



2022 Weekly Devotions

Week of: July 18th - 24th

Sermon: July 17th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
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July 18

Romans 1:18-31

Our text from yesterday contained several familiar themes within the book of Acts. As we follow Paul and Barnabas, we read of the fruit of their ministry and the inevitable resistance that also accompanied their faithful preaching of the Gospel of Christ. The result of their ministry was two-fold as some believed but others rejected the truth of Christ, refusing to believe in Jesus.

Verses 3 and 4 are particularly interesting to me as they state that the Lord “bore witness” to Paul and Barnabas’ ministry by providing many signs and wonders which were done through the men for the purpose of establishing the validity of their message. These signs and wonders were unique, supernatural feats that could only be pulled off by the God of the universe. As such they were marvelous pieces of evidence which substantiated the words of the disciples of Christ.

What interests me however is the follow up to Luke’s description in verse 4 as Luke says the people of the city were “divided”. The division is between belief and unbelief and the point is that even despite the obvious, supernatural evidence (and the empty tomb!), many in the crowd refused to submit to Christ. This is a haunting illustration of the state of lost men’s hearts, and it is a reminder that unbelief is a terrible and universal condition of lost men and women. The Bible is illustrating for us that the lost man does not need a well-reasoned argument or more evidence of God’s power, the lost man needs a supernatural transformation whereby His eyes are opened, and His heart changed.

Jesus spoke to this reality in both John 12 and Luke 16. In both texts, we read Christ’s statement that unbelieving men and women will not repent due to miraculous signs and wonders. There is this idea that mankind is morally neutral and, therefore, able to be swayed by the most convincing arguments. This is a false belief. After all, what better piece of evidence for a man’s ability to offer eternal life than his own empty grave? Still, the vast majority of those who saw it refused to believe in Christ! The simple truth is that man is lost and that lostness is the product of sin which has disastrous and deleterious impacts on our lives.

Unbelief is a horrific thing, but it deserves our attention if we are going to stand against it and understand its effects in the hearts and minds of those we minister unto. That is our hope in the coming days. In fact, I think we are going to undertake in a Points to Ponder first as we consider one passage, and its subject matter, for an entire week. This text is about lostness and the universal realities at play in the world as it is comprised largely of lost folks. In Romans 1, we see the cause and effect of unbelief and we are reminded of man’s great need for the Gospel. As we read today, I want you to simply note how universally Paul speaks. He is not talking about a subset of the population, instead the Apostle has his mind set on all those who inhabit the world who are devoid of saving faith in Jesus Christ. Their condition has universal implications and its results are truly disastrous.

July 19

Romans 1:18

Yesterday we began to think about the subject of unbelief. I will admit that this is not the most encouraging topic to cover in devotions! Nevertheless, the truths regarding lost man's natural condition and the results of their state deserve our attention if we are going to be faithful to pray for their supernatural conversion and deal with their sinful state.

Today we begin to dive into the topic in more detail by looking at the way in which lost men interact with the truth of God's revelation. Paul says that God's wrath is unleashed against the ungodly and unrighteous because they "suppress" the truth. The term "suppress" literally means to forcefully hold down. It paints the picture of a man or woman utilizing every fiber of their being for the purpose of keeping at bay that which continues to try to escape their grasp. The picture is of someone who is devoted to refusing to allow the truth to see the light of day.

This is an interesting phrase and it is quite illuminating as well. In this verse, we are told by Paul that men and women naturally know that the truth exists but they do not want to allow it to speak! Instead of investigating and interacting with the truth, the unrighteous simply do all they can to silence it! There are many implications here but perhaps the most important is that Paul would vehemently deny the popular idea that men and women are looking for truth and, therefore, can be easily persuaded if they are presented with enough evidence. Many in our day claim that they are open to anything that can demonstrate its veracity, but this is simply a lie.

Lost folks are not eagerly looking for truth, they are passionately suppressing any hint of it whatsoever! This is demonstrated in many places in our society in which the logical, and authoritative teachings of Scripture are not even considered. Why is it that the public sphere is so against biblical teaching on gender, the family, morality and ethics? These ideas are perfectly practical and helpful but they are truth that emanates from One that mankind does not want to acknowledge. Therefore, the truth about God must be suppressed regardless of the potential consequence or the lunacy of its replacement.

The problem is not that men have been given little evidence, nor is it that God has somehow concealed His existence and His attributes from mankind. The issue is that mankind does not want God to exist and, therefore, is intent on suppressing His being and revelation so that He can be replaced with their own autonomy as the authority. This does not necessarily preclude "religious" people but it does prevent men from submitting to the real God. As we will see, the effect is that man worships himself and/or other beings who give an appearance of deity but lack the authority and transcendence which are so threatening to men who want to be their own guides.

July 20

Romans 1:19

Now, some may object to what I stated yesterday by claiming that many men and women have lived their entire lives without even hearing or reading the Word of God. How could I claim that all lost folks suppress the truth when many of them haven't even heard the truth of the Gospel of Christ? The answer is found in verse 19.

This passage refers to a concept known as "general revelation". As believers in the Bible, we affirm that there are two types of revelation (the term revelation is taken from the root term "reveal" and it means the means by which God reveals Himself to the world). There is special revelation. This is revelation that comes through the medium of Scripture. In special revelation we learn of God's character, attributes, Divine expectations and interactions with our world. Special revelation is where we learn of God's plan of redemption and how we can respond to His love and mercy in order to gain salvation. This type of revelation is limited to those who either read or hear the Word of God as the Bible is God's means of special revelation.

Obviously, there are many people who have lived and never heard or read the Bible. Does this mean that they are somehow exempt from being accountable to God? After all, the Bible reveals God's work and expectations. The answer is a resounding "no" and the reason is because there is another type of revelation known as general revelation. General revelation is just that, it is available to all people. Paul says that what can be known about God is "plain to them". He means that God's existence is manifest by Him in a manner in which all can understand... but how?

The answer is found, chiefly, in nature. As we clearly perceive the world we live in, it becomes quite apparent that an intelligent being is Creator. There is simply no way to see the complexity of life, the beauty of the world and the diversity of creation without positing some sort of Creator. While we may not know much about this Creator, it is obvious through nature that He exists! His very existence should cause man to run to Him but this is not what happens. Instead, mankind clearly perceives that God exists but refuses to seek Him in any meaningful way. God has demonstrated His existence but man has refused to find Him. Instead, we have suppressed the truth about Him by either denying the existence of the supernatural in totality or by devising our own myths of His identity (known as false religions). Both of these responses are the product of mankind's mind and, therefore, are acts of rebellion against God as they seek to explain the world He made without His input.

This means that every lost person you encounter is living in a world that screams of God's existence all the while refusing to respond to the evidence by seeking Him. Instead of seeing Creation and finding out about the Creator in His Word, mankind sees the world and argues against Him or replaces Him with one god, or many gods, who couldn't possibly have done what the One True God has accomplished in creation.

July 21

Romans 1:21-22

The effect of man's rebellion against God is the subject of the next few devotions. As we consider these truths, it becomes more and more clear how men could be confronted with the wisdom of the Word of God and the evidence of the supernatural power of God and still refuse to submit to Him as their Lord and Savior. What Paul and Barnabas encounter in Acts 14 is not the result of a poorly executed ministry, it is the logical outworking of man's lostness as illustrated in our text for the day.

Notice here that Paul utilizes two terms that are meant to describe lost men. First, they became futile in their thinking and second, their foolish hearts were darkened. I want you to notice first that these are passive verbs. In both cases, the Apostle is pointing out that this was the effect or consequence of their actions! They didn't "choose" darkness or futility, the effect of their choosing to disregard revelation was futility and darkness. Sin always has this effect. It disorients and blinds mankind.

The term "futile" means to be consumed with worthless things or to lack wisdom. It speaks of someone whose ideas have no correspondence with truth whatsoever. In context, the effect of refusing to heed the truth about God is futility. We simply cannot replace the truth of God with a lie and expect a life that is meaningful and wise. There is no such thing as worldly wisdom because there is only one foundation of truth upon which to live and operate. When that standard is violated, there is nothing left to stand upon. This explains why our society is so absolutely topsy turvy at the moment. We have attempted to disregard God's wisdom and replace it with our own and the result is futility! We cannot agree on basic things and we have no ability to govern ourselves with our own sense.

Second, our hearts are darkened. Just as darkness prevents us from clearly perceiving what is around us and reacting accordingly, so our hearts are no longer able to understand the world and navigate its challenges in light of our knowledge. When people are "darkened" they are no longer able to understand or comprehend what surrounds. This is why there are so many ideas in our world that gain traction while being totally ridiculous to the believer! The truth is that many in influential positions simply cannot perceive the truth which renders them incapable of comprehending the danger and nonsensical nature of their propositions.

What's the result of this kind of futile, dark thinking? The answer is that people are so misguided as to think of themselves as wise when they are really fools. When the world is full of futility and darkness, the beliefs that populate the landscape are corporately affirmed leading the population to think they have figured something out when in reality they are simply barreling down the pathway to destruction while celebrating everyone's nonsense as "wisdom" and "progress".

The larger truth is that we cannot afford to suppress the truth! The effect of such suppression is summed up nicely by the famous 20th Century theologian G.K. Chesterton who said "when men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing. Alas, it is much worse, they then become capable of believing in anything!"

July 22

Romans 1:26-27

Today's passage begins a portion of Romans 1 that details God's judgment of lost men. When we think of judgment, we typically consider the cataclysmic. God's judgment is often associated with natural disasters or miraculous acts of devastation (think earthquakes, hurricanes, wars, sickness, etc.). to be clear, these could all be evidence of God's wrath but this is not the way God's wrath manifests itself on a daily basis. Instead, the Apostle Paul points to a different kind of judgment in our passage for the day.

Our text begins with this statement, "for this reason, God gave them up...". These are some of the most foreboding words in all the Bible as Paul tells us that the result of man's suppression of the truth is simply the removal of His hand. His greatest act of judgment is not restraint but freedom to pursue those which harms and kills us! When God really judges a people, He simply allows them to pursue what they want in their natural, sinful hearts.

Paul tells us what this looks like with remarkable relevance and precision. This text could have been written about American society and culture yesterday! The first portion of the passage tells us that God's wrath is manifest in allowing men to pursue sinful pursuits sexually. Instead of following God's created order of romantic relationship and intercourse with the opposite sex, foolish and darkened men rebel against God's created order and pursue those of the same sex.

Some may wonder why Paul starts here. Why is it that sexual relations are such a huge part of the manifestation of God's judgment? One answer is found in the nature of the rebellion. The simple truth is that God's design is obvious in heterosexual relationships. We are clearly designed to be romantically involved with the opposite sex! Second, we were given the mandate by God to be fruitful and multiply. As we move farther and farther away from His wisdom, the appeal of children and expanding God's dominion becomes less appealing which gives rise to His judgment in allowing society to crumble through the forsaking of healthy, reproductive relationships.

Notice the effect of this kind of sin in verse 27. Paul says here that these people receive "in themselves the due penalty for their error". What does this mean? I think it has at least two meanings. First, I do believe there is a physical penalty here. Without getting too detailed, many scientific studies demonstrate the negative effect of homosexual relationships with the body. Those who partake in such actions will, generally speaking, suffer physically. Second, I believe there is a societal ramification as well. One commentator summarizes it well saying "God allows this whole process of widespread, unchecked sexual immorality to pervade a culture as a means of showing how empty and barren life is without Him." There is no joy in reproduction, there is no joy in sexual relationships and there is no joy in a healthy society... all of these are disastrous penalties.

July 23

Romans 1:28-31

My grandfather had a favorite phrase to recite to me during summer breaks when I was a student at home. As he heard about my plans, or lack thereof, for my days he would remind me that “idle hands are the devil’s workshop”. The idea there is fairly simple, when we are not actively pursuing something of worth, we are susceptible to all kinds of advances from our adversary.

King David was tempted to commit adultery in part because he was not where he should have been. Instead of commanding the troops in battle, he was wasting time at his home when he observed the bathing Bathsheba. He opened the door to temptation and sin precisely because he was not pursuing his duty as King to the best of his ability.

In the same way, when mankind is not actively pursuing and embracing truth, he is necessarily going to be immersed in error and sin! This is Paul’s second point as he discusses the effect of sin on the world. Notice how he grounds this portion of Scripture, man’s sin occurs “Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God.” Essentially, Paul is claiming that it was the vacuum that was created by virtue of man’s turning from God in which all of these sins occurred.

If man was faithful to embrace and follow the Word of God, the sins that Paul mentions would not be prevalent but because we do not see fit to acknowledge Him, the weed grows where the vegetable should be planted. This means that the impact of refusing the Word of God is multifaceted. It results in our darkness and futility but it also results in the replacement of truth with error which has drastic, and far reaching, consequences for the world at large.

You will note that Paul gives a list of sinful actions and attitudes which pervade in lost men’s lives and society. This not necessarily an exhaustive list but it is representative! You will also notice that these things are the antithesis of what the Word of God commands and encourages. We are not to be haters of God but lovers of God. We are not to murder but to protect life. We are not to gossip but to tell the truth and only the truth. In these things, Paul is illustrating the truth that those who suppress truth must turn to error and turning to error will result in our turning from the precepts of God to the attitudes and tactics of the devil.

In these things we see that God simply removes His hand from those who are lost, allowing them to tread the same path that ultimately led to Satan’s dismissal from heaven and condemnation. You cannot replace biblical teaching with unbiblical error and hope to come out unscathed. Our ideas inevitably impact our actions and our actions are guided by our convictions and thoughts.

These attitudes and actions are quite plentiful in our society and their manifestation should call our attention to God’s judgment. When a culture is defined by envy, strife, deceit and the like, you can rest assured that they are suffering from God’s wrath whether they realize it or not.

July 24

Romans 1:32

The final portion of our passage details one last evidence or manifestation of God's judgment. In this verse we learn that man's sin is not only pervasive, it is encouraged! Whereas we have already seen that God's judgment is demonstrated in His removing His hand from us, now we see that His judgment is further executed on others through allowing other futile, darkened men to encourage and embolden us in our rebellion.

The result is a society that rejects God and cheers one another on as they corporately head toward condemnation and hell. I'm not sure that there is a more appropriate description of our society than verse 32. We are a society full of men and women who are not only affirmed in our own sin but hell bent (pun intended) on encouraging and emboldening others to go down the same path with as much gusto as possible.

In America, we are guilty of approving that which is detestable and detesting that which is approved by God. We have entire months now that celebrate and abhorrent and wicked lifestyle and most of our corporations, governing officials and clubs encourage the masses to give hearty approval as well. Make no mistake folks, this is not evidence of progress, it is proof of God's judgment.

We must be careful here in saying that we believe in mercy and grace for the sinner. This is not meant to be needless combative nor is it meant to embolden us to be jerks to others! However, we must understand that the most loving, grace-filled response we can have in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation is grounded in truth. What people need is not the same as what they want. Society does not need someone else cheering a person towards judgment, society needs men and women who are filled with faith and dedicated to proclaiming the revelation of God.

Remember, this revelation has been rejected by the masses already. Therefore, it won't be popular! Nevertheless, the Word of God is the means whereby we hear the Gospel of God and the Gospel of God is the means whereby men and women are saved by God (see Romans 1:16) and this means that they need to hear it! Will this cause us to stand out? Absolutely! Verse 32 is a reality in our world. Will they hate us? Some will but others will hear the good news and repent. We will be the stench of death to those who reject us but the aroma of life to those who God calls to Himself!

May we have the courage to stand against the masses. May we understand that there is not wisdom in numbers when those who make up the crowd are foolish and futile in their thinking because of their darkened hearts. God's Word does not change and His authority is unmatched. Stand on His truth and allow Him to demonstrate His wisdom and power.