

SCC Congregational Devotion

“Being Prayerfully Prepared”

A 21 Day Journey

January 23, 2023

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-2

“The Disciplines of a Great Commission Church”

Thought for the Day:

The cost of discipleship is explained by the instruction of Jesus to take up one’s cross and follow Him (Mathew 10:38; Luke 9:23). What does it mean to take up one’s cross and follow Him? The cross of Jesus is the cross of sacrifice, the cross of giving oneself away for the sake of others. As followers of Christ we, too, must give ourselves away; as Jesus prayed in the garden, “not as I will, but as you will” (Mathew 26:39).

A good place to begin taking up one’s cross is Romans 12:1-2. The Apostle Paul tells us that each of us is to become a *living sacrifice*. Unlike Jesus, we might not be called upon to die physically for our faith, but we are called to die to our own volition, or will, as we live for the will of God. Paul refers to this sacrificial living as holy and acceptable to God. In fact, he describes this way of living as our spiritual worship. Further, Paul informs that living the Christian life calls for nonconformity to the world and transformation of the mind. How? We are transformed as we fill our minds with the word of God. In doing so, we can discern God’s will.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a prayer:

January 24, 2023

Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 6:15-16

“A Picture of Vision Fulfilled”

Thought for the Day:

There was much to do in restoring God’s people and his holy city of Jerusalem, perhaps none more strategic and symbolic as the rebuilding of the wall. This would be strategic because the wall would provide protection, and this would be symbolic because the people of God would show their enemies, and themselves, that they were making progress in gaining strength and stability. Rebuilding the wall would also have spiritual impact as it would demonstrate that the hand of God was blessing them and their vision of restoration.

Nehemiah 6:15 reveals that the wall was in fact rebuilt and goes on in verse 6:16 to reveal the impact that this accomplishment had on their enemies. As your church embraces Great Commission Vitality, who and what are your “enemies?” How will you know when your “wall” is rebuilt? What will be the evidence of “the help of your God?”

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

January 25, 2023

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

“Great Commission Churches Pray with Power- PREEMPTIVE PRAYER”

Thought for the Day:

In this passage of Scripture, from Paul’s letter to the Christians in Phillipi, he tells them to rejoice always and to pray about everything. More than a doctrinal statement, this is a recipe for how to live life in Christ; always rejoicing; always praying. The vital Great Commission church is a prying church, relying on the power of prayer to tap into and release the power of God so that God will accomplish his purposes in our churches and in our lives. Prayer is not to be about religious rites or practices but is to be heartfelt communication to and from our living God.

Submit all matters of life and ministry to God in prayer, expecting Him to hear, expecting Him to speak, and expecting Him to act. He will hear, He will speak, and He will act, and in so doing your church will be vitalized, and those both inside and outside of the church will be blessed.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

January 26, 2023

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

“Great Commission Churches Build on a Biblical Foundation”

Thought for the Day:

We live in a time when many, perhaps most, Christians do not have a full understanding of Scripture, perhaps having never read completely through the Bible. And yet we speak doctrinally of the Bible as being the very Word of God, a word that is the basis of what we believe. The vital Great Commission Church builds its ministry, and its congregation, on the Word of God, being certain to proclaim that word thoroughly and accurately. It is vital that we know what God says in His word and what God means by what He says. This requires a study of all that is contained in the sixty-six books of the Bible.

2Timothy 3:16-17 informs us that all Scripture is useful, not just highlights of Scripture, or favorite passages, but ALL Scripture. From cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation, it is all God’s word, and all must be read and studied. Then and only then are we fully competent and equipped.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

January 27, 2023

Scripture Reading: Luke 14:25-27

**“Great Commission Churches Raise the Bar- COST
COMMITMENT”**

Thought for the Day:

These verses are surely strange and cryptic. Does Jesus really want and expect us to hate our own father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters, and even our own lives? Not in the sense that we normally assign to hate. Jesus is saying that our love of Him, and our commitment to Him because of that love, should be so intense and focused that any love and commitment to others would be much less by comparison that we might characterize that lesser love and commitment as hate. It is a matter of priority, and who is to get the highest priority in our lives? Jesus is to be our ultimate priority, above all others, even or especially ourselves.

We are encouraged and challenged to bear our own crosses and to follow Him. Our crosses are different than his cross, and my cross might be different than yours. But there is a commonality and that is sacrifice. We are to love Jesus Christ so much that we are willing to give Him our ultimate commitment by living sacrificial lives. Imagine a church where sacrificial commitment is a common characteristic. That's a vital Great Commission Church.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

January 28, 2023

Scripture Reading: Luke 15:21-24

**“Great Commission Churches Reach the Lost- MULTIPLICATION
THROUGH OUTREACH”**

Thought for the Day:

Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke provides three teachings by Jesus concerning finding things, and people, that are lost. First there is the shepherd who finds his lost sheep, then things, and people, that are lost. First there is the shepherd who finds his lost sheep, then there is a woman who finds her lost coin, and finally there is the father who finds his lost son. In every case, there is a celebration and Jesus makes it clear that there is rejoicing in heaven whenever someone comes to faith, whenever someone who is lost is found.

These and other Scriptures press the point again and again of how important lost people are to God, and how important it is for the people of the church to make God's priorities our priorities. Yet, many churches go through the motions of ministry year after year reaching few if any with the saving message of the gospel, and if they grow at all they grow by transfer and not by professions of faith. Sadly, many churches are content with this ineffective witness, but the vital Great Commission Church reaches the lost.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

January 29, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 16:13-18

“The Great Promise”

Thought for the Day:

Salvation rests squarely on the identity of Jesus Christ. Jesus asks, “Who do the people say that I am?” Then He turns to the more pointed question, “Who do *you* say that I am?” Simon responds, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

With the identity of Jesus clearly established, Jesus promises that upon *this* rock, He will build his church. What rock? Simon, who will become known as Peter, a name derived from the Greek word for rock, will play a vital role, but he is not *the* rock. That rock is the revelation by God the Father through God the Spirit that God the Son, Jesus, is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The promise is two-fold; first, that the identity of Jesus will be revealed again and again, and second, that as each man, woman or child comes into knowledge of this revelation, the church will be built. The Vital Church is about the ministry of proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ to those who have yet to come to Him as Lord and Savior.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

January 30, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 16:13-14

“What Do They Say”

Thought for the Day:

Caesarea Philippi was named for Caesar. How ironic that Jesus, God the Son who has become a man, enters the region named for Caesar, the man who desired to be God. The identity of Jesus is the subject of conversation as He asks His disciples to tell Him what the people are saying about Him. Who do the people think that Jesus is? The response of the disciples is that the people are saying that He is John the Baptist, or Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. It's interesting to note that the people, though not understanding fully, knew that Jesus was not just an ordinary man. They knew there was something special, something anointed and powerful about Him. Is the uniqueness of Jesus Christ clearly visible in the life of your church? Is the power of Christ showing itself in the everyday ministries of the church, or is the anointing of Jesus as the Messiah more doctrinal than practical? If we were to ask the people who live near your church who Jesus is, based on what they have seen of Him through your church, what would they say?

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

January 31, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 16:15-16

“What Do You Say?”

Thought for the Day:

The ultimate question that we all must answer is the question that Jesus puts to His disciples. He asks, “Who do *you* say that I am?” The answer to this question is the key to eternal life. To know by faith that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the One who died as the penalty for sin and who was resurrected in power over death is to have eternal life. To know Him as anything else, or not to know Him at all, is to have eternal death. Jesus is the dividing line. Belief in Him leads to life, while disbelief leads to death.

Are you clear in what you believe about Jesus Christ? Does your church make it clear to those who live in the surrounding neighborhoods

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 1, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 16:17

“Which Came First?”

Thought for the Day:

When asked the question, “Who do you say that I am?” Simon has correctly answered that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus then tells Simon (Peter) that he is blessed. So, which came first, the right answer or the blessing? Did Simon receive the blessing because he answered correctly or did he answer correctly because he had been blessed? The verse goes on to show that Simon answered correctly because he had been blessed in the form of a revelation from God the Father that Jesus is the Christ. Without this revelation, Simon would have been left to speculate in his own strength, but with the revelation from God the Father through God the Spirit that God the Son is the Christ, he was able to answer correctly and truthfully concerning the identity of Jesus.

If you were asked the question, “Who do you say that Jesus is?” What would you answer? How do you know that you would answer correctly? Are you prepared to let others in on what you know about Jesus?

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 2, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 16:18a; 1 Peter 2:5-8

“Jesus Will!”

Thought for the Day:

Jesus will do what? He will build his church on the rock. Who or what is the rock upon which the church of Jesus will be built? The text suggests that Simon, now known as Peter or *Petros*, a derivative of the Greek word *petra*, meaning rock, is in fact the rock upon whom the church will be built. True, Peter will play a significant role in the founding of the church, but he is, after all, just a man. The true rock is the revelation by God the Father through God the Spirit that God the Son is Christ, the Savior of the world. Every time a man, woman or child on this planet receives that revelation, that blessing from God, the church is built, one person: one soul at a time. Peter, in his letter of 1 Peter, uses much stone imagery, making sure to point out to disciples then and now that Jesus is the cornerstone of the church, the One of whom the prophets spoke. The church is not a physical house, but a spiritual house built with living stones.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 3, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 16:18b; 1 John 4:1-4

“Hell Will Not!”

Thought for the Day:

The church is the house of life while hell is the house of death, seeking to destroy all that is good and righteous. Though death is well represented in this world through sin and the mortality that was birthed from sin, death will not ultimately prevail. The attacks of hell on the true church will be defended, and the attack on hell itself will prevail through Christ. As the Apostle John tells us in 1 John 4, the spirit of the antichrist is in the world already, but “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” Through Christ, the church, the body of true believers, will overcome and prevail.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 4, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 22:34-40

“The Great Commandment”

Thought for the Day:

Jesus summarizes the Ten commandments by giving two: Love the Lord your God with everything that you are and everything that you have and love your neighbor as yourself. These two in combination are commonly known in church circles as the Great Commandment. If you’ve been around the church any time at all you have probably heard the Great Commandment mentioned many times.

Doctrinally, all Christian churches acknowledge the Great Commandment, and many describe themselves as Great Commandment churches. Unfortunately, right doctrine (orthodoxy) does not always lead to right behavior (orthopraxis). The real issue regarding the Great Commandment is the issue of application. How is uncompromising and wholehearted love for God and love for neighbor being expressed in your church? What churches say or print on the front of their bulletins or in values or mission statements, is not really what the Great Commandment is all about. It’s about love in action. Vital churches live the Great Commandment. They don’t just talk about it.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 5, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 22:34-35; Malachi 3:6-10

“Putting Jesus to the Test”

Thought for the Day:

The Sadducees and the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the Hebrew community, opposed Jesus throughout His ministry, and the incident recorded in this passage in Mathew is no exception. A lawyer, or scribe, was an expert in the law of the Israelites which was in fact the law of God, contained in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. This lawyer was not seeking information but was seeking to test Jesus in the hope that He would fail in the eyes of the people. How foolish to test the Son of God in this way.

There is a proper way to test God, as seen in Malachi 3. God, speaking through the prophet Malachi, invites such testing, revealing that the one who tests God by keeping God's statutes will be one who is blessed.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 6, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 22:36-38; Deuteronomy 6:4-6

“A Great & First Commandment”

Thought for the Day:

Jesus is asked to identify the great commandment in the Law and Jesus answers. Essentially, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4-6 known as the Shema. This instruction to love God with all that you are and all that you have has been the basis of the relationship between God and His people for thousands of years. Why? When someone makes loving God the priority in life, all else falls in place in proper perspective and in proper emphasis. This vertical love toward God should be clear in the life of the believer and in the life of the church. How will we as individuals demonstrate our love for God? How will we as a church demonstrate our love for God, not in what we say, but in what we do?

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 7, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 22:39; Leviticus 19:17-18

“A Great & Second Commandment”

Thought for the Day:

Jesus continues to answer the question by identifying a second great commandment. This instruction to love our neighbor as we love ourselves has been God’s basis for the relationship between people for thousands of years. Imagine a world where this commandment truly held sway.

This horizontal love finds its biblical roots in Leviticus 19 but finds its theological and moral roots in the very character of God. How will we as individuals demonstrate our love for neighbor? How will we as a church demonstrate our love for neighbor, not in what we say, but in what we do?

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 8, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 22:40; Ephesians 2:19-21

“Citizens in Christ”

Thought for the Day:

Jesus indicates at the close of this passage in Mathew that all the Law and the Prophets, in other words, all of what we know as the Old Testament, depend on the two commandments to love God and love neighbor. In essence, these two commandments summarize the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20. In Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul instructs that the church, the household of God, is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which is the foundation of Scripture. And what is the foundation of this *foundation*? It's the love of God and the love of neighbor. When we and our churches are built on this foundation, we become fellow citizens with the people of God, the house of God that is being built, with Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 9, 2023

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

“A New Covenant”

Thought for the Day:

The Law of God is the foundation of His relationship with His people, summarized in the love of God and the love of neighbor. In the original expression of this covenant, this relationship, the law was written on tablets of stone and obedience to this *external* law was taught and expected.

In Jeremiah 31, God speaks through the prophet of a new covenant that will come one day, a covenant in which the law is written on the heart, an *internal* law that guides the believer’s relationship to God and obedience to his law. That day has come in the person of Jesus Christ, and the writing of this law on the heart is being accomplished by the Holy Spirit, poured out upon believers soon after the ascension of Christ. The follower of Christ who loves God with all his heart, loves with a heart that carries the inscription of the very law of God.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 10, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 28:16-20

“The Great Commission”

Thought of the Day:

The disciples had been directed to go to Galilee following the death of Jesus, and it was there, on a mountainside, that He found them. Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, but before His miraculous exit, He would leave them final instructions. He reminded them that the authority under which He served as God the Son was authority granted Him by God the Father, and in this same authority he commissioned them for ministry. They were to go and make disciples of all nations, not just the Jews, not just those in and around their homes, but they were to take the gospel message of the person and work of Jesus Himself to the whole world. As those from the nations heard this message, the Holy Spirit would reveal that Jesus is the Christ, and the church would be built. This Great Commission was guaranteed by the promise from Jesus that He would be with them forever, that they would never be alone in their ministry of making disciples. To be a disciple is to make other disciples, not just to continue to be taught, or continue to teach already-made disciples. The vital church makes new disciples, living the Great Commission in the authority of Jesus Christ.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 11, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 28:16-17

“Worshipper or Doubter?”

Thought for the Day:

Following the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples numbered eleven as Judas was no longer with them. They had been instructed that Jesus would come to them in Galilee, so to Galilee they went. Did they really believe that Jesus would be raised from the dead and that He would come to them, or was Galilee simply home, a logical place to go following the death of their leader? Consider the inner turmoil, the inner debate, that must have been going on in the minds and hearts of the eleven. They were, after all, just people like you and me.

So, they went to the familiar mountain site to which they had been directed and Jesus appeared, just as He said He would. Some worshipped, some doubted, and some probably worshipped and doubted at the same time. Where are you, where is your church, in the tug of war between worship and doubt? When Jesus does what He says He will do, are you surprised; do you doubt? Or do you worship?

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer:

February 12, 2023

Scripture Reading: Mathew 28:20a; 1 John 2:1-6

“Learning vs. Living”

Thought for the Day:

The Great Commission says that we should teach. Teach what? Learn what? Often even seasoned Christians respond by saying that we are to teach and learn all that Jesus has commanded. That makes sense and even sounds correct, but that is not what the Great Commission is saying. We are told in this commandment to teach disciples how to *observe* or *obey* all that Jesus commanded. Knowledge and obedience are two very different things. It's not enough to learn the commandments; rather, we are to live them.

1 John 2:1-6 gives us a glimpse of what it means to obey, to live the commandments of Jesus Christ. Keeping, or obeying, His commandments is an indication that we are truly following Him, following the path that He walked. In this obedience, says 1 John 2, the love of God is perfected and is an indication that we are living *in* Him, meaning that we are walking His walk in a right relationship with Him. The priority of the Great Commission is to go beyond Learning into living all that Jesus commanded.

Your Thoughts and Reflections:

Write a Prayer: