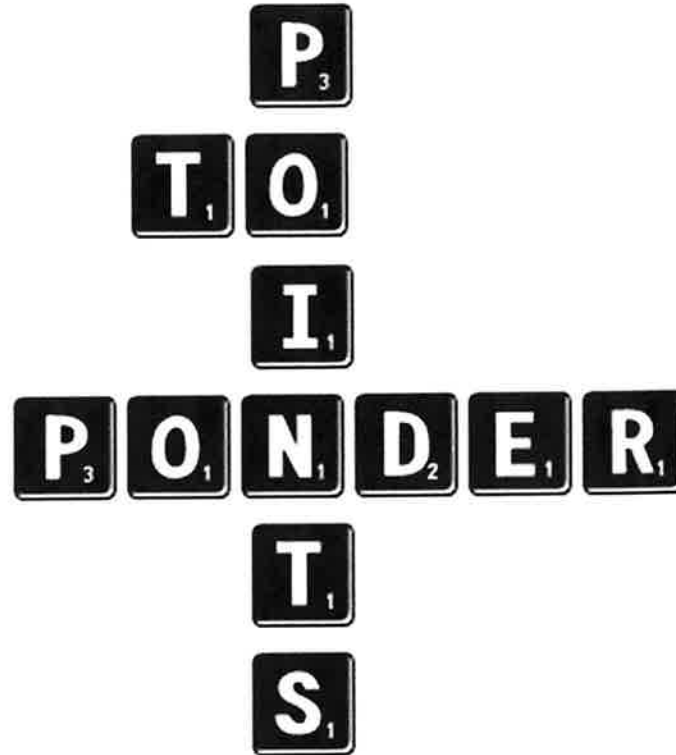




2025 Weekly Devotions

Week of: October 6th - 12th

Sermon: October 5th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community → equipping believers → serving Jesus

October 6

2 Peter 1:16-21 & 2 Timothy 3:16

One of the many awesome truths that we have as Christians is that we serve the God who has revealed Himself to us. The confidence that we have in Him is a confidence that we learn by coming to the source He has given us, that is the Bible. The Bible is unique among any other book that exists because God is the author who worked behind the scenes and moved, influenced, and directed the human authors who wrote the very words God wanted to be conveyed to His people. We see this in texts such as 2 Peter 1:16-21 and 2 Timothy 3:16.

In 2 Peter 1:16-21 the apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us that what he has written in this letter is not something he just dreamed up one random afternoon. It is not like Peter was just sitting around at 2:49 one Thursday afternoon and thought, “Woah, this would be a great idea for a story” and then started writing a fanciful tale to alleviate himself from his boredom. Peter clearly explains that he is writing about what he saw and experienced during his time with Jesus, as He walked the earth. Without using confusing or nuanced language Peter says plainly that the Holy Spirit is the one who carried along the authors of the Bible. There is no room in Peter’s thinking for viewing the Scripture as anything less than God’s direct revelation.

Along the same thoughts that Peter gives us, the apostle Paul helps us to further unpack the way we should view the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16 is probably the most well-known verse that shows us the divine origin of the Bible. Some translations say the Scripture is “inspired by God,” and others give a more literal translation by saying the Scripture is “breathed out by God.” However, both translations are correct. The writers of Scripture were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the very words that God had breathed out, that He spoke. Since God is the source of the Scriptures, the human authors have given us every word and idea that God intended to be preserved.

This confidence that we have in the Bible should help us trust God, especially when we come to passages that might be a little more difficult or confusing at first glance. Yesterday the sermon looked at Moses and his encounter with God at the burning bush. When God called out to Moses and made Himself known, Moses did not fully grasp all that God was saying to Him. Even when we have to take the time to dig deeper into the portion of the Bible we are reading, it is worth it to put forth this effort. Just as Moses encountered God at the burning bush, we encounter God when we open His word. While we do not hear Him audibly speak to us as Moses did, we nevertheless have His words when we come to the Scriptures. Remind yourself of this as you have your time in the word this week.

October 7

Matthew 3:17

Yesterday I reminded you that we serve the God who communicates to us through His word. Over the next few days, I want to briefly highlight some of the occurrences of where we have each person of the Godhead appearing in the Scriptures. My goal is for us to see the unity within the Trinity. Each person of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit shares the same divine nature. There are times when each divine person either speaks or shows up in the Bible. What this means for our devotions this week is that we should see the same weight and authority applied to each member of the Trinity's words. The words that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit speak are all equally the words of God.

While Jesus was here on earth, He was constantly teaching His disciples about who He was. We have the benefit of seeing the entire picture of His life because we look back to it in the pages of the Bible. The disciples did not have the same advantage as we do. In all of this though, God was patient with them as He revealed to them who Jesus is.

At the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, we have the account of His baptism. This picture might seem puzzling at first. Why was Jesus baptized? When we are baptized today, it is a sign to those who witness it that we have believed in Jesus. Our sins have been forgiven, and we are taking the first step of obedience. As it has often been said, baptism is an outward sign of an inward change. Baptism does not save us but is one of the first signs in our lives that shows we have already been saved by believing the Gospel. Jesus did not have sin. He was baptized in order to identify with His people. Matthew 3:15 tells us that Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus was born into a world that was still under the Old Testament Law. Jesus kept the law perfectly. His baptism was a way for Him to identify with His people. He was baptized to show that He was going to keep every requirement of the law. Because He was sinless, He could actually do it.

Verse 17 tells us that God the Father spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism. Matthew records it this way, "And behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'" We see explicitly in this passage that the Father speaks. He is able to clearly communicate to His people. The message that the Father speaks is the approval of Jesus, His Son. God had spoken hundreds of times in the Old Testament, see Gen. 1:3, Gen 7:1, and Ex. 33:17-23 just to name a few. He speaks in the presence of those gathered for Jesus' baptism. He does this to authenticate the ministry of Jesus. From this incident in the New Testament, we see that the Father is consistent; from the beginning He is the God who speaks.

October 8

Hebrews 1:1-4

Today I want to focus on how the Bible describes Jesus. When we turn to the Gospels, we come to words that Jesus spoke. I would venture to say that these are very familiar portions of Scripture. The nation of Israel had experienced various teachers through its history. Israel had also been warned, judged, corrected and at times encouraged by prophets who had been sent by God. In the pages of the Gospels, we have the uniqueness of Jesus on display.

In John chapter seven we read the account of a division among the people concerning who they thought Jesus was. Even though the crowd did not come to the same conclusion in their idea of who Jesus was, only some thought He was the Messiah, we get insight into who Jesus is from the report of the officers. John 7:45-46 says this, "The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, 'Why did you not bring Him?' The officers answered, 'No one ever spoke like this man!'" These officers had no doubt heard the teachings of the day from the Scribes, Sadducees and the Pharisees. It is also safe to say they would have heard other rabbis of the day. However, the testimony of these officers is that in all of the teachings they had encountered Jesus was different from every single person they had ever heard.

Jesus gives His own reason as to why His words are different. His explanation builds on the testimony of the officers from the passage above. In John five Jesus tells us that His testimony about Himself is true because it is validated by the Father. Under the law, a testimony was true if it was validated by multiple witnesses. Jesus said that His words were true because the Father testifies to the fact of their truthfulness. Jesus was saying that His words were true because He was saying the same thing the Father was saying. The Father and Son bear witness to each other's words and satisfy the requirement for multiple witnesses. John 5:19, "So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.'"

No prophet from the Old Testament would dare to say that he could do the works of God in and of himself. It is true to say that God did miraculous works through them and gave them His words to speak. Jesus could say that He does the exact same things the Father does because He is equal to the Father in deity. Jesus can do the very works and speak the very words of God.

An important argument of the book of Hebrews shows us that Jesus is the full and final revelation of God. Hebrews 1:1-4 establishes the fact that God has moved in the past through His prophets, yet Jesus is entirely different from all that have come before Him. The majesty of Jesus is on display in His words and actions. They are different than anything anyone else has spoken or performed because Jesus shows us that He is the second person of the Trinity, the divine Son of God.

October 9

Ezekiel 11:5

In Matthew 19 we have an account of Jesus talking with the Pharisees. In this encounter Jesus gives us insight as to how the Holy Spirit is active in conveying the words of God. Jesus has this to say In Matthew 19:4 “He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female.’” This one might require a little work. Dr. James White translates this verse like this, “Have you not read what he spoke to you saying”.

On Tuesday I used a few passages from Genesis to establish the fact that the Father spoke many times throughout the Old Testament. I want to emphasize from this passage in Matthew that the Holy Spirit is responsible for what is written in the Bible. Remember back to Monday’s devotion where the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of Scripture with the words they were to write down. Here Jesus is focusing on the written Word of God. Look again at how he phrased it, what the Pharisees were reading were the words that God had spoken. We see that God spoke these words to Adam and Eve at the beginning. When it came time to write these words down, the Holy Spirit moved upon Moses to record the words of God. So putting it all together, the words Moses wrote in Genesis 2 were the words the Holy Spirit guided him to write. Jesus tells the Pharisees that what they read was what God had spoken. Therefore, everything God had spoken in the Scriptures, in the past, the Holy Spirit empowered human authors to record. Jesus tells the Pharisees directly, and us by extension, that what we read in the Bible comes from God. What we read we are to receive as the Word of God.

Let’s turn to the Old Testament for an example. When we look at the Old Testament it sometimes seems like there are fewer occurrences of the Holy Spirit speaking directly. We have multiple occurrences of the Holy Spirit moving upon people and empowering them to speak divine messages.

In the book of Ezekiel, we find one of the often-repeated phrases from the Old Testament, “Thus says the LORD”. Ezekiel was a prophet in the Old Testament, and he prophesied as a captive of the Babylonians during the 500’s BC. Ezekiel chapter 11 is the passage I want to focus on in this section. As Ezekiel is proclaiming judgment against the wicked counselors, the Bible describes the specific way Ezekiel spoke. Ezekiel 11:5, “And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and He said to me, ‘Say, Thus says the LORD: so you think, O house of Israel.’” From this introductory portion of Ezekiel’s prophecy, we are told that Ezekiel is going to speak a message from God. The interesting fact from this verse is that we are given insight as to how Ezekiel knew what to say. Look at the first part of verse 11 again, the Bible says, “And the Spirit of the LORD fell on me”. What this means is that the Holy Spirit empowered Ezekiel to speak the words of the LORD, the words of God. Ezekiel did not give these wicked counselors his own opinions, he did not give them possible ideas they could choose from. He gave the very words of God because the Holy Spirit of God moved on him. From this we see that the Holy Spirit, though speaking through the man Ezekiel, is able to speak with divine authority. As the third person of the Trinity, when the Holy Spirit speaks, God speaks.

October 10

Genesis 18:1-15

We have been attempting to read the Bible with a Christocentric lens. This is a fancy way of saying that the Bible is chiefly about God in Christ! When the Scripture is interpreted in this way, we are guarded from reading into passages in ways that do not honor God and we also are allowed to see the depth of wisdom that God demonstrates in His plan of redemption which culminates in the death, resurrection, and ultimate return of Christ.

To be clear, Jesus shows up in the Old Testament in a myriad of ways. Sometimes, we see Christ through prophecies, other times we see Him as the fulfillment of covenantal promises, other times we see Him through “types” these are figures/objects/ceremonies which foreshadow Jesus who constitutes the ultimate manifestation of those entities or practices. However, on rare occasions, we simply see Jesus! These moments are known as “Christophanies”.

Sometimes, Jesus just shows up and He did so to Abraham in Genesis 18. We know that one of the visitors to Abraham is God because of the original language that is employed to describe what happened. I will quote here from the ESV study Bible notes that state, “The term here (Hb. ‘Adonay) is a distinctive one for God in the OT... If the spelling in the Hebrew text is correct- and there is no reason to doubt it- then Abraham recognizes that one of his visitors is a divine manifestation.” Simply stated, Abraham sees God, in the Person of Christ, and he knows it!

What most gripped me this week about this interaction was the way in which Abraham responds. Two things stand out about the immediate reaction of Abraham in this passage. First, notice that Abraham “runs to meet Him...” The idea of an aged man running in this cultural setting was truly reprehensible to those who comprised the ancient society. It was considered uncouth and undignified to run in such a manner and this means that Abraham violated so much of what the world said was appropriate because of his desperate desire to seek the presence of God. When God showed up, Abraham didn’t concern himself with his own dignity or the potential thoughts of others, he simply wanted to be in the presence of Christ. How about you? When faced with the choice of the world’s accepted practices and what the culture thinks is honorable or the opportunity to follow Jesus, what would you accept?

Second, notice the great sacrifice Abraham undertook to show hospitality and favor towards his Divine guest. Immediately, Abraham commands Sarah to get to baking while he goes to the flock and slaughters/prepares one of his most choice animals for a feast. This feast wasn’t planned, it wasn’t in the proverbial budget, but it was totally worth the sacrifice for the joy of honoring the special guest. Folks, the presence of God demands our sacrifice, but the presence of God should bring us such joy that the sacrifice He commands should pale in comparison to the joy we get from being with Him. Dear brother or sister, if the sacrifice to follow Christ seems like too much of a cost to pay, the real problem is grounded in our understanding and perception of the joy of being in Jesus’ presence.

October 11

Exodus 3:1-10

We serve a God who speaks. In fact, His Word is the very foundation upon which we understand and embrace the Christian faith. While Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith and the very ground upon which we stand, the Word of God is the means whereby we learn about this Jesus, in fact Paul would teach us that faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ, and this means that the Bible is a crucial and necessary resource for conversion and the subsequent Christian life.

The method that God employs to speak is varied. Typically, God spoke in the Old Testament through prophets. These were individuals who were commissioned by God with a very specific message. However, there were some atypical moments in redemptive history when God refused the medium of a prophet and simply showed up and spoke Himself and Exodus 3 records one of those miraculous and glorious occurrences.

The burning bush is a familiar text to most Christians, but does it describe a theophany? Some would quibble with our assessment that the One speaking here is in fact God. After all, the speaker is clearly referred to as the "Angel of the Lord." Where do we come up with this idea that the One speaking is Christ? The answer is grounded in the language that undergirds the passage; the context makes it unmistakable that the Lord is in view. Kenneth Harris writes, "Where the angel of the Lord appears in the Old Testament, he is often described as acting or speaking in a manner that suggests he is more than simply an angel or messenger and that he is closely identified with God Himself. Here he appears to Moses in a flame of fire, which is a sign of God's presence throughout the events narrated in the book of Exodus: in the pillar of fire and cloud that leads and protects the Israelites; in the signs of God's presence on Mount Sinai; and in the tabernacle... Furthermore, in verse 4 this angel of God is identified as 'The Lord' and 'God'."

The point of the passage is clearly to communicate the power and authority of God. Moses receives the instructions to go back to Egypt to stand against Pharaoh and he knows that his message won't be well received, nevertheless the instruction is clear and the One who guarantees his ultimate victory is the great I Am. The great I Am is self-existent and therefore depends upon no one for His victory, He is the creator and sustainer of all things and therefore able to do as He pleases in creation, and He is unchanging in His character and therefore what He says can be trusted! The point of the passage is that Christ's presence and His very Person is plenty for us to stand in the battle against whatever assails us.

God gives us this story for many reasons. Certainly, we should know the redemptive history of the faith, certainly we should marvel at His wonder working power but also, we should be reminded that His commands are always to be heeded and that His very character makes sure those things which might seem most outlandish to us.

Folks, the God who showed up and spoke to Moses is the same God who delivered Moses and His people and the same God who overwhelmed the grave and that God is alive and well and speaking today. Our job is not to gauge the legitimacy or believability of His commands, our job is to follow in the example of Moses who heard and heeded the clear instruction of God!

October 12

Daniel 3:16-28

Well, we have arrived at our last devotion for the week, and, in my opinion, this is the best theophany of all! The context is familiar to most but, to rehash just a bit, King Nebuchadnezzar commanded all people to bow down to an idol that was made in his image. Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, being the faithful men of God that they were, refused to do so and, therefore, were condemned to death by fire in a furnace.

There is a marvelous statement of faith that is delivered by the men prior to their entering the furnace but that is not what I want to focus upon today. Instead, what is most interesting and illuminating in the passage is grounded in Nebuchadnezzar's observations regarding the content of the fiery furnace when he exclaims, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?...Look!...I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God"

This One like the Son of God was in fact the Son of God, who came to save the men from a fiery demise. The foreshadowing of this event is obvious but also instructive. Jesus did not just save three men from the fiery furnace; He would come to save all of us from an eternity of torture in the fiery pit called hell.

The difference is that Christ's ultimate salvation would cost Him more than what He expended in Daniel 3. Ultimately, Jesus endured the wrath of God, He took the penalty of the flame for us so that we could be spared its torturous burn. Jesus would come and be condemned to die by the Roman authorities but, unlike Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, no one preserved Him from the penalty. While Christ was clear that He could save Himself and command the angels to come and overwhelm those who placed Him on the cross, Jesus willingly walked to His death and suffered in a way that the three men didn't have to in Daniel 3.

He did this because our sin demands punishment, and He did this as the ultimate declaration and demonstration of His righteousness and authority. He was able to suffer in our place precisely because there was nothing in Him that demanded His suffering for His own sin. He was the spotless lamb of God. His suffering, however, was just a precursor to His resurrection and in His getting up He declared to the world His authority over all things. Not even death could stop our Risen King, and this is good news!

I hope we have been enriched by the study this week. Let me leave you with this exhortation... always look for Jesus in your study of the Scriptures. Admittedly, this week's devotions were dedicated to passages that scream of the presence of God but that doesn't mean that other passages are somehow devoid of Him. All things lead to Jesus, Christ is the point and pinnacle of the Scripture, and it is only when we see Him, truly see Him, that we are able to understand and properly abide by all that God has said and it is only as we behold Him that we are able to worship Him in Spirit and truth.