



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: January 4th - 10th

Sermon: January 3rd



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus

January 4

Psalm 19:7-10

There were two main points of our sermon this past week. The first point was that the foundational reason for believing in the virgin birth is that God's Word clearly teaches the immaculate conception. The problem with those who do not believe this account is multi-faceted and exceedingly troublesome. If anyone chooses to disregard the virgin birth, then they must choose to ignore the clear biblical instruction on the subject. Furthermore, this decision to disregard Scripture in just this one instance leads to a larger problem which is the fact that there is now no discernable reason not to disregard other passages or ideas that we either don't like, can't explain or we think serve to make us look foolish.

However, this is only one facet of a much larger tangled web that theological liberalism weaves. Over the next two days we will seek to understand two more problems that arise when we disregard the teaching of the virgin birth as it pertains to Scripture and God's character. The first issue is found in our text for today, as the Bible clearly states that God's Word is "perfect".

In the ESV, verse 7 begins this way, "the law of the Lord is perfect...". The term translated "law" is rendered "teaching, instruction or command" in other portions of the Scripture. Scholars largely agree that the entity on David's mind is God's inspired Word or the holy Scriptures. This understanding is cemented further down in the verse when we read David's statement that the "testimony of the Lord is sure". God's testimony is provided in His revelation of Himself in His Word which we know as the Bible.

Again, the point is that God's Word can be trusted but how would this verse align with liberalism's denial of the virgin birth? The simple truth is that it would not! Although many would like to attempt to explain away the virgin birth while still holding to the authority of the Word of God, the result of denying one portion of Scripture is a necessary refutation of other passages.

You see, if the virgin birth narrative is false then Psalm 19 (and 119, and 2 Timothy 3, and many other passages) are false as well. To deny the clear teaching of Scripture in Luke 1 or Isaiah 7 is to deny the obvious point of this passage today which is that God's Word is totally trustworthy. Stated succinctly, refuting the virgin birth has drastic consequences.

The effect of this kind of thinking is born out in many churches today. Whereas the true church is built on the foundation of the truths of the Bible, the unfaithful and fruitless church is constantly retreating from more and more biblical truths. Over time, countless texts and passages become unpreachable and, therefore, ostracized for the simple truth that the house falls is one plank of the Scripture is removed.

So, holding to the virgin birth is both embracing the narrative as we have it AND accepting and believing the clear statements of the rest of the Bible about the trustworthiness of all its various parts and components.

January 5

2 Timothy 3:16-17 & 2 Peter 1:21

Yesterday's devotion unpacked the truth that a denial of the virgin birth is also a refutation of the Bible's claim to total reliability. Today's truth is that a rejection of the Bible's claim to reliability is, essentially, an accusation of the dishonesty of God.

Our two texts for today both clearly teach the origin of the Bible. Both Paul and Peter understood the Scriptures to ultimately originate not in man but in God. In 2 Timothy 3, the term that is translated "breathed out" in the ESV is "theopneustos" in the Greek. This is important because it is a unique term comprised of two insightful parts. First, the prefix "theo" is utilized in several other words (theology, theonomy, etc.) and it refers specifically to God. Second, the term pneustos is derived from the root word "pneuma" which means spirit or breath. Words like "pneumonia" (a disease that impacts our breathing) derive from this same Greek term. Paul's point is that the Bible originates from the spirit of God. Paul's point is that this Holy Bible that we possess did not originate in the way that all other books came into being, instead it is the very product of the breath or Spirit of God.

Peter cements this understanding as he teaches that no man spoke prophecies by his own will but only as he was "carried along" by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is seen as the main and necessary actor in both of these passages such that only His inspiration and guiding leadership can be credited with the result of the Bible. The Scripture does not deny the utilization of various men, but it does help us see behind the proverbial curtain to the very oversight and supervision of God as He directed these vessels to write down His truth.

What does this have to do with the virgin birth? The answer is that to deny the Scriptures that teach the virgin birth is to call God, ultimately, a liar! I pray that the problem with this is obvious but let me drive this even a bit deeper. The Bible is clear that God is righteous, and that God is bound to live by His righteous standard. This means that God's holiness is directly tied to His very being as God. If God were to cease to be totally blameless, He would cease to be God because God by His own definition MUST be holy. Therefore, if the Bible is God's Word and if we refuse to accept the narrative of the virgin birth, we are calling God a liar (after all it is His Word) and, therefore, He cannot be God at all.

So, if Luke and Matthew and Isaiah all recorded God's Words in the prediction or narration of the virgin birth then we either accept God's testimony or reject Him as God at all. I would argue that this is exactly what theological liberalism has done. The reason why churches that deny the Scriptures die is because their leadership has refused to submit to and honor the One True God.

The virgin birth may seem somewhat trivial at first glance but at its core the issue is whether or not God's Word, and by extension God Himself, can be trusted. If the Bible is His revelation and if it is clear on a subject, then we must either accept it or deny Him.

January 6

Genesis 8:21

The second main point of the sermon was the “Instrumental Cause” of the virgin birth. The argument is quite simple as we stated that the virgin birth was not just a cool trick, performed by a matchless God, instead it was a purposeful and necessary way to circumvent the sin that entangles and enslaves mankind.

This argument is rooted in a doctrine called “original sin”. It is a biblical teaching that states that all of us are not just born with a propensity to sin but, rather, we are born already marred by sin. People are not born good and subsequently corrupted; people are brought forth in their corruption and then simply act out their depraved state.

The result of this doctrine is a conviction that all of us, at all times, are in need of salvation! Furthermore, this truth requires Jesus to have been brought forth in supernatural ways. If Jesus were conceived in normal ways, He would’ve been characterized by the same sin that befalls each and every person.

Today’s devotion is meant to cement the truth that we are brought forth in iniquity as we read these words “the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” The great American theologian Jonathan Edwards has written extensively on this topic including a detailed study on the term “youth” in our verse of the day.

Edward’s writes ““The word translated youth, signifies the whole of the former part of the age of man, which commences from the beginning of life. The word in its derivation, has reference to the birth or beginning of existence . . . so that the word here translated youth, comprehends not only what we in English most commonly call the time of youth, but also childhood and infancy.”

Moses’ point in the passage serves to cement our understanding of original sin. From the very beginning of our life, we are sinners! The unguarded way in which the Word speaks of this truth helps us understand that it is a general principle. The Word of God does not say “some men have evil intent” or “most men have evil stored up in their hearts” the Word utilizes the most generic term for mankind possible suggesting the universality of the problem.

So, how do we apply this truth? Well, one way is by understanding the clear teaching and formulating ideas that are in step with the instruction. Folks, the answer to man’s problems is not some sort of societal reform! The fundamental need is not less restraint or a reformation of power structures, the core need is salvation which results in transformation of our wicked hearts. This salvation can only come from outside of us and it must be accomplished by someone who would stand in our place, absorb the consequence of our sin and offer us His righteous standing before God.

Our need for salvation requires a perfect substitute! The requirement for a totally righteous sacrifice is also a prerequisite for the necessity of the virgin birth.

January 7

Ephesians 2:1-3

Today's text serves to affirm the doctrine of original sin one more time. It may seem as if we are belaboring this point, but the reality of our own corrupt origin is truly fundamental to an understanding of the virgin birth. Those who believe that man is basically "good" at birth and subsequently corrupted have a very low view of the need of the virgin birth. Conversely, people who understand the universal nature and impact of sin are led quite quickly to the beauty, wisdom and necessity of Jesus' immaculate conception.

In our devotion for the day, I would like to answer one final objection to the idea of original sin. Some have stated that original sin is disproven by the presence of men and women who are now deemed righteous in God's eyes. The theory is that those who were not chosen for salvation were marked by their sin but those who are believers in Jesus Christ were ALWAYS clothed in His righteousness and, therefore, not brought forth in iniquity.

The thought is that God's Sovereign decree shields some from original sin and the outworking of this thought is that Jesus could have been brought forth by natural means by those who were believers in God and, therefore, the virgin birth is an unnecessary addendum to the diving story of man's redemption in Christ.

Ephesians 2 totally obliterates this argument. In fact, as we understand two truths about this text, we will come to see that salvation marks a transformation from sin to life whereby our dead and sin-filled hearts are transformed into liveliness and righteousness.

The first point that we need to understand in answer to the abhorrent theory referenced above is that Paul is speaking directly to the church. The book of Ephesians is written to Christians in Ephesus. The desired audience is, therefore, Christians! This point becomes important when we understand the second truth which is that all of these men and women WERE characterized by their sin prior to salvation. Notice here that Paul says that the believers in Ephesus saying among the lost "we (notice how Paul includes both the congregation and himself) ALL formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh".

Paul's point is embarrassingly simple, all believers were conceived in iniquity. The distinction that the Bible makes between Christians and lost men is not one of inherited perfection, rather it is one of extrinsic transformation. The difference between the lost and saved man is not their intrinsic sinful nature, it is the radical regeneration of the saved man from a sinner to a believer, growing in holiness.

Why does this matter? It proves that even believing parents (such as Joseph and Mary) need to be transformed from their sinful state and naturally would pass along their own depravity to their offspring. The virgin birth (and the Divine Conception that it represents) is an absolute necessity to the accomplishment of your salvation.

January 8

Exodus 12:1-11 & John 1:29

A few days ago, we ended the devotion by stating that the need for salvation requires a perfect substitute. Today, I would like to take up that phrase and build off of it by showing that the statement is indeed in line with the overarching biblical narrative on the subject.

The Passover is a famous moment in the history of the people of Israel that was commemorated and passed down over the generations. The details of the Passover are familiar to most of us, God commanded His people to slaughter a lamb, spread the blood of the lamb on their doorposts which would precipitate the angel of death (who was tasked with killing the firstborn of every family who was not covered by the lamb's blood as a sign of judgment) passing over their homes thereby leaving their family untouched by God's right wrath.

We believe that this text is both historically accurate AND a picture or "type" of events that were yet to come. In this case, the Passover is a window into the future when the people of God would be passed over by the wrath of God due to their being covered by the blood of the lamb of God.

This background is essential to understanding the nature of John's allusion in John 1. The term "lamb of God" is employed by the forerunner on purpose. Those who initially heard his loud proclamation would immediately have noticed the symbolism and many, no doubt, would have noted the reference to the Passover Lamb. You see, what John is saying is that Jesus is the ultimate Passover lamb. He is the One who would sprinkle His own blood on the altar causing the wrath of God to turn away from those who embrace His sacrifice by faith.

Now, what does this have to do with the doctrine of the virgin birth? The answer is found in the nature of the sacrifice. You see, Exodus 12:5 specifies the kind of lamb that is acceptable to God as a sacrifice. The text states this lamb must be "without defect". God would not accept a sub-standard sacrifice, instead this animal must be spotless and therefore perfect to stand in the gap for the people of the home.

Obviously, a lamb is not sufficient to truly take away the sins of the people, no animal's blood can atone for sin (Hebrews 10:4). The perfection of the lamb was not meant to be an efficient reason for the mercy God extended, instead it was meant to foreshadow the true, perfect lamb of God who must be spotless in order for the ultimate or eternal Passover to take place.

Once again, we connect this back to the reason for the virgin birth. If all of man's seed is corrupted and, therefore, all of his offspring are marred by sin and not spotless then the need for a perfect lamb must necessitate His supernatural origin. He simply could not have been conceived by Mary and Joseph and met the spotless standard required to achieve our salvation.

January 9

Luke 1:38

Today and tomorrow's devotion will be on the right response to the revelation we have received of the virgin birth. Luke 1:38 records Mary's ultimate answer to the amazing truths she had received from the Angel Gabriel. In order to really attempt to understand this passage, we must try to put ourselves in her proverbial shoes. Many have struggled with the idea of the virgin birth even after the story has been told and believed for generations, imagine having initially received this word from God! Undoubtedly, Mary found the words of Gabriel hard to understand, which explains her question in verse 34.

Nevertheless, after Gabriel reminds Mary of the matchless power and ability of God, her ultimate response is one of faith. Commentators have helped us immensely by drawing attention to the obvious contrast between Mary's response in verse 38 and Zechariah's reply in verse 18. When Zechariah is given the news that his wife will conceive in her old age, he asks "how can I know this?" This is a response of unbelief, as the means by which Zechariah would "know this" is right in front of him! Zechariah is asking for more evidence. He's hedging his proverbial bets just a bit. He's not yet convinced that God is really speaking and/or that He can deliver. How can you know this Zechariah? You can know because the mighty angel and messenger of the Lord is standing before you!

In contrast, Mary asks a question of clarification but not of doubt. She would like to know more of the inner workings of how God will bring about her pregnancy but, at the end of the exchange, she embraces her finitude and the Lord's Sovereign power and accepts His Words as true.

In this case, Mary serves as our exemplar. Obviously, all of us have questions and some of them may not be fully answered! Nevertheless, we must trust in the reliability of our great God and embrace His message as true even if we don't totally understand or comprehend how He brought His plan about. The object of Mary's faith is not her own fallen and limited reason, the object of her faith is a God that she knew she could trust and that she knew was far wiser and more powerful than she was to bring about all that He promised.

Ultimately, the issue of the virgin birth is one of faith. If we really believe God can create all that we see with a simple Word, if we truly believe that He can split oceans, cause great natural disasters, work out every detail of every situation and raise a man from the dead, can we not believe that He can orchestrate the virgin birth?

While we may not be able to totally wrap our minds around God or His plan, we have plenty of evidence to prove that He is able and that He is trustworthy. May our response to His revelation be as Mary's "let it be to me according to your word."

January 10

Luke 2:8-21

We will admit that the verses we read today come after the announcement and event of the virgin birth. Nevertheless, we see them as a reaction to the totality of the coming of the Savior. At this point in the narrative, Jesus has been born with much adoration and acclaim. His arrival has drawn people from literally across the globe to worship the coming Messiah and Mary has had a front row seat to it all!

She has seen Gabriel, experienced a supernatural pregnancy, delivered a child in a bizarre location, interacted with wise men and shepherds alike, and now she is reflecting on the experience to this point. What an overwhelming moment in this young lady's life! She has seen and internalized so much and yet; the Bible says that her response is that she "treasured up all these things..."

Evidently, Mary took the time to reflect and meditate upon all that she had witnessed. She treasured these things, and rightly so! It's clear that she knew she was in the middle of the greatest story man would ever know and her response is one of wisdom. She wants to "soak it all in"! Earlier, Mary responds to the announcement of her conception of Christ with worship. She is amazed and stunned by all that she has heard. Undoubtedly, she was already treasuring things in her heart then and the overflow of all she had come to know, and embrace was worship.

I wonder if we treasure the story of the virgin birth and the arrival of our Savior. When was the last time you walked through a text like Luke 1 and 2 in order to meditate on the truths that God has revealed? Have you treasured in your heart the fact that Christ, God in the flesh, was supernaturally conceived in order to save you from your sins? Have you thought about the matchless love and mercy of God as it is revealed in the story of Christmas? Have you considered the wisdom of a God who overcomes the seemingly insurmountable problem of sin and separation from Him by taking on flesh, dwelling among us, living in perfection while being tempted as we are and, voluntarily, dying in our place so that we may live?

You see, the truth is that we actually have more to treasure than Mary had at that moment in time. The completion of God's work of redemption and the subsequent biblical teaching on its implications and assurances should lead all of us to meditate upon our God and erupt in praise of His majesty! Today, as you prepare to corporately worship Him once again, take some time to meditate on His goodness and wisdom!