than the faith of a Jew in 1000 BC. We confess Christ and Christ crucified, something that a person in Israel in those days wouldn't know! How could we be justified, and they be justified when our understanding is so different?

The answer is found in the doctrine of progressive revelation. We believe that the Bible is telling one story. It is the story of God's glory in salvation. It records the steps of God's plan of redemption which unfolded in history. He first revealed His plan in Genesis 3:15 (a text we will get to tomorrow) and He gradually unveiled more and more, culminating in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. All along the way, God created and governed a people. These people were His and He was their God (to varying degrees) and the way they related to Him and what they knew about Him, and His work increased over time. This means that Abraham's justification was grounded in the revelation he was given. His faith was shown when he left his home as an act of obedience to God's commands and believed in God's promise for a son. Abraham wouldn't have known about a Jewish carpenter from Nazareth, but he knew what he had been told and he believed that God would deliver on the promises that were made. His life was a life of faith.

So, Abraham knows what he knows but the story doesn't end with him. Instead, the Bible continues walking through God's plan of redemption through Abraham's descendants. Each step of the way reveals more of God's plan and all of it leads to Christ. Our text for today tells us that God chose to speak in a variety of ways using a variety of messengers in those days. In each of those instances, God gave more revelation, which provided more explanation and insight into His plan and His people were responsible to embrace it like Abraham! Their faith was to be placed in what God revealed but the ultimate destination of God's revelation is found in the coming of Jesus.

The passage for today affirms the assertion that Jesus is the pinnacle or culmination of God's revelation. We see this in the way the author of Hebrews changes tenses in this verse. In previous days God "spoke" but in these last days He has "spoken". The term "spoken" denotes a finality. The point that the author is making is that God is no longer revealing more of His plan. When Jesus came, the pinnacle of God's message had arrived and therefore there was no need to speak further. He is the Person that all the prophets and the law were looking to and this is why He is the object of our faith. Whereas Abraham believed God in what he knew, today's believers believe God in the manifestation of His Son. The Son is the One that we trust, and the finished work of Jesus is the ground of our faith. Old Testament believers didn't have this level of revelation, but we do, and we are therefore accountable!

So, how is a person justified? By faith alone! Faith in what? Faith in what God has revealed. God revealed a little to Abraham and a little more to David and a little more to Israel in the time of the prophets, but He has revealed everything He is going to reveal in Christ, and we must believe all that He has said.

January 6, 2023

Genesis 3:15

For the next three devotions, I'd like us to see progressive revelation in action. Remember, progressive revelation is the belief that God reveals His plan of redemption, over time, in the Scripture. The term "progressive" does not mean liberal! It is used in the sense of progress. God makes progress in more fully revealing to man His plan of redeeming mankind from their sins. This progress is seen as we read the Bible from beginning to end.

God's redemptive plan is first seen in our text for today. Theologians have called this the "protoevangelium". That's a big word but it is quite easy to break down! The prefix "proto" is the same prefix we use for "prototype". It denotes the first of something. The term "evangelium" should look somewhat familiar to many of us as we get the words "evangel" and "evangelism" from it. Put together, this is the first declaration by God of His evangel, or Gospel, to us.

While there is a whole lot of mystery and intrigue in the moment, we can see how God's first statement of His plan reflects the heart of what we now know as the Gospel. In this text, God prophesies that one will come from the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. This one was unknown at the time, but we now know Him to be Jesus! The way He would crush the head of the serpent (Satan) wasn't understood either, but we now know He crushed Him by being crushed. Jesus overcame the devil and the sin that Satan helped usher in through His crucifixion (accounting for sin's penalty) and resurrection (overcoming sin's consequence).

The rest of the Bible is the story of how God is going to bring this Person to the scene through mankind. Specifically, it is the story of God's redeeming plan to create a people through Abraham for the purpose of raising up a Savior to overwhelm Satan and redeem folks from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

When we read the Bible in light of this progressive revelation, we are confronted with a coherent story that allows us to take every portion of the Bible and place it in its context. Along the way, we should see Christ as He is more clearly revealed, and we should understand more fully what God is doing through the history of His people and the commands He gives.

Furthermore, we understand that a person who lived somewhere on this timeline would be accountable to believe only what they knew at that point. An Old Covenant believer may not fully grasp God's plan to send His Son as the ultimate sacrifice, or lamb, to take away the sins of the world but they could grasp that God commanded them to offer an earthly lamb as a means of sacrifice and atonement for their sin. Their faith was grounded in what God had given but what God was giving was increasing over time.

January 7, 2023

2 Samuel 7:8-17

Genesis 3:15 really sets the direction for the rest of the Bible. In that little verse, we are given a roadmap as it were for interpreting the rest of the Bible. We know immediately that God is going to deal with Satan and sin, but we don't yet know how. The rest of the Old Testament sheds some light on that, and I want to highlight two specific places where we see more revelation on the subject most clearly.

The verse in Genesis makes two distinct assertions about the battle between Christ and Satan. The first is that Christ would crush the head of Satan. This means that Jesus would rule and prevail over Satan ultimately. The reader is immediately alerted to the fact that God has a plan to send One who would overcome Satan.

This Messiah, a word that isn't used yet, would rule and reign over all forces of darkness and this idea is later developed to show us that the One who is coming from the seed of woman will be a conquering King. While there is some information here, we still need quite a bit of clarity. Where would this Messiah come from? When would He arrive? How would He crush the head of Satan? The rest of the Old Testament and the Gospels shed light on those issues and our text for today is a prime example.

Today's passage answers a few of those questions. First, we read that the Messiah would come from the line of David. Next, we read that His throne will be established forever, meaning He will rule and reign for all eternity. As we read 2 Samuel 7:8-17, we come to some clarity around God's plan. The way that He is going to bring this Messiah into the world is through David. He will arise out of David's line, and He will be a conquering King, as demonstrated by the fact that He will never be overthrown.

Whereas the people in David's day still would have questions, we can clearly connect the dots between this prophecy and Genesis 3:15 in Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of all that God prophesied years ago. This shows God's knowledge, Sovereignty and faithfulness and it makes sense of Jesus' Words in John 5:39 when He states that all of their Scripture (the Old Testament at the time) was ultimately about Him.

The prophecy in 2 Samuel 7 also helps to explain why some of the Gospels begin with a genealogy. These men knew the Old Testament well and they understood that the Messiah would need to come from the line of David as well as fulfill other genealogical prophecies within the pages of Old Testament Scripture. In light of these truths, the effort was taken to ensure that the dots were connected such that a reader could see in Christ the fulfillment of all that God had predicted years prior. The Bible fits together in a masterful way and the way that we see this is through the lens of Jesus Christ, the subject and main character of God's Word.

January 8, 2023

Isaiah 53

Yesterday we dealt with one of the assertions regarding Christ in the protoevangelium but there is another prophecy that God's covenant with David doesn't necessarily expound. You'll see in Genesis 3 that the coming seed of the woman (Jesus) would prevail over Satan but, in the process of the battle, Satan would wound Jesus. This is referred to when we read that the coming seed will have his heel bruised by the evil one.

What does this mean and what does it foreshadow? On this side of redemptive history, we know that Jesus' heel was bruised in the suffering for sin that took place on the Cross. We could say it this way, Jesus prevailed over sin, Satan, and death but the enemy exacted a pound of flesh in the battle! Jesus really did suffer harm on Calvary, and this was prophesied in the very first book of our Old Testament.

These two ideas, a conquering King in the line of David and a suffering substitute on the cross might seem to contradict one another. We know that Jesus' identity and death was extremely problematic for the Jews of his day as they had no category for a Messiah who conquered death in such a way. However, the Bible makes clear that this kind of suffering servant was coming.

Our passage for today is one of my absolute favorites. When you consider the depth and detail in these verses and then think about the fact that they were written centuries prior to Christ's arrival, the providence and wisdom of God is almost overwhelming! Isaiah describes for us the very work and disposition of Christ as a further illumination of God's promise to us in Genesis 3:15. Isaiah is telling us how the seed of the woman's heel will be bruised. He is describing the pain and agony of the coming Messiah and, in so doing, he is giving more revelation as to the identity and characteristics of the coming Redeemer.

Indeed, the Lord would lay upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. Jesus was silent before Herod. Christ was pierced for our transgressions. He did bear our transgressions and He was punished by God in our place. In all these things, the heel of Jesus was bruised but praise God, the head of the serpent was crushed simultaneously.

Isaiah is the greater, clearer picture of the One who is prophesied about in Genesis 3:15. The Gospels then take this picture and add further clarity as they give the historic account of the fulfillment of the prophecies in Genesis and Isaiah. All along the way, we are learning and seeing more of who Christ is and what He has done, and this is a prime example of progressive revelation. God is leading His people along a path that leads to Christ and He has given us the finished work so that we can see Christ in His glory and suffering.