



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: February 8th - 14th

Sermon: February 7th



February 8

Romans 1:18-32

Pastor Joe's first point yesterday was based on the idea that the world has gone crazy. Truthfully, I do not think I have to say too much to establish this fact considering the chaos that is our current cultural, political, and even moral climate. What we used to assume as obvious and binding has been cast off as restrictive and domineering and the free-for-all that has ensued is absolutely mind blowing. Our culture has few, if any, absolutes. We are constantly at war with anyone, or anything, that would seek to claim authority over us, and the result is maddening and disheartening. We cannot agree on God's design for the family, the existence of genders, the presence of any moral ethic and the like.

Today's devotion is not to continue to "pile on" to this ever-present and tired topic, instead my goal is to attempt to dive into the biblical reason for our issues. To seek to understand why we find ourselves in this mess, we would be wise to consult Paul's words about the lost and blind nature of the world as recorded in the first chapter of the book of Romans.

Paul explains the madness of the world underneath two broad headings. The first is found in verses 18-23 as the Apostle tells us that the world has seen the obvious existence of God and still rejected Him. We see His power in nature, we know that He exists but because lost men hate God and His rightful claim to authority over them, we have forsaken true worship and replaced the One True God with a false god (or gods) that we can manage.

The result of this approach is catastrophic and predictable. While we think we are wise (after all, we have come up with our own gods who like us and do not contradict us!) we become as fools. We are fools because our minds are darkened, and that darkening is a necessity. It is required because it is the height of foolishness to think that we can somehow arrive at truth while denying the truth that we have been given. Where else would a man turn for revelation when he refuses to accept the giver of that knowledge? To make matters worse, the world thinks it wise to be rebels. The Apostle says that the lost world thinks they are wise, but they become as fools. Think about the world we live in today, is this not appropriate? We think it wise to rail against the obvious existence of genders and then champion women's rights. We think it wise to deny absolute truth all the while telling the world that they shouldn't believe in absolute truth... absolutely! We instruct our college students that there is no such thing as a moral law and then shriek in horror when they live as if there are no moral standards in the corrupt business world.

There are undoubtedly many consequences of this approach to knowledge, but none are as frightening as the result described in v. 28-32. How does God respond to such rebellious foolishness? The answer is that He simply gives us up to our nonsense. His judgment is not as severe in the natural disaster and the plagues as it is in His indifference. Instead of interfering, He simply allows us to continue in our rebellion, wandering farther and farther away from truth and eroding any semblance of foundation that may be left. As the Proverb so wisely says "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (9:10). The inverse of that statement is equally true, the rejection of the Lord is the beginning of man's ruin.

February 9

Ephesians 2:1-3 & Jeremiah 17:9

Yesterday's devotion was really about culture on a macro-level. Paul is speaking in Romans 1 about the overwhelming state of the society at large but this manifestation of depravity still begs for an explanation. Why is it that the world is so full of sin?

Believe it or not, there have been many psychologists, philosophers, and sociologists (amongst others) who have attempted to explain this situation away without implicating the natural corruption in man's hearts. Broadly speaking, the social sciences have claimed that men are born with a morally neutral heart but, over time, society corrupts these otherwise innocent souls which leads to the decay and hubris that we see today. Theoretically, these "educated" (those who think themselves wise but are really fools) claim that men could grow up without the bent towards sin if society would cooperate.

While this might make academia feel better, the simple truth is that this kind of theory is the very opposite of what the Bible clearly teaches. The Scriptural reason for the absolute filth of our society is located in the corruption of every man's heart. The Apostle points to this universal presence of sin as he speaks to the church in Ephesus saying that those who are now believers (hence they are members of the church in Ephesus) all once walked in the "course of this world" having been "dead in their trespasses and sins".

To be more exact, the Apostle makes it clear that all of them once lived that way as they are "by nature children of wrath." The point of the text is to emphasize the reality that men are born with a natural desire and unavoidable bent towards sin. This explains the Apostle's statement that all of us were born "children of wrath," meaning we all deserved the just punishment of our sin as we follow the leadership of the evil one.

We aren't born "good" and subsequently corrupted. We are born "evil" and simply follow the desires of our wicked heart. The prophet Jeremiah states the same truth in Jeremiah 17:9 as he tells us that the human heart is so desperately wicked that we can't even know the sin in its depths!

Why is this important? Because it reminds us of the only hope the world has for recovery. If people are naturally sinful and "dead" in their sins this must mean that they have no vitality, no spiritual strength, to do anything about their condition. They simply cannot just improve on their own, they must be acted upon by an outside force. Someone must bring them, by His own power and strength, from death to life. Somebody has to fundamentally change their heart, altering their desires, providing life and strength they do not otherwise have all the while displaying the way to true life and righteousness. This "somebody" is of course Christ and, in light of our condition without Him, He comprises our only hope for true, lasting reformation in our own hearts and in the world at large.

February 10

Matthew 5:16

The Bible uses many metaphors to refer to the reality and effect of sin in our lives and world in general. One of the Lord's favorite metaphors is that of "darkness". Sin is described as utterly devoid of light, leaving us groping for revelation and unable to navigate through the challenges of this world. Darkness houses much evil; it flees from righteous light and it characterizes the day in which we now live. Conversely, light acts as a beacon of hope and a declaration of the difference that has been wrought in the lives of believers by virtue of God's saving power.

Whereas the first two devotions attempted to unpack the biblical certainty and reason for darkness, today's devotion pivots to our responsibility in light of the darkness that abounds. Those of us who have been brought from darkness to light have been given an explicit instruction that we must provide a beacon of light to those who are still engulfed in the night. This is Jesus' point and exhortation in Matthew 5:16.

His desire is for His church (those who are saved by grace through faith in Him) would allow their light to so shine before men. He wants His followers to be different, to live holy lives which set them apart from the surrounding world and display the power of God and hope that a dying nation and globe so desperately needs to see and understand.

How do we let our light shine? Jesus offers a generic but important answer to that question as He tells us that our light will shine before men as they "see our good works" and give glory to our Father in heaven. There are two components of "light shining" then. The first is good deeds. It is important to note that we are not saved by good deeds. Nobody gets into heaven because we are moral, in fact the last two devotions have, hopefully, done away with such an odd inference as the Bible is clear that we are incapable of good in our natural state. Good deeds are the product of salvation and, in a world so full of corruption, they stand out light a beacon of light in the dark night. The church, as it continues going about doing good, will continue to be set apart from the world and this light that it displays will be obvious to all.

Second, there must be an explanation of the source of light. Notice that Jesus says those who see our good deeds will give glory to our Father in heaven. The obvious implication of the text is that those who do good will declare the source of their motivation and strength to live righteous lives. It is only as people connect the light that they see with the giver of light that they may learn how to be saved.

Finally, notice that Jesus assumes that His followers will be busy doing good! The way to bring more people to faith which is the only way our world and culture has hope of seeing change (remember, nobody's heart is capable of real, lasting good without Christ) is through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we live in its power and display God's transforming grace in the process, we do far more good than attempting to be heard in the world while utilizing sinful and impotent tools of worldly persuasion. May we be faithful letting our light shine so that others may see and know our great and powerful God!

February 11

Philippians 4:11-13

Yesterday, pastor Aaron's devotion dealt with the general requirement on a believer's life to "let your light shine." The purpose of that admonition from God's Word is that as we serve others through good works in the name of the Lord Jesus, they will "see" our heavenly Father who is in heaven and give Him glory. The biblical truth is that we are to bring glory and honor to God, our Creator, by how we live our lives. Now, the truth is that there are times when it is easy to accomplish this task but then there are those times when....

Pastor Joe's sermon actually dealt with the times when life isn't so easy and letting your light shine is far more difficult. We all know there are times when it is all we can do to keep the light lit much less let it shine. In those times when life has become too hard to handle and imaging God is tough, we must remember the last point of his sermon – Jesus will help you suffer well. Today's devotion is one of those places where the Apostle Paul addresses this subject. He too faced persecution and pressures beyond anything most, if not all, of us have faced and he did it well. The question is how?

Paul writes, *"Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am...I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"* (Phil. 4:11-13). If you add to this 2 Cor. 11:23-28, you will clearly see that Paul faced intense suffering and challenges to easy living; Yet he continued to let his light shine. Of course, we see this in the life of Christ who reflected the perfect image of the Father all the while He was being rejected, mocked, scourged, and killed. The one who did it perfectly (Christ) is the one who Paul leans upon in his time of struggle.

Notice that Paul's circumstances in our text for today did not determine his contentment or faithfulness to the Lord. It was in spite of those realities that he was able to overcome and still glorify God. The all-important verse for today is verse 13. Here we read, "I can do all things through Him (Christ) who strengthens me." Paul had the strength to be Christlike in good times and bad times, in prosperity or in need. This is true because of the One who gave him the strength. The Greek word used here by Paul for "strengthening" means to "put power in." When you consider this passage alongside Galatians 2:20 which says, "...it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." It is the very presence of God the Holy Spirit empowering a believer and actually living through him/her.

Dear brothers and sisters, the only way you and I can live with contentment and peace in this crazy world is by the presence and strength of God in us. This fact, this knowledge and understanding is intended to encourage us so that we can hold strong and true in the face of suffering and disappointment. Our light can still shine for His glory and even brighter when we are suffering and hurting. Why? Because then He gets all the glory as the world witnesses our weaknesses and sees His strength sustaining us and giving us peace.

February 12

Acts 4:1-31

The passage for today's devotion has always been a source of encouragement for me. I hope it will be for you as well. We must fight the tendency to think of this text as a fiction. These were real men, facing a real threat, with real life consequences. We could easily understand if they had chosen to capitulate to the strong-arm tactics of the Sanhedrin. Peter and John had been preaching Jesus and the resurrection to the people. As a result of their faithfulness to proclaim Christ, many more people were saved (v.4). The message of the Gospel angered the Sadducees, so they put Peter and John in jail.

The next day they were brought before the leaders, questioned, and ordered to stop preaching about Jesus. During this interrogation, Peter and John boldly preached to them truth about Jesus as the Messiah sent by God to save people. I want you to take note of the fact that they preached in the face of persecution with boldness and confidence (v.13). Please keep in mind that this was a real moment in time. Two followers of Christ stood before hostile and powerful leaders and "let their light shine" before men. They did not yield to the pressure or succumb to the fear. This was one of those moments when the admonition to "let your light shine before men" could have been easily compromised and we would have understood it. But they did not! How could they face this moment and shine for Jesus? You see, the powers that be had threatened them further and told them to stop preaching about Jesus (v.18). Can't you imagine in our day this scenario playing out? I imagine a day when authorities will tell us to stop preaching against sinful behavior in our nation. We are already witnessing a turn against the church and disapproval in our culture. What will we do when we find ourselves in this situation? How were they able to be courageous, bold, and faithful as followers of Christ? We must get this!

They made this declaration, "It is right to give heed to God rather than man; therefore, we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." Precious family, it is imperative that we understand that the staying power for these tough moments is a real, genuine, firsthand, personal relationship with Jesus Christ Himself. The two disciples show us that there was nothing in this life that could measure up to the truth that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh and that He lived a perfect life, died, was buried, and resurrected. They could stand strong and shine for Christ because they knew there was a reward, a treasure, a home beyond this life that far exceeded the temporary pleasures of this world. They truly believed that to live was Christ and to die was gain. They honestly trusted that to lose your life was to gain real life. They also knew that Holy Spirit would be with them always and everywhere.

Church family, please know that when you hold to faith and trust God like this, you set yourself up to experience God in breathtaking ways. As they continued to pray for boldness in the face of persecution, the Holy Spirit filled them to continue trusting, serving, and shining bright for the glory of God. Pray beloved that we will continue to grow in knowledge and love of the Lord.

February 13

1 Peter 3:13-15, 4:1

To keep an incident or situation in proper perspective is often half the battle won. For me personally, if I understand what is happening and it makes some sense to me, I am better able to handle it and move into or through it. The problem arises when I am confused by my circumstances or when they simply don't make sense – on the surface. If I see no rhyme or reason or purpose for the “suffering,” I tend to struggle and fight against it. Our text for today provides perspective intended to strengthen us by helping us believe that there is benefit in our suffering. Now, before I go any further, please hear me say that you must be sure that your suffering is not due to your bad choices and/or disobedience to the Lord. When you have taken inventory of your life and you know that, as far as you can tell, you are walking in obedience to the Lord and are abiding in Christ (John 15:10-11), then you can move onto today's exhortation.

Now, as is usually the case, this is not a quick fix tip or how to “have a better life now” devotional thought. The basis for the peace, the strength, the courage, and the faithfulness in suffering is knowledge. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome and said, “...but we exult in our tribulations, knowing that...” (Rom. 5:3). James wrote, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that...” (James 1:2). You see, these men were exhorting their readers to trust the Lord when hard times and suffering come because they knew some things. Beloved we all know that life is hard, that we live in a fallen world that is under a curse, that people are sinners, and that Satan is seeking to kill, steal, and destroy. We are not home yet, and this is certainly not heaven. We are all on a journey and the path is filled with trials and tribulations.

So, imagine the peace and the confidence you would gain if while facing suffering you remind yourself of this simple truth, “Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed” (1 Peter 3:13-14). Isn't that a beautiful truth? Do you see how that becomes a means for faithfulness and perseverance? Just knowing that God will bless you as you remain faithful in your suffering helps. Of course, you might say, “Preacher you are nuts. Who is there to harm me? I can tell you who – the politicians, and the criminals, and all the other bad guys out there.” But what if you process your thoughts through Scripture? Rather than worrying you pray (Phil. 4:6). Rather than fighting to hold onto all that this temporary world offers, you remember that you have a home beyond this world and that there is no need to fear man because the worst he can do is kill you. You know that God, in His sovereignty, is directing your ship and all is well.

We can be confident because we know that as believers, we never really die and when we stop breathing in these old bodies we transition straight to life in heaven. We know that there is great reward for those who persevere to the end. So, we arm ourselves now with the precious promises of God's Word that give us boldness, strength, hope, and faith. We live knowing that God is working good in our lives and there is no such thing as wasted pain when we cling to the hand of our compassionate and loving heavenly Father.

February 14

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

If you are like me and most of mankind, you have an issue with feeling too independent and self-reliant at times. I could say that most of us have issues with pride. Pride is a serious offense against God and is the reason the Bible says, "He gives grace to the humble but resists the prideful" (James 4:6). We all know that God loves us too much to leave us the way we are so our entire lives are years of sanctification. God does what He knows is best to transform us into the likeness of Jesus. Sometimes that process includes pruning us and making us realize our true dependence upon Him. This means that we must be broken of self-reliance and the idea that we can handle everything in our own strength. What does that often look like for a Christian?

Our text for today speaks to that issue directly. Paul states that because of some of the privileges and experiences that he had, there existed within him a propensity to exalt self. So, what did God do? The Bible tells us that God gave him a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble. This "thorn" served to keep him "on his knees" so to speak. In other words, it was a reality in his life, unknown to us, that forced him to depend on God for the strength to endure and live with it. Paul was obviously not pleased with this thorn and so the text tells us that he prayed three times to God asking each time that the source of his suffering be removed (2 Cor. 12:8). As you know, God answered his prayers with a resounding "no," but instead reminded Paul that His grace would be sufficient to see him through his suffering and struggling with his thorn.

Beloved, much of what we have written this week dealt with the fact that we must simply trust that God is in control of all things and that He is working out a perfect plan for our lives as well as His overall plan for eternity. Today I add to that the reality that suffering keeps us from sinning. It keeps us humble; it keeps us aware of our need for Christ, and it keeps us near to our Savior. You and I both know that when everything is going well and life is "easy," we tend to get lazy in our spiritual disciplines and "fat" in our prosperity. It is when the challenges come, the fear rises, and the recognition that we are no longer in control that we lean into Christ. It is in these times that we pray and seek His presence with a serious determination and laser focus.

King David's most egregious sin occurred when he was on top of the world. He had experienced vast military conquest and popularity as the king. In his prosperity, victory, and ease he got lazy. We find him walking around on his rooftop and eventually falling into horrible sin. He did this with time on his hands and apparent ease in his life. Compare that to the prayers of lament when he was broken over Absalom or when he was fleeing from the sword of Saul. God knows what He is doing when He providentially ordains suffering in our lives. Without it, we will forget that we need Him and that He is our real strength. It is too easy for us to forget.

Friends, as we close today and this week of devotions, be encouraged with the rest of this text. He promises that He will give us enough grace to handle any and all situations that we face and will be in it with us. It is in our times of weakness that we are actually made strong. Paul knew the benefit of suffering and could actually say I thank God for them and will rejoice in my weakness because it is there that I see and come to know the beauty and strength of the Lord. In other words, he knows that the blessings are worth the suffering that we endure to come to know Him in the most intimate of ways. When we get to this place of intimacy as a result of truly knowing Him, then our lights will shine in good times and even brighter in the hard times. To God be the glory.