



## Daily Devotionals – August 28 to September 3, 2021

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

**August 28 - Psalm 26:1-8**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Plea for Justice and Declaration of Righteousness of David.***

<sup>1</sup> Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering.

<sup>2</sup> Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and mind. <sup>3</sup> For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you. <sup>4</sup> I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; <sup>5</sup> I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked.

<sup>6</sup> I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O Lord, <sup>7</sup> singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all your wondrous deeds. <sup>8</sup> O Lord, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides.

### **Devotion:**

Have you discovered the familiar pattern that is found in Psalms? The Psalmist declares and cries out to God because of injustice. God's name is called out over and over to make the injustices go away. The Psalmist "sees" God at work, but yet lacks enough faith to wait for God to complete the work.

Always complaining, lacking in trust and impatient are characteristics found in the Psalmist. Without dwelling on the chosen verses, please join me on a wild ride in the front seat of the Psalmist's chariot.

Have you noticed that some people suddenly "get religion" when their world is not going according to their plan? When their applecart is turned upside down, they are almost indigent in their outbursts. One question is repeated often, "Why did this happen to ME?" Maybe they are trying to blame God for their circumstances. Maybe they are convinced that the world is out to get them. Whatever the thought, a common thread is found throughout the lament and that thought is this: Whatever has happened to me could not possibly be my fault!

Today many of us have abdicated personal responsibility. We desire to be free to make our own decisions, but yet, we do not want to take responsibility for our actions. In America, we are free to make our decisions, but we are not free from the consequences of our decisions.

The Psalmist believes that their behavior is upright before God. As if God needed a reminder, a litany of personal attributes is listed: Walked in integrity, trusted in the Lord, walk in faithfulness, hate the company of evildoers, and wash their hands in innocence. The writer even proclaims their love for God's house.

The writer pleads their case before God, almost as an attorney pleads their case before a jury. Just like an attorney, the Psalmist waits following presenting his case.

Waiting is difficult for all of us, especially when we really need an answer pronto! Today our country is divided - - masked vs. no mask; republican vs. democrat; city vs. county; in person worship vs. online worship. If we stop and think, we will disagree on many things, but hopefully, we agree on the completed work of Jesus Christ.

The following verse states this far better than I.

*How Deep the Father's Love for Us*

(Stuart Townend; Celebrating Grace #178; Stanza 3):

I will not boast in anything; no gifts, no power, no wisdom;  
but I will boast in Jesus Christ; his death and resurrection.  
Why should I gain from his reward? I cannot give an answer.  
But this I know with all my heart; his wounds have paid my ransom.

**Prayer:**

Patient and ever-loving God, thank you for hearing our petitions and thank you for answering our petitions. Help us to trust your provisions for us, in this life, and the life to come. Amen.

**August 29 - Psalm 105**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Remember the Wonders***

1 Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done.

2 Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. 3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

4 Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. 5 Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, 6 you his servants, the descendants of Abraham, his chosen ones, the children of Jacob.

23 Then Israel entered Egypt; Jacob resided as a foreigner in the land of Ham. 24 The Lord made his people very fruitful; he made them too numerous for their foes, 25 whose hearts he turned to hate his people, to conspire against his servants.

26 He sent Moses his servant, and Aaron, whom he had chosen.

**Devotion:**

We get a few, representative verses today from the much longer Psalm 105. The psalm begins with this encouragement. "Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done."

Because we are human, maybe it's easiest to remember to worship God when we take some effort. In this case, it's the effort to do what the Psalmist shows us. Psalm 105 is a detailed, specific remembrance of what God has done in Israel's long history.

In these few verses, as well as those unassigned ones that are sandwiched in between, the psalmist outlines Israel's vast history to that point. They have moved, and it appears that God has moved with and even ahead of them along the way. God has blessed them in many ways, even though here and there they have suffered hardship.

That kind of effort is necessary in a what-have-you-done-for-me-lately kind of world. Don't you think? We linger in the Covid-19 era presently. During that time of global pandemic, civil unrest has broken out and the home stretch of a presidential election year has gotten predictably ugly. Now as I write, two hurricanes are barreling toward the same stretch of the U.S. coastland. Nevermind any personal illness, misfortune, loss, challenge or heartbreak that we can go through even in the best of years.

Sometimes, we may need to sit down and read the sacred words. Sometimes, we may need to do our own reflection. Then, God's hand upon our own lives might be easier to see than during a time when we could be feeling a little sorry for ourselves. God's larger imprint upon humanity might be more apparent if we look back. "Sing to him...tell of all his wonderful acts."

**Prayer:**

Lord of all days, speak to us in our challenging time. May we also speak to you. May we gather up your story with us, and may we remember your goodness in our lives. Amen.

**August 30 - Exodus 3:1-15**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***I Am Who I Am***

1 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up."

4 When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.

10 So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12 He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

13 But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

**Devotion:**

Okay. Shhhh....don't tell anyone what I'm about to tell you. It'll be our little secret. If you travel in what we call "The Holy Land," you might be on a tour that stops by the traditional location of Moses' theophany with *the burning bush*. Your tour guide may let you step off the bus and take pictures. With your shoes off, of course, just as Moses did. Here is the problem: depending on your tour guide, you may be at Mount Serbal, you may be at Mt. St. Catherine's or you may be at the current Mount Sinai. At one time or another, all have been believed to be the biblical location of Mt. Sinai or "Horeb" as it was called in Exodus.

Truth is, no one knows for sure now. Wherever biblical Mt. Horeb was during Moses' time, it was probably not an extraordinary place. The bush itself was also probably unremarkable. Most believe it was a "bramble," a common scrub bush of that time and region. Which brings up one of the more powerful edges of this week's text: God will most often speak to us in the common places and circumstances of our lives.

Another powerful motif here is that of captive or needful people being freed (or *delivered*) by the efforts of a reluctant hero. Moses did not seem to have sought the office. God found Moses and commissioned him. Moses resisted. God persisted and then prepared a willing Moses. That pattern has repeated itself biblically and throughout Christian history. Including probably within your own life and in your own church. Think back. Remember. Celebrate and then live forward. God may be calling you even now to deliver someone!

Maybe I like most what God tells Moses to say if someone asks who has sent him. He is to tell them that "I Am" has sent him. A sentence before that, though, God elaborates. "I Am Who I Am" is like an explanation for Moses. We try to put God in all kinds of boxes. We use certain words to describe God, every one of which -- if you think about it -- misses the mark. Every single time. God transcends our understandings, so God obviously cannot be captured accurately by any of our words. Take it from God: *I Am Who I Am*.

It gives me chills later when Jesus -- God in human form -- uses this same response in John 8:58 (under fire from Pharisees who were questioning him). He did so earlier with the woman at the well in John 4. "I Am..." Jesus says, as he is questioned about who he is. Words will not capture, they cannot hold, the essence of God. Eventually, "I Am" makes as much sense as anything else.

**Prayer:**

Lord, help us to recognize you. Even more, help us to know you. Lead us to insight about what you mean when you say, "I Am Who I Am." Amen.

**August 31 - Revelation 3:1-6**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***The Message to Sardis***

3 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

"I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. 3 Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. 6 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

**Devotion:**

I know I have shared this with you before. On our biblical tour called "The Journeys of Paul and John," Elizabeth and I went to the Isle of Patmos, Greece. It was a brief stop on the water part of our trip. Our ship docked in the harbor at the foot of a hill, and a bus took us on the steep climb to the top. There, we toured a monastery that was over 1,000 years old.

However, the treasure of our stop was just around the corner. The chance to go down into the *Cave of Apocalypse* or the *Cave of the Revelation*, as some call it. A steep staircase descended the equivalent of about one level if you were in a house. There is found the traditional location of the cave into which the apostle St. John went each day. He was exiled there on Patmos for a time. While there, he felt a calling to go into this cave and commune with God. He received there each day parts of a message which he had written down. These messages comprise what we know today as our biblical "Revelation of John." The last book of our New Testament.

For two centuries now, people have monkeyed with John's revelation. They have twisted it, stretched it especially and sometimes lost its meaning altogether. You have heard me say that overall, this quirky and colorful piece of apocalyptic literature is really "...a love-letter from God." Its attempt is to reassure people of faith that God is in control, and that God is working to redeem all of Creation.

There are letters to seven churches within this Revelation, now referred to as "The 7 Churches of the Apocalypse." One of them was at Sardis. The people at Sardis could be grateful that they were not the neighboring church at Laodicea. For that church, God's words were not pleasant.

*15 I know your deeds; you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were one or the other! 16 So because you are lukewarm -- neither hot nor cold -- I am about to vomit you out of My mouth! 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have grown wealthy and need nothing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked....*

Still, the message for Sardis (and us by extension) is challenging. Okay, it's worse than that. But there is a chance at least. The believers at Sardis need to wake up. Doesn't it hurt you to read the description that you'd never want to hear someone give of US? "You have the name of being alive, but you are dead." If they will take what little life they have left and live as God's faithful, Jesus will advocate for them with God. They will stand a chance of being welcomed into the New Jerusalem. They will stand a chance of getting to spend an active eternity nearer to their God.

**Prayer:**

Lord, help us to burst from our complacency. From our tiredness, our boredom and our comfort, Lord, bring us into the light of what you would have us to be! Amen.

**September 1 - Exodus 5:1-23**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Bricks without Straw***

5 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.'" 2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go." 3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword." 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!" 5 Pharaoh continued, "Now they are more numerous than the people of the land and yet you want them to stop working!" 6 That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors, 7 "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.'" 9 Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words."

10 So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw. 11 Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.'" 12 So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. 13 The taskmasters were urgent, saying, "Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw." 14 And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, "Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?"

15 Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, "Why do you treat your servants like this? 16 No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people." 17 He said, "You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the

Lord.' 18 Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks." 19 The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, "You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks." 20 As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. 21 They said to them, "The Lord look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

22 Then Moses turned again to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people."

**Devotion:**

Let's check in on Moses this morning. He has now accepted his assignment from God. He is a reluctant servant, though. For the task is large and it is not within his comfort zone. He doesn't feel worthy. He is shy about speaking. It's funny how the call of God doesn't always hit within what we're exactly comfortable doing. Sometimes God's call causes us to stretch ourselves a bit.

At a former church, we had a young lady who had been elected a Deacon. Similar to here, the Deacons there leaned heavily toward pastoral care and service. She told me, "I'm not too comfortable making visits to people in the hospital or homebound. And, I definitely can't pray or speak in public." I completely understood that those might be things that didn't come naturally for her. But what she meant was that she wouldn't even try. She basically sat in meetings for three years and then rotated off. But I bet she still lists "deacon" as an office of service on her resume.

Moses has now gone before Pharaoh and begun his appeals to let the Israelites go. He has drafted his brother to help, and has mustered the courage to give this frightening work a try. As you may recall, the Pharaoh is famously resistant. On the one hand, the Israelites now outnumber his own Egyptian people by his estimation. On the other, his lifestyle and his government's economy have been built on the backs of the cheap slave laborers. They are addicted to what they can accomplish with forced, basically under-compensated labor by non-citizens they control. He doesn't want the Israelites, but he can't do without them either. God has heard the cry of a people who are being treated as less than human.

Do you notice what Pharaoh's reaction is to Moses' request? He doubles down on his mistreatment. He demands that the same number of bricks be made by the Jewish slaves, but he takes away the straw they used. Now without a traditional binding agent, they must manufacture just as many bricks. That is cruel! As we will see them do in the wilderness, the slaves turned on their would-be deliverers and blamed them for the increased hardship.

We end with Moses' frustrated, defeated plea to God --

*Then Moses turned again to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? 23 Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people."*

**Prayer:**

Hear our tiredness, O Lord. We sense your call upon our lives to help you bring about your kingdom here on earth. But we look around us and see forces it would seem we cannot overcome. Including our own relative comfort. Move us. Motivate us...to at least try where we are. Amen.

**September 2 - Matthew 12:22-32**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Jesus and Beelzebul***

<sup>22</sup> Then they brought to him a demoniac who was blind and mute; and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see. <sup>23</sup> All the crowds were amazed and said, "Can this be the Son of David?"

<sup>24</sup> But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons."

<sup>25</sup> He knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. <sup>26</sup> If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? <sup>27</sup> If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

<sup>28</sup> But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. <sup>29</sup> Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his property, without first tying up the strong man? Then indeed the house can be plundered. <sup>30</sup> Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

<sup>31</sup> Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>32</sup> Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

#### **Devotion:**

One of the many qualities that I admire about Franklin Baptist is the ability to ask questions. The nurture of our faith is taken seriously, as it should. A growing faith is one that questions, reexamines and then moves forward. I believe that this passage is a case study in the nurture of faith.

The passage opens with Jesus healing a demoniac who was blind and mute. The reaction to this healing brought forth a question -- can this be the Son of David? What the writer does not tell us is why this particular healing incident brought forth the question, or was it the culmination of other unknown events that prompted the question. At present, we do not have the answer, but we do have the question!

Was this the Son of David? Assuredly, a profound question, but also a question that sparks friction with the religious leaders. This friction comes from the tension between the religious leaders and the people. The religious leaders were jealous of Jesus and his ability to heal. Can you imagine the thought process? It may have gone something like this...if this is the Son of David, then sooner or later the people will realize that they do not need us. The Pharisees cannot explain the healing and they try to analyze it. Since they could not agree with Jesus being the Son of David, they cast suspicion by attributing the action to Beelzebul. Jesus quickly refuted their claims by saying that if he were Satan, there would be no reason to cast out demons. Jesus then states that the Pharisees already endorsed other exorcists, so casting out demons was not something completely new. Jesus then goes on to say that through the healings that he is demonstrating his power over Satan. He further states that people are either for Jesus or against Jesus. If you attribute the work of God to Satan, then you are blaspheming against God and God's Spirit.

Those who follow Christ and have experienced his ministry know better. But, this is to say that finite humans do not understand the full counsel of God. The good news in all of this is that Christ has redeemed us through his work on the cross. Thanks be to God!

#### **Prayer:**

God, we give you thanks for your patient and forgiving love. Amen.

**September 3 - Psalm 119:33-40**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***The Glories of God's Law***

<sup>33</sup> Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end. <sup>34</sup> Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. <sup>35</sup> Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. <sup>36</sup> Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain. <sup>37</sup> Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways. <sup>38</sup> Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you.

<sup>39</sup> Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your ordinances are good. <sup>40</sup> See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.

**Devotion:**

One of my favorite verses is Psalm 119: 33, "Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end." This simple verse has become so very profound in my life. What does this require?

First, we must acknowledge that the Lord is worthy of our investment of time. Once we have the proper order (God first), then we are ready to learn.

Second, to be able to be taught one must be willing. If we approach God with a willing heart, then we are able to be taught by the Master Teacher. A willing heart is a heart that is not only ready, but one that is committed to learn. The more that we are around the Master, the more we are able to absorb his teachings. The more teaching that we absorb, the more like Christ we become. Teach me, O Lord.

Third, the more time we spend learning God's statutes, the more we will understand them. The Psalmist then shifts abruptly to pressing issues -- is it possible that they might keep the law and observe it with their entire being? The Psalmist prayer goes something like this -- keep my heart and eyes locked upon you, O God. Keep me from selfish gain. Keep my eyes from being disrupted by the vain things of this world.

After communicating these thoughts, the Psalmist waits for God's confirmation. People have not changed much in some 2,000 years, have they? Today we find ourselves waiting for the approval of others. It is important to live in harmony with each other and to seek approval of others. But the approval of God is the approval that we all seek.

I believe that ministry is replicating the life of Jesus -- loving others, supporting others, praying for others, sharing with others and communing with others. During this pandemic, the only way to accomplish this is virtually. I propose that you and I use this pandemic to reimagine how we are able to do ministry. So let us dream dreams about the Lord our God who loves us with an everlasting love! I, for one, look forward to that day when our plans become reality!

**Prayer:**

God of law and love, invade our hearts that we might be your teachable children. Amen.