



**Daily Devotionals – December 5 to December 11, 2020
To Encourage Franklin in Such a Time As This
By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson-- Franklin Baptist Church**

This brief series of daily devotionals are designed to speak into the days in which we live. But we frame that sacred time in the challenging days of the Covid-19 or Novel CoronaVirus that is spreading across our globe. Take in these daily words of devotion. We hope you will experience wisdom, perspective and yes even hope!

They draw from the Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings by date.
(All scriptures will use the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted)

**Saturday, December 5 - Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13
by Dr. Charles Qualls
*Let Me Hear What God the Lord Will Speak***

1 Lord, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

2 You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin. *Selah*

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:

I don't know how you tend to hear biblical texts like those that come from the Psalms. If you hear them as though they were only written by spiritual super-heroes, you're probably missing out on something. If you tend to believe they were written only by the crème de la crème of biblical characters, you may rob them of their richness. It can be easy to fall into the trap of thinking these biblical voices had it all together. If we actually pay attention to their words, they didn't.

If it would help, go back just for a moment and re-read our brief psalm portion for today. Take it slowly, and wonder what would make someone pray to God as this person essentially does.

Perhaps they were caught up in the painful exile of the Hebrew people. We know that exile and occupation, during the later Old Testament times, was a near-constant issue. Perhaps this person is a prophet, or has listened to the prophets. Maybe he is feeling penitent.

What is gripping, though, is that eventually he rightly concludes that the thing we most need to do is to listen. Have you listened to God during the pandemic? Have you made an effort to find some quiet and to reflect on what God might be telling you? In the midst of all our complaining and editorial that 2020 has prompted, have you left room for God to offer an opinion?

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. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

Prayer:

Lord, speak into our lives just now. May we find your voice in the midst of all the others that would clamor for our attention. Your perspective matters. Your spirit can lead. Amen.

Sunday, December 6 - 2 Peter 3:8-15a

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Lord is Not Slow About His Promise

8 But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

11 Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? 13 But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

14 Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; 15a and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him.

Devotion:

How did you “wait” for Christmas when you were a child? A teenager? How do you wait now? Why is waiting so tough on human beings? With all this talk about waiting, consider some related questions --

- How might “waiting” differ from culture to culture?
- Should waiting be passive or active?
- How are we to actively wait?
- What difference would that make on your Advent season?

By definition, Christians are a people in waiting! We are waiting on the return of Christ. We are waiting on the redemption of Creation. We are waiting on a heavenly reward. We are waiting to see what God is doing on

Earth. Right now I'm sitting in my office waiting on this Pandemic to end! Waiting, waiting, waiting... I don't wait well. You?

In Western cultures, we don't do *waiting* as constructively as we could. We see an interim period as time wasted. We are used to microwave results. We want 5G internet now. Waiting causes stress. Early Christians had already been given notice about how they should spend this time. There was a world to change!

2 Peter reminded the early Christians that they should be at work even as they were reminded that God was at work. God is intentional about how Creation progresses. Also, God's time is not necessarily our time. What seems slow might actually be quite timely. The day of the Lord is coming. Meantime, we too have world-changing work to do. We are to live godly lives. We are to be loving people. A lifetime is not enough to become who God wants us to be.

What we do now matters, the whole world is waiting for us!

Prayer:

Lord, move me from a mere consumer of hope to a provider of hope. Guide me to redeem my waiting time, so that more of what you desire gets done. Amen.

Monday, December 7- Mark 1:1-8

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Prepare the Way of the Lord

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" 4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Devotion:

If you are familiar with the saying, "Two sides of the same coin," I suppose that's one way we could hear today's scripture text. If I tried to outline John's message, there are two points that leap out at me. Both points take us in the same crucial direction.

On the surface, though, the two points might not sound just alike. First, John says to all those who are coming out into the wilderness, "***Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.***" We are called to prepare as God in Christ comes near. That is such a healthy and important Advent message. This is, after all, a time of spiritual preparation as we wait to celebrate the birth of the Christ child.

Then, he also said "***The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.***" John makes clear that he is not God. Sometimes, don't we have trouble trusting God to manage our lives? Don't we unwittingly become our own little gods? We take over the controls when God is a little too quiet, or when God's timing or direction doesn't match our preferences.

- You are not God, nor do you have to be.
- Make room for God. Get things in your life out of God's way.

Those are John's two important ideas for us here in Mark 1. What might it mean for me to take John seriously this Advent? What might it mean for me to try to make a straighter path for God this Christmas? How do I sometimes try to play god, thereby not leaving a whole lot of room for the real thing?

John was a messenger. I try to be a messenger in your life, too. The One to whom we point is the real deal. He is the One who is able. He is the One who can save and who can transform us. Use this Advent well, my friends. I'm trying to, as well!

Prayer:

Use your Spirit, O God, to lead me as I prepare this Advent. Speak into my life that I might hear your voice calling. May you find a place prepared just for you in my life. Amen.

Tuesday, December 8 - Psalm 27
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Triumphant Song of Confidence

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh -- my adversaries and foes -- they shall stumble and fall.

3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

4 One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

6 Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

8 "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

9 Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

10 If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

11 Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

14 Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Devotion:

Do you ever read scripture and suddenly have a song or a hymn fire up inside your head? I do right here as I read this 27th Psalm. Trouble is, it's actually two songs that come to mind. I don't know which one to let play through!

We have two powerful songs that find their roots right here. Maybe more. The ones I am thinking of are:

- ***The Lord is My Light*** -- normally this is sung as a powerful solo. I'll have to see if I can tackle this one at some point soon. It was first published as sheet music way back in 1897, and written by Frances Allitsen, based sure enough on Psalm 27.
- ***Be Strong In the Lord*** -- This is actually one of the newer hymns, to feel like it's been around forever (at least to me). Tom Fettke and Linda Lee Johnson set this to words and music, and it was published in 1979. This song has been in the last couple of hymnals (p629 in our Celebrating Grace hymnal!), and at least where we've been has been sung a lot in worship. (Ephesians 6: 10-18 may have been even more of a basis for this song)

Here may be my very favorite line from Psalm 27, and I don't know that it made it into either of those songs:

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

That line sums up the life of the Christian, including the life of the Advent Christian who even now awaits the celebration of the Christ child. We are to be seeking actively to *live in the house of the Lord*, so to speak. In other words, to conduct ourselves in some resemblance to Christ. To act in just, loving ways that reflect our transformation as new creatures. To have the courage to have the convictions of Jesus Christ, even when they push us past our comfort. Maybe especially when they push us past our comfort. To allow God's ways to become ours to the point that we are able to behold the beauty of the Lord.

Prayer:

God, give me good courage that I may live strong in you. Help me to take my faith seriously enough that this Christ Child might hold sway over me. Amen.

Wednesday, December 9 - Luke 1:5-17

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

⁵In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. ⁷But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

⁸Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, ⁹he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. ¹⁰Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. ¹¹Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶He will turn many of the people

of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Devotion:

Have you ever been surprised? Have you ever prayed for something for an eternity? Have you forgotten what you had prayed for only to receive the answer that you wanted so much? This story is about such an encounter.

Our main characters are Zechariah and Elizabeth. Both people were from decorated families, with Zechariah belonging to the priestly order of Abijah and Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron. Luke states that they both were righteous before God, even living blameless before God and keeping all of the Lord’s regulations and commandments. Everything seems to be fine except for one thing -- they were childless and both were advanced in years.

Elizabeth had prayed for years to have a son, but her request had so far been denied. Zechariah had allowed the duties of priest to take precedent that Elizabeth’s prayer was not on his radar, until he was surprised when an angel of the Lord appeared and spoke to him. Surprised by such a visitor, Zechariah at first was terrified and overwhelmed. This visitor appeared when Zechariah was offering incense in the sanctuary of the Lord. All this time the assembly of the people were outside praying to the Lord when Zechariah received this disturbing message.

Because he was terrified when the angel Gabriel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

As if all this is not enough, Zechariah is told what the baby’s name will be -- John. What self-respecting father would not desire to name his child? Especially the child that he had feared he would never have?

We would do well to remember the meaning of Zechariah and Elizabeth’s names. Zechariah’s name is translated “YAHWEH has remembered”, while Mary’s name bears the connotation of “God is the absolutely faithful one” or “God is the covenant maker.”

If Zechariah was so startled by a heavenly messenger, how would we react? If Mary prayed for a child for many years, would we pray in a like manner?

All of this is to say that God delights in the faithfulness of God’s people. As we prepare for the coming of the Christ child, how will we react to such joyous news?

Prayer:

Surprising Lord, help us to be prepared for your surprising news when it comes our way. Amen.

Thursday, December 10 - 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:

How are you doing this Advent? We wait, with anticipation, of a vaccine that is safe and effective for Covid-19. We hope, with expectation, of our world getting back to normal. We long for the fellowship that we have enjoyed to return. We miss loved ones who have entered their eternal rest. We grieve for families who are trying to cope with not having all the members of their family present.

We hope and pray for the promised Messiah. Would we even recognize the Messiah if we came face to face with him? When the Messiah comes, will the arrival be everything that we have hoped for? Does one person have the ability to change the entire world? Or, have our dreams become too impossible? Are we able to dream "God-sized" dreams?

The Psalmist probably had some of the same feelings that we have. The passage opens with praise and thanksgiving for God's abundant blessings. But then it happens. The other show drops and the scene changes. In an instant, the chorus of praise turns to an abundance of doubt. Can't you imagine they wring their hands up in the air wanting to know what they should do next? This sounds very familiar to us today, because all of us can relate to this scene. What does the Psalmist have to say to us in 2020?

- 1) The Psalmist reminds us that life contains cycles -- cycles of joy and cycles of sadness.
- 2) The Psalmist reminds us that the cycles change and so do our circumstances.
- 3) The Psalmist reminds us that God's overarching plan will continue until God's purposes are completed.
- 4) The Psalmist reminds us that weeping and rejoicing are a natural part of life.
- 5) The Psalmist reminds us that God has done great things for us and we rejoiced.
- 6) The Psalmist reminds us that though we go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, we shall return rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

Prayer:

God of infinite love, forgive our lack of dependence on you. Forgive our lack of gratitude for all of your manifold blessings. Please restore to us your hope that we may once again rejoice in you. Amen.

Friday, December 11 - Philippians 3:7-11
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Forgetting What is Behind

7 Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Devotion

This Advent is so very different. We are trying to prepare for the Christ Child, yet our hearts are not festive. We put up lights and trees, but somehow this seems like a futile effort. After all, why go to all of this in such an uncertain time.

While we may not know for sure, I surmise that the Apostle Paul may well have had some of the very emotions that we experience. Paul had devoted his entire life toward the making of Jesus Christ known to all. Ever since that dramatic scene of the Damascus Road, Saul's name was changed to Paul. And ever since that fateful day, Paul's ministry was to share Christ with the Gentiles -- yes, even you and I!

I'm certain that Paul became weary in repeating how his name was changed (not the actual event, but reminding people that he once was Saul, but now is Paul). After what seemed like the millionth question, I would be very surprised if Paul did not grow weary in his ministry.

Likewise, today it is easy to grow fatigued in ministry. Today with all of the Covid news, we kind of become inoculated with the news. We grieve for what was, yet we long for what will be. While we wait for what will happen with Covid, we continue to pray. We pray for that promised time "when peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling; and the whole world give back the song which now the angels sing." (Edmund H. Sears, 1849)

I so look forward to the singing of Christmas Carols with our church family, but sadly, that will not happen this year. So, what are we to do? I believe that we should adopt Paul's perspective as found in verses 10 and 11:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection
and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming
like him in his death, 11 if somehow
I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

I am convinced, dear friends, that our celebration will be festive if we adopt Paul's passion and perspective.

Prayer:

Loving and all present God, thank you for the privilege of knowing, serving and celebrating your most amazing love. Amen.