



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: June 28th - July 4th

Sermon: June 28th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◦ equipping believers ◦ serving Jesus

June 28

Psalm 42:1

Psalm 42 is admittedly a sorrowful and transparent Psalm recording David's consternation in a moment of immense difficulty and pain. The entire Psalm is, obviously, worth your time to read! It is instructive to see how David preaches truth to himself and how the process of reminding our own minds of God's truth can require us to overcome what we "feel" in the moment to embrace and hold onto what we "know" about God's promises and character.

Nevertheless, I want to focus on David's description of himself in verse 1 as he likens his desire for fellowship with God to a deer panting for water. The metaphor is a powerful and succinct statement of David's immense desire to know God and to sense His presence. It is not enough for David to simply know the basics and hope that God is somewhere nearby. No, this man of God earnestly desires to feel and sense God's presence and be reminded of the truths that God has revealed.

We could say that David had tasted God's goodness and now he desperately wants more. Like a starving man who has encountered the first bite of food, the joy and fulfillment David found in savoring God catapulted him to a deep desire for more of the mighty Lord.

This deep longing for a knowledge of God and a sense of His presence should be characteristic of all believers. In the Gospel of Christ, God has made Himself and His power known to us and through an embracing of the person of Jesus, we have tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord, but this initial experience was never meant to satisfy.

No, to know and see the glory of God in the face of Christ should lead us to an ongoing desire to know and see more of Him! The life of the believer is one of constant learning and yearning for more of God. Those who are truly converted know His goodness and they simply cannot get enough of Him. This is what causes them to press into His Word, knowing that He is found in His revelation by His Spirit. This is what causes them to commune with God in prayer and to dedicate themselves to the local body where God's Word is taught, God's Spirit inhabits their brothers and God's plan of redemption and sanctification is carried out.

To be transparent, I fear for many today who claim to be believers who seemingly do not echo David's words. In fact, it seems as if many believers I meet today are totally happy with the little bit they think they know about the Lord. There is certainly no obvious effort to know more, in fact even an effort to teach these people more is often met with apathy at best and even disdain at worst! My prayer for all of us is that we would deeply feel our need for more of God's grace, more of His wisdom and more of the peace, patience and perseverance that only He can provide and that our desires for these blessings would propel us to cry out with David as we plead for God to satisfy our thirsty and earnest souls.

June 29

Ephesians 2:20

The Bible says that the church was dedicated to the teaching of the Apostles in our text from Sunday. Acts tells us that the members of the body were present daily to hear the Apostles teach them truth and this is a logical outflow of conversion which yields the desire for God that we mentioned in yesterday's devotion.

There is one possible hiccup in this text, however, and that is the source of their teaching. The Bible says that they were dedicated to the Apostles teaching and yet the church today does not have men called Apostles standing to preach... why? This is an important question and I hope it is one that you have asked along the way. What is going on in Acts 2 and why is it that pastors preach today?

The answer is found as we understand both the redemptive moment and our text in Ephesians for the day. You see, the book of Acts marks a transitional phase in redemptive history. God has finished His work of redemption in Christ, Jesus has ascended to rule and reign, the Spirit has been poured out on believers and the church has been established. All of that is still true today! However, the New Covenant church is birthed without the completion of the New Testament. In fact, there is no New Testament book at all at the time of Acts 2. None of those works were written but they would be, and their completion would be largely overseen by the Apostles.

Whereas the New Testament is now completed and tells us all we need to know about Christ and our Christian lives in light of Jesus, the source of revelation about Christ was different in first century Jerusalem. Instead of the Gospels testifying about Christ and instead of the Epistles written in light of Christ, the early church had the Apostles who had lived with Christ and were now responsible for teaching the church about Him. Over time, these men would author and/or oversee the books of the New Testament which would stand as the rule of faith for coming generations but until then they would speak underneath God's authority and by His inspiration to the church.

In our passage for today, the Apostle Paul alludes to these men, along with Old Testament authors (generally referred to as the prophets) saying that the church was built on the foundation of their ministry. This term, "foundation", is important because it denotes something of incredible significance as we consider our subject for the day. You see, a foundation is not something that is constantly added to, instead a foundation is constructed once and for all! There is no adding, or tweaking, a foundation, instead it is a necessary first step of building any structure. The idea that is expressed here is therefore, that the Bible was given to us as a foundation, through the prophets and apostles and that now, as the foundation is complete, the work of building the church on that Word from God continues. We are no longer adding to the foundation, we are looking back to what it teaches as we seek to be used of God to build His church.

This means that there is no longer a need for Apostles, giving new and fresh revelation. Instead, the Apostles have handed the baton to pastors and teachers who are to expound what the Apostles and Prophets gave for the glory and building up of the body. The church no longer devotes itself to new teaching from an Apostle, the church looks back to the foundation that was laid by them as it seeks to be faithful and fruitful in our moment in time!

June 30

1 John 4:7-21

The second point in Sunday's sermon was that Gospel community is nurtured through fellowship. We examined the reality that the church in Jerusalem was not a Sunday only type community, instead these men and women were devoted both to daily teaching and interpersonal fellowship. We said that this is a necessary result of salvation because our salvation results in a restoration of our right relationship with our Father in heaven and with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

To put it succinctly, to claim that one is a believer, and therefore a member of the family of God, without a desire to love and spend time with the rest of His family in Christ is a misnomer. This is why Christ connects love for one another as a sure sign of love for Christ (John 13:35) and it is why I frankly worry so much about the multitude of folks in our day who claim to love Jesus but have no desire to spend their lives in fellowship with His bride. There is no biblical category for such a person. How can one say they love Jesus and flatly deny His obvious statement that love for Him **MUST** result in love for others? How can one claim to love God and not desire to spend anytime with his bride? Perhaps even more to the point, how can one despise the faults and shortcomings of others while claiming to understand a Gospel message that categorically declares that every man is immersed in his own depravity?

The Gospel humbles and motivates us to love, in fact, today's text makes it clear that true love for our brothers and sisters in Christ is a result of experiencing love from the Father. If one has truly understood and embraced God's love, he will exude that love to others, specifically the household of faith. Notice how John begins with a declaration in verse 7 "whoever loves has been born of God and knows God" and then he immediately grounds that assertion in the Gospel.

How can John say that love is a direct result of salvation (being born of God) and communion with God? Because a relationship with God is a relationship with One who "is love" (v. 8) and who has displayed that love chiefly in the Gospel (v. 9-10).

The Gospel creates a community, a family, of true believers and those who would enter into the Gospel by faith will, necessarily love God and the household of faith He has secured in redemption. This is why John ends our text this way "whoever loves God must also love his brother." Do you see the term "must" in the text? This is not a suggestion! It is also not a command to follow in order to earn God's saving grace. Instead, it is simply a declaration that those who truly love God will, inevitably, truly love their brothers and sisters in Christ. The two are inextricably connected and they can never be separated.

How do we show our love for our brothers and sisters? We display our concern for them by spending time with them, serving them as they have need, persevering with them through trials, providing accountability when they stray and showing patience to them in their struggles and missteps. These actions display God's love and posture towards us, and they are unveiled in Gospel community with one another.

July 1

Ecclesiastes 4:11-12

The community of faith serves many different functions in our lives. It offers us accountability, encouragement, and partnership in accomplishing the Great Commission. These are all necessary and marvelous results of being a part of a local church but they by no means constitute an exhaustive list. In fact, the Bible is full of reasons to be a part of a Gospel community and another one of the motives for Gospel fellowship is found in Ecclesiastes 4.

The book of Ecclesiastes is considered a portion of the Bible's "wisdom literature". There are several statements and passages in the book that are gloriously wise and helpful for us as believers including our verse for today. In fact, for my money, this might be my favorite verses in the book as it is both so simply and yet profoundly important and true.

Solomon provides two reasons why individuals need support in this text. First, we need support to meet our personal needs. In verse 11, he says "if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?" The implication of the text is that we need each other! There are things in life that we simply cannot accomplish apart from support.

The picture here is of a man or woman who is isolated in less than ideal circumstances. They are frigid and unequipped to provide the warmth they need as an individual. It is only in the company of another that the requisite warmth is available to make it through the night. The larger truth is that community meets the needs of otherwise finite and vulnerable people. We simply are not able to live this life alone, all of us need help!

By God's grace we are given that help supernaturally in the Spirit of God and socially in the people of God, the church. Those who claim to not need community misunderstand their own limitations and mischaracterize the plan of God for human flourishing which is always communal in nature.

Second, we need support to navigate a fallen, and dangerous, world. Solomon goes on to say, "a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him". The picture here is one of the vulnerabilities of isolation. Like a predator waits for one of his prey to be isolated from the pack, so the forces of evil in this world feast on those who are not connected to the fellowship.

God has certainly provided many means of protection from the attacks of those who wish to do us harm (whether they be supernatural and demonic, or physical and fleshly) but many of those provisions are found in the body of Christ! All of us are enemies of the world and the forces of evil. All of us are prone to experience moments of attack and despair and all of us are therefore wise to be involved in the community that God has provided.

To put it negatively, those who claim they have no need of community misunderstand their own personal limitations and the necessity of protection that comes from fellowship. To put it positively, God has provided for many our needs in each other and there is strength for the battle in numbers.

July 2

Acts 16:1-5 & 1 Timothy 1:2

Growing up, “fellowship” always meant an event! If we were going to fellowship in my local church that meant everybody had to be invited, somebody had to cook a ton of food, there had to be a program and we all had to mark it on our calendars weeks in advance. Please do not get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with such a type of fellowship, but the biblical model of fellowship is generally far less coordinated and much more organic than that!

The Bible tells us in Acts 2 that the church met together for worship and then broke bread together in their homes. The picture is both one of sharing a meal together but also it is meant to denote the kind of life that simply incorporates others into our daily activities. There is an “as you are going” type of quality to so much of what God intends in fellowship. The discipline of simply grafting individuals into your errands, job opportunities, meals and even hobbies is an oft-overlooked component of true, biblical community.

Today’s texts are instructive in this regard. I have always been blown away by Paul’s claim about Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:2. How can Paul say that Timothy was his “child”? We do not believe that Paul was ever married, we know he was not guilty of a sexually immoral affair, and we know that Timothy was not a Jew! How is it that Paul could claim Timothy as a son? The answer is that Timothy had become so dear to Paul that he was Paul’s child, and this relationship was forged over time spent together.

In fact, in Acts 16, we read of the genesis of this relationship as Paul decides to take young Timothy with him as he goes about his missionary journey. The picture is instructive. Paul takes Timothy with him as he goes about ministry. He does this in order to build a relationship and train his young disciple and that training takes place both formally (as in sit down discussions about theology) and informally (in talks around dinner and sharing life together).

The result of this relationship is an intimacy and affection and maturity that is largely unknown to the 21st Century American church. Timothy grew to love Paul and learned immense truths from Paul’s words and lifestyle and these things served to forge a bond between the two that simply could not be explained in any other way.

Now, I know that none of you are embarking on a missionary journey! However, it is important for us to note that we grow in our relationships through time spent. There is no substitute for intentionality and time. Just as the early church spent many of their meals together and just as Paul took Timothy along with him as he navigated this world in ministry, so you and I MUST make time for each other. We will never grow in our affection for people we hardly know.

So, what hobbies do you enjoy and who else likes them as well? Could you afford a few extra dollars in the grocery budget in order to invite someone over for dinner? When you are running errands, do you have time to pick up someone who could ride with you? When you are made aware of a need, could you call someone else in the fellowship to ask if they would serve with you? These things might seem basic and unimportant, but the result of this kind of time spent is a marvelous and long-lasting bond.

July 3

Galatians 6:10

Today's passage deals with the idea of service, and it gives a special emphasis to the community, or household, of faith that we know as the local church. In this text, Paul is dealing with the importance of "doing good" as we are able. The idea of serving is absolutely central to the Christian faith precisely because it is through the service of our Lord and Savior that we are believers at all! To follow Christ is to serve simply because Jesus served, even to the point of giving His very life as a ransom for us (Matthew 20:22). Our passage for the day shows us that our service should be universal in scope but calibrated in nature.

First, notice that Paul says we are to do good to "everyone" as we have opportunity. This is an important statement to make because it guards against an elitism that can befall the church if we are not careful. The admonition that comes later to serve those in the household of faith does not absolve us from loving and serving our lost neighbor. In fact, God's design is that we would be known by our love and service to the world as this is a wonderful representation of the Gospel and a means by which we share our faith. The church should be concerned with those in their community, and we should look for ways to engage and meet the various needs that arise.

Second, notice that we are to serve "especially" those in the church. The picture here is of a priority of relationship. Paul is not saying that our service to the world is at odds with our service to the church, but he is saying that we must prioritize the wellbeing and needs of our brothers and sisters.

Think of this like a medical triage. As you enter into an emergency room facility, the people who are tasked with your care are, necessarily, prioritizing certain patients over others. The emergency room absolutely desires (at least we hope!) to treat all who come through their doors, but some are in desperate need and take priority. If you enter an emergency room with a badly sprained ankle, you will wait behind a person who comes in with severe chest pains. In the same way, Paul says we should take care of the household of faith as a great priority.

Now, some may say this seems opposed to evangelism, but this is simply not the case. In fact, as the world sees our community love and serve one another, the reality of Christ's love is highlighted and the appeal of the household of faith is increased. Just as the Bible says in Acts 2, the serving church had favor with all men, so it is today. As we demonstrate the beauty and joy of belonging to the community of faith, we draw a stark contrast between the fellowship of the saints and the bankruptcy of the world.

Church, in our day we have a marvelous opportunity to show the difference between the disfunction, loneliness and selfishness that abounds in the lost with the unity, community and sacrificial love that characterizes the redeemed.

July 4

1 Thessalonians 3:12

Today's devotion is dedicated to a beautiful sentiment from the Apostle Paul towards the Thessalonian church. The stated desire is for the church to grow and abound in their love for one another and for all. Love is a marvelous and necessary component of church life but notice here how Paul claims love flows into the church.

The Apostle is clear that it is God who "makes" us increase in love for one another. The kind of love that Paul is describing is supernatural in nature. It does not come naturally to us as individuals, in fact it is the product of God alone. If you have true, redemptive, righteous love for your brothers and sisters it is because God has imparted that love to you through Christ.

Notice the scope of this love as well. You see the theme that we discussed yesterday once again emphasized in the text as Paul distinguishes and unites two objects of the church's love. First, they are to love one another. The fellowship of the body requires such a love, and it is of first importance that the church be known by their affection for each individual member.

Second, notice that Paul says we should love "all". This might sound wonderful (and it is!) but it is also incredibly challenging. Love for all means love for even the most challenging, hateful, vindictive, ugly, vile, duplicitous, and antagonistic among us. We often romanticize this idea by thinking of the most appealing and easy to love but this is not what makes love supernatural. In fact, Jesus was clear in Luke 6 that even the world loves those who naturally love them. The supernatural component of this kind of love is found when we love and do good to our enemies, this is the kind of affection and sacrifice that characterizes the church, and it is what makes us different from the rest of society.

Church family, as we close this week's devotion, I would like to take a moment to exhort you to this kind of love. You see, the early church had an offensive message but their obvious care for one another and the needs of those around them garnered them favor in the world's eyes. Obviously, this did not mean that they were not persecuted but it did mean that the world noted that they were unique.

I wonder if the world thinks this way about us today. Are we loving those who hate us? Are we loving those who are doing things we don't like? I am not saying we shouldn't speak the truth, but I am saying that we should do so without the kind of posture that is so prevalent amongst the world. Do we really need to personally insult those who disagree with us? Do we have to communicate hate even as we disagree politically? Do we have to justify name-calling, disdain and awful sentiments in order to speak the truth? I would say absolutely not!

The way forward is truth IN love. As the church in Acts demonstrated, the truth of the Gospel is foundational to the ministry of the church, but the truth of the Gospel propels us in the love of Christ. May we stand boldly for what we know to be true and may we do so in a manner that accurately represents the love of a gracious and saving God.