



2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Jan 26th - Feb 1st

There was no sermon on Sunday, January 25th due to weather conditions.



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus

January 26

1 Corinthians 3:9; Ephesians 5:25

PROGRAMMING NOTE: *If you are reading this devotion, it is because we did not have church on Sunday morning due to the winter storm. Because there was no sermon, there are no devotions based on the message which means we have the awesome privilege of revisiting one of my favorite weeks of devotions from the past. Let's take a stroll down memory lane and read, yet again, a series of devotions that were first written in May of 2023!*

Today, as we ponder the reality that Jesus promised to take care of the church and to see her all the way through to the end, we should be encouraged, hopeful, and forever confident that the church will always endure and have a testimony that the world nor Satan can ever destroy. I want us to consider today why this is true from a theological vantage point.

First of all, we should know that we are His personal possession. Paul wrote to Titus, "Christ gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14). We are also objects of His unfailing love and precious care. Paul wrote, "...and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:2, 25). The church is precious for many reasons, but none more so than the fact that Christ died for her. For all who know and love Jesus as Lord, no place in the world should be any sweeter or cherished than the church. Charles Spurgeon once said, "The church is the dearest place on earth." This is true because of the relationship we have with Christ – our bridegroom.

When one considers how precious the church is to Jesus, should she not also be to us. It seems to me that since we are His children, we should belong to the church, serve the church, support her, pray for her, use our gifts, labors, and resources for her. In so doing, we are strengthening the entity that Christ died for and the Father loves deeply. The church is obviously vitally important and has the provision and protection of the One who created her, die for her, and redeemed her. Let us love what He loves.

Paul told the Corinthians that they were God's fellow workers (1 Cor. 3:9). What a privilege to be called to join Christ in serving and building His church. I want to look at this truth from a slightly different perspective. It is relatively easy to think about how amazing it is to work with Christ. The angle I want you to consider today as a great source of hope and encouragement is that He (Jesus) is working *with* us. He is personally involved in the work of sustaining, strengthening, and growing the church. The reason that is a source of encouragement is because it clearly means He has not left us alone to figure this out in our own strength. You might recall that He said in Matthew 28:20, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Not only that, but Paul told the Colossians that Christ is literally in them (Col. 1:27). The fact that He indwells true believers is the basis for our hope.

So, when Christ died for the church, he bought her with His blood and took full ownership of her. The church is His – blood bought and sanctified. There is no way under heaven or earth that He will ever let anything happen that would threaten her existence. The church is His bride, and He is more than capable of taking care of her, defending her, and making certain her safe passage through this crazy world in which she now resides as an outpost of the Kingdom of God on foreign soil and in enemy territory. She is well defended, and we need not fear.

January 27

Matthew 16:18

I decided to go in the direction of making Paul an example of how God takes care of the church as a whole in perilous times. As Pastor Aaron reminded us in last week's sermon, God is at work in "little things" to ensure us that He is providentially providing for and protecting us according to His perfect and sovereign plan. For Paul, the plot to murder him was discovered by his nephew and ultimately reported to Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander. In response to the information furnished to him by the young man, he calls together two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen. On top of that, he made sure that Paul had a nice horse to ride on as well. Fascinating is the fact that the Roman commander took such measures to make sure Paul would be safely brought to Felix (Acts 23:23-24). Please do not overlook what God did for His own in this situation. There were reportedly 40 men who were plotting to kill Paul, and God prompted a Roman to defend Paul with 470 trained military men. I must admit it makes me laugh and wonder why we worry about much of anything.

I want to make a couple more observations before we get to our text to ponder today. Notice that in Claudius' letter, he stated that he had already rescued Paul from the Jews who wanted to do him harm (v. 27). He had already determined Paul was not deserving of death or imprisonment (v. 29) and had in this final fiasco, recused him again to be delivered safely to Felix. It would be easy for us to read this portion of Scripture and simply blow right through it without much thought for what Paul must have been experiencing. Dear ones, please understand that His circumstances seemed dire at times. No doubt moments existed when Paul must have wondered how in the world, he would get out of this one. Each and every time, God made a way.

The takeaway for us must be that He will often make ways for us when there seems to be no way. God specializes in taking care of His own. Pastor Aaron mentioned Moses as an example of how God took a young baby boy who was supposed to be murdered with the rest of the male Hebrew babies and worked it out so Moses would actually be raised in the Pharaoh's own home. That is crazy! But you see, within the experiences of being raised under the Pharaoh's roof was the opportunity for education and knowledge of Egypt that he never would have received as a poor Hebrew slave. God is amazing. All of His training became useful as the one called by God to deliver the Hebrews from Egypt. God's sovereignty honestly astounds me and gives me great peace.

As I mentioned yesterday, we belong to Him and in Matthew 16:18, He has promised to "build His church." Folks, there is no measure to which He will not go to take care of us. In our current culture, the tide is rising against the church. The political tenor is surely sour and hostile towards the church. Laws are being passed that will slowly but surely undermine what we are called to do as His people. Increasingly we are being blamed for problems in America and have been marginalized right out of the sphere of discussions. The media does not care what we have to say, which means we no longer get a seat at the table. All of that has transpired and leaves us in an ever-increasingly more difficult situation. But...

The same God who saw fit to use Roman soldiers, a young nephew of Paul's, and a governor to look favorably upon Paul, is looking out for us too. These can be some of the most exciting times we have ever lived if we learn to see God in our day to day. Expect Him to make the lines fall in good places for us. Expect God to show up. Expect Him to give you grace for your journey and never forget that Jesus promised to build His church. We have no need to worry!

January 28

Matthew 16:18 (Pt. 2)

Today we will focus more on the actual verse chosen. Again, Jesus said, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." A look into church history will easily reveal that the church has endured periods of intense persecution. Many have died for that sake of Christ. The Bible tells us this is true. In John 15:18-20 we are told that the world will hate us because it hated Jesus first. Jesus told them that as He had been persecuted so would they...and we. Threats from outside of the church have been accompanied by threats from within as well. Jude wrote in verse 4, "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed..." The wonder of all of this is that despite everything that is thrown at the church to destroy her, she will never be destroyed or defeated.

This is true because the Lord assured us that He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Though our outward circumstances may feel as hopeless as Paul's must have felt at times, we belong to a cause that cannot fail. That is wonderful news. Jesus is the architect, the builder, the owner, and the Lord of the church.

The church will never be shaken or extinguished because Christ is the foundation of the church. In our passage for today Jesus said, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." Now the Roman Catholics have completely botched this verse by proclaiming that Peter is the rock and therefore the Pope who is allegedly in the lineage of Peter assumes that role. Let me assure you that Peter is not the foundation of the church and surely the Popes are not either. The *rock* that Jesus referred to was the profession made by Peter in Matthew 16:16. There Peter said in response to Christ's question, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." When Jesus said, "Upon *this* rock I will build my church," He was referring to Peter's profession of faith in Christ and His deity. Jesus used the Greek term *petra* not *petros* in this verse. *Petra* is an immovable, unshakeable rock whereas *petros* is movable and detached stone.

Old Testament passages refer to Jesus Christ as the rock in whom we as believers find strength and shelter. In 1 Samuel 2:2, Psalm 18:2, and 18:31 just to name a few, God is the rock. Likewise, Paul identified Jesus as the rock in 1 Corinthians 10:4. So the foundational testimony that Peter made that Jesus is the Messiah is the declaration that becomes the rock on which the church will be established. This is accomplished as the Word of God is preached and taught and people are brought to profession of faith in Jesus – the Rock.

So, when we think of Matthew 16:18, it is important to remember that we need not worry about the safe passage of the church through these tumultuous and dangerous waters because Jesus Himself is our firm foundation which cannot be moved. He is also personally involved (I will), He promises that He WILL get it done, that He will BUILD it, that it belongs to Him, that it will be the church made up of the called-out ones, and that He will be successful because even the gates of hell will not prevail against it. That is quite the building block of strong and unshakeable faith for us.

Our job dear ones is to be faithful in submitting to Jesus Christ as our Head, our Master, our Lord, and our King. We must be sure to bow to His authority and His Word as the standard of how we live and conduct ourselves as well as the business (ministry) of His church. He sets the agenda. He makes the mandates, and His glory is our goal. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood here to proclaim the excellencies of our Savior. We cannot lose because He will not lose!

January 29

1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 3:10

When we consider all that Christ did to redeem His bride, we need to consider why He invested so much into her. In other words, why is the church here on planet earth? Paul was correcting some errors in the Corinthian church and ended the 26th verse of chapter 14 with these words, "Let everything be done for edification." The word edification means to build up. I have always considered Ephesians 3:10 a special verse related to the mission of the church. It guides much of what we do here at Smyrna. It says, in reference to preaching and teaching associated with the church, "...so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church." Church family, God's desire is that we live together in community, reflecting what it looks like to be the people of God to a lost world that needs a picture of His Kingdom.

Our responsibilities as His children include proclaiming the gospel throughout the world so that sinners from every tribe, tongue, and language will have a chance to be rescued too. We also exist to glorify God (Eph. 1:5-6; 1 Cor. 10:31). We do that by actively and intentionally building up one another so that we all mature as followers of Christ (Eph. 4:12-16) by faithfully teaching the Word, celebrating the ordinances, and fellowshiping together (Acts 2:42-47). As we delve a little deeper, I don't want you to forget what I am trying to focus on today. Considering all that Jesus did to show His amazing grace and love for His bride, there must be important reasons why He did.

Beloved, it is our duty to make sure we are and remain God-centered so that we exalt Him and show His glory to the world. We do that best by serving one another (1 Peter 4:11) and by proclaiming His excellencies as the One who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). He saved us that we might enjoy Him and reflect His worth in value in worship and praise. The church is to be the place on earth where Christ is openly, truly, and genuinely lifted high.

As I mentioned above, another reason Jesus redeemed us is to help each other grow. The Bible calls it edification. We do that best with the application of the Word into one another's lives. We have often stated that the dozens of what is known as the "one another" verses can, for the most part, only be lived out in the community of the church. Jesus shed His blood, gave His life, and ransomed His bride so that we would have each other to do life with. Loving one another is the second great commandment. We do that as the church.

Finally, Jesus did all of this so we could be the church and do our part in reaching the lost. When we as a church genuinely fall in love with God, we will, because of His nature in us, have a heart for others both locally and around the world. He does so we will! We are told in Matthew 28:18-20 to go be the church in the world. That includes making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus has taught us through the Word. We have a clear mission, brothers and sisters. It is in part why He rescued us. When we reach people, we are to be adamant about bringing them into the church through baptism and discipling them through solid biblical teaching.

Friends, as I close today, I am reminded that so long ago Jesus said to the hypocritical religious leaders of His day, "...the Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people producing its fruit" (Matt. 21:43). Please never let it be said of us that God took away our ministry and gave it to a church that was more faithful to Him and more fruitful. Let us be the church that remains faithful and true to God and blessed by His favor because we simply do what He saved us to do.

January 30

Matthew 23:37

As we ended yesterday's point to ponder, I admonished us to never live in such a way that God would take our ministry away and give it to another congregation who obeyed Him more fully and bore more fruit than we do. The verse that I referenced was one in which Jesus was telling the Jews that God was going to give His blessing to the Christian church to carry out His plan of reaching the world for His glory. It matters that you know that was not a knee-jerk reaction on God's part. He had been patient with Israel and had put up with centuries of rebellion and idolatry.

Jesus captured their history well in Matthew 23:37 where it is written, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!" That is a terribly egregious indictment. I mention this here because in our text from Sunday's message, we are once again witnessing the corrupt ways of the Jewish leadership. Jesus went on to say in the verse I quoted above, "Therefore your house shall be left unto you desolate." That is a terrible prophecy and judgment laid on them by Christ Himself.

Their history was one of letting evil men like Ananias and Caiaphas serve as high priest while putting to death men like Jesus Christ and Stephen. They are simply trying to do the same thing to Paul that they had always done to the godly men God sent to lead and guide them. We have all heard the adage, "Don't shoot the messenger." Well, Israel was famous for doing just that. They didn't like Jesus, so they killed Him. They didn't like Stephen, so they killed Him. They didn't like Paul, so they were set on killing him. They did the same thing to the apostles and many of the prophets of the Old Testament. If they didn't kill them, they would exile, imprison, drop in wells, etc. I think we all get the point that what was happening to Paul was par for the course in the history of Israel's abuse of God's men.

Much like the circumstances that surrounded Christ's trial, Paul had an official recognizing his innocence just as Pilate recognized Christ's. The Roman commander wrote in his letter to Felix, "I have nothing to lay to his charge." This simply did not matter to the Jewish leaders. They hated the messengers of God because the truth was not welcomed nor honored. What about us? Do we want to hear the truth, to live by it? Do we welcome biblical preaching that comforts and convicts?

When I consider the lack of spiritual health in many churches on the American landscape today, I can't help but believe that God's opinion of them is poor and His Spirit may no longer even be present among those people. Friends, wouldn't it be awful if Jesus said of us that we were known for silencing His messengers, despising His truth, rejecting His authority, or fighting against the advancement of His Kingdom? I am telling you, there are congregations all around that do just that. I have known pastors who are opposed at every turn when they try to lead their congregation to more biblical faithfulness. When the powers that be get offended in certain churches, they throw a fit, tear the preacher down, and do all they can to undermine any efforts at change. That dear friends is no different than the stubborn, hard hearted rebellion against God demonstrated in our text as well as the history of Jewish rejection of God's prophets. May we always remain pliable in the hands of God, sensitive to His Word, and fully yielded in obedience to all that the Father requires of us.

January 31

1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 12:3-4

We all know what it feels like to fall into a pit of despair and begin to think that no one on earth has ever felt the pain, loneliness, frustration, or trial that we are facing. Times exist when you think that the challenge is too much, and the waves will certainly overtake you. Have you discovered that remembering another person's journey can help you on yours? For me, when I look at some of you who have faced tragedy, heartache, and loss with grace and strength that I know is from God, I am encouraged and strengthened by your strength. The line from the old hymn, "What He's done for others, He'll do for you" rings loud and true in my heart because I have seen it lived out in another.

Paul's journey through the last couple of chapters of the book of Acts that we have dealt with is eerily similar to that of Jesus Christ. Paul, like Jesus, is wrongly accused, beaten, scourged, mocked, torn down with lies, and brought before kangaroo courts that have no business having him on trial. The courts are thrown together in unjust manners while their very own laws are disregarded because of their hatred for Paul. They are literally working in darkness to hide the reality of the mockery of what the crimes they are committing. Paul is even struck in the face like Christ was for no valid reason. I write all of this simply to make the point that what Paul was going through – Christ already had!

The author of Hebrews wrote, "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3). Dear ones, when we think we cannot handle anymore, remember Jesus and even others who have gone before you. It may feel like nobody else has ever been through what you are going through but that just is not true. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in an attempt to encourage them, "No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Friends, dozens of reasons exist for why we need the church body. We have stated many times that the church is a gift to us for teaching, training, guiding, correcting, encouraging, and for accountability among other blessings. To say life is hard is an understatement and to have others who walk with us through the valleys or who have walked before us through similar valleys is a priceless gift of God. I cannot help but wonder in Paul's dark moments, did he stop and think about all that Jesus went through for him. I believe that he did.

We are admonished to consider Christ when we are growing weary. We are reminded that He paid a higher price and endured even more than any of us have had to at the hands of ungodly, hateful men. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 4:16, "...he did not lose heart, even though his outer man is wasting away and wearing out..." This confidence and hope was based on knowledge of the life Jesus had already lived. I am simply saying that when Paul considered the death AND resurrection of Christ, it put his own journey into proper perspective. The "therefore" in v. 16 is based on the truth of Christ's victory over death and the grave and when it is applied to his life, he is encouraged and finds the strength for another step on his own path. Consider Christ dear ones. Consider Paul and many like him. Consider the people in your life right now who demonstrate to us that God's grace really is sufficient for anything and everything that we are called to endure. God bless you with grace for the race.

February 1

Isaiah 43:7; Romans 8:28

Today's verse is a familiar one. It is written, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Folks, that is one of those verses that we love to read or quote because somehow it gives us comfort. The problem is that what is "good" in the eyes of God may be a tough row to hoe for those of us who are receiving that "good." I have written before about defining what is good as I think that is necessary. Good is directly related to our holiness and His glory not our comfort, ease, or even momentary happiness. Today I want to focus not on what is "good," but on "according to His purpose."

We've already touched on the fact that because God had a plan for Paul to witness to people in Rome, we knew He would make a way to get him there. There was no way Paul was going to die prior to completing what God called him to do in Rome. We have also considered that way in which God sovereignly orchestrates the miraculous and the mundane to accomplish his purposes. Whether it was a young man overhearing the plot to kill Paul, a timely earthquake to set him free from jail, or a group of people with a basket to lower him from a window to escape, God always gets his people where He wants them to be... "according to His purpose."

Today as we finish this week of points to ponder, think with me for a while about how God was working all things for good in Paul's life for His eternal purposes. There was the Philippian jailer and his family. We learned in Acts 16 of Lydia and the ladies on the riverbank. In both of these instances, God brought people to salvation through Paul. We know how he impacted the people in Ephesus and the surrounding towns, cities, and islands for the glory of God and the salvation of many. A little later in the book of Acts we will read of Paul on a ship that was wrecked at sea. We can assume that many came to believe because of those difficult couple of weeks on rough seas. We learned that father of Publius was healed on the island of Malta. Eventually in Rome, the Bible says as a result of Paul's preaching and teaching, "Some were being persuaded by the things spoken" (Acts 28:24a).

I mention all of these events because I want you to think about the phrase, "according to His purpose." Folks, we are not the main characters in the story, and we are not the center of the universe. God is the lead, and we are privileged to have a part in His story of Kingdom advancement and exalting the Lord Jesus Christ. Our lives are meant to be lived out for His glory. Whether we are on earth or in heaven, we are still to be focused on the glory of the Father and exaltation of Christ. Isaiah 43:7 says, "Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory." We are literally created for His glory so whether we live on earth or in heaven the purpose is still the same.

So, all of the "good" that He allows or ordains in our lives is to aid us in accomplishing the purpose for our lives which is to glorify Him. Now, we do that best in our Pauline circumstances when our faith remains strong in Him in hard places. We glorify Him beautifully when we worship Him even in our losses. King David worshipped God even after his son had died. We glorify God when we do all things as unto Him. Dear ones, life is hard sometimes. Those are the moments best suited for glorifying Him by letting your light shine. The lives of faithful saints lived in front of us are intended to strengthen us for our life's journey. They made it and you can too if you hold on to Jesus and never let go regardless of how hard the wind blows against you.