



Daily Devotionals – May 29 to June 4, 2021

By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson -- Franklin Baptist Church

We have concluded our weekly exercise of writing a daily reflection for a year. I hope you'll consider this good news, though. We plan to loop around and continue sending these to you weekly until they are published in book form. We'll keep you posted as we know more about that.

A word about how this will work. Now they will come simply by date with no mention of the day of the week. Remember, these devotions were written for a specific year in time. This means occasionally you may find mention of it being "Easter" even though at a given time the calendar that year may see Easter, Christmas, etc. fall on a different day. If that is the case, then be flexible and just enjoy that special day as it falls within the Devotional. We hope you'll enjoy these as they continue to speak to the year ahead.

Faithfully,

Dr. Charles Qualls, Pastor

May 29 - Romans 8:14-17
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Life in the Spirit

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ -- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Devotion:

Many people know and quote the eighth chapter of Romans, especially verses 31-39. But before we are able to grasp the concept that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, we must first become a part of God's family.

This passage of Scripture outlines the benefits for those who follow Christ, for those who are part of God's family. This list of benefits is quite exhaustive and available only to Christ followers.

To be led by the Spirit of God indicates that we are children of God. It is because of God's gracious invitation that we are able to become children of God, and not because of anything that we have done. So the first criterion to become a child of God is an invitation from God to follow God. To be clear -- God invites and then waits patiently for our response. This is what is meant by free will -- people are free to decide for themselves whether to accept or reject God's gracious offer.

Once we become a part of God's family we receive the spirit of adoption. This spirit of adoption is the complete opposite of the spirit of slavery. The image of the spirit of slavery is taken from the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness, being led by the pillar and the fire. This is what happened after they followed Moses who led their deliverance from Egypt.

We freely accept God's offer to become a part of the family by adoption. Then we are able to cry out to God, saying, "Abba, Father!" and the Spirit confirms that we are indeed God's children. By invoking, "Abba, Father,"

the person invokes our personal exodus promises of Scripture by calling on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for deliverance. This prayer was a way of personalizing Jesus' prayer, and as such, sharing the sonship of Jesus. In essence, this prayer expresses from the heart the very center of the Gospel: That Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that God's covenant faithfulness has been revealed for salvation to all who believe.

But that is not the end of the story! If we are God's children, then we are also heirs of God, and if heirs, then joint-heirs with Jesus Christ! Can you imagine the benefits of being joint-heirs with Christ?

Being joint-heirs with Christ indicates that we share in Christ's journey, the good and the bad. The road that we now travel to our inheritance, to our path to glory lies along the road of suffering.

Sisters and brothers, let us rejoice because God has adopted us and made us joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Being joint-heirs does not imply that everything will always be roses; rather it assures us that we will travel with Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (See Hebrews 12:2)

This journey is not for the faint of heart, but for the faithful. This journey is not for everyone, but for those who choose to travel. This journey is not for everyone, but for those who choose to follow Jesus.

Prayer:

We give you thanks O God for adopting us and making us heirs and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Enable us to follow the path to glory, even though it must travel through the road of suffering. Amen.

May 30 - Matthew 5:1-11

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Beatitudes: What God's Kingdom Looks Like

5 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Devotion:

We're going to take our time here at first. Then, we'll finish fast. I promise.

What Jesus said -- right here -- was essential and not just to those with whom he was speaking at the moment. This was timeless. So, I don't want to miss the small things. Let's get both the setting and the posture down. Those are important for catching what we ought to understand here.

First, where was Jesus? Having seen a crowd, he went up onto a mountain. Stop...what other times in the Bible did someone go up onto a mountain?

Let's see --

- There was Moses. That turned out to be pretty important.
- Elijah famously ascended Mt. Carmel and facilitated a fiery showdown that God had with king Ahab's false-prophets.
- Isaiah prophesied a day when everyone would have a chance to climb God's holy mountain as one people.
- Jesus would later take three disciples up onto a mountain and the Transfiguration happened.

So...it probably ought to put us on the edge of our seats that Jesus is once again here up on a mountain in Matthew 5. Then, he sat down. Rabbis taught while sitting down. So, Jesus is going to instruct now. On a mountain. We should listen. What did he say?

“Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are those who mourn...Blessed are the meek...Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...”

What? No. We want to be WINNERS! We don't want to be poor in anything. We don't like to mourn at all, and we try to get that over with post-haste anytime we do. We eat when we're hungry and drink when we're thirsty, and often even when we aren't. So on and so forth.

Then he said more -- ***Blessed are the merciful...Blessed are the pure in heart...Blessed are the peacemakers...Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you on my account...***

Stop it, Jesus. Make it stop. I'll hang up a cross-stitched quote of the Beatitudes in my kitchen. I'll buy the laminated plaque with a tranquil picture of you saying the Beatitudes and hang it in the guest bedroom. I'll sit through a Sunday School lesson on them. I'll give my kids a throw pillow with the Beatitudes on it for Christmas. I'll tell the pastor he did well the next time he preaches on them.

Just don't make me actually take these Beatitudes seriously. They'll affect how I live. They'll change what I do with my money. They'll cause me to look at people differently. They might affect how I vote. Stop it.

Prayer:

God, this is what your Son said your kingdom looks like. No ifs/ands/buts. This is not a negotiation. This is the real world. Help us to understand and to be obedient, if what we say we believe is actually how we should live. Open us to take these teachings into the very fabric of our souls. Amen.

May 31 - Acts 2:1-21
by Dr. Charles Qualls
The Holy Spirit Arrives!

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs -- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

Peter Addresses the Crowd

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Devotion:

(That's a long scripture. I don't know why they think we'll read all this...plus it's kind of weird with all the wind and fire...)

Hey! Excuse me. Did I catch you in time? Don't go anywhere just yet. This is the story of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit to the early Church. This is the genesis of your own story. It's pretty important. That's why we celebrate it each year on this, the Pentecost Sunday.

For many of us, it is a strange story. Or, at least a story with some strange imagery we are not familiar with. There is a loud, rushing wind. Tongues of fire and speaking in tongues. We straight-laced Baptist types don't really know a lot about those notions that sound...well...a little pentacostal to us.

Verses 5-13 draw upon Genesis 11:1-9, most scholars believe. It is as though God's relationship with humanity had now matured -- especially now in light of Christ's departure back to Heaven. This was a new covenant answer to the division of languages or "tongues" that happened so early in the Bible's pages. Now, God was the God of one people. But they were a diverse people and God would reign over all and with all. No longer would any one ethnic people, or faith group, have the market cornered with God!

What did it all look like? They assumed these people were drunk.

That is often how we react to people who are different from us. We don't know what to do with the diversity, so we characterize it strongly. Peter stepped up and spoke, so that he at least tried to catch onlookers up to speed. He reminded them (and this cracks me up every single time) that it was only 9 a.m., so no one was

drunk. Instead, this was the presence of God. Doing a surprising thing just as God sometimes does. In fact, this was God keeping God's own word by fulfilling an old prophecy of Joel's.

Prayer:

Lord of your word, and God of big promises. We are thankful and encouraged that you keep your word. For your grace and your transformation, we thank you once again on this day. Keep moving in our midst! Amen.

June 1 - Romans 8:18-24

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Future Glory

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?

Devotion:

"That's a small price to pay..." We often say that when we have invested in something, or given toward something, and have paid some type of price for that. Using a different set of words, this is basically what we hear the apostle Paul begin with in this scripture text.

So, what is the small price to which he refers? The letter to the Romans may well be Paul's best known letter. It certainly is his longest. We know that this one time persecutor of Christians became one of the most persecuted of his time after his conversion. Paul paid a steep price -- not a small one -- in terms of his freedom and his physical well-being. He was beaten and jailed umpteen times during his ministry, and by the very same religious mechanism that he had been a part of.

But Paul is suspected to have written this particular letter from Corinth. If true, he had gone back there to visit friends and the church he had once started. His stay there was three months in duration. He was not in jail, nor did he seem to be physically assaulted while in Corinth.

Instead, he seems to be taking an accounting of all the ways in which he had paid a price for doing the faithful work of Christ. The cost, inconvenience and the lifestyle of traveling the world for the cause.

I love this phrase most --

"22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

That turn of phrase is powerful, and speaks to what Paul believes is a cosmic movement in time. "...the whole creation has been groaning...." There is something dramatic that Paul believes is happening under God's watchful eye.

What is that? It could be the dawning of Creation living in grace. In chapter 8, Paul begins by acknowledging the limitations of the old Law based system. Now, though, under Christ we have grace and the leading of the Spirit. We have access to God and can live more directly with God. His sufferings cumulatively have been a small price...to get to proclaim the love of God!

Prayer:

Lord, humble our hearts. If one like Paul felt this strongly about all he had done -- and the costs he had paid -- then may we also recognize that our faith is no casual matter. Your love and guidance is no casual matter. Amen.

June 2 - Ezekiel 39:21-29**by Dr. Charles Qualls*****Israel Restored to the Land***

21 I will display my glory among the nations; and all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid on them. 22 The house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God, from that day forward. 23 And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt treacherously with me. So I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. 24 I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid my face from them.

25 Therefore thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for my holy name. 26 They shall forget their shame, and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they live securely in their land with no one to make them afraid, 27 when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have displayed my holiness in the sight of many nations. 28 Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them behind; 29 and I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God.

Devotion:

Ezekiel is such a fascinating figure in the Old Testament. He is a 6th century BCE prophet who lived in Babylon. There is enough debate about when his "30th year" began (mentioned earlier in Ezekiel's prophecy) that no one knows whether his whole life was spent in exile or just an adult portion of time. He seems to have lived by the banks of the Chebar River, as he tells us in an autobiographical note.

Part of his collection of prophecy is prose. He is working in the typical fashion used by most Old Testament prophets. But a significant part is also filled with colorful visions. Ezekiel lived with a group of exiled Jews, perhaps the descendants of as many as 3,000 or more who had been pushed from Jerusalem as the Babylonians took over. Today, his tomb in Iraq is a popular visiting place for both Muslims and at times in history has even been so for Jews.

Today, we sample from a fairly typical prophetic text. God will restore the fortunes of the faithful. They may even find the opportunity to be brought home to Jerusalem and surrounding areas. Ezekiel's visions of a "temple" would have been a 3rd Temple Era, a prophecy not yet fulfilled.

These words are straight-forward in their honesty. There have been transgressions, and a steep price has been paid. Sometimes we can do things, or live in patterns over a long time, and lose self-awareness. Eventually, misfortune or a "run of bad luck" can beset us. At times, what we may not understand is that our previous decisions or actions contributed to our terrible "luck." This is the suggestion that Ezekiel labors to clear up.

Despite what prominent televangelists may try to suggest, I cannot agree that today's Covid-19 pandemic is "God's judgment" for a world somehow run amuck. That is not to say that I believe God is entirely happy with Creation. Nor that human decisions haven't contributed to this illness becoming the widespread crisis we have now. We live largely apart from God in Western culture, and even "good Christians" neglect the gatherings of God's people to worship and study.

Still, I have to wonder what it might look like if God's people today got serious and came "home." I wonder what it might be like to live in a land where we become "at home" again as God's gathered and active people. That is why I teach, preach and minister. That is why I bother. Because like Ezekiel, I can't help but feel that there is something more out there for us under God.

Prayer:

Lord, call us home. To a home in you, and under your Spirit's keeping. Watch over us, but continue to beckon us with your voice and your grace. Amen.

June 3 - John 7:37-39
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Rivers of Living Water

37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38 and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Devotion:

The backstory of this passage is the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles). This Feast featured a water libation ritual in which the priests processed from the temple to the pool of Siloam, which was nearby. Once there, they drew water out of the pool using a golden pitcher and then returned to the temple to pour it on the altar. The genesis of this ritual was when Moses struck the rock in the wilderness and water gushed out (see Exodus 17:1-6; Psalm 78:16). This miracle was also the reason that Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land.

Jesus continues his mastery of communication that both excites and confuses those around him. "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scriptures have said, 'Out of the believers heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" There is much to unpack in these short verses.

- 1) By setting Jesus' teaching within the Tabernacles context, John states that the unexpected has once again taken place: life giving water has come from the most unexpected source -- from Jesus.
- 2) Gilberto A. Ruiz states that the phrase "out of a believer's heart" could have indicated that two references for this pronoun are possible: the believer and Jesus. The reason for this variation in interruption can be explained by a difference in punctuation. The bottom line is this -- even if a believer is understood to be a source of living water for others, living water ultimately comes for Jesus.
- 3) The Feast of Tabernacles has an eschatological dimension that anticipated the future. Zechariah 14:8 states, "On that day, living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem." John believes that Jesus inaugurates the day that Zechariah foresaw with the coming of Jesus into the world, and in Jesus' death when water flows from Jesus' body (19:34).
- 4) Verse 39 identifies the Spirit as the living water that springs from Jesus. Water and the Spirit of God can be found in Isaiah 44:3 and Ezekiel 36: 25-27. It is John's Gospel that gives the Spirit as a distinctive characteristic of Jesus. However the Spirit is not available to believers until after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. John refers to this sequence as Jesus' glorification.

Does John indicate that the Spirit was not present before the cross? No, because the Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism. For John the Spirit of God does not become a reality until the glorified Jesus shares the Spirit with the people. Remember that we are empowered by the Spirit of God for the living of these days.

How are we then to live in the days of Covid-19?

First, we should live in confidence because God's Spirit lives in us. We need to base our decisions on the Spirit and not on the flesh.

Second, we should live in the confidence that God loves us and has a purpose for our lives and even our pain.

Third, we need to focus on the needs of others and not only on our needs. As St. Francis stated, "for it is in giving that we receive."

Fourth, we should remember that our earthly lives are temporal, and our lives in God are eternal. No matter the heartache, in God's time all will be made well.

Fifth, remember that the prayers of your brothers and sisters continue on your behalf. Jesus said, "Ask and it shall be given to you." (Matthew 7:7) The list is far from exhaustive and you will be able to add many more actions. We as Christians should remember that God will complete God's mission in us and the world in God's timetable. Our job is to remain faithful to God.

Prayer:

O God, we love you and desire to serve you. Forgive our feeble attempts to love and serve you. Enable us to rest on your promises. Forgive our doubts and replace them with your eternal promises, which we find in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

June 4 - 2 Timothy 1:8-12

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Thanksgiving and Encouragement

8 Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 For this gospel, I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, 12 and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.

Devotion:

Have you ever "suffered for Jesus?" Are you ashamed of the gospel? Do you believe that God is able to guard that which has been trusted to God?

This short paragraph begins with a power packed and lengthy sentence which has several points to ponder.

+ Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me.

The writer, Paul, indicates that he is not ashamed of the gospel and implores the readers to join in. The journey is not an easy one, but we are promised strength for the journey.

+ Join me in suffering for the gospel.

The parameters of the journey are clearly spelled out -- the journey involves suffering. The caution is placed because everyone needs to know upfront what is expected of them.

+ Relying solely on God's power.

The writer attests to the validity of God's power. Even throughout his suffering as a prisoner, Paul relies on God's power.

+ Who saved us not by our works, but according to his purpose and grace.

Our salvation is a gift from God and is a holy calling. God has saved us for his purpose and God's grace is available in fulfilling that purpose.

+ This grace comes from our Lord Jesus Christ before the ages began.

Our Lord Jesus was here before the beginning of all time, even before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

+ This grace has now been revealed through Jesus Christ.

This grace has been revealed by the appearing of Jesus Christ who abolished death. By abolishing death, Christ brought new life to the gospel.

+ This gospel has appointed me.

The writer has been appointed as a herald, an apostle and a teacher. This designation as "herald" and "teacher" support Paul's usual title as "apostle." As such, the Pastoral Letters often refer back to Paul the "teacher."

+ The duality of suffering and shame are replaced with vindication in Christ.

In Christ's first appearing the proclamation of a crucified Christ might well be offensive, but that is erased when Christ returns for his faithful. At Christ's return, all wrongs will be righted and the reward for our faithfulness will be reality.

+ The return of Christ reaffirms the trust that has been placed in God.

The return of Christ is the culmination of our faith story -- we heard of the work of Christ, we placed our trust in Christ, and when Christ returns, the deposit of our faith is fulfilled. Christ, the faithful one, returns for his people, who then give their honor and praise to Christ. This is the ultimate certificate of deposit -- the only certificate of deposit that the bearer reaps so very much more than was intended!

How does this strengthen us during Covid-19?

Throughout all the hardships that we endure, we keep our eyes focused on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1). If we are able to keep our eyes on the larger prize (the salvation of our souls), then our daily struggles pale in comparison.

The prize of faith is not attained in a single day, week or year. Rather it is the culmination of a life of faith that is rewarded. This is our hope and our goal -- to be faithful until the very end of our lives and then to receive the crown of righteousness (Revelation 2:10).

Prayer:

Faithful God, we are thankful for your deposit of faith into us, and for the promise that one day we will receive our inheritance. Give us faith to remain true to your call every day that we live. Amen.