



2022 Weekly Devotions

Week of: June 27th - July 3rd

Sermon: June 26th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

June 27

Romans 6:23

Today's passage is a marvelous and familiar verse from the book of Romans. In this text, we are reminded of the horrible consequence of sin and the great grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. If we were able to list all the problems that face mankind, the source of them would be sin and the subsequent fall of creation. As we read the biblical text, we are reminded that every frustration and pain we encounter is tied to the entrance of sin into creation. Furthermore, the biblical witness is clear that all of us not only experience sin "out there", but we are also all naturally sinners. This means that man's greatest enemy is sin and its consequence, death.

For centuries men have attempted to find ways to overcome sin and death. Without Christ this has led to various false religions that all teach some method of overcoming your own guilt and earning salvation. To be fair, there are a myriad of ways that have been proposed to prevail over the great enemy of death, but they are all wrapped up in this false belief that you and I can somehow achieve our own liberation and salvation. In stark contrast, the Bible points outside of us to the answer for the sin that troubles us. In this passage we are reminded of both the universal nature of sin and the wonderful solution of Christ.

Paul tells us that the "wages of sin is death". The term "wage" is important as it signifies what we earn. When you sign up for a job, you agree upon a certain wage. If you are an hourly employee, you expect a paycheck that reflects the amount of wage you earned as calculated by the number of hours you work at the rate you agreed upon. When you get your check, you are simply given what you "earned". In the same way, the wage that man earns by virtue of his sin is death. It is what is coming to us and what we deserve!

Second, Paul notes that the "gift" of God is Christ Jesus. The term gift denotes something altogether different. A gift is not earned but freely given as an act of love and, in this case, mercy. Gifts are not deserved (at least not in the way that Paul uses the term), instead they reflect someone's love and, in this case, grace towards the receiver. No one can earn Jesus' gift of salvation, but it is freely offered, nonetheless.

The point then is that the only way to avoid what we earn is to receive the gift that God gives by His mercy. Jesus offers us the gift of salvation by taking the penalty of death upon Himself and offering us the blessing of eternal life by His grace. In this way, He sets us free, and this freedom is never to be relinquished! The free gift of God's grace in Christ is an eternal freedom from the consequences of sin and this is one of the major reasons why we can separate the Christian view of salvation from all false beliefs in the universe.

June 28

John 8:36-38

Today's passage is a personal favorite of mine, and it seems like a wonderful text to consider in light of yesterday's devotion. Romans 6 teaches us that God's gift is eternal life. This gift of eternal life is also referred to as "salvation" in the Scripture. Specifically, it is the gift of being saved from our sin and all its bondage. As believers, we are freed from sin and, therefore, free to pursue Christ which is the source and purpose of our life.

Today's text uses that term freedom. It is meant to be understood in the context of salvation and all that salvation entails. The Bible teaches us that those who are still in their sin are underneath the tyranny of sin and Satan. They are children of wrath who are by nature enemies of God and enslaved to their wicked passions and the "god" of this world (the devil). Those who are going to be freed need to find someone who can liberate them from the grip of sin and shield them from the advances of the enemy who would like nothing other than to recapture their souls and lead them into eternal condemnation.

Today's passage is a reminder that neither of those horrible things will befall a true believer. Instead, those who truly believe in Christ will be "free indeed". How does Jesus free us from these things? First, Jesus frees us from sin by atoning for our sins, which means paying the penalty for us. This leads to God's justifying us, declaring us righteous before Him, which allows for the Spirit to indwell us and change our hearts from those that are dead to God and enslaved to righteousness to hearts that no longer enslaved by sin and desirous of the things of God. Simply stated, we are free in Christ because Jesus has radically transformed our hearts such that we no longer only desire sin. Instead, we are now alive to the things of the Lord, awake and perceptive of His movements and passionate about knowing and pursuing Him! Whereas we once followed along in the ways of darkness, now we are free to follow the Lord in ways of life.

Second, we are free from the dominion of Satan. Those who believe in Christ are joined to the One who has overcome all the advances of Satan and defeated all forces of darkness. This means that there is no power that can overcome or overwhelm the power of our great God and, therefore, we have no need to be concerned about Satan somehow reclaiming us as his own. In Christ, we are free from his threats and more than conquerors as we share in the victory that Jesus secured in His resurrection. As 1 John 3:8 teaches us, the Son of Man came to destroy the works of the devil and there is coming a day in which the devil will be bound and tossed into eternal torment forevermore (Revelation 20:10)! Until then we rest in the knowledge that Jesus has taken the best shot of the enemy and emerged as the victor in all things.

June 29

Revelation 5:12-13

We have seen that the Son of God has secured freedom for all believers and now we will pivot to see how His triumph over death and His exaltation over all His enemies results in His rule and reign which will never end. Today's passage is a great declaration of the supremacy of Christ. Jesus is in fact the great ruler of all creation and He alone is worthy to be worshipped and to sit on His throne for all eternity.

Today's text describes the scene in heaven as Jesus is worshipped. First, we must notice that Jesus is declared "worthy" in the heavenlies. Why is He worthy? He is worthy because He is perfect, He is worthy because He is all-powerful, and He is worthy because He has defeated all of God's enemies (amongst other things). This worthiness is the cause of worship for all time.

It makes me wonder how worthy we think Jesus is to be praised in our own personal lives. If your concept of Christ is predicated on what He can do for you or on whether He answers your prayers in the way you think He should or based on faulty views of His attributes and character, then your praise is going to reflect a watered-down Savior. It is only as we contemplate who Christ is (a triumphant, glorious, eternal, perfect, holy, and righteous Savior, amongst other things) and what Christ has done (liberating us from our sin and securing eternal salvation in His presence in glory) that we will be led to truly worship. Could it be that worship in many modern-day churches falls short because there is very little concern with knowing and contemplating Christ?

Second, notice how long Jesus is to reign. Those in the heavens cry out that Christ will reign in honor, glory and might forever. There will never come a time in which Jesus is not ruling. There will never be a new election, there will never be a moment in which He is incapacitated, there will never be a time in which He needs to take a leave of absence. Instead, our great God will rule and reign forever! This separates Him from the rulers and leaders of Old Testament past. David's rule was transferred to Solomon, Moses gave way to Joshua, Abraham passed the mantle to Isaac, but Jesus will never be succeeded. He will always be our God; He will always rule, and He will always deserve and demand the worship of His people.

As Paul spoke on the Sabbath day to his Jewish counterparts some 2000 years ago, he was burdened for them to see this Christ. He knew that everything in the Old Testament was pointing to a greater King and redeemer and that Jesus was that greater figure. Centuries later, we still talk about Christ precisely because He continues to sit on the throne and lead His people.

June 30

Hebrews 1:3

If we were to attempt to summarize the main truth of Acts 13:13-43 in a sentence, we may well say that the point of Paul's sermon to the Jews was to illustrate the superiority of Christ as the prophesied leader of God's people. As Paul walks through the history of God's people, he illustrates the reality that God raised up several leaders to accomplish many good and necessary tasks but none of these leaders was perfect and none of their responsibilities was finally settled.

God raised up Moses to liberate the people of Israel and Moses succeeded... temporarily! The people were freed from Egyptian captivity, but they were not free from future oppression and, most importantly, they were not free from the sins that enslaved them. God raised up David as a King and he was a good king... mostly. David ruled as a man after God's own heart, but he was still just a man. This meant that his rule was not timeless. He made his way to the grave which created the need for another King. Furthermore, his rule was not blameless. While David was a good king, he also committed some major transgressions which caused his family and his country severe harm.

In all these things, the Bible points to God's faithfulness in the moment while simultaneously screaming of people's need for a great redeemer, liberator, and ruler. Repeatedly, the Bible proclaims God's plan that He would send One who would fulfill the roles of Savior and King perfectly and Paul is preaching of that Divine Person. Now, the Apostle speaks to the Jews about the One who was greater than Abraham, Moses, and David. While it was mind-blowing to his initial audience, their own texts demonstrate the necessity and reality of His coming.

Now, I want to spend the next several days talking about why Jesus is superior to all others. How is it that we can say that Christ is indeed greater than anyone else? The answer is found, in part, in the book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews chooses to go about his task of magnifying Jesus by declaring His superiority over all men and things. This is the point of the first chapter of the book, and it will be the point of our next four devotions.

Today's portion of Hebrews 1 teaches us that Christ is Superior to all others in His being. We see this in the phrase "the exact representation of His nature." The term translates a Greek word that denotes an impression made by a stamp on a seal. It literally means that Jesus is the exact reproduction of God. Colossians 1:15 tells us this same thing saying that Christ is the "image of God" which is a word that is elsewhere translated "icon". An "icon" is an exact copy.

In both instances the idea is clear, Jesus is the exact representation of the Father in all respects. Unlike Moses (who struggled with anger and insecurity) and David (who struggled with lust and dishonesty), the Savior of the world is perfect in all of His attributes. This means that He can be trusted and that His character will never get in the way of His rule or work (amongst many other things!). Our Jesus is a marvelous, matchless, glorious and worthy King.

July 1

Hebrews 1:3

Ruling and reigning can be challenging! I remember as a kid having the opportunity to go to the state capitol and meet a Georgia representative. This gentleman was very kind to our elementary group as he allowed us to see what his day-to-day life was like as an elected official. For whatever reason, the portion of the trip that stays with me revolves around his schedule. Towards the end of our time together, the man mentioned that it was time for him to go and, in passing, he told us a bit about the calendar he keeps. As he talked about his meetings and daily responsibilities, I felt overwhelmed! How could one person keep up with all these things? The answer is that it took all his time, and his responsibilities were limited to one state in one country!

All of us realize that even the most productive among us can only handle so much. There are those who have been prolific leaders, inventors and CEO's who are able to juggle many responsibilities but even they have a limit. The simple truth is that all of us are only capable of handling so much. This is one of the realities of being a mortal, we all have our limits.

This means that even the most responsible and productive must delegate. The idea that one person could adequately, much less exceptionally, run the entire universe is mind-blowing and unrealistic for us to consider. We cannot consider such a thought, but our great and reigning Savior is fulfilling this duty right now!

Our text for today reminds us that Jesus "upholds all things by the word of His power". The phrase upholds means to support and sustain. Everything that you and I depend upon from our personal breath and strength to the functioning of the universe in predictable ways, is managed and upheld by Jesus. He is aware of every detail, He is governing every situation, He is accomplishing His will in every arena, and He will continue to do so for all time.

Our Lord won't ever grow weary, and He will never retire. His administration is perfect, having never made a mistake. He doesn't allow things to slip by His grasp and He is never confused about what to do. His governance is always right, He has never made a wrong decision and in all these things He stands far above anyone who would challenge His rightful place as ruler of creation. His rule should bring us comfort. Nothing will happen without His approval. His rule should cause us to worship, no One else could accomplish such a feat. His rule should give us confidence, the One who is in control of all things has adopted us into His family!

July 2

Hebrews 1:3

What is man's greatest problem? I've heard many answers to that question over the years. Today, it seems that many have fallen into the trap of believing that our greatest issue is "society". We like to think that man's problem is "oppression" and societal incongruities that lead to disparities. The thought is if we can just fix what's wrong systemically then all men will flourish and the problems that we have will go away.

This might sound convincing to some of you, but it is misleading and misguided. You see, society has its problems because the men who comprise the society are ridden with problems. The corporate manifestation of cultural issues is just a conglomeration of each individual's sin. This means that society won't change unless sin has been dealt with accordingly!

Even more fundamentally, sin is the manifestation of two, conjoined, problems. First, sin is committed because man's heart is desperately wicked. We sin because we are sinners, and we are sinners because our hearts desire wickedness over righteousness. Second, our sin has separated us from a holy God who will not, and cannot, share His company with those who have rebelled against His rule and law.

So, at its core, man's greatest need is for his sin to be dealt with. This would include a fundamental change in his heart and an atonement for the transgressions that he has committed against a holy and righteous God. If man is going to be led to salvation and if man is going to dwell underneath the rule and reign of God, sin must be dealt with first.

This fundamental need illustrates another reason why Jesus is greater than any other leader or ruler. You see, no other man could deal with his own sin, much less the sins of his people. David was helpless to bring his own heart fully into subjection with God's law and, therefore, he was helpless to change the hearts of the people he governed. However, there is a great David, Jesus Christ, who has dealt with our sins. The Bible says in our text that Jesus made "purification" of our sins.

Literally, Jesus purified us from the sin that stained us prior to His salvation. He did this by atoning for our transgressions through His sacrificial death which led to His covering us in His righteousness, thereby allowing us to be engrafted into the family of God which brings us into God's presence and underneath His righteous rule as children of the King!

No one else in history could do this for you church. Everyone else is marred by their sin. No one was able to cover your sins, and no one could demonstrate more true love and mercy for you than Jesus did in purifying you of your depravity. The Lord is a gracious and kind ruler, demonstrated most clearly by His purification of you while you were mired in your wretched sin.

July 3

Hebrews 1:3

As we complete our week of devotions on Christ as the greatest Savior and Ruler, it seems appropriate to consider the place that Christ currently holds. It seems that man is constantly looking for exaltation. Those who seek to rule in this world are often out for their own personal glory and affirmation. In fact, historically speaking, there have been many glory thirsty leaders who have gone to great lengths to receive praises from those they govern.

Think for a moment about some of the scenes you have witnessed on video from the reign of Hitler. Or perhaps consider the evil ways of the dictator in North Korea. There are stories of Roman Caesars who persecuted Christians for refusing to call the Roman ruler “god” and Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den because of a misguided policy by the King to seek worship of his people.

The point is that rulers want worship, but do they deserve it? The answer, historically speaking, is a resounding no! These men are not worthy of our worship, but Jesus is! In fact, we read in our portion of the text today that even God the Father sees Christ as worthy of exaltation. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father on high. The place of the right hand is a position of strength, and it signifies at least four things.

First, it shows us that Christ is to be honored. The Father has Jesus sit at His right hand as a declaration that His Son is worthy of the power and authority ascribed to Him. If God the Father honors Christ, shouldn’t we?

Second, it demonstrates Christ’s authority. This position of honor is a position of great influence and power. From this seat on high, our Lord governs all things. There is no a molecule or square inch of the universe that escapes His authority on this heavenly throne.

Third, it demonstrates the completion of His work. Jesus is done with atoning for our sins, he has already purified us and, therefore, we see the sufficiency of His work. When Christ said, “it is finished”, He really meant it! There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because the blood of Christ is sufficient to cleanse us from all sin. Nothing else needs to be done or added to your salvation, it is accomplished!

Fourth, from this position Christ intercedes for us. Even now, you have an advocate with the Father in the Son. The good news is that your advocate is constantly in God’s presence and has God the Father’s favor for all time. To be clear, we don’t believe that the Father is otherwise angry with us. In fact, we believe that it was God the Father’s love that sent His Son into the world (John 3:16) but we do believe that the reason why God’s anger has been satisfied is Christ Jesus’ atoning blood. The wrath of God was poured out on Jesus and now that substitute pleads His blood on our behalf before the Father at all times. What a marvelous, matchless, Savior and Leader we have!