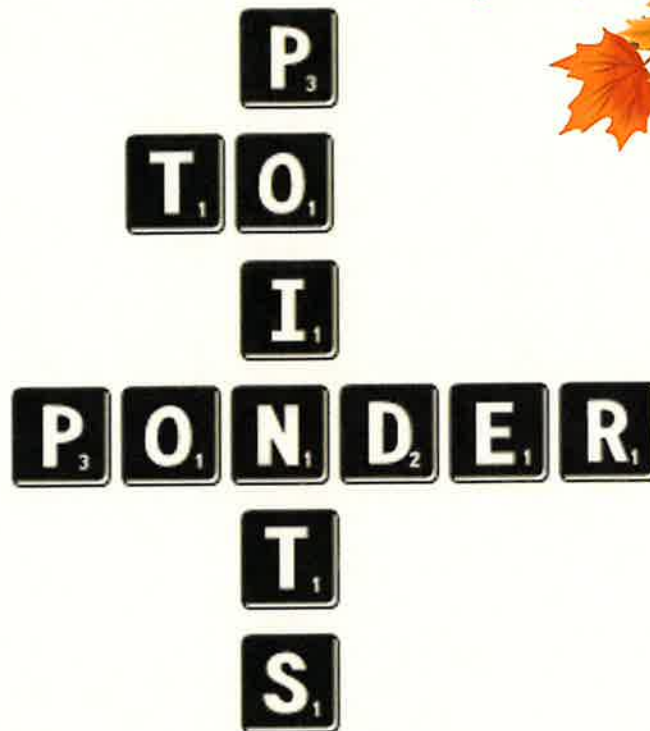




2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: October 19th - 25th

Sermon: October 18th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community > equipping believers > serving Jesus



October 19

Matthew 28:18-20 & Colossians 2:10

I am looking forward to this week's devotionals as we further explore the biblical teaching on the topic of missions. Let's begin with a reminder of the definition for missions that we utilized yesterday: "God's sending activity to establish His kingdom through evangelism, church planting, and witness, with the ultimate goal of God's glory and worship." Notice here that missions are not ultimately about man, it is centered on our desire to see God glorified. God gains glory through salvation as He demonstrates His power to overcome our sin nature and as the converted sinner spends the rest of his life proclaiming the excellencies of the One who saved him!

This week, we are going to look more into the nuts and bolts of our missionary calling by walking through the Great Commission together. We will stop frequently to examine what Christ means and the implications of His instructions to us as His disciples. Before we begin, let us take a moment to remember that this Commission was given just prior to Christ's ascension. At this point in redemptive history, Christ has died and has risen again, and He is preparing His followers to carry on the work of the Kingdom, through the Spirit, without His bodily presence.

Today we stop with the first clause of the Great Commission, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me..." Unfortunately, I hear comparatively little about this phrase when the Great Commission is taught. It seems that many have not stopped to consider the profound implications of Jesus' Words! Nevertheless, there are at least two clear implications for us here.

First, the Great Commission is not a "Great Suggestion". Jesus reminds His followers (which include us by proxy) that His exhortation comes from a position of authority. We are not at liberty to simply choose whether we will heed this command, we are obligated to obey as a follower of the One who is in authority over us.

Second, the Great Commission is destined to succeed. We should enter our task believing and trusting that God is with us and that He is able to ensure that we will be fruitful. Stated differently, we don't take on the task of making disciples in hopes that we may prevail, we undertake the God-given responsibility of making disciples with conviction that the One who has all authority sends and therefore we can expect to be fruitful. Paul reminds us in Colossians 2 that we have been "filled" with Him (indicating the indwelling presence of God that comes because of our salvation) and this means that we walk around indwelt by One who rules with all authority.

Dear friends, as we carry out the task of the Great Commission, let us do so with confidence that the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world. We have every reason to look forward to success but this success is not a result of our meager efforts, it is because the One with authority over all things empowers us.

October 20

Matthew 28:18-20 & Romans 10:13-15

Today's devotion is really predicated on one tiny, two-letter, word... "go"! There has been some disagreement about what this term means as it relates to our lifestyle. Over the years, some have taken this to be a direct command to leave where you are and head to another locality. In this manner of interpretation, one is not being faithful unless he or she changes their address! Others have pushed back on this interpretation and said that the term "go" is really in the passive tense which means that the translation could (and perhaps should) be translated "as you are going". This school of thought takes the command and makes it an exhortation to be faithful wherever the Lord has planted you meaning that the Great Commission is not about changing your locality as much as it is about obeying Christ's command in your daily life.

So, which is it? I believe the answer is both! I do not think you can rightly interpret the Great Commission, in its context, without some understanding that Christ is commanding His followers to endeavor to expand the Gospel outside of their hometowns and country of origin. The simple fact that Jesus says we are to "go" and then later alludes to "all nations" seems to make it quite clear that He had going on His mind. Conversely, it is apparent that His desire to see the disciples "go" did not preclude or inhibit their responsibility to make disciples in their country of origin. They were to be faithful in Jerusalem and Judea (close by localities) just as they were to be faithful in the rest of the world.

As we examine biblical history, we see that this played out in a very interesting way. Peter stayed in Jerusalem for a good while whereas Paul was sent, almost immediately, to the Gentile areas which caused him to traverse different continents! Each of these men was led by God, each of them was faithful in Israel and abroad but one stayed a bit closer to home than the other.

In the same way, Christians out to be faithful in every moment of their lives. Most of us will more than likely never leave our country to live somewhere else but some probably will (and should)! Nevertheless, those who "stay" should have a practice of going on occasion and supporting those who go and those who leave should make disciples wherever they are, including when they return! The point that Jesus is making is that our day-to-day lives should intentionally engage lostness. That we should live as if we have been sent out with direct orders, because we have!

Do you "go" in your personal life? Do you see your neighbors, co-workers, family and friends as mission fields? Do you attempt to engage your peers at the ballfield or the school with the Gospel? Paul's logic in Romans 10 is unmistakable. People will not hear the Gospel and believe the Gospel unless it is preached to them. Are you proclaiming the Gospel to those around you? Furthermore, do you pray for missionaries, long to join the work (even on a short-term basis) overseas and support the work with your resources? If not, ask yourself the question that Paul asks, how can the hear the Gospel if preachers aren't sent? Some may change their zip code, others may change their country, but all should be thinking about how to take the good news of Jesus to all who don't currently know it.

October 21

Matthew 28:18-20 & Mark 16:16

We move forward a few words in the Great Commission to the little phrase, “make disciples”. The connection between “go” and “make disciples” cannot be missed. The purpose of the Christian life is not to simply change locations; it is to go with a purpose and that purpose is salvation.

The term “make” denotes creating something that was not there previously. If I am going to “make cookies”, I am going to craft a delectable treat out of ingredients which, until combined, would not give me the same joy as a warm, savory cookie. In the same way, the implication of “make disciples” is that Christians are to labor, in God’s power, to form that which was not previously.

The question before us is how would we go about making disciples? The answer is evangelism! Jesus is commanding His followers to proclaim the truth of the cross because it is through their repentance and faith that they are born again and only those who have been born again are followers of Christ.

This might seem obvious, but it has not been all that clear to supposed Christians over the years. Frankly, I’m not sure many in our own community and, dare I say it, our own church grasps this truth. Much of what has passed for “missions” has no Gospel in it at all. While we are certainly not averse to helping those with physical needs, let us be reminded here that Jesus’ clear command is that we take the Good News of the Gospel and proclaim it to those who need to hear it! Without the message of Christ crucified, the effort (however well intended) falls short of Great Commission faithfulness.

Paul makes it clear in his writing that his missionary journeys were founded upon teaching the truth of the Gospel. In fact, he claims that he decided to know nothing, but Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). He pronounced a curse upon himself if he did not preach the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16) and we are to follow him in this regard.

Christian missions are Christian because Christ is the center and Christ cannot be the center if His Person and work are assumed, He must be named. This is important for us as a church as we contemplate and pray about who we are to support and what we are to do. We must endeavor to proclaim the Gospel in our personal lives “as we are going” and we must find those who are proclaiming the Gospel in their missionary efforts. This is not my opinion alone, it is the clear result of following Jesus’ orders as given to us in the Great Commission.

October 22

Matthew 28:18-20 & Revelation 7:9

We move forward in our Great Commission study today with the next clause which says that we are to go and make disciples “of all nations”. Christ’s command is global in nature. There is no getting around the fact that Jesus intended for His church to expand across the entirety of the earth.

The instruction itself is abundantly clear. There is little doubt that Christ desires for His followers to share His Gospel to all who need it, but many followers have attempted to muddy the waters regarding Christian mission. Some have stated that Christian mission does not require a person to leave their homeland to share the Gospel. This is true! There have been many faithful Christians that never ventured far away from their homes, but it misses the point that the church (collectively speaking) is responsible, before God, to take the good news to the world. Whereas most Christians will not relocate to share Christ internationally, the church as a unit must endeavor and support efforts to bring the truth to those who need to hear it. This being the case, all Christians have a part to play. Missionaries may be on the front lines but those who remain must: pray, give and go even for short periods.

Second, some have attempted to make the Great Commission ALL about leaving home in order to share the Gospel. This understanding is warped as well. Whereas it is certainly true that Christ desires people from all nations to be saved by our witness, it is equally true that we are to be faithful witnesses at home as well as abroad. John describes the scene in heaven at the end of history when people from all across the globe unite to praise the Lord together. This wonderful and joyous view into the joy that will pervade heaven at the end of time reminds us that Jesus desires to save people from every tribe, tongue and nation. My point, however, is that this desire to save people from everywhere includes Americans as well!

The point is that we should be living our lives as if the entire globe is an arena for discipleship. A true Great Commission Christian will look for opportunities to make disciples in his or her home, business, social settings all the while longing for the salvation of those who live in different countries. He or she will proclaim the truth of Christ whenever there is an opportunity and support others who are preaching and teaching in places they may never visit.

What I have learned is that those who have a passion for their neighbor down the street also have a passion for the lost pagan across the world. It turns out that a heart that is dedicated to serving Christ and passionate about His glory does not differentiate between those who are lost next door and those who are lost across the globe.

October 23

Matthew 28:18-20 & Acts 8:36-38

Today's devotion fixates on the very next word in the Great Commission, "baptizing". Believe it or not, the topic of baptism is very contested within Christian circles. Today, my hope is to remind us of the centrality of Baptism within the Great Commission and offer a very simple, straightforward defense of why we at Smyrna practice what is called "believer's baptism".

First, I want you to see that baptism is not tertiary to the Christian mission. Jesus alludes to this responsibility in the middle of His instructions on purpose! Baptism serves a very important function in the life of the church. You might consider baptism the "front door" of the church. Some might push back here and say I thought faith alone was the way to heaven. You are absolutely correct! You will notice that I did not say the front door into God's Kingdom but the front door into the "church". What's the difference? The church and Kingdom are connected. In fact, we would argue that the church is the visible manifestation of the Kingdom of God. It is comprised of saints but, unfortunately, the church also contains a few unconverted sinners. This means that the church is an imperfect but genuine representation of the family of God. This begs the question, who gets in? The answer is all those who demonstrate an understanding and faith-filled embrace of the Gospel. Entrance into the fellowship is predicated on a public testimony of faith. The reason why the church has some weeds amongst the tares is because we cannot fully and perfectly judge a man's heart. Some people will be unmasked as frauds in this life and others won't be unveiled until the final judgment before the Lord (see Matthew 7:22-23).

What does this have to do with baptism? The answer is that since we cannot fully know a man's heart, we must move forward with his entrance into the church by his testimony. In order to be accepted into the body, a person must have a genuine understanding of the Gospel and a credible confession. Baptism is that public confession. The act of baptism is the action of standing before God's people and exclaiming "I'm one of you!". Because we cannot know the heart fully, we must have some way of gauging a person's heart by his or her confession and actions. This is what baptism is for the body of Christ.

Second, this leads to believer's baptism. Why do we insist that believers are to be baptized AFTER their conversion and not as infants? Two reasons, first, baptism is a confession of personal faith. An infant cannot make such a confession and, therefore, his or her parents must speak on their behalf. Second, the order of the Great Commission affirms this interpretation. Notice that disciples are "made" (meaning men and women are converted) and then a person is baptized. Baptism is not a preemptive act; it is a demonstration of faith that has already been born in the hearts of those who are baptized. We see this quite clearly in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch as recorded in Acts 8. Once he came to an understanding and embrace of the Gospel, he immediately desired to be baptized to publicly proclaim his dependence and allegiance to Christ.

The Great Commission recognizes this order. Jesus commands us to baptize those who confess Him as Lord but, as we will see, this is just the beginning of our responsibility to them as they commence their walk with Christ.

October 24

Matthew 28:18-20 & 2 Timothy 2:2

For years, the conservative evangelical church has understood the call to make disciples and baptize. Over the years many strategies and events have been engineered to see people converted. Missions movements have blitzed areas with the Gospel and large stadium events have populated the landscape of America. These efforts are not intrinsically bad but, if left with no follow-up, they fall woefully short of fidelity to the Great Commission.

The next clause in the Great Commission proves that Jesus was after far more than simple converts. Instead, Christ commands His disciples to “teach them all that I have commanded you...” The Great Commission is not fulfilled when a person is born again, the Great Commission is fulfilled when a person is brought to maturity in the truth.

Unfortunately, the net effect of leaving people in their infantile faith in the interest of pursuing the conversion of another is negative. Christ’s design is not for a few overachievers who know more than the rest to travel the globe to save the masses. Jesus’ plan and expectation is that we would raise up numerous men and women who can reproduce. How does this happen? Faithful teaching and years of investment.

At Smyrna, we believe that you can see the fruit of this kind of faithfulness. Our ministry is not predicated on simply trying to convert as many as possible. If it were, we would rarely (if ever) preach most of the texts that we unpack on a weekly basis! If all that is needed is an elementary understanding of the Gospel, then the rest of the Scriptures (which unpack the implications and responsibilities of believers considering the Gospel) are not all that valuable.

However, if God gains glory through the holiness of His people and if their lives and their ability to proclaim Him rest upon their own maturity, then any strategy that short-circuits their growth is short-sighted and foolish. Our desire is for all of us to grow such that God can use us as capable and effective instruments to reach all we are around. The beauty of this undertaking is that, over time, the movement multiplies!

Jesus demonstrated this truth when He walked among us. He spent an inordinate amount of time with 12 men. This might seem foolish if the goal is to reach the world... after all, He could have preached better than them Himself! Why would He spend so much of His precious time with the same people when the world needed to hear about Him? The answer is that He understood that He was dying and ascending and He labored to make sure that His Gospel would be entrusted to those who could share it once He returned to His exalted position on high. Over the years, these men would take the truth and share it with thousands, they would record it for millions to review for the rest of history, and they would raise up others who could proclaim the truth once they died. This is the beautiful picture and goal of Great Commission ministry.

Smyrna folks, I desire to see an army of faithful and equipped men and women who can take the Gospel to places and environments I will never physically enter. We want to disciple you so that you can answer the hard questions and proclaim the truth with clarity amongst your family and friends. The result will be a transformation in Dinwiddie and beyond that no single preacher could ever realize by himself.

October 25

Matthew 28:18-20 & Deuteronomy 31:8

Today's final devotion is the most reassuring and precious to me. You can imagine the disciples' shock and, perhaps, dismay as they consider the ramifications and pure magnitude of what Jesus has assigned. How in the world could they accomplish such a monumental task? What about the times when their ministry is contested? Would they have the courage to stay the course when they are persecuted?

Remember, they had just witnessed Christ's own crucifixion, and they were scared as a result! Peter denied Jesus prior to His death, and, after His sacrifice, the Bible says they were all locked in a room together for fear of what may threaten outside. It is not hard to imagine that these men were overwhelmed and a bit dismayed at the responsibility Jesus was giving them and, I would surmise, they are not alone.

Perhaps you are a bit anxious when you read these clear words from Christ. It is natural to consider how challenging it will be to fulfill the Great Commission. We may worry that others won't always like what we have to say and it might make us fearful to consider the problems we may face along the way.

This being the case, the promise that Christ gives is a precious and soothing balm to the soul. As the Great Commission finishes, Christ reminds His disciples that He will be with them to the end of the age. The presence of Christ is the promise that makes the work possible! If Jesus weren't with us, we might as well just go on home! There is no hope that I could convert anyone. I need God's power and I need His wisdom to do what God has commanded.

Notice here that this promise is enduring in nature. Jesus promises not only His momentary presence but his lasting presence, "until the end of the age". What does this mean? The age in question is the age that is now occurring. It is the time period between Christ's first coming and His Second Coming. This promise is as true for us as His disciples today as it was in first century Jerusalem.

Dear friend, Jesus is with you as you make disciples today. He's with you around the dinner table when you share the Gospel with an agitated family member. He's with you on the airplane as you fly overseas to make disciples. He's with your finances as you sacrificially give to support Kingdom growth. He's with you in the living room as you seek to disciple your children. He's with you in the workplace as you stand against foolish, sinful policies or simply attempt to live a holy life amongst the ungodly. Christ will never leave us nor forsake us, and this gives us confidence and peace in all of life's circumstances. Dear friend, we are to be faithful to the Great Commission. You do your part and trust that Christ will uphold His end of the bargain.