



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: July 5th - July 11th

Sermon: July 4th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus

July 5

Ephesian 2:20; 2 Corinthians 12:20

Last week pastor Aaron wrote about Ephesians 2:20 in one of his points to ponder. I bring that up here because I want to remind you that what took place through the ministry of Christ and the apostles was and is the foundation of the church. Picking up in Ephesians 4:11-12, we find that when the various gifts were given to the church there was no mention of healing or signs and wonders. Now, one might argue that in 1 Corinthians 12:9 that there is the mention of a gift of healing, and you would be correct. However, we must interpret that verse in light of other Scripture. For example, 2 Corinthians 12:12 says, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles." So, there was a time when that gift was indeed given to the apostles, but it was given to verify and confirm their calling and to strengthen their effectiveness in shoring up the early church. As the office of the apostle ended, so did the gift of healing as some would understand it.

Now, of course this does not mean that God cannot heal people and perform miracles in our day. I absolutely believe that God can and does heal people and do things that we would consider miraculous in our day. What we hold to is that God does sometimes work through a person's presence and prayers to do amazing things. The difference is that we do not give credit to a person who claims to have the gift of healing. Instead, we believe that God can choose to perform a miracle through any of His children at any time according to His will not an individual person's will. There is no reason to be forced into one extreme of this discussion or the other. To say that I don't believe in the gift of healing is not to say that I don't believe God can perform miracles. By the way, a miracle by nature is uncommon not routine and normal. It appears that every time miracles are performed in the Bible, it is at a time when God is beginning a new work among a new, unreached group of people. This may be why "miracles" happen among frontier missions more often than in a place where the truth of God's Word and changed lives take the place of other miracles.

For those who like to claim that we should have enough faith to be seeing the miracles done by God through the hands of the apostles today, I would like to ask if they also believe we should see people like Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to God, drop dead in the church? That too was an unusual and uncommon occurrence to drive home a point for the early church. Their death, which we will talk about later, was a result of bearing false witness. The entire book of Acts is about witness! God shows up in miraculous ways to bear witness to the truth of the ministry of Christ, the apostles, and a few associates of theirs to solidify the truth claims of the Gospel and to propel this truth to the ends of the earth. The shame of all of this is that far too many people put confidence in signs and wonders far more than they do the never changing, always truthful, sufficient Word of God. For some reason, His precious promises just don't seem to be enough and so people want "signs and wonders" rather than just exercising beautiful faith in God and His Word. Please never forget that a wicked and idolatrous generation seeks after a sign. Beloved, we have all that we need in the Word and so it serves to strengthen us today.

July 6

Romans 10:1-3

When I consider the lame man in the passage from Sunday's message, I think of mankind in general. We find a man in Acts 3 who was for all practical purposes helpless and most likely hopeless. The Bible tells us in Acts 4:22 that he was more than 40 years old. Can you imagine being in that condition from birth and living in a time when life was physically much harder and more demanding than what most of us know today. On top of that, he was crippled. His only means of survival was to be carried by others to the temple gate and to beg people for money – or so he thought.

A thought that came to me while reading this passage was this, he asked for what he thought he needed most. Aren't we all like that? Friends, from his perspective, that of an unregenerate man, he thought what he needed most was simply means to meet his daily needs. He had no idea that his greatest need ran much deeper than daily sustenance. The Bible tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of God's holy standard (Rom. 3:23). It also tells us that there are none who are righteous in and of themselves (Rom. 3:10). My chosen text for today's point to ponder comes from Romans 10:1-3. Here Paul writes, "My heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation...for not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own...." Of all the needs that Paul could have desired and prayed that God would meet in their lives, he chooses their salvation.

It is noteworthy that this lame man did not ask to be healed. He did not ask, based on any measure of faith, for a miracle. He knew he needed money and that is as far as his concerns took him. What about us? What do you consider your greatest needs in your life? What about that of your children and/or other family members? I would venture a guess here, based on how people spend their time, resources, and energy, that few think of their standing before God as their greatest need. It is most certainly every man's greatest need whether he realizes it or not. Physical healing, money in the bank, or success in this life will be useless if a person passes away not knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The lame man in our story had no idea of what he needed and what knowing Christ would mean for his life. I hope that I will long more earnestly and faithfully for the salvation of those whom I love. Church family, what do we as a church have to offer people in the 21st century? We do not have enough money to meet everyone's financial needs. We do not have enough time to sit with every person who longs for company. We do not have the ability to fix everyone's broken relationships. So, what do we have to offer? It is simple and it is the best thing. It is the most necessary thing. It is the transforming power of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Like Peter and John, we should not be ashamed to say, "Silver and gold have I none, what I do have I give to you." The lame man did not know he needed Jesus; we know that he does. He did not know the joy that he would know and experience through a relationship with the Savior; we should know. Let us seek to offer the world what they need the most and rejoice in God's mercy as He saves our family and friends.

July 7

Acts 3:5; 1 Timothy 3:7

I have often heard it said that you cannot effectively share the good news with a bad name. Our reputation matters greatly when it comes to our ability to share the good news of Christ. I have often wondered what people think of when they think of our church. What are their expectations when they come to worship in this place? I hope and pray that for the most part our testimony is one of faithfulness to the Word of God, passionate worship, and love for people both within and outside of these walls. In our text for Sunday, the lame man looked at Peter and John and the Bible says, "He expected to receive something from them" (Acts 3:5). What did he expect to get? I suppose the logical answer would be money. He sure did get more than he bargained for, didn't he? What do people expect to get from us when they look to us as children of God?

There have been hundreds of times through the years when people have shown up expecting to get money for bills, groceries, or gas. There have been the times when people wanted help with Christmas gifts or thanksgiving meals. What I am thinking about in this point to ponder is a bit more negative than that. I wonder how many people avoid the church because they expect to be judged, ignored, overlooked, or badgered in some way. Do people today expect to hear a right wing, conservative, political push for capitalism, republicanism, or patriotism? Do they avoid church because of the doom's day attitudes of our Fox News cronies? Are people tired of the culture bashing with no alternatives other than old fashioned moralism – you know, the dos and don'ts that characterized much of Christianity for the past 50 years. I think you get my point.

This man had been sitting outside the beautiful gate for most of his life. As I mentioned yesterday, he was more than forty years old. Think of the days, the years in which he sat watching religious people enter the temple. People were showing up to worship God, to offer sacrifices, and to hear the Torah read. Yet, there he sat crippled and hopeless. Think of his brokenness and the conclusions he must have drawn about God and His people. What a useless, waste of time he must have thought. I think of him thinking, "Hey give me some money you idiots. I am happy to take advantage of your silly superstitions." He may have thought that their religion clearly didn't change them so why should he expect that they had anything special to offer him.

Brothers and sisters, the world can offer people money, social services, and various levels of aid but only the church can offer the transforming power of Jesus Christ. I hope that you and I will live our lives in such a way and conduct ourselves as children of God so that people would expect something different from us. May our goal be that people would expect to hear the good news of Jesus Christ from us. May they expect to be loved in a mature, Christlike way. May people expect the truth, honesty, and compassion with boldness from us. I hope they would know that we will help when and where we can in material ways but that our greater goal is to help them come to know Jesus. I hope that they would expect that God can transform them because they have seen how He transformed us. I pray they will expect that God can set them free from the addictions and yearnings for worldliness because He set us free. I hope they see how to raise children, love a spouse, and be a great citizen because they see all of those things in us.

July 8

Romans 5: 6, 8

I touched on this just a bit in a devotion earlier in the week, but I want to go back to the reality of the lame man's helplessness to overcome his circumstance and how that is an example of our helplessness to overcome our most devastating condition. Paul writes in Romans 5: 6 and 8, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly...But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Dear ones, we were all in a helpless condition unable to do anything to remedy our own predicament. We were no less lame and dependent upon another as this man was and purely and solely by the mercy and election of God, He was healed. Likewise, we were drawn to the Father and born again not by our own will but the will of God (John 1:13). It is important that you see yourself as the lame man in this passage and that you see Christ reaching down to take your helpless hand, to put you on your feet, to give you the strength to walk, to leap, and to praise. It is also imperative that you understand it was by no merit of your own that He chose to save you.

This lame man did not come to the temple that day looking for Jesus or His followers. He did not come to the temple to worship or praise God in any way. He came to use the people of God for his own personal benefit with no concern for the things or the people of God. He did not come there with any measure of faith. He was simply a helpless, hopeless man. You must see yourself in that light in order for the good news of the saving work of Christ to truly matter to you. Paul makes it clear that we were all still sinners when Jesus died as our substitutionary sacrifice making atonement for us. Our goodness did not trigger His move towards us. We love Him because He first loved us.

Brothers and sisters, please note the result of this man's radical and miraculous transformation. Oh, how I wonder how he felt when as his ankles and feet were strengthened and he entered the temple what he must have felt. For all of these years he had only made it to the gate never having entered the courtyard. Now, here in verse 8 of Acts 3, he stood upright for the first time ever and began to walk. Then it says he entered the temple, walking, leaping, and praising God. What happened to you when you got transformed by the Master? Any leaping and praising? What do others think of the Lord's salvation by your demonstration of what it means in your life?

Luke writes in verse 9, "And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note...and they were filled with wonder and amazement." Oh, I know you may say that seeing a lame man walk is more miraculous than seeing a lost man saved but you would be wrong. The problem is that there is typically not enough difference in a regenerate man's life. Now, please know that I say that as judgment and even as doubt about the "salvation experience" of many. I do not mean you have to run around and do flips to prove you are saved. I simply mean that there should be noticeable differences between how an unregenerate person lives and how a child of God lives. This man's life bore witness and gave testimony to the work of Christ on the cross and your life and mine should too. He became evidence of the validity of the Gospel as should we.

July 9

Acts 3:6; Col. 3:17

What does it mean to invoke the name of Jesus as Peter did and as we are instructed to do when we offer prayers in the name of Jesus? The actual name of Jesus in Hebrew is *Yeshua* which literally means Yahweh saves. In our text for Sunday, Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene-walk." This is far more than simply stating a mantra or using the name Jesus as some magical incantation. The name of Jesus means that He saves and we know that indeed He does.

Paul wrote in Colossians 3:17, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." We know that at His name every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:10). We read in Acts 4:12 that there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved. So, what does it mean to serve, to work, and to do everything you do in His name? Again, it is important that you understand that the name of Jesus is not a magic wand and chanting it does not give anyone special powers. The power in the name is the power behind the name. Another way to say that is to say that there is power in the name of Jesus because there is power in the person of Jesus. The name of Jesus is important because of its meaning and because of whom it represents. There is power and authority in the person of Jesus Christ, and the person is designated by the name. We associate the name of Jesus with His Character, nature, and work.

It is important to note that God went out of His way in the Old Testament to make connections between people's names and their purpose in life. For example, Abraham meant the father of nations. God Himself went by I Am which literally was intended to cause us to think of His essence when we thought of Him. Moses meant drawn from the water. Jacob's name meant trickster but was changed to Israel after his encounter with God. Jesus also means God with us. Again, the name refers to the essence or the defining reality of the person. It is obvious that the name really matters but why?

John Piper asks the question, "What would we miss if no one had a name or designation of any kind?" He goes on to say that we would lose the ability to relate well and communicate easily. When we invoke the name of Jesus, we are making Him known publicly and not keeping Him private or hidden. He is more than some hidden essence in your heart or in the privacy of your own closet. We are going public with Jesus when we pray, work, and play in His name. Think about it, we are acknowledging that He is a person who can be talked to and talked about. We as His children praise Him out loud, we worship Him by name, and we make Him known by calling on His name as we live. Paul wrote in Romans 9:17, "...that My Name might be claimed throughout the whole earth." When I think of living my life to make His name known, I have to consider what my actions are saying about who Jesus is. If I claim to do something or pray for something in His name, I like to think of it as if I am saying this is what Jesus would say, do, or ask for if He were here. So, when Peter said to the lame man "stand up and walk", he was saying that Jesus wants you to stand up and walk. As ambassadors of Christ, we are to move, walk, speak, and pray in the name of the One we live to represent and make known.

July 10

1 Corinthians 3:9

You have been with us long enough now to know that pastor Aaron and I believe wholeheartedly in the sovereignty of God. By that we mean that God is in control of all things and nothing happens apart from either His perfect will or His permissible will. We also believe that even though He is completely sovereign, He has designed His plan in a way that includes our service. Our deeds of faith, service, and love are not frivolous, useless, or make believe. What He calls us to do and our efforts absolutely matter in the unfolding of His perfect plans.

The apostle Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 3:9, “For we are God’s fellow workers.” Peter said it this way, “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). In both instances, the apostles are teaching us that we are saved to serve and to come alongside the Spirit in working to advance God’s kingdom. Here is how I see that fitting into our text for this past Sunday. First of all, Peter and John went up to the temple at the ninth hour, which was 3pm in the afternoon. Why did they do that? One might say it was the vestiges of old habits of Judaism and maybe it was. The Jews would go to the temple three times daily to pray. I like to think that they strategically positioned themselves to have access to masses of people. I land here because it appears they didn’t go up just to pray because shortly after they arrived, Peter was already preaching a sermon. It appears he went there to talk to people.

Here is my point – God could convert people without us, but He chooses not to. We have a vital part to play in other people’s salvation. We are to be witnesses and workers for Christ. It is not enough to sit back and say that since God is sovereign, He will simply do what He has planned to do with or without us. God gives us the privilege of being the means of grace by which He does great things in the lives of others. Peter and John had a job to do and there was a way to do it effectively. They thought about evangelism strategies and approaches that would at least potentially have the greatest impact. We matter in kingdom work.

Another example of this in our text Sunday was how God used Peter and John to actually heal the lame man. Notice in verse 6 and 7 their involvement in the whole miracle. First of all, they saw him. They took the time to notice this man who had been by the gates for upwards of four decades. They noticed him and they spoke to him. Peter and John were ready to bear witness to Christ and to obey the Spirit’s prompting in this providential encounter. Again, I remind you that God could have reached and healed this man in any number of ways but chose to do it through two men whom He had saved to serve Him and others. Not only did they notice him and speak to him, but they reached for him. I am reminded that it was the power of Jesus Christ that healed the lame man, but it was Peter’s hand that reached to help him up. Beloved, never forget that God utilizes us and considers us fellow workers. Is that not crazy? We get to be co-laborers with the Almighty. I hope you realize that as He involves you in kingdom work, He is doing a work in another person’s life, but He is also doing a mighty work in yours. Serve Him dear friends with gladness.

July 11

Hebrews 11:10, 35-38

We live in a time in which the prosperity gospel movement has run rampant in the world and done great damage to the cause of Christ and the advancement of the Gospel. The prosperity gospel (also known as the “health and wealth gospel” or by its most popular brand, the “Word of Faith” movement) is a perversion of the gospel of Jesus that claims that God rewards increases in faith with increases in health and/or wealth. Kenneth Copeland, a student at ORU who served as a pilot and chauffeur for Oral Roberts became one of the most notorious (and wealthiest) of prosperity preachers. These men paved the way for the televangelists who became famous in the 1980s, including Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Benny Hinn, and Pat Robertson. Today some of the best-known prosperity teachers are Creflo Dollar, T.D. Jakes, Paula White, and of course Joel Osteen.

There are clear indications that should tip a listener off to this heresy. The absence of a serious doctrine of the biblical necessity and normalcy of suffering. The absence of a clear and prominent doctrine of self-denial is a tip off that something is amiss. The absence of serious exposition of Scripture. The absence of dealing with tensions in Scripture. A prominence of self and a marginalization of the greatness of God. And of course, church leaders who have exorbitant lifestyles. Let us jump from there into our text and point to ponder for today.

Peter said to the lame man as he and John made their way to the temple gate, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you” (Acts 3:6). Brothers and sisters, I do not want you to miss the fact that these men had sacrificed greatly to follow Jesus Christ. Their self-denial included walking away from their fishing business to follow a man who had neither a home nor a place to lay his head. They were not kidding when they said they had no money. How does that fit into the prosperity gospel preacher’s message? It does not. Please know that coming to Christ as Lord and Savior does not bring with it a promise to health, wealth, and prosperity. I don’t care how much faith a person may or may not have, there is no biblical basis for believing Christians are supposed to be healthy and wealthy. As a matter of fact, just the opposite is often true as it was for Peter, John, and the other disciples.

The author of Hebrews records for us some amazing results of deep faith in God while showing us the less than glamorous side of it too. In Hebrews 11:35-38 it is written, “Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mocking and scourging, yes also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two....” That would not fit in, nor will it ever be heard from the likes of Joel Osteen or Kenneth Copeland. It is absolutely the journey for many who follow Christ. Peter and John had no money, but they had so much more to offer the lame man in his need. Beloved, they and we can remain faithful and joyful in service to our King even when times are hard by “looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:10). Friends, this is not our home, and we were never meant to put our tent stakes down so deeply. Keep you eyes upon Jesus and your hopes in our promised future, and you will be able to endure strong until the end regardless of temporary and momentary afflictions.