



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: July 19th - July 25th

Sermon: July 18th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
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July 19

Genesis 22:18

Peter's sermon was truly a marvelous proclamation! Inspired by the Spirit, the Apostle arose to preach the Gospel message to a group of intrigued, if unruly, Jews in the middle of Jerusalem. As we study the sermon, one thing becomes evident immediately, Peter's sermon was rooted in the Old Testament. As we consider this truth, we need to ask the question, why? Why is it that Peter is so intent on proclaiming the truth of the Old Testament in the era of the New Covenant?

The reality is that there are several reasons for this approach. First, God's Word is inspired and inerrant and, therefore, it must be the foundation of what we think and say. Second, the context reminds us that Peter is speaking primarily to the Jews. These men and women claimed to love the One True God and they were well-versed in the Old Testament Scriptures. As Peter stands to speak, he takes advantage of their claimed allegiance to God and their familiarity and supposed submission to the revelation of God by unveiling the clear connection between Old Testament teaching and the person and work of Christ.

For our purposes today, I want to examine one text that Peter references in Acts 3. Towards the end of his address, the Apostle reminds the people that it was through Jesus (by way of Abraham) that all the nations would be blessed.

There are two points of interest for us as they relate to Peter's thoughts. First, we should note the reality that God's plan of redemption was in place from the very beginning of redemptive history. While this is most certainly an obvious point, it bears repeating, our Great God was not left grasping at straws upon Adam's fall, instead He had a plan and gave certain revelation that His plan encompassed the redemption of the nations. God is Sovereign, Omniscient and Omnipotent such that all things that take place occur underneath His Sovereign will and according to His Sovereign plan. While it might have seemed that God lost the battle in Jesus' crucifixion, the power of the resurrection and the beauty of what Jesus accomplished through His substitutionary death serve as the pinnacle of the plan to bless all nations that He uttered to Abraham millennium before.

Second, notice the worldwide scope of this plan. As we move through the book of Acts, we will notice one prominent subject of tension. Over and over again, the church grapples with the question of whether or not the Gentiles (literally anyone who is not a Jew) could be saved. They simply are not comfortable with the idea that all nationalities and ethnicities have saving interest in the Jewish Messiah. While this is undoubtedly a real issue, it is not a problem precipitated by the Bible! On the contrary, God was explicit from the beginning that His plan was for all men to be saved. The book of Acts serves as the launching point for this redemptive power to be unleashed globally for the rest of time until the Lord returns.

July 20

James 4:4

If we had to describe Peter's sermon, one adjective we would almost certainly employ is "confrontational". Peter truly pulls no punches as he proclaims the guilt of the Jews. These were the men and women who precipitated Christ's death and, in light of their grave rebellion and rejection of God, they needed to repent! Obviously, anyone reading the Bible could understand why Peter would say such a thing. After all, these men literally played a part in killing the Christ! But what about men today?

Are people in the 21st Century still in need of repentance? None of us were present at Jesus' death. We weren't the one who put on the mock trial or spat and mocked the Savior as He hung for the sins of the world. Are we still enemies of His? Many in our world would say "No!" They would claim that people are basically good and that entering into a relationship with God doesn't require repentance (an admission of and turning from sin), instead we simply need to hear about God's love and accept His acceptance of us. While this might sound nice, it flies in the face of very clear Scriptures that scream a message to the contrary.

One such example is found in James 4:4. In this text, we read that those who are "friends with the world" are "enemies of God". What makes one a friend of the world? The answer is simple, those who imitate and accept the worldly practices which are characterized by sin and rebellion are friends with the world. The truth is that we are all naturally friends of the world. We are born into sin, and because of our wicked and natural hearts, we all run head long into the depravity that the world has to offer. There is no one born righteous and, according to James, this means that ALL of us are naturally enemies of God.

This truth is explicit in the Bible, but it is not often embraced nor is it accepted in culture at large. In fact, you might hear people say "we are all God's children" or something to the same effect often in our world today. While this might sound nice, those who are God's children have been adopted into His family. They are no longer enemies of His but children in His Kingdom. No, we are all God's CREATION, but we are not all His children.

The way to cross from a created, enemy of God to a beloved, child of God's is repentance. Those who see their wickedness, understand their deserved penalty, look to Christ for the satisfaction of their consequence and repent of their sin that caused His death are the ones who have hope of friendship with the Lord. Dear friends, repentance is a necessary step towards salvation because reconciliation only truly happens when the offending party admits his or her fault!

July 21

Colossians 1:21

Are men naturally enemies of God? This might seem extreme at first blush. After all, there are many people who are not believers who claim to love and know God! Are they all wrong? The short answer is “yes” and the reasons for that simplistic answer are at least partially fleshed out in our text for the day.

Today’s passage records Paul’s words to the Colossians. Specifically, the Apostle is dealing with the reconciliation that takes place through the Gospel of Christ bringing men from alienation from God to friends and sons in His heavenly family. The text is helpful for us in our study of the need for repentance as it points out two attributes, or characteristics, of lost men that necessarily lead us to the conclusion that all men absolutely must repent of their sins in order to be saved.

First, notice that Paul says the Colossians were once “hostile in mind”. The term “hostile” means exactly what you might think as it refers to one who is not only indifferent or cold to the presence of God but is actively opposed and vigilantly angry with God’s authority and direction for our lives. While may seem a bit extreme, a simple perusal of our culture will demonstrate that lost men do in fact despise God, specifically as it relates to His authority and design for our conduct and lives.

Think about this for a moment, how well received is the statement that marriage is to be between a man and a woman? That belief is now actively and overwhelmingly labeled as “hate speech” in our society but it is simply a declaration of God’s created order. The dark culture around us hates God’s Word in this regard. Think further about ethics and how the world demonstrates little receptivity to true biblical precepts. Try to navigate a business world while declaring and pointing out the unethical, and even illegal, behavior that is so prevalent in our society today. Those who insist on honesty, fidelity to the law, and the like are often labeled and marginalized. There is simply no desire to have true rules govern mankind. These few issues illuminate the truth that men who do not know God are hostile to Him.

Second, Paul says that lost men are guilty of “evil deeds”. I’m really not sure we need to flesh that out much at all! In fact, the world abounds with evil deeds. Sex trafficking, drug cartels, adultery, fraud, dishonesty, political corruption and even community gossip and backbiting are so prevalent that they’ve become an acceptable way of life. How can one say that these things are characteristic of men and not understand that man’s practice of such sin is a declaration of their war with God?

Finally, notice the effect of our conflict with God. We are “alienated” from Him. Why? Well, the answer is pretty simple. Those who declare their rebellion against God cannot, and should not, be welcomed into His presence and into relationship with Him. In the Gospel, Christ has reconciled us to Him but the glorious result of His work is available only to those who will acknowledge and forsake their enmity with God. To be a part of God’s family is to be in right relationship with Him and that connection is only possible if we recognize our transgressions and turn from them.

July 22

Isaiah 43:25

So, we have established our need to repent but we still need to examine the reason we have that justifies our hope that our repentance will be accepted. All of us have had experiences where we truly apologized, or “repented”, only to have the offended party refuse to accept our apology. Is there any risk of this with God?

As we examine the text for today, we are reminded that God’s promise is total in its nature. The Bible does not say that some sins are immediately forgiven and others may have to be taken under further consideration! Instead, the Scripture makes it clear that God forgives us both totally and permanently.

First, it is interesting to note the parallel word between our passage for today in Isaiah and the sermon text from Sunday. In both portions of Scripture, the phrase “blots out” is utilized. The phrase speaks of expunging our sins from the record in totality. For God to “blot out” our sin is for the Lord to wipe the slate absolutely clean in our lives! This promise is both amazing and instructive. It is amazing as it speaks to the depth of grace in God and it is instructive in that it reminds us that we have a sure hope in the forgiveness of God.

Second, the permanent nature of God’s forgiveness is seen in this passage as the Lord says that He will “not remember your sins”. This means that God forgives in totality in the moment AND He forgives forever. There is no situation in which God will bring back charges against our record. His forgiveness is permanent!

These two truths together serve to buttress our joy in the knowledge that God will indeed forgive us if we repent. There is no deed too extreme and no transgression that God will hold over our head.

Now, I am going to assume something for a moment. My assumption is that if you are reading this you are a believer (or at least you claim to be). If that is true, then you confess that you believe God and His Word and hold dear His promises. My prayer and exhortation to you is that you allow a promise such as this one to infiltrate your heart and propel you to obedience in repentance. If God is clear that He will wipe out every sin, why would we not run to Him and confess our transgressions? God is ready and willing to forgive His children, may we take that knowledge and practice a lifestyle of repentance which brings healing and freedom!

July 23

Psalm 103:12

I will admit that today's devotion is somewhat redundant, but I do believe the subject matter is so glorious that two days of the same "big idea" are more than justified! Yesterday's devotion dealt with the depth and breadth of forgiveness that God offers. The Lord promises us that He will "blot out" our sins and that this expunging of our record is permanent in nature.

Today's text reinforces this idea with a spatial metaphor that illustrates the radical nature of God's forgiveness of those who truly repent and believe. The Psalm teaches us that God removes our sins from us and this is an incredibly important truth! The Lord not only forgives us of our sin but, in His economy, He takes what used to rest on us and literally expels it from His memory and from its residing presence in our lives.

The phrase that the Psalm employs is instructive as we read that our sins are removed "as far as the east is from the west". The idea that is being expressed here is quite clear, the "east" and "west" are totally opposed to one another and those localities or things that are fixed in one location are never at risk of wandering into the other geographic region.

It is as if the Lord is telling us that He has taken our sins and thrown them so far away that they can never wander back into our lives... they are literally no longer a threat to us and no longer an obstacle to our fellowship with God the Father.

One point of application might be appropriate for us as we meditate upon this idea. If God removes our sins from us so totally, shouldn't we trust His saving power and remove them from our own thoughts and guilty conscience as well? If God has forgiven those who truly repent, what business do we have living in our shame any longer? It strikes me that a real issue in true believers is an inability to grasp and/or embrace this truth which leads to our own depression over something that God has already dealt with in totality.

Brother and sister, our sin is real. Our need to repent is great but our God's ability to forgive is infinite and His promises to us are clear. If you have truly repented of your sin, you can know that Christ's sacrifice atoned for its consequence and God's grace has blotted them out entirely! The reason why we can know that is found in the text. God's Word is clear on the subject and our rest is found only as we lean on His promises for our security and peace.

The promises of God should liberate us to walk freely but they will do so only as they are foremost on our minds. Don't allow Satan and misplaced guilt to ruin your joy! Trust in God's character and run to Him knowing that He stands ready and willing to forgive and restore.

July 24

Daniel 9:9

A few months ago, my three girls were playing at home when I witnessed one of the most heartwarming instances I've ever seen as a parent. As my three were playing, there erupted quite the disagreement over who could play with various stuffed animals strewn about the floor. This is not an unusual occurrence in our home but on this day something truly remarkable took place. As my youngest and middle child grappled over a teddy bear, my oldest little girl left the room and returned rather quickly with another stuffed animal. When she entered the door, she made a beeline for my youngest and offered her the privilege of playing with this new stuffed animal.

My eyes almost filled with tears as my oldest reached down with that new stuffed animal and tenderly, and sacrificially, offered my youngest this toy saying, "here Allison, why don't you can have this stuffed animal instead." At that moment, I felt like a success as a parent, but my euphoria immediately wore off when my middle child screamed "that's my bear!" You see, my oldest had not gone to her room and grabbed a bear that was her possession, instead she went to my middle child's room and grabbed a stuffed animal that did not belong to her in order to make a peace offering. What seemed like a marvelous, and sacrificial, gesture in actuality was quite hollow.

You see, my oldest did not possess the stuffed animal in order to offer it to someone else. While the intent could've been good, the stark truth was that she had no right to give what she did not rightly possess.

Why do I bring that story up? Because it is directly applicable to the subject of God's forgiveness. You see, if God were not truly the offended party, if He did not have the right to offer us forgiveness then His promises might sound nice, but they are not really meaningful. However, Daniel 9 teaches us that God does indeed have the ability to offer forgiveness because He possesses it! He grants us what we do not deserve and He does so with full control and autonomy to make such a decision.

Sin is ultimately a rebellion against God alone. This is what Daniel means when he says that we have rebelled against God. When a man or woman sins, they are shirking His rightful authority and, therefore, all penalty for our actions are to be served at His behest. This means that we owe Him a great debt and it also means that He alone is able to atone for that debt and allow us to walk away free. Brother and sister, when God offers you grace, He does so with every right to forgive! May we marvel at His mercy and trust in His authority as we embrace His invitation to return to Him in faith and repentance.

July 25

Acts 3:26; Acts 9:1-13

For all who come to genuine saving faith in Jesus Christ, there is likely a time when a sense of shame and guilt bring a measure of grief that can cause us to feel there is no way we could possibly be forgiven much less saved. We remember the things we have done and determine that we are a lost cause or unworthy to be saved. On one level, it is beneficial to see our sin as deeply serious and worthy of the wrath of God. I would rather you be broken over your sins against God than to think them insignificant or of no consequence and undeserving of His judgment. The point that you are to ponder today is the beautiful truth of just how deep is God's love and how much greater is His grace than our sin (Romans 5:20). Paul wrote, "Where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more." Let us think a bit of the man who wrote that passage.

Luke wrote in Acts 3:26, "God raised up His servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways." If we are honest, we would admit that there are people who we would consider beyond God's grace or desire to save. Some of us would even go so far as to say that we believe ourselves to be beyond His love and reach. I do not mean that we think He cannot save us. I mean that we believe He does not want to save us based on the perceived depth of our sin. Yet, we cannot dance around nor ignore this passage. Peter said, "every one" of you. A comforting exercise may be to examine the life of one of our biblical heroes, the Apostle Paul. When you evaluate your life, and feel you are too far gone, turn to Paul's life.

I want you to remember that present at the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was the Apostle Paul. Now, you may say Paul was not there; Oh, but he was. Acts 7:58 says, "when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses lay aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. Luke tells us that Saul was later known as Paul (Acts 13:9). Why do I tell you this? Before you think yourself too sinful and beyond God's gracious mercy and forgiveness, consider Paul and his part in the death of Stephen. For all practical purposes, Paul was a murderer. He may not have thrown a stone but he was orchestrating the entire event. You see, the Bible tells us in Acts 9 that Paul was, at that moment, "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord." This man was a murderer, a blasphemer (1 Tim. 1:13), and a hater of the church and the followers of Jesus. Would you consider yourself worse than he? Have your sins exceeded his? Ananias, when directed by the Spirit to go to Paul said, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints in Jerusalem" (9:13). Are you so feared that Christians would avoid you?

Dear ones, God chose Paul and saved him as He can save you. Your sins do not exceed those of the Apostle Paul and yet God used him to write at least 13 books of the New Testament. The Lord called him "a chosen instrument of mine, to bear My name..." (13:15). God sent His Son to save the lost. We fall into that category. There is no limit to how far His grace can reach in regard to saving those who are called. He came to turn you and me from our wicked ways and He does that by giving us a new heart, a new nature, and His Spirit. God is greater than your sin and it is a low view of Him to believe that He cannot overcome *your* sin. God raised Him to overcome sin and death – including yours. If Paul's sins can be blotted out, surely yours can be too.