



2022 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Sept 19th - Sept 25th

Sermon: September 18th



September 19

Ruth 2:3; Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5

Last Sunday, Pastor Aaron preached about the sovereign hand of God in the tension that rose between Paul and Barnabas which led to their decision to part company but to continue in service to Christ Jesus. He did a masterful job of demonstrating the spiritually mature way they handled their disagreement and how God used their decision to double the missionary work force. As we pick up in Acts 16 this week, we see another positive outcome of what happened at the end of chapter 15.

Upon arriving at Derbe and Lystra, Paul and Silas meet a young disciple named Timothy. I suppose it goes without saying that this encounter impacted the kingdom of God immensely as God used Timothy mightily in ministry. I begin here this week because I want it to be clear that God is indeed sovereign over all things and what Satan means for evil, God means for good. The meeting with Timothy was not by chance, fate, or luck. This encounter was no less the providence of God than was Ruth “happening” to end up in the fields of Boaz back in the book of Ruth 2:3. There it says, “So, she departed and went and gleaned in the fields after the reapers; and she “happened” to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz.” Trust me when I tell you, she did not just happen to end up there. Ruth was providentially led by the very hand of God to that field at that time.

It is important for us to understand and believe the doctrines relating to the sovereignty of God. Everything dear ones that happens in our lives is ordered by the Lord and part of a grander plan than we can often see. There is no way that Ruth, a Moabite girl, could have known that when a famine caused an Israelite family to move to Moab that she would find a husband as a result. She could not have known that her father-in-law, brother-in-law, and her own husband would all die early in her marriage. She could not have known that her mother-in-law would plan to head back to Israel and that she would be led to go with her to a foreign land to live among foreign people who worshipped a foreign God. All of that is precisely what happened which was all part of God’s plan for Ruth to meet Boaz.

Ruth’s providential encounter with Boaz led to their being married and having children. She gave birth to Obed who was later the father of none other than David the shepherd boy who became a king. Who could have ever thought of such an elaborate and detailed journey that was all intended to bring to life the one who would rule as king of God’s chosen people. This one, king David, would be a shadow or type of the King of Kings – Jesus Christ. This woman Ruth who “happened” to be in a particular field on a particular day, became part of the lineage of Jesus Christ. So much of her journey was borne out of sorrow but was all part of a plan that would bless her and the world to come. I can only imagine the wonderful events that God is unfolding through your life and mine that remain hidden and unknowable for the present time.

So, when we think of our text for Sunday morning and recall the heartache that Paul and Barnabas felt over their need to part company, we rest knowing that God meant even that for good. The “good” in this case was the call of Timothy into ministry and the blessing of his impact on the early church. Can you imagine the joy and encouragement that his mom Eunice and his grandmother Lois must have felt knowing their boy was a huge part of God’s plan for the early church. The Bible is replete with the impact of this young man on churches across the regions. Paul and Silas may never have found him were it not for the events that multiplied the mission force.

September 20

Proverbs 22:1; 2 Timothy 1:5-6

As you consider my chosen text for today, it should be understood that “a good name” is best understood as “a good reputation.” So, when we read that it is better to “choose” a good name rather than wealth and riches, what the Bible is talking about is the idea of going after that which is more desirable. In other words, it is the choice to make the decisions to live so that people recognize you as a person of honor, integrity, and goodness. To choose a good name is to pursue that which would establish such a name or reputation. Another way to say this might be, “It is far better to have honor and esteem associated with your name than all the riches in the world.” Of course, you must keep in mind that wealth is not the culprit in this text but how we obtain it. Riches are worthless if we destroy our reputation in the process. We would have paid too high a price.

I mentioned Ruth in yesterday’s point to ponder. She would be a good example of a young lady who, because of her choices, had gained a good name for herself (Ruth 2:1-13). A good reputation comes from obeying God’s Word. Read Deuteronomy 4:1-14 and 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 to see what living to please the Lord profits you. We should live to keep a clear conscience before God and before people (Acts 24:16; Heb. 13:18; 1 Thess. 4:1). Notice that even Jesus lived this way (Luke 2:52). It was men of “good reputation” that the early church chose in Acts 6 to serve the members of the church. One final verse before moving on is Prov. 3:3-4 which says, “Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So, you will find favor and repute in the sight of God and man.” Dear ones, we must do our part to exercise the faith that God has given us with fear and trembling so that we will progress in sanctification and holiness.

The connection to our sermon from this past Sunday is what was stated of Timothy in our passage. Luke writes in Acts 16:2 that young Timothy was already “well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium.” Church family, the majority of the time when a person is called of God into service for, and to His bride (church), they will be people who are already demonstrating a love for God and His people. They will be people who are well respected and who demonstrate what it looks like to be a child of God. Much of Timothy’s spiritual development was due in large part to the discipleship that he received from his mother and his grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5-6). The faith of his mom and grandmother was intentionally passed down to him through their efforts of teaching him about Jesus and the gospel.

We all know of the miraculous and unusual conversion of Paul, and a few like him. What we must realize however is that the predominant means by which a person comes to know Jesus as Lord is through the ongoing witness and training of others in his/her life. This is why in Deuteronomy we are told many times over that it is imperative that parents teach their children the word and ways of God so that they can teach their children and so on. The godly influence of Christians in the lives of the lost cannot be overstated. Timothy was purposefully trained to know and to follow Jesus. He was not left by his relatives to grope in darkness in hopes that he may or may not find the truth. Lois and Eunice left no room for the devil to slip in easily. They taught young Timothy the Truth and taught him how to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. The evidence is, as we read in Acts 16 that Paul recognized the Holy Spirit in him and desired that he come along with he and Silas to serve the Lord. I pray that our “name” would be more valuable to us than riches and that our name would bear witness that we belong to and love Jesus.

September 21

Acts 16:3; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

I can imagine the confusion that one may experience while reading verse 3 of our text from Sunday. With all of Paul's talk about not being circumcised and falling back under law and away from grace, one might find this verse completely contradictory to his teaching. Paul himself takes Timothy, prior to adding him to the missionary team, and gets him circumcised. Did this place Timothy under the law once again? After all, did they not just decide at the Jerusalem council that circumcision was not necessary for salvation? Well, it is certainly true that the leadership of the early church in Jerusalem settled that issue, and it is equally true that Paul and Silas were traveling through various cities teaching that very decision. So, what is this?

A key element to Paul's decision regarding the circumcision of Timothy is purpose. Paul did not have the young man circumcised in order to obey the law for the purpose of salvation. Paul already knew that Timothy was saved, this was a decision related, not to salvation, but to service in kingdom work. Now, does that mean every servant of the Lord must be circumcised? The answer is of course not. The reason Paul thought it best for Timothy to be circumcised is solely because of the people group to whom he would be working. Timothy's lineage would pose a problem, a "stumbling block", to the advancement of the gospel among the Jews. Timothy would have been considered a Gentile as his father was a Greek. Actually, Timothy would have been looked at as a half-breed.

To highlight what I am asking you to consider today, we must go to 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. There you will find Paul illustrating a principle to the Corinthians, and it is the principle that love limits our liberty. That principle is delineated in chapter 8 and chapter 9 through verse 18 of 1 Corinthians. They were wondering whether a Christian should just go do whatever he felt he had the freedom to do, and Paul says, "No, you have the freedom to do some things technically, but if you do them, you're going to make somebody else stumble, and you ought to limit your freedom by your love for that somebody."

That's the whole point of Acts 16:3. That is also what he's saying in verse 19 of 1 Corinthians 9. "That's what I do. I am free to do whatever I want, but I make myself a slave unto everybody in order to win them. I will set aside my liberty to win somebody to Christ. If somebody gets offended with something in my life, I'll stop that something, whatever it is. I won't do it in order that I might be inoffensive, in order that I might win them to Christ." That's what he's saying.

It all came about because the Corinthians were asking him a question whether they should eat meat offered to idols. And he said, "Well, it's not wrong in itself, but it's wrong if when you do that you offend other Christians. Or if you do that and other people think that that's wrong, then you have really put yourself in a wrong position, even doing something that in itself isn't wrong."

"But that isn't the issue," he says. Out of that one little issue of meats offered to idols, he draws a principle that's applicable for all time, and it's this: the Christian has a gray area between right and wrong, where he has the freedom to do things. And he can do them, technically, but he has to guide whether he does them or not by the fact of how they will affect somebody else. The closer you walk with the Spirit, the easier this will be to discern.

September 22

Acts 16:4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

One of the challenges through the years in leading people, or specifically in being a pastor of people is making sure they are staying on track with solid, doctrinally sound, biblical teaching/sharing. Rogue men and women have crossed our paths here at Smyrna who wanted to teach what we would call false doctrine or even heresy. Typically, the poor teaching would revolve around prosperity gospel issues or charismatic abuse of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. I have had some who wanted to constantly teach about demonic oppression, generational curses, and demons behind every rock. These folks were not allowed to teach here and were not given platforms to do so – as far as I knew! The point is that the need to guard doctrinal truth is a real and ever-present work of a good shepherd of God's people.

Once again, Paul demonstrates a principle that we should all live by and certainly one that governs our ministry here at Smyrna. In Acts 16:4 it is written that he, Silas, and now Timothy are passing through various cities, "They were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem." My simple point to ponder is that we are bound by the Scriptures to teach only what the Scriptures say. Followers of Christ, and certainly entire churches, are not permitted to make up the rules as they go or to alter the message in any way. We are tethered to the infallible Word of God as our anchor, guide, and authority.

Another example of Paul's faithfulness to the unadulterated message of the Bible is what he states in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. There it says, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel...For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ..." (vv. 1, 3). Church family, we must have confidence in God's redemptive plan. In that, I mean confidence in the way He decided to accomplish the salvation of His children. We must believe that it is not weak, feeble, foolish, or unable to save. Think for a moment of how adamant you can be about a solution to a problem when you are wholly confident that you are right and that it works and is effective. You find boldness and firmness in your conviction to the degree to which you are certain it is right and good. The question today is do you have the same confidence and trust in God's plan to save?

Paul stated time and time again that he preached the gospel just the way he received it. He did not alter the truth or feel the need to come up with a new, relevant, and innovative way to reach people. He did not cower in embarrassment of the "foolishness" of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). In fact, Paul stated it this way, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). Oh, to rest in knowing that the truth that we are privileged to know and to share is like a stick of dynamite that could go off in a person's life at any time. To know and to truly believe that the gospel is all we need and when the Spirit decides to move in a person's life, it (gospel) will transform their hearts and immediately change their lives. That dear friend is power. Why in the world would we feel the need to come up with something different?

Folks, I completely understand the temptation or pressure to sometimes want to hold back on sharing the truth of the Bible. Sometimes it just does not seem kind to tell someone they are in sin or that what they are doing is wrong. Sometimes it just does not seem like the gospel is the answer to their problem. Sometimes we are tempted to leave out some of the hard stuff or the spiritual elements of God's plans for individuals and families. But may it be said of us, and may we be confident and comfortable in the straightforward truth that God has given us to deliver. Find freedom in knowing you don't have to come up with something new or "brilliant." You just need to tell them what Jesus told you to tell them and trust Him from there.

September 23

Exodus 21:1-6; Romans 13:8

It may simply be the pastor in me, but I find myself often utilizing a passage of Scripture in such a way, hoping that we see what must be true underneath the text in order for us to live out the principle or imperative of the text. In other words, when I read about Paul telling Timothy he must be circumcised so as not to be a stumbling block causing the gospel not to spread, and his willingness to do it, I want to know what must be true about Timothy's understanding of faith, Lordship, eternity, self-denial and such things. What does he really believe that would cause him to see why getting circumcised in that situation is a good idea for the sake of the gospel and the potential salvation of the Jew? Unfortunately, I believe a huge mistake that Christians make is expecting others, especially lost people, to simply choose to behave a certain way regardless of the condition of their hearts. Again, what I mean here is simply that there must be a genuine heart transformation caused by genuine belief and acceptance *before* a person should be expected to understand self-denial for the good of others.

I think of Paul's writing to the Philippians in chapter 2 where he tells them to "Think more of others than you do yourself and to look out for their interests not merely your own" (Phil. 2:3-4). No one should be expected to understand that, let alone actually live it out prior to knowing Jesus and all that He did to come down from heaven to save us. When we arrive at the place of knowing and accepting the truth revealed to us from God's Word, then it becomes a reasonable expectation to obey and to worship our King (Romans 12:1-2). Paul recognized the need to have Timothy circumcised in light of his mission field, and Timothy saw the need to go through with that sacrificial and painful procedure for the sake of the gospel and the souls of men and women.

As I wrote in an earlier point to ponder this week, it is Christian love that should limit our Christian freedom. I believe a beautiful example of this can be found in an unlikely place in the Bible. Turn in your Bibles to Exodus 21:1-6. There you will actually read about one who has become a slave to a master. Now, I am not in any way addressing the institution of slavery as we know it from the history of our own nation. Within the context of this passage of Scripture, we are thinking more along the lines of an indentured servant. This man who has been bought into slavery is a Hebrew himself. He had evidently come on hard times and could not provide for himself or his family, so he took the roll of a slave in order to have clothing, food, and shelter. In accordance with Hebrew law, after six years of service, on the seventh year the slave is to be set free. Notice what happens in verse 5 of our text. "But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, wife, and children; I will not go out as a free man.'" He has the option to leave his master but because of love he stays.

Friends, it is because of love that we willingly remain in the servitude of our Lord and Master too. It is because of love that we are willing to sacrifice, to practice self-denial, and to limit our freedoms. We long to please the One we love and because of trust, respect, etc. we remain with Him and follow His orders as our Lord. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome that they should owe no one anything but love because in loving our neighbors we fulfill the law (Rom. 13:8). Dear church family, it is not easy to love people much less to sacrifice for them. The only way it is done is to love Jesus intimately first. Loving others flows from loving Him and trusting Him. We learn to love what and who he loves and are willing to let go of the temporal pleasures of the now because of our steadfast hope in His promises for tomorrow.

September 24

2 Timothy 2:8

From yesterday's point to ponder, the word for slave from Exodus 21 who decided to stay with his master from love, is very strong. It is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 7:15 in relation to the bond between a husband and a wife as well as the same word used in Romans 6:18,22 to speak of our union with Christ. So, it is a vitally important word. It is a word of the very strongest kind of union. He is saying, "I will bind myself to you and do whatever it requires to reach you, to minister to you, to meet your needs." He's truly a slave to the well-being and salvation of another.

He follows the pattern of Jesus, who said, "Whoever would be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Mark 10:44). That is precisely what Jesus was, for in the next verse it says, "I even came not to be served but to serve and to give my life a ransom for many." So, Paul says, "I'm willing to sacrifice everything to be your servant." That may cause you to ask the often-asked question, "Well, how far does this go, pastor?"

It goes just as far as it needs to go to reach somebody. How many things do you set aside to reach somebody? Anything that stands in the way. Paul gives the reason in verse 19. Here is his reason, "In order that I might gain the more." His objective is to win more people to Christ because he knows Proverbs 11:30 which says, "He that wins souls is wise." He said in Romans 11:14 essentially the same thing in reference to Israel. He said, "I would do anything, that by any means I would provoke to jealousy them who are my flesh and might save some of them. I'd do anything to reach Israel."

In 2 Timothy 2:8-9 he says, "Remember Jesus Christ...for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the Word of God is not imprisoned (bound). For this reason, I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus." In other words, "I would do anything if people would become saved. I will be a prisoner. I will forego eating things I enjoy. I will set my dreams and passions aside. I will give my life. I will do anything. And short of those things, I certainly will sacrifice some rights that might unnecessarily be offensive to others."

Here the Corinthians, like so many Christians today, were saying, "Well, it's my right," and so they were going out and doing what they wanted to do. Of course, the weaker brother and the unbeliever was not able to rectify that behavior and to resolve that with the faith they testified to, and it became a stumbling block. So, Paul says, "This is the way I live." Now, look at verse 1 Corinthians 9:20. Here he gets into some practical applications, just showing you the areas in which he worked this way. "Unto the Jews I became as a Jew." In other words, I adapted to their customs." Why, Paul? Here's the second purpose clause, "In order that I might gain the Jews." I think he would say, "whatever their ceremonial law dictated, I did. If it was important to them to have a certain meal a certain way, fine, I did it. If it was important for them to celebrate a certain day a certain way, fine, I did that, too. If it was important for them to follow a certain pattern, I did that as well." Why? "That I might win them." The point is simply that you gain the right to speak the truth by making adjustments that don't offend and aren't sinful in themselves. If you go in and offend people, you lose that.

September 25

2 Corinthians 2:17; Galatians 1:10

Let us ponder the question today that may have entered your mind this week. From 1 Corinthians 9, we learned that Paul did a lot of “adjusting” his behavior in order to win others to Christ. He was to the Jew as a Jew, to the Gentile as a Gentile, to the weak brother as a weak brother. Why? The end of verse 22 sums it up, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means” – what? – “save some.” What is his ultimate goal in all of this self-denial and adjusting? To win them to Christ he will be anything (almost). You might say, “He’s just compromising.”

I would be the first to say, and I think Paul would too, to say that is not what he is doing nor should we. The difference between limiting your liberty and compromise is the difference between what is optional and what is not optional. To condescend to meet somebody at their own level is to set aside a liberty that I have that is optional so that I can come down and meet that person where they are. To compromise is to set aside a truth that I have no business setting aside. The difference is in 2 Corinthians 2:17 where Paul says, “For we are not like many, peddling the Word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.” There existed people who were “using” the gospel for personal gain. They were men corrupting the truth of God’s Word so as to sell a cheap imitation of it in order to profit financially. These men were willing to compromise truth, water down the gospel, and preach false doctrine to win a crowd.

Do you know what a peddler of the Word of God is? He sells a cheap gospel that’s palatable to everybody by stripping it of its offensive character. He doesn’t talk about the crucifixion; he doesn’t talk about sin or hell, and he doesn’t talk about anything that’s going to offend. So, he sells a cheap gospel. I have heard it said, “They sell glass for diamonds, and people will buy because they don’t know the difference.”

Paul says, “No. Compromise is where you set aside the truth; condescension is where you set aside a liberty that you could exercise to meet a man on his own level.” Paul is not a man pleaser. In Galatians 1:10 he says, “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? I’m no man pleaser. I’m not going to set aside the truth for anybody. If a man is offended by the cross, that’s his problem. If a man is offended by the truth of the Word of God, that’s his problem. If a man is offended by church discipline, then that’s his problem. But if a man is offended by some behavior that I am doing that isn’t necessary, then I’ll stop doing that; That’s my problem. Surely dear ones that should make sense to your heart and mind.

So, to wrap up this week, remember that Paul having Timothy circumcised was not a compromise, it was like Christ coming to earth to meet us where we are. Jesus condescended to us to save us. God put on flesh to become incarnational and that is what we are asked to do. Live among people in such a way that you remove unnecessary obstacles to the gospel so that the only confrontational characteristic about us is the gospel itself. The “gray” areas are the places where we can make the adjustments that make room for relationship building among people who may be a little different from. Folks, try to become all things to all people that you may win more of them with the gospel of Christ. Don’t forget that Christian love limits Christian freedoms.