



Daily Devotionals – July 31 to August 6, 2021

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

July 31 - Isaiah 41:8-10
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Israel Assured of God's Help

⁸ But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; ⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"; ¹⁰ do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

Devotion:

The second section of Isaiah, Chapters 40-55 contain words of deep distress which is the result of Israel being exiled in Babylon. During this time period, the Jews were literally a people without a country, lost and without hope that the writer delivers these prophecies of hope and comfort (Dr. Page H. Kelley). During these dark days, God's messenger offered these words of comfort and encouragement.

The writer is essentially saying the following: It doesn't matter if you can't sense God, God is with you. God is the same God that called you to be God's servant and God will not abandon you. Remember your lineage -- you are Abraham's offspring!

No doubt, this segment was given in response to a lament (Isaiah 40:27). This response indicates God's involvement with Israel.

First God speaks to reassure Israel that her election still stands. This was necessary because many Israelites interpreted the exile as the end of God's covenant with them. God addresses Israel as *my servant*. By being named God's servant, Israel not only belonged to God, but also owed her allegiance to God. As God's trusted friend, Israel also enjoys God's care and protection. Because there is nothing to fear, God is with Israel and thus Israel's victory is assured.

This passage has remained one of my favorite ones for many years. You may want to ask why, and I'm delighted to share with you the reason. All of us experience "valleys" in our lives and if I find myself in such a "valley" I begin to quote these verses. The assurance comes in waves: Israel, my servant; Jacob, my chosen; offspring of Abraham; I have chosen you and will not cast you off; I am with you -- do not fear or be afraid; your God will strengthen, help and uphold you with God's victorious right hand.

Wow! What an affirmation of God's love for us!

This is an important passage for today, when the news appears to continue to spiral downward concerning COVID-19. Is our predicament different from the Jews in exile? We are in exile because everything that we know has been turned upside down. We are in exile because we desperately want to return to what normal was. We sincerely desire to visit our family and loved ones. We need to be able to touch, embrace and hug one another, because we are created for fellowship with each other and fellowship with God! In the midst of all this uncertainty, God is speaking a word of hope and encouragement -- "do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

Thanks be to God for this timeless gift of encouragement!

Prayer:

Thank you for not leaving us, O God. Thank you for supporting us, O God. But most of all, thank you for never giving up on us, O God. Amen.

August 1 - Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Lord is Near

8 The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

14 The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. 15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. 16 You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.

17 The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. 18 The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. 19 He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them. 20 The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

21 My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

Devotion:

Do you ever feel like you're living life on an island of some kind? Right now, someone who is reading this feels like they are alone somehow. Either they feel that no one really understands what they are going through. Or, they feel as though they are the only one who thinks a certain way or believes a certain way.

The uncertainty of our current pandemic, the cultural and political age...all of this could tempt us to believe that no one in history has lived in this unique set of circumstances. What an odd moment in our nation's brief history, at least.

Then, there's another way you could feel like you are on an island. Maybe you know you did what you did. You said what you said. You chose what you chose. Now, you are experiencing some isolation. You are feeling scrutinized, punished and guilty.

I have good news. The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

Yes, we have to sincerely want grace. Some would look for me to use a word like "repent." We have to mean our apologies and have spirits that are sincere in their contrition. But the Lord upholds those who are falling and raises up all those who have humbled themselves already. With bowed heads, our hearts are heard. God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger.

Now, isn't that good news?! Rise and accept God's grace today.

Prayer:

Lord, we know most of the time when we have fallen short. We know most of the time when we have sinned. Help us to do our best until we know better, then empower us to do better once we know better. Amen.

August 2 - Romans 9:1-5
by Dr. Charles Qualls
I am Speaking the Truth

1 I am speaking the truth in Christ -- I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit -- 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; 5 to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Devotion:

Nearly every our Benediction includes the following phrase. "*Speak truthfully...*" That is, among other requests as we leave worship we implore God to lead us to speak the truth.

Okay. In the spirit of speaking truthfully, you're going to get a sermon today on this same text. So I don't want to give away all my toys here in the devotional. That said, there is plenty we can preview that might enrich the message.

What truth is Paul referencing here?

It could feel like we have walked up on the Apostle having an insider conversation. Maybe even a conversation with himself, if we didn't know that the context is of course his letter to the believers at Rome. Elsewhere in this same letter, we have heard Paul say to them that there is nothing in all Creation that will separate them from the love of God. This is the meaning of grace, and a grace with the power to transform individual lives. Not just "save" them.

What is he so worked up about that his "...soul has anguish"?

Perhaps even Israel's rejection of Christ -- Paul's own people -- is not enough to separate them from the love of God. Paul will explore that in Romans 11, by the way. He will make the case that the covenants previous to Christ might still be in place. God will sort all of that out in Eternity. For us, and for now, suffice Paul's truth to be that one bad moment, one bad choice, one season of genuine evil may not be enough to cause God not to love us. You and me. Isn't that encouraging news?

Prayer:

God of limitless grace, we thank you. In among all of the sinners with whom you are spell-bindingly patient is us. Every last one of us. Thank you, thank you Jesus. Amen.

August 3 - Romans 1:8-15
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Prayer of Thanksgiving

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. 9 For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, 10 asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you --12 or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

13 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am

a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish 15 -- hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Devotion:

Have you ever dreamed of going somewhere, but never were able to work it out? Some place that is either beautiful, fascinating or historically significant? So, now it occupies your curiosity. Yet things just never have seemed to line up to where you can go. For me, that place is the Holy Land. As you know, we had a large group scheduled to go in May of this year when the Covid-19 related travel restrictions settled in. We lost that trip for understandable reasons.

In 1985, my duty as an intern to Bo Prosser took an interesting turn for one brief morning. Bo was to meet a tour group at a parking lot so that a bus could take them to the airport. He was off to see the Holy Land. He didn't have a good camera, so he asked if he could borrow mine. Oh, and he needed an early morning ride, too. I sent the camera with him, assuring him that I just wanted to see his pictures when he returned. Ever since I viewed those amazing shots, I have wanted to go. When it has been safe to go, circumstances have never been favorable. When circumstances would have allowed me to go, the fighting in the Middle East has made it unsafe. I've still never been.

"As God is my witness..." Have you ever said that phrase, or heard someone say it? No doubt. The apostle Paul is writing to the Christian believers at Rome. His zeal, never far from the surface, is apparent now. He wants to go to Rome, and so far has never been able to work it out. Until he can, the Roman Christians are always on his heart and he wants them to know that!

He makes a couple of interesting points in talking about them. First, he says that their "faith" is known around the world. People are talking positively about the believers at Rome. Apparently in some demonstrable ways, they are living out their calling in Christ. Second, Paul's interest in coming to see them is grounded in what he believes could be a mutual sharing of faith. Yes, he thinks he probably could strengthen or teach them. But he also believes that they just might teach or strengthen him, too.

Believe it or not, I knew of Franklin Baptist twenty years before I came here to be your pastor. You've heard me tell that before. I knew some of your previous pastors and admired them. Recently, we have had some national Baptist press acclaim for ministry and missions you've done here at Franklin. I am privileged to get to be with yet another congregation that might be surprised to learn it has some renown outside its own town. All this to say, I think I relate a little to the Apostle's yearning.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, we thank you today that you have had your hand on our shoulder here at Franklin Baptist Church. Continue to call us, equip us and transform us for your service. May others want to be a part of what you do here among us! Amen.

August 4 - Acts 2:37-47
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Life Among the Believers

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." 40 And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." 41 So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Devotion:

"Now when they heard..." what?

My Sunday School class knows by now that if we have a lesson text that begins as this one does, we're going to head backwards before we move forward. A segment of scripture worded this way begs you to look back and find out what has happened just before. So, today we do that. The Holy Spirit has just come upon the new church in Jerusalem. This is Acts 2, where swirling tongues of fire dance about. A mighty rushing wind is in the room.

Then, the crowd watching these Christ-followers reacts. "These men are drunk," they say. So, Peter addresses them to explain that they are not, but instead have received the Holy Spirit. He then reaches back to connect the Crucified and Risen Christ with their shared heritage in King David. He points out that this one has been the promised Messiah that they had awaited, and that their reaction had been to kill him.

Now you see their frightened reaction beginning in v37. "What should we do then?!" Our text for today's devotion is part of Peter's sermon to them. We like it when he tells them to "repent." You see the visceral reaction to this first hand testimony. Nearly 3,000 are said to have been converted to faith in Christ.

Trouble is, today good Christians call the very next part "The Communist Passage" in the New Testament. You are laughing about right now, but you ought to hear some of the reactions that pastors get to just reading this scripture we consider today.

43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

We ministers get fussed at for reading this, and heaven forbid we take it seriously and try to teach or preach this. I'm not exaggerating. This is called "liberal." This is called "socialist." You know what I call it? I call it part of the New Testament. Part of the same sacred, inspired scripture that all the rest of our Bible is composed of. Part of our story as Christians. So, if the notion of anyone removing or changing part of the Bible is "fighting words" to you -- then you also have to take seriously this part. Maybe there's something instructional in there for us.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to take seriously your sacred word. All of it. Even the parts of it that don't come naturally to us. Especially the parts that don't come naturally. May we listen for your voice, as opposed to a facsimile of our own. Amen.

August 5 - Matthew 15:32-39

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Feeding the Four Thousand

³² Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way." ³³ The disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" ³⁴ Jesus asked them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." ³⁵ Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, ³⁶ he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after

giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ³⁷ And all of them ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ³⁸ Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹ After sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

Devotion:

Today's passage follows after Jesus healing the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute and many others. They were brought to Jesus, sat down at his feet and he cured them.

Our lesson follows the physical healing of many and Jesus is not finished with the crowd. They have been with Jesus for three days and had not eaten. Jesus asked the disciples what resources were available and discovered a total of seven loaves of bread and a few fish. Certainly this meager amount was not sufficient for the crowd which was numbered at 4,000 men in addition to women and children (v38). How would Jesus meet this human need?

Jesus instructed the people to sit on the ground and took the fish and the loaves. He took the bread, gave thanks for the bread, broke the bread, and gave it to them. In essence, Jesus provided a preview into the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. Jesus had just incorporated what theologians term the "Great Thanksgiving." (You probably remember those words from Franklin Baptist Communion Services.)

Notice that the disciples were practical at heart -- "Where are we to get enough food to feed such a large crowd?" (v33). Jesus was trying to paint a larger picture and by doing so, we might glimpse the coming of the kingdom of God. What paralyzes you today? What paralyzes me today? What paralyzes society today?

COVID-19 appears to be everywhere and cases are still spiking in our beloved Franklin area. The reality of personal hygiene (frequent hand washing), staying an appropriate distance from others and wearing a mask are our new reality. So much has changed that sometimes we lose our bearings. What does God ask of us in this time of national unrest? How can we be the hands and feet of Christ today?

First, we need to remember that God provides for our needs: The disciples fed 4,000 men plus women and children.

Second, we need to follow the actions of Christ: Survey the need, seek resources for the need and then act on the need.

Third, we need to act in faith: Give thanks, bless, break, and share our blessings with others.

Fourth, we need to be kind and generous with our thoughts and actions.

Finally, remember that our Heavenly Father knows our needs, even before we know them. Just as God provided food for the thousands on the hillside, God still provides for our needs.

Prayer:

Limitless God, thank you for loving us by teaching us. Help us to remain faithful to your teachings. Amen.

August 6 - Psalm 85:8-13

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Prayer for the Restoration of God's Favor

⁸ Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. ⁹ Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. ¹¹ Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. ¹² The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. ¹³ Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

Devotion:

How many of you remember as a child having to wait for Christmas? For me, it was torture counting down the days until Christmas. Waiting is never easy for any of us and the Psalmist describes how Israel fares during the exile as they wait.

Psalm 85 lends itself to a neat division -- verses 1-7 and 8-13. They complement each other with verses 1-7 asking the questions and the reply is found in verses 8-13. The questions center on a single question; Lord, will you restore the fortunes of our land?

Apparently the people of Israel have a short memory. It is during this time that the people are in exile and seeking God's provisions. But their memory is long enough to recall how their lives used to be -- before the exile. This Psalm (especially v8-13) reminds us that God remains true to his promises. The blessings that are promised are that God will speak peace to his people, that his salvation is near for those who fear him, love and righteousness will meet, faithfulness and righteousness and peace will surely come. In essence, heaven on earth!

The promise of the gifts prayed for in the first section are promised in the second section. Perhaps it was a single voice that spoke in verses 8-13 -- maybe a prophet or a preacher delivers the news. The good news of peace calls for a response. The promise that salvation is at hand requires a response. The promise of steadfast love also requires a response. But, these gifts are not guaranteed, they are conditional gifts that are given only to those who fear God.

The point here is this -- God's character and activity will fill not only the earth, but the entire universe. The description affirms that God will be with and for God's people. God's glory (symbolic of God's presence) will indeed dwell in the land.

Thomas a' Kempis relied on Psalm 85 as he wrote *The Imitation of Christ*. The Psalm captures the reality that Christians already know -- the birth of Jesus Christ was the very coming of God, and his life and ministry embodied the love, righteousness, faithfulness and peace of God.

Psalm 85 is often used in Advent, the season when we wait for the birth of Christ, but this Psalm's focus is more clearly the return of Christ. Both Advent and Psalm 85 encourage us to both celebrate and pray for salvation, and also for the return of Christ. "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20b)

Prayer:

Be with us Lord Jesus in these days of uncertainty. Shepherd us through uncharted waters as we strive to be your authentic and loving disciples. Encourage us that we might continue to be your faithful disciples, we ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.