



**Daily Devotionals – February 13 to February 19, 2021
To Encourage Franklin in Such a Time As This
By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson -- Franklin Baptist Church**

This brief series of daily devotionals are designed to speak into the days in which we live. But we frame that sacred time in the challenging days of the Covid-19 or Novel CoronaVirus that is spreading across our globe. Take in these daily words of devotion. We hope you will experience wisdom, perspective and yes even hope!

They draw from the Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings by date.
(All scriptures will use the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted)

**Saturday, February 13 - Psalm 50
by Dr. Charles Qualls
*God Shines Forth***

- 1 The Mighty One, God, the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to where it sets.
- 2 From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth.
- 3 Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before him, and around him a tempest rages.
- 4 He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people: 5 “Gather to me this consecrated people, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”
- 6 And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for he is a God of justice.

Devotion:

Don't you wish you knew more about how God went about beginning the process of Creation? We are used to living in an age where if someone is discussing a happening -- someone else probably has video of it. We can Google almost anything we are curious about. Not God's opening act of Creation.

The writer of this beautiful psalm of praise starts there. God has merely spoken, so great is God's power, and summons the earth. (v1) From sunrise to sunset, everything that has been created has been created by this powerful God.

But this beautiful psalm has teeth. There is an agenda here. After a distinctly Hebrew affirmation of God's reign from on high at Zion, God has business to attend. There is injustice in the land. There are some who have built their power on unrighteousness. God wants that fixed, then as now in our age. V3-6 makes that clear.

God will not sit by and watch people take advantage of each other. God will not let mistreatment go by. Life is hard enough as it is. God will not abide us making it harder on each other. That is the agenda of this psalm. The writer reminds us that God has not retreated into disinterest. Later, the prophets and then Jesus Christ himself sounded the same notes.

We want to proclaim our love for God. We want to offer our thanks to a loving and mighty God. The collective scriptures make clear how best to do that. As Micah would later remind us, "*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*"

Prayer:

Lord, help us to live up to this standard. We love the beauty of the psalms. Help us to love equally the beauty of your justice. Amen.

Sunday, February 14 - 2 Kings 2:1-12

by Dr. Charles Qualls

I Will Not Leave You

1 Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

3 The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent." 4 Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho.

5 The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent." 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on.

7 Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8 Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. 9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." 10 He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not."

11 As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. 12 Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Devotion:

From Yoda to Gandalf to Mary Poppins, fiction is filled with wise mentors, one writer has said about today's text. Nearly every one of these stories also features another reality -- sooner or later the wise mentor will be taken from us or moved to another avenue of service. Those transitions are memorable and often filled with grief. They are crossroads where the mentee looks out at all that is ahead and wonders if they are up to the moment. What will they do without the trusted leader upon whom they have looked for guidance?

Earlier in Ruth 1:16-17, we heard her pledge her commitment to her mother-in-law, Naomi --

'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die -- there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!'

Later, we'll hear Peter pledge his presence to Jesus as his arrest nears. Though he faltered for a moment, Peter would most visibly take the new church on his back after Jesus departed.

The story of Elisha losing Elijah is compelling. It brings us one such transition, where ministry and friendship reaches that sad crossroad. Our text today will challenge us to remember that what God is doing through your life is never completely yours. We all have to be prepared for God to pass on what we are doing to another person, or to another group, church or generation. Most of us, if we're honest, do well if we pour most of our energy into doing the best job we can at what God has called us to do. Then, we realize that what we weren't concentrating on was someday giving it away to someone different.

Elijah's mysterious departure from the earth contributed to his having a role in biblical expectations. The Prophet Malachi said that Elijah would return before the Messiah came (4:5). Therefore, some wondered if Jesus might not actually be Elijah returned to earth. Jesus instead affirms that John the Baptist has actually fulfilled this role. In Jesus' transfiguration, Elijah appears alongside Moses with Jesus. Elijah lived on, and not just in all these ways. He also lived on in his successor, Elisha. All the investment in Elisha moved forward into a new ministry.

I love one more aspect of this text today. Notice how Elisha looks after the dignity of his aging mentor. As each person essentially says, "You know he's finished as of today," Elisha replies, "Yes I know; be silent." That integrity, that sense of honor, is a good example for us, too.

Prayer:

Lord, don't let us quit before we should. But help us all to understand that we don't own what we do for you. Work through us, and through those who will come after. Amen.

Monday, February 15 - Hebrews 2:1-4

by Dr. Charles Qualls

A Reminder to Pay Attention

1 We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Devotion:

Can't you hear the unction in the tone this Hebrews writer uses? This is important to him.

I extend the same reminder occasionally to Christians: We ought to pay attention. Our faith deserves the very best of who we can be. Us marking faith off our list as something we "took care of as children" is not the intent. Jesus Christ himself made clear that instead the faith journey would be something we had to work at with every fiber of our being.

If faith **seems easy**, it's not.

If faith **seems like "a moment of Salvation,"** it's not.

If faith **seems like something you can tuck** into fifth place behind your comforts, your opinions, biases and preferences -- it's not.

Until we understand that "salvation" as Jesus and his disciples viewed it was not just a moment (nor just a decision), we do not fully understand it. Our "decision" or moment is merely the beginning of a journey of growth that lasts us the rest of our lifetime. Much as we should want others to make their decision for Christ, we also must work at our faith.

One person has said, "Sadly, most Christians have been inoculated with a weakened strain that prevents them from ever developing a full-blown case." This is what I hear Hebrews reminding us about.

Prayer:

Lord, may we use these days to re-center our focus on you. Awaken us to understand that if we are not growing, we could be drifting. Amen.

Tuesday, February 16 - 1 Timothy 3:14-16

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Reasons for Paul's Instructions

14 Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, 15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. 16 Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

Devotion:

We all long for the simplest answer. The simplest explanation. The shortest, most straight-forward sentence.

However, as H.L. Mencken once said --

For every complex problem, there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong. This is true for our Christian faith, too. Still, we should strive to occasionally capture the love, passion and sacrifice of Jesus Christ in simple terms.

The apostle Paul seems to be writing a letter to his old friend, Timothy here. Timothy had met Paul at Lystra and then traveled extensively with him. Together, they worked in several of the biblical stops along Paul's famous missionary journeys. Now, though, Timothy has planted himself in one place to minister. Church tradition has Timothy living at Ephesus until his death as a martyr. Due to several themes that seem to counter the new, emerging "gnosticism," this letter might well be one of the very last ones Paul ever wrote.

For instance, today's text speaks pretty directly to *gnosticism*. But you wouldn't catch that if you just gave this a quick read. Among its features, "gnosis" held that the human body was irretrievably sinful and dirty. The physical body was the center of all sin, and could not be redeemed. So, one gnostic chant was "The body is a tomb!" Therefore, they rejected the notion that Jesus Christ had been God incarnate -- since in their view God would never stoop to putting on human flesh and living among sinners.

Now, read today's scripture again in light of all this. You see how simple Paul's writing can appear if we just read it 2,000 years later. But behind it, inside it, his message has complexity and depth. So, then, should our faith take on depth as we study and grow as Paul intended early Christians to do the same.

Prayer:

Life is not simple. Neither, then, will be a faith that can endure. Help us to be willing to do the work. Amen.

Wednesday, February 17 - Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Ash Wednesday

1 "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

5 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

16 "And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Devotion:

On Ash Wednesday 2021, we have this lesson that points out our potential shortcomings and offences before God. We read this and at first glance a question pops into our minds -- Where is the good news in all of this?

As Steven P. Eason states, "Here is an opportunity to awaken the good Christians who dared to get up, get dressed, and come to worship. Who would think that good things like giving and praying could be dangerous?" As we know, there is a dark side to everything and we will explore that concept for a moment.

Why do you or I give alms? All of us are completely capable of turning something good into something sour. It is human nature to let everyone know of our good deeds. Yet, this passage compels us to give our alms quietly, not in a way that seeks the praise of others. So, the alms matter is easier said than done and then our attention turns to prayer.

Can prayer really be considered dangerous? Praying should be communication with God, not praying for show. We constantly need to be watching our motives, especially when we pray. Our prayers are to be directed to God, not others who may be listening. Jesus reminds us to not swerve into an unhealthy piety, lots of fluff, but short on substance.

The bottom line from Jesus is this -- if we pray, give, fast, or whatever action that we do, it must be for God's glory and not ours. On this Ash Wednesday when we focus on ourselves and our shortcomings, may God have mercy on our souls.

Prayer:

God of life, turn our eyes upon you. Give to us the ability to follow you and not seek personal attention. Amen.

Thursday, February 18 - 1 John 1:3-10
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
God is Light

³We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Devotion:

Many people do not like the winter of the year due to the lack of sunlight. People need sunlight in order to function well. (One of our guest oboists recently moved to Alaska where it is dark for a prolonged amount of time.) The opposite of darkness is light. Light is that quality that illumines our surroundings and makes it easier for us to see.

Likewise, there is a spiritual darkness that people can find themselves in. This darkness is all consuming and is not going away easily. First, the person must understand that they are in darkness and then they must desire to move from darkness to light.

The writer states that God is light and in him cannot be found any darkness. How can we discover if a person walks in darkness or in light? If we believe that we do not have sin, we are in darkness. If we confess our sins, then we walk in the light of God. Darkness cannot abide where light is, because light drives out darkness.

Sometimes matters in life are just that simple -- light and dark.

Prayer:

God of light, enlighten our lives so that we may not walk in darkness. Amen.

Friday, February 19 - 2 Timothy 4:1-5
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Paul's Charge to Timothy

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ²proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. ⁵As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Devotion:

Paul is sharing with Timothy his job description in the faith, and it is a lengthy and exacting one! First of all, Timothy must be able to proclaim the Gospel of Christ at any and all times. To proclaim the Gospel at all times requires the proclaimer to be at the ready to share God's message anytime, anywhere.

The second part of the job description requires absolute faithfulness in the sharing of the Gospel. Regardless of how people respond, preach the Gospel. Whether people understand or not, preach the Gospel. When one preaches the Gospel, one of the main points is to persuade the listener to the truth of the Gospel. The proclaimer needs to encourage others as to why they need to hear and heed the Gospel.

Why the insistence on preaching the Gospel? The answer is found in verse three -- there is coming a time when people will not accept sound doctrine. It is as if the clock is running and time will soon be over. When that time comes, people will not listen to sound doctrine and will wander away from the truth.

Lastly, Paul reminds Timothy to always be sober, endure suffering, to do the work of an evangelist and to carry out your ministry fully.

Friends, you and I need to remain committed to sharing the Gospel each day. We need to represent Christ fully in all of our actions, thoughts, words and deeds. As Paul stated, the world is depending upon us, as is God. May our God find us faithful to the task of preaching the Gospel.

Prayer:

Holy God, give us the ability to preach the Gospel at all times. Amen.