



Daily Devotionals – June 12 to June 18, 2021

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

Since we have resumed handing out printed bulletins in Worship as we were doing before the pandemic, we will no longer be sending out the prayer concerns and order of worship via constant contact on Fridays.

There are three ways you can access the weekly bulletin along with church notes: 1) either in person on Sundays during worship, 2) on the church's website under the Sermons/Bulletins/Devotionals tab or 3) on the church's Facebook page each week.

Faithfully,

Dr. Charles Qualls, Pastor

June 12 - Psalm 100
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
All Lands Summoned to Praise God

A Psalm of Thanksgiving

1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.

3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

5 For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Devotion:

The purpose of this Psalm is to teach us the how and why to worship God. This Psalm could have been utilized in at least three ways:

- 1) This was used as the culmination of six Psalms used in worship approaching the temple.
- 2) This was sung when the congregation entered the temple proper.
- 3) This was sung as an accompaniment to the thank offering.
- 4) Worshippers could recite, sing or chant the Psalm as a portion of their praise.

This Psalm reminds us that worship was characterized by exuberant praise (shout for joy), gladness and joyful songs. These songs point us to the following attributes of God: Our maker, redeemer and sustainer (the Lord is God, God made us, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture).

Why do we praise God? The answer is found in verse 5 -- "For the Lord is good, his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."

This was one of the first passages of scripture that I memorized as a child and it has remained with me over the years. Not only do I love to praise God, but I draw immense comfort from "his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."

Prayer:

O God, we thank you for your steadfastness and faithfulness to your people throughout all generations. Help us to live as thankful people. Amen.

June 13 - Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Thanksgiving for Recovery from Illness

1 I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. 2 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

12 What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me? 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord, 14 I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

15 Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones. 16 O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds. 17 I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord. 18 I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, 19 in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

Devotion:

This is a beautiful psalm, perhaps capturing a key moment as most of them certainly did. Sometimes, scholars are able to put their fingers on what that particular moment was. Other times, we can tell that an important war, famine, transition, fear or other passage has just transpired. But we simply don't know with certainty.

I won't labor at all there is within this psalm, but for our devotional purposes I do want to hit some highlights. First, the need to give thanks or "praise" to God is obvious. If all we do in our worship is to praise, that is not a very balanced approach. However, if we never give thanks and recognition to God, we are bereft of one important worship stance also. Ancient Israelites established the practice of "*Hallel*" or verbatim recitation of some of the thanksgiving psalms. I'm saying that...they memorized psalms 113-118 and observant Jews would recite them on important occasions. Let that sink in just for a moment.

Many of you know that Bo Prosser is my ministry mentor and the single most formative presence in my life. As early as my college years, he invested in me by offering internships and friendship. He shared important resources with me and gave me opportunities. Bo taught and challenged, praised and sheltered me. Most of all, he modeled excellence and integrity in what we do. Nowadays, our relationship is more collaborative in nature. But I can never repay the one who is still my mentor. Yet I do try. One thing he loves is to relax at the beach and listen to Jimmy Buffett songs. Anywhere I travel that has a Jimmy Buffett's "Margaritaville" cafe, I always make a beeline to buy Bo a t-shirt. It's my feeble attempt to thank him for more than I can ever repay.

After having skipped a few verses for our assignment, we pick up with v12. In that gateway to the closing section, the psalmist basically asks, "How will I ever repay you?" Then, in verses 13-19 he labors to make some pledges. He will try to repay that which cannot ever adequately be repaid. In v13, we find two specific actions. "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord..." That is, he will acknowledge that his soul rests in God's grace and he will be in relationship with God (or "call upon"). He is not God, and he knows it.

You would expect me to visit v14. The psalmist will go and gather with God's people to worship. Regularly. The saying goes, "There are no atheists in foxholes." If you were King David, you could see a whispered prayer being lifted in battle. "Lord...if you'll just let me survive this one, I'll go to church every Sunday. I promise!" The psalmist knows that his is now the responsibility to walk into the tabernacle and make good on all those rushed up vows of desperation.

The balance of this psalm speaks similarly. Never been in a foxhole yourself? I'll bet you've been short of money at the end of yet another month. I'll bet you've whispered a fervent and sincere vow to the Lord in a hospital room or waiting lounge. My guess is that you've cried out in the night, desperately hoping that the sunlight of a new day would shine on you as you sought a chance to apologize. An urgent need at work...a pressured visit to the doctor for lab results...a misstep within your household...they've all caused us to promise things to God.

Prayer:

Lord, you long for us to make good on our vows. Not so much like an accountant keeping a ledger, but more like a loving parent who longs for a relationship with a child. Nudge us...beckon us...into your presence again and again and again to worship so that we can say, 'Thank you.' Amen.

June 14 - Matthew 9:35-10:23

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Harvest Is Great, the Laborers Few

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

10:1 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. 2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

The Mission of the Twelve

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, 6 but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8 Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. 9 Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, 10 no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. 11 Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. 12 As you enter the house, greet it. 13 If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. 15 Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Coming Persecutions

16 "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; 18 and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. 19 When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; 20 for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. 21 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and

have them put to death; 22 and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 23 When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Devotion:

When we write these devotionals, we trust that you take your time and read the scripture first each day (just right up there above this). You know...rather than skipping to what we have to say in the devotional section itself. Because this stuff won't usually make a whole lot of sense if you do skip the scripture. Today, I sympathize a bit because the scripture selection is long.

It's also important. That's why I thought it was worth it to read the whole selection. Truth is, it could have gone even longer. Jesus was still preparing the Disciples for what they were about to do. Do you know who he was describing to them in today's scripture? You and me.

That's right. He was trying to get them ready to go out two-by-two into the towns and villages to attempt reaching people just like you and me with the Good News. To minister to their needs and to heal what most needed healing. So, if you didn't read the scripture yet...or need to re-read it in light of what I've already said...go for it.

Jesus made some observations that are still true today. It would be cliché' for me to devolve this into another "It's hard being a minister" diatribe. But notice that he said that "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." That is still true today, as the 80/20 Rule is alive and well in churches and other organizations. 80% of the people seem to sit back and watch the other 20% give the money and do all the work.

He also told them to do their best, starting with the hometown crowd. If they found receptive people, then their peace would be upon that household. If unreceptive, the disciples were to shake the dust from their sandals and move on. The church still today has to minister where there is energy and opportunity, sometimes making the tough decisions to move on from unfruitful efforts.

Finally, it is compelling that Jesus gave this warning. "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Christianity and ministry would not be like a daily bible-study retreat for them. You'd be hard-pressed to find an educated/trained minister today who can't quote Matthew 10:16. Still, though, the work is sacred. It is worth it, and on balance Jesus' commission upon their lives (and ours, too!) is a journey that we do well to take. What Jesus called them to is the reason, ultimately, why we are gathered as the Church today. Praise be!

Prayer:

Lord of our calling, place your hand upon our shoulders. Send us out, and may we be found faithful. Help us to be fertile, receptive homes into which your good news may be planted! Amen.

June 15 - 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

by Dr. Charles Qualls

I Could Bear It No Longer

3 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens; 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, 3 so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that this is what we are destined for. 4 In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor had been in vain.

Devotional:

I confess. In fact, I am going to bare my heart. I wish we hadn't missed a single Sunday or Wednesday night. Obviously, we had to. It was the prudent decision to make with everyone's safety in mind. Still, if there had been any wise way around missing all the time we've missed as a gathered church -- that's the path I would've preferred. I miss you all. I have reached the point that I can hardly bear it any longer.

This disease has been a killer. I have a very fit 45-year-old fellow minister who barely survived the Coronavirus. He spent over a week in the ICU, and doctors won't guarantee him that his lungs will ever completely recover from the damage. We all know someone who has died of it, or a family that was touched by the virus.

The apostle Paul has the Christian believers at Thessalonica on his heart. He can't go visit them yet. He has heard that they were attacked by persecutors. He worries about them, and feels helpless because it's not time to go see them just yet. He needs to stay at Athens. So, he does the next best thing. He will send Timothy to Thessalonica instead.

Timothy's job was at least three-fold. He was to go and continue in the discipling of the believers there. He would teach and preach. Second, he was there to encourage and uphold them in the face of the difficulties they endured. Third, he would report back to Paul a firsthand account of what life was actually like for the Thessalonian Christians. This was the best Paul could do for now.

We got a brief glimpse of ancient Thessalonica when we were there on our biblical tour a few years ago. We landed there and spent our first two nights in the city. There is a small stretch of the ancient forum that is visible at street level. Most of the rest of the ancient ruins of Paul's Thessalonica are underneath years of "progress." They have been built upon in layers of history and commerce since then. But that quick look at ancient Thessalonica was all I needed to feel a connection with Paul and the people.

I connected with them again just today. Because I now understand what it is to long to see your people. I miss you, Franklin Baptist Church. We finally had a meeting the other night in the fellowship hall, and I showed up 40 minutes early just to be there and greet as committee members showed up. I can bear it no longer. You occupy my thoughts and my prayers. I can't wait to worship, study and fellowship with you. You matter. You are important. You are so loved!

Prayer:

Lord, may we be encouraged today to know that we are still part of a sacred spiritual community. Foster a longing in each of our hearts to reconnect as soon as we are able. May we never be casual again about the sacred gatherings of Franklin Baptist Church! Amen.

June 16 - Psalm 126
by Dr. Charles Qualls
A Harvest of Joy

1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."

3 The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. 4 Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. 5 May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. 6 Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Devotional:

We so long for everything "...to return to normal." People have been talking about this since the Coronavirus shelter-in-place orders began back in the early Spring. I have to tell you, I believe there is a day out there when it will. So, we prepare faithfully for that time now. When it is still not anywhere near normal.

Getting there will be a bumpy ride. I genuinely believe there are those among us who think we'll just flip a light-switch some date soon and everything will be like it was. In reality, it's going to be a little more drawn out than that, and the process for getting there will have to be more creative and collaborative than any of us imagined back in early March.

In Psalm 126, we have this central image of "the watercourses of the Negeb." The Negeb or Negev region sat right in a transitional area of the Holy Land. It was neither fertile and rich nor was it a desert. Still, it leaned toward *dry* most of the year. As in 10 months or so without rain. Thousands of tiny waterways or fissures ran through what was mostly hard-packed, dry earth. To survive there -- to get any use from the land -- you would have to find ways to capture what little water did come. Even more drastically, you had to prepare the earth and plant seeds well ahead of the brief "wet" season and then hope for the best.

Ahhh...but the rainy times usually did come. Heavy rains would flood the area during a brief window of time. Water would run off the hard-pan earth and into the small watercourses until they met up and fed into larger streams.

The habit began to plant the fields, sometimes through the "tears" (v5) or doubt that this year rain might even come. When the rains did come, shouts of joy (v6) and the laughter of sheer relief abounded among the people!

In my office, I have a small framed print of the famous painting, "The Laughing Jesus." I looked at it the other day while I was there. In the sketch, our Lord has his head thrown back and is enjoying a raucous belly-laugh! Such will be my joy soon when we can re-inhabit our building and be together again in one space. It's coming, y'all. It's coming. Hang with us and trust that a day of joy will be ours soon!

Prayer:

Lord of our faith and God of our own church, give us patience for a little longer. May the seeds that we sow in the quiet of this season give way to joyous fruit soon to come. Amen!

June 17 - Psalm 126
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
A Harvest of Joy - A Song of Ascents

1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." 3 The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

4 Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. 5 May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. 6 Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Devotion:

This rather short Psalm of only six verses has much to say to us. The natural division of the Psalm is verses 1-3; and verses 4-6. Let's dive a little deeper into the words...

Psalm 126 begins by reflecting on the theme of preceding Psalms -- the people have experienced God's aid and deliverance in the past, but when confronted with a new crisis, they petition God for support and profess their confidence in God.

Verses 1-3 seems to recall the return of the captives from Babylon, which is like a dream come true (1b). Perhaps the ultimate joy for Israel was to be set free from captivity and to return to Jerusalem. It was in

Jerusalem that their mouths were filled with laughter and their tongues with outbursts of joy. It was following these actions that the faithful would shout and sing “The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.”

Just what did the Lord accomplish for the Israelites? Above all, the Lord took off the chains of bondage to the Babylonians and returned them to Jerusalem. Secondly, as they approached the Holy City, their minds recalled the religious festivals, the religious ceremonies and all the worship that they had experienced. They were **joyful** to have been freed from exile and to be able to return to Jerusalem.

Then the Psalm abruptly stops and seeks to make sense out of the present difficulties. Recollection is a powerful tool to be used wisely. If one is not careful, recollection becomes reality instead of a memory. Much can be learned by looking back in time, but we are not to remain stuck in time. Contrast the imagery in the sections of this Psalm. From sheer joy (v 1-3) to almost panic (v 4-6). Even with the difficulties present in verses 4-6, all is not lost.

Farmers depend upon rain to grow their crops. In our relatively flat area, all of us are aware of what happens when too much rain happens too quickly -- flooding occurs. And yet following the rain, the ground quickly returns to the condition it was before the rain. If we look retrospectively, flooded lands quickly return to dry land. The farming motive continues with sowing and reaping. “May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.” (v 5-6)

Weeping and tears indicate the pressing need of the people. But just as their need is real, so is their hope. Their memories of how God has acted on their behalf serves as a motivator to continue their hope. In essence, they believe that because God has acted in the past that God is able to act again.

What are some of the lessons from Psalm 126?

- 1) God acts throughout human history.
- 2) Memorable moments often are associated with worship.
- 3) God still allows God’s people to dream.
- 4) God’s people rejoice when remembering the powerful acts of God.
- 5) We need to prepare our hearts to in-person worship when the time is right.
- 6) Worship will “feel” different, because of the prohibition against singing.
- 7) Worship in the building will be different.
- 8) Spacing in the Sanctuary will be altered.
- 9) Worship will always center on the God who loves and redeems God’s people.
- 10) The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

It is my prayer that Psalm 126 will provide a springboard for our preparation to move from online worship to in-person worship. (Please remember to change from your pajamas to regular clothes!)

Prayer:

We give you thanks, O God, for your faithfulness to your people. May our mouths be filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy. Amen.

June 18 - Hebrews 2:5-9
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Exaltation through Abasement

5 Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. 6 But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? 7 You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, 8 subjecting all things under their feet."

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, 9 but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Devotion:

The Hebrews text is a companion to the recent Psalm 8 text. Hebrews 2:5-9 is essentially an interpretation of Psalm 8, in which the future and final reign of Christ is central. Hebrews 2: 6-8a closely follows Psalm 8: 4-6, with the exception of one line that is omitted: "You have given them dominion over the works of your hands." The reason for the omission is not clear, but the author's point is clear – "Jesus is now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." (v 9)

The reader comes away with the contrast of the majesty and power of God with the insignificance of people. With such a vast difference, one might wonder why God would even think about or care about people. The Psalmist affirms the unique place of humanity in relation to creation and also to God. Notice that Jesus is first mentioned in verse 9, but certainly was in the writers mind in 8 b: "In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him."

This section concludes with humanity's description of the temporary journey of the Son: for a little while lower than the angels and then crowned with glory and honor forever.

Why was Jesus crowned with glory and honor?

- 1) Because Jesus suffered death, Jesus was exalted -- crowned with glory and honor.
- 2) When Jesus died, he tasted death for everyone.
- 3) Jesus' suffering and death are vitally linked to his priestly ministry.
- 4) Because Jesus tasted death for everyone, everyone has the opportunity to share in Jesus' ministry.
- 5) We must remember our place in creation -- to be caretakers of creation.
- 6) Our actions reflect our theology of creation and of ministry.

God has blessed us and our lives should reflect that truth.

Prayer:

Creating God, thank you for thinking about people, for loving people and for sending the ultimate example for us – Jesus. May our lives show forth our praise to you. Amen.