

Daily Devotionals

February 27 to March 5



FRANKLIN
BAPTIST CHURCH

Daily Devotionals

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 27 - Mark 8:27-30

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Peter's Declaration About Jesus

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Devotion:

"I sure like it when Charles uses a shorter scripture. I wish he would every day..."

Let me crawl out of your head and into the text for a minute. But you know somebody thought it. There are a couple of things here. Okay, many more than

a couple. But we'll focus a little on this beautiful, powerful story.

I don't know about you. But when we're on the road, just clicking off the miles, we tend to have conversations we wouldn't always think to have. Sometimes we plan or evaluate. We might make a tough decision. But sometimes, we just have fun. "Hey, what would YOU do if we suddenly had \$90 million?" Here, Jesus and the disciples are on a trip. First, he wanted to know what other people thought of him. Then, he checked the guys' pulse on who they understood him to be.

So now let me turn his question toward you: Who do you understand Jesus to be?

Nearly everything we believe in our faith is ultimately colored by our answer to that simple question. What we believe about God, and God in Christ, is the basis for all our other theological and doctrinal conclusions. How well have you worked at and grown your understanding? Good ole Peter passes the test: *You are the Messiah*, he says here. I wonder if Jesus walked the next few steps with more hope than he'd had just a few minutes earlier.

Prayer:

Lord, may we strive to understand you as YOU want to be understood. Help us to want you to be happy with our image of you -- rather than our image of ourselves. Amen.

Sunday, February 28 - Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Multitudes of Blessing

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. ² And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous."

³ Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,⁴ "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

¹⁵ God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Devotion:

How has God refined a blessing in your life over time? How has God clarified things for you? How do you need more clarity? These are some of the central questions that result from today's scripture text. God surprises by showing up when we didn't expect, speaking words we never thought we'd hear and promising blessings we wish we knew more about. Can you relate?

Our story today catches Abram so off-guard that he laughs! How often do you catch yourself laughing at something-- not because it's funny-- but because you don't know how else to react?

This is where we find Abram today. He has no idea that at this stage of life, things are about to change so drastically. He has no idea a major new chapter...THE major new chapter... of his life is about to unfold. He has no idea his name is about to change to reflect these new days.

God will show up when God wants, in ways that God chooses and will do things we never saw coming. Along the way, there will be blessings we hardly have the capacity to catch. Still, these surprises and changes come at a cost, don't they.

Abram laughed, and God named Abraham's son "Isaac" to capture Abram's reaction. Change came to Abram and Sarai's lives. Blessing through the covenant came to them. But they didn't get all the blanks filled in. Abraham's covenant had a catch. He and Sarah, newly renamed now, would not live to see all that God would pour into their lives. This covenant would live on beyond his years, and the fruition of his descendants being a holy nation would take hundreds of years to develop. In fact, God is going to place the "sign" of this covenant after the enslavement in Egypt. What can we learn from this? What helps you to trust through the newness and the mystery of the day?

Prayer:

Lord, help us to live into the mystery of the days that test our faith. May we trust your promises, and your love for us. Amen.

Monday, March 1 - Genesis 22:1-19

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Command to Sacrifice Isaac

22 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. 5 Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac said to his father

Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

9 When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." 13 And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, 18 and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." 19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

Devotion:

This may well be the most oft-remembered part of Abraham and Sarah's story. At least for so many. This is also one of the more disturbing episodes in all of scripture for some believers. The very notion of God even making someone think that the human sacrifice of their loved-one -- their offspring -- was going to be required is a jarring one. We do well to acknowledge that, and I can't altogether help you here. It bothers me a little, too.

However, I hope that as with all scripture we'll be faithful to do the work we should. Even cautionary tales, which I do not believe this is, have something to teach us. There are insights and lessons waiting for us. We should mine this and benefit from them.

Abraham perceived that God was telling him to take forth his son and offer him as a burnt sacrifice. So, he set in motion the episode that unfolded. Isaac naturally raised questions like, "Hey, Dad -- what are we going to sacrifice?" We get the impression that Abraham played along and acted as though he didn't know. Instead, Isaac is counseled to trust and that God would provide a sacrifice. What eventually having your father prepare to kill you for a sacrificial offering would do to your relationship (for the rest of your life), I don't know. I think for most families, that could be an obstacle that even the best therapist would struggle to guide them through.

Thankfully, God appears only to want to see IF Abraham were willing. Isaac is, of course, spared. Here, we could see:

- Abraham's extreme faithfulness in the face of being asked to do something that you know he didn't want to do. Isaac was his late-in-life child, his dream come true. He didn't want to kill his son. Yet, his faith was foremost.
- In a foreshadowing of the New Testament gospel, a father in covenant is willing to offer up his only son for a larger purpose. Does that sound familiar from later in our Bibles?
- Faithfulness is rewarded by God, declaring that indeed the terms and promises of the covenant promise will be kept. Future blessing will come to Abraham's name and legacy in light of his willingness to serve. "Fear of the Lord" guided Abraham, and is what God still looks for in us today.

Prayer:

Lord, may we reconcile our spirits even to the difficult scriptures. Teach us the lessons of faithfulness. May we desire to be a part of your mysterious movement into the days to come. Amen.

Tuesday, March 2 - Hebrews 11:1-3
by Dr. Charles Qualls
The Meaning of Faith

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

Devotion:

We Christian believers have a lot of "churchy" words, don't we.

There is jargon that we use so comfortably, I'm not even sure most of the time we stop to consider what we're saying. Or, the possibility that others around us may not know what we mean. Because some of our words can accidentally be an insider language that's more exclusive than we realize.

"Faith" is one of those words that we say comfortably. My guess, though, might be some of us mean different things even though we're all using the same word. *Faith*. For even more, I doubt we always stop to consider whether we even know all that this word faith means.

Let's tune in and pay attention to what the biblical writer of this letter to the Hebrews says faith is:

- faith is the assurance of things hoped for
- the conviction of things not seen
- by faith our ancestors received approval
- Additionally, by faith we understand that God creates and moves primarily by speaking -- and that's power!

Meditate on these things today. Things not seen. Things hoped for. Things from our spiritual forebears that have come to us because of their willingness. Pray on the power of God that speaks into being our whole world and realms beyond our time. Are these things what you mean when you mention your "faith"? How rich this little scripture is.

Prayer:

God, may we consider just how much we must believe that is not seen. Visit upon us the wisdom and insights of your Spirit, that we might have faith all the more. Amen.

Wednesday, March 3 - John 12:36-43

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Unbelief of the People

³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light. "After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them. ³⁷ Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

³⁹ And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said, ⁴⁰ "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn -- and I would heal them." ⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him.

⁴² Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

Devotion:

This portion of John's Gospel serves as a pivot from the first portion of John, Chapters 1-12, which is known as the Book of Signs, to the Book of Glory, Chapters 13-20. Jesus had concluded his public ministry and now was focusing on the building up of his disciples.

The path forward would become increasingly more difficult for the disciples because Jesus, the Light of the World, is preparing to leave the disciples. In the absence of light, darkness rules supremely.

It is interesting that Jesus departed and hid from them. While the writer does not establish the reasoning behind this action, one has to believe that this is proof that Jesus was human and divine. Perhaps this was how Jesus dealt with rejection. Remember, not everyone who heard his message believed his message. Jesus had come face to face with human rejection. In spite of all the miracles, not everyone believed.

The remaining section (V37-43) discusses the rationale of the soul's privilege to believe or not to believe. While no one except God knows the rationale of unbelief, these verses lay out a possibility -- God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.

Perhaps the purpose of this passage is to assist our thoughts on the following theme -- varying levels of belief. On the one hand, belief without signs is explanatory, while refusing to express one's faith publicly, represents the lowest level.

In today's pandemic reality, the same may be true. Because we mainly stay at home, it is easy to express our faith digitally. But, what will happen when we are able to gather outside of our homes? My prayer is simple, that we will not love human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

Prayer:

Holy God, forgive our inability to give you glory for all that you have done for us. Amen.

Thursday, March 4 - 1 Peter 2:4-10
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
The Living Stone and a Chosen People

⁴ Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

⁷ To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," ⁸ and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Devotion:

Here we have a description of how God, the master builder plans to build his masterpiece. All of the plans rest upon Jesus Christ who is the chief cornerstone. This stone was rejected by mortals, yet is a living stone upon which the house is built. If we accept this living stone, then we are to be a part of all the living stones that are to be a part of this spiritual house. It is when we become a part of this spiritual house that we are able to become part of the holy priesthood, and thus, offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

This cornerstone, chosen and precious, promises to those who believe that they will not be put to shame. But, for those who do not believe, this cornerstone is rejected. This cornerstone that has been rejected has become the chief cornerstone, and a rock that causes those in unbelief to stumble and fall. This stumbling is caused by those who disobey the word. The contrast is quite clear -- those who believe this cornerstone is precious, but to those who do not believe a stumbling block.

Those who believe have become part of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people! The purpose of this is to proclaim God's mighty acts that called us out of darkness into God's marvelous light. Once we were not a people, now we are God's people; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. The contrasts between believers and non-believers is quite stark.

Martin Luther's belief in the priesthood of every believer probably came from this passage. That priesthood now calls us to offer the sacrifice of faithful obedience and the life of love that goes hand in hand with that. As such, we are called to live lives without malice, guile, insincerity, envy, slander, all are attributes that the believer has replaced with faith.

In today's world of hyphenated identities, we should remember and live our vocations simply as Christians. We would do well to remember that we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's own people who are called to proclaim God's mighty acts that has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light!

Prayer:

Holy God, thank you for your invitation to become your own people with the privilege of proclaiming your mighty acts. May we be found faithful to our task. Amen.

Friday, March 5 - Exodus 19:9-15

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The People Consecrated

⁹ Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after. "When Moses had told the words of the people to the LORD, ¹⁰ the LORD said to Moses: "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes ¹¹ and prepare for the third day, because on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

¹² You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death. ¹³ No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows; whether animal or human being, they shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain." ¹⁴ So Moses went down

from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes. 15 And he said to the people, "Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman."

Devotion:

Have you ever considered that Yahweh, the Lord would come to us in a dense cloud? This improbable action is where our passage begins. This is a certainty and there is no wiggle room, God is coming. The dense cloud is to say that God's direct presence and his speaking will be covered by mystery and shadows. The intent is that God will speak and Israel will hear.

God speaking is a way of certifying and legitimatizing Moses, so that Israel will trust Moses. The Israeli people will need all of the ability of Moses, speaking as God's servant. Later in this chapter, the people will protest against Moses because the requirements are so exacting and rigid. Of course, the requirements that Moses lays out is a precursor to the exactness that God requires of everyone. This also is a precursor to the Israeli people leaving Egypt, and the exacting details of that journey.

God's people need the work of preparation in order to be holy -- that is, to be qualified to enter the very presence of God. So much of our theology is found in the ritual of cleansing or purification -- the Passover exodus, the last supper, etc. God was preparing Israel, through the teaching of Moses, to be purified. God is teaching us, through Moses, the difference between "clean and unclean", "sacred and profane."

The meeting with Yahweh was not one of platitudes and certainly not one between buddies. The purpose was and is to prepare God's people first for worship and second for service.

Could God have used our pandemic to prepare us for future ministry opportunities? How have you and I used this time -- to invest in our families and communities? Will we be ready to move quickly when it is safe to do so? Even though we are not able to gather as a church body now, there are many actions that we can take. Prayer is the first item that comes to my mind. Calling friends and neighbors is a welcome act. Sharing food with those who are sick is another wonderful response.

The bottom line is this -- how are you preparing yourself for a new season of ministry?

Prayer:

Holy God, help us to prepare our hearts to serve others and to offer worship to you. Amen.