



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: June 21st - June 27th

Sermon: June 20th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

June 21

Romans 8:13

Our passage for Sunday records Peter's response to the crowds who are "pierced" by the recognition of their sin. As they see their transgression, they cry out for help in dealing with their standing before God to which Peter commands them to "repent". Yesterday, we talked for a few moments about what that term means. Repentance is a turning from your sin. It denotes both a recognition of the vile nature of sin and a determination, by God's grace, to turn away from pursuing such rebellion, thereby turning to God and His righteous ways.

Repentance is not optional for the believer. If one is truly going to follow Christ as a disciple, you must by definition no longer pursue the sin that characterizes the world. It truly is an either/or proposition! Either you follow your fleshly desires OR you follow Christ. However, there is another misconception about repentance that must be dealt with as well and that is the idea that repentance is isolated to conversion.

Some have preached and believed that we are only called to repent once. If a man or woman repents once, that is sufficient to secure salvation. However, that idea ignores the larger biblical testimony that repentance is both an act that occurs at the moment of salvation and a discipline that is characteristic of the believer's life from that moment forward.

The Bible is clear, even after we are saved, the vestiges of sin are still present in our lives. While the flesh has been mortally wounded, it still has a presence in our earthly lives and therefore the believer must make it a habit to refuse its advances and repent of those momentary falls into transgression.

This means that we are living our lives at war with sin and in a state of constant repentance (or turning) from sin when its presence is identified in our lives. Yesterday, I made this statement to summarize what I'm trying to communicate "to be at peace with sin is to be at war with God, to be at war with sin is to be at peace with God." The point is not that we are totally perfect after our conversion, the point is that we are on the attack, ruthlessly seeking out and killing all of the remaining sinful premonitions and actions we identify in our lives.

Now, that is quite a pithy statement if I do say so myself, but is it biblical? I would say, based on passages like Romans 8:13 that it is absolutely true that we should be at war with sin if we are going to live at peace with God. Notice here Paul utilizes terminology of war. We are to "put to death the deeds of the body" (deeds of the body is meant to denote the sins of our flesh, a term he uses in the preceding verses). The idea is not that we should live in harmony with sin, nor should we simply expect God's grace to cover our sin (although it certainly does), instead we should be vigilant in attacking the sin that is present, putting it to death!

What Paul is driving at here is a daily war of repentance and sanctification. Anytime we see sin in our lives, we should repent... immediately! We do so by the power of the Spirit (v. 14) which God grants us at salvation. Only those who have the Spirit have the energy and vitality to repent and put sin to death. By God's grace, may we be faithful to employ His power to overcome our sin. Brother and sister, be at war with sin today!

June 22

Acts 16:31

Peter's command to the crowd was two-fold. First, they were to repent. Second, they were to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Over the years, this command has given many folks trouble. Is Peter saying that if a person is not baptized, they cannot be saved? Many have stated that this is exactly what Peter meant but this would be a misunderstanding of the text. We know this because the totality of the testimony of Scripture does not support such a claim. Instead, the Bible makes it clear that we are saved by grace alone. There is no external action that merits salvation, instead man is saved totally by the Sovereign and merciful power of God.

The sermon Sunday emphasized the truth Peter's command to be baptized was given in order to highlight the reality that saving faith is active faith. If the people who heard Peter's sermon were not willing to respond in obedience, the faith that they claimed to have in Christ would be exposed as fraudulent. Peter was not saying that baptism saved them, he was saying that baptism was the evidence of faith in their lives.

Today's text is helpful because it allows us to see that the Apostles understood and preached salvation by faith alone. In our text for today, Paul is asked a very familiar question by a Philippian jailer. The jailer has experienced God's power and grace in a miraculous way and now is begging Paul to know how to find salvation. Paul's answer to the jailer is straight forward, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

The statement is simple, but profoundly helpful for us. You see, if baptism was the required means of salvation, then Paul's answer would be untrue! If people are saved BY baptism, then Paul would have necessarily had to instruct the jailer to be baptized in order to be saved, but this is not what Paul led with. Instead, the exhortation is clear, faith leads to salvation!

Those who would preach and teach baptismal regeneration (big term that simply means people are saved by baptism, or that people MUST be baptized if they will be saved) cannot possibly reconcile their opinion with this passage.

The teaching is clear, people are saved by faith, but we would be remiss if we did not point out that the jailer's faith led him to immediate baptism. The jailer was saved in the moment he exercised faith, but his faith propelled him to quickly display his conviction in obedience to baptism. The jailer did not need baptism in order to warrant salvation, but his faith led him to work out his newfound faith in his Lord and Savior by obeying Jesus' command to be baptized.

So, we see that Peter and Paul did not disagree. Peter is simply exhorting the crowd to live out their faith by instructing them that those who are truly saved will be obedient to God's Word and Paul is preaching the necessity of faith while leading the jailer to immediately display his faith in obedience. Both have faith at their root and obedient action as the fruit of their changed lives.

June 23

Romans 3:21-30

Today's text hammers home the truth that we have attempted to teach this week, namely that we are saved by grace through faith NOT through any action, however obedient and important it might be. The context of our passage is important, Paul is dealing with the reality that no man can earn his salvation. In fact, verse 20 makes this explicit as the Apostle tells us that "no human being will be justified" in the sight of God by works of the law. He means that there is no hope of our earning, or meriting, salvation and this is because all of us have fallen far short of God's righteous standards because of our sin.

If one were to earn their place before the Lord, they would need to do so through perfect obedience and yet this is impossible. This means that in order for a man or woman to be saved, they must be offered grace! That grace is found in Jesus who did live perfectly but died in our place, paying the debt of our sin (the consequence for our violation of the law) and offering us His atoning payment on our behalf.

None of this is merited, none of it can be earned and none of it is applied to our account because we were faithful to perform some religious ritual (even if that ritual is important and good). No, we are not saved by our actions but by Christ's actions in our place. This teaching strikes at the root of all false religion. Every other religion in the world teaches that we somehow merit our standing before God. To be fair, the steps one takes in order to gain the favor of the Almighty are vastly different but fallen man's propensity is to believe that he is able to earn his way into God's good graces. This is the natural conclusion of lost men, but it is absolutely anti-gospel. We cannot merit God's gracious salvation, instead Jesus has earned our salvation for us.

The question then becomes how do we benefit from Christ's saving act on our behalf? Is His grace applied as we try really hard? Do we have to jump through a few religious hoops and then God grants us salvation?

No! Instead, Paul answers our question explicitly in verse 27 saying "one is justified by faith, **APART** from the works of the law" (emphasis mine). Do you see the contrast? The idea that we could somehow earn our salvation through a work of the law, even an act of obedience, communicates our misunderstanding of the problem.

We are lawbreakers, we are guilty of breaking God's righteous decree and nothing we can do can restore us to right standing before us! Instead, it is Christ alone who justifies us and all of our obedience and adherence to His Lordship is a response to what He has done for us on the cross.

So, is one saved by baptism? Paul would say "no". One is saved by Christ alone and the one who has been redeemed by Christ now obeys in light of the salvation he has been given. Obedience to Christ is the result of salvation, not an act of merit.

June 24

Matthew 3:8

Yesterday we mentioned that we are saved by grace through faith alone. Our salvation is God's gift to us, not a result of works but this does not mean that works have no place in a saved person's life! While it is true that we are not saved BY our works, it is equally true that we are saved in order to perform good works (Ephesians 2:10). We could summarize this way; we are saved by grace through faith but the faith that saves is a faith that leads to work. Those who are truly regenerate will display the transformation that God brings to their lives through a transformed life.

While this might seem very academic, the ramifications of a misunderstanding of the place of works in the believer's life is everywhere. On a daily basis (no exaggeration), I meet people who claim to be believers without the slightest hint of God's transforming, sanctifying power. There is this misnomer that because we are naturally wretched sinners and desperately and totally in need of God's grace for salvation, that our salvation has no bearing whatsoever on our daily walk and, therefore, we have thousands of people in Dinwiddie County and the surrounding areas who claim Christ but display no evidence of a saving, sanctifying relationship with Him.

Our text for today helps us see that this is simply not a biblical perspective on the issue as John the Baptist commands Pharisees who are coming forward for baptism to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Essentially, John is telling the Pharisees to prove that they are genuine by bearing out the transformed life that is a necessary result of salvation.

John is not saying that their good works earn their salvation, but he is saying that the absence of good works and holiness, or fruit of faith, is enough to determine a lack of faith and, therefore, an absence of true salvation! Evidently, John the Baptist would not have been a big fan of the idea that we can't judge someone based on the evident fruit in their life! In fact, he is saying quite the opposite, that those who truly repent and believe will display that change quite clearly.

As we close, let us offer a few important qualifiers. First, John is not saying that fruit has to be uniform, nor that it comes on in an overwhelming fashion. All believers struggle and some produce more fruit than others! Nevertheless, this does not obscure the point that some fruit is necessary! Second, John is clear that this fruit is "in keeping" with repentance. This means that it is fruit of a life that has turned from sin and is pursuing righteousness. He is not talking about the weird, or bizarre, instead he is talking about the kind of fruit that is listed in Galatians 5 (love, joy, peace, etc.) which testifies of the sanctifying power of God in the lives of believers!

The main truth is quite simple, those who have been saved will be increasingly molded more and more into the image and likeness of Christ. Those who claim to be saved and give no evidence of being anything but worldly have no reason to find assurance in their confession.

June 25

Genesis 12:1-3

One of the key points of contention in the book of Acts regards the eligibility of the Gentiles (Gentiles is a word that means anyone who is not a Jew) to receive salvation. As we read that statement in the 21st Century church, it might seem rather odd to us.

Many of us have grown up with good preaching and mentors who have demonstrated the truth that God offers salvation to all people of every tribe tongue and nation. This is a cemented biblical truth in the church today but in Peter's moment in history, the idea that God was going to be busy calling Gentiles to Himself was incredibly groundbreaking.

The Jews of that day had grown up in an environment where there was little to no concern for other people groups. Their religious world was fixated on their nationality but was this a standpoint that was consistent with the Old Testament or not? The answer is that God had been explicit from the very beginning that his redemptive plan was meant to progress through Israel to the rest of the world.

We see this in God's promise to Abraham (Abram in this moment in Genesis). God's promise is for Abraham to enjoy many descendants and through this group of descendants, known as the Jews, the world would be blessed. God was busy creating a people who would reflect His holiness to the world and through those people He would bless the rest of the nations.

The question is how did that blessing materialize? While there are actually several answers to that question, the chief and final way that God has blessed the nations through Israel is Christ. It was through Abraham's descendants that Jesus was born, and it was through Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection that all people can find redemption from their sins. In Christ, all men are offered the hope of salvation and this coming Messiah was always the chief end of God's plan that was increasingly unveiled to Abraham and his offspring!

While the Jews might have been caught off guard and even repulsed by Peter's sentiment, their own Scriptures easily display God's international plan of redemption. Our God has always been concerned with forming a people full of men and women from the nations and this was ultimately realized in Jesus.

There is no room for racial superiority with the Gospel. Instead, the Gospel is intent on redeeming people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, uniting us together in Christ and making all of our differences pale in comparison to our corporate joy and commonality in the grace and redemption of Jesus Christ our Lord.

June 26

Revelation 7:9

I thought it would be neat to follow up yesterday's devotion with a passage from the other end of the Bible. Genesis, as you all know, is the first book of the Bible. It records the very beginning of mankind and teaches us how God was working, even in the beginning, to bring about His ultimate plan of redemption. Revelation, on the other hand, constitutes the final book of the Bible and it largely records the future end of time as we know it and the culmination of God's redemptive plan.

Whereas Genesis records the promise of the nations experiencing God's blessing, Revelation records the fulfillment of that promise as we read in Revelation 7:9. In this text, the Bible describes a coming day in which God's people will praise Him. This people will be exuberant and joyous, but they will also be incredibly diverse. In fact, people from literally every people group and nation in the world will comprise the redeemed in God's presence. They will stand to sing and worship and marvel at our great God and as they do so they will be the visible proof of God's promise all the way back in Genesis 12.

What I find particularly interesting about our passage from Sunday is how it fits within the bookends of Genesis and Revelation. Genesis promises that God is going to bless the nations, Revelation foretells a moment in which that blessing is complete, and Acts tells the story of the church pursuing that blessing, underneath God's providential power.

The book of Acts is the narrative of how God utilized the church to take the Gospel to the world. In fact, the book of Acts more than likely tells the story of how some of those who are in this future crowd arrived in glory. It teaches us that Ethiopians, Romans, Asians, Samaritans, and the like found their way into the Kingdom as God's people were faithful witnesses to the ends of the earth and, as such an account, it provides both a blueprint and an encouragement for us to emulate their commitment and behavior.

The simple truth is that the task of winning the nations to Christ was begun by the church 2000 years ago, but it is not complete! There are still people groups who have never heard the name of Christ and the commission of Jesus, given in Acts 1, still stands as our marching orders as well. We can rest in knowing that God's will is going to be completed but we must also understand that His Sovereign plan of international redemption includes our faithfulness in the life that He has given.

One of my prayers for us at Smyrna is that our church would continue to reflect the diverse nature of the Kingdom of God. I pray that God would lead folks from different ethnicities, countries and so on to our congregation such that we reflect the diversity of the Kingdom. Even more so, I pray that you and I take seriously our call to preach the Gospel to those who are "far off" as Peter said. May it be the cry of our hearts that all people hear about Jesus and that all who come to faith in Him are welcomed through our doors and into our fellowship!

June 27

Ephesians 2:1-10

The final point of the sermon dealt with the essential nature of God's power in the Gospel. Simply stated, we can and should proclaim the Gospel but only God can bring about salvation. Theologians differentiate between the external call and the internal call. The external call is the physical speaking of the message. Every person who is physically able can hear the words of the external call of the preacher. Many people come and sit in churches or have conversations with believers about the truths of the Gospel. However, the external call by itself is not enough. Instead, God utilizes the external call and impresses the truth of the words on the heart of certain hearers through what is called the internal call of the Gospel. The internal call is the work of the Holy Spirit and therefore it is supernatural. It is the impressing of the truth of the Gospel, the awakening of the soul to its glorious realities and the changing of our hearts such that the message we once did not understand or embrace we now cling to and love.

This internal call results in salvation, and it is solely the work of the Lord. It is the reason why preachers say that any fruit of their preaching is the work of God alone. It is the recognition that only God can convert a person from a lifeless sinner to a lively saint.

Paul's words to the Ephesians reference this regenerating work of God. You will notice in the text that God is the primary actor. In fact, God is the only means by which salvation is achieved. Paul describes lost men as "dead in their trespasses and sins". I do not know how many dead men you've been around, but the simple truth is that dead people are totally incapable of responding to anything or anyone! This means that they can do nothing to help their condition and they are imperceptive to anything that is taking place around them. According to the Bible, that same condition is characteristic of our souls. Not only do we lack spiritual vitality, but we also lack any assemblance of ability to change or even understand our need to change. In order for a dead person to be resurrected, something supernatural must happen to them, and that is exactly why God's call is necessary for salvation.

Look at how Paul describes the responsible party for our salvation. He says it is God who "made us alive in Christ", it is God who "raised us up with him (Christ)" and it is God who gives us even the gift of faith that we exercise. God alone is the reason for our salvation, and this is exactly what Peter meant as he preached to the masses in Acts 2. Without the internal call of God. Without His supernatural power, breathing life into our souls, changing our hearts from stone to flesh, giving us spiritual sight to see the truth and beauty of His gospel, there is simply no hope for anyone. Conversely, when a man or woman does repent and believe, we can know that it is because our great God has called them to Himself.

Indeed, as Christ articulated so clearly in John 6:44, no one can (a term of ability) come to the Son unless the Father draws Him. If you are in the family of God today, if you believe the Gospel, it is because the Father called you. What a marvelous reason to praise His holy name!