



2022 Weekly Devotions

Week of: November 21st - 27th

Sermon: November 20th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
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November 21

Jeremiah 9:23-24; John 17:3

Paul was provoked in his spirit by the lostness of Athens and because he was jealous for the glory of God. As mentioned last week, the jealousy stemmed from a desire for God to be rightly honored and worshipped as Creator God. These two reactions in his heart and mind prompted him to action. But what was the action that he took? Did Paul go purchase a sledgehammer from the local Home Depot and smash the idols? NO! Did he write a nasty letter or get snarky on the local TV stations? NO! I could go on, but you get the idea. Paul was moved to action and that action was to take to the synagogues and streets to make known the God who they labeled as “unknown.”

Paul knew that the cure for the city and its people was as simple as truly *knowing* the One True Creator, God. So, he says boldly in Acts 17:23, “This God whom you do not know, I proclaim to you.” Paul believes wholeheartedly that not only should you know God, but that you can know God. Since he already knows Him, he sets out to introduce our Great God to the people of Athens. That is his remedy for what ails the city and the people of Athens. Why is it so important to Paul that they know God? By the way, when he talks about knowing God, he is saying this in the sense of intimately knowing God in a life altering way. I would call it knowing God in a “saving way.” It is far more than knowing a few bits of information about God, but knowing His character, His attributes, and His ways. Paul wants to introduce them to God knowing that there is nothing more important than that and nothing more transformational than that.

Paul’s desire for them to know God is directly linked to his understanding that eternal life is attached to “knowing God.” As a matter of fact, Jesus said in John 17:3, “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” I believe it has been unfortunate that when we think of eternal life, we tend to think only of the length or time. We think of it is reference to quantity not quality. There is another aspect to eternal life that deals with the quality of life. Eternal life means that we enter into a quality of life in Christ that allows us to begin to experience aspects of the “heavenly” on this side of heaven. We begin to taste heaven and experience the blessings now that we will know and experience fully after we are glorified in His Kingdom.

So, when Jesus says that eternal life is knowing God, He is certainly referring to our eternal and glorified state in heaven, but He is also referring to our quality of life while we live here on earth prior to death or His second coming. There are rich blessings to knowing God now! Paul knows this both intellectually and experientially in his own life and wants others to share in this truth too. So, provoked to action, he sets out to help them “know” God so that they can have eternal life as well. Before we wrap this point to ponder up today, please stop for a moment and consider the words of Jesus in John 17:3 and pray that you truly know God and are not satisfied with simply saying you “believe in” God. How can you truly believe in a God whom you do not know. Get to know Him first and then decide if you believe in Him.

Finally, I want to close with a reference to Jeremiah 9:24 which says, “Let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord.” You can see why Paul was stirred by the Athenians pride, arrogance, and boasting in themselves and their philosophy. They needed God and Paul knew it. He did the most loving action a person can do for another – He told them about God and helped them have a shot at knowing Him.

November 22

1 John 2:3-5

Yesterday we looked at the truth that eternal life is the equivalent of knowing God. I want to be sure to add this important part of John 17:3 which says, "...and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." That reminds me so much of what Jesus told his disciples just prior to his arrest in John 14. There He said, "Believe in God, believe also in Me." Dear ones, you cannot know God if you do not know Jesus Christ. He is God in flesh; incarnate. Jesus is the exact representation of the Father and when you see Him, you see God (John 14:9; Heb. 1:1-3). So, again I want to emphasize that "knowing God" is deeply meaningful and must be rightly understood. Let's take that further now with today's point to ponder from 1 John 2.

How can you determine if you "know" God? You might say to me, "Pastor, I think I know God but how can I know for sure that it is enough?" That is an excellent question and I hope that all of us have pondered it. As usual, our goal today will be to let the Scriptures answer the question for us. John makes it crystal clear in this little epistle known as 1 John. In 1 John 2:3-4 he writes, "By this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him', and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in Him." Yikes! I believe that John makes it rather clear here. The key to knowing that you know God is obedience. It always seems to come down to the same thing, doesn't it?

Dear friends, the idea behind the answer being obedience lies in the truth of God and His Plan for our redemption. If we know him and we understand who He is and what He requires of His creation, then we must respond. If we believe that everything that Bible tells us about His nature and our fallen nature, then action is required on our part in light of what we "know" about this Truth. You cannot say that you know God or understand Him if all of this truth about His love, judgment, wrath, impending return, etc. does not stir you to make decisions to align your life with His commandments. This is a silly example, but it sheds some light on this. If we were standing in the yard and I said to you that a big bear was coming out of the woods to eat you, and you said that you believe me but simultaneously did not make a move in light of your new knowledge, I would know you didn't believe me or was just ignorant of what a bear could do to you. I must conclude that you did not believe me, or you had no respect for the bear. Either way you are about to be eaten by a bear.

I know that is a weak analogy, but my point is belief that does not lead to life change is not belief at all. John said that if you truly know God in a saving way, it will lead to obeying His Word. We honestly don't have any excuse for having to wonder if we know God well enough. Are you obeying Him? Of course, no one obeys perfectly all the time, but it should be the characteristic of our life rather than disobedience being our most common trait. John went on to say that if you claim to know God but disobey Him, you are a liar, and His truth is not yet in you. This is why Jesus could say that knowing God is eternal life because He assumed that to know God is to obey God which leads to eternal life.

November 23

Hosea 6:6; 1 John 2:12-14

Earlier in the week I referenced a passage from Jeremiah 9. In verses 23 and 24 we are told that man should not boast in worldly things. For example, we should not boast about our intelligence, our financial standing, or worldly accomplishments. We are told that we are to boast in one thing only which is our knowledge and understanding of God. If there is one thing that I want to be able to boast in, it is that I know God and can handle His word accurately. In my 55 years of life, I have come to see many times that the person that most people want to see when they are facing life and death is the pastor. Folks who never had much use for the preacher suddenly wants to hear about heaven and how he/she can be sure they are "right" with God when it's all said and done. When life is over, the only issue that will matter is what you did with Jesus. God is not going to be impressed with our education, our bank account, the degrees on the wall, the trophies in the case, or your status in the community. He will want to know of your knowledge and understanding of Him

In Hosea 6:6, the prophet writes, "For I delight and loyalty rather than sacrifice, and I the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Jesus quoted this passage twice in the book of Matthew. First in Matthew 9:13 and then again in 12:7. In both instances he was rebuking the Pharisees for caring more about the external, legalistic keeping of the law rather than compassion towards people and inward faithfulness to God and His commandments pertaining to loving others, mercy, and grace. My point so far is to consider what truly pleases God most. It is not outward, external adherence to laws with a cold, harsh, judgmental heart. God desires and loves it when His people are merciful toward others AND genuine knowledge of Him. God is in essence saying that your religiosity does nothing for me; I want you to know Me and My heart. Remember that the apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:10 that the only thing that mattered to him was knowing God (Christ) intimately.

Let's ponder today God's desire for us to continue growing in knowledge of Him; Back to 1 John 2. In verses 12-14 we find that John is writing to three different groups of people that are distinguished by their level of knowledge of God. First, he writes to a group that he refers to as "little children." These are people who might be considered babes or spiritual infants in Christ. They are born again but all they know at this point is that God is, that He is good, and that He loves them. Then there is the group that John calls "young men" (1 John 2:13b) These are the believers that have grown and learned to do battle with the evil one and developed a solid understanding of doctrinal or biblical truths. The last group he refers to as "fathers" (1 John 2:13a). Look at how John describes these spiritually mature saints. He says, "I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning." John describes them in view of their knowledge of God.

I want you to see that spiritual growth is directly tied to knowledge of God. As your knowledge of God grows so does your faith, your commitment, your service, and your willingness to deny self to serve others in a gracious, merciful and sacrificial way. These are the characteristics that Hosea says makes God pleased with us. So, it seems to me that a reasonable and intelligent person might see the value in spending time in pursuit of knowing God. I can't make you believe this, but I can say it again. The most exciting and beneficial subject for you to study is God. At the end of that pursuit lies peace, joy, fulfillment, and genuine contentment. There is a confidence and a strength for this life's journey that comes to those who know God.

November 24

Romans 1:18-22; 1 Thessalonians 4:5

As is so often the case, there are problems that we must deal with that are intended by the evil one to prevent us from knowing God. There was a time before original sin when Adam and Eve lived in relationship with God and knew Him intimately as they walked together in the garden without sin between them. As soon as they sinned, there was separation and a desire to hide from God. The ability to know him was damaged and to some degree hidden from us because of the blinding effect of sin and our fallen nature to care more about self than God.

What you will discover when you read our text for today is that sinned has marred our ability to know God on three fronts. A reality that should frighten humanity is that God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of mankind because they have chosen to suppress and ignore the truth that God is (Romans. 1:18). The NASB uses the phrase "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" while the ESV says, "who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." The point of this verse is that mankind *has the truth* but chooses because of their unrighteousness to suppress or basically ignore it. What that means is that the actual truth is inside of us as well as outside of us because God has chosen to place it there.

Romans 1:19 says, "Because that which is known about God is evident within them." God put a knowledge of Himself in man. It should be natural for a person to believe in God. Think about how most if not all little children would say without hesitation that they believe in God. The concept or reality is planted within them by God. Its typically later in life that we get so smart that we talk ourselves out of believing in God. That is not all this passage of Scripture teaches us.

The Bible says that not only did God put it within us to know that He exists, but He also put it outside of us in creation. Paul goes on to write, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). This is the foundation for the idea of intelligent design. Any reasonable person should be able to look at the wonders and amazing characteristics of creation and know that there has to be a designer. Think of how absolutely absurd it would be to imagine a pile of lumber, nails, shingles, siding, and everything needed to build a house being dropped off on a lot. Then think of how impossible it would be for someone to somehow blow them all up into the air and they fall down to earth in the perfect form of a house. That is exactly what you must believe to think that there was a big bang and all of this amazing creation, including us, just fell into place. Creation tells us that there has to be a God.

So, with all of this evidence, why is it so hard for people to believe in God? Afterall, He has written His existence inside of us, shows it to us on the outside through creation, and has written it in His perfect Word. The problem is simply sin. The knowledge of God is possible but sin blinds us from the beauty of God. Verse 21-22 says, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks...professing to be wise they became fools." At the end of verse 22 it says that their foolish hearts were darkened. We could in essence say that the lights went out! Paul exhorted the believers in Thessalonica to walk and please God by living sanctified lives for His glory not like pagans who don't know God (1 Thess. 4:5). Paul was surrounded by those in Athens who knew not God. Friends, be certain to pray that God would simply give you and those you love the eyes to see Him in creation and to sense Him within themselves so that they too might come to believe and obey God as King.

November 25

Acts 17:22-23

I think one of the biggest mistakes that people tend to make when attempting to share the gospel or their testimony with another person, is failing to simply be kind and to meet them where they are, spiritually speaking. Notice in the text chosen for today that Paul, even though he was provoked (angry), did not begin the conversation with the people with an attitude. He did not come at them with fire in mouth with his guns blazing. He did not treat them like they were stupid or evil. He began, as a matter of fact, with a complement. Friends, this is important because he did not build walls, create hostility, or come across judgmental before he ever got started. A good lesson for us is to remember to simply keep the door of communication open for as long as you can so that you can share as much of the story of Christ and the cross as possible. Do not unnecessarily add to the confrontation that they may naturally experience when, or if, you tell them that we are all sinners and in need of a Savior. Most folks don't like being told something is wrong with the.

When Paul entered a city, he sought out the devout persons there. If there was a synagogue, he always made this his first place to speak (Acts 17:17). Here he found men acquainted with the Holy Scriptures; here he found worshippers of God from among the Gentile nations. On a Sabbath, Paul would unfold the mystery of God unto both, showing and proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. When the Jews would become angry, envious, jealous, or simply come under conviction because of the things spoken by Paul, then he and his team would have to leave that place and move to the next providentially appointed location. Then, either in the home of a faithful disciple, or in a private school, wherever shelter was afforded him, Paul would continue to testify to both Jew and Greek "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

His teaching was done both publicly and in private. In Athens, it may have been in the market or from Areopagus. While in Ephesus, it was "from house to house" (Acts 20:20). Wherever the opportunity presented itself, there Paul taught. And, when there was no opportunity it seems he made one. Whether as a friendless stranger in a pagan city, a prisoner in bonds, or a shipwrecked castaway, this man ceased not to preach and teach both night and day.

When I consider methodology, I like to learn from the apostle Paul. Again, note that the complemented the people even though he knew they were, in many cases, worshipping idols and as lost as could be. The complement was, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious." I can just imagine them puffing up just as bit as they agreed wholeheartedly with his compliment. Then he goes on to say that he was looking at the objects of their worship which I am sure made them proud that the was "impressed" by their city and their devotion to religious things.

Now, that he had built a bridge and the door was comfortably open, his starting place was with one of their idols. You see, what he did here was very important. He did not say, "You guys are stupid. You don't even know who God is." He said, "Hey I see that you have a statue to an unknown God. They would say, 'Yeah, that's right.'" Paul follows up with this, "Hey, let's talk about that One." From there the sermon begins. I mentioned it earlier in the week and I want to remind you again, that Paul became all things to all people so that he might win some to Christ. This is a good example of that. Let's do our best to share Jesus with others, but to do it so as to eliminate any unnecessary barriers to the Good News. Remember, they are lost so there are going to be things about them that are sinful, confused, and just plain wrong. That is why God has providentially put you in their paths – to share Jesus in an inviting and loving way.

November 26

Job 42:7

When Paul begins his sermon at Areopagus, he simply tells the people about the attributes of God. Remember that he is trying to help them “know” the unknown God to whom they must offer some type of worship. It seems crazy to think they would worship a god whom they do not know, but I would submit to you today the thought that people do it all the time. Consider how many people offer our God some measure of worship or acknowledgement without really knowing Him. Oh yes, they know there is a God, and they might sincerely think they know Him, but apart from the Savior, the Scriptures, and the Spirit they cannot know God.

The Bible, God’s Word, tells us what God is like and what He is not like. Without the authority of the Bible, any attempt to explain God’s attributes (inherent qualities) would be no better than an opinion, which by itself is often incorrect, especially in understanding God. Job’s “friends” spoke plenty to him while he was suffering the torment inflicted upon him by Satan. God says in Job 42:7, “...My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right.” Folks, it is a big deal to put words in God’s mouth that He did not speak or to characterize him inaccurately. To say that it is important for us to try to understand what God is like is a huge understatement. Failure to do so can cause us to set up, chase after, and worship false gods contrary to His will (Exodus 20:3-5). Let us take a look at Paul’s sermon in Athens and see how he described God.

He begins by talking about God as Creator and Lord of heaven and earth (Acts 17:24), does not dwell in a temple made by man, and does not need anything that man can offer. Keep in mind that he was talking to people who worshipped hundreds of idols. Those idols were made by the hands of men and placed in locations that became their homes. Those idols had to be constantly “served” by the people as if they (the god) were in need. Paul is trying to get them to stop and think of how limited, weak, and incapable their gods are compared to the One True “Unknown” God who needed none of those things because He Himself is the Creator of all things and occupies, as Ruler, all of heaven and earth. I remember when Johanna and our kids were in Thailand. There we witnessed people coming each day to the little houses that housed their gods to bring them flowers and food. You see, those false gods needed the people to provide for them. Our God does not!

So, Paul is contrasting the weaknesses of their gods with the strength of our God. We learn in Paul’s sermon of the eternal nature of God. We hear of God’s aseity. I know that is a strange word but it simply means that God is not dependent upon any outside force for His beginning or continued existence. Let me explain further. We, unlike God, are dependent upon Him for our beginning. God gave us life AND we are dependent upon Him for our existence each and every day including every breath we take or every beat of our hearts. He has the attribute of aseity, we do not.

We also learn in Paul’s sermon of the immanence of God. That means that although He is transcendent which means He is far above us, He is also immanent which means He is very near to us (v. 27). Paul says, “...though He is not far from each one of us.” We learn of the fact that we are all connected as he started with one man and all others come from him. He is our Righteous Judge, we are created in His image, and He is merciful, gracious, and patient as He gives us time to repent. More tomorrow!

November 27

Genesis 1: 26-27; Isaiah 44:9-20; Acts 17:29

As we wrap up another week of “points to ponder,” I want to emphasize the point that Paul did not blatantly embarrass, not attack their lack of knowledge of God, but instead spoke to them so as to cause them to think. He wanted them to step back for a moment and realize, on their own, the absurdity of their belief system as the Spirit illuminated the truth of what he was proclaiming. At the same time, please do not fail to see that he absolutely challenged their worldview, but he did it with a method that would sort of sneak up on them. Let me explain.

The Bible contains in the book of Genesis the truth that we, human beings, are created in the image of God. As a matter of fact, it is written, “Let us make man in Our image, according to our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Then Moses adds the next verse that says, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (v.27). He created us with the ability to think, reason, to be creative, to be emotional, to fellowship, etc. No other part of creation was created in His image. Now, let us look at how Paul uses this truth in his sermon in Athens.

Isaiah provides a wonderful commentary for Paul’s sermon in reference to Acts 17:29. Paul is wanting his hearers to look at the ugly little, lifeless statues that they had made themselves, and consider the fact that we are not like them. Paul says that since we have been created by God in His likeness, it is foolish to think that God could be nothing more than a man-made piece of stone, wood, or even silver or gold. I could imagine Paul saying or hoping that they would just think for a moment. Pause, he would say, look at those man-made objects and then look at yourself and consider that we are nothing like that. In fact, he wanted them to consider that they made those gods not the other way around. Why in the world would you worship a god of your own making?

Go back and think of the first part of his sermon. In it he reminded them that this “unknown God” was the maker of heaven and earth and all of mankind. If we are the offspring of God and He made us, then it is not plausible to think that we can make Him. Since God is the Creator and the Sustainer, again we cannot make Him not to mention contain Him in some little shrine or temple. Isaiah paints a perfect picture of the absurdity of worshipping idols (Isa. 44:9-20). He talks about how takes a tree and uses part of it to provide heat, fuel to cook on, and then uses the leftover to make a god. He says, “They do not know, nor do they understand, for He has smeared over their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts cannot comprehend...they literally fall down before a block of wood.” People need the Holy Spirit to remove the scales from their eyes. Prat for that!

Now, let’s finish this off today by looking at Acts 17:30 where we are told that the time of our ignorance is over. God once patiently overlooked man’s “not knowing” Him, but no more. He has spoken through the Law, the prophets, and finally in these last days through Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-2). He has sent His own Son who is the righteous Judge, and every man will be judged at the appointed time. God has chosen to make Himself known to us and provided access through His Son. The Truth of who He is, is written in our souls, in creation, and on the pages of holy Script. We are without excuse, but many continue to live in darkness groping for answers, contentment and peace. Unfortunately, many continue to turn to and create idols of their own making which can never satisfy. Dear ones, ask God to help you come to the place where you recognize all that the world offers as rubbish compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord (Phil. 3:7-8).