



Daily Devotionals – October 9 to October 15, 2021

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

October 9 - Psalm 23
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
The Divine Shepherd

A Psalm of David.

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; 3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff -- they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Devotion:

Arguably the most familiar and popular Psalm, this seems like a trip down memory lane. Many families have called upon these comforting words during trying times. Often associated with funerals and funeral services, this Psalm deserves a wider reading and importance -- not just for graveside services.

The basic tenant of the Psalm is that God will provide no matter what circumstance we find ourselves in. This assurance of God's provision is a relief in times of trouble.

Because God is my Shepherd, I will not want or fear anything. Because God is my Shepherd, God knows better than I when I need to lay down and rest. Because God is my Shepherd, I will not fear, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Because God is my Shepherd, God remains with me and comforts me.

Because God is my Shepherd, God prepares a table before me to bless me, even in the presence of my enemies. Because God is my Shepherd, my anointed head will overflow with oil and my cup will be full to overflowing. Because God is my Shepherd, I am able to dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Provision and protection; blessing upon blessing, and the assurance of God's continued presence are hallmarks of this Psalm.

I admire Isaac Watt's paraphrase of Psalm 23 and have included it for your reading.

My Shepherd will supply my need, Jehovah is His Name; in pastures fresh He makes me feed, beside the living stream. He brings my wand'ring spirit back when I forsake His ways; and leads me, for His mercy's sake, in paths of truth and grace.

2 When I walk thro' the shades of death, Thy presence is my stay; a word of Thy supporting breath drives all my fears away. Thy hand, in sight of all my foes, doth still my table spread, my cup with blessings overflows, Thine oil anoints my head.

3 The sure provisions of my God attend me all my days; O may Thy house be mine abode, and all my work be praise! There would I find a settled rest, while others go and come; no more a stranger or a guest, but like a child at home.

Prayer:

Remind us O God of your continuing provisions for us throughout our life. Amen.

October 10 - Mark 2:18-22

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Why Aren't We More Like Them?!

18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 19 Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.

21 "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

Devotion:

Hey...why aren't we more like them?

Hasn't that been humanity's distraction pretty much since there was a humanity?

"Keep your eyes on your own test paper," the teacher has to remind.

"She's such a copycat!" the child protests about her classmate and rival.

"Why don't we run an offense like they do?" the football fan protests.

"What about him? Why doesn't he have to do what I have to do?" Peter asked Jesus when he saw John approaching one day.

There are some places and times where uniformity, predictability and precision is the best plan. The military would be an obvious example. In his autobiography, chef Anthony Bourdain observed, "When I am running a restaurant I don't really want a team of talented chefs. All they want to do is to make their own mark. They want to free-lance and create. I've already done the creating. I want cooks, not chefs. I want predictable, military-like precision time after time." In the late 1940s and on through the 50s, companies all over the United States economy grew and prospered in part because military personnel had come home from the war and filled the offices of companies that simply needed people who would be reliable and do the work they were asked to do.

Not always so in God's kingdom. People were seeing something different in our text today, but they did not yet understand. Uniformity was the order of the day, as Jesus and His disciples went about their business. The Temple culture set the pace, and obediences to the Mosaic Law -- and temple edicts on practice -- were to be carried out without exception. This is of course what got Jesus and his disciples cross-ways with the religious leaders.

All around Jesus, no one could figure out why he and his disciples dared to be so different. Still today, when folks see a church that has held to its true identity and practice, they wonder. "Why aren't you doing this like

everyone else is these days?” Or nowadays they ask, “Why haven’t you resumed in-person worship gatherings yet?” *Hey...why aren’t we more like them?*

We aren’t more like “them” because we are us. Just living out what we perceive to be the calling of God for us. It’s a very Baptist thing to do. We’ll leave the rest up to God.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to trust in your Spirit’s guidance. When we collectively believe you are leading us a little out of the norm, help us especially to believe you may have a reason. Amen.

October 11 - Isaiah 25:1-9

by Dr. Charles Qualls

I Will Praise Your Name

1 O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. 2 For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt.

3 Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you. 4 For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm, 5 the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.

6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. 7 And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. 8 Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. 9 It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Devotion:

Exalt. Praise. Not all words are created equally. Words like these two are strong, vivid words. They are not casual nor do they reflect inattentiveness. When one is going to “exalt” or “praise,” one is tuned-in and active. So, what qualities of God could elicit these active and focused worship responses?

In Isaiah 25, the prophet speaks of what God has done and of what God “will” do. In fact, these future promises are big ones! God is on the line to affect humanity in powerful ways. I wonder, what have you noticed about God’s salvation through the Bible, through your own faith and in your everyday living?

Especially our Bible makes the case that God has a watchful eye on those who are oppressed. God favors those upon whom strong forces have overwhelmed and threaten to smash. While the Bible is not God’s last or only revelation, it is our sacred and holy written document. It tells the story of God at work within all of Creation, from beginning to now. We find that God is consistent. God does not take well to bullies, oppressors, injustices and unfairnesses. God offers us *salvation* that can take on many forms. Obvious within our faith, we believe that Jesus Christ “saves” our souls and makes eternity possible.

But how else might God have *saved* you already, and how might God be saving you right now?

Beautiful is the description of God making a refuge for those who are troubled. A shelter for the needy, including those for whom the rainstorms of life would threaten to overwhelm. Even the ruthless will be no match for God’s opposition. Those who need shade will find soothing clouds. A lavish Messianic feast will await the overcome as they ascend the mountain of the Lord. The Lord will wipe away the tears of those who

grieve. How has God already shown you evidence that the Divine is indeed capable of delivering on these prophecies?

Prayer:

God, we give thanks for the many ways in which we find shelter and refuge in you. Hear our voices when we give you praise. May we learn ever more to trust in you. Amen.

October 12 - Jude 17-25

by Dr. Charles Qualls

A Call to Persevere

17 But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. 18 They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." 19 These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. 22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear -- hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Doxology

24 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy -- 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Devotion:

Social media has been good for a lot of things. But with it comes the other stuff, too. Including the frequent posts over the years that surely we are living in the last days. Assurances that these last cultural ebbs and flows indicate God is bringing things to a close. Convictions that evidently we are living in the very most sinful of times, and that the signs-and-signals indicate God is about to stop it all.

Now, that may be. But every generation in history since the Christ walked among us has felt this way. Someone in every year of every era has proclaimed our world to be hopelessly broken and that God was about to wrap it all up. Every natural disaster, every plague and each economic recession is said by some corn-pone theologian to be God's judgment and revenge upon a broken humanity.

Yet, here we still are.

How, then, can we hear the apostles' counsel about the opposition that God's people will no doubt face in the last days?

"In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." 19 These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

Fact is, Christians in all eras of our existence have been met with these forces. On our worst days, you or I could be one of these same kinds of people.

Well, here are some things we can do in any age --

20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. 22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear -- hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Don't miss God's promises within the small "Doxology" in today's scripture. You know what? Even more, here are some things we all could do: Don't be one of those who brings division, divisiveness and doubt to the fellowship. Don't do it. Be light where there is darkness. Be peace where there is unrest. Be Christ where there is too little hope. Then, let's leave the rest to God.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, give us hope. Show us why we should trust in your timing, your movement, all over again. Move among us in evident ways while we put our hope in you. Amen.

October 13 - Exodus 33:1-6

by Dr. Charles Qualls

I Will Not Go With You

33 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' 2 I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 3 Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

4 When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments. 5 For the Lord had said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.'" 6 So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb.

Devotion:

Leave this place...I will not go with you.

That's not exactly heart-warming, is it? Probably not what you would call "inspirational" on its surface. When I read a text like this, and I know that I am going to either preach or teach on it, my first reaction is "Oh, boy." For these could be some of the scariest words in our Bible.

So, as I hope you would expect we're going to go deeper than its surface.

Can you feel God creating some distance here in these verses? I mentioned recently in one of these devotions that I believe one of the most frequent and worst of God's punishments can be when God simply leaves us to the wages of our own poor decisions or actions. Not striking us with a lightning bolt, not spontaneous combustion while we're walking down the street. Just letting what we've brought on ourselves actually happen.

This is what we hear in V1-6 of Exodus 33 today. Twice God says, "I will not go with you..." choosing to send an "angel" (read: *messenger* or *guide*) ahead of them instead. Then, God explains why. "...because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way." Jesus would later make this accusation, and in the Acts of the Apostles the term pops up again.

A stiff-necked people is haughty, stubborn and unyielding in their focus. Specifically, God has tired of the Israelites' complaining and rebellion. Add in that here they are also busy trying to fashion a golden calf while Moses is meeting with God. So, they are attempting to stray from their worship of the "one true" God and instead practice monotheism or multiple gods. God has estimated that they will not turn. The Divine, who has loved and provided for them, has been worn out by how they are acting. God will choose to let them go on rather than be near them and risk "destroying" them. Oh my. Note that God cares enough...to take a season and calm down. Then, let them move on into what they have chosen if that's what they insist on. That is actually the ultimate act of love.

Prayer:

God, we know that this is our story, not a story about “them.” Help us, O Lord, to trust in you enough to follow you rather than ourselves. May you find us faithful and obedient, pleasing and humble, in your presence. Amen.

October 14 - John 6:25-35**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson*****The Bread of Heaven***

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?”

²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”

²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” ³⁰ So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing?”

³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³² Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴ They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Devotion:

This portion of scripture immediately follows the story of Jesus feeding the multitude of 5,000. If you remember the story, you will remember the disciples gathering twelve baskets of food that was left over after everyone had eaten to their hearts content. Then the disciples and Jesus went to the other side of the sea and Jesus calms the stormy waters with a word.

Our portion begins with the crowd busy looking for Jesus, and when they found him, they could not understand how Jesus traveled to the other side of the sea without them noticing. When asked this question, Jesus replies,

“Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” (V26-28)

The crowd had a twofold mission: To find out how Jesus had escaped them and to eat to their hearts content once again. Magery R. Devega, Pastor of St. Paul’s UMC in Cherokee, Iowa, has this thought on our passage,

“The response of Jesus is as puzzling as it is liberating. When the crowds finally locate him, he does not congratulate them for finding him, nor does he applaud their tenacity and their choice to continue following him. Instead, he identifies the idolatrous nature of their pursuit, names their motivation as selfish, and introduces them to a possibility of a holier life.” Feasting on the Gospels: John, p184

The crowd had followed Jesus for *all the wrong reasons*. Instead of following for an intimate relationship, they were following for the instant gratification that might come. After finding Jesus, they still did not grasp what Jesus was saying. They wanted a short cut to faith, not the faith that is built on everyday practices such as scripture reading and prayer. “What must we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” (V28-29)

“This is God’s work,” said Jesus. This is a liberating word for us today. When our spiritual practice does not produce the desired effects, then our practices need updating. But not so fast, because God does all the work. If we find ourselves in the winter of the soul, then belief takes over, bridging the gap.

Then we find ourselves in the discussion about the Bread of Life. The crowds wanted a sign that they might believe, even reminding Jesus that their ancestors received manna in their wilderness journey. Jesus reminded them that it was God and not Moses who supplied the bread from heaven. Then they asked for this bread always. What happened next surely puzzled the crowds --

Jesus stated “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (V35)

Like the crowds in this passage, people today are concerned about their futures. We are being bombarded with issues such as Covid, economic issues, healthcare and the election to name just a few. When people are anxious, they revert to past actions. It is when we replace “how things have been” with the life altering word from God that *does not* depend on us.

Our security and provisions are based on the faithfulness of God. After all, it is God’s desire “that everyone who believes in him may perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16b)

Prayer:

Faithful God, thank you for your provisions in this life and the next. Amen.

October 15 - III John 9-12
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Diotrephes and Demetrius

⁹ I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰ So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with those charges, he refuses to welcome the friends, and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church.

¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. ¹² Everyone has testified favorably about Demetrius, and so has the truth itself. We also testify for him, and you know that our testimony is true.

Devotion:

This portion of III John is an illustration of a church that does not have existing boundaries, and as thus, the people disagree. Verse 9 is written by the elder (?) who appears to criticize Diotrephes and his reluctance to receive him, and as such, does not recognize the elder’s authority. Because of this disagreement, whatever was written was not received, and thus the friction between the two.

In the elder’s view, Diotrephes is guilty of at least three charges:

- 1) Does not acknowledge the elder’s authority.
- 2) Spreads false charges against the elder.
- 3) Seeks excommunication for all who oppose him.

What do we know about Diotrephes? It appears that he wanted to control the church. Today we would probably call him a church bully. The signs are all there: Did not associate with other spiritual leaders, his slander of church leaders, sets a bad example by not welcoming other religious teachers and attempting to

excommunicate anyone who opposed his leadership. This sounds very familiar to us today, because the same traits are often associated with a cult.

This is not the first time that a church has been in conflict, and it certainly will not be the last time. People disagree and often disagree strongly. But even a harsh disagreement is able to be redeemed if the parties discover a third way. This third way does not belong to either person, this third way is the way of love. This way of love looks out not for self, but for the other. This way of love is from God and seeks the betterment of others. Remember the words from verse 11: ¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

What do we make of verse 12? ¹² Everyone has testified favorably about Demetrius, and so has the truth itself. We also testify for him, and you know that our testimony is true.

Because churches are comprised of people, churches are not immune from sins such as jealousy, pride, and slander. These traits are still present in any church, but great harm can be done if no one holds each other accountable. The evidence of a true spiritual leader is servanthood and not an autocrat.

Question for thought -- do our lives demonstrate the traits of a servant, or the traits of an autocrat?

Prayer:

Holy God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus, help us to monitor our thoughts, words and deeds that they may be pleasing in your sight and continue to bring harmony to your church. Amen.