



2025 Weekly Devotions

Week of: September 22nd -28th

Sermon: September 21st



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

September 22

Psalm 145:13

Exodus 1 connects the conclusion of the story of Abraham's descendants as recorded in Genesis to the unfolding drama of their escape from Egypt which is quickly to follow. Amongst other things, this means that the introductory remarks of Exodus are meant to further the narrative of God's redemptive promises made to Abraham several generations prior.

The reason why I bring this up to start our devotions for the week is relatively simple, verse 7 takes on a far deeper meaning when we connect the development it describes with the promises that were made long ago by God. The preceding verses of chapter 1 remind us that there were 70 persons in Joseph's family when they relocated to Egypt and now, according to verse 7, the entire land of Egypt was filled with Abraham's seed!

Why does this matter so much? One reason is because the testimony shows us, yet again, that God is faithful! It seemed absolutely ridiculous to think that Abraham would have any children at all, much less descendants that were more numerous than the stars. Nevertheless, the Lord fulfilled His promise to Abraham (and He continues to do so today) and this was not by accident or happenstance, instead the multiplication that took place over the years is a direct result of God's faithfulness to His Word.

As Psalm 145 tells us and Exodus 1 shows us, our God is faithful. My prayer for today's devotion is that you take a moment to consider the nature of His faithfulness. God's promise to Abraham was not fulfilled expediently (at least not by most of our definition)! It took time and the road was winding. In fact, there was a great period between the Lord's promise to Abraham and even the first offspring! Regardless, God demonstrates time and again that He is always faithful to honor what He guarantees, and this should bring us great hope.

As we close today's devotions, I want to challenge you to consider the library of promises you might possess. It's one thing to say that God honors His Word to us and it is quite another to say that we know what God has stated. If we are not aware of the promises of God, we have much less to base our hopes upon. Friends, if you believe that God is faithful to His Word, if you see evidences of His character in stories like this one, it would be very wise to dive into the Scriptures in order to gain a clear understanding of the many marvelous promises He makes to those who love and follow Him.

September 23

John 15:18

Yesterday we discussed the reality that God is faithful. His faithfulness can be trusted but it doesn't always materialize in the manner we might expect. What I mean is that some folks erroneously conclude that God is not faithful because they endure momentary suffering and sometimes that suffering is even in the form of persecution!

One could argue that the first chapter of Exodus actually connects God's faithfulness and persecution. After all, Abraham's descendants had multiplied, and this is the stated cause of Pharaoh's desire to enslave them! If Israel had stayed small, it stands to reason that they might not have drawn the ire of Pharaoh, but if they had been relegated to a small clan, the Lord's promises would not have been fulfilled.

When Jesus came on the scene, we see an even more obvious example of this issue. Christ was a very prominent religious figure in His day, and His influence and wisdom constitutes a primary cause of the Pharisees disdain and history demonstrates that Jesus was not alone! In fact, He tells us that those who wish to honor the Lord by following Him should expect persecution as well. This means that suffering for the name of Christ is not an example of God's failure to be faithful, it is a manifestation of the trustworthiness of God's Word! If we are suffering for Jesus, we are experiencing the very thing that He promised. Consequently, you and I need to have a developed, biblical, understanding of the issue of persecution so that we can rightly interpret our surroundings and trust the Lord in the midst of our trial.

Over the next 6 days we are going to explore the biblical teaching on the topic of suffering beginning today with a straightforward statement from our Lord. John 15:18 is not hard to understand but it can be hard to embrace! Jesus made an absolute connection between Himself and His followers and, specifically in this text, a parallel between His own persecution and the persecution that would inevitably flow to those who dare to align with Him.

Christ was hated for righteousness. The "light of the world" served to shine light on things that the world desired to remain hidden, so they killed Him for it. In the same way, those who desire to let their light shine by proclaiming and living the truth of the Word of God ought not be shocked when some who prefer to live in the darkness don't appreciate their efforts! Folks, if you are going to stand for Christ, you must realize that some in this world are going to want to see you fall. This might include loved ones, close friends, government authorities, co-workers and the like. There may well be pain and angst over betrayals but that betrayal should not surprise us.

September 24

2 Timothy 3:12

One of the things that we should be aware of in our Bible study are absolutes. When the Bible says something “will” or “won’t” or “always” or “never” happens, we should lean into those texts. Our God is not an over-exaggerator; He is not guilty of hyperbolic overstatements, instead, He is a God of truth who speaks clearly and with precision in all that He says.

What I’m driving at is that the Lord’s declarations that something will happen is a guarantee and we find one of those guarantees in 2 Timothy 3. Notice here that Paul tells us that “all” who desire to live in a holy manner “will be persecuted”. Isn’t that an amazing statement? There were so many other ways that the Apostle could have expressed himself if He was so led. Perhaps he could have told us that “many” will be persecuted or that it is “possible” that persecution comes our way but that is not what He was inspired to write!

2 Timothy is telling us that those who follow Christ are guaranteed to suffer persecution. Now, to be clear, not all persecution looks the same. There are degrees of maltreatment. The persecution that a believer generally experiences today in the Middle East is certainly different than the persecution we may typically encounter in Virginia but degree is not the same thing as kind. If we are living for Christ, we will endure suffering.

This brings added meaning to our first devotion. We like to talk about God’s faithfulness to bring His promises to pass in a good light and, to be sure, there are numerous reasons to do so! Nevertheless, our Lord’s trustworthiness and faithfulness extends to all of His promises and predictions.

Folks, following Jesus will cost you. It may cost you relationships, social capital, health, reputation and the like. Furthermore, if it has not cost you anything, there may be reason to wonder how closely we are following Christ! Are you leading a godly life? If so, you should expect the enemy to notice.

My admonition to you today is simple, don’t allow persecution to discourage you or convince you that you are doing something wrong. In many ways, persecution is the world’s testimony to us that we are on the right track! To be certain, there are some qualifications we could offer here. We need to be sure that we are being persecuted for the sake of righteousness and not because we are jerks! However, we ought not be shocked when our kindness, holiness and love of the world is met with anger, carnality and hatred.

September 25

Matthew 5:44

We have established the fact that God is faithful to keep His Word and that His Word promises that those who love and follow Christ will be persecuted. I want to spend a few days discussing our proper response to this inevitable persecution. What should Christians be doing when the world comes against us? Transparently, it seems that this question is being asked quite often over the past few days. In light of current events, specifically the assassination of Charlie Kirk, it has become evident to many that we must have an answer for how to proceed. My goal today and tomorrow is to remind us of what Christ commanded in Matthew 5:44.

I want to take these two things in reverse order. Today, let us see that Christ commands us to pray. Praying for those who dislike us is not a natural thing to do, nevertheless, it is the biblical thing to do! Prayer is a declaration that God can do something about our circumstance and, specifically, prayer is an act of faith that Christ can change those who currently hate us.

The Bible records stories of Jesus saving and therefore transforming men who used to hate Christ and His followers. The most obvious example of this is the Apostle Paul. Paul despised Christ yet the Lord chose to save Him and remake Him into a faithful and loving disciple. In light of such examples, we pray for our enemies that God would make them friends because we know that He can.

When was the last you sought the Lord's favor and grace for those who are opposed to you? When was the last time you communicated with the Lord about their need of salvation over and against scheming, how you may best respond? Our level of prayer for those who hate us is a direct reflection of our level of faith in the saving power of God and our understanding of our own need for grace. If we see those who despise Christians as lowlifes, we are partially correct. It is certainly true that they are sinners and that their rebellion is repugnant, but it is just as true that it is only the grace of God that separates you and me from their plight! The difference between Christians and enemies of Christ is not merit, it is grace and that grace is available to ALL who would repent and believe.

Do you believe that God can radically transform those who are enemies of yours? If so, then pray! Beg God to do marvelous things in their lives. Ask Him to save them and to use them like He used Paul as a testament to His matchless mercy and unrivaled Sovereign power.

September 26

Matthew 5:44

Yesterday we dealt with the second portion of Christ's exhortation to us as believers, namely, to pray for those who persecute you. Today, I want to return to the first portion of this precious verse in which Christ commands us to "love those" who persecute us.

The term "love" is variably defined in our world today to say the least! Some believe that love is akin to universal acceptance. These folks would tell us that we are being "unloving" if we contradict or correct anyone at anytime for anything. The idea is that love must not only accept an individual but accept all their actions as equally valid expressions of their own humanity.

Frankly, this kind of "love" is both unwise and untenable. Every individual who preaches universal tolerance and acceptance is a hypocrite. They all have categories of unacceptable behavior, but they are too blind or dishonest to admit such realities publicly! For instance, I have yet to meet an advocate of tolerance who would accept and honor the serial rapist. My prayer is that no one would agree that pedophiles should be accepted and tolerated in their pursuits! Furthermore, the level of political angst in our country demonstrates that all parties have certain non-negotiables that require them to contradict and correct their enemies.

My point is that love cannot mean tolerance for all things. Instead, the biblical definition of love is grounded in communicating the truth with love. Jesus did not hold back from saying the hard things and neither should His church. If we believe that sin kills, that God is a righteous judge and that we are all careening towards a day whereby we stand before Him, we must communicate these truths to others if we truly do love them as Christ commands.

Love means we speak the hard things, and we do so with concern for the well-being of our fellow man. Love dictates that we never stop sharing the Gospel, living righteous lives and exhorting others to follow Christ. Love means that we point out the consequences of the sinful pursuits of others in our country and world precisely because we desire their good! Love means we speak the truth. We cannot shirk the reality that God has made this planet and, therefore, He has designed it to function according to His right rule. This means that we cannot expect blessing from carnality.

Do you love your enemies today? If so, you must express this love in word and action. Tell them about Christ, engage them in the truth and pray for them as you do so. Who knows, perhaps God will transform their wicked hearts as He has done so many times for others.

September 27

1 Peter 4:12-14

Persecution is a reality but persecution also brings hope! That might sound like an odd statement, but over the next two days I would like to try to prove to you what I mean. Today's text begins with a reminder of what we have been discussing this week... persecution is not unusual for the Christian! Peter admonishes his readers to view persecution (and other trials) to be normative for those who are in the faith.

There is nothing weird or out of place about a Christian suffering and this is precisely because we follow the One who demonstrated the wisdom and necessity of suffering. There are many false doctrines in our world today, amongst the most popular is the concept that Christ has come so that we can live in tranquility. Like many false doctrines, there is a grain of truth to this assertion. Christ did come to save us and usher us into eternal joy and peace but that does not mean that His coming guarantees us temporal joy and peace!

What is interesting to me today is that Peter tells us the real relationship between trials and approaching rest by stating that it is through our shared sufferings with Christ that we have assurance that we will enjoy eternal glory with our Lord. Stated differently, trials demonstrate our faith and those who have true faith have every reason to look forward to eternal joy.

Are you suffering persecution today? If so, take Peter's advice! Don't be surprised by the fiery trial. Don't be discouraged or disheartened or tempted to think that God has abandoned you. Instead, see this as an opportunity for your faith to be proven and strengthened knowing that this saving faith will lead you to the place where persecution is no more when you meet Christ in glory.

While we ought not pursue persecution, we should not see it as entirely evil. Instead, it is a badge of honor to be counted with our Lord. It is a joy to walk in His ways and to side with Him against the enemy. We should know that our involvement in the battle means that arrows and bullets will fly our way but this should never do anything to discourage us because our Lord has already won the war.

If given the opportunity, the wise man would choose a few years of pain and suffering in exchange for an eternity of bliss. This is the transaction we have chosen and it will pay off gloriously in the Millenniums to come!

September 28

Romans 8:35

I want to end this week's devotions with a bit of encouragement and, hopefully, a perspective that will enable you to suffer persecution well. The Bible would teach us that persecution is an opportunity. It is an opportunity for us to demonstrate the faith that we have been given, and it is an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power in our lives.

Today's passage is a personal favorite. The latter portion of Romans 8 constitutes one of the most helpful and hopeful passages in all of the Scripture (at least in my walk with Christ). There is a glorious fixation upon the Providential Lordship of God and His ability to preserve us from all things. We have a great guarantee in this passage, namely that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus and in the midst of this promise, we read that persecution is on the list of "nothings" that can separate!

The point that Paul is making is that there is nothing the world can do to remove us from the Lord's good graces. While this is true, it is also a truth that must be experienced! Historically, the church has enjoyed the privilege of seeing many godly men and women endure to the end. They have shown us that all of the devices and weapons of the world pale in comparison to the glorious grace and might of our great God.

This means that our own persecutions represent a chance for the Lord to show us that He is able. One of the results of our enduring hardship, therefore, is that we get to see the grace and faithfulness of God. Stated differently, if you and I were never persecuted, we would be robbed of the chance to experience the truth of Romans 8 in action. While that wouldn't preclude the fact that God is able to keep us through harassment, it would mean that we could not see His faithfulness and power in our own lives.

Folks, every time you are persecuted, you are entering into a moment whereby you can expect to see and experience God's hand. While you may not choose it (I hope you wouldn't seek out opposition!), the Lord will choose to allow you to go through it and, once you get out on the other side, He will provide you with more reasons to trust and worship Him by virtue of His goodness and grace.

My challenge to you is simple... don't allow persecution to discourage you. Instead, understand that it is normal and can be used for good. Enter into the difficulty expecting God to meet you and guide you through and then return to passages like Romans 8 and praise Him for His adherence to His Word. After all, as we learned Monday, our God is ALWAYS faithful and that includes moments of temporal pain.